CS100 Lecture 14

Classes

Contents

Classes

Members of a class

A simple `class`

The initial idea: A `class` is a new kind of `struct` that can have member functions:

```
class Student {
  std::string name;
  std::string id;
  int entranceYear;
  void setName(const std::string &newName) {
    name = newName;
  }
  void printInfo() const {
    std::cout << "I am " << name << ", id " << id
              << ", entrance year: " << entranceYear << std::endl;
  }
  bool graduated(int year) const {
    return year - entranceYear >= 4;
  }
};
```

Member access

Member access: `a.mem`, where `a` is an **object** of the class type.

- Every member [1] belongs to an object: each student has a name, id, entrance year, etc.
  - You need to specify *whose* name / id / ... you want to obtain.

To call a member function on an object: `a.memfun(args)`.

```
Student s = someValue();
s.printInfo(); // call its printInfo() to print related info
if (s.graduated(2023)) {
  // ...
}
```

Access control

```
class Student {
private:
  std::string name;
  std::string id;
  int entranceYear;
public:
  void setName(const std::string &newName) { name = newName; }
  void printInfo() const {
    std::cout << "I am " << name << ", id " << id
              << ", entrance year: " << entranceYear << std::endl;
  }
  bool graduated(int year) const { return year - entranceYear >= 4; }
};
```

- `private` members: Only accessible to code inside the class and `friend`s.
  - $\Rightarrow$ We will introduce `friend`s in later lectures.
- `public` members: Accessible to all parts of the program.

Access control

```
class Student {
private:
  std::string name;
  std::string id;
  int entranceYear;

public:
  void setName(const std::string &newName);
  void printInfo() const;
  bool graduated(int year) const;
};
```

Unlike some other languages (e.g. Java), an access specifier controls the access of all members after it, until the next access specifier or the end of the class definition.

Access control

```
class Student {
// private:
  std::string name;
  std::string id;
  int entranceYear;
public:
  void setName(const std::string &newName);
  void printInfo() const;
  bool graduated(int year) const;
};
```

What if there is a group of members with no access specifier at the beginning?

- If it's `class`, they are `private`.
- If it's `struct`, they are `public`.

This is one of the **only two differences** between `struct` and `class` in C++.

The `this` pointer

```
class Student {
  // ...
public:
  bool graduated(int year) const;
};

Student s = someValue();
if (s.graduated(2023))
  // ...
```

How many parameters does `graduated` have?

The `this` pointer

```
class Student {
  // ...
public:
  bool graduated(int year) const;
};

Student s = someValue();
if (s.graduated(2023)) // ...
```

How many parameters does `graduated` have?

- **Seemingly one, but actually two:** `s` is also information that must be known when calling this function!

The `this` pointer

```
class Student {
public:
  void setName(const std::string &n) {
    name = n;
  }

  bool graduated(int year) const {
    return year - entranceYear >= 4;
  }
};

Student s = someValue();
if (s.graduated(2023))
  // ...
s.setName("Alice");
```

- The code on the left can be viewed as:

```
void setName
    (Student *this, const std::string &n) {
  this->name = n;
}
bool graduated
    (const Student *this, int year) {
  return year - this->entranceYear >= 4;
}

Student s = someValue();
if (graduated(&s, 2023))
  // ...
setName(&s, "Alice");
```

The `this` pointer

There is a pointer called `this` in each member function of class `X` which has type `X *` or `const X *`, pointing to the object on which the member function is called.

Inside a member function, access of any member `mem` is actually `this->mem`.

We can also write `this->mem` explicitly.

```
class Student {
public:
  bool graduated(int year) const {
    return year - this->entranceYear >= 4;
  }
};
```

Many languages have similar constructs, e.g. `self` in Python. (C++23 has `self` too!)

`const` member functions

The `const` keyword after the parameter list and before the function body `{` is used to declare a **`const` member function**.

- A `const` member function cannot modify its data members [2].
- A `const` member function **guarantees** that no data member will be modified.
  - A non-`const` member function does not provide such guarantee.
  - In a `const` member function, calling a non-`const` member function on `*this` is not allowed.
- For a `const` object, **only `const` member functions can be called on it**.

[Best practice] If, logically, a member function should not modify the object's state, it should be made a `const` member function. Otherwise, it cannot be called on `const` objects.

`const` member functions and the `this` pointer

This `const` is essentially applied to the `this` pointer:

- In `const` member functions of class `X`, `this` has type `const X *`.
- In non-`const` member functions of class `X`, `this` has type `X *`.

If `ptr` is of type `const T *`, the expression `ptr->mem` is also `const`-qualified.

