



Lecture 8 - Pointers

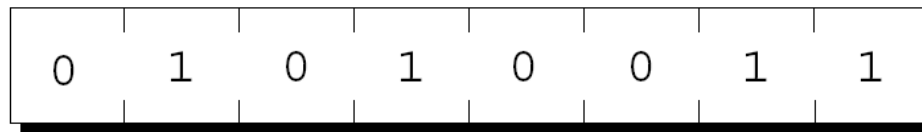
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8.1 Pointer Variables



Pointer Variables

- The **first step** in understanding pointers is **visualizing what they represent** at the **machine level**.
- In most modern computers, **main memory** is divided into **bytes**, with each byte capable of storing **eight bits** of information:



- Each byte has a **unique address**.

Pointer Variables (cont.)

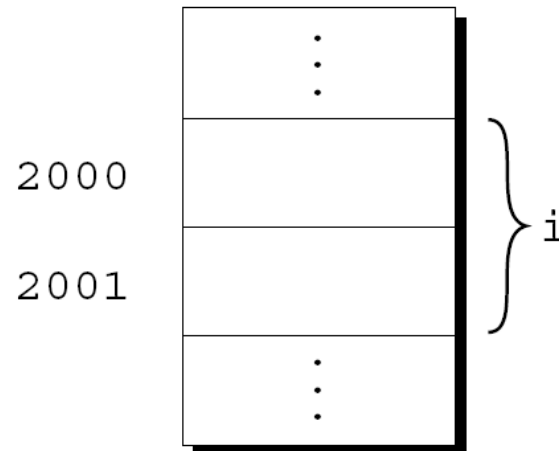
- If there are n bytes in memory, we can think of addresses as numbers that range from 0 to $n - 1$:

Address Contents

0	01010011
1	01110101
2	01110011
3	01100001
4	01101110
	⋮
$n-1$	01000011

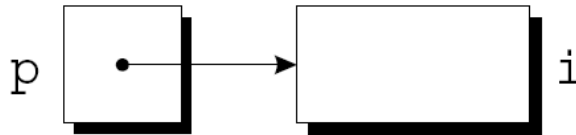
Pointer Variables (cont.)

- Each variable in a program occupies one or more bytes of memory.
- The address of the first byte is said to be the address of the variable.
- In the following figure, the address of the variable `i` is 2000:



Pointer Variables (cont.)

- Addresses can be stored in special **pointer variables**.
- When we **store the address of a variable i** in the **pointer variable p**, we say that **p "points to" i**.
- A graphical representation:



Declaring Pointer Variables

- When a **pointer variable** is **declared**, its **name** must be **preceded by an asterisk**:
`int *p;`
- `p` is a **pointer variable** capable of pointing to ***objects*** of **type** `int`.
- We use the term ***object*** instead of ***variable*** since `p` might point to an area of memory that doesn't belong to a variable.

```
int *p;  
p = 2001;
```

Declaring Pointer Variables (cont.)

- Pointer variables can appear in declarations **along with other variables**:

```
int i, j, a[10], b[20], *p, *q;
```

- **C requires** that every **pointer variable point only to** objects of a **particular type** (the ***referenced type***):

```
int *p;      /* points only to integers */  
double *q;   /* points only to doubles */  
char *r;     /* points only to characters */
```

- There are **no restrictions on** what the referenced **type** may be.

The Address and Indirection Operators

- C provides **a pair of operators** designed specifically for use with pointers.
- To **find the address of a variable**, we use the **&** (address) operator.
- To gain **access to the object that a pointer points to**, we use the ***** (***indirection***) operator.

The Address Operator

- Declaring a pointer variable **sets aside space** for a pointer **but doesn't make it point to an object**:

```
int *p; /* points nowhere in particular */
```

- It's **crucial to initialize p** before we use it.

The Address Operator (cont.)

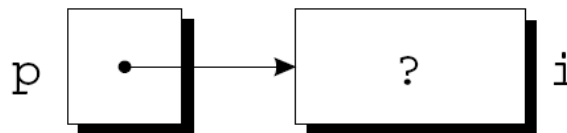
- One way to initialize a pointer variable is to **assign** it the **address of a variable**:

```
int i, *p;
```

...

```
p = &i;
```

- Assigning the address of `i` to the variable `p` makes `p` **point to `i`**:



The Address Operator (cont.)

