COS 217: Introduction to Programming Systems

Modules and Interfaces

The material for this lecture is drawn, in part, from The Practice of Programming (Kernighan & Pike) Chapter 4



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Goals of this Lecture

Help you learn:

• How to create high quality modules in C

Why?

 Abstraction is a powerful (the only?) technique available for understanding large, complex systems



- A mature programmer knows how to find the abstractions in a large program
- A mature programmer knows how to convey a large program's abstractions via its modularity

Agenda

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A good module:

- Encapsulates data
- Manages resources
- Is consistent
- Has a minimal interface
- Detects and handles/reports errors
- Establishes contracts
- Has strong cohesion
- Has weak coupling



Encapsulation + Information Hiding



A well-designed module encapsulates data

- An interface should hide implementation details
- A module should not allow clients to manipulate the data directly
- A module should use its functions to encapsulate its data

Why?

- Clarity: Encourages abstraction
- Security: Clients cannot corrupt object by changing its data in unintended ways
- Flexibility: Allows implementation to change even the underlying representation, e.g. data structure without affecting clients

Barbara Liskov, a pioneer in CS

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"An abstract data type defines a class of abstract objects which is completely characterized by the operations available on those objects. This means that an abstract data type can be defined by defining the characterizing operations for that type."

> Barbara Liskov and Stephen Zilles. "Programming with Abstract Data Types." ACM SIGPLAN Conference on Very High Level Languages, April 1974.



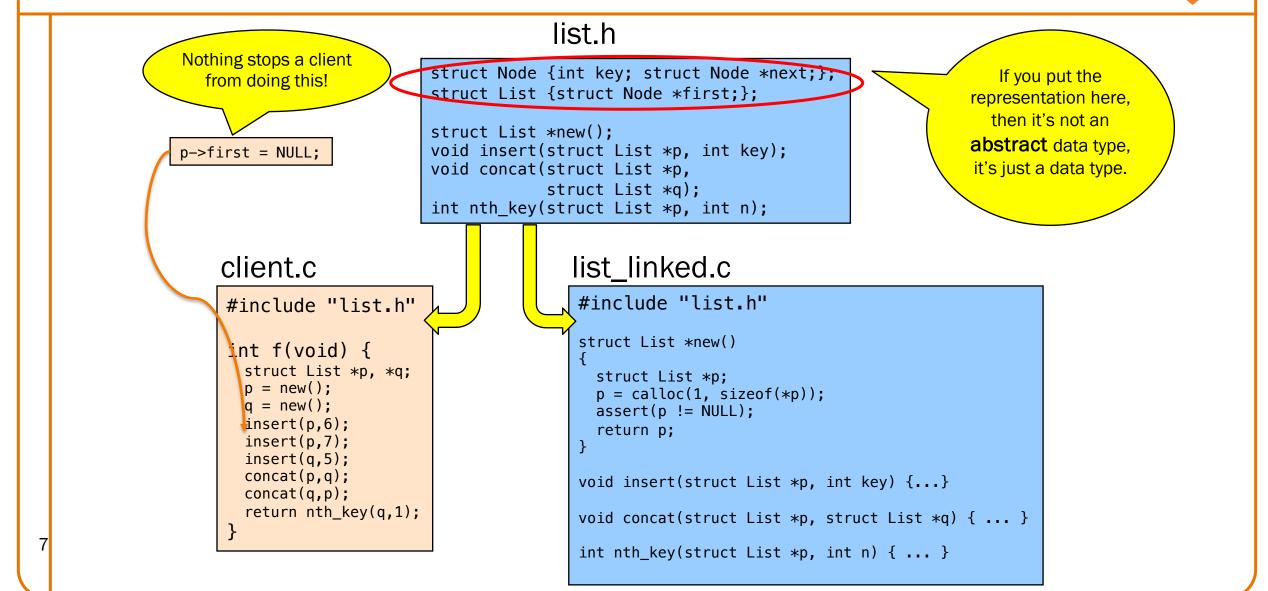
Turing Award winner 2008: "For contributions to practical and theoretical foundations of programming language and system design, especially related to data abstraction, fault tolerance, and distributed computing."

