

CS100 Lecture 6

Pointers and Arrays II

Contents

Pointers and Arrays

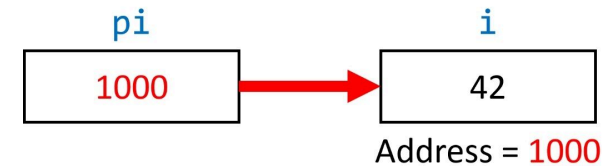
- Pointer arithmetic
- Array-to-pointer conversion
- Pass an array to a function
- Pass a nested array to a function
- Do we need an array?

Pointers and Arrays

Recap: Pointers

A pointer *points to* an object. The value of a pointer is the address of the object that it points to.

```
int i = 42;  
int *pi = &i;
```



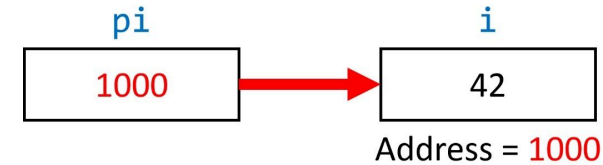
To declare a pointer: `PointeeType *ptr;`

- What is the type of `ptr` ?

Recap: Pointers

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To declare a pointer: `PointeeType *ptr;`

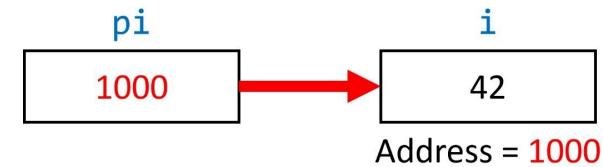
- What is the type of `ptr` ? `PointeeType *`

How can we make `ptr` point to `var` ?

Recap: Pointers

A pointer *points to* an object. The value of a pointer is the address of the object that it points to.

```
int i = 42;  
int *pi = &i;
```



To declare a pointer: `PointeeType *ptr;`

- What is the type of `ptr` ? `PointeeType *`

How can we make `ptr` point to `var` ?

- First, `var` should be of type `PointeeType` .
- `PointeeType *ptr = &var;` (initialize)
- `ptr = &var;` (assign)

Recap: Arrays

An array is a sequence of `N` objects of type `ElemType` stored contiguously.

To declare an array: `ElemType arr[N];`

- What is the type of `arr` ?

Recap: Arrays

An array is a sequence of `N` objects of type `ElemType` stored contiguously.

To declare an array: `ElemType arr[N];`

- What is the type of `arr` ? `ElemType [N]`

To access the `i`-th element: `arr[i]`

- What is the valid range of `i` ?

Recap: Arrays

An array is a sequence of `N` objects of type `ElemType` stored contiguously.

