

Lecture 1.1: The Need for Rigour in Software Development

Topic: The Crisis of Software Quality and the Motivation for Rigour **Duration:** 50 Minutes

1. Learning Objectives

By the end of this lecture, students should be able to:

1. Identify the core challenges inherent in developing complex software systems.
 2. Recall major historical software failures and articulate the non-trivial impact of software errors.
 3. Explain the fundamental limitations of empirical software testing.
 4. Define formal methods and state their primary goals in achieving high assurance.
-

2. Challenges in Traditional Software Development

Traditional software development relies heavily on iterative coding, peer review, and post-implementation testing. While effective for many applications, this approach introduces significant risks when dealing with large, complex, or safety-critical systems.

2.1. The Nature of Complexity

- **Scale and Interconnectedness:** Modern systems (e.g., cloud platforms, autonomous vehicles) involve millions of lines of code, often distributed across multiple geographical locations and interacting concurrently.
- **Non-Linearity:** A small change in one module can have unpredictable, cascading effects (butterfly effect) across the entire system.
- **Hidden State and Behavior:** Software often operates in states and under conditions that developers never anticipated or tested.
- **Difficulty in Specification:** It is exceptionally hard to precisely define what a complex system *should* do, leading to ambiguity and misinterpretation during implementation.

2.2. The Pervasiveness of Bugs

- Software defects (bugs) are inevitable products of human error, misunderstanding requirements, or faulty translations from design to code.
- **The Cost of Errors (Boehm's Curve):** The cost required to find and fix a defect increases *exponentially* the later it is discovered in the development lifecycle:
 - Fixing a requirement error during the **Design Phase** is 1X cost.

- Fixing that same error during the **Testing Phase** may be 10X cost.
- Fixing it **post-release (in the field)** may be 100X cost, often involving public relations damage and legal fees.

3. Examples of Software Failures and Their Impact

Software failures are not merely inconvenient; in safety-critical domains, they carry severe—often catastrophic—consequences.

Failure Example	Year	System/Domain	Cause of Failure	Impact
Ariane 5 Rocket	1996	Aerospace (Launch Vehicle)	Conversion of a 64-bit floating-point number representing vehicle velocity into a 16-bit signed integer resulted in an Operand Error (overflow) . The function was reused untested from Ariane 4, where the velocity magnitude was smaller.	Total destruction of the uninsured rocket and satellites (approx. \$370 million loss).
Therac-25 Medical Accelerator	1985–1987	Medical Device (Radiation Therapy)	Race conditions and poor synchronisation between the operator interface and the control software allowed the device to administer massive, lethal overdoses of radiation.	Several patient deaths and serious injuries. Highlighted the danger of concurrency errors in safety-critical systems.
Mars Pathfinder Rover	1997	Space Exploration (Real-Time OS)	The operating system (VxWorks) suffered from Priority Inversion . A low-priority task unexpectedly	The mission was nearly lost. Although the

Failure Example	Year	System/Domain	Cause of Failure	Impact
			locked a shared resource needed by a high-priority task (the communication bus monitor), causing the system to reboot repeatedly.	problem was identified and fixed remotely, it demonstrated how subtle timing errors in real-time systems can cause major failures.

Key Takeaway: These failures highlight that issues often stem not from hardware malfunction, but from design flaws, specification gaps, and subtle timing or concurrency errors in the software logic.

4. The Role of Testing and Its Limitations

Testing is an essential quality assurance activity. It involves executing the system with the intent of finding errors and validating functional requirements.

4.1. The Essential Role of Testing

- **Validation:** Ensuring the software meets the user's requirements (Are we building the right product?).
- **Verification:** Ensuring the software correctly implements the specification (Are we building the product right?).
- **Quality Metrics:** Providing empirical data on reliability and performance.

4.2. Fundamental Limitations of Testing

For high-assurance systems (where failure is unacceptable), testing is inherently insufficient due to mathematical and practical constraints.