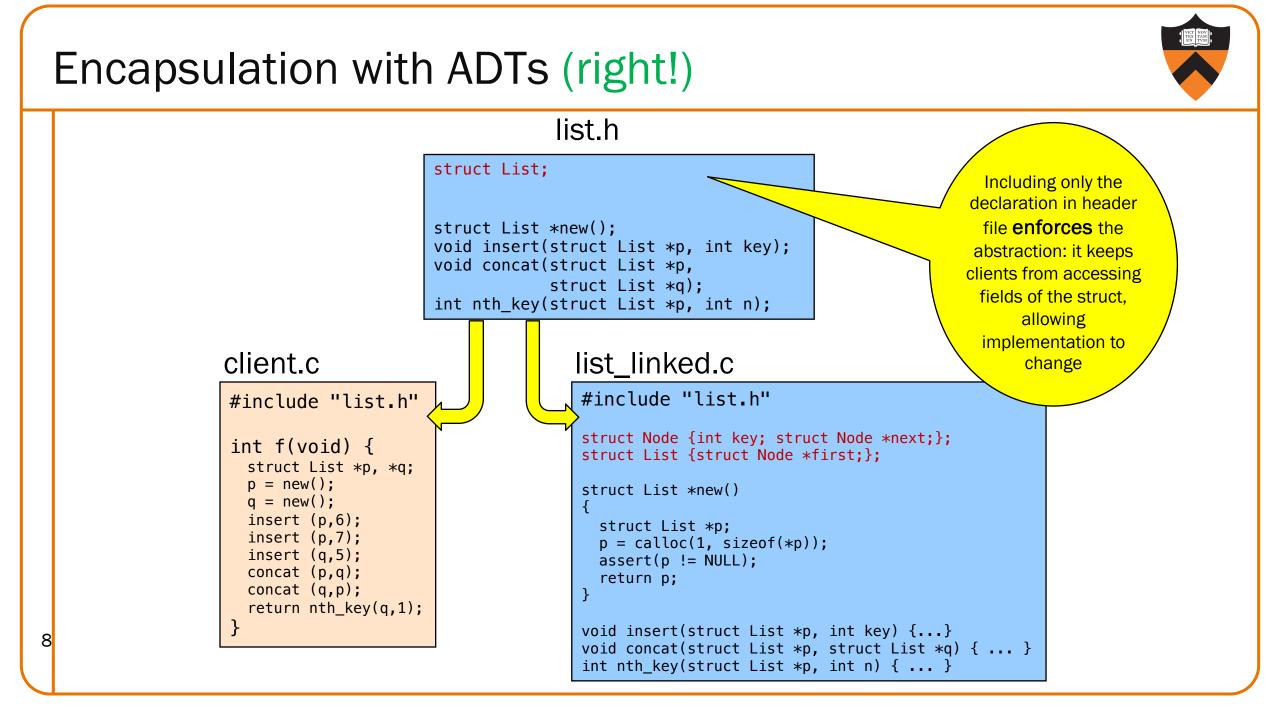
Abstract Data Type (ADT)



<pre>struct Node { int key; struct Node *next; all client code m</pre>		An abstract data type has a <i>hidden representation</i> ; all client code must access the type through its <i>interface</i> :	
	<pre>struct List { struct Node *first; }; and some operations:</pre>	<pre>struct List *new() { struct List *p; p = calloc(1, sizeof(*p)); assert(p != NULL); return p; } void insert(struct List *p, int key</pre>	<pre>struct List; struct List *new(); void insert(struct List *p, int key); void concat(struct List *p,</pre>
6		<pre>{ struct Node *n; n = malloc(sizeof(*n)); assert(n != NULL); n->key=key; n->next=p->first; p-> }</pre>	

Encapsulation with ADTs (wrong!)





Specifications



If you can't see the representation (or the implementations of insert, concat, nth_key), then how are you supposed to know what they do?

Specification:

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A List p represents a sequence of integers σ .

Operation new(): returns a list *p* representing the empty sequence.

Operation insert(*p*, *i*): if *p* represents σ , causes *p* to now represent *i* $\cdot \sigma$.

Operation concat(*p*, *q*): if *p* represents σ_1 and *q* represents σ_2 , causes *p* to represent $\sigma_1 \cdot \sigma_2$ and leaves *q* representing σ_2 .

Operation nth_key(*p*, *n*): if *p* represents $\sigma_1 i \cdot \sigma_2$ where the length of σ_1 is *n*, returns *i* otherwise (if the length of the string represented by *p* is $\leq n$), it returns an arbitrary integer.

This is OK! Client programs relying on unspecified behavior might break with a new implementation.

