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.

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

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:
```
99
0xbffffb0c
```

Using Pointer Variables

- Another example

```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) 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:

   ```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;
```

```c
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.

```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:

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

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.

```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
```

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

Pointer and Arrays

Note unary * has higher precedence than +, so the parentheses are required.

```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:

```
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;
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;
int ages[20];
int *pint1 = ages;
int *p1 = &myValue, *p2=ages, x=1;
```

- 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;
}
```

```
int main() {
    int x;
    cout << "Enter an int " << endl;
    cin >> x;
    changeVal(&x);
    cout << x << endl;
}
```

- How is the syntax different from using reference parameters?

```
void changeVal (int &val) {
    val = val * 11;
}
```

```
int main() {
    int x;
    cout << "Enter an int " << endl;
    cin >> x;
    changeVal(x);
    cout << x << endl;
}
```

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() {
    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`:
  
  ```
  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):
  
  `<   <=   >   >=   ==   !=`

- 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`

9.8 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:

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

- New operator returns the address of a newly created anonymous variable.
- Use dereferencing operator to access it:

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

- dynamically allocate arrays with new:

```c++
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:

```c++
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: the return type of this function is (int *) or pointer to an int.

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