

# COS 217: Introduction to Programming Systems

## Debugging

The material for this lecture is drawn, in part, from  
The Practice of Programming (Kernighan & Pike) Chapter 5



**PRINCETON UNIVERSITY**



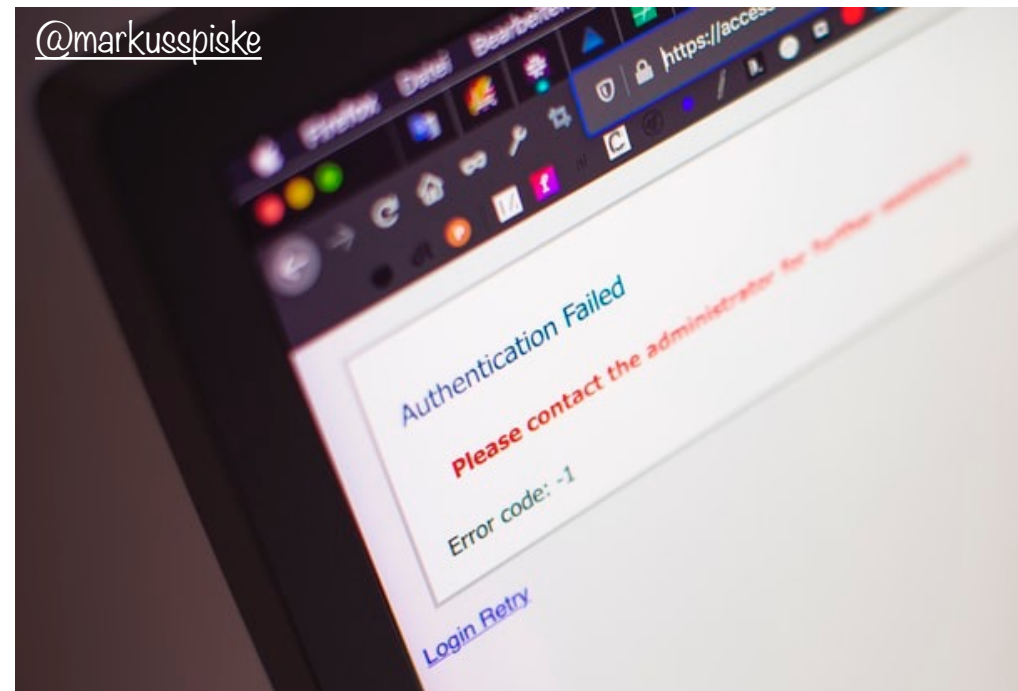
# Goals of this Lecture

Help you learn about:

- Strategies and tools for debugging your code

Why?

- Debugging large programs can be difficult
- A mature programmer knows a wide variety of debugging **strategies**
- A mature programmer knows about **tools** that facilitate debugging
  - Debuggers
  - Version control systems
  - Profilers (a future lecture)



# 1. UNDERSTAND ERROR MESSAGES



# Understand Error Messages

```
#include <stdio,h>
/* Print "hello, world" to stdout and return 0.
int main(void)
{
    printf("hello, world\n")
    return 0;
}
```

What's the first error?  
(No fair looking at  
the next slide!)

Debugging at **build-time** is easier than debugging at **run-time**,  
if and only if you... **Understand the error messages!**



# Understand Error Messages

```
#include <stdio,h>
/* Print "hello, world" to stdout and return 0.
int main(void)
{
    printf("hello, world\n")
    return 0;
}
```

Which tool (preprocessor, compiler, or linker) reports the error(s)?

```
$ gcc217 hello.c -o hello
hello.c:1:19: fatal error: stdio,h: No such file or directory
#include <stdio,h>
                ^
compilation terminated.
```



# Understand Error Messages

```
#include <stdio.h>
/* Print "hello, world" to stdout and return 0.
int main(void)
{
    printf("hello, world\n")
    return 0;
}
```

What's the next error?  
(No fair looking at  
the next slide!)



