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The

Second Edition

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Program in C language



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Brian W. Kernighan • Dennis M. Ritchie

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THE
C
PROGRAMMING
LANGUAGE

Second Edition

Brian W. Kernighan • Dennis M. Ritchie

AT&T Bell Laboratories
Murray Hill, New Jersey

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Contents

Preface	ix
Preface to the First Edition	xi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. A Tutorial Introduction	5
1.1 Getting Started	5
1.2 Variables and Arithmetic Expressions	8
1.3 The For Statement	13
1.4 Symbolic Constants	14
1.5 Character Input and Output	15
1.6 Arrays	22
1.7 Functions	24
1.8 Arguments—Call by Value	27
1.9 Character Arrays	28
1.10 External Variables and Scope	31
Chapter 2. Types, Operators, and Expressions	35
2.1 Variable Names	35
2.2 Data Types and Sizes	36
2.3 Constants	37
2.4 Declarations	40
2.5 Arithmetic Operators	41
2.6 Relational and Logical Operators	41
2.7 Type Conversions	42
2.8 Increment and Decrement Operators	46
2.9 Bitwise Operators	48
2.10 Assignment Operators and Expressions	50
2.11 Conditional Expressions	51
2.12 Precedence and Order of Evaluation	52
Chapter 3. Control Flow	55
3.1 Statements and Blocks	55
3.2 If-Else	55

3.3	Else-If	57
3.4	Switch	58
3.5	Loops—While and For	60
3.6	Loops—Do-while	63
3.7	Break and Continue	64
3.8	Goto and Labels	65
Chapter 4. Functions and Program Structure		67
4.1	Basics of Functions	67
4.2	Functions Returning Non-integers	71
4.3	External Variables	73
4.4	Scope Rules	80
4.5	Header Files	81
4.6	Static Variables	83
4.7	Register Variables	83
4.8	Block Structure	84
4.9	Initialization	85
4.10	Recursion	86
4.11	The C Preprocessor	88
Chapter 5. Pointers and Arrays		93
5.1	Pointers and Addresses	93
5.2	Pointers and Function Arguments	95
5.3	Pointers and Arrays	97
5.4	Address Arithmetic	100
5.5	Character Pointers and Functions	104
5.6	Pointer Arrays; Pointers to Pointers	107
5.7	Multi-dimensional Arrays	110
5.8	Initialization of Pointer Arrays	113
5.9	Pointers vs. Multi-dimensional Arrays	113
5.10	Command-line Arguments	114
5.11	Pointers to Functions	118
5.12	Complicated Declarations	122
Chapter 6. Structures		127
6.1	Basics of Structures	127
6.2	Structures and Functions	129
6.3	Arrays of Structures	132
6.4	Pointers to Structures	136
6.5	Self-referential Structures	139
6.6	Table Lookup	143
6.7	Typedef	146
6.8	Unions	147
6.9	Bit-fields	149
Chapter 7. Input and Output		151
7.1	Standard Input and Output	151
7.2	Formatted Output—Printf	153

7.3	Variable-length Argument Lists	155
7.4	Formatted Input—Scanf	157
7.5	File Access	160
7.6	Error Handling—Stderr and Exit	163
7.7	Line Input and Output	164
7.8	Miscellaneous Functions	166
Chapter 8. The UNIX System Interface		169
8.1	File Descriptors	169
8.2	Low Level I/O—Read and Write	170
8.3	Open, Creat, Close, Unlink	172
8.4	Random Access—Lseek	174
8.5	Example—An Implementation of Fopen and Getc	175
8.6	Example—Listing Directories	179
8.7	Example—A Storage Allocator	185
Appendix A. Reference Manual		191
A1	Introduction	191
A2	Lexical Conventions	191
A3	Syntax Notation	194
A4	Meaning of Identifiers	195
A5	Objects and Lvalues	197
A6	Conversions	197
A7	Expressions	200
A8	Declarations	210
A9	Statements	222
A10	External Declarations	225
A11	Scope and Linkage	227
A12	Preprocessing	228
A13	Grammar	234
Appendix B. Standard Library		241
B1	Input and Output: <stdio.h>	241
B2	Character Class Tests: <ctype.h>	248
B3	String Functions: <string.h>	249
B4	Mathematical Functions: <math.h>	250
B5	Utility Functions: <stdlib.h>	251
B6	Diagnostics: <assert.h>	253
B7	Variable Argument Lists: <stdarg.h>	254
B8	Non-local Jumps: <setjmp.h>	254
B9	Signals: <signal.h>	255
B10	Date and Time Functions: <time.h>	255
B11	Implementation-defined Limits: <limits.h> and <float.h>	257
Appendix C. Summary of Changes		259
Index		263

Preface

The computing world has undergone a revolution since the publication of *The C Programming Language* in 1978. Big computers are much bigger, and personal computers have capabilities that rival the mainframes of a decade ago. During this time, C has changed too, although only modestly, and it has spread far beyond its origins as the language of the UNIX operating system.