A. The Combinatorial Explosion (The Practical Limit)

The number of possible inputs, states, and execution paths in even a moderately complex program is astronomical.

- **Example:** A simple function with 10 integer inputs (32-bit integers) has $2^{32 \times 10}$ possible inputs. It is physically impossible to test them all.

- **Conclusion:** Testing can only cover a small fraction of the state space. We must rely on heuristics, risk assessment, and carefully chosen test cases, meaning many errors (especially boundary cases or rare interactions) remain hidden.

B. The Theoretical Limit (Related to the Halting Problem)

Testing relies on observing behaviour. While a test case might show that a program works for that specific input, we can never define an automated process that can determine, for *all* arbitrary programs and inputs, whether the program will halt or produce the correct output.

C. Dijkstra's Insight

The most famous critique of relying solely on testing comes from Edsger W. Dijkstra:

"Program testing can be used to show the presence of bugs, but never to show their absence!"

This crucial distinction means testing provides **empirical evidence** of correct behavior, but cannot provide **mathematical proof** of correctness.

5. Introduction to Formal Methods (FM)

If empirical testing is insufficient for guaranteeing the required levels of safety and reliability, a more rigorous, mathematical approach is needed. This is the motivation for introducing Formal Methods (FM).

5.1. Definition

Formal Methods (FM) are mathematically based techniques and tools used for the specification, development, and verification of software and hardware systems.

They treat the software system (and its desired properties) as a **mathematical object** that can be analysed using logic, set theory, graph theory, and proof techniques, rather than simply analysing runtime behaviour.

5.2. The Goals of Formal Methods

The primary goal of FM is to move assurance from the domain of observation (testing) to the domain of **mathematical proof**.

Goal	Description
Correctness	Guaranteeing that the implemented system logically satisfies its formal specification.

Goal	Description
Reliability	Ensuring the system behaves consistently across all possible operating conditions, including rare and unforeseen inputs.
Safety and Security	Proving the absence of specific, critical negative behaviours (e.g., proving that a safety mechanism can never be overridden, or that a system will never enter a dangerous state).
Ambiguity Reduction	Using formal languages (which are unambiguous) to write specifications eliminating the misinterpretations inherent in natural language requirements.

5.3. Core Components of Formal Methods

Formal methods typically involve three steps:

1. **Formal Specification:** Writing the system requirements in a precise, unambiguous mathematical language (e.g., Z, B, VDM, TLA+).
2. **Formal Development/Refinement (Where applicable):** Systematically deriving the code from the specification, often proving correctness at each step.
3. **Formal Verification:** Using mathematical proof or model checking tools to demonstrate that the final design or implementation meets the formal specification.

6. Key Takeaways and Conclusion

- **The Problem:** Traditional software development struggles with complexity, leading to subtle errors that are costly and dangerous in critical systems.
- **The Limitations:** Testing is necessary but fundamentally limited; it cannot prove the absence of errors due to combinatorial explosion and theoretical limits.
- **The Solution:** Formal Methods provide the necessary mathematical rigour to specify system properties unambiguously and prove—rather than merely testing—that safety-critical properties hold true across the entire state space.

Lecture 1.2: Foundations of Formal Methods

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this lecture, students will be able to:

- Define and differentiate key concepts in Formal Methods: Specification, Modelling, Verification, and Validation.
 - Distinguish between model-based and property-based formal methods.
 - Recall the basic principles of set theory, relations, functions, and logic as they apply to formal methods.
 - Outline the typical lifecycle of applying formal methods in system development.
-

1. Introduction to Formal Methods (Brief Recap/Context)

Formal Methods are mathematically based techniques and tools for the specification, design, and verification of software and hardware systems. The goal is to produce highly reliable, secure, and robust systems by applying mathematical rigour throughout the development process. They aim to reduce ambiguities, reveal inconsistencies, and enable rigorous analysis that might be impossible with informal methods.