- It's also possible to **initialize a pointer variable** at the time it's declared:

```
int i;  
int *p = &i;
```

- The **declaration of i can even be combined** with the **declaration of p**:

```
int i, *p = &i;
```

- We can **print the value of p** by using the specifier **%p**:

```
printf("%p\n", p); /* i.e. printf("%p\n", &i); */
```

The Indirection Operator

- Once a pointer variable points to an object, we can use the `*` (indirection) operator to access what's stored in the object.
- If `p` points to `i`, we can print the value of `i` as follows:

```
printf("%d\n", *p);
```
- Applying `&` to a variable produces a pointer to the variable. Applying `*` to the pointer takes us back to the original variable:

```
j = *&i;    /* same as j = i; */
```

The Indirection Operator (cont.)

- As long as `p` points to `i`, `*p` is an **alias** for `i`.
- `*p` has the **same value** as `i`.
- **Changing** the value of `*p` **changes** the value of `i`.
- The example on the next slide illustrates the equivalence of `*p` and `i`.

```
printf("%d\n", *p);
```

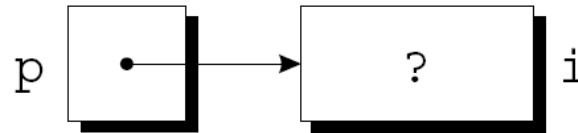
```
printf("%d\n", i);
```

```
*p = 5;
```

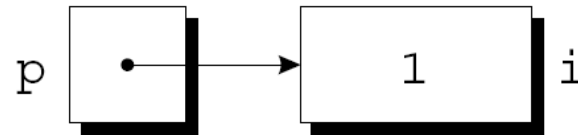
```
i = 5;
```

The Indirection Operator (cont.)

```
p = &i;
```



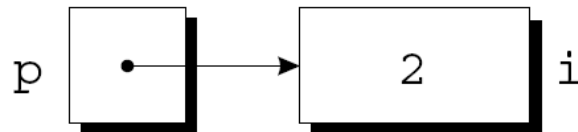
```
i = 1;
```



```
printf("%d\n", i);      /* prints 1 */
```

```
printf("%d\n", *p);     /* prints 1 */
```

```
*p = 2;
```



```
printf("%d\n", i);      /* prints 2 */
```

```
printf("%d\n", *p);     /* prints 2 */
```

The Indirection Operator (cont.)

- Applying the indirection operator to an uninitialized pointer variable causes undefined behavior:

```
int *p;  
printf("%d", *p);    /*** WRONG ***/
```

- Assigning a value to `*p` is particularly dangerous:

```
int *p;  
*p = 1;    /*** WRONG ***/
```


Pointer Assignment

- C allows the use of the **assignment operator** to **copy pointers** of the **same type**.

- Assume that the following declaration is in effect:

```
int i, j, *p, *q;
```

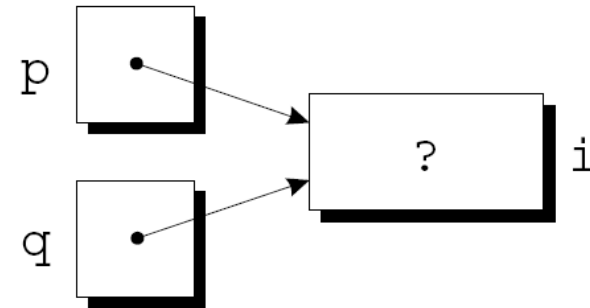
- Example of pointer assignment:

```
p = &i;
```

- Another example of pointer assignment:

```
q = p;
```

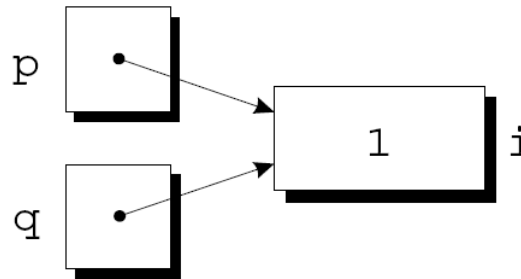
q now points to the same place as p:



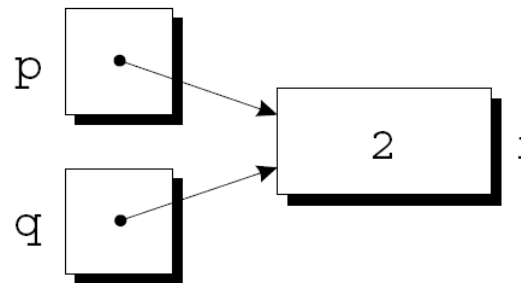
Pointer Assignment (cont.)

- If p and q both point to i , we can **change i by** assigning a new value to **either $*p$ or $*q$** :

$*p = 1;$



$*q = 2;$



- Any number of pointer variables** may point to the **same object**.