	STIUCT LIST *IIEW();		
	<pre>void insert(struct list *p, int key);</pre>		
	<pre>void concat(struct list *p,</pre>		
	struct list *q);		
	<pre>int nth_key(struct list *p, int n);</pre>		
nce.			
ent <i>i∙</i> σ.			

struct List *new();



Reasoning About Client Code



List of specifications allows for reasoning about the effects of client code.

struct List;

<pre>int f(void) {</pre>
. , .
struct List *p, *q;
p = new();
q = new();
insert (p,6);
insert (p,7);
insert (q,5);
concat (p,q);
concat (q,p);
<pre>return nth_key(q,1);</pre>
1

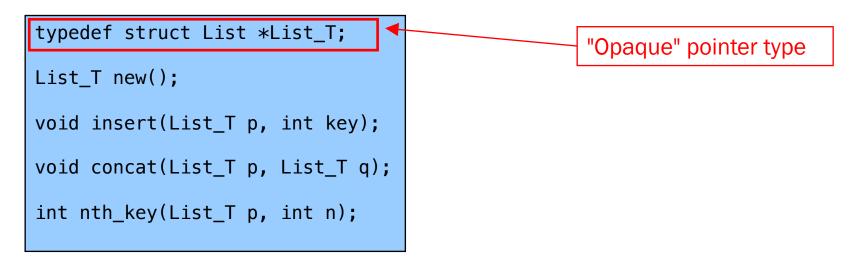
p:[]
p:[] q:[]
p:[6] q:[]
p:[7,6] q:[]
p:[7,6] q:[5]
p:[7,6,5] q:[5]
p:[7,6,5] q:[5,7,6,5]
return 7

Object-Oriented Thinking

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C is not inherently an object-oriented language, but can use language features to encourage object-oriented thinking



- Interface provides List_T abbreviation for client
 - Interface encourages client to think of objects (not structures) and object references (not pointers to structures)
- Client still cannot access data directly: data is "opaque" to client



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Concrete Question: Abstract Data Type?



Q: Is a string, as used by the <string.h> module an ADT?

- A. Yes clients can't know the implementation of strcpy, etc.
- B. Yes clients can't know the representation of strings.
- C. No clients can know the implementation of strcpy, etc.
- D. No clients can know the representation of strings.
- E. No strings are not a datatype.

D

We know the underlying representation of strings.

Clients can manipulate the string's state directly, not through the interface.

Living with ADTs



Sometimes need to provide controlled access to internal representation

- For example, what if we want to be able to print contents of a List_T?
- Or perform some other operation on the keys?
- Do we have to define every possible operation in list.h?

Function Pointers



Sometimes need to provide controlled access to internal representation

```
Function pointer parameter
Function pointers to the rescue:
                                                                   Call via function pointer
     /* list.h */
                                                                              Take address of a function
     void foreach(List_T p, void (*func)(int key));
                                                                          /* main.c */
                                                                         void print_int(int i)
     /* list_linked.c */
                                                                           printf("%d\n", i);
     void foreach_node(struct Node *n, void (*func)(int key))
       if (!n)
                                                                          int main()
         return;
       (*func)(n->key);
                                                                           List_T p = new();
       foreach_node(n->next, func);
                                                                            insert(p, 42);
                                                                            insert(p, 78);
                                                                            foreach(p, &print_int);
     void foreach(List_T p, void (*func)(int key))
       foreach_node(p->first, func);
```

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Agenda



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Resource Management



A well-designed module manages resources consistently

- A module should release a resource *iff* the module has claimed that resource
- Examples
 - Object allocates memory \leftrightarrow object frees memory
 - Object opens file \leftrightarrow object closes file

Why?

- Claiming and releasing resources at different levels is error-prone
 - Forget to free memory \Rightarrow memory leak
 - Forget to allocate memory \Rightarrow dangling pointer, seg fault
 - Forget to close file \Rightarrow inefficient use of a limited resource
 - Forget to open file \Rightarrow dangling pointer, seg fault

Resources in Assignment 3



Who allocates and frees the key strings in symbol table? Potential options:

- (1) Client allocates and frees strings
 - SymTable_put() does not create copy of given string
 - SymTable_remove() does not free the string
 - SymTable_free() does not free remaining strings
- (2) SymTable object allocates and frees strings
 - SymTable_put() creates copy of given string
 - SymTable_remove() frees the string
 - SymTable_free() frees all remaining strings

Our choice: (2)