2. Key Concepts in Formal Methods

These four concepts are central to understanding the application and benefits of formal methods:

2.1. Specification

- **Definition:** A precise, unambiguous description of what a system *should do* (its required behaviour, properties, and constraints) without necessarily dictating *how* it does it.
- **Purpose:** To capture requirements in a way that eliminates natural language ambiguities, allowing for rigorous analysis and agreement between stakeholders and developers.
- **Formal Specification:** Uses a formal language (e.g., mathematical notation, logic, specific formalisms like Z, B, VDM) with a well-defined syntax and semantics. This allows for automated tooling and mathematical reasoning.

- **Example:** Instead of "The system should respond quickly," a formal specification might state: "For any request R, the system must produce a response S such that the time elapsed between R and S is less than or equal to 50 milliseconds."

2.2. Modelling

- **Definition:** The creation of an abstract representation of a system (or parts of it) using a formal notation. This model captures essential aspects like structure, behaviour, and data.
- **Purpose:** To simplify complex systems, allowing developers to analyse them at a higher level of abstraction, identify potential issues early, and explore design alternatives before significant implementation effort.
- **Formal Model:** A mathematical representation (e.g., finite state automata, process algebras, mathematical functions, sets, relations) that can be manipulated and analysed rigorously.
- **Example:** Modelling a traffic light system as a finite state machine with states (Red, Yellow, Green) and transitions between them triggered by timers or external events.

2.3. Verification

- **Definition:** The process of ensuring that a system (or its model/implementation) *conforms to its specified requirements*. It answers the question: "Are we building the product *right*?"
- **Purpose:** To prove, with mathematical certainty (or high confidence), that the system possesses certain desired properties or behaves as intended by the specification.
- **Formal Verification Techniques:**
 - **Theorem Proving:** Using logical deduction to mathematically prove that a system model satisfies its specification. This involves constructing proofs, often with tool assistance.
 - **Model Checking:** Systematically exploring all possible states and transitions of a finite-state model to check if a given property holds. Fully automated, but limited by state space explosion.
 - **Static Analysis:** Analysing code or models without executing them to find errors or ensure adherence to rules.
- **Result:** A proof or a counterexample (a trace showing where the property is violated).

2.4. Validation

- **Definition:** The process of ensuring that the system *meets the actual needs and expectations of its users and stakeholders*. It answers the question: "Are we building the *right* product?"

- **Purpose:** To confirm that the specified requirements accurately reflect the user's true intent and that the system, once built, will be useful and solve the intended problem.
 - **Relationship with Verification:** Verification checks consistency *against the specification*. Validation checks consistency *against the real-world problem*. A system can be perfectly verified (build the product right) but poorly validated (built the wrong product).
 - **Role of Formal Methods:** While traditionally more informal (reviews, user testing), formal methods contribute to validation by providing an unambiguous and precise specification that can be more effectively reviewed and discussed with stakeholders. A clear formal model can also serve as a basis for generating test cases.
-

3. Types of Formal Methods

Formal methods can broadly be categorised based on their primary approach to system description and analysis:

3.1. Model-Based Formal Methods

- **Focus:** Constructing a mathematical model of the system's state and operations, often focusing on data, state transitions, and system behaviour.
- **Approach:** Define the system's *structure* and *behaviour* by explicitly describing its possible states, the operations that change these states, and the invariants that must hold.
- **Key Idea:** The system *is* the model. You build the model, then analyse its properties.
- **Examples:**
 - **Z (Zed):** Based on Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory and first-order predicate logic. Used to specify data types and operations.
 - **VDM (Vienna Development Method):** Uses set theory, sequences, maps, and logic to model system behaviour and data types.
 - **B-Method:** Focuses on developing proof-based systems, often for critical software, using abstract machines and refinement.
 - **TLA+ (Temporal Logic of Actions Plus):** Developed by Leslie Lamport, it's a language for specifying and reasoning about concurrent and distributed systems, emphasising states and actions.

3.2. Property-Based Formal Methods

- **Focus:** Specifying abstract properties that the system *must satisfy*, without necessarily building a complete model of the system's internal workings.

