
CSE 331

Software Design & Implementation

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Fall 2014

Identity, `equals`, and `hashCode`

(Based on slides by Mike Ernst, David Notkin, Hal Perkins)

Object equality

A **simple** idea??

- Two objects are equal if they have the same value

A **subtle** idea: intuition can be misleading

- Same object or same contents?
- Same concrete value or same abstract value?
- Same right now or same forever?
- Same for instances of this class or also for subclasses?
- When are two collections equal?
 - How related to equality of elements? Order of elements?
 - What if a collection contains itself?
- How can we implement equality efficiently?

Expected properties of equality

Reflexive `a.equals(a) == true`

- Confusing if an object does not equal itself

Symmetric `a.equals(b) ⇔ b.equals(a)`

- Confusing if order-of-arguments matters

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

- Confusing again to violate centuries of logical reasoning

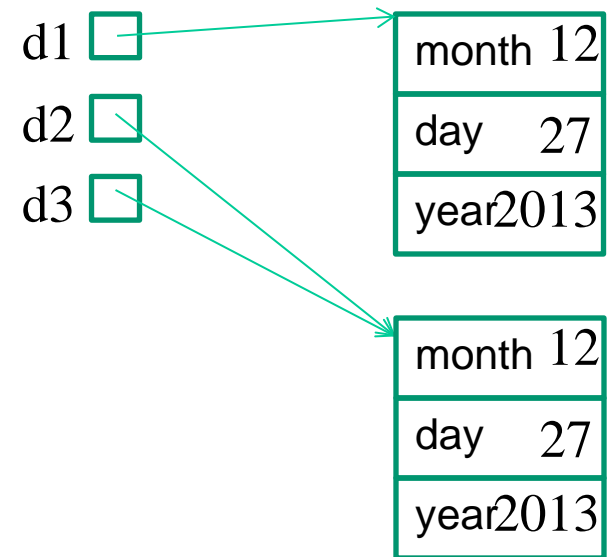
A relation that is reflexive, transitive, and symmetric is
an *equivalence relation*

Reference equality

- Reference equality means an object is equal only to itself
 - $\mathbf{a} == \mathbf{b}$ only if \mathbf{a} and \mathbf{b} refer to (point to) the same object
- Reference equality is an equivalence relation
 - Reflexive
 - Symmetric
 - Transitive
- Reference equality is the *smallest* equivalence relation on objects
 - “Hardest” to show two objects are equal (must be same object)
 - Cannot be smaller without violating reflexivity
 - Sometimes but not always what we want

What might we want?

```
Date d1 = new Date(12,27,2013);
Date d2 = new Date(12,27,2013);
Date d3 = d2;
// d1==d2 ?
// d2==d3 ?
// d1.equals(d2) ?
// d2.equals(d3) ?
```



- Sometimes want equivalence relation bigger than ==
 - Java takes OOP approach of letting classes *override equals*

Object.equals method

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

- Implements reference equality
- Subclasses can override to implement a different equality
- But library includes a *contract* `equals` should satisfy
 - Reference equality satisfies it
 - So should *any* overriding implementation
 - Balances flexibility in notion-implemented and what-clients-can-assume even in presence of overriding

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`.

Why all this?

- Remember the goal is a contract:
 - Weak enough to allow different useful overrides
 - Strong enough so clients can assume equal-ish things
 - Example: To implement a set
 - Complete enough for real software
- So:
 - Equivalence relation
 - Consistency, but allow for mutation to change the answer
 - Asymmetric with `null` (other way raises exception)
 - Final detail: argument of `null` must return **false**

An example

A class where we may want `equals` to mean equal contents

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

- Should be able to implement what we want and satisfy the `equals` contract...

How about this?

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

Two bugs:

1. Violates contract for `null` (not that interesting)
 - Can add `if(d==null) return false;`
 - But our fix for the other bug will make this unnecessary
2. Does not override `Object`'s `equals` method (more interesting)

Overloading versus overriding

In Java:

- A class can have multiple methods with the same name and different parameters (number or type)
- A method *overrides* a superclass method only if it has the same name and exact same argument types

So `Duration`'s `boolean equals(Duration d)` does *not* override `Object`'s `boolean equals(Object d)`

- Sometimes useful to avoid having to make up different method names
- Sometimes confusing since the rules for what-method-gets-called are complicated
- [Overriding covered in CSE143, but not overloading]

Example: *no overriding*

```
public class Duration {
    public boolean equals(Duration d) {...}
    ...
}
Duration d1 = new Duration(10,5);
Duration d2 = new Duration(10,5);
Object o1 = d1;
Object o2 = d2;
d1.equals(d2); // true
o1.equals(o2); // false (!)
d1.equals(o2); // false (!)
o1.equals(d2); // false (!)
d1.equals(o1); // true [using Object's equals]
```

