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1  // Lecture 90: Constant Expressions (constexpr)
2  int main(){
3      constexpr int i = 10; //this indicates that the
    • value of 'i' is computed at compile time,
    • therefore we can use i in those expressions that
    • expect a compile time constant.
4      // for example, we can use i as a size of the
    • array.
5      int arr[i]; // set the size of the array.
6  }
7  // now you might ask, we can do the same thing with
    • the const keyword:
8  int main(){
9      const int i = 10;
10     int arr[i];
11 }
12 // So what's the difference?
13 // The initialisation of the constexpr is evaluated at
    • compile time, in the second case, the expression is
    • also evaluated at compile time, but not all constant
    • declarations are evaluated at compile time.
14 // some constants are initialised at runtime.
15
16 int GetNumber(){
17     return 42;
18 }
19 int main(){
20     int j = GetNumber(); // the initialisation of j is
    • deferred until runtime.
21     // So its value cannot be computed at compile
    • time.hence it cannot be used as a size of an
    • array.
22 }
23 // if we try to initialise the constexpr with
    • GetNumber() it will NOT WORK.
24 const int j = GetNumber(); // will not work!
25
26 // A constant expression variable can only be
    • initialised when there is a constant expression,
    • that means it does not return a constant value. (The
    • compiler doesn't know that the function is returning
    • a constant value.)

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27
28 // but if we know that a function is returning a const
  • value, then we would like to optimise it.
29 // We would like the compiler to evaluate the return
  • value of GetNumber() at compile time, and we can do
  • that by making this function as a constexpr so we
  • will have to mark the return type with constexpr.
30
31 // Do this instead:
32 constexpr int GetNumber(){
33     return 42;
34 }
35 // This indicates that GetNumber() is a constant
  • expression function and its return value is
  • computed at compile time.
36 int main(){
37     constexpr int j = GetNumber(); // now j can be
  • initialised at compile time as well.
38     // And that is why now we can use j to denote the
  • size of the array.
39     int array[j];
40     // What kind of functions can be constexpr? If a
  • function returns a value that can be computed at
  • compile time, then it can be a constant
  • expression function, but such a function must
  • accept and return ONLY LITERAL TYPES.
41     // What are literals? Literal types are those
  • which are allowed in constant expressions, such
  • types are void types, scalar types – integer /
  • float / double / arrays / CLASSES that has
  • constant expression constructors.
42 }
43 // So GetNumber() is a constant expression function,
  • What if we use it to initialise a variable that is
  • not a constant? In this context, GetNumber() would
  • be like a normal function and not a constant
  • expression function.
44 // And the initialisation of j will occur at
  • RUNTIME.
45 constexpr int GetNumber(){
46     return 42;
47 }

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48  int main(){
49      int j = GetNumber(); // occurs at runtime.
50  }
51
52  /// Let's create a function that accepts 2 numbers and
    • returns their sum.
53
54  // Is it possible to make this function a constexpr
    • function? If we marke the return type as constexpr
    • and we know that sum() accepts only literal types
    • and also returns a literal type, we can use it as a
    • constant expression.
55  constexpr int Sum (int x , int y ){return x + y;}
56  int main(){
57      constexpr int sum = Sum(2,3); // the execution
    • will be really fast! compared to the case when
    • we invoke Add() as a non constexpr function.
58  }
59  // A constexpr function can be used both in context of
    • a non-constexpr and constexpr.
60
61  // If we invoke it like this:
62  int main(){
63      int sum = Sum (2,3); // sum will be computed at
    • runtime.
64  }
65
66  // It can even accept variables as arguments.
67  int main(){
68      int x = GetNumber(); // not a compile time constant
69      constexpr int sum = Sum(x,3); // will not be a
    • constexpr function in this case. This does not
    • work, and you will get a COMPILER ERROR.
70  }
71  // The one thing about constexpr functions is that
    • they can ONLY HAVE A SINGLE LINE STATEMENT inside,
    • and that statement should be a return statement.
72  // So this is a limtitation, because most functions
    • would need more than 1 line of code.
73  // So let's create 1 more function, which returns the
    • maximum of 2 integers:
74  // --> we'll have to implement it in a single

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- statement. This works.

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75 constexpr int Max(int x, int y){
76     return x > y ? x : y; // this works.
77 }
78 constexpr int Max(int x, int y){
79     if (x > y) return x;
80     return y;
81 } // this doesn't work! Error: constexpr functions can
    • only have 1 return statement. (C++11)
82 // However C++14 has relaxed these rules, so in C++14,
    • you can have conditional statements inside functions.
83 // There is actually a comprehensive set of rules, and
    • you can look them up on cppreference.com.
84 // when we build this now, it builds fine, and we can
    • use this Max() function in context of a constexpr.
85 // All constexpr are IMPLICITLY INLINE! this means
    • that you have to write a constant expression just
    • like an inline function, so constexpr functions will
    • always be defined in a header file.
86
87 // How should we decide to use the const keyword or
    • the constexpr keyword?
88
89
90

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