The growing popularity of C, the changes in the language over the years, and the creation of compilers by groups not involved in its design, combined to demonstrate a need for a more precise and more contemporary definition of the language than the first edition of this book provided. In 1983, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) established a committee whose goal was to produce "an unambiguous and machine-independent definition of the language C," while still retaining its spirit. The result is the ANSI standard for C.

The standard formalizes constructions that were hinted at but not described in the first edition, particularly structure assignment and enumerations. It provides a new form of function declaration that permits cross-checking of definition with use. It specifies a standard library, with an extensive set of functions for performing input and output, memory management, string manipulation, and similar tasks. It makes precise the behavior of features that were not spelled out in the original definition, and at the same time states explicitly which aspects of the language remain machine-dependent.

This second edition of *The C Programming Language* describes C as defined by the ANSI standard. Although we have noted the places where the language has evolved, we have chosen to write exclusively in the new form. For the most part, this makes no significant difference; the most visible change is the new form of function declaration and definition. Modern compilers already support most features of the standard.

We have tried to retain the brevity of the first edition. C is not a big language, and it is not well served by a big book. We have improved the exposition of critical features, such as pointers, that are central to C programming. We have refined the original examples, and have added new examples in several chapters. For instance, the treatment of complicated declarations is augmented by programs that convert declarations into words and vice versa. As before, all

examples have been tested directly from the text, which is in machine-readable form.

Appendix A, the reference manual, is not the standard, but our attempt to convey the essentials of the standard in a smaller space. It is meant for easy comprehension by programmers, but not as a definition for compiler writers—that role properly belongs to the standard itself. Appendix B is a summary of the facilities of the standard library. It too is meant for reference by programmers, not implementers. Appendix C is a concise summary of the changes from the original version.

As we said in the preface to the first edition, C “wears well as one’s experience with it grows.” With a decade more experience, we still feel that way. We hope that this book will help you to learn C and to use it well.

We are deeply indebted to friends who helped us to produce this second edition. Jon Bentley, Doug Gwyn, Doug McIlroy, Peter Nelson, and Rob Pike gave us perceptive comments on almost every page of draft manuscripts. We are grateful for careful reading by Al Aho, Dennis Allison, Joe Campbell, G. R. Emlin, Karen Fortgang, Allen Holub, Andrew Hume, Dave Kristol, John Linderman, Dave Prosser, Gene Spafford, and Chris Van Wyk. We also received helpful suggestions from Bill Cheswick, Mark Kernighan, Andy Koenig, Robin Lake, Tom London, Jim Reeds, Clovis Tondo, and Peter Weinberger. Dave Prosser answered many detailed questions about the ANSI standard. We used Bjarne Stroustrup’s C++ translator extensively for local testing of our programs, and Dave Kristol provided us with an ANSI C compiler for final testing. Rich Drechsler helped greatly with typesetting.

Our sincere thanks to all.

Brian W. Kernighan
Dennis M. Ritchie

Preface to the First Edition

C is a general-purpose programming language which features economy of expression, modern control flow and data structures, and a rich set of operators. C is not a "very high level" language, nor a "big" one, and is not specialized to any particular area of application. But its absence of restrictions and its generality make it more convenient and effective for many tasks than supposedly more powerful languages.

C was originally designed for and implemented on the UNIX operating system on the DEC PDP-11, by Dennis Ritchie. The operating system, the C compiler, and essentially all UNIX applications programs (including all of the software used to prepare this book) are written in C. Production compilers also exist for several other machines, including the IBM System/370, the Honeywell 6000, and the Interdata 8/32. C is not tied to any particular hardware or system, however, and it is easy to write programs that will run without change on any machine that supports C.

This book is meant to help the reader learn how to program in C. It contains a tutorial introduction to get new users started as soon as possible, separate chapters on each major feature, and a reference manual. Most of the treatment is based on reading, writing and revising examples, rather than on mere statements of rules. For the most part, the examples are complete, real programs, rather than isolated fragments. All examples have been tested directly from the text, which is in machine-readable form. Besides showing how to make effective use of the language, we have also tried where possible to illustrate useful algorithms and principles of good style and sound design.

The book is not an introductory programming manual; it assumes some familiarity with basic programming concepts like variables, assignment statements, loops, and functions. Nonetheless, a novice programmer should be able to read along and pick up the language, although access to a more knowledgeable colleague will help.