Example fixed (mostly)

```
public class Duration {
    public boolean equals(Object d) {...}
    ...
}
Duration d1 = new Duration(10,5);
Duration d2 = new Duration(10,5);
Object o1 = d1;
Object o2 = o2;
d1.equals(d2); // true
o1.equals(o2); // true [overriding]
d1.equals(o2); // true [overriding]
o1.equals(d2); // true [overriding]
d1.equals(o1); // true [overriding]
```

A little more generally

- Won't go through all the *overloading-resolution* rules here
- In short, Java:
 - Uses **(compile-time) types** to pick the *signature* (at compile-time)
 - In example: if receiver or argument has compile-time type **Object**, then only signature taking an **Object** is “known to work,” so it is picked
 - At **run-time**, uses dynamic dispatch to choose what implementation with that signature runs
 - In un-fixed example: the inherited method is the only one with the take-an-Object signature
 - In fixed example: Overriding matters whenever the run-time class of the receiver is **Duration**

But wait!

This doesn't actually compile:

```
public class Duration {  
    ...  
    public boolean equals(Object o) {  
        return this.min==o.min && this.sec==o.sec;  
    }  
}
```

Really fixed now

```
public class Duration {
    public boolean equals(Object o) {
        if(! o instanceof Duration)
            return false;
        Duration d = (Duration) o;
        return this.min==d.min && this.sec==d.sec;
    }
}
```

- Cast cannot fail
- We want equals to work on *any* pair of objects
- Gets `null` case right too (`null instanceof C` always `false`)
- So: rare use of cast that is correct and idiomatic
 - This is what you should do (cf. *Effective Java*)

Satisfies the contract

```
public class Duration {
    public boolean equals(Object o) {
        if(! o instanceof Duration)
            return false;
        Duration d = (Duration) o;
        return this.min==d.min && this.sec==d.sec;
    }
}
```

- Reflexive: Yes
- Symmetric: Yes, even if `o` is not a `Duration`!
 - (Assuming `o`'s `equals` method satisfies the contract)
- Transitive: Yes, similar reasoning to symmetric

Even better

- Great style: use the `@Override` annotation when overriding

```
public class Duration {
    @Override
    public boolean equals(Object o) {
        ...
    }
}
```

- *Compiler warning* if not actually an override
 - Catches bug where argument is `Duration` or `String` or ...
 - Alerts reader to overriding
 - Concise, relevant, *checked* documentation

Okay, so are we done?

- Done:
 - Understanding the **equals** contract
 - Implementing **equals** correctly for **Duration**
 - Overriding
 - Satisfying the contract [for all types of arguments]
- Alas, matters can get worse for subclasses of **Duration**
 - No perfect solution, so understand the trade-offs...

Two subclasses

```
class CountedDuration extends Duration {
    public static numCountedDurations = 0;
    public CountedDuration(int min, int sec) {
        super(min, sec);
        ++numCountedDurations;
    }
}

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

CountedDuration is good

- `CountedDuration` does not override `equals`
- Will (implicitly) treat any `CountedDuration` like a `Duration` when checking `equals`
- Any combination of `Duration` and `CountedDuration` objects can be compared
 - Equal if same contents in `min` and `sec` fields
 - Works because `o instanceof Duration` is `true` when `o` is an instance of `CountedDuration`

Now NanoDuration [not so good!]

- If we don't override `equals` in `NanoDuration`, then objects with different `nano` fields will be equal
- So using everything we have learned:

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

- But we have violated the `equals` contract
 - Hint: Compare a `Duration` and a `NanoDuration`

The symmetry bug

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

This is *not symmetric*!

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

Fixing symmetry

This version restores symmetry by using `Duration`'s `equals` if the argument is a `Duration` (and not a `NanoDuration`)

```
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;
}
```

Alas, this *still* violates the `equals` contract

- Transitivity...

The transitivity bug

