CSE 331
Software Design & Implementation

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`==`, **`equals()`**, and all that

(Slides by David Notkin and Mike Ernst)

Programming: object equality

A simple idea:

- Two objects are equal if they have the same value

A subtle idea: intuition can be misleading

- Same object/reference, or same value?
- Same concrete value or same abstract value?
- Is equality temporary or forever?
- How does equality behave with inheritance?
- When are two collections of objects equal?
  - How is it related to equality of elements? order?
  - What if a collection contains itself?
- How can we implement equality efficiently?

Properties of equality
for any useful notion of equality

Reflexive `a.equals(a)`

3 ≠ 3 would be confusing

Symmetric `a.equals(b)` ⇔ `b.equals(a)`

3 = 4 ∧ 4 ≠ 3 would be confusing

Transitive `a.equals(b)` ∧ `b.equals(c)`
⇒ `a.equals(c)`

((1+2) = 3 ∧ 3 = (5-2)) ∧
((1+2) ≠ (5-2)) would be confusing

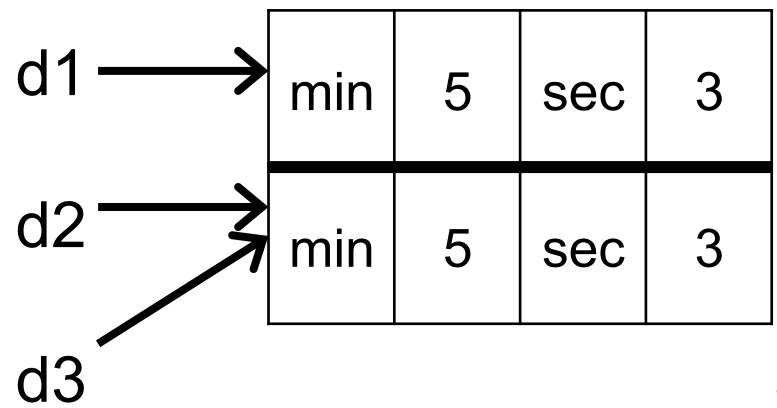
A relation that is reflexive, transitive, and symmetric is an *equivalence relation*

Reference equality

- The simplest is *reference equality*
- `a == b` if and only if `a` and `b` refer (point) to the same object
- Easy to show that == is an equivalence relation
- Strongest (most restrictive) defn. of equality

```
Duration d1 = new Duration(5,3);
Duration d2 = new Duration(5,3);
Duration d3 = d2;

// T/F: d1 == d2 ?
// T/F: d1 == d3 ?
// T/F: d2 == d3 ?
// T/F: d1.equals(d2) ?
// T/F: d2.equals(d3) ?
```



`Object.equals` method

```
public class Object {
  public boolean equals(Object o) {
    return this == o;
  }
}
```

This implements reference equality

What about the specification of **`Object.equals`**?

It's a bit more complicated…

Equals specification

public boolean equals(Object obj)

Indicates whether some other object is "equal to" this one.

The **equals** method implements an equivalence relation:

- It is *reflexive*: for any reference value x, x.equals(x) should return true.
- It is *symmetric*: for any reference values x and y, x.equals(y) should return true if and only if y.equals(x) returns true.
- It is *transitive*: for any reference values x, y, and z, if x.equals(y) returns true and y.equals(z) returns true, then x.equals(z) should return true.
- It is *consistent*: for any reference values **x** and **y**, multiple invocations of **x.equals(y)** consistently return true or consistently return false, provided no information used in equals comparisons on the object is modified.
- For any non-null reference value **x**, **x.equals(null)** should return false.

The **equals** method for class **Object** implements the most discriminating possible equivalence relation on objects; that is, for any reference values **x** and **y**, this method returns true if and only if **x** and **y** refer to the same object (**x==y** has the value true).

Parameters:

obj - the reference object with which to compare.

Returns:

true if this object is the same as the obj argument; false otherwise.

See Also:

hashCode(), HashMap

The `Object` contract

Why so complicated?