In our experience, C has proven to be a pleasant, expressive, and versatile language for a wide variety of programs. It is easy to learn, and it wears well as one's experience with it grows. We hope that this book will help you to use it well.

The thoughtful criticisms and suggestions of many friends and colleagues have added greatly to this book and to our pleasure in writing it. In particular, Mike Bianchi, Jim Blue, Stu Feldman, Doug McIlroy, Bill Roome, Bob Rosin, and Larry Rosler all read multiple versions with care. We are also indebted to Al Aho, Steve Bourne, Dan Dvorak, Chuck Haley, Debbie Haley, Marion Harris, Rick Holt, Steve Johnson, John Mashey, Bob Mitze, Ralph Muha, Peter Nelson, Elliot Pinson, Bill Plauger, Jerry Spivack, Ken Thompson, and Peter Weinberger for helpful comments at various stages, and to Mike Lesk and Joe Ossanna for invaluable assistance with typesetting.

Brian W. Kernighan
Dennis M. Ritchie

Introduction

C is a general-purpose programming language. It has been closely associated with the UNIX system where it was developed, since both the system and most of the programs that run on it are written in C. The language, however, is not tied to any one operating system or machine; and although it has been called a "system programming language" because it is useful for writing compilers and operating systems, it has been used equally well to write major programs in many different domains.

Many of the important ideas of C stem from the language BCPL, developed by Martin Richards. The influence of BCPL on C proceeded indirectly through the language B, which was written by Ken Thompson in 1970 for the first UNIX system on the DEC PDP-7.

BCPL and B are "typeless" languages. By contrast, C provides a variety of data types. The fundamental types are characters, and integers and floating-point numbers of several sizes. In addition, there is a hierarchy of derived data types created with pointers, arrays, structures, and unions. Expressions are formed from operators and operands; any expression, including an assignment or a function call, can be a statement. Pointers provide for machine-independent address arithmetic.

C provides the fundamental control-flow constructions required for well-structured programs: statement grouping, decision making (*if-else*), selecting one of a set of possible cases (*switch*), looping with the termination test at the top (*while*, *for*) or at the bottom (*do*), and early loop exit (*break*).

Functions may return values of basic types, structures, unions, or pointers. Any function may be called recursively. Local variables are typically "automatic," or created anew with each invocation. Function definitions may not be nested but variables may be declared in a block-structured fashion. The functions of a C program may exist in separate source files that are compiled separately. Variables may be internal to a function, external but known only within a single source file, or visible to the entire program.

A preprocessing step performs macro substitution on program text, inclusion of other source files, and conditional compilation.

C is a relatively "low level" language. This characterization is not

pejorative; it simply means that C deals with the same sort of objects that most computers do, namely characters, numbers, and addresses. These may be combined and moved about with the arithmetic and logical operators implemented by real machines.

C provides no operations to deal directly with composite objects such as character strings, sets, lists, or arrays. There are no operations that manipulate an entire array or string, although structures may be copied as a unit. The language does not define any storage allocation facility other than static definition and the stack discipline provided by the local variables of functions; there is no heap or garbage collection. Finally, C itself provides no input/output facilities; there are no READ or WRITE statements, and no built-in file access methods. All of these higher-level mechanisms must be provided by explicitly-called functions. Most C implementations have included a reasonably standard collection of such functions.

Similarly, C offers only straightforward, single-thread control flow: tests, loops, grouping, and subprograms, but not multiprogramming, parallel operations, synchronization, or coroutines.

Although the absence of some of these features may seem like a grave deficiency ("You mean I have to call a function to compare two character strings?"), keeping the language down to modest size has real benefits. Since C is relatively small, it can be described in a small space, and learned quickly. A programmer can reasonably expect to know and understand and indeed regularly use the entire language.

For many years, the definition of C was the reference manual in the first edition of *The C Programming Language*. In 1983, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) established a committee to provide a modern, comprehensive definition of C. The resulting definition, the ANSI standard, or "ANSI C," was completed late in 1988. Most of the features of the standard are already supported by modern compilers.

The standard is based on the original reference manual. The language is relatively little changed; one of the goals of the standard was to make sure that most existing programs would remain valid, or, failing that, that compilers could produce warnings of new behavior.

For most programmers, the most important change is a new syntax for declaring and defining functions. A function declaration can now include a description of the arguments of the function; the definition syntax changes to match. This extra information makes it much easier for compilers to detect errors caused by mismatched arguments; in our experience, it is a very useful addition to the language.