To declare an array: `ElemType arr[N];`

- What is the type of `arr`? `ElemType [N]`

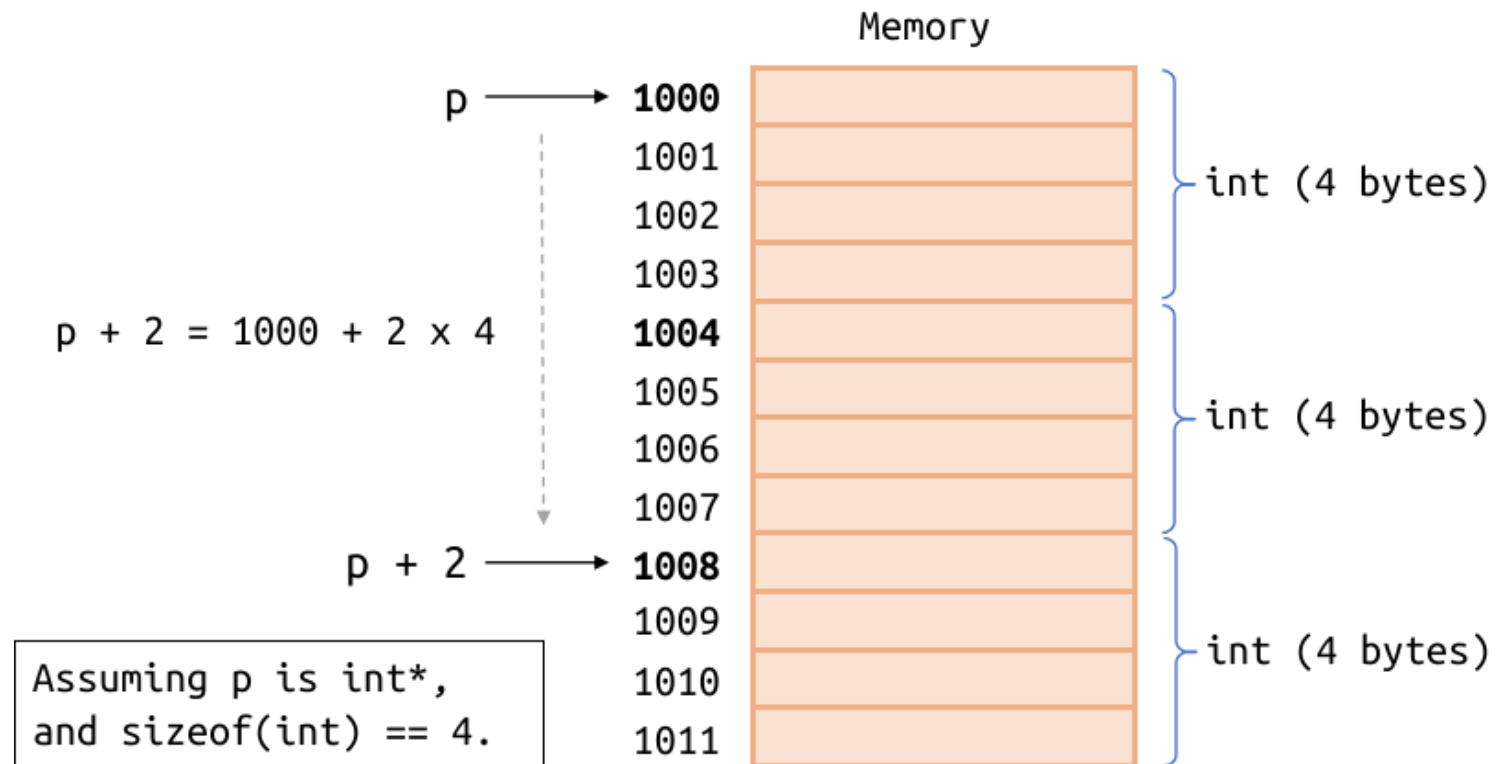
To access the `i`-th element: `arr[i]`

- What is the valid range of `i`? $[0, N)$

Pointer arithmetic

Let `p` be a pointer of type `T *` and let `i` be an integer.

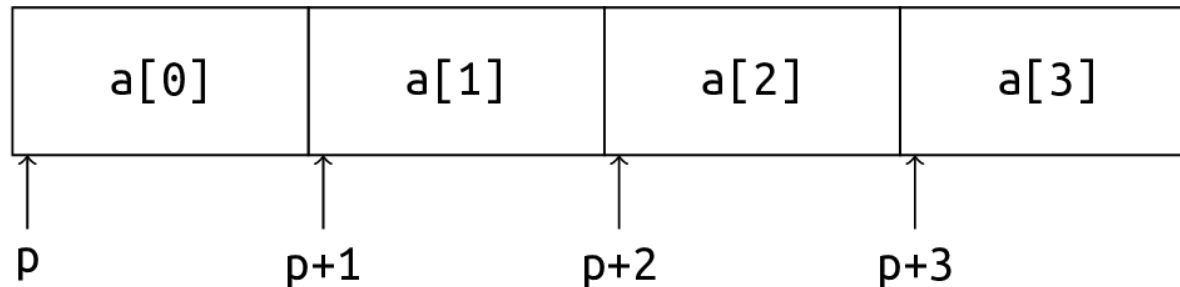
- `p + i` returns the address equal to the value of `(char *)p + i * sizeof(T)`. In other words, pointer arithmetic uses the unit of the pointed-to type.



Pointer arithmetic

Let `p` be a pointer of type `T *` and let `i` be an integer.

- `p + i` returns the address equal to the value of `(char *)p + i * sizeof(T)`. In other words, pointer arithmetic uses the unit of the pointed-to type.
- If we let `p = &a[0]` (where `a` is an array of type `T [N]`), then
 - `p + i` is equivalent to `&a[i]`, and
 - `*(p + i)` is equivalent to `a[i]`.