Pointer Assignment (cont.)

- Be careful **not to confuse**

```
q = p;
```

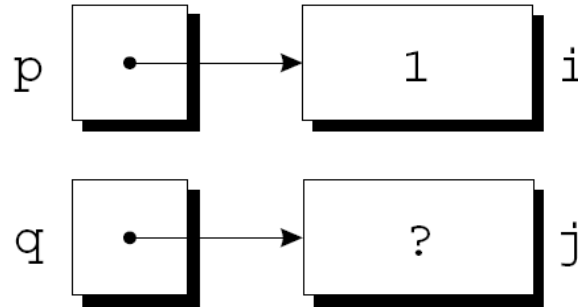
with

```
*q = *p;
```

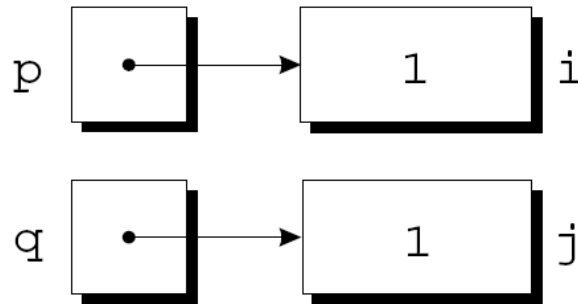
- The **first** statement is a **pointer assignment**, but the **second is not**.
- The example on the next slide shows the effect of the second statement.

Pointer Assignment (cont.)

```
p = &i;  
q = &j;  
i = 1;
```



```
*q = *p;
```



8.2 Pointers as Arguments and Return Values



Pointers as Arguments

- By passing a *pointer* to a variable instead of the *value* of the variable, *decompose* (in Lecture 6) can be fixed.
- New definition of *decompose*:

```
void decompose(double x, long *int_part, double *frac_part)
{
    *int_part = (long) x;
    *frac_part = x - *int_part;
}
```

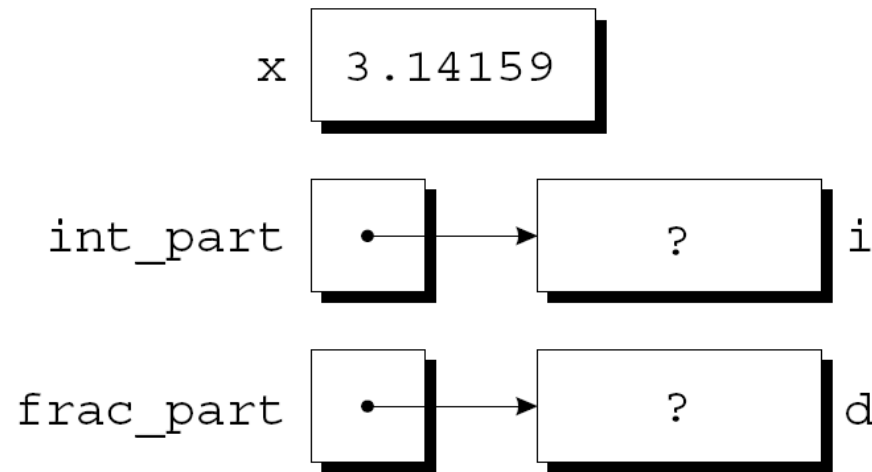
```
void decompose(double x, long int_part, double frac_part)
{
    int_part = (long) x;
    frac_part = x - int_part;
}
```

Pointers as Arguments (cont.)

- A call of `decompose`:

```
decompose(3.14159, &i, &d);
```

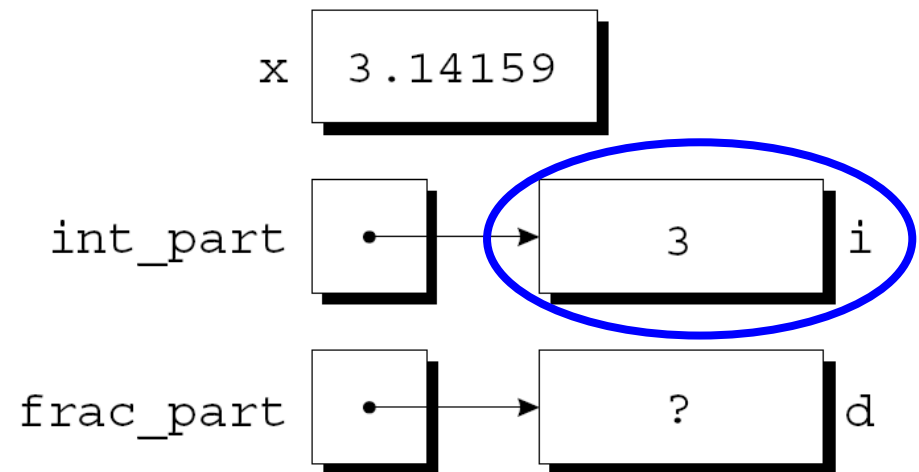
- As a **result** of the call, `int_part` **points to** `i` and `frac_part` **points to** `d`:



Pointers as Arguments (cont.)

