Ch 9. Pointers

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A pointer is a variable that contains the address of a variable. Pointers are much used in C, partly because they are sometimes the only way to express a computation, and partly because they usually lead to more compact and efficient code than can be obtained in other ways. Pointers and arrays are closely related; this chapter also explores this relationship and shows how to exploit it.

Pointers have been lumped with the goto statement as a marvelous way to create impossible-to-understand programs. This is certainly true when they are used carelessly, and it is easy to create pointers that point somewhere unexpected. With discipline, however, pointers can also be used to achieve clarity and simplicity. This is the aspect that we will try to illustrate.


9.1 The Address Operator

- Consider main memory to be a sequence of consecutive cells (1 byte per cell).
- The cells are numbered (like an array). The number of a cell is its address.
- When your program is compiled, each variable is allocated a sequence of cells, large enough to hold a value of its type.
- The address operator (&) returns the address of a variable.

```c
int x = 99;
cout << x << endl;
cout << &x << endl;
```

Output:

```
99
0xbffffb0c
```

- Addresses in C/C++ are displayed in hexadecimal. [bffffb0c = 3,221,224,204]

9.2 Pointer Variables

- A pointer variable (or pointer):
  - contains the address of a memory cell

- An asterisk is used to define a pointer variable
  ```c
  int *ptr;
  ```

- “ptr is a pointer to an int” or
- “ptr can hold the address of an int”

```c
int * ptr; //same as above
int* ptr;  //same as above
```
Using Pointer Variables

• Assigning an address to a pointer variable:

```c
int x = 99;
int *ptr;
ptr = &x;
cout << x << endl;
cout << ptr << endl;
```

Output:

```c
address of x: 0xbffffb0c
```

Another example

• Assigning an address to a pointer variable:

```c
int rate = 100;
int *s_rate;
s_rate = &rate;
cout << rate << endl;
cout << s_rate << endl;
```

Output:

```
100
1004
```

Dereferencing Operator: *

• The unary operator * is the **indirection** or **dereferencing** operator.
• It allows you to access the item that the pointer points to.
• *ptr is an alias for the variable that ptr points to.

```c
int x = 1;
int y = 2;
int *ip;

ip = &x;   // ip points to x
y = *ip;   // y is assigned what ip points to
*ip = 100; // (the variable ip points to) gets 100
```

pointer declaration vs. dereferencing

• The asterisk is used in 2 different contexts for pointers, meaning two different things

1. To declare a pointer, in a variable definition:

```c
int *ip;       // ip is defined to be a pointer to an int
```

2. To dereference a pointer, in an expression

```c
y = *ip;   // y is assigned what ip points to
```
### Dereferencing Operator

- Another example

```c
int x = 25, y = 50, z = 75;
int *ptr;
ptr = &x;
*ptr = *ptr + 100;
ptr = &y;
*ptr = *ptr + 100;
ptr = &z;
*ptr = *ptr + 100;
cout << x << " " << y << " " << z << endl;
```

### 9.3 Pointers and Arrays

- You can treat an array variable as if it were a pointer to its first element.

```c
int numbers[] = {10, 20, 30, 40, 50};
cout << "first: " << numbers[0] << endl;
cout << "first: " << *numbers << endl;
cout << &numbers[0] << endl;
cout << numbers << endl;
```

```
Output:
first: 10
first: 10
0xbffffb00
0xbffffb00
```

### Pointer Arithmetic

- When you add a value to a pointer, you are actually adding that value times the size of the data type being referenced by the pointer.

```c
int numbers[] = {10, 20, 30, 40, 50};
// sizeof(int) is 4.
// Let us assume numbers is stored at 0xbffffb00
// Then numbers+1 is really 0xbffffb00 + 1*4, or 0xbffffb04
// And numbers+2 is really 0xbffffb00 + 2*4, or 0xbffffb08
// And numbers+3 is really 0xbffffb00 + 3*4, or 0xbffffb0c
```

```
0xbffffb00 10
0xbffffb04 20
0xbffffb08 30
0xbffffb0c 40
0xbffffb10 50
```

- Note unary * has higher precedence than +

```c
int numbers[] = {10, 20, 30, 40, 50};
cout << "second: " << numbers[1] << endl;
cout << "second: " << *(numbers+1) << endl;
cout << "size: " << sizeof(int) << endl;
cout << numbers << endl;
cout << numbers+1 << endl;
```

```
Output:
second: 20
second: 20
size: 4
0xbffffb00 0xbffffb04
```

- Note: array[index] is equivalent to *(array + index)
Pointers and Arrays

- Pointer operations can be used with array variables.
  ```
  int list[10];
  cin >> *(list+3);
  ```

- Subscript operations can be used with pointers.
  ```
  int list[] = {1,2,3};
  int *ptr = list;
  cout << ptr[2];
  ```

- Only difference: you cannot change the value of the array variable.
  ```
  double totals[20];
  double *dptr;
  dptr = totals; //ok
  totals = dptr; //not ok, totals is a const
  ```

9.4 Pointer Arithmetic

- Operations on pointers over data type d:
  ```
  d *ptr;
  ```

- `ptr+n` where `n` is int: `ptr+n*sizeof(d)`
- `ptr–n` where `n` is int: `ptr-n*sizeof(d)`
- `++` and `--`: `ptr=ptr+1` and `ptr=ptr-1`
- `+=` and `-=`
- Subtraction: `ptr1 — ptr2` result is number of values of type `d` between the two pointers.

