

# **C++ Constructor Insanity**

## **CSE 333 Winter 2025**

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# Administrivia

- ❖ Next exercise released today, due Monday morning
  - Write a substantive class in C++ (but no dynamic allocation – yet)
  - Look at `Complex.h/Complex.cc` (this lecture) for ideas
- ❖ Homework 2 due next Thursday (2/6)
  - How's it going? Any surprises, questions, problems?

# Lecture Outline

- ❖ **Constructors**
- ❖ Copy Constructors
- ❖ Assignment
- ❖ Destructors
- ❖ An extended example

# Constructors

- ❖ A **constructor (ctor)** initializes a newly-instantiated object
  - A class can have multiple constructors that differ in parameters
    - Which one is invoked depends on *how* the object is instantiated

- ❖ Written with the class name as the method name:

```
Point(const int x, const int y);
```

- C++ will automatically create a **synthesized default constructor** if you have **no** user-defined constructors
  - Takes no arguments and calls the default ctors on all non-“plain old data” (non-POD) member variables
  - Synthesized default ctor will fail if you have non-initialized const or reference data members

# Synthesized Default Constructor

```
class SimplePoint {  
public:  
    // no constructors declared!  
    int get_x() const { return x_; }      // inline member function  
    int get_y() const { return y_; }      // inline member function  
    double Distance(const SimplePoint& p) const;  
    void SetLocation(const int x, const int y);  
  
private:  
    int x_; // data member  
    int y_; // data member  
}; // class SimplePoint
```

SimplePoint.h

```
#include "SimplePoint.h"  
  
... // definitions for Distance() and SetLocation()  
  
int main(int argc, char** argv) {  
    SimplePoint x; // invokes synthesized default constructor  
    return 0;  
}
```

SimplePoint.cc

# Synthesized Default Constructor

- ❖ If you define any constructors, C++ assumes you have defined all the ones you intend to be available and will not add any others

```
#include "SimplePoint.h"

// defining a constructor with two arguments
SimplePoint::SimplePoint(const int x, const int y) {
    x_ = x;
    y_ = y;
}

void foo() {
    SimplePoint x;           // compiler error: if you define any
                             // ctors, C++ will NOT synthesize a
                             // default constructor for you.

    SimplePoint y(1, 2);     // works: invokes the 2-int-arguments
                             // constructor
}
```

# Multiple Constructors (overloading)

```
#include "SimplePoint.h"

// default constructor
SimplePoint::SimplePoint() {
    x_ = 0;
    y_ = 0;
}

// constructor with two arguments
SimplePoint::SimplePoint(const int x, const int y) {
    x_ = x;
    y_ = y;
}

void foo() {
    SimplePoint x;           // invokes the default constructor
    SimplePoint a[3];        // invokes the default ctor 3 times
                             // (fails if no default ctor)
    SimplePoint y(1, 2);     // invokes the 2-int-arguments ctor
}
```

# Initialization Lists

- ❖ C++ lets you *optionally* declare an **initialization list** as part of a constructor definition
  - Initializes fields according to parameters in the list
  - The following two are (nearly) identical:

```
Point::Point(const int x, const int y) {  
    x_ = x;  
    y_ = y;  
    std::cout << "Point constructed: (" << x_ << ", ";  
    std::cout << y_ << ")" << std::endl;  
}
```

```
// constructor with an initialization list  
Point::Point(const int x, const int y) : x_(x), y_(y) {  
    std::cout << "Point constructed: (" << x_ << ", ";  
    std::cout << y_ << ")" << std::endl;  
}
```



# Initialization vs. Construction

```
class Point3D {  
public:  
    // constructor with 3 int arguments  
    Point3D(const int x, const int y, const int z) : y_(y), x_(x) {  
        z_ = z;  
    }  
  
private:  
    int x_, y_, z_; // data members  
}; // class Point3D
```

First, initialization list is applied.

Next, constructor body is executed.

- Data members in initializer list are initialized in the order they are defined in the class, not by the initialization list ordering (!)
  - Data members that don't appear in the initialization list are *default initialized/constructed* before body is executed
- Initialization preferred to assignment to avoid extra steps of default initialization (construction) followed by assignment
- (and no, real code should never mix the two styles this way 😊)

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# Copy Constructors

- ❖ C++ has the notion of a **copy constructor (cctor)**
  - Used to create a new object as a copy of an existing object

```
Point::Point(const int x, const int y) : x_(x), y_(y) { }  
  
// copy constructor  
Point::Point(const Point& copyme) {  
    x_ = copyme.x_;  
    y_ = copyme.y_;  
}  
  
void foo() {  
    Point x(1, 2); // invokes the 2-int-arguments constructor  
  
    Point y(x);    // invokes the copy constructor  
                  // could also be written as "Point y = x;"  
}
```

