CSE 331
Software Design & Implementation

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Lecture 5 – Specifications
Administrivia

• HW2 released Wednesday
  – starts and ends with reasoning problems
  – middle parts are about learning to use the tools

• Pushed a small update to the code early Thursday
  – pull that change as soon as you can
  – make sure you *merge* with any changes you made
Goals

We want our code to be:

1. Correct
   - everything else is secondary
2. Easy to change
   - most code written is changing existing systems
3. Easy to understand
   - corollary of previous two
4. Easy to scale
   - modular
Specifications

To prove correctness of our method, need
• precondition
• postcondition

Without these, we can’t say whether the code is correct
These tell us what it means to be correct

They are the specification for the method

Correctness = Validity of
\{ P \} \Rightarrow \{ Q \}
Importance of Specifications

Specifications are essential to correctness

They are also essential to changeability
• need to know what changes will break code using it

They are also essential to understandability
• need to tell readers what it is supposed to do

They are also essential to modularity
• need to tell clients what it will do so they can start building their own parts of the system
A specification is a contract

• A set of requirements agreed to by the user and the manufacturer of the product
  – describes their expectations of each other

• Facilitates simplicity via two-way isolation (modularity)
  – isolate client from implementation details
  – isolate implementer from how the part is used
  – discourages implicit, unwritten expectations

• Facilitates change
  – reduces the “Medusa effect”: the specification, rather than the code, gets “turned to stone” by client dependencies
Isn’t the interface sufficient?

The interface defines the boundary between implementers and users:

```java
public class MyList implements List<E> {
    public E get(int x) { return null; }
    public void set(int x, E y){}
    public void add(E elem) {}
    public void add(int index, E elem){}
    ...
}
```

Interface provides the *syntax and types*
But nothing about the *behavior and effects*
  – provides *too little* information to clients
Why not just read code?

```java
static <T> boolean ???(List<T> src, List<T> part) {
    int part_index = 0;
    for (T elt : src) {
        if (elt.equals(part.get(part_index))) {
            part_index++;
            if (part_index == part.size()) {
                return true;
            }
        } else {
            part_index = 0;
        }
    }
    return false;
}
```

How long does it take you to figure out what this does?
**Sublist example**

```java
static <T> boolean sub(List<T> src, List<T> part) {
    int part_index = 0;
    for (T elt : src) {
        if (elt.equals(part.get(part_index))) {
            part_index++;
            if (part_index == part.size()) {
                return true;
            } else {
                return false;
            }
        } else {
            part_index = 0;
        }
    }
    return false;
}
```
Code is complicated

- Code gives more detail than needed by client

- Understanding or even reading every line of code is an excessive burden
  - suppose you had to read source code of Java libraries to use them
  - same applies to developers of different parts of the libraries
  - would make it impossible to build million-line programs

- Client cares only about *what* the code does, not *how* it does it
Code is ambiguous

• Code seems unambiguous and concrete
  – but which details of code's behavior are essential, and which are incidental?

• Code invariably gets rewritten
  – client needs to know what they can rely on
    • what properties will be maintained over time?
    • what properties might be changed by future optimization, improved algorithms, or bug fixes?
  – implementer needs to know what features the client depends on, and which can be changed
Comments are essential

Most comments convey only a vague idea of what the code does:

```java
int maxLoc(int[] arr, int n) {

// Returns the location of the largest value
// in the first n elements of the array arr
```

Ambiguity remains:
– what if n = 0
– what if arr.length < n?
– what if there are two maximums?
Comments are essential

Most comments convey only a vague idea of what the code does:

```java
// This method checks if "part" appears as a subsequence in "src"
static <T> boolean sub(List<T> src, List<T> part)
```

Ambiguity remains:
- should be True if `part` is empty and False if `src` is empty
- what if `src` and `part` are both empty?
From vague comments to specifications

- Roles of a specification:
  - client agrees to rely *only* on information in the description in their use of the part
  - implementer of the part promises to support everything in the description
    - otherwise is perfectly at liberty

- Sadly, much code lacks a specification
  - clients often work out what a method/class does in ambiguous cases by running it and depending on the results
  - leads to bugs and programs with unclear dependencies, reducing simplicity and flexibility
A more careful description of `sub`:

// Check whether "part" appears as a subsequence in "src"

needs to be given some caveats:

// * src and part cannot be null
// * If src is empty list, always returns false
Recall the sublist example

```java
static <T> boolean sub(List<T> src, List<T> part) {
    int part_index = 0;
    for (T elt : src) {
        if (elt.equals(part.get(part_index))) {
            part_index++;
            if (part_index == part.size()) {
                return true;
            }
        } else {
            part_index = 0;
        }
    }
    return false;
}
```
A more careful description of sub

// Check whether “part” appears as a subsequence in “src”

needs to be given some caveats:

// * src and part cannot be null
// * If src is empty list, always returns false
// * Results may be unexpected if partial matches
  // can happen right before a real match; e.g.,
  // list (1,2,1,3) will not be identified as a
  // sub sequence of (1,2,1,2,1,3).

or replaced with a more detailed description:

// This method scans the “src” list from beginning
// to end, building up a match for “part”, and
// resetting that match every time that...
A better approach

It’s better to simplify than to describe complexity!

