
Classes in C++03 and C++11

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Overview

What is a class?

Constructors & . . .

What if I don't write . . .

Why Prefer Init?

Principle of Least . . .

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1. Overview

- The C++ class is one of the most difficult constructs to write correctly
- Some methods are written silently by the compiler
- Some methods are required w/ pointers
- C++03 contained 3 types of constructors, but C++11 added a **move** constructor.
- These slides describe classes, including 3 of the 4 constructors.
- We describe **move** semantics in separate slides



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2. What is a *class*?

- Unit of encapsulation:
 - Public operations
 - Private implementation
- **Abstraction:**
 - string: abstracts `char*` of C
 - student
 - sprite
- C++ Classes: easy to write, hard to get **right!**
- Need lots of examples



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2.1. The actions of a *class*

- Constructors: initialize data attributes
- Constructors: allocate memory when needed
- Destructor: De-allocate memory when necessary



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2.2. C++ *class* vs C++ *struct*

- Default access is only difference
- Generally, structs used for data
- Classes used for data and methods

Bad class	Good Class
<pre>class Student { public: string name; float gpa; };</pre>	<pre>class Student { string name; float gpa; };</pre>



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2.3. Object: an instantiated class

- C++ objects can be stored on the stack:

```
class A{};
int main() {
    A a, b;
};
```

- Or on the heap:

```
int main() {
    A *a = new A;
    A *b = new B;
};
```

- Compiler does stack; programmer does heap!

3. Constructors & Destructors

- No name and cannot be called directly
- Init data through initialization lists
- Constructor types are distinguished by their parameters.
- The four types of constructors are:
 1. Default
 2. Conversion
 3. Copy
 4. Move (which we describe in later slides)



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Constructor examples:

```
class Student {  
public:  
    Student();           // default: no params  
    Student(char * n);   // convert  
    Student(const Student&); // copy: param is Student  
    Student(Student&&);   // move  
    ~Student();          // destructor (no params)  
private:  
    char* name;  
};
```



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3.1. Default Constructor

```
1 class Student {  
2 public:  
3     string() : buf(new char[1]) { buf[0] = '\\0'; }  
4 private:  
5     char* name;  
6 };
```

- No parameters to default constructor
- Uses an initialization list to create a “buffer” of length 1 characters: `buf(new char[1])`
- Places null termination character into the newly created buffer.
- `cppreference`: Constructs an empty string, with a length of zero characters.

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3.2. Prefer initialization to assignment

- Initialization is more efficient for data members that are objects (demo later)
- Only way to pass parameters to base class:

```
class Person {  
public:  
    Person(int a) : age(a) {}  
private:  
    int age;  
};  
class Student : public Person {  
public:  
    Student(int age, float g) : Person(age), gpa(g) {}  
private:  
    float gpa;  
};
```



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3.3. Init performed in order of declare

- In `Student`, the constructor will initialize `iq` first, then `age`, because `iq` appears first in declaration (line 5):

```
1 class Student {  
2 public:  
3     Student(int a) : age(a), iq(age+100) {}  
4 private:  
5     int iq;  
6     int age;  
7 };
```



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3.4. Conversion Constructor

```
1 class Student {
2 public:
3     string(const char* b) :
4         buf(new char[strlen(b)+1]) {
5         strcpy(buf, b);
6     }
7 private:
8     char* name;
9 };
```

- Converts a `char*`, `b` on line 3, into a `string`
- `strlen` returns the size of the c-string, not including the null termination
- On line 4 we allocate `strlen(b)+1` bytes, where `+1` allows for the null termination



3.5. Copy Constructor

```
1 class Student {
2 public:
3     string(const string& s) :
4         buf(new char[strlen(s.buf)+1]) {
5         strcpy(buf, s.buf);
6     }
7 private:
8     char* buf;
9 };
```

- Copy constructor uses the parameter `s`, line 3, to make a **deep** copy.
- Notice the parameter transmission mode: `const&`

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3.6. Destructor

```
1 class Student {  
2 public:  
3     ~string() { delete [] buf; }  
4 private:  
5     char* name;  
6 };
```

- We used `new char[]` in the constructors to allocate an array
- We use `delete []` on line 3 to indicate that we are deallocating an array.



