Pointers & Dynamic Memory Allocation

Unit 3
Chapter 9
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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.

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

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

• Assigning an address to a pointer variable:

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

Output:

```
99
0xbffffb0c
```

Another example

```cpp
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.

```cpp
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) is assigned 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:

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

2. To **dereference** a pointer, in an expression

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

- Another example

```cpp
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 use an array variable (the name of the array) as if it were a pointer to its first element.

```cpp
int numbers[] = {10, 20, 30, 40, 50};
```

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

```cpp
int *ptr = numbers;
cout << "first: " << *ptr << endl;
```

Pointers and Arrays

- 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.

```cpp
int numbers[] = {10, 20, 30, 40, 50};
// 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
```

Note: array[index] is equivalent to *(array + index)

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

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

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

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

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;
  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;   //wrong!!, totals is a const
  ```

9.5 Initializing Pointers

- Pointers can be initialized when they are defined.
  ```
  int myValue;
  int *pint = &myValue;
  ```

- Note: you are initializing the pointer, NOT the variable the pointer points to.
  ```
  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;
  ```

9.7 Pointers as Function Parameters

- Use pointers to implement pass by reference.
  ```
  //prototype: void changeVal(int *);
  void changeVal (int *val) {
    *val = *val * 11;
  }
  ```

- How is the syntax different from using reference parameters?

Pointers as array parameter

- Pointer may be used as a parameter for array arg

  ```
  double totalSales(double *arr, int size) {
    double sum = 0.0;
    for (int i=0; i<size; i++) {
      sum += arr[i];   // or sum += *(arr+i);
    }
    return sum;
  }
  ```

- ```
  int main() {
    int main() {
      double sales[4];
      // input data into sales here
      cout << “Total sales: “ << totalSales(sales, 4) << endl;
    }
  ```
9.4 Pointer Arithmetic

- Operations on pointers to data type d:
  
  ```c
  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` changes ptr to point to next/prev variable of type d
  - `+=` and `-=`
  - subtraction: `ptr1 – ptr2`
    result is number of values of type d between the two pointers.

9.6 Comparing Pointers

- Pointers maybe compared using relational operators (based on their address values):
  
  ```c
  <   <=   >   >=   ==   !=
  ```

- Examples:
  ```c
  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`

9.8 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 the address of a 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 to be stored: ";
cin >> size;
iptr = new int[size];

for (int i=0; i<size; i++) {
    iptr[i] = i;  // populating the array
}
```

- 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;  // allocate new array
    for (int index = 0; index < size; index++)
        newArray[index] = arr[index];  // copy to new array
    return newArray;
}
```

- The return type of this function is `(int *)` or pointer to an int.

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

### Output

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integer</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>ok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>ok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>ok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>ok</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Problems returning pointers (watchout)

• **Bad:**
  ```cpp
  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:**
  ```cpp
  int *getList () {
    int *list;
    list = new int[80];
    for (int i=1; i<80; i++)
      list[i] = i;
    return list;
  }
  ```

Variable Length Arrays

• Some compilers allow you to use a variable to define the size of a regular (static) array:
  ```cpp
  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 a feature of standard C++!!