- Initializer lists can also be used in copy constructors (preferred)

# When Do Copies Happen?

## ❖ The copy constructor is invoked if:

- You *initialize* an object from another object of the same type:
- You pass a non-reference object as a value parameter to a function:
- You return a non-reference object value from a function:

```
Point x;           // default ctor  
Point y(x);        // copy ctor  
Point z = y;       // copy ctor
```

```
void foo(Point x) { ... }  
  
Point y;           // default ctor  
foo(y);            // copy ctor
```

```
Point foo() {  
    Point y;        // default ctor  
    return y;       // copy ctor  
}
```

# Compiler Optimization

- ❖ The compiler sometimes uses a “return by value optimization” or “move semantics” to eliminate unnecessary copies
  - Sometimes you might not see a constructor get invoked when you might expect it

```
Point foo() {  
    Point y;           // default ctor  
    return y;          // copy ctor? optimized?  
}  
  
Point x(1, 2);         // two-ints-argument ctor  
Point y = x;           // copy ctor  
Point z = foo();       // copy ctor? optimized?
```

# Synthesized Copy Constructor

- ❖ If you don't define your own copy constructor, C++ will synthesize one for you
  - It will do a *shallow* copy of all of the fields (*i.e.* member variables) of your class
  - Sometimes the right thing; sometimes the wrong thing

```
#include "SimplePoint.h"

... // definitions for Distance() and SetLocation()

int main(int argc, char** argv) {
    SimplePoint x;
    SimplePoint y(x); // invokes synthesized copy constructor
    ...
    return 0;
}
```

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# Assignment != Construction

- ❖ “=” is the **assignment operator**
  - Assigns values to an *existing, already constructed* object

```
Point w;           // default ctor
Point x(1, 2);     // two-ints-argument ctor
Point y(x);        // copy ctor
Point z = w;       // copy ctor
y = x;             // assignment operator
```

- How can you tell the difference between assignment operator= and a copy constructor that uses =?
  - Answer: are you creating/initializing a new object? If so, it's a copy constructor; if you are just updating an existing object it's assignment



# Overloading the “=” Operator

- ❖ You can choose to define the “=” operator
  - But there are some rules you should follow:

```
Point& Point::operator=(const Point& rhs) {  
    if (this != &rhs) { // (1) always check against this  
        x_ = rhs.x_;  
        y_ = rhs.y_;  
    }  
    return *this;      // (2) always return *this from op=  
}  
  
Point c;               // default constructor  
a = b = c;             // works because = return *this  
a = (b = c);           // equiv. to above (= is right-associative)  
(a = b) = c;           // "works" because = returns a non-const
```

# Synthesized Assignment Operator

- ❖ If you don't define the assignment operator, C++ will synthesize one for you
  - It will do a *shallow* copy of all of the fields (*i.e.* member variables) of your class
  - Sometimes the right thing; sometimes the wrong thing

```
#include "SimplePoint.h"

... // definitions for Distance() and SetLocation()

int main(int argc, char** argv) {
    SimplePoint x;
    SimplePoint y(x);
    y = x;           // invokes synthesized assignment operator
    return 0;
}
```

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# Destructors

- ❖ C++ has the notion of a **destructor** (**dtor**)
  - Invoked automatically when a class instance is deleted, goes out of scope, etc. (even via exceptions or other causes!)
  - Place to put your cleanup code – free any dynamic storage or other resources owned by the object
  - Standard C++ idiom for managing dynamic resources
    - Slogan: “*Resource Acquisition Is Initialization*” (RAII)

```
Point::~~Point() {    // destructor  
    // do any cleanup needed when a Point object goes away  
    // (nothing to do here since we have no dynamic resources)  
}
```

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# Complex Example Walkthrough

See:

`Complex.h`

`Complex.cc`

`testcomplex.cc`

- ❖ (Some details like friend functions and namespaces are explained in more detail next lecture, but ideas should make sense from looking at the code and explanations in *C++ Primer*.)

# Extra Exercise #1

- ❖ Modify your Point3D class from Lec 10 Extra #1
  - Disable the copy constructor and assignment operator
  - Attempt to use copy & assignment in code and see what error the compiler generates
  - Write a `CopyFrom()` member function and try using it instead
    - (See details about `CopyFrom()` in next lecture)

## Extra Exercise #2

- ❖ Write a C++ class that:
  - Is given the name of a file as a constructor argument
  - Has a `GetNextWord()` method that returns the next whitespace- or newline-separated word from the file as a copy of a `string` object, or an empty string once you hit EOF
  - Has a destructor that cleans up anything that needs cleaning up