# Understand Error Messages

```
#include <stdio.h>
/* Print "hello, world" to stdout and return 0.
int main(void)
{
    printf("hello, world\n")
    return 0;
}
```

Which tool (preprocessor, compiler, or linker) reports the error(s)?

```
$ gcc217 hello.c -o hello
hello.c:2:1: error: unterminated comment
/* Print "hello, world" to stdout and
^
```



# Understand Error Messages

```
#include <stdio.h>
/* Print "hello, world" to stdout and return 0. */
int main(void)
{
    printf("hello, world\n")
    return 0;
}
```

What's the next error?  
(No fair looking at  
the next slide!)





# Understand Error Messages

```
#include <stdio.h>
/* Print "hello, world" to stdout and return 0. */
int main(void)
{
    printf("hello, world\n")
    return 0;
}
```

Which tool (preprocessor, compiler, or linker) reports the error(s)?

```
$ gcc217 hello.c -o hello
hello.c: In function 'main':
hello.c:6:4: error: expected ';' before 'return'
    return 0;
    ^
hello.c:7:1: warning: control reaches end of non-void
function [-Wreturn-type]
    }
    ^
```



# Understand Error Messages

```
#include <stdio.h>
/* Print "hello, world" to stdout and return 0. */
int main(void)
{
    printf("hello, world\n");
    return 0;
}
```

What's the next error?  
(No fair looking at  
the next slide!)



# Understand Error Messages

```
#include <stdio.h>
/* Print "hello, world" to stdout and return 0. */
int main(void)
{
    printf("hello, world\n");
    return 0;
}
```

Which tool (preprocessor, compiler, or linker) reports the error(s)?

```
$ gcc217 hello.c -o hello
hello.c: In function 'main':
hello.c:5:4: warning: implicit declaration of function
'printf' [-Wimplicit-function-declaration]
    printf("hello, world\n");
    ^
/tmp/cc2Q1XR0.o: In function `main':
hello.c:(.text+0x10): undefined reference to `printf'
collect2: error: ld returned 1 exit status
```



# Understand Error Messages

```
#include <stdio.h>
#include <stdlib.h>
int main(void)
{
    enum StateType {
        STATE_REGULAR,
        STATE_INWORD
    }
    printf("just hanging around\n");
    return EXIT_SUCCESS;
}
```

What are the errors? (No fair looking at the next slide!)



# Understand Error Messages

```
#include <stdio.h>
#include <stdlib.h>
int main(void)
{
    enum StateType {
        STATE_REGULAR,
        STATE_INWORD
    };
    printf("just hanging around\n");
    return EXIT_SUCCESS;
}
```

What does this error message even mean?

```
$ gcc217 states.c -o states
states.c:9:11: error: expected declaration specifiers or '...'
before string constant
```



# Understand Error Messages

## Caveats concerning error messages

- Line # in error message may be approximate
- Error message may seem nonsensical
- Compiler may not report the real error

## Tips for eliminating error messages

- Clarity facilitates debugging
  - Make sure code is indented properly
- Look for missing “punctuation”
  - ; at ends of structure and enumerated type definitions
  - ; at ends of function declarations
  - ; at ends of do-while loops
- Work incrementally
  - Start at first error message
  - Fix, rebuild, repeat



[@alvarordesign](#)

## 2. THINK BEFORE WRITING



# Think Before Writing

Inappropriate changes could make matters worse, so...

