CSE 142 Programming I

Recursion

What is Recursion?

- **Defn: A function is recursive if it calls itself**

```
int foo(int x) {
  …
  y = foo(…);
  …
}
```

- **Questions:**
  - **How can recursion possibly work?**
    - **This we can explain**
  - **Why would I want to write a recursive function?**
    - **This we will try to motivate**

Factorial Function Revisited

```
0! is 1
1! is 1
2! is 1 * 2
3! is 1 * 2 * 3
. . .
```

```
int factorial ( int n ) {
   int product, i ;
   product = 1 ;
   for ( i = n ; i > 1 ; i = i - 1 ) {
      product = product * i ;
   }
   return (product) ;
}
```

function name

parameter

local variables

return type & value

Factorial via Recursion

Factorial's definition is inherently recursive:
0! = 1! = 1; and for n > 1, n! = n(n-1)!

```
0! is 1
1! is 1
n! is n * (n-1)!, for n>1

E.g.: 3! =3 * 2!
        = 3 * 2 * 1!
        = 3 * 2 * 1
```

```
int factorial(int n)
{
   int t;

   if (n <= 1)
      t = 1;
   else
      t = n * factorial(n - 1);

   return t;}
```

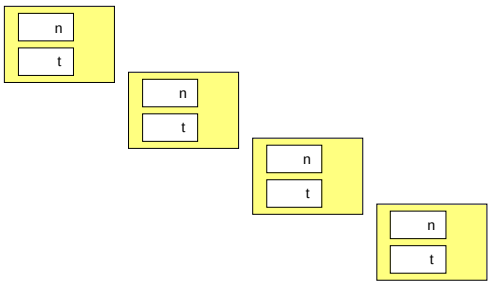

Review: Function Basics

- ***Tracing recursive functions is no sweat if you remember the basics about functions:***
  - **Parameters and variables declared in a function are local to it**
    - **Allocated (created) on function entry.**
    - **De-allocated (destroyed) on function return.**
  - **Parameters are initialized by copying values of arguments when a function is called.**

Factorial

factorial(4) =
4 * factorial(3) =
4 * 3 * factorial(2) =
4 * 3 * 2 * factorial(1) =
4 * 3 * 2 * 1 = 24

Factorial Trace



Insist on 'y' or 'n'

```
char yes_or_no (void) {
  char answer = 'X';
  while (answer != 'y' && answer != 'n') {
     printf ("Please enter 'y' or 'n':");
     scanf (" %c", &answer);
     }
  return answer;
}
```


Insisting without Looping

```
char yes_or_no (void) {
  char answer;
  printf ("Please enter 'y' or 'n':");
  scanf (" %c", &answer);
  if  (answer != 'y' && answer != 'n')
      answer = yes_or_no ( );
  return answer;
}
```

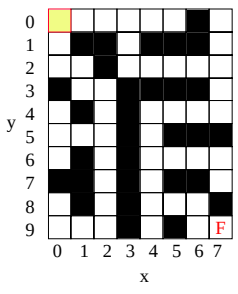

Iteration *vs.* Recursion

- Turns out *any* iterative algorithm can be reworked to use recursion instead (and vice versa).
- There are programming languages where recursion is the only choice(!)
- Some algorithms are more naturally written with recursion
  - But *naïve* applications of recursion can be inefficient

When to use Recursion?

- Problem has one or more simple cases
  - These have a straightforward nonrecursive solution, and:
- Other cases can be redefined in terms of problems that are closer to simple cases
  - By repeating this redefinition process one gets to one of the simple cases

Example: Path planning



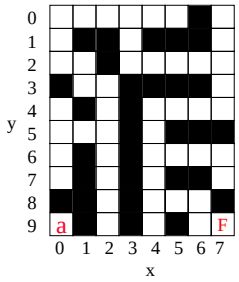

```
/* 'F' means finished!
   'X' means blocked
   ' ' means ok to move */
char maze[MAXX][MAXY];
int x =0, y=0;    /* start in yellow */
```

Unless blocked, can move up, down, left, right

Objective: determine if there is a path?

