

Programming in JavaScript

Section 3: ES6 and JavaScript

3.1 Const and Let Variables

Const and Let variables are a new feature that is introduced into ES6. The syntax is exactly the same as the var variable keyword; however, the behaviour are slightly different and will throw an error depending on the variable type used.

A const variable must be initialised when being declared i.e. we must assign it a value otherwise we would get an error.

A const or constant variable can store a value just like a variable. However, when declaring a const variable we must assign it a value (unlike var which does not require it to be initialised when declared).

```
var name;  
name = "John";  
  
const name; SyntaxError: Missing initializer in const declaration
```

```
const name = "John";
```

The var value can change its value anytime. The const variable on the other hand does not allow you to change the value of the constant variable and will result an error.

```
var name = "John";  
name = "Mary";  
  
const name = "John";  
name = "Mary"; TypeError: Assignment to constant variable.
```

Therefore, when declaring a const variable we must assign it a value when it is declared and we cannot re-assign it a new value at any point in the code hence, as the name indicates, it has a constant value.

The let variable is almost the same as var but similar to const variables there is a difference between var and let variables. A var variable has two scopes a global and a function scope. The let variable has three scopes a global scope, function scope and a block scope.

When we declare a variable outside a function the variable is said to be declared in the global scope. This means any child functions of the code can access this global variable.

```
var global = "I am a global variable";  
  
function sayMyName() {  
  console.log(global);  
};  
  
sayMyName();  
console.log(global);  
  
I am a global variable  
I am a global variable
```

A local scope (or a function scope) is a variable that is only available in the function and is not available outside in the global scope i.e. it is only local to the function it was declared in. The below code will throw a `ReferenceError` on `console.log(local)` because the global scope does not have access to the function variable outside the local scope. Therefore, the variable can only be manipulated inside of the function where it was declared.

```
function sayMyName() {  
  var local = "I am a local variable";  
  console.log(local);  
};  
  
sayMyName();  
console.log(local);
```

ReferenceError: local is not defined

The `let` variable functions exactly the same as the `var` variable i.e. it can be initialised at a later point in time and has both the global and function scope.

```
let global;  
global = "I am a global variable";  
  
function sayMyName() {  
  let local = "I am a local variable";  
  console.log(global);  
  console.log(local);  
};  
  
sayMyName();  
console.log(global);  
// console.log(local);
```

The `console.log(local)` code will throw a `ReferenceError` as seen above example for `var`. As we can see the `let` and `var` variables work exactly the same.

I am a global variable
I am a local variable
I am a global variable

The only difference as mentioned above is that the `let` variable has a third scope which is called the block scope. In JavaScript a block is anything that starts and closes with curly brackets (`{ }`). The code contained in the curly braces is part of that block of code.

The `let` variable inside of a block can only be accessed in the block scope and cannot be accessed outside of the block i.e. in the global scope (as seen below this will return a `ReferenceError`).

```
{  
  let block = "I am a block scope variable";  
  console.log(block);  
};  
  
console.log(block);
```

ReferenceError: block is not defined

When the block code completes its execution the `let` variable no longer exists which is why it gives the `ReferenceError`. This behaviour does not apply to `var` variables as demonstrated in the below example:

```
{  
  var block = "I am a block scope variable";  
  console.log(block);  
};  
  
console.log(block);
```

I am a block scope variable
I am a block scope variable

Finally, it is important to note that a `let` and `var` variable cannot have the same name (no variables can be declared with the same name) and this will throw a `SyntaxError` to inform you that the variable name has already been declared. In the below example the variable name is called 'variable' and this will change to whatever the name of the variable is that has already been declared.

SyntaxError: Identifier 'variable' has already been declared

3.2 Block Scope Functions

When a function is created outside in the global scope and another function with the same name is created in a block scope, the new block scoped function will override the global scoped function.

Remember a block scope is anything that starts and ends with the curly brackets e.g. if statements, while, do while and for each loops.

```
function foo() {
  return "b";
};

{
  function foo() {
    return "bar";
  };
  console.log(foo());
};

console.log(foo());
```

```
{
  function foo() {
    return "bar";
  };
  console.log(foo());
};

function foo() {
  return "b";
};

console.log(foo());
```

In this example the `foo()` function in the block scope has overwritten the `foo()` function in the global scope and will print 'bar' in the console twice.

Note the same does not apply in the vice versa i.e. if we declare a function inside of the block scope first and then in the global scope declare a function with the same name, this will not override the block scope.

```
bar
bar
```

```
{
  function foo() {
    return "foo";
  };

  {
    function foo() {
      return "bar";
    };

    console.log(foo());
  };

  console.log(foo());
};
```

When we have a block inside another block (nested blocks) the same behaviour occurs i.e. whereby the new function with the same name overrides the previous function as seen in the example below:

The `console.log()` in the inner block returns 'bar' to the terminal/console because the inner `foo` function overrides the outer block `foo` function.

However, the `console.log()` in the outer main block returns 'foo' in the terminal/console and is not overwritten by the inner block function.

```
{
  let variable = "foo";
  function foo() {
    return variable;
  };

  {
    let variable = "bar";
    function foo() {
      return variable;
    };

    console.log(foo());
  };

  console.log(foo());
};
```

The reason for this behaviour is because the inner block code i.e. functions will only exist in the inner block execution and will override the outer block function with the same name. Once the inner block execution completes the inner function (code block) no longer exists. Therefore, the function in the outer block is now the only function that exists in the block execution.

Therefore, when working with inner block functions that have functions with the same name as the outer block functions we need to pay special attention to this behaviour of JavaScript. This behaviour also applies to variables within block scope.

```
bar
foo
```

Important Note: If the inner block 'variable' did not have the 'let' keyword then this will overwrite the outer blocks let variable and would end up printing 'bar' twice.