CSE 374
Programming Concepts & Tools

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Lecture 4 – Shell Variables, More Shell Scripts
(Thanks to Hal Perkins)
Recall from last lecture:
• test (not built-in) takes arguments that look like a predicate
• doesn’t do anything other than return an exit code

• if … then … fi (built-ins)
• if <command>; then
  <commands>
fi
Where we are

• We understand most of the bash shell and its “programming language”. Final pieces we’ll consider:
  – Shell variables
    • Defining your own
    • Built-in meanings
    • Exporting
  – Arithmetic
  – For loops
• End with:
  – A long list of gotchas (some bash-specific; some common to shells)
  – Why long shell scripts are a bad idea, etc.
Shell variables

- We already know a shell has state: current working directory, streams, users, aliases, history.
- Its state also includes shell variables that hold **strings**.
  - Always strings even if they are “123” – but you can do math
- Features:
  - Change variables’ values: foo=blah
  - Add new variables: foo=blah or foo=
  - Use variable: ${foo} (braces sometimes optional)
  - Remove variables: unset foo
  - See what variables “are set”: set
- Omitted feature: Functions and local variables (see bash manual 3.3)
- Roughly “all variables are global (visible everywhere)”
Why variables?

• Variables are useful in scripts, just like in “normal” programming.
• “Special” variables affect shell operation. 3 of the most common:
  – PATH (tells shell where to find programs)
  – PS1 (determines the shell prompt)
  – HOME (determines what ~ means)
• Some variables make sense only when the shell is reading from a script:
  – $#, $n (where n is an integer), $@, $*, $?
Export

• If a shell runs another program (perhaps a bash script), does the other program “see the current variables that are set”?  
  – i.e., are the shell variables part of the initial environment of the new program?
• It depends.  
  – export foo – yes it will see value of foo  
  – export -n foo – no it will not see value of foo  
  – Default is no
• If the other program sets an exported variable, does the outer shell see the change?
• No.  
  – Somewhat like “call by value” parameters in conventional languages  
  – Remember, each new program (and shell) is launched as a separate processs with its own state, environment, etc.
• export -p OR printenv – see all exported variables
Arithmetic

• Variables are strings, so $k=i+j$ is not addition
• But $((k=i+j))$ is (and in fact the $i$ is optional here)
• So is  `let k="i + j"`
• The shell converts the strings to numbers, silently using 0 when a variable is empty
For loops

• Syntax:
  for v in $w_1 \ w_2 \ldots \ w_n$
  do
    body
  done
• Execute body n times, with v set to $w_i$ on $i^{th}$ iteration (Afterwards, v=$w_n$)
• Why so convenient?
  – Use a filename pattern after in
  – Use list of argument strings after in: "$@"
    • Not "$*" – that doesn’t handle arguments with embedded blanks the way you (usually) want
• for a range of integers look at “man seq”
Quoting

• Does x=* set x to string-holding-asterisk or string-holding-all-filenames?
• If $x$ is *, does ls $x$ list all-files or file named asterisk?
• Are variables expanded in double-quotes? single-quotes?
• Could consult the manual, but honestly it’s easier to start a shell and experiment. For example:

```bash
x="*"
echo x
echo $x
echo "$x"  (Double quotes suppress some substitutions)
echo ’$x’  (Single quotes suppress all substitutions)
...
```
Gotchas: A very partial list

1. Typo in variable name on left: create new variable oops=7
2. Typo in variable use: get empty string – ls $oops
3. Use same variable name again: clobber other use HISTFILE=uhoh
4. Spaces in variables: use double-quotes if you mean “one word”
5. Non-number used as number: end up with 0
6. set f=blah: apparently does nothing (assignment in csh)
7. Using ls to list files to iterate over in for loop (just use string expansion *)
8. Many, many more…
Shell programming revisited

• How do Java programming and shell programming compare?
• The shell:
  – “shorter”
  – convenient file-access, file-tests, program-execution, pipes
  – crazy quoting rules and syntax
  – also interactive
• Java:
  – verbose syntax
  – none of the previous gotchas
  – local variables, modularity, typechecking, array-checking, . . .
  – real data structures, libraries, more common syntax
• Rough rule of thumb: Don’t write shell scripts over 200 lines?
Treatment of strings

- Suppose foo is a variable that holds the string hello

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Java</th>
<th>Bash</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use variable (get “hello”)</td>
<td>foo</td>
<td>$foo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The string foo</td>
<td>“foo”</td>
<td>foo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assign variable</td>
<td>foo = hi</td>
<td>foo=hi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concatenation</td>
<td>foo + “oo”</td>
<td>${foo}oo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convert to number</td>
<td>library call</td>
<td>silent and implicit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Moral: In Java, variable-uses are easier than string-constants
- Opposite in Bash
- Both biased toward common use
More on shell programming

• Metapoint: Computer scientists automate and end up accidentally inventing (bad) programming languages. It’s like using a screwdriver as a pry bar.
• HW3 in part, will be near the limits of what seems reasonable to do with a shell script (and we’ll end up cutting corners as a result)
• There are plenty of attempts to get “the best of both worlds” in a scripting language: Perl, Python, Ruby, . . .
• Personal opinion: it raises the limit to 1000 or 10000 lines? Gets you hooked on short programs.
• Picking the bash shell was a conscious decision to emphasize the interactive side and because it is commonly used despite its terribleness
• Next: Regular expressions, grep, sed, others.
Bottom line

• Never do something manually if writing a script would save you time
• Never write a script if you need a large, robust piece of software
• Some programming languages (ruby, python, perl) try to give the “best of both worlds” – you now have seen two extremes that don’t (Java and bash)