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• With option (1) client could corrupt the SymTable object (as described in a previous lecture)

Resources in Assignment 3



Who allocates and frees the values in symbol table? Reasonable (?) options:

- (1) Client allocates and frees values
 - SymTable_put() does not create copy of given value, yet client can't corrupt data structure.
 - SymTable_remove() does not free the value
 - SymTable_free() does not free remaining values
- (2) SymTable object allocates and frees values
 - SymTable_put() needs more parameters: the size of the value and a function pointer to a function that will copy the value (or to use memcpy, or to do an awful hack and cast the value to a char* and copy byte-by-byte)
 - SymTable_remove() frees the value

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• SymTable_free() frees all remaining values

Our choice: (1) simpler interface, no search integrity risk, no copy cost

Passing Resource Ownership



Violations of / Diversions from expected resource ownership should be noted explicitly in function comments

```
/* somefile.h */
...
/* ...
This function allocates memory for
the returned object. You (the caller)
own that memory, and are responsible
for freeing it when you no longer
need it. */
void *f();
...
```

Agenda



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https://www.usno.navy.mil/USNO/time/master-clock/images/clockvaults.jpg

Consistency



A well-designed module is consistent

- A function's name should indicate its module
 - Facilitates maintenance programming
 - Programmer can find functions more quickly
 - Reduces likelihood of name collisions
 - From different programmers, different software vendors, etc.
- A module's functions should use a consistent parameter order
 - Facilitates writing client code

