

5.4 Loops

Let's take a look at some loops. Loops are pretty simple, but they are easy to miss if you are just skimming over the disassembly. When reversing a binary you won't see keywords like "while" or "for" which are indicators of a loop. This is why they can be easy to miss.

For Loop

00007FF7A8591070	<test	40:53	PUSH RAX	Source.cpp:2
00007FF7A8591072		48:83EC 20	SUB RSP, 0x20	Source.cpp:3
00007FF7A8591076		33DB	XOR EBX, EBX	Source.cpp:4
00007FF7A8591078		0F1F8400 0	NOP DWORD PTR DS:[RAX + RAX], EAX	[const char* format = "Index: %d\n"
00007FF7A8591080		8BD3	MOV EDI, EBX	printf
00007FF7A8591082		48:8D0D 07	LEA RCX, QWORD PTR DS:[0x7FF7A85A9D90]	A: '\n'
00007FF7A8591089		E8 82FFFFFF	CALL <testing.printf>	Source.cpp:7
00007FF7A859108E		FFC3	INC EBX	Source.cpp:8
00007FF7A8591090		83FB 0A	CMP EBX, 0xA	
00007FF7A8591093		7C EB	JL testing.7FF7A8591080	
00007FF7A8591095		33C0	XOR EAX, EAX	
00007FF7A8591097		48:83C4 20	ADD RSP, 0x20	
00007FF7A859109B		5B	POP RBX	
00007FF7A859109C		C3	RET	

The quickest way to identify a loop is to find the index/iteration counter. In the example above we can see that EBX is being zeroed out with `XOR EBX, EBX`. This is nothing special, but if we go down a little we can see that EBX is being incremented with `INC EBX`. x64dbg also uses arrows (such as orange one on the far left) that hint at a possible loop. Alright, enough skimming, let's actually take a real look at the loop.

- First EBX is zeroed. We now know that this loop is going to start with a loop of zero. Let's refer to EBX as the loop index.
- EDI is set to the loop index.
- A string is moved into RCX.
- `printf()` is called. RCX (the first parameter passed to `printf()`) contains the string "Index: %d\n". EDI (the second parameter passed to `printf()`) contains the loop index. We can assume the `printf()` call looks something like:
`printf("Index: %d\n", index);`
- The loop index is then incremented by one.
- The index is compared to 10 (0xA).
- If the index is less than 10, it will repeat the loop. The start of the loop is `MOV EDI, EBX`.

So this loop will print "Index: %d\n" 10 times. Here is what it looks like written in C/C++:

```
for (int i = 0; i < 10; i++) {
    printf("Index: %d\n", i);
}
```

While Loops

Here is a program that is functionally the same as the previous one, except this one is a while loop.

00007FF7489D1070	<test	40:53	PUSH RBX	Source.cpp:2
00007FF7489D1072	.	48:83EC 20	SUB RSP, 0x20	
00007FF7489D1076		33DB	XOR EBX, EBX	Source.cpp:3
00007FF7489D1078		0F1F8400 00	NOP DWORD PTR DS:[RAX + RAX], EAX	
00007FF7489D1080	>	8BD3	MOV EDX, EBX	Source.cpp:5
00007FF7489D1082		48:8D0D 078	LEA RCX, QWORD PTR DS:[0x7FF7489E9D90]	[const char* format = "Index: %d\n"
00007FF7489D1089		E8 82FFFFFF	CALL <testing.printf>	printf
00007FF7489D108E		FFC3	INC EBX	Source.cpp:6
00007FF7489D1090		83FB 0A	CMP EBX, 0xA	A: '\n'
00007FF7489D1093	^	7C EB	JL testing.7FF7489D1080	
00007FF7489D1095		33C0	XOR EAX, EAX	Source.cpp:9
00007FF7489D1097		48:83C4 20	ADD RSP, 0x20	Source.cpp:10
00007FF7489D109B		5B	POP RBX	
00007FF7489D109C		C3	RET	

As you can see, the while loop is the same as the for loop.

Do-While Loops

Do-while loops are not used very often by most developers, but compilers generate them constantly. Do-while loops are while loops except for the code inside of the while loop is run at least once. Most developers make loops that do exactly this even though they may not define them as such. Both the while loop and for loop examples given previously could be done with do-while loops. In an attempt to improve performance many compilers will use do-while loops instead of for loops or while loops. This is because they can eliminate one comparison and jump from the loop. If you ever use a decompiler you will mostly see them showing loops as do-while loops, this is why.

[<- Previous Lesson](#)

[Next Lesson ->](#)

[Chapter Home](#)