- **Approach:** Define the desired *characteristics* or *requirements* the system must exhibit (e.g., safety, liveness, security). The system is then checked against these properties.
- **Key Idea:** The system satisfies certain properties. You define the properties, then check if the system (or its model) fulfils them.
- **Examples:**
 - **Temporal Logic (LTL, CTL):** Used to specify properties over time, particularly for concurrent and reactive systems.
 - **LTL (Linear Temporal Logic):** Describes sequences of states (e.g., "eventually X will happen," "X will always be true until Y").
 - **CTL (Computation Tree Logic):** Describes properties about branching time, allowing statements about possible futures (e.g., "it is possible that X will happen," "for all paths, eventually X will happen").
 - **Hoare Logic:** A formal system for reasoning about the correctness of imperative computer programs. Uses Hoare triples $\{P\} C \{Q\}$, meaning if P is true before command C, then Q is true after C.
 - **Refinement Calculi:** Methods for transforming abstract specifications into more concrete implementations while preserving properties.

4. Mathematical Underpinnings (Brief Review)

Formal Methods derive their power from mathematics. A solid understanding of basic mathematical concepts is crucial.

4.1. Set Theory

- **Concept:** A collection of distinct objects, considered as an object in its own right.
- **Key Elements:**
 - **Set:** $\{1, 2, 3\}$, $\{\text{Red, Green, Blue}\}$.
 - **Element:** $x \in S$ (x is an element of set S).
 - **Subset:** $A \subseteq B$ (all elements of A are in B).
 - **Union:** $A \cup B$ (elements in A or B or both).
 - **Intersection:** $A \cap B$ (elements common to A and B).
 - **Difference:** $A \setminus B$ (elements in A but not in B).

- **Cartesian Product:** $A \times B$ (set of all ordered pairs (a, b) where $a \in A$ and $b \in B$).
- **Empty Set:** \emptyset or $\{\}$.
- **Relevance to FM:** Used to define data types, possible states of a system, collections of items, and domains for variables.

4.2. Relations

- **Concept:** A set of ordered pairs, representing a connection or relationship between elements from two (or more) sets.
- **Key Elements:**
 - **Binary Relation:** A subset of a Cartesian product $A \times B$. E.g., `is_greater_than` = $\{(2,1), (3,1), (3,2)\}$.
 - **Domain:** The set of all first elements in the pairs.
 - **Range:** The set of all second elements in the pairs.
 - **Properties of Relations (on a single set A):**
 - **Reflexive:** $(a, a) \in R$ for all $a \in A$.
 - **Symmetric:** If $(a, b) \in R$ then $(b, a) \in R$.
 - **Transitive:** If $(a, b) \in R$ and $(b, c) \in R$ then $(a, c) \in R$.
 - **Equivalence Relation:** Reflexive, Symmetric, and Transitive (partitions a set into equivalence classes).
- **Relevance to FM:** Used to model connections between entities, state transitions (e.g., $(\text{current_state}, \text{next_state})$), data structures, and constraints.

4.3. Functions

- **Concept:** A special type of relation where each element in the domain maps to *exactly one* element in the codomain.
- **Key Elements:**
 - **Notation:** $f: A \rightarrow B$ (function f maps elements from set A to set B).
 - **Domain:** Set A .
 - **Codomain:** Set B .
 - **Image:** The set of all values $f(a)$ for $a \in A$.
 - **Types:** Injective (one-to-one), Surjective (onto), Bijective (one-to-one and onto).

- **Relevance to FM:** Used to model transformations, computations, mappings between inputs and outputs, and system operations.