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4. What if I don't write one

I write this:

```
class Empty{};
```

Compiler writes this:

```
class Empty {  
public:  
    Empty();  
    Empty(const Empty &);  
    ~Empty();  
    Empty& operator=(const Empty &);  
};
```



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4.1. Here's what they look like:

```
inline Empty::Empty() {}  
inline Empty::~~Empty() {}  
  
inline Empty * Empty::operator&() {return this;}  
  
inline const Empty * Empty::operator&() const {  
    return this;  
}
```

The copy constructor & assignment operator simply do a member wise copy, i.e., shallow. Note that the default copy/assign may induce leak/dbl free



4.2. What can go wrong? Consider:

```
1 #include <iostream>
2 #include <cstring>
3 class string {
4 public:
5     string() : buf(new char[1]) { buf[0] = '\0'; }
6     string(const char * s) :
7         buf(new char[strlen(s)+1]) {
8         strcpy(buf, s);
9     }
10    ~string() { delete [] buf; }
11 private:
12     char * buf;
13 };
14 int main() {
15     string a, b(a);
16 }
```

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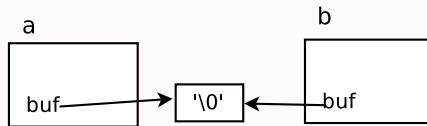
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4.3. Shallow Copy

- The previous example gives undefined behavior, usually **double free**.
- Default constructor creates **string a**, line 15
- However, the compiler generated copy constructor simply copies the address in **a.buf** into **b.buf**, which makes a shallow copy
- In memory it looks like:



Deletion of **a** is okay; deletion of **b** is a problem!



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4.4. Prevent Compiler Generated Ctors

- To address the problem of shallow copies, C++03 developers suggested placing signatures in private (line 10).
- Use of copy constructor won't compile
- This is Item #6 in Meyers Effective C++.

```
1 #include <iostream>
2 #include <cstring>
3 class string {
4 public:
5     string();
6     string(const char * s);
7     ~string() { delete [] buf; }
8 private:
9     char * buf;
10    string(const string&);
11 };
```



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4.5. C++11 Solution

- In C++11, if the special syntax `= delete` is used, the function is defined as deleted.
- Any use of a deleted function is ill-formed and the program will not compile.

```
1 #include <iostream>
2 #include <cstring>
3 class string {
4 public:
5     string();
6     string(const char * s);
7     ~string() { delete [] buf; }
8 private:
9     char * buf;
10    string(const string&) = delete;
11 };
```

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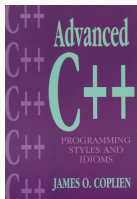
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4.6. Canonical Form

- James Coplien: a class with pointer data should be in *Canonical Form*, which means it should include programmer written:
 1. Copy constructor
 2. Copy assignment
 3. Destructor
- Canonical form prevents shallow copy



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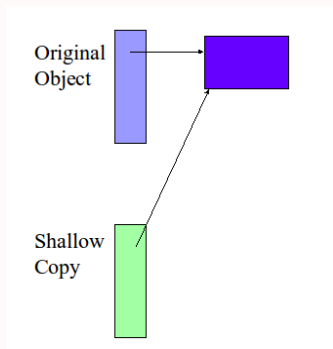
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4.7. Compiler generated \Rightarrow Shallow Copy



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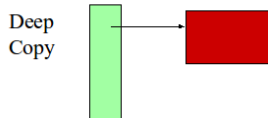
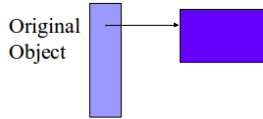
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4.8. Canonical Form \Rightarrow Deep Copy



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5. Why Prefer Init?