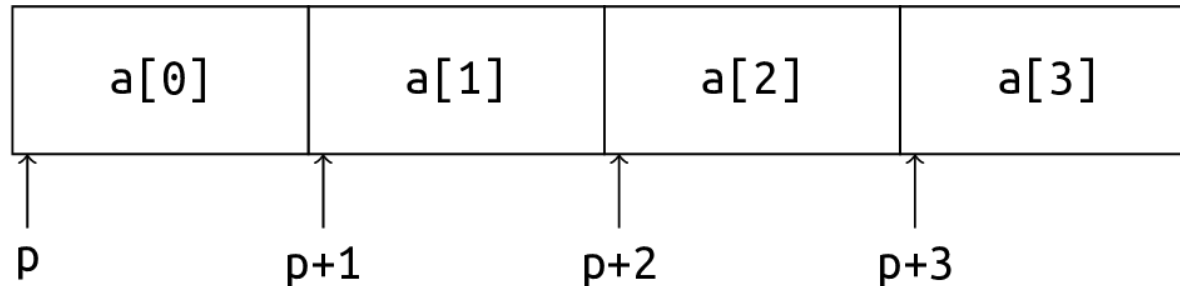


- Arithmetic operations `i + p`, `p += i`, `p - i`, `p -= i`, `++p`, `p++`, `--p`, `p--` are defined in the same way.

Array-to-pointer conversion

If we let $p = \&a[0]$ (where a is an array of type $T[N]$), then

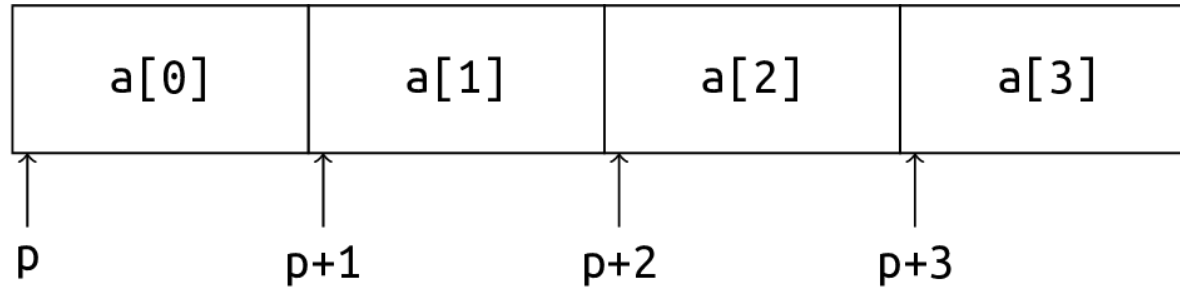
- $p + i$ is equivalent to $\&a[i]$, and
- $*(p + i)$ is equivalent to $a[i]$.



Considering the close relationship between arrays and pointers, an array can be **implicitly converted** to a pointer to the first element: $a \rightarrow \&a[0]$, $T[N] \rightarrow T^*$.

- $p = \&a[0]$ can be written as $p = a$ directly.
- $*a$ is equivalent to $a[0]$.

Array-to-pointer conversion

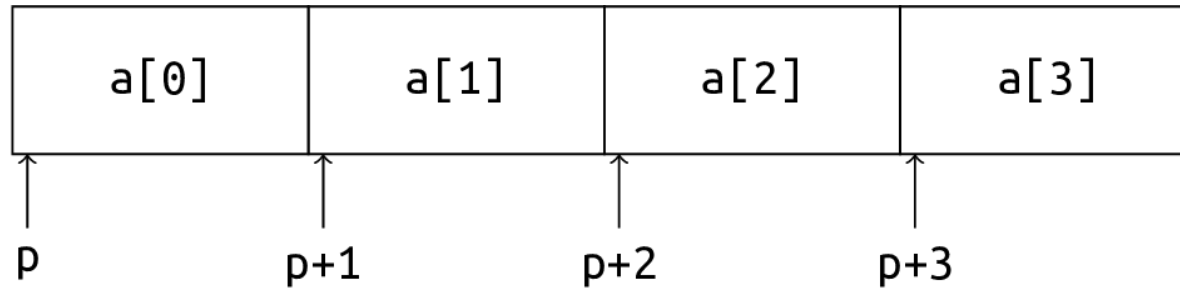


We can use pointers to traverse an array:

```
int a[10];

bool find(int value) {
    for (int *p = a; p < a + 10; ++p)
        if (*p == value)
            return true;
    return false;
}
```

Subtraction of pointers



Let `a` be an array of length `N`. If `p1 == a + i` and `p2 == a + j` (where `i` and `j` are nonnegative integers), the expression `p1 - p2`

- has the value equal to `i - j`, and
- has the type `ptrdiff_t`, which is a **signed** integer type declared in `<stddef.h>`.
 - The size of `ptrdiff_t` is implementation-defined. For example, it might be 64-bit on a 64-bit machine, and 32-bit on a 32-bit machine.
- Here `i, j ∈ [0, N]` (closed interval), i.e. `p1` or `p2` may point to the "*past-the-end*" position of `a`.