- The first assignment in the body of `decompose` converts the value of `x` to type `long` and stores it in the object pointed to by `int_part`:

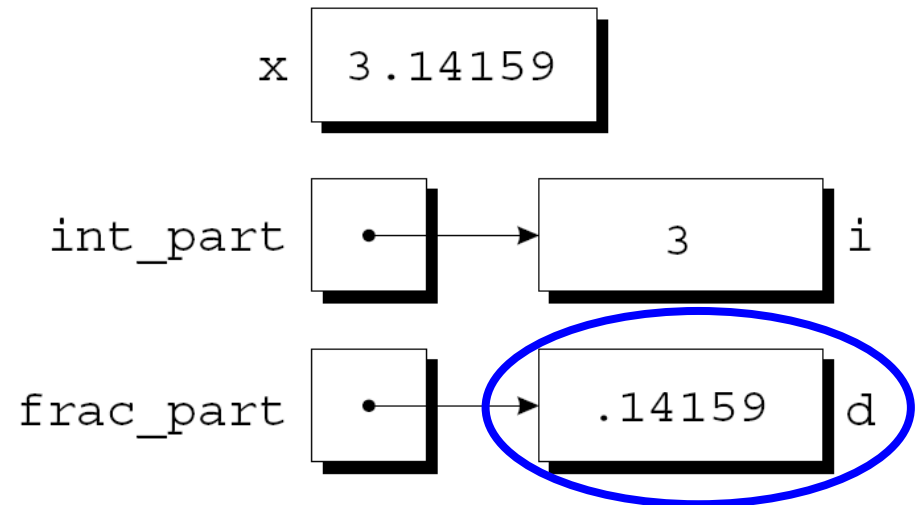
```
*int_part = (long) x;
```



Pointers as Arguments (cont.)

- The second assignment stores $x - *int_part$ into the object that `frac_part` points to:

```
*frac_part = x - *int_part;
```



Pointers as Arguments (cont.)

- Arguments in calls of `scanf` are pointers:

```
int i;  
scanf("%d", &i);
```

Without the `&`, `scanf` would obtain the *value* of `i`, not the *address* of `i`, which *may crash* the program execution .

- You can also *directly pass a pointer* instead:

```
int i, *p;  
p = &i;  
scanf("%d", p);
```

- Using the `&` operator in the call would be *wrong*:

```
scanf("%d", &p);    /* ** WRONG ** */
```

Pointers as Arguments (cont.)

- Failing to pass a pointer to a function when one is expected can have disastrous results.
- A call of `decompose` in which the `&` operator is missing:

```
decompose(3.14159, i, d);
```
- When `decompose` stores values in `*int_part` and `*frac_part`, it will attempt to change unknown memory locations instead of modifying `i` and `d`.
- If we've provided a prototype for `decompose`, the compiler will detect the error.
- In the case of `scanf`, however, failing to pass pointers may go undetected.

Program: Finding the Largest and Smallest Elements in an Array

- The `max_min.c` program uses a function named `max_min` to **find the largest and smallest elements** in an array.
- Prototype for `max_min`:

```
void max_min(int a[], int n, int *max, int *min);
```
- Example call of `max_min`:

```
max_min(b, N, &big, &small);
```
- When `max_min` finds the **largest element** in `b`, it **stores the value in `big` by assigning it to `*max`**.
- `max_min` stores the **smallest element** of `b` **in `small` by assigning it to `*min`**.

Program: Finding the Largest and Smallest Elements in an Array (cont.)

