

## Type Conversion and Casting

If you have previous programming experience, then you already know that it is fairly common to assign a value of one type to a variable of another type. If the two types are compatible, then Java will perform the conversion automatically. For example, it is always possible to assign an **int** value to a **long** variable. However, not all types are compatible, and thus, not all type conversions are implicitly allowed. For instance, there is no automatic conversion defined from **double** to **byte**. Fortunately, it is still possible to obtain a conversion between incompatible types. To do so, you must use a *cast*, which performs an explicit conversion between incompatible types. Let's look at both automatic type conversions and casting.

### Java's Automatic Conversions

When one type of data is assigned to another type of variable, an *automatic type conversion* will take place if the following two conditions are met:

- The two types are compatible.
- The destination type is larger than the source type.

When these two conditions are met, a *widening conversion* takes place. For example, the **int** type is always large enough to hold all valid **byte** values, so no explicit cast statement is required.

For widening conversions, the numeric types, including integer and floating-point types, are compatible with each other. However, there are no automatic conversions from the numeric types to **char** or **boolean**. Also, **char** and **boolean** are not compatible with each other. As mentioned earlier, Java also performs an automatic type conversion when storing a literal integer constant into variables of type **byte**, **short**, **long**, or **char**.

### Casting Incompatible Types

Although the automatic type conversions are helpful, they will not fulfill all needs. For example, what if you want to assign an **int** value to a **byte** variable? This conversion will not be performed automatically, because a **byte** is smaller than an **int**. This kind of conversion is sometimes called a *narrowing conversion*, since you are explicitly making the value narrower so that it will fit into the target type.

To create a conversion between two incompatible types, you must use a cast. A *cast* is simply an explicit type conversion. It has this general form:

*(target-type) value*

Here, *target-type* specifies the desired type to convert the specified value to. For example, the following fragment casts an **int** to a **byte**. If the integer's value is larger than the range of a **byte**, it will be reduced modulo (the remainder of an integer division by the) **byte**'s range.

```
int a;  
byte b;  
// ...  
b = (byte) a;
```

A different type of conversion will occur when a floating-point value is assigned to an

integer type: *truncation*. As you know, integers do not have fractional components. Thus, when a floating-point value is assigned to an integer type, the fractional component is lost. For example, if the value 1.23 is assigned to an integer, the resulting value will simply be 1. The 0.23 will have been truncated. Of course, if the size of the whole number component is too large to fit into the target integer type, then that value will be reduced modulo the target type's range.

The following program demonstrates some type conversions that require casts:

```
// Demonstrate casts.
class Conversion {
public static void main(String args[]) {
byte b;
int i = 257;
double d = 323.142;
System.out.println("\nConversion of int to byte.");
b = (byte) i;
System.out.println("i and b " + i + " " + b);
System.out.println("\nConversion of double to int.");
i = (int) d;
System.out.println("d and i " + d + " " + i);
System.out.println("\nConversion of double to byte.");
b = (byte) d;
System.out.println("d and b " + d + " " + b);
}
}
```

This program generates the following output:

```
Conversion of int to byte.
i and b 257 1
Conversion of double to int.
d and i 323.142 323
Conversion of double to byte.
d and b 323.142 67
```

## Automatic Type Promotion in Expressions

In addition to assignments, there is another place where certain type conversions may occur: in expressions. To see why, consider the following. In an expression, the precision required of an intermediate value will sometimes exceed the range of either operand. For example, examine the following expression:

```
byte a = 40;
byte b = 50;
byte c = 100;
int d = a * b / c;
```

The result of the intermediate term **a \* b** easily exceeds the range of either of its **byte** operands. To handle this kind of problem, Java automatically promotes each **byte**, **short**, or **char** operand to **int** when evaluating an expression. This means that the subexpression **a \* b**

is performed using integers—not bytes. Thus, 2,000, the result of the intermediate expression, **50 \* 40**, is legal even though **a** and **b** are both specified as type **byte**.

As useful as the automatic promotions are, they can cause confusing compile-time errors.

For example, this seemingly correct code causes a problem:

```
byte b = 50;
```

```
b = b * 2; // Error! Cannot assign an int to a byte!
```

The code is attempting to store  $50 * 2$ , a perfectly valid **byte** value, back into a **byte** variable. However, because the operands were automatically promoted to **int** when the expression was evaluated, the result has also been promoted to **int**. Thus, the result of the expression is now of type **int**, which cannot be assigned to a **byte** without the use of a cast. This is true even if, as in this particular case, the value being assigned would still fit in the target type.

In cases where you understand the consequences of overflow, you should use an explicit cast, such as

```
byte b = 50;
```

```
b = (byte)(b * 2);
```

which yields the correct value of 100.

## The Type Promotion Rules

Java defines several *type promotion* rules that apply to expressions. They are as follows: First, all **byte**, **short**, and **char** values are promoted to **int**, as just described. Then, if one operand is a **long**, the whole expression is promoted to **long**. If one operand is a **float**, the entire expression is promoted to **float**. If any of the operands is **double**, the result is **double**.

The following program demonstrates how each value in the expression gets promoted to match the second argument to each binary operator:

```
class Promote {  
    public static void main(String args[]) {  
        byte b = 42;  
        char c = 'a';  
        short s = 1024;  
        int i = 50000;  
        float f = 5.67f;  
        double d = .1234;  
        double result = (f * b) + (i / c) - (d * s);  
        System.out.println((f * b) + " + " + (i / c) + " - " + (d * s));  
        System.out.println("result = " + result);  
    }  
}
```

Let's look closely at the type promotions that occur in this line from the program:

```
double result = (f * b) + (i / c) - (d * s);
```

In the first subexpression, **f \* b**, **b** is promoted to a **float** and the result of the subexpression is **float**. Next, in the subexpression **i / c**, **c** is promoted to **int**, and the result is of type **int**. Then, in **d \* s**, the value of **s** is promoted to **double**, and the type of the subexpression is **double**.

Finally, these three intermediate values, **float**, **int**, and **double**, are considered. The outcome of **float** plus an **int** is a **float**. Then the resultant **float** minus the last **double** is promoted to **double**, which is the type for the final result of the expression.