Complicated description suggests poor design
  – rewrite `sub` to be more sensible, and easier to describe

```java
// Returns true iff there exist sequences A and B (possibly empty) such that src = A + part + B, where + means concat
static <T> boolean sub(List<T> src, List<T> part) {

• Mathematical flavour not always necessary, but avoids ambiguity
• “Declarative” style is important: avoids reciting or depending on operational/implementation details
```
Sneaky fringe benefit of specs

• The discipline of writing specifications changes the incentive structure of coding
  – rewards code that is easy to describe and understand
  – punishes code that is hard to describe and understand
    • (even if it is shorter or easier to write)

• If you find yourself writing complicated specifications, it is an incentive to redesign
  – in `sub`, code that does exactly the right thing may be slightly slower than a hack that assumes no partial matches before true matches, but cost of forcing client to understand the details is too high
Writing specifications with Javadoc

- Javadoc
  - Sometimes can be daunting; get used to using it
  - Very important feature of Java (copied by others)

- Javadoc convention for writing specifications
  - Method signature
  - Text description of method
    - @param: description of what gets passed in
    - @return: description of what gets returned
    - @throws: exceptions that may occur
Example: Javadoc for String.contains

```java
public boolean contains(CharSequence s)

Returns true if and only if this string contains the specified sequence of char values.

Parameters:
    s - the sequence to search for

Returns:
    true if this string contains s, false otherwise

Throws:
    NullPointerException - if s is null

Since:
    1.5
```
CSE 331 specifications

- The **precondition**: constraints that hold before the method is called (if not, all bets are off)
  - `@requires`: spells out any obligations on client

- The **postcondition**: constraints that hold after the method is called (if the precondition held)
  - `@modifies`: lists objects that may be affected by method; any object not listed is guaranteed to be untouched
  - `@effects`: gives guarantees on final state of modified objects
  - `@throws`: lists possible exceptions and conditions under which they are thrown (Javadoc uses this too)
  - `@return`: describes return value (Javadoc uses this too)

**Note**: these are abbreviated. In your code, it must be `@spec.requires`, `@spec.modifies`, etc.
Example 1

static <T> int changeFirst(List<T> lst, T oldelt, T newelt) {
    int i = 0;
    for (T curr : lst) {
        if (curr == oldelt) {
            lst.set(newelt, i);
            return i;
        }
        i = i + 1;
    }
    return -1;
}
Example 2

static List<Integer> zipSum(List<Integer> lst1, List<Integer> lst2)
    requires lst1 and lst2 are non-null.
    lst1 and lst2 are the same size.
    modifies none (or leave these off)
    effects none
    returns a list of same size where the ith element is the sum of the ith elements of lst1 and lst2

    static List<Integer> zipSum( 
        List<Integer> lst1, List<Integer> lst2) {
        List<Integer> res = new ArrayList<Integer>();
        for(int i = 0; i < lst1.size(); i++) {
            res.add(lst1.get(i) + lst2.get(i));
        }
        return res;
    }
Example 3

static void listAdd(List<Integer> lst1, List<Integer> lst2)
    requires lst1 and lst2 are non-null.
    lst1 and lst2 are the same size.
    modifies lst1
    effects ith element of lst2 is added to the ith element of lst1
    returns none  (or leave this off)

static void listAdd(
    List<Integer> lst1, List<Integer> lst2) {
    for(int i = 0; i < lst1.size(); i++) {
        lst1.set(i, lst1.get(i) + lst2.get(i));
    }
}
Should requires clause be checked?