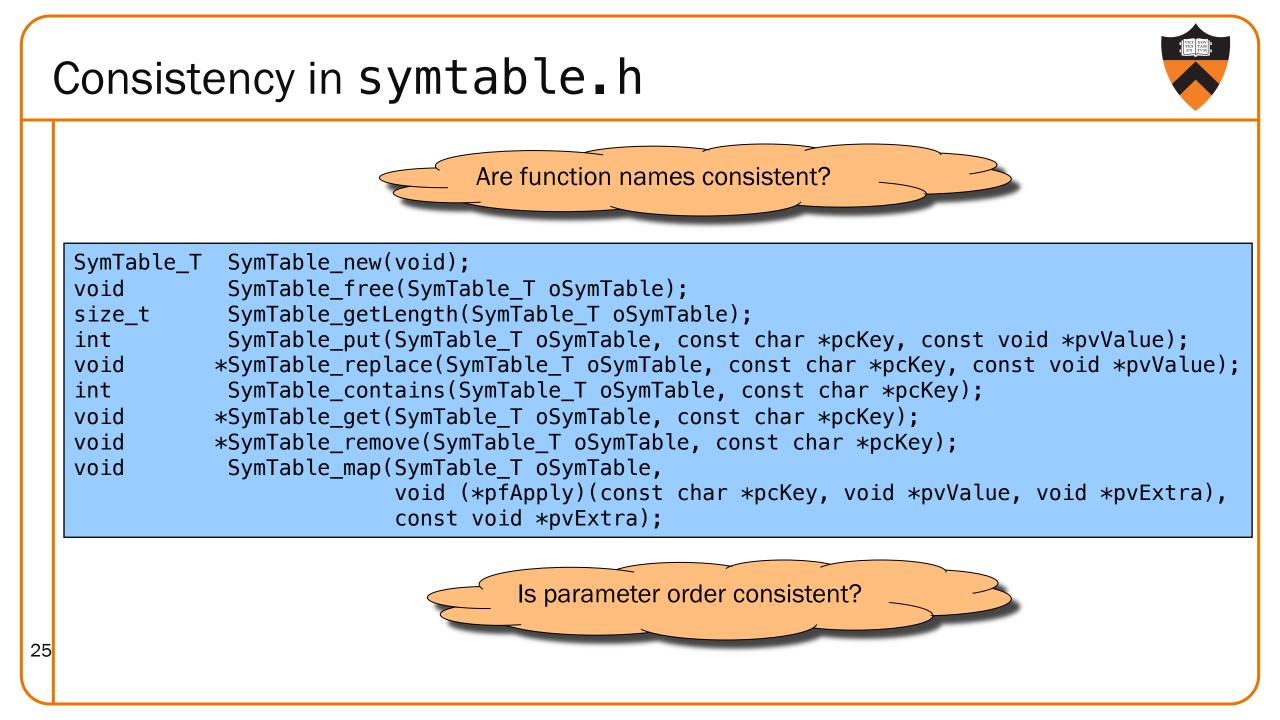
Consistency in string.h

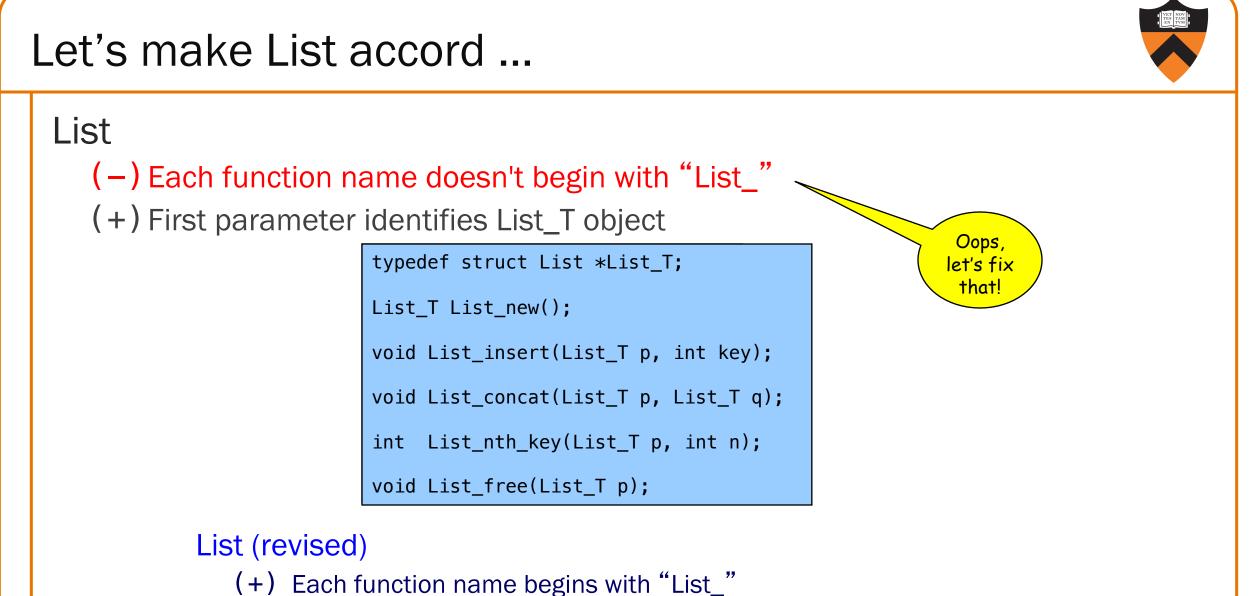
Are function names consistent?

/* string.h */

size t strlen(const char *s); *strcpy(char *dest, const char *src); char *strncpy(char *dest, const char *src, size_t n); char char *strcat(char *dest, const char *src); char *strncat(char *dest, const char *src, size t n); strcmp(const char *s1, const char *s2); int int strncmp(const char *s1, const char *s2, size t n); *strstr(const char *haystack, const char *needle); char void *memcpy(void *dest, const void *src, size t n); int memcmp(const void *s1, const void *s2, size t n); . . .

Is parameter order consistent?





(+) First parameter identifies List_T object

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A well-designed module has a minimal interface

- Function declaration should be in a module's interface if and only if:
 - The function is necessary for functionality, or
 - The function is necessary for clarity of client code

Why?

• More functions \Rightarrow higher learning costs, higher maintenance costs



SymTable_contains(redundancy)?



Q: Assignment 3's interface has both SymTable_get() (which returns NULL if the key is not found) and SymTable_contains() – is the latter necessary?

- A. No should be eliminated
- B. Yes necessary for functionality
- C. Yes necessary for efficiency
- D. Yes necessary for clarity

В

SymTable bindings can have NULL values, but SymTable_get() can't tell these apart from keys that aren't in the table.



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Now hash this one out



Q: Assignment 3 has SymTable_hash() defined in symtablehash.c's implementation, but not the symtable.h interface. Is this good design?

- A. No should be in interface to enable functionality
- B. No should be in interface to enable clarity
- C. Yes should remain an implementation detail

С

It is only ever used internally, and only in a hash table implementation.