Pointer arithmetic

Pointer arithmetic can only happen within the range of an array and its "past-the-end" position (indexed $[0, N]$). For other cases, **the behavior is undefined**.

Examples of undefined behaviors:

- $p1 - p2$, where $p1$ and $p2$ point to the positions of two different arrays.
- $p + 2 * N$, where p points to some element in an array of length N .
- $p - 1$, where p points to the first element $a[0]$ of some array a .

Note that the evaluation of the innocent-looking expression $p - 1$, without dereferencing it, is still undefined behavior and may fail on some platforms.

Pass an array to a function

The only way ¹ of passing an array to a function is to **pass the address of its first element**.

The following declarations are equivalent:

```
void fun(int *a);  
void fun(int a[]);  
void fun(int a[10]);  
void fun(int a[2]);
```

In all these declarations, the type of the parameter `a` is `int *`.

- How do you verify that?

Pass an array to a function

```
void fun(int a[100]);
```

The type of the parameter `a` is `int *`. How do you verify that?

```
void fun(int a[100]) {  
    printf("%d\n", (int)sizeof(a));  
}
```

Output: (On 64-bit Ubuntu 22.04, GCC 13)

```
8
```

- If the type of `a` is `int[100]` as declared, the output should be `400` (assuming `int` is 32-bit).

Pass an array to a function

Even if you declare the parameter as an array (either `T a[N]` or `T a[]`), its type is still a pointer `T*`: **You are allowed to pass anything of type `T*` to it.**

- Array of element type `T` with any length is allowed to be passed to it.

```
void print(int a[10]) {
    for (int i = 0; i < 10; ++i)
        printf("%d\n", *(a + i));
}
int main(void) {
    int x[20] = {0}, y[10] = {0}, z[5] = {0}, w = 42;
    print(x);    // OK
    print(y);    // OK
    print(z);    // Allowed by the compiler, but undefined behavior!
    print(&w);   // Still allowed by the compiler, also undefined behavior!
}
```

Pass an array to a function

Even if you declare the parameter as an array (either `T a[N]` or `T a[]`), its type is still a pointer `T*`: **You are allowed to pass anything of type `T*` to it.**

- Array of element type `T` with any length is allowed to be passed to it.

The length `n` of the array is often passed explicitly as another argument, so that the function can know how long the array is.

```
void print(int *a, int n) {  
    for (int i = 0; i < n; ++i)  
        printf("%d\n", *(a + i));  
}
```

Subscript on pointers

```
void print(int *a, int n) {  
    for (int i = 0; i < n; ++i)  
        printf("%d\n", a[i]); // Look at this!  
}
```

Subscript on pointers is also allowed! `a[i]` is equivalent to `*(a + i)`.²

Return an array?

There is no way of returning an array from the function.

Returning the address of its first element is ok, **but be careful**:

This is OK:

```
int a[10];

int *foo(void) {
    return a;
}
```

This returns an **invalid address**! (Why?)

```
int *foo(void) {
    int a[10] = {0};
    return a;
}
```

Return an array?

These two functions have made the same mistake: **returning the address of a local variable.**

```
int *foo(void) {  
    int a[10] = {0};  
    return a;  
}  
int main(void) {  
    int *a = foo();  
    a[0] = 42; // undefined behavior  
}
```

```
int *fun(void) {  
    int x = 42;  
    return &x;  
}  
int main(void) {  
    // undefined behavior  
    printf("%d\n", *fun());  
}
```

- When the function returns, all the parameters and local objects are destroyed.
 - `a` and `x` no longer exist.
- The objects on the returned addresses are **"dead"** when the function returns!

Exercise

Write a function that accepts an array of `int`s, and copies the odd numbers to another array in reverse order.

```
int main(void) {  
    int a[5] = {1, 2, 3, 5, 6}, b[5];  
    copy_odd_reversed(/* ... */); // your function  
    // Now `a` is unchanged, and the values in `b` are {5, 3, 1}.  
}
```

Design the usage of your function (parameters and return values) on your own.

