Implicit instantiation (C++ only)

Unless a template specialization has been explicitly instantiated or explicitly specialized, the compiler will generate a specialization for the template only when it needs the definition. This is called *implicit instantiation*.

C++11

The compiler does not need to generate the specialization for nonclass, noninline entities when an explicit instantiation declaration is present. C++11

If the compiler must instantiate a class template specialization and the template is declared, you must also define the template.

For example, if you declare a pointer to a class, the definition of that class is not needed and the class will not be implicitly instantiated. The following example demonstrates when the compiler instantiates a template class:

```
template<class T> class X {
 public:
   X* p;
   void f();
   void g();
1};


X<int>* q;
X<int> r;
X<float>* s;
r.f();
s->g();
```

The compiler requires the instantiation of the following classes and functions:

- `X<int>` when the object `r` is declared
- `X<int>::f()` at the member function call `r.f()`
- `X<float>` and `X<float>::g()` at the class member access function call `s->g()`

Therefore, the functions `X<T>::f()` and `X<T>::g()` must be defined in order for the above example to compile. (The compiler will use the default constructor of class `X` when it creates object `r`.) The compiler does not require the instantiation of the following definitions:

- class `X` when the pointer `p` is declared
- `X<int>` when the pointer `q` is declared
- `X<float>` when the pointer `s` is declared

The compiler will implicitly instantiate a class template specialization if it is involved in pointer conversion or pointer to member conversion. The following example demonstrates this:

```
template<class T> class B { };
template<class T> class D : public B<T> { };


void g(D<double>* p, D<int>* q)
{
 B<double>* r = p;
 delete q;
}
```

The assignment `B<double>* r = p` converts `p` of type `D<double>*` to a type of

`B<double>*`; the compiler must instantiate `D<double>`. The compiler must instantiate `D<int>` when it tries to delete `q`.

If the compiler implicitly instantiates a class template that contains static members, those static members are not implicitly instantiated. The compiler will instantiate a static member only when the compiler needs the static member's definition. Every instantiated class template specialization has its own copy of static members. The following example demonstrates this:

```
template<class T> class X {
public:
  static T v;
};

template<class T> T X<T>::v = 0;

X<char*> a;
X<float> b;
X<float> c;
```

Object `a` has a static member variable `v` of type `char*`. Object `b` has a static variable `v` of type `float`. Objects `b` and `c` share the single static data member `v`.

An implicitly instantiated template is in the same namespace where you defined the template.

If a function template or a member function template specialization is involved with overload resolution, the compiler implicitly instantiates a declaration of the specialization.

Parent topic: Template instantiation (C++ only)