
CSE 374

Programming Concepts & Tools

Hal Perkins

Fall 2017

Lecture 20 – C++ Subclasses and Inheritance

Subclassing

- In many ways, OOP is “all about” subclasses overriding methods
 - Often not what you want, but what makes OOP fundamentally different from, say, functional programming (Racket, Scheme, ML, Haskell, etc., cf. CSE 413)
- C++ gives you lots more options than Java with different defaults, so it’s easy to scream “compiler bug” when you mean “I’m using the wrong feature” ...

Subclassing in C++

- Basic subclassing:

```
class D : public C { ... }
```

- This is *public inheritance*; C++ has other kinds too (won't cover)
 - Differences affect visibility and issues when you have multiple superclasses (won't cover)
 - So **do not forget** the `public` keyword

More on subclassing

- Not all classes have superclasses (unlike Java with Object)
 - (and classes can have multiple superclasses — more general and complexity-prone than Java)
- Terminology
 - Java (and others): “superclass” and “subclass”
 - C++ (and others): “base class” and “derived class”
- Our example code: **House** derives from **Land** which derives from **Property** (read the code, no time for detailed presentation)
- As in Java, can add fields/methods/constructors, and override methods

Constructor and destructors

- Constructor of base class gets called before constructor of derived class
 - Default (zero-arg) constructor unless you specify a different one after the `:` in the constructor
 - Initializer syntax:
`Foo::Foo(...) : Bar(args); it(x) { ... }`
 - Needed to execute superclass constructor with arguments; also works on instance variables and is preferred in production code (slogan: “prefer initialization over assignment”)
- Destructor of base class gets called after destructor of derived class
- So constructors/destructors really extend rather than override, since that is typically what you want
 - Java is the same

Method overriding, part 1

- If a derived class defines a method with the same method name and argument types as one defined in the base class (perhaps because of an ancestor), it *overrides* (i.e., replaces) rather than *extends*
- If you want to use the base-class code, you specify the base class when making a method call (`class::method(...)`)
 - Like `super` in Java (no such keyword in C++ since there may be multiple inheritance)
- Warning: the title of this slide is *part 1*

Casting and subtyping

- An object of a derived class *cannot* be cast to an object of a base class.
 - For the same reason a `struct T1 {int x,y,z;}` cannot be cast to type `struct T2 {int x,y;}` (different size)
- A pointer to an object of a derived class *can* be cast to a pointer to an object of a base class.
 - For the same reason a `struct T1*` can be cast to type `struct T2*` (pointers to a location in memory)
 - (Story not so simple with multiple inheritance)
- After such an *upcast*, field-access works fine (prefix), but what do method calls mean in the presence of overriding?

An important example

```
class A {
public:
    void m1 () { cout << "a1"; }
    virtual void m2 () { cout << "a2"; }
};
class B : public A {
    void m1 () { cout << "b1"; }
    void m2 () { cout << "b2"; }
};
void f () {
    A* x = new B ();
    x->m1 ();
    x->m2 ();
}
```


In words...

- A **non-virtual method-call** is *resolved* using the (compile-time) type of the *receiver* expression
- A **virtual method-call** is *resolved* using the (run-time) class of the *receiver object* (what the expression evaluates to)
 - Like in Java
 - Called “dynamic dispatch”
- A method-call is virtual if the method called is marked **virtual** or overrides a virtual method
 - So “one virtual” somewhere up the base-class chain is enough, but it’s probably better style to repeat it
 - Good style (C++11 and later) specify “override” in method declaration – let compiler catch goofs (like Java @Override)

More on two method-call rules

- For software-engineering, virtual and non-virtual each have advantages:
 - Non-virtual – can look at the code to know what you’re calling (even if subclass defines the same function)
 - Virtual – easier to extend code already written
- The implementations are the same and different:
 - Same: Methods just become functions with one extra argument *this* (pointer to receiver)
 - Different:
 - Non-virtual: linker can plug in code pointer
 - Virtual: At run-time, look up code pointer via “secret field” in the object

Destructors revisited

```
class B : public A { ... }  
...  
B * b = new B();  
A * a = b;  
delete a;
```

- Will `B::~~B()` get called (before `A::~~A()`)?
- Only if `A::~~A()` was declared `virtual`
 - Rule of thumb: Declare destructors virtual; usually what you want

Downcasts

Old news:

- C pointer-casts: unchecked; better know what you are doing
- Java: checked; may raise **ClassCastException** (checks “secret field”)

New news:

- C++ has “all the above” (several different kinds of casts)
 - Use C++-style casts in C++ code
- If you use single-inheritance and know what you are doing, the C-style casts (same pointer, assume more about what is pointed to) should work fine for downcasts
- Worth learning about the differences on your own

Pure virtual methods

A C++ “pure virtual” method is like a Java “abstract” method.

- Some subclass must override because there is no definition in base class
- Makes sense with dynamic dispatch
- Unlike Java, no need/way to mark the class specially
- Funny syntax in base class; override as usual:

```
class C {  
    virtual t0 m(t1, t2, ..., tn) = 0;  
    ...  
};
```

- Side-comment: with multiple inheritance and pure-virtual methods, no need for a separate notion of Java-style interfaces

C++ summary

- Lots of new syntax and gotchas, but just a few new concepts:
 - Objects vs. pointers to objects
 - Destructors
 - virtual vs. non-virtual
 - pass-by-reference
 - Plus all the stuff we didn't get to, especially templates, exceptions, and operator overloading.