4.4. Basic Logic

- **Concept:** A formal system for reasoning and drawing conclusions based on propositions and predicates.
- **Key Elements:**
 - **4.4.1. Propositional Logic:** Deals with simple declarative statements (propositions) that are either true or false.
 - **Propositions:** P, Q, R (e.g., "It is raining," "The door is open").
 - **Logical Connectives:**
 - **Negation (NOT):** $\neg P$ (not P)
 - **Conjunction (AND):** $P \wedge Q$ (P and Q)
 - **Disjunction (OR):** $P \vee Q$ (P or Q)
 - **Implication (IF...THEN...):** $P \Rightarrow Q$ (If P then Q, P implies Q)
 - **Biconditional (IF AND ONLY IF):** $P \Leftrightarrow Q$ (P if and only if Q)
 - **Truth Tables:** Used to define the semantics of connectives.
 - **Tautology:** A statement that is always true.
 - **Contradiction:** A statement that is always false.
 - **4.4.2. Predicate Logic (First-Order Logic):** Extends propositional logic to allow reasoning about individuals, properties of individuals, and relationships between individuals.
 - **Variables:** x, y, z (represent elements in a domain).
 - **Predicates:** P(x), R(x, y) (propositional functions, e.g., IsEven(x), $x > y$).
 - **Quantifiers:**
 - **Universal Quantifier (FOR ALL):** $\forall x P(x)$ (For all x, P(x) is true).
 - **Existential Quantifier (THERE EXISTS):** $\exists x P(x)$ (There exists an x such that P(x) is true).
- **Relevance to FM:** Used to express simple requirements, preconditions, postconditions, and properties of a system.

- **Relevance to FM:** Crucial for expressing complex specifications, system invariants, and properties that involve data variables and relationships. E.g., "For all users, if a user is logged in, then they have access to their profile." ($\forall u (\text{LoggedIn}(u) \Rightarrow \text{HasProfileAccess}(u))$).
-

5. Overview of the Formal Methods Lifecycle

Formal Methods are not a replacement for traditional software development lifecycles (e.g., Agile, Waterfall) but rather a set of techniques that can be integrated into them.

1. Requirements Elicitation & Analysis:

- Understand the system's purpose, environment, and user needs.
- Start identifying critical requirements for formal treatment.

2. Formal Specification:

- Translate selected informal requirements into a precise, unambiguous formal language.
- This might involve specifying system properties, data structures, or behaviour.
- Can be done in conjunction with informal specifications to bridge the gap.

3. Formal Modelling:

- Based on the formal specification, create a mathematical model of the system (or its critical parts).
- This model is typically more abstract than the final implementation.

4. Formal Verification:

- Analyse the formal model against its specification to prove desired properties (e.g., safety, liveness, security).
- Techniques include theorem proving, model checking, or static analysis.
- Iterative process: If verification fails, the model or specification needs adjustment.

5. Refinement / Design & Implementation:

- Gradually transform the abstract formal model into a more concrete design and then into executable code.
- Formal refinement techniques (e.g., in B-Method) ensure that properties proven at higher levels are preserved in lower-level implementations.

- For less formal integration, the verified model acts as a blueprint for implementation.

6. **Code-Level Verification (Optional but Recommended):**

- Apply formal verification directly to source code or generate high-level test cases from the formal model.
- Tools like static analysers or runtime verification can ensure consistency with the formal design.

7. **Validation:**

- Ensure the final system (and the formal models/specifications) genuinely address the original problem and stakeholder needs.
- Formal methods aid validation by providing clear artifacts for stakeholder review and precise bases for acceptance testing.

Key Point: Formal methods can be applied at different stages and to varying degrees. They don't have to be "all or nothing," often focusing on the most critical components of a system.

Key Takeaways:

- **Specification, Modelling, Verification, and Validation** are the pillars of formal methods.
- **Verification (building the product right)** ensures consistency with the specification, while **Validation (building the right product)** ensures consistency with user needs.
- **Model-based methods** build mathematical descriptions of system state and behaviour (e.g., Z, B).
- **Property-based methods** describe desired system characteristics using logic (e.g., Temporal Logics, Hoare Logic).
- **Set Theory, Relations, Functions, and Logic** provide the mathematical foundation for formal methods.
- Formal methods integrate into the software lifecycle, offering rigorous analysis from **requirements to implementation and beyond**.