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A well-designed module detects and handles/reports errors

A module should:

- Detect errors
- Handle errors if it can; otherwise...
- Report errors to its clients
 - A module often cannot assume what error-handling action its clients prefer

Handling Errors in C

C options for **detecting** errors

- if statement
- assert macro

C options for handling errors

- Write message to stderr
 - Impossible in many embedded applications
- Recover and proceed
 - Sometimes impossible
- Abort process
 - Often undesirable



C options for reporting errors to client (calling function)

• Use function return value?

```
int div(int dividend, int divisor, int *quotient)
{
    if (divisor == 0)
        return 0;
    ...
    *quotient = dividend / divisor;
    return 1;
}
...
successful = div(5, 3, &quo);
if (!successful)
    /* Handle the error */
```

Awkward if return value has some other natural purpose

C options for reporting errors to client (calling function)

• Set global variable?

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```
int successful;
...
int div(int dividend, int divisor)
{
    if (divisor == 0) {
        successful = 0;
        return 0;
    }
    successful = 1;
    return dividend / divisor;
}
...
quo = div(5, 3);
if (!successful)
    /* Handle the error */
```

- Easy for client to forget to check
- Bad for multi-threaded programming
- Some standard C library functions set errno global variable $\ensuremath{\mathfrak{S}}$



C options for reporting errors to client (calling function)

• Use call-by-reference parameter?

```
int div(int dividend, int divisor, int *successful)
{
    if (divisor == 0) {
        *successful = 0;
        return 0;
    }
    *successful = 1;
    return dividend / divisor;
}
...
quo = div(5, 3, &successful);
if (!successful)
    /* Handle the error */
```

Awkward for client; must pass additional argument



C options for reporting errors to client (calling function)

• Call assert macro?

```
int div(int dividend, int divisor)
{
    assert(divisor != 0);
    return dividend / divisor;
}
...
quo = div(5, 3);
```

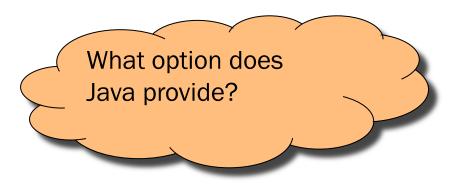
- Asserts could be disabled
- Error terminates the process!





C options for **reporting** errors to client (calling function)

• No option is ideal



User Errors

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Our recommendation: Distinguish between...

(1) **User** errors

- Errors made by human user
- Errors that "could happen"
- Example: Bad data in stdin
- Example: Too much data in stdin
- Example: Bad value of command-line argument
- Use if statement to detect
- Handle immediately if possible, or...
- Report to client via return value or call-by-reference parameter
 - Don't use global variables

Programmer Errors

(2) **Programmer** errors

- Errors made by a programmer
- Errors that "should never happen"

• Example: pointer parameter should not be NULL, but is: this is a "mismatch" between the caller and callee's contract/expectations/behavior.

• For now, use assert to detect and handle, as a user can't do anything about it

The distinction sometimes is unclear

- Example: Write to file fails because disk is full
- Example: Divisor argument to div() is 0

Default: user error

Error Handling in List



```
List_T List_new() { ... }
```

```
void List_insert (List_T p, int key)
{
    struct Node *n;
    n = malloc(sizeof(*n));
    assert(n != NULL);
    n->key=key; n->next=p->first; p->first=n;
}
void List_concat(List_T p, List_T q) { ... }
int List_nth_key(List_T p, int n) { ... }
void List_free(List_T p) { ... }
```

- This error-handling in List_insert violates our advice just now.
- How to fix it? Some choices:
 - void List_insert (List_T p, int key, int *error);
 - int List_insert (list_T p, int key);

Error Handling in List



typedef struct List *List_T;

List_T List_new();

```
void List_insert(List_T p, int key);
```

void List_concat(List_T p, List_T q);

```
int List_nth_key(List_T p, int n);
```

void List_free(List_T p);

Operation nth_key(p,n), if p represents $\sigma_1 i \cdot \sigma_2$ where the length of σ_1 is n, returns i; otherwise (if the length of the string represented by p is $\leq n$), returns an arbitrary integer.

- And what about the curious specification for List_nth_key
- How to do better? Some choices:
 - int List_nth_key (List_T p, int n, int *success);
 - Or, perhaps more consistent with other bad parameter handling, add the interface function int List_length(List_T p); then: Operation List_nth_key(p,n): if p represents σ₁·i·σ₂ where the length of σ₁ is n, returns i; otherwise (if the length of the string represented by p is ≤n), fails with an assertion failure or abort().

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Establishing Contracts



A well-designed module establishes contracts

- A module should establish contracts with its clients
- Contracts should describe what each function does, especially:
 - Meanings of parameters
 - Work performed
 - Meaning of return value
 - Side effects

Why?

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- Facilitates cooperation between multiple programmers
- Assigns <u>blame</u> to contract violators!
 - If all *your* functions have precise contracts and implement them correctly, then the bug must be in *someone else's* code!

How? Comments in module interface

Contracts in List



/* list.h */