Object class is designed for inheritance

Its specification of **`equals`** will apply to all subtypes

- In other words, all Java classes
- Specification for equals cannot later be weakened

So, its specification must be flexible

- If **`a.equals(b)`** were specified to test **`a==b`**, then no class could change this and still be a true subtype of **`Object`**
- Instead spec for equals enumerates basic properties that clients can rely on in all subtypes of **`Object`**
- **`a==b`** is compatible with these properties, but so are other tests

Comparing objects less strictly

```
public class Duration {
    private final int min;
    private final int sec;
    public Duration(int min, int sec) {
        this.min = min;
        this.sec = sec;
    }
}
…
Duration d1 = new Duration(10,5);
Duration d2 = new Duration(10,5);
System.out.println(d1.equals(d2));
```

`false` – but we likely prefer it to be `true`

An obvious improvement

```
public boolean equals(Duration d) {
  return d.min == min && d.sec == sec;
}
```

This defines an equivalence relation for **`Duration`** objects (proof by partial example and handwaving)

```
Duration d1 = new Duration(10,5);
Duration d2 = new Duration(10,5);
System.out.println(d1.equals(d2));
```

```
Object o1 = new Duration(10,5);
Object o2 = new Duration(10,5);
System.out.println(o1.equals(o2));  // False!
```

But oops

Overloading

We have two **`equals`** methods:

`equals(Object)` in class **`Object`**

`equals(Duration)` in class **`Duration`**

The one in **`Duration`** does ***not*** override the inherited one – it **overloads** it (different parameter type)

If **`d`** has type **`Duration`**, **`d.equals(Duration)`** invokes the **`equals(Duration)`** method in **`Duration`**

If **`o`** has type **`Object`**, **`o.equals(Duration)`** invokes the **`equals(Object)`** method in **`Object`**

- *Even if* the dynamic type of **`o`** is **`Duration`**!
- **`Object`** does not have an **`equals(Duration)`** method. Method types are resolved using static types.
- Dynamic types are used to select appropriate method at runtime (dynamic dispatch), but only selected from possible methods with the correct static type.

@Override equals in Duration

```
@Override                   // compiler warning if type mismatch
public boolean equals(Object o) {
  if (! (o instanceof Duration))    // Not equal if parameter
    return false;                   //    is not a Duration
  Duration d = (Duration) o;        // cast to treat o as
                                    //    a Duration
  return d.min == min && d.sec == sec;
}

Object d1 = new Duration(10,5);
Object d2 = new Duration(10,5);
System.out.println(d1.equals(d2));    // True
```

- *overriding* re-defines an inherited method from a superclass – same name & parameter list & return type
- **Durations** now have to be compared as **Durations** (or as **Objects**, but not as a mixture)

Equality and inheritance

Let's add a nanosecond field for fractional seconds

```
public class NanoDuration extends Duration {
  private final int nano;
  public NanoDuration(int min, int sec, int nano) {
    super(min, sec);
    this.nano = nano;
}
```

Inherited **`equals()`** from **`Duration`** ignores **`nano`** so **`Duration`** instances with different **`nano`**s will be **`equal`**

`equals`: account for `nano`

```
public boolean equals(Object o) {
  if (! (o instanceof NanoDuration))
    return false;
  NanoDuration nd = (NanoDuration) o;
  return super.equals(nd) && nano == nd.nano;
}
```

But this is not symmetric! **Oops!**

```
Duration d1 = new NanoDuration(5,10,15);
Duration d2 = new Duration(5,10);
System.out.println(d1.equals(d2)); // false
System.out.println(d2.equals(d1)); // true
```

Let's get symmetry

```
public boolean equals(Object o) {
  if (! (o instanceof Duration))
    return false;
  // if o is a normal Duration, compare without nano
  if (! (o instanceof NanoDuration))
    return super.equals(o);
  NanoDuration nd = (NanoDuration) o;
  return super.equals(nd) && nano == nd.nano;
}
```

