

Hands-On: Total Order

Total Order [🔗](#)

If a *total order* exists on a collection of values, it means that these values can be arranged in ascending (or descending) order. That is, any value in the collection can be compared to any other value in the collection on the basis of “less than or equal to”. Here are two links that provide more formal definitions of a total order

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Total_order
- <http://mathworld.wolfram.com/TotallyOrderedSet.html>

If we want to perform operations such as sorting, finding the minimum or maximum, etc. on a collection of values, the values in that collection must have a total order defined on them or otherwise these operations don’t even make sense. Java provides two standard ways of defining a total order on a data class: the `Comparable` interface or the `Comparator` interface.

While `Comparable` and `Comparator` serve the same purpose (defining a total order on a data class), the context of their use is very different. The `Comparable` interface is implemented by a data class, and thus is used in the context of one instance of that data class comparing *itself* to another instance of that data class. For example, in the notes, class `Book` implemented the `Comparable` interface. So, if `b1` and `b2` are instances of `Book`, then we could ask `b1` to compare itself to `b2` based on the natural order of `Book` like so: `b1.compareTo(b2)`.

In contrast, the `Comparator` interface is **not** implemented by the data class. Instead, a “third party” class is used to implement `Comparator` for a given data class. Again referring to the `Book` example from the notes, we had a class defined like so: `public class CompareBooksByTitle implements Comparator<Book>`. An instance of this class, say `bcomp`, can compare two `Book` objects on the basis of the particular total order defined by this class like so: `bcomp.compare(b1, b1)`. Note that the data class (`Book`) is completely “unaware” of this other total order that `CompareBooksByTitle` defines. Also note that it is the ability to define multiple “third party” total orders that allowed us to write a single search method that can compare items according to totally different criteria from one call to the next.

The following sections will give you practice in implementing and using both the `Comparable` and `Comparator` interfaces.


Comparable




The standard way to require that objects of a given class can be ordered is to have that class implement the `Comparable` interface. The implementation of `Comparable` defines the **natural ordering** of a class, since it is the class itself that decides what the order is. Read about the `Comparable` interface here:

- <https://docs.oracle.com/en/java/javase/14/docs/api/java.base/java/lang/Comparable.html>

1. Open `Student.java` in jGRASP and compile it.
2. Implement the `compareTo` method according to the commented description in the source code. The current (stub) version of `compareTo` is shown below.

```
@Override
public int compareTo(Student s) {
    return -99;
}
```

3. Open `ClassRoll.java` in jGRASP and compile it.
4. Use `ClassRoll.java` to informally test your implementation of the natural order of the `Student` class. Note that you do not have to address the shuffling or `Comparator` aspect of the `ClassRoll` class yet. Just run the file as-is.
5. Use the provided jGRASP Canvas file (`ClassRoll.jgrasp_canvas.xml`) to watch the sort by natural order happen as you single-step in debug mode. Once you save the jGRASP Canvas XML file to the same directory as the source code, you can use the jGRASP Canvas like so:
 - Click on the Canvas file in the jGRASP Browse tab or click on the *Run in Canvas* button  in the jGRASP tool bar.
 - Once the Canvas window opens, resize it so that it best fits your display.

- You can use any of the following controls to watch the program execute.
 - *Play*  - Starts the program running in auto-step mode.
 - *Step Over*  - Manually steps over each statement.
 - *Step In*  - Manually steps into each statement (method call).

Comparator

Java provides the `Comparator` interface as the standard way of defining a total order on a class that is different from its natural order. Read about the `Comparator` interface here:

- <https://docs.oracle.com/en/java/javase/14/docs/api/java.base/java/util/Comparator.html>

1. Open `ClassRoll.java` in jGRASP and compile it.
2. Implement the `CompareStudentsBySection` comparator according to the commented description in the source code. The current (stub) version is shown below.

```
private static class CompareStudentsBySection implements Comparator<Student> {
    /** Compares s1 to s2 in with respect to the defined total order. */
    public int compare(Student s1, Student s2) {
        return -99;
    }
}
```

3. Compile and run `ClassRoll.java` to informally test your solution.
4. Use the provided jGRASP Canvas file ([ClassRoll.jgrasp_canvas.xml](#)) to watch the sort by comparator happen as you single-step in debug mode.
5. Respond to the prompts at the points specified in the source code comments to shuffle the roll and sort it in descending order of section. Try out your solutions by running the `ClassRoll` program. You may want to read the API for `Collections` :

- <https://docs.oracle.com/en/java/javase/14/docs/api/java.base/java/util/Collections.html>

6. Use the provided jGRASP Canvas file ([ClassRoll.jgrasp_canvas.xml](#)) to watch the

shuffling and reverse order sort happen as you single-step in debug mode.

Submission

The submission page for this activity asks you to submit both `Student.java` and `ClassRoll.java` for a grade.