## Think before changing your code

- Explain the code to:
  - Yourself
  - Someone else
  - A rubber duck / Teddy bear / stuffed tiger?
- Do experiments
  - But make sure they're disciplined







### 3. LOOK FOR COMMON BUGS



[@lucieaurelien](https://www.instagram.com/lucieaurelien)



# Look for Common Bugs

Some of our “favorites”:

What are the errors?

```
switch (i) {  
  case 0:  
    ...  
    break;  
  case 1:  
    ...  
  case 2:  
    ...  
}
```

```
if (i = 5)  
  ...
```

```
if (5 < i < 10)  
  ...
```

```
int i;  
...  
scanf("%d", i);
```

```
char c;  
...  
c = getchar();
```

```
while (c = getchar() != EOF)  
  ...
```

```
if (i & j)  
  ...
```



# Look for Common Bugs

Some of our “favorites”:

```
for (i = 0; i < 10; i++) {  
    for (j = 0; j < 10; i++) {  
        ...  
    }  
}
```

```
for (i = 0; i < 10; i++) {  
    for (j = 10; j >= 0; j++) {  
        ...  
    }  
}
```

What are  
the errors?



# Look for Common Bugs

Some of our “favorites”:

```
{
  int i;
  ...
  i = 5;
  if (something) {
    int i; ←
    ...
    i = 6;
    ...
  }
  ...
  printf("%d\n", i);
  ...
}
```

What value is written if this statement is present? Absent?



## 4. DIVIDE & CONQUER



@namzo



# Divide and Conquer

## Divide and conquer to debug a program:

- Incrementally find smallest **input file** that illustrates the bug

- Approach 1: **Remove** input

- Start with file
- Incrementally remove lines until bug disappears
- Examine most-recently-removed lines



- Approach 2: **Add** input

- Start with small subset of file
- Incrementally add lines until bug appears
- Examine most-recently-added lines





# Divide and Conquer

## Divide and conquer: To debug a module...

- Incrementally find smallest **client subset** that illustrates the bug
- Approach 1: **Remove** code
  - Start with test client
  - Incrementally inactivate lines of code until bug disappears
  - Examine most-recently-removed lines
- Approach 2: **Add** code
  - Start with minimal client
  - Incrementally add lines of test client until bug appears
  - Examine most-recently-added lines



@loic



# 5. FOCUS ON NEW CHANGES





# Focus on Recent Changes

## Focus on recent changes

- Corollary: Debug now, not later

### Attractive but Difficult:

- (1) Compose entire program
- (2) Test entire program
- (3) Debug entire program

### Monotonous but Easier:

- (1) Compose a little
- (2) Test a little
- (3) Debug a little
- (4) Compose a little
- (5) Test a little
- (6) Debug a little
- ...



# Focus on Recent Changes

## Focus on recent change (cont.)

- Corollary: Maintain old versions

Low overhead but  
Difficult recovery:

- (1) Change code
- (2) Note new bug
- (3) Try to remember what changed since last version

Higher overhead but  
Easier recovery:

- (1) Backup current version
- (2) Change code
- (3) Note new bug
- (4) Compare code with last version to determine what changed



git diff



# Maintaining Old Versions

## Use a **Revision Control System**

(Since you have to set it up anyway to get the files, you might as well *actually use it!*)

Allows programmer to:

- **Check-in** source code files from **working copy** to **repository**
- **Commit** revisions from **working copy** to **repository**
  - saves all old versions
- **Update** source code files from **repository** to **working copy**
  - Can retrieve old versions
- Appropriate for one-developer projects
- Extremely useful, almost *necessary* for multideveloper projects!



## 6. ADD (MORE) INTERNAL TESTS





# Add More Internal Tests

- Internal tests help **find** bugs (see “Testing” lecture)
- Internal test also can help **eliminate** bugs
  - Validating parameters & checking invariants can eliminate some functions from the bug hunt



## 7. DISPLAY TO OUTPUT





# Display Output

Write values of important variables at critical spots

- Possibly poor:

```
printf("%d", keyvariable);
```

`stdout` is buffered;  
program may crash  
before output appears

- Maybe better:

```
printf("%d\n", keyvariable);
```

Printing '`\n`' flushes  
the `stdout` buffer, but  
not if `stdout` is  
redirected to a file

- Better still:

```
printf("%d", keyvariable);  
fflush(stdout);
```

Call `fflush()` to flush  
`stdout` buffer explicitly



# Display Output

- Maybe even better:

```
fprintf(stderr, "%d", keyvariable);
```

Write debugging output to `stderr`; debugging output can be separated from normal output via redirection