There are other small-scale language changes. Structure assignment and enumerations, which had been widely available, are now officially part of the language. Floating-point computations may now be done in single precision. The properties of arithmetic, especially for unsigned types, are clarified. The preprocessor is more elaborate. Most of these changes will have only minor

effects on most programmers.

A second significant contribution of the standard is the definition of a library to accompany C. It specifies functions for accessing the operating system (for instance, to read and write files), formatted input and output, memory allocation, string manipulation, and the like. A collection of standard headers provides uniform access to declarations of functions and data types. Programs that use this library to interact with a host system are assured of compatible behavior. Most of the library is closely modeled on the "standard I/O library" of the UNIX system. This library was described in the first edition, and has been widely used on other systems as well. Again, most programmers will not see much change.

Because the data types and control structures provided by C are supported directly by most computers, the run-time library required to implement self-contained programs is tiny. The standard library functions are only called explicitly, so they can be avoided if they are not needed. Most can be written in C, and except for the operating system details they conceal, are themselves portable.

Although C matches the capabilities of many computers, it is independent of any particular machine architecture. With a little care it is easy to write portable programs, that is, programs that can be run without change on a variety of hardware. The standard makes portability issues explicit, and prescribes a set of constants that characterize the machine on which the program is run.

C is not a strongly-typed language, but as it has evolved, its type-checking has been strengthened. The original definition of C frowned on, but permitted, the interchange of pointers and integers; this has long since been eliminated, and the standard now requires the proper declarations and explicit conversions that had already been enforced by good compilers. The new function declarations are another step in this direction. Compilers will warn of most type errors, and there is no automatic conversion of incompatible data types. Nevertheless, C retains the basic philosophy that programmers know what they are doing; it only requires that they state their intentions explicitly.

C, like any other language, has its blemishes. Some of the operators have the wrong precedence; some parts of the syntax could be better. Nonetheless, C has proven to be an extremely effective and expressive language for a wide variety of programming applications.

The book is organized as follows. Chapter 1 is a tutorial on the central part of C. The purpose is to get the reader started as quickly as possible, since we believe strongly that the way to learn a new language is to write programs in it. The tutorial does assume a working knowledge of the basic elements of programming; there is no explanation of computers, of compilation, nor of the meaning of an expression like $n=n+1$. Although we have tried where possible to show useful programming techniques, the book is not intended to be a reference work on data structures and algorithms; when forced to make a choice, we have concentrated on the language.

Chapters 2 through 6 discuss various aspects of C in more detail, and rather more formally, than does Chapter 1, although the emphasis is still on examples of complete programs, rather than isolated fragments. Chapter 2 deals with the basic data types, operators and expressions. Chapter 3 treats control flow: **if-else**, **switch**, **while**, **for**, etc. Chapter 4 covers functions and program structure—external variables, scope rules, multiple source files, and so on—and also touches on the preprocessor. Chapter 5 discusses pointers and address arithmetic. Chapter 6 covers structures and unions.

Chapter 7 describes the standard library, which provides a common interface to the operating system. This library is defined by the ANSI standard and is meant to be supported on all machines that support C, so programs that use it for input, output, and other operating system access can be moved from one system to another without change.

Chapter 8 describes an interface between C programs and the UNIX operating system, concentrating on input/output, the file system, and storage allocation. Although some of this chapter is specific to UNIX systems, programmers who use other systems should still find useful material here, including some insight into how one version of the standard library is implemented, and suggestions on portability.

Appendix A contains a language reference manual. The official statement of the syntax and semantics of C is the ANSI standard itself. That document, however, is intended foremost for compiler writers. The reference manual here conveys the definition of the language more concisely and without the same legalistic style. Appendix B is a summary of the standard library, again for users rather than implementers. Appendix C is a short summary of changes from the original language. In cases of doubt, however, the standard and one's own compiler remain the final authorities on the language.



Second Edition

Programming Language

Brian W. Kernighan • Dennis M. Ritchie

The computing world has undergone a revolution since the publication of the first edition of the C Programming Language. During this time, the C language has changed and spread beyond its origins as the language of the UNIX operating system. This second edition provides a more comprehensive and contemporary definition of the C language as defined by the ANSI standard - the "ANSI C". The most striking change relates to the new form of function declaration and definition. It is primarily meant to help the reader to learn how to program in C.

Key Features

- Presents changes in the C programming language as defined by the ANSI.
- Contains new material on organizing programs into multiple source files.
- Provides additional coverage of declaration syntax.
- Presents the standard library which specifies functions for input, output, file, access, string operations mathematical computations, etc.
- Offers an improved exposition of important features such as pointers, that are central to C programming.
- Includes new material on manipulating variable length argument lists.
- Reflects changes in the C programming environment.
- Contains new material on organizing programs into multiple source files.

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