But this is not transitive! **Oops!**

```
Duration d1 = new NanoDuration(5,10,15);
Duration d2 = new Duration(5,10);
Duration d3 = new NanoDuration(5,10,30);
System.out.println(d1.equals(d2)); // true
System.out.println(d2.equals(d3)); // true
System.out.println(d1.equals(d3)); // false!
```

Fix in **`Duration`**

Replaces earlier version

```
if (! (o instanceof Duration))
    return false;
```

```
@Overrides
public boolean equals(Object o) {
  if (o == null)
    return false;
  if (! o.getClass().equals(getClass()))
    return false;
  Duration d = (Duration) o;
  return d.min == min && d.sec == sec;
}
```

- Check exact class instead of **`instanceOf`**
- Equivalent change in **`NanoDuration`**

General issues

Every subtype must override **`equals`**

- even if it wants the identical definition

Take care when comparing subtypes to one another

- Consider an **`ArithmeticDuration`** class that adds operators but no new fields (on your own)

Another solution: avoid inheritance

Use composition instead

```
public class NanoDuration {
  private final Duration duration;
  private final int nano;
  // ...
}
```

`NanoDuration` and **`Duration`** are unrelated

- There is no presumption that they can be **`equal`** or unequal or even compared to one another…

Solves some problems, introduces others

- Example: can't use **`NanoDuration`**s where **`Duration`**s are expected (not a (Java) subtype)

Efficiency of equality

Equality tests can be slow

e.g.: two huge collections; two video files

Often useful to quickly pre-filter – for example

```
if (video1.length() != video2.length())
  return false
else do full equality check
```

Java requires each class to define a standard pre-filter – a `hashCode()` method that produces a single hash value (a 32-bit signed integer) from an instance of the class

If two objects have different hash codes, they are *guaranteed* to be different

If they have the same hash code, they *may* be equal objects and should be checked in full

Unless you define `hashCode()` improperly!!!

specification for `Object.hashCode`

`public int hashCode()`

"Returns a hash code value for the object. This method is supported for the benefit of hashtables such as those provided by **`java.util.HashMap`**."

The general contract of **`hashCode`** is

Deterministic: **`o.hashCode() == o.hashCode()`**

... so long as **`o`** doesn't change between the calls

Consistent with equality:

`a.equals(b)` ⇒ **`a.hashCode()==b.hashCode()`**

Change **`equals()`**? Must you update **`hashCode()`**?

ALMOST ALWAYS! I MEAN ALWAYS!

`hashCode` and hash tables

Classic use of hashcode is selecting an index for an object in a hash table (e.g., map, set)

Amortized costs are *O*(1) if done right

Java libraries do this too, but in two distinct steps:

`hashCode` returns an **`int`** value that respects equality

Collections scale this value as needed

See CSE 332 for much more…

Duration hashCode implementations

Many possibilities, which ones are safe? efficient?…

```
public int hashCode() {           // always safe, no pre-filtering
    return 1;
}

public int hashCode() {           // safe, inefficient for Durations
    return min;                   // differing only in sec field
}

public int hashCode() {           // safe and efficient
    return min+sec;
}

public int hashCode() {
    return new Random().newInt(50000);  // danger! danger!
}
```

Consistency of equals and hashCode

Suppose we change the spec for **`Duration.equals`**:

```
// Return true if o and this represent the same number of seconds
public boolean equals(Object o) {
  if (! (o instanceof Duration))
    return false;
  Duration d = (Duration) o;
  return 60*min+sec == 60*d.min+d.sec;
}
```

We must update hashCode, or we will get inconsistent behavior. (Why?) This works:

```
public int hashCode() {
  return 60*min+sec;
}
```

Equality, mutation, and time

If two objects are **`equal`** now, will they always be **`equal`**?

- In mathematics, “yes”
- In Java, “you choose”
- The **`Object`** contract doesn't specify this (why not?)