Bonus: `stderr` is unbuffered

- Maybe even better still:

```
FILE *fp = fopen("logfile", "w");  
...  
fprintf(fp, "%d", keyvariable);  
fflush(fp);
```

Write to a log file





## 8. USE A DEBUGGER





# The GDB Debugger

## GNU Debugger

- Part of the GNU development environment
- Integrated with Emacs editor
- Allows user to:
  - Run program
  - Set breakpoints
  - Step through code one line at a time
  - Examine values of variables during run
  - Etc.

For details see precept materials

# COS 217: Introduction to Programming Systems

## Debugging Dynamic Memory Bugs





@hjmckean

## 9. COMMON CULPRITS

(This overlaps with 3. “Look for Common Bugs” but is more constrained.)



# Look for Common DMM Bugs

Some of our “favorites”:

```
int *p;  
... /* code not involving p */  
*p = somevalue;
```

```
char *p;  
...  
fgets(p, 1024, stdin);
```

```
int *p;  
...  
p = malloc(sizeof(int));  
*p = 5;  
...  
free(p);  
...  
*p = 6;
```

What are the errors?



# Look for Common DMM Bugs

Some of our “favorites”:

```
int *p;  
...  
p = malloc(sizeof(int));  
...  
*p = 5;  
p = malloc(sizeof(int));
```

```
int *p;  
...  
p = malloc(sizeof(int));  
...  
*p = 5;  
...  
free(p);  
...  
free(p);
```

What are the errors?



# 10. DIAGNOSE SEGFAULTS WITH GDB



@bill\_oxford



# Diagnose Seg Faults Using GDB

Segmentation fault => make it happen in gdb

- Then issue the `gdb where` command
- Output will lead you to the line that caused the fault
  - But that line may not be where the error resides!





# 11. MANUALLY INSPECT MALLOCS





# Manually Inspect Malloc Calls

Manually inspect each call of `malloc()`

- Make sure it allocates enough memory

Do the same for `calloc()` and `realloc()`



# Manually Inspect Malloc Calls

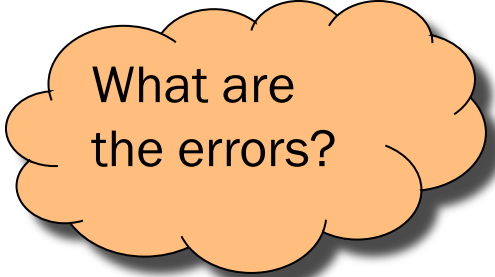
Some of our “favorites”:

```
char *s1 = "hello, world";  
char *s2;  
s2 = malloc(strlen(s1));  
strcpy(s2, s1);
```

```
char *s1 = "hello, world";  
char *s2;  
s2 = malloc(sizeof(s1));  
strcpy(s2, s1);
```

```
long double *p;  
p = malloc(sizeof(long double *));
```

```
long double *p;  
p = malloc(sizeof(p));
```



What are the errors?



## 12. HARD-CODE MALLOC AMOUNTS



# Hard-Code Malloc Calls

Temporarily change each call of `malloc()` to request a large number of bytes

- Say, 10000 bytes
- If the error disappears, then at least one of your calls is requesting too few bytes

Then incrementally restore each call of `malloc()` to its previous form

- When the error reappears, you might have found the culprit

Do the same for `calloc()` and `realloc()`



~~free~~

13. COMMENT OUT CALLS TO FREE



# Comment-Out Free Calls

Temporarily comment-out every call of `free()`

- If the error disappears, then program is
  - Freeing memory too soon, or
  - Freeing memory that already has been freed, or
  - Freeing memory that should not be freed,
  - Etc.

Then incrementally “comment-in” each call of `free()`

- When the error reappears, you might have found the culprit



# Meminfo

# Valgrind

14. USE A MEMORY PROFILER TOOL