• Preconditions are common in ordinary classes
  – in public libraries, necessary to deal with all possible inputs

• If the client calls a method without meeting the precondition, the code is free to do anything
  – including pass corrupted data back
  – it is a good idea to fail fast: to provide an immediate error, rather than permitting mysterious bad behavior

• Rule of thumb: Check if cheap to do so
  – Example: number has to be positive → check
  – Example: list has to be sorted → skip
  – Be judicious if private / only called from your code
Comparing specifications

- Occasionally, we need to compare different specifications:
  - comparing potential specifications of a new class
  - comparing new version of a specification with old
    - recall: most work is making changes to existing code

- For that, we often consider *stronger* and *weaker* specifications...
Satisfaction of a specification

Let M be an implementation and S a specification

\textit{M satisfies} \ S \textit{if and only if}

- for every input allowed by the spec precondition, M produces an output allowed by the spec postcondition

If M does not satisfy S, either M or S (or both!) could be “wrong”

- “\textit{one person’s feature is another person’s bug}.”
Stronger vs Weaker Specifications

• Definition 1: specification $S_2$ is stronger than $S_1$ iff
  – for any implementation $M$: $M$ satisfies $S_2 \implies M$ satisfies $S_1$
  – i.e., $S_2$ is harder to satisfy

• Two specifications may be incomparable
  – but we are usually choosing between stronger vs weaker
Stronger vs Weaker Specifications

• An implementation satisfying a stronger specification can be used anywhere that a weaker specification is required
  - can use a method satisfying $S_2$ anywhere $S_1$ is expected

Making changes to a specification...
• changing from $S_2$ to $S_1$ should not break implementation
  – but it could break clients!
• changing from $S_1$ to $S_2$ should not break clients
  – but it could break implementation
Stronger vs Weaker Specifications

- **Definition 2**: specification $S_2$ is stronger than $S_1$ iff
  - precondition of $S_2$ is weaker than that of $S_1$
  - postcondition of $S_2$ is stronger than that of $S_1$
    (on all inputs allowed by both)

- **A stronger specification**:
  - is harder to satisfy
  - gives more guarantees to the client

- **A weaker specification**:
  - is easier to satisfy
  - gives more freedom to the implementer
Example 1 (stronger postcondition)

```java
int find(int[] a, int value) {
    for (int i=0; i<a.length; i++) {
        if (a[i]==value)
            return i;
    }
    return -1;
}
```

- Specification A
  - requires: value occurs in `a`
  - returns: `i` such that `a[i] = value`

- Specification B
  - requires: value occurs in `a`
  - returns: smallest `i` such that `a[i] = value`
Example 2 (weaker precondition)

```java
int find(int[] a, int value) {
    for (int i = 0; i < a.length; i++) {
        if (a[i] == value)
            return i;
    }
    return -1;
}
```

• Specification A
  – requires: value occurs in a
  – returns: i such that a[i] = value

• Specification C
  – returns: i such that a[i] = value, or -1 if value is not in a

Which is stronger?
Example 3

```java
int find(int[] a, int value) {
    for (int i=0; i<a.length; i++) {
        if (a[i] == value)
            return i;
    }
    return -1;
}
```

• Specification B
  – requires: value occurs in a
  – returns: smallest i such that a[i] = value

• Specification C
  – returns: i such that a[i] = value, or -1 if value is not in a
Strengthening a specification

- Strengthen a specification by:
  - Promising more (stronger postcondition):
    • returns clause harder to satisfy
    • effects clause harder to satisfy
    • fewer objects in modifies clause
    • more specific exceptions (subclasses)
  - Asking less of client (weaker precondition)
    • requires clause easier to satisfy

- Weaken a specification by:
  - (Opposite of everything above)
“Strange” case: @throws

Compare:
S1:
   @throws FooException if x<0
   @return x+3
S2:
   @return x+3
S3:
   @requires x >= 0
   @return x+3

• S1 & S2 are stronger than S3
• S1 & S2 are incomparable because they promise different, incomparable things when x<0
Which is better?

- Stronger does not always mean better!
- Weaker does not always mean better!

- Strength of specification trades off:
  - usefulness to client
  - ease of simple, efficient, correct implementation
  - promotion of reuse and modularity
  - clarity of specification itself

- “It depends”
Warnings on Specifications

Specifications are also the products of human design, so...

- They will contain **bugs**
  - (recall the central dogma of this course)

- Creating them requires **judgement**
  - no mechanical way to produce good specs (or invariants)
  - harder but good for job security

- Harder to fix the more people that use it
  - Medusa effect: “turns to stone” a bit more with each look
  - widely used parts become impossible to change
CHANGES IN VERSION 10.17:
The CPU no longer overheats when you hold down spacebar.

COMMENTS:

LONGTIME_USER4 writes:
This update broke my workflow! My control key is hard to reach, so I hold spacebar instead, and I configured Emacs to interpret a rapid temperature rise as "control".

ADMIN writes:
That's horrifying.

LONGTIME_USER4 writes:
Look, my setup works for me. Just add an option to reenable spacebar heating.

Every change breaks someone's workflow.