9.5 Initializing Pointers

- Pointers can be initialized when they are defined.
  ```
  int myValue;
  int *pint = &myValue;
  ```
  ```
  int ages[20];
  int *pint1 = ages;
  ```

- Note: pointers to data type `d` can be defined along with other variables of type `d`.
  ```
  double x, y, *d, radius;
  ```

9.6 Comparing Pointers

- Pointers maybe compared using relational operators:
  ```
  <  <=  >  >=  ==  !=
  ```

- Examples:
  ```
  int arr[25];
  cout << (&arr[1] > &arr[0]) << endl;
  cout << (arr == &arr[0]) << endl;
  cout << (arr <= &arr[20]) << endl;
  cout << (arr > arr+5) << endl;
  ```

- What is the difference?
  ```
  - ptr1 < ptr2
  - *ptr1 < *ptr2
  ```
9.7 Pointers as Function Parameters

- Use pointers to implement pass by reference.

```c
//prototype: void changeVal(int *);
void changeVal (int *val) {
    *val = *val * 11;
}
int main() {
    int x;
    cout << "Enter an int " << endl;
    cin >> x;
    changeVal(&x);
    cout << x << endl;
}
```

- How is it different from using reference parameters?

9.8 Dynamic Memory Allocation

- When a function is called, memory for local variables is automatically allocated.
- When a function exits, memory for local variables automatically disappears.
- Must know ahead of time the maximum number of variables you may need.
- Dynamic Memory allocation allows your program to create variables on demand, during run-time.

The new operator

- “new” operator requests dynamically allocated memory for a certain data type:

```c
int *iptr;
iptr = new int;
```

- new operator returns address of newly created anonymous variable.
- use dereferencing operator to access it:

```c
*iptr = 11;
cin >> *iptr;
int value = *iptr / 3;
```
Dynamically allocated arrays

- dynamically allocate arrays with new:

```cpp
int *iptr; //for dynamically allocated array
int size;
cout << "Enter number of ints: ";
cin >> size;
iptr = new int[size];
for (int i=1; i<size; i++) {
    iptr[i] = i;
}
```

- Program will throw an exception and terminate if not enough memory available to allocate

9.9 Returning Pointers from Functions

- functions may return pointers:

```cpp
int *findZero (int arr[]) {
    int *ptr;
    ptr = arr;
    while (*ptr != 0)
        ptr++;
    return ptr;
}
```

- The returned pointer must point to
  - dynamically allocated memory OR
  - an item passed in via an argument

NOTE: if the function returns dynamically allocated memory, then it is the responsibility of the calling function to delete it.

delete!

- When you are finished using a variable created with new, use the delete operator to destroy it:

```cpp
int *ptr;
double *array;
ptr = new int;
array = new double[25];
delete ptr;
delete [] array; // note [] required for dynamic arrays!
```

- Do not “delete” pointers whose values were NOT dynamically allocated using new!
- Do not forget to delete dynamically allocated variables (Memory Leaks!!).

Returning Pointers from Functions: duplicateArray

```cpp
int *duplicateArray (int *arr, int size) {
    int *newArray;
    if (size <= 0) //size must be positive
        return NULL; //NULL is 0, an invalid address
    newArray = new int [size]; //allocate new array
    for (int index = 0; index < size; index++)
        newArray[index] = arr[index]; //copy to new array
    return newArray;
}
```

```cpp
int a [5] = {11, 22, 33, 44, 55};
int *b = duplicateArray(a, 5);
for (int i=0; i<5; i++)
    if (a[i] == b[i])
        cout << i << " ok" << endl;
delete [] b; //caller deletes mem
```
Problems returning pointers (watchout)

- **Bad:**
  ```c
  int *getList() {
    int list[80];
    for (int i = 0; i<80; i++)
      list[i] = i;
    return list;
  }
  - what happens to list on function exit?
  
  - **Good:**
  ```c
  int *getList () {
    int *list;
    list = new int[80];
    for (int i=1; i<80; i++)
      list[i] = i;
    return list;
  }
  ```

Variable Length Arrays

- Using a variable to define the size of a regular array:
  ```c
  void f() {
    int size;
    cout << “Enter list length:“ << endl;
    cin >> size;
    string list[size]; //size determined at runtime
  ...
  }
  
  - what happens to list on function exit?

- Like dynamic arrays, size is determined at runtime
- Unlike dynamic arrays, array is deleted/deallocated at the end of the function.
- This is NOT feature of C++, though g++ supports it.