Exercise

Write a function that accepts an array of `int` s, and copies the odd numbers to another array in reverse order.

```
int copy_odd_reversed(int *from, int n, int *to) {
    int cnt = 0;
    for (int i = n - 1; i >= 0; --i)
        if (from[i] % 2 == 1)
            to[cnt++] = from[i]; // What does this mean?
    return cnt;
}

int main(void) {
    int a[5] = {1, 2, 3, 5, 6}, b[5];
    int b_length = copy_odd_reversed(a, 5, b); // b_length == 3.
    // Now `a` is unchanged, and the values in `b` are {5, 3, 1}.
}
```

Since arrays cannot be returned, we often create the result array on our own, and pass it to the function.

Pointer type (revisited)

The type of a pointer is `PointeeType *`.

For two different types `T1` and `T2`, the pointer types `T1 *` and `T2 *` are **different types**, although they may point to the same location.

```
int i = 42;  
float *fp = &i;  
++*fp; // Undefined behavior. It is not ++i.
```

In C, pointers of different types can be implicitly converted to each other (with possibly a warning). This is **extremely unsafe** and an error in C++.

Dereferencing a pointer of type `T1 *` when it is actually pointing to a `T2` is *almost always* undefined behavior.

- We will see one exception in the next lecture. ³

Pass a nested array to a function

When passing an array to a function, we make use of the **array-to-pointer conversion**:

- `Type [N]` will be implicitly converted to `Type *`.

What about nested arrays?

Pass a nested array to a function

When passing an array to a function, we make use of the **array-to-pointer conversion**:

- `Type [N]` will be implicitly converted to `Type *`.

A "2d-array" is an "array of array":

- `Type [N][M]` is an array of `N` elements, where each element is of type `Type [M]`.
- What is the conversion result of `Type [N][M]` ?

Pass a nested array to a function

When passing an array to a function, we make use of the **array-to-pointer conversion**:

- `Type [N]` will be implicitly converted to `Type *`.

A "2d-array" is an "array of array":

- `Type [N][M]` is an array of `N` elements, where each element is of type `Type [M]`.
- `Type [N][M]` should be implicitly converted to a "pointer to `Type[M]`".

What is a "pointer to `Type[M]`"?

Pointer to array

A pointer to an array of `N` `int` s:

```
int (*parr)[N];
```

An array of `N` pointers (pointing to `int`):

```
int *arrp[N];
```

Too confusing! How can I remember them?

Pointer to array

A pointer to an array of `N` `int` s:

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```

An array of `N` pointers (pointing to `int`):

```
int *arrp[N];
```

Too confusing! How can I remember them?

- `int (*parr)[N]` has a pair of parentheses around `*` and `parr` , so
 - `parr` is a pointer (`*`), and
 - points to something of type `int[N]` .
- Then the other one is different:
 - `arrp` is an array, and
 - stores `N` pointers, with pointee type `int` .

Pass a nested array to a function

The following declarations are equivalent: The parameter is of type `int (*)[N]`, which is a pointer to `int[N]`.

```
void fun(int (*a)[N]);  
void fun(int a[][N]);  
void fun(int a[2][N]);  
void fun(int a[10][N]);
```

We can pass an array of type `int[K][N]` to `fun`, where `K` is arbitrary.

- The size for the second dimension must be `N`.
 - `T[10]` and `T[20]` are different types, so the pointer types `T(*)[10]` and `T(*)[20]` are not compatible.

Pass a nested array to a function

```
void print(int (*a)[5], int n) {
    for (int i = 0; i < n; ++i) {
        for (int j = 0; j < 5; ++j)
            printf("%d ", a[i][j]);
        printf("\n");
    }
}

int main(void) {
    int a[2][5] = {{1, 2, 3, 4, 5}, {6, 7, 8, 9, 10}};
    int b[3][5] = {0};
    print(a, 2); // OK
    print(b, 3); // OK
}
```


Pass a nested array to a function

In each of the following declarations, what is the type of `a`? Does it accept an argument of type `int[N][M]`?

1. `void fun(int a[N][M])`

2. `void fun(int (*a)[M])`

3. `void fun(int (*a)[N])`

4. `void fun(int **a)`

5. `void fun(int *a[])`

6. `void fun(int *a[N])`

7. `void fun(int a[100][M])`

8. `void fun(int a[N][100])`

Pass a nested array to a function

In each of the following declarations, what is the type of `a`? Does it accept an argument of type `int[N][M]`?

