C introduction

Complex data types

Contents

Motivation

Think of a data type that can store all data belonging to a person:

```
char name[32];
int age, id;
```

However, there seems to be no way to put those different types together.

Think of a data type that can store the state (current color) of traffic lights:

```
int color;
/* 0 = red, 1 = yellow, 2 = green */
```

How to avoid someone assigning a different value to *color*?

Limits of primitive data types

Primitive data types are fine as long as you want to

- Store a single value that does not depend on other variables
- Store a sequence of values of the same type with a constant length
  $\rightarrow$ *arrays*

However, it is not possible to

- Compose variables of different data types to a compound structure
  $\rightarrow$ *composite data types*
- Have a variable that can only attain certain values
  $\rightarrow$ *enumerations*
- Have a sequence with an adjustable length
  $\rightarrow$ soon...

Data records

Composite data types are derived from primitive data types. You can store any number of primitive variables in one composite variable.

- The composite variable is called *structure* and has the type *struct*
- The primitive variables are called *members* of that structure

Defining a new composite type "*struct* person":

```
struct person {       /* struct <identifier> */
    int id;
    int age;          /* block for member declaration */
    char name[32];
};                    /* end declaration with ';' */
```

A *struct* variable is at least as large as all of its members.

struct variables

Our new type *struct person* can be used to declare variables any where in its scope:

```
struct person pers_alice, pers_bob;
```

You can declare a *struct* variable directly in the type definition:

```
struct person {
    /* member declaration */
} pers_alice, pers_bob;
```

If we do not need the struct type *person* for further variable declarations, its identifier can be left out.

Definition and member access

To initialize the *struct* members upon declaration, enclose the values in braces as we did it for arrays:

```
struct person pers_alice = { 1, 20, "Alice" };
```

To access the struct members, use the struct identifier followed by a '**.**' and the member identifier:

```
printf("%d\n", pers_alice.id);
pers_alice.age++;
```

structs as *struct* members

An adress is rather complicated:

```
struct adress {
    int postcode;
    /* ... imagine much more members */
};
```

Now, let the *person* have one:

```
struct person {
    struct adress contact;
    /* ... and all the other members */
} pers_alice;
```

Access:

```
pers_alice.contact.postcode = 15430;
```

unions

- Similar to *structs*, handle them in the same way
- However: only one member can be "active"
- If you assign a value to a member, all other members become invalid

Interface between a *list-style* and a *vector-style* implementation:

```
union compound {
    int list[3];
    struct {
        int x1, x2, x3;
    } vector;
};
```

The size of a union variable is equal to the size of its largest member.
$\rightarrow$ saving memory

Smart aliases

An enumeration consists of identifiers that behave like *constant values*. It is declared using the keyword *enum*:

```
enum light {
    RED,
    YELLOW,
    GREEN
};
```

Now you can assign the values *red*, *yellow* and *green* to variables of the type *enum light*. Internally they are represented as numbers (*red* = 0, *yellow* = 1 etc.), but

- Using the aliases is clear and fancy
- No invalid values (like *-1*) can be assigned

Profit

You can determine the values of the constants on your own:

```
enum workday {
    MONDAY,             /* 0 */
    TUESDAY,            /* 1 */
    THURSDAY = 3,       /* 3 */
    FRIDAY              /* 4 - implicit (predecessor + 1) */
};
```

However, this can confuse people → only use it if there is a good reason.

Enumerations provide a nice way to define "global" constants:

```
enum { WIDTH = 10, HEIGHT = 20 };
...
char tetris_board[WIDTH][HEIGHT];
```

Consistency

- Since complex type definitions heavily rely on blocks, you should use the same coding conventions on them
- Let your custom type identifiers start with small letters

If you define a complex data type, you are very likely going to use it in many different parts of your program.
$\rightarrow$ Have a global type definition, declare the variables in the local context

Name *enum* constants in CAPITAL letters to visually seperate them from variables.

typedef

Sometimes you see people writing code like that:

```
typedef struct foo {
    /* member declarations */
} bar;
```

This creates the new type *bar* which is nothing more than a *struct foo*.

However, this simple fact is hidden for other programmers working on the same project → **possible confusion**.

- Unclear, if *bar* is a composite type at all
- If so, is it a *struct* / *union* / *enum* or something really crazy?

Never use *typedef*.

Please, avoid using *typedef*.[1]

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Of course, there are situations in which the use of *typedef* makes sense.
BUT:

- Not in the C introduction course
- Not for simple *struct*s

[1] Seriously, never use *typedef*.

Exercises

- You are now able to solve tasks 20 and 21.