```
Duration d1 = new NanoDuration(1, 2, 3);
Duration d2 = new Duration(1, 2);
Duration d3 = new NanoDuration(1, 2, 4);
d1.equals(d2); // true
d2.equals(d3); // true
d1.equals(d3); // false!
```

NanoDuration

min	1
sec	2
nano	3

Duration

min	1
sec	2

NanoDuration

min	1
sec	2
nano	4

No great solution

- *Effective Java* says not to (re)override `equals` like this
 - Unless superclass is non-instantiable (e.g., abstract)
 - “Don’t do it” a non-solution given the equality we want for `NanoDuration` objects
- Two far-from-perfect approaches on next two slides:
 1. Don’t make `NanoDuration` a subclass of `Duration`
 2. Change `Duration`’s `equals` such that only `Duration` objects that are not (proper) subclasses of `Duration` are equal

Avoid subclassing

Choose composition over subclassing

- Often good advice: many programmers overuse (abuse) subclassing [see future lecture on proper subtyping]

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

NanoDuration and **Duration** now unrelated

- No presumption they can be compared to one another

Solves some problems, introduces others

- Can't use **NanoDurations** where **Durations** are expected (not a subtype)
- No inheritance, so need explicit *forwarding* methods

Slight alternative

- Can avoid some method redefinition by having **Duration** and **NanoDuration** both extend a common abstract class
 - Leave overriding **equals** to the two subclasses
- Keeps **NanoDuration** and **Duration** from being used “like each other”
- But requires advance planning or willingness to change **Duration** when you discover the need for **NanoDuration**

The getClass trick

Different run-time class checking to satisfy the `equals` contract:

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

But now `Duration` objects never equal `CountedDuration` objects

- Subclasses do not “act like” instances of superclass because behavior of `equals` changes with subclasses
- Generally considered wrong to “break” subtyping like this

Subclassing summary

- Due to subtleties, no perfect solution to how to design and implement **NanoDuration**
- Unresolvable tension between
 - “What we want for equality”
 - “What we want for subtyping”
- Now:
 - **Duration** *still* does not satisfy contracts relevant to **equals**
 - Have to discuss another **Object** method: **hashCode**

hashCode

Another method in `Object`:

```
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`.”

Contract (again essential for correct overriding):

- Self-consistent:

 - `o.hashCode () == o.hashCode ()`

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

- Consistent with equality:

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

Think of it as a pre-filter

- If two objects are equal, they *must* have the same hash code
 - Up to implementers of `equals` and `hashCode` to satisfy this
 - If you override `equals`, you *must* override `hashCode`
- If two objects have the same hash code, they *may or may not* be equal
 - “Usually not” leads to better performance
 - `hashCode` in `Object` tries to (but may not) give every object a different hash code
- Hash codes are usually cheap[er] to compute, so check first if you “usually expect not equal” – a pre-filter

Asides

- Hash codes are used for hash tables
 - A common collection implementation
 - See CSE332
 - Libraries won't work if your classes break relevant contracts
- Cheaper pre-filtering is a more general idea
 - Example: Are two large video files the exact same video?
 - Quick pre-filter: Are the files the same size?

Doing it

- So: we have to override `hashCode` in `Duration`
 - Must obey contract
 - Aim for non-equals objects usually having different results
- Correct but expect poor performance:

```
public int hashCode () { return 1; }
```
- Correct but expect better-but-still-possibly-poor performance:

```
public int hashCode () { return min; }
```
- Better:

```
public int hashCode () { return min ^ sec; }
```

Correctness depends on equals

Suppose we change the spec for `Duration`'s `equals`:

```
// true if o and this represent same # 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;
}
```

Must update `hashCode` – 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”
- **Object** contract doesn't specify

For **immutable** objects:

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

For **mutable** objects, either:

- Stick with reference equality
- “No” equality is not forever
 - Mutation changes abstract value, hence what-object-equals

Examples

`StringBuffer` is mutable and sticks with reference-equality:

```
StringBuffer s1 = new StringBuffer("hello");
```

```
StringBuffer s2 = new StringBuffer("hello");
```

```
s1.equals(s1); // true
```

```
s1.equals(s2); // false
```

By contrast:

```
Date d1 = new Date(0); // Jan 1, 1970 00:00:00 GMT
```

```
Date d2 = new Date(0);
```

```
d1.equals(d2); // true
```

```
d2.setTime(1);
```

```
d1.equals(d2); // false
```

Behavioral and observational equivalence

Two objects are “**behaviorally equivalent**” if there is no sequence of operations (excluding `==`) that can distinguish them

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

- Excludes mutators (and `==`)

Equality and mutation

`Date` class implements (only) observational equality

Can therefore **violate rep invariant** of a `Set` 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 of same date
    System.out.println(d);
}
```

Pitfalls of observational equivalence

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**

Same problem applies to mutations that **change hash codes** when using **HashSet** or **HashMap**

(Libraries choose not to copy-in for performance and to preserve object identity)

Another container wrinkle: self-containment

`equals` and `hashCode` 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);
lst.hashCode();
```

Summary

- Different notions of equality:
 - Reference equality stronger than
 - Behavioral equality stronger than
 - Observational equality
- Java's `equals` has an elaborate specification, but does not require any of the above notions
 - Also requires consistency with `hashCode`
 - Concepts more general than Java
- Mutation and/or subtyping make things even less satisfying
 - Good reason not to overuse/misuse either