1. `void fun(int a[N][M])` : A pointer to `int[M]` . Yes.
2. `void fun(int (*a)[M])` : Same as 1.
3. `void fun(int (*a)[N])` : A pointer to `int[N]` . Yes iff `N == M` .
4. `void fun(int **a)` : A pointer to `int *` . No.
5. `void fun(int *a[])` : Same as 4.
6. `void fun(int *a[N])` : Same as 4.
7. `void fun(int a[100][M])` : Same as 1.
8. `void fun(int a[N][100])` : A pointer to `int[100]` . Yes iff `M == 100` .

Exercise

We wrote a "transpose" program in last lecture's exercise, which accepts a matrix from input and prints its transpose.

Rewrite this functionality as a function. Suppose the size of the given matrix is 3×4 .

```
int main(void) {
    int a[3][4];
    for (int i = 0; i < 3; ++i)
        for (int j = 0; j < 4; ++j)
            scanf("%d", &a[i][j]);
    int b[4][3];
    transpose(a, b); // Your function
    for (int i = 0; i < 4; ++i) {
        for (int j = 0; j < 3; ++j)
            printf("%d ", b[i][j]);
        printf("\n");
    }
}
```

Do we need an array?

Write a program that reads an integer n and prints the n -th Fibonacci number. Assume that the numbers are representable by `int`.

$$F_n = \begin{cases} 0, & n = 0, \\ 1, & n = 1, \\ F_{n-1} + F_{n-2}, & n > 1. \end{cases}$$

Do we need an array?

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$$F_n = \begin{cases} 0, & n = 0, \\ 1, & n = 1, \\ F_{n-1} + F_{n-2}, & n > 1. \end{cases}$$

```
int calc_fib(int n) {  
    int fib[100] = {0, 1};  
    for (int i = 2; i <= n; ++i)  
        fib[i] = fib[i - 1] + fib[i - 2];  
    return fib[n];  
}
```

Is this array necessary?

Do we need an array?

Is this array necessary?

```
int calc_fib(int n) {  
    int fib[100] = {0, 1};  
    for (int i = 2; i <= n; ++i)  
        fib[i] = fib[i - 1] + fib[i - 2];  
    return fib[n];  
}
```

We only need two (three) variables!

```
int calc_fib(int n) {  
    int a = 0, b = 1;  
    for (int i = 2; i <= n; ++i) {  
        int new = a + b;  
        a = b;  
        b = new;  
    }  
    return b;  
}
```

Do we need an array?

In the following cases, do we need an array?

- Read n integers, then print the sum of them.
- Read n integers, then print them in reverse order.
- Read n integers, then print the maximum of them.
- Read n integers, then print the second maximum of them.

Do we need an array?

In the following cases, do we need an array?

- Read n integers, then print the sum of them. **No**
- Read n integers, then print them in reverse order. **Yes**
- Read n integers, then print the maximum of them. **No**
- Read n integers, then print the second maximum of them. **No**

Summary

Pointer arithmetic

- can only happen within the range of an array and its "past-the-end" position. Other cases are undefined behaviors.
- `p + i` returns the address `(char *)p + i * sizeof(T)`, i.e. `i * sizeof(T)` bytes away from `p`.
- `p1 - p2` is equal to `i - j`.

Array-to-pointer conversion

- An array `a` can be implicitly converted to `&a[0]`.
- `T [N] → T *`.

Summary

Pass an array to a function

- You cannot declare an array parameter. It is always a pointer.
- We often use another parameter to indicate the length of the array.
- Instead of returning an array, we create the result array and pass it to the function.
- `T[N][M] → T (*)[M]`

Avoid unnecessary arrays.

Notes

¹ In fact, you can pass the address of an array:

```
void print_array_10(int (*pa)[10]) {  
    for (int i = 0; i < 10; ++i)  
        printf("%d\n", (*pa)[i]);  
}  
int main(void) {  
    int a[10], b[100], c = 42;  
    print_array_10(&a); // OK  
    print_array_10(&b); // Error  
    print_array_10(&c); // Error  
}
```

In the function `print_array_10` above, the parameter type is `int (*)[10]`, a pointer to an array of 10 `int` s. The pointee type must be `int[10]`. Passing the address of anything else to it would not work.

Notes

² In fact, [the subscript operator](#) is defined by the standard for pointers. In expressions like `a[i]` where `a` is an array, `a` undergoes the implicit array-to-pointer conversion. [Such implicit conversion is so common](#) that some people even treat arrays and pointers as the same thing, which is a common misunderstanding.

³ See [strict aliasing](#) for detailed rules.