For immutable objects:

- Abstract value never changes
- Equality is forever (even if rep changes)

For mutable objects, equality can either:

- Compare abstract values field-by-field, or
- Be eternal.
- But not both! (Since abstract value can change.)

examples

StringBuffer is mutable, and takes the “eternal” approach

```
StringBuffer s1 = new StringBuffer("hello");
StringBuffer s2 = new StringBuffer("hello");
System.out.println(s1.equals(s1)); // true
System.out.println(s1.equals(s2)); // false
```

This is reference (==) equality, which is the only way to guarantee eternal equality for mutable objects. (Not a problem for immutable data)

By contrast:

```
Date d1 = new Date(0); // Jan 1, 1970 00:00:00 GMT
Date d2 = new Date(0);
System.out.println(d1.equals(d2)); // true
d2.setTime(1);                     // a millisecond later
System.out.println(d1.equals(d2)); // false
```

Behavioral and observational equivalence

Two objects are "behaviorally equivalent" if there is no sequence of operations that can distinguish them

- This is "eternal" equality
- Two Strings with same content are behaviorally equivalent, two Dates or StringBuffers with same content are not

Two objects are "observationally equivalent" if there is no sequence of *observer* operations that can distinguish them

- Excluding mutators
- Excluding == (allowing == would require reference equality)
- Two Strings, Dates, or StringBuffers with same content are observationally equivalent

Equality and mutation

Date class implements observational equality

Can therefore violate rep invariant of a Set container by mutating after insertion

```
Set<Date> s = new HashSet<Date>();
Date d1 = new Date(0);
Date d2 = new Date(1000);
s.add(d1);
s.add(d2);
d2.setTime(0);
for (Date d : s) {   // prints two identical Dates
    System.out.println(d);
}
```

Pitfalls of observational equivalence

Equality for set elements would ideally be behavioral

Java makes no such guarantee (or requirement)

So have to make do with caveats in specs:

> "Note: Great care must be exercised if mutable objects are used as set elements. The behavior of a set is not specified if the value of an object is changed in a manner that affects equals comparisons while the object is an element in the set."

Same problem applies to keys in maps

Mutation and hash codes

Sets assume hash codes don't change
Mutation and observational equivalence can break this assumption too:

```
List<String> friends =
  new LinkedList<String>(Arrays.asList("yoda","zaphod"));
List<String> enemies = ...;   // any other list, say with "cthulhu"
Set<List<String>> h = new HashSet<List<String>>();
h.add(friends);
h.add(enemies);
friends.add("weatherwax");
System.out.println(h.contains(friends)); // probably false
for (List<String> lst : h) {
      System.out.println(lst.equals(friends));
}   // one "true" will be printed - inconsistent!
```

More container wrinkles: self-containment

equals and **hashCode** methods on containers are recursive:

```
class ArrayList<E> {
  public int hashCode() {
     int code = 1;
     for (Object o : list)
       code = 31*code + (o==null ? 0 : o.hashCode());
    return code;
  }
```

This causes an infinite loop:

```
List<Object> lst = new ArrayList<Object>();
lst.add(lst);
int code = lst.hashCode();
```

Summary:
All equals are not equal!

- reference equality
- behavioral equality
- observational equality

Summary: Java specifics

Mixes different types of equality

Objects are treated differently from collections

Extendable specifications

Objects, subtypes can be less strict

Only enforced by the specification

Speed hack and required for use with collections:

`hashCode`

Summary: object-oriented Issues

Inheritance

- Subtypes inheriting `equal` can break the spec
- Many subtle issues
- Forcing all subtypes to implement is cumbersome

Mutable objects

- Much more difficult to deal with
- Observational equality
- Can break reference equality in collections

Abstract classes

- If only the subclass is instantiated, we are ok…

Summary: software engineering

Equality is such a simple concept

But…

- Programs are used in unintended ways
- Programs are extended in unintended ways

Many unintended consequences

In equality, these are addressed using a combination of:

- Flexibility
- Carefully written specifications
- Manual enforcement of the specifications
  - perhaps by reasoning and/or testing