

Concepts in Programming Languages

This textbook for undergraduate and beginning graduate students explains and examines the central concepts used in modern programming languages, such as functions, types, memory management, and control. The book is unique in its comprehensive presentation and comparison of major object-oriented programming languages. Separate chapters examine the history of objects, Simula and Smalltalk, and the prominent languages C++ and Java.

The author presents foundational topics, such as lambda calculus and denotational semantics, in an easy-to-read, informal style, focusing on the main insights provided by these theories. Advanced topics include concurrency and concurrent object-oriented programming. A chapter on logic programming illustrates the importance of specialized programming methods for certain kinds of problems.

This book will give the reader a better understanding of the issues and trade-offs that arise in programming language design and a better appreciation of the advantages and pitfalls of the programming languages they use.

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page ix</i>
Part 1 Functions and Foundations	
1 Introduction	3
1.1 Programming Languages	3
1.2 Goals	5
1.3 Programming Language History	6
1.4 Organization: Concepts and Languages	8
2 Computability	10
2.1 Partial Functions and Computability	10
2.2 Chapter Summary	16
Exercises	16
3 Lisp: Functions, Recursion, and Lists	18
3.1 Lisp History	18
3.2 Good Language Design	20
3.3 Brief Language Overview	22
3.4 Innovations in the Design of Lisp	25
3.5 Chapter Summary: Contributions of Lisp	39
Exercises	40
4 Fundamentals	48
4.1 Compilers and Syntax	48
4.2 Lambda Calculus	57
4.3 Denotational Semantics	67
4.4 Functional and Imperative Languages	76
4.5 Chapter Summary	82
Exercises	83

vi **Contents**

Part 2 Procedures, Types, Memory Management, and Control

5	The Algol Family and ML	93
	5.1 The Algol Family of Programming Languages	93
	5.2 The Development of C	99
	5.3 The LCF System and ML	101
	5.4 The ML Programming Language	103
	5.5 Chapter Summary	121
	Exercises	122
6	Type Systems and Type Inference	129
	6.1 Types in Programming	129
	6.2 Type Safety and Type Checking	132
	6.3 Type Inference	135
	6.4 Polymorphism and Overloading	145
	6.5 Type Declarations and Type Equality	151
	6.6 Chapter Summary	155
	Exercises	156
7	Scope, Functions, and Storage Management	162
	7.1 Block-Structured Languages	162
	7.2 In-Line Blocks	165
	7.3 Functions and Procedures	170
	7.4 Higher-Order Functions	182
	7.5 Chapter Summary	190
	Exercises	191
8	Control in Sequential Languages	204
	8.1 Structured Control	204
	8.2 Exceptions	207
	8.3 Continuations	218
	8.4 Functions and Evaluation Order	223
	8.5 Chapter Summary	227
	Exercises	228

Part 3 Modularity, Abstraction, and Object-Oriented Programming

9	Data Abstraction and Modularity	235
	9.1 Structured Programming	235
	9.2 Language Support for Abstraction	242
	9.3 Modules	252
	9.4 Generic Abstractions	259
	9.5 Chapter Summary	269
	Exercises	271
10	Concepts in Object-Oriented Languages	277
	10.1 Object-Oriented Design	277
	10.2 Four Basic Concepts in Object-Oriented Languages	278

	Contents	vii
10.3 Program Structure	288	
10.4 Design Patterns	290	
10.5 Chapter Summary	292	
10.6 Looking Forward: Simula, Smalltalk, C++, Java	293	
Exercises	294	
11 History of Objects: Simula and Smalltalk	300	
11.1 Origin of Objects in Simula	300	
11.2 Objects in Simula	303	
11.3 Subclasses and Subtypes in Simula	308	
11.4 Development of Smalltalk	310	
11.5 Smalltalk Language Features	312	
11.6 Smalltalk Flexibility	318	
11.7 Relationship between Subtyping and Inheritance	322	
11.8 Chapter Summary	326	
Exercises	327	
12 Objects and Run-Time Efficiency: C++	337	
12.1 Design Goals and Constraints	337	
12.2 Overview of C++	340	
12.3 Classes, Inheritance, and Virtual Functions	346	
12.4 Subtyping	355	
12.5 Multiple Inheritance	359	
12.6 Chapter Summary	366	
Exercises	367	
13 Portability and Safety: Java	384	
13.1 Java Language Overview	386	
13.2 Java Classes and Inheritance	389	
13.3 Java Types and Subtyping	396	
13.4 Java System Architecture	404	
13.5 Security Features	412	
13.6 Java Summary	417	
Exercises	420	
Part 4 Concurrency and Logic Programming		
14 Concurrent and Distributed Programming	431	
14.1 Basic Concepts in Concurrency	433	
14.2 The Actor Model	441	
14.3 Concurrent ML	445	
14.4 Java Concurrency	454	
14.5 Chapter Summary	466	
Exercises	469	