```
/* Return the nth element of the list p,
if it exists. Otherwise (if n is
negative or >= the length of the list),
abort the program. */
```

int List_nth_key(List_T p, int n);

Comment defines contract:

- Meaning of function's parameters
 - p is the list to be operated on; n is the index of an element
- Obligations of caller
 - make sure n is in range; (implicit) make sure p is a valid list
- Work performed

- Return the nth element.
- Meaning of return value
 - Side effects (none, by default)

Contracts in List



/* list.h */

/* If 0 <= n < length(p), return the nth element of
the list p and set success to 1. Otherwise (if n is
out of range) return 0 and set success to 0. */</pre>

int List_nth_key(List_T p, int n, int *success);

Comment defines contract:

- Meaning of function's parameters
 - p is the list to be queried; n is the index of an element; success is an error flag
- Obligations of caller
 - (implicit) make sure p is a valid List
- Work performed

- Return the nth element; set success appropriately
- Meaning of return value
- Side effects: set success

One more "contractual" consideration

/* list.h */

/* If 0 <= n < length(p), return the nth element of
the list p and set success to 1. Otherwise (if n is
out of range) return 0 and set success to 0. */</pre>

int List_nth_key(List_T p, int n, int *success);

Ron Minsky '94

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Your caller won't break your contract if you make it impossible to do so!

• List lengths are always non-negative, so perhaps n should be unsigned:



Yaron (Ron) Minsky @yminsky

Replying to @rtfeldman @axiologic and @elmlang

I did coin the term "make illegal states unrepresentable", but the idea is of course much older. The phrase "Minsky compliant" surely gives me too much credit, but at least it sounds more positive than the concept of the "Minsky moment".

7:36 PM · Aug 29, 2018 · Twitter Web Client

int List_nth_key(List_T p, size_t n, int *success);

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A well-designed module has strong cohesion

• A module's functions should be strongly related to each other

Why?

• Strong cohesion facilitates abstraction

Strong Cohesion Examples

List		
(+)	All functions are related to the encapsulated data	
string.	h	
(+) (-) (+)	Most functions are related to string handling Some functions are not related to string handling: memcpy But those functions are similar to string-handling functions	•
stdio.ł		
(+)	Most functions are related to I/O Some functions don't do I/O: sprintf, sscanf	
(-) (+)	But those functions are similar to I/O functions	
.,		

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Agenda



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Weak Coupling



A well-designed module has weak coupling

- Module should be weakly connected to other modules in program
- Interaction within modules should be more intense than among modules

Why? Theoretical observations

- Maintenance: Weak coupling makes program easier to modify
- Reuse: Weak coupling facilitates reuse of modules

Why? Empirical evidence

• Empirically, modules that are weakly coupled have fewer bugs

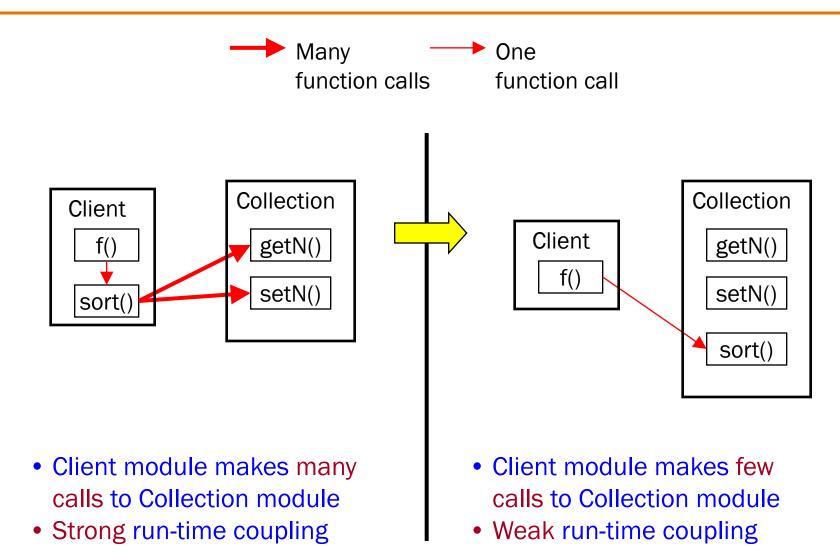
Examples (different from previous)...

Weak Design-time Coupling Example Function call Airplane Airplane getLat() getLat() getLon() Simulator getLon() getAlt() Simulator run() getAlt() setLat() run() move() setLon() setLat() setLon() setAlt() setAlt() move() • Simulator module calls Simulator module calls many functions in Airplane few functions in Airplane

• Strong design-time coupling

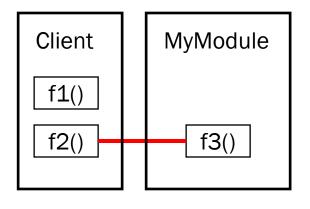
• Weak design-time coupling

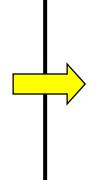
Weak Run-time Coupling Example

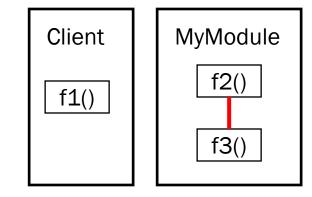


Maintenance-time Weak Coupling Example

Changed together often







- Maintenance programmer changes Client and MyModule together frequently
- Strong maintenance-time coupling

- Maintenance programmer changes Client and MyModule together infrequently
- Weak maintenance-time coupling



Achieving weak coupling could involve refactoring code:

- Move code from client to module (shown)
- Move code from module to client (not shown)
- Move code from client and module to a new module (not shown)

Summary



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Sample Exam Questions

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S17 Exam2 Q6c: What changes would be needed in a callback function for your A3 symbol table's map function if the implementation of the symbol table is changed from using a linked list to using a hash table?

Sample Exam Question (Spring 2020 Exam 2)

VEES TYAN:

Consider the following program, which consists of 6 files:

{ a.h, a.c, b.h, b.c, c.h, c.c}.

a.h:

