University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Dept. of Electrical and Computer Engineering

ECE 120: Introduction to Computing

Learning to Read C Code

Another Useful Skill: Reading Code

You can learn a lot by reading code

- How to **express types of problems**.
- How to **properly use application programming interfaces** (APIs) for networking, mathematics, graphics, sound, animation, user interfaces, and so forth.
- How to **make code easy to read** (style).

It's Often Necessary to Read Code to Understand It

We try to make you write plenty of comments.

When we give you code for class assignments, it will be well-commented (DISCLAIMER: THIS IS NOT A WARRANTY!)

In the real world…

- You will be lucky to find comments.
- Remember the Big Screw award?
- You will be really lucky to find comments in a language that you understand.

Let's Do an Exercise in Code Reading Together

Our next example has no topical comments and uses one-letter variable names.

Let's **figure out what it does**.

For more exercises of this type,

- **use the ECE120 C Analysis tool**.
- But note that the tool
  - has only 14 examples.
  - **Type an answer** before you press 'Check Answer.'

Structure is Similar to Previous Examples

Take a look at the program.

Basic structure is **similar to previous examples**:
- print a prompt,
- wait for input,
- check input for correctness,
- compute something, and
- print a result.

What Input is Expected?

Look at the following:
- the **`scanf`** format,
- the arguments (types must match),
- the error check and the error message.

As input, the program requires…
- two **2's complement** numbers (**`%d`**) (variables **`A`** and **`C`**)
- separated by an **ASCII** character (**`%c`**) (variable **`B`**)

Now Look at the Computation

`if-else` structure with **five cases**.
- The **last case is an error condition**.
- The other four are **ways of calculating variable `D`**.

Notice that variable **`D` is used for the final output**.

When Does the Computation Print an Error?

The last case is reached when…
- **`B`** is NOT a '+', AND
- **`B`** is NOT a '–', AND
- **`B`** is NOT a '/', AND
- **`B`** is NOT a '*'.

In other words, the code generates an error
- **unless the user enters +, –, /, or ***
- as the character between two integers.

How is D Computed?

First case: when **B** is '+', **D** is **A** + **C**.
Second case: when **B** is '–', **D** is **A** – **C**.
Third case: when **B** is '/', **D** is **A** / **C**.
Fourth case: when **B** is '*', **D** is **A** * **C**.

So … the program is doing what?

computing the value of an expression with one arithmetic operator