viii **Contents**

15 The Logic Programming Paradigm and Prolog	475
15.1 History of Logic Programming	475
15.2 Brief Overview of the Logic Programming Paradigm	476
15.3 Equations Solved by Unification as Atomic Actions	478
15.4 Clauses as Parts of Procedure Declarations	482
15.5 Prolog's Approach to Programming	486
15.6 Arithmetic in Prolog	492
15.7 Control, Ambivalent Syntax, and Meta-Variables	496
15.8 Assessment of Prolog	505
15.9 Bibliographic Remarks	507
15.10 Chapter Summary	507
Appendix A Additional Program Examples	509
A.1 Procedural and Object-Oriented Organization	509
<i>Glossary</i>	521
<i>Index</i>	525

Preface

A good programming language is a conceptual universe for thinking about programming.

Alan Perlis, NATO Conference on Software Engineering Techniques, Rome, 1969

Programming languages provide the abstractions, organizing principles, and control structures that programmers use to write good programs. This book is about the concepts that appear in programming languages, issues that arise in their implementation, and the way that language design affects program development. The text is divided into four parts:

- *Part 1*: Functions and Foundations
- *Part 2*: Procedures, Types, Memory Management, and Control
- *Part 3*: Modularity, Abstraction, and Object-Oriented Programming
- *Part 4*: Concurrency and Logic Programming

Part 1 contains a short study of Lisp as a worked example of programming language analysis and covers compiler structure, parsing, lambda calculus, and denotational semantics. A short Computability chapter provides information about the limits of compile-time program analysis and optimization.

Part 2 uses procedural Algol family languages and ML to study types, memory management, and control structures.

In Part 3 we look at program organization using abstract data types, modules, and objects. Because object-oriented programming is the most prominent paradigm in current practice, several different object-oriented languages are compared. Separate chapters explore and compare Simula, Smalltalk, C++, and Java.

Part 4 contains chapters on language mechanisms for concurrency and on logic programming.

The book is intended for upper-level undergraduate students and beginning graduate students with some knowledge of basic programming. Students are expected to have some knowledge of C or some other procedural language and some

x **Preface**

acquaintance with C++ or some form of object-oriented language. Some experience with Lisp, Scheme, or ML is helpful in Parts 1 and 2, although many students have successfully completed the course based on this book without this background. It is also helpful if students have some experience with simple analysis of algorithms and data structures. For example, in comparing implementations of certain constructs, it will be useful to distinguish between algorithms of constant-, polynomial-, and exponential-time complexity.

After reading this book, students will have a better understanding of the range of programming languages that have been used over the past 40 years, a better understanding of the issues and trade-offs that arise in programming language design, and a better appreciation of the advantages and pitfalls of the programming languages they use. Because different languages present different programming concepts, students will be able to improve their programming by importing ideas from other languages into the programs they write.

Acknowledgments

This book developed as a set of notes for Stanford CS 242, a course in programming languages that I have taught since 1993. Each year, energetic teaching assistants have helped debug example programs for lectures, formulate homework problems, and prepare model solutions. The organization and content of the course have been improved greatly by their suggestions. Special thanks go to Kathleen Fisher, who was a teaching assistant in 1993 and 1994 and taught the course in my absence in 1995. Kathleen helped me organize the material in the early years and, in 1995, transcribed my handwritten notes into online form. Thanks to Amit Patel for his initiative in organizing homework assignments and solutions and to Vitaly Shmatikov for persevering with the glossary of programming language terms. Anne Bracy, Dan Bentley, and Stephen Freund thoughtfully proofread many chapters.

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John Mitchell