Simple Cases

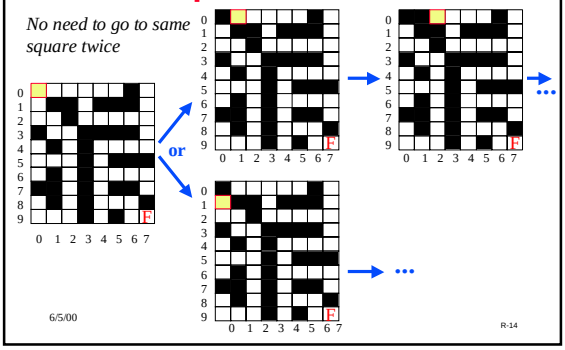
- Suppose at x,y
- If maze[x][y]==‘F’
  - Then “yes!”
- If no place to go
  - Then “no!”



6/5/00 R-13

Redefining a hard problem to several simpler ones

No need to go to same square twice



6/5/00 R-14

Helper function

```
/* Returns true if <x,y> is a legal move
   given the maze, otherwise returns false */
int legal_mv (char m[MAXX ][MAXY],
                                  int x, int y) {
  return(x>=0 && x<=MAXX &&
         y>=0 && y<= MAXY &&
          m [x][y] != ‘X’);
}
```

6/5/00 R-15

Elegant Solution

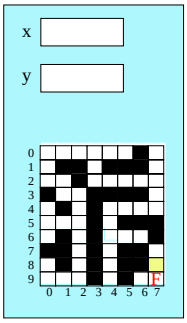
```
/* Returns true if there is a path from <x,y> to an element of maze
   containing ‘F’ otherwise returns false */
int is_path(char m[MAXX][MAXY ], int x, int y) {
  if (m [x][y] == ‘F’)
    return(TRUE);
  else {
    m[x][y] = ‘X’;
    return((legal_mv(m,x+1,y) && is_path(m,x+1,y)) ||
           (legal_mv(m,x-1,y) && is_path(m,x-1,y)) ||
           (legal_mv(m,x,y-1) && is_path(m,x,y-1)) ||
           (legal_mv(m,x,y+1) && is_path(m,x,y+1)))
}}
```

6/5/00 R-16

Example

is_path(maze, 7, 8)

```
int is_path(char m[MAXX][MAXY ], int x, int y) {
  if (m [x][y] == ‘F’)
    return(TRUE);
  else {
    m[x][y] = ‘X’;
    return((legal_mv(m,x+1,y) && is_path(m,x+1,y)) ||
           (legal_mv(m,x-1,y) && is_path(m,x-1,y)) ||
           (legal_mv(m,x,y-1) && is_path(m,x,y-1)) ||
           (legal_mv(m,x,y+1) && is_path(m,x,y+1)))
```

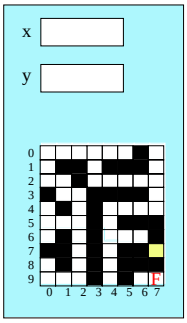


6/5/00 R-17

Example Cont

is_path(maze, 7, 7)

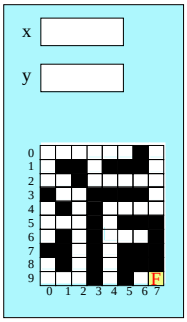
```
int is_path(char m[MAXX][MAXY ], int x, int y) {
  if (m [x][y] == ‘F’)
    return(TRUE);
  else {
    m[x][y] = ‘X’;
    return((legal_mv(m,x+1,y) && is_path(m,x+1,y)) ||
           (legal_mv(m,x-1,y) && is_path(m,x-1,y)) ||
           (legal_mv(m,x,y-1) && is_path(m,x,y-1)) ||
           (legal_mv(m,x,y+1) && is_path(m,x,y+1)))
```



6/5/00 R-18

Example Cont is_path(maze, 7, 9)

```
int is_path(char m[MAXX][MAXY ], int x, int y) {
  if (m [x][y] == 'F')
    return(TRUE);
  else {
    m[x][y] = 'X';
    return((legal_mv(m,x+1,y) && is_path(m,x+1,y)) ||
           (legal_mv(m,x-1,y) && is_path(m,x-1,y)) ||
           (legal_mv(m,x,y-1) && is_path(m,x,y-1)) ||
           (legal_mv(m,x,y+1) && is_path(m,x,y+1)))
```



Recursion Wrapup

- Recursion is a programming technique
  - It works because of the way function calls and local variables work in C
  - New copy of everything whenever a function is called
- Recursion is more than a programming technique. It's also a way of thinking about problem solutions.
- It takes practice to get fluent at recursive thinking
- It may seem unnatural now, but... in CSE143, we will see data structures for which recursion is the natural approach, and not using recursion is awkward.