- Meyers, in Item #4 of Effective C++, says “prefer initialization to assignment” in ctors.
- The two examples in Sections 5.1 and 5.2 illustrate a considerable efficiency boost when using initialization rather than assignment.
- The two examples are exactly the same except for line 18:
 - Section 5.1, line 18, assignment::
`TestAssign(char* n) { name = n; }`
 - Section 5.2, line 18, initialization list:
`TestAssign(char* n) : name(n) { }`

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5.1. assign Example

```
1 #include <iostream>
2 #include <cstring>
3 class string {
4 public:
5     string() { std::cout << "default" << std::endl; }
6     string(const char* b) { std::cout << "convert" << std::endl; }
7     string(const string& s) { std::cout << "copy" << std::endl; }
8     ~string() { std::cout << "destructor" << std::endl; }
9     string& operator=(const string&) {
10         std::cout << "assign" << std::endl;
11         return *this;
12     }
13 private:
14     char* buf;
15 };
16 class TestAssign {
17 public:
18     TestAssign(char* n) { name = n; }
19 private:
20     string name;
21 };
22 int main() { TestAssign test("dog"); }
```

- The output for the previous program in Section 5.1 is:

```
default  
convert  
assign  
destructor  
destructor
```

- The first line of output, **default**, results when the compiler tries to initialize **name** in an initialization list. Since there isn't one, it uses the default constructor.



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- The next two lines of output, **convert** and **assign** result from `name = n`, which doesn't match any function call as written. However, if `n` is **converted** to a string then it will match: `string.operator=(string)`.
- The first destructor call results when the compiler reallocates the temporary string that was created with the **convert**.
- The final destructor call results when the compiler deallocates `name` in `Student`.

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5.2. Init Example

```
1 #include <iostream>
2 #include <cstring>
3 class string {
4 public:
5     string() { std::cout << "default" << std::endl; }
6     string(const char* b) { std::cout << "convert" << std::endl; }
7     string(const string& s) { std::cout << "copy" << std::endl; }
8     ~string() { std::cout << "destructor" << std::endl; }
9     string& operator=(const string&) {
10         std::cout << "assign" << std::endl;
11         return *this;
12     }
13 private:
14     char* buf;
15 };
16 class TestInit {
17 public:
18     TestInit(char* n) : name(n) { }
19 private:
20     string name;
21 };
22 int main() { TestInit test("dog"); }
```



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- The output for the previous program in Section 5.2 is:

```
convert  
destructor
```

- Clearly, the initialization list, `name(n)`, is a use of the conversion constructor in `string` to convert `n` to a string.



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6. Principle of Least Privilege

- A **const** class method cannot change any of the class data attributes.
- Use **const** as much as possible!
- Can reduce debugging
- Provides documentation
- Allow a function enough data access to accomplish its task and no more!
- Most beginners take them all out . . . probably need more!

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6.1. Example of Least Privilege

```
class string {
public:
    string(const char* n) : buf(new char[strlen(n)+1]) {
        strcpy(buf, n);
    }
    const char* get() const { return buf; }
private:
    char *buf;
};

std::ostream&
operator<<(std::ostream& out, const string& s) {
    return out << s.get();
}

int main() {
    string x("Hello");
    std::cout << x.get() << std::endl;
}
```

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6.2. What's wrong with this class?

```
class Student {  
public:  
    Student(const char * n) : name(n) { }  
    const getName() const { return name; }  
    void setName(char *n) { name = n; }  
private:  
    char *name;  
};
```



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7. Overload Operators

```
class string {
public:
    string();
    string(const char*);
    string(const string&);
    ~string();
    string operator+(const string&);
    string& operator=(const string&);
    char& operator[] (int index);
    const char& operator[] const (int index);
private:
    char *buf;
};
ostream& operator<<(ostream&, const string&);
string operator+(const char*, const string&);
```

Overloaded operators will be described in separate slides.

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