- `max_min.c` will read 10 numbers into an array, pass it to the `max_min` function, and print the results:

Enter 10 numbers: 34 82 49 102 7 94 23 11 50 31

Largest: 102

Smallest: 7

Program: Finding the Largest and Smallest Elements in an Array (cont.)

maxmin.c

```
#include <stdio.h>
#define N 10
void max_min(int a[], int n, int
             *max, int *min);
int main(void)
{
    int b[N], i, big, small;

    printf("Enter %d numbers: ", N);
    for (i = 0; i < N; i++)
        scanf("%d", &b[i]);

    max_min(b, N, &big, &small);

    printf("Largest: %d\n", big);
    printf("Smallest: %d\n", small);
    return 0;
}
```

```
void max_min(int a[], int n, int
             *max, int *min)
{
    int i;

    *max = *min = a[0];
    for (i = 1; i < n; i++) {
        if (a[i] > *max)
            *max = a[i];
        else if (a[i] < *min)
            *min = a[i];
    }
}
```

Using `const` to Protect Arguments

- When an argument is a pointer to a variable `x`, **we normally assume that `x` will be modified**:
`f (&x) ;`
- **It's possible**, for efficiency reason, that `f` merely needs to examine the value of `x`, **not change it**.
- We can use `const` to **ensure that a function won't change an object** whose address is passed to the function:

```
void f(const int *p)
{
    *p = 0;    /*** WRONG ***/
}
```

Attempting to modify `*p` is an error that the **compiler will detect**.

Pointers as Return Values

- Functions are allowed to return pointers:

```
int *max(int *a, int *b)
{
    if (*a > *b)
        return a;
    else
        return b;
}

int main()
{
    int *p, i, j;
    p = max(&i, &j);    /* After the call, p points to either i or j. */
    return 0;
}
```


Pointers as Return Values (cont.)

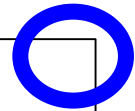
- Never return a pointer to an *automatic* local variable.

```
int *f(void)
{
    int i;
    return &i;  /* i won't exist after f returns. */
}
```



- A function **could** also return a pointer to an **external variable** or to a **static local variable**.

```
int i;
int *max(int *a)
{
    static int j;
    return (j>*a)?&j:a;
}
int main()
{
    int *p;
    p = max(&i);
}
```



Pointers as Return Values (cont.)

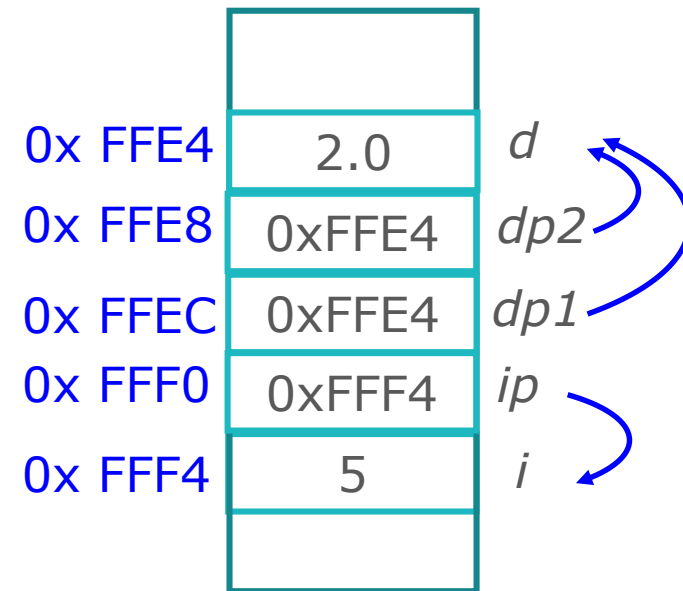
- Pointers can point to **array elements**.
- **If a is an array**, then $\&a[i]$ **is a pointer to element i of a .**
- A function that **returns a pointer to the middle element** of a , assuming that a has n elements:

```
int *find_middle(int a[], int n) {  
    return &a[n/2];  
}
```

A Quick Review to This Lecture

- Each **byte** has a **unique address**.
- Each **variable** occupies **one or more bytes**, where the **first byte** is the **address of the variable**.
- **Addresses** can be stored in **pointer variables**.
- You can print out a pointer by specifier `%p`:
`printf("%p", p);`
- **Address (&)** and **Indirection (*)** Operators

```
int i=5, *ip = &i;
double *dp1, *dp2, d;
dp1 = dp2 = &d;
*dp1 = 2.0;
*ip = *&i;    /* garbage code */
```



- **Remember to initialize a pointer** before using indirection operator.

A Quick Review to This Lecture (cont.)

- Pointer as arguments (can use `const` to protect from modification) and return values

```
int x;  
int * fun(int *ip1, const int *ip2)  
{  
    *ip1 = 3;  
    *ip2 = 5;    /* compilation error */  
    return &x;  
}  
int main() {  
    int i, *ip3;  
    ip3 = fun(&i, &i);  
}
```