```
#include <stddef.h>
  (t standt s is s thinks)
```

```
/* struct a is a thing. you can't see inside, though.
better yet, just think of it as an object */
typedef struct a * a_T;
a_T a_new(const char* src);
size_t aT_to_size_t(a_T a);
void a free(a T a);
```

a.c:

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```
#include <stdlib.h>
#include <string.h>
#include "a.h"
struct a { size_t a; };
a_T a_new(const char* src) {
    char* res = strstr(src, "a");
    a_T a = malloc(sizeof(*a));
    if(res == NULL) a->a = 0;
    else a->a = res-src;
    return a;
}
size_t aT_to_size_t(a_T a) {
    return a->a;
}
void a_free(a_T a) {
    free(a);
}
```

b.h:

```
/* I need a.h to know what an a_T is. */
#include "a.h"
a_T getAnA(void);
```

b.c:

```
#include "b.h"
#include <stdio.h>enum { LIMIT = 100 };
a_T getAnA(void) {
   char buf[LIMIT];
   scanf("%s", buf);
   return a_new(buf);
}
```

c.h:

```
#include <stdio.h>
#include "b.h"
```

C.C:

```
#include "c.h"
int main(void) {
    a_T at = getAnA();
    printf("%lu\n", aT_to_size_t(at));
    return 0;
}
```

What ambiguity or potential problem is exposed to clients of module A via the return value of the a_new function? Hint - consider the following inputs to the client program : ensign, lieutenant, commander, captain, admiral.



Sample Exam Question (Fall 2015, Exam 2)

Consider the **Oueue** interface: /* A Queue is a first-in-first-out data structure.*/ /* First node of the queue*/ struct QueueNode * first; /* The last node of the queue*/ struct QueueNode * last; /* The number of elements in the queue */ int count: /* Initialize the Queue */ void Queue init (void); /* Free the resources consumed by the Queue */ void Queue_free (void); /* Return the number of items in the Queue */ int Queue_getCount (void); /* Add item e to the end of the Queue. Return 1 (TRUE) if successful and 0 (FALSE) if memory is exhausted. */ int Queue_enqueue (void * e); /* Remove the item at the front of the queue and return it. */ void * Queue dequeue (void);

Q8b: Briefly describe *two* design problems with this code (i.e., two ways the .h file violates standard practice for modular software development) and how they should be fixed?