Chapter 10: General Issues in Using Variables

Data Literacy

- The first step in creating effective data is knowing which kind to create

Making Variable Declarations Easy

- Don't use implicit declarations
- Use naming conventions
- Cross reference variable names

Scope

- How famous a variable is?

Localize References to Variables

- Good idea to localize references to variables by keeping them close together in code
- Short number of lines in between uses
- Improves readability

Keep Variables "Live" for as Short a Time as Possible

- Number of statements over which a variable is live
- Want to keep low
- Gives you a more accurate picture of code as you can concentrate on smaller section
- Good for splitting large routines into smaller ones as well

General Guidelines for Minimizing Scope

- Initialize variables used in a loop immediately before the loop, instead of at beginning of routine
- Don't assign value to variable until just before its used
- Group related statements
- Break groups of related statements into separate routines
- Begin with most restricted visibility
    - Expand only if necessary
    - Part of keeping variable as local as possible

Persistence

- Lifespan of a piece of data
- Lifespans
    - For life of particular block of code or routine
    - For life of program
    - Forever (database)
- Main problem is when you assume variable has longer persistence than it really does
- Steps to solve:
    - Use debugger to check for reasonable values

    - Set variable to “unreasonable values” when done with them
    - Write code that assumes data isn’t persistent
    - Develop habits of declaring and initializing data right before its used
        - If you see data used without a nearby init, be suspicious

Binding Time

- Time at which the variable and its value are bound together
- Ideally want to make binding time as late as possible
    - Most flexibility
- Times when variable van be bound:
    - Coding time (magic numbers)
    - Compile time (named constant)
    - Load time (read from external source)
    - Object instantiation time (read value each time window created)
    - Just in time (value each time window is drawn)

Relationship Between Data Types and Control Structures

- Patterns in code match patterns in data
- Three types of data and corresponding control structures:
    - Sequential data translates to sequential statements in a program
        - Clusters of data used together in a certain order
    - Selective data translates to if and case statements
        - One of several pieces of data used at any particular time
    - Iterative data - for, repeat, while looping structures
        - Same data type repeated several times

Using Each Variable for Exactly One Purpose

- Sometimes tempting to use one variable in two places for two diff activities
    - “temp”, “x”
- Avoid variables with hidden meaning
- Make sure all declared variables are used