- Recall that in a member function, access of a member `mem` is actually `this->mem`.
- Therefore, `mem` is also `const`-qualified in a `const` member function.

```
class Student {
public:
  void foo() const {
    name += 'a'; // Error: `name` is `const std::string` in a const member
                 // function. It cannot be modified.
  }
};
```

`const` member functions

Effective C++ Item 3: **Use `const` whenever possible.**

Decide whether the following member functions need a `const` qualification:

```
class Student {
  std::string name, id;
  int entranceYear;
public:
  std::string getName(); // returns the name of the student.
  std::string getID();   // returns the id of the student.
  bool valid();    // verifies whether the leading four digits in `id`
                   // is equal to `entranceYear`.
  void adjustID(); // adjust `id` according to `entranceYear`.
};
```

`const` member functions

Effective C++ Item 3: **Use `const` whenever possible.**

Decide whether the following member functions need a `const` qualification:

```
class Student {
  std::string name, id;
  int entranceYear;
public:
  std::string getName() const; // returns the name of the student.
  std::string getID() const;   // returns the id of the student.
  bool valid() const;    // verifies whether the leading four digits in `id`
                         // is equal to `entranceYear`.
  void adjustID(); // adjust `id` according to `entranceYear`.
};
```

The `const` ness of member functions should be determined **logically**.

`const` member functions

```
class Student {
  std::string name, id;
  int entranceYear;
public:
  std::string getName() const { return name; }
  std::string getID() const { return id; }
  bool valid() const { return id.substr(0, 4) == std::to_string(entranceYear); }
  void adjustID() { id = std::to_string(entranceYear) + id.substr(4); }
};
```

`str.substr(pos, len)` returns the substring of `str` starting from the position indexed `pos` with length `len`.

- If `len` is not provided, it returns the **suffix** starting from the position indexed `pos`.

Constructors

Often abbreviated as "ctors".

Constructors

Constructors define how an object can be initialized.

- Constructors are often **overloaded**, because an object may have multiple reasonable ways of initialization.

```
class Student {
  std::string name;
  std::string id;
  int entranceYear;
public:
  Student(const std::string &name_, const std::string &id_, int ey)
    : name(name_), id(id_), entranceYear(ey) {}
  Student(const std::string &name_, const std::string &id_)
    : name(name_), id(id_), entranceYear(std::stoi(id_.substr(0, 4))) {}
};

Student a("Alice", "2020123123", 2020);
Student b("Bob", "2020123124"); // entranceYear = 2020
Student c; // Error: No default constructor. (to be discussed later)
```

Constructors

```
class Student {
  std::string name;
  std::string id;
  int entranceYear;

public:
  Student(const std::string &name_, const std::string &id_)
    : name(name_), id(id_), entranceYear(std::stoi(id_.substr(0, 4))) {}
};
```

- The constructor name is the class name: `Student`.
- Constructors do not have a return type (not even `void` [3]). The constructor body can contain a `return;` statement, which should not return a value.
- The function body of this constructor is empty: `{}`.

Constructor initializer list

Constructors initialize **all data members** of the object.

The initialization of **all data members** is done **before entering the function body**.

How they are initialized is (partly) determined by the **constructor initializer list**:

```
class Student {
  // ...
public:
  Student(const std::string &name_, const std::string &id_)
    : name(name_), id(id_), entranceYear(std::stoi(id_.substr(0, 4))) {}
};
```

The initializer list starts with `:`, and contains initializers for each data member, separated by `,`. The initializers must be of the form `(...)` or `{...}`, not `= ...`.

Order of initialization

Data members are initialized in order **in which they are declared**, not the order in the initializer list.

- If the initializers appear in an order different from the declaration order, the compiler will generate a warning.

Typical mistake: `entranceYear` is initialized in terms of `id`, but `id` is not initialized yet!

```
class Student {
  std::string name;
  int entranceYear; // !!!
  std::string id;

public:
  Student(const std::string &name_, const std::string &id_)
    : name(name_), id(id_), entranceYear(std::stoi(id.substr(0, 4))) {}
};
```

Constructor initializer list

Data members are initialized in order **in which they are declared**, not the order in the initializer list.

- If the initializers appear in an order different from the declaration order, the compiler will generate a warning.
- For a data member that do not appear in the initializer list:
  - If there is an **in-class initializer** (see next page), it is initialized using the in-class initializer.
  - Otherwise, it is **default-initialized**.

What does **default-initialization** mean for class types? $\Rightarrow$ To be discussed later.

In-class initializers

A member can have an in-class initializer. It must be in the form `{...}` or `= ...`.[4]

```
class Student {
  std::string name = "Alice";
  std::string id;
  int entranceYear{2024}; // equivalent to `int entranceYear = 2024;`.
public:
  Student() {} // `name` is initialized to `"Alice"`,
               // `id` is initialized to an empty string,
               // and `entranceYear` is initialized to 2024.
  Student(int ey) : entranceYear(ey) {} // `name` is initialized to `"Alice"`,
                                        // `id` is initialized to an empty string,
                                        // and `entranceYear` is initialized to `ey`.
};
```

The in-class initializer provides the "default" way of initializing a member in this class, as a substitute for default-initialization.

Constructor initializer list

Below is a typical way of writing this constructor without an initializer list:

```
class Student {
  // ...
public:
  Student(const std::string &name_, const std::string &id_) {
    name = name_;
    id = id_;
    entranceYear = std::stoi(id_.substr(0, 4));
  }
};
```

How are these members actually initialized in this constructor?

Constructor initializer list

Below is a typical way of writing this constructor without an initializer list:

```
class Student {
  // ...
public:
  Student(const std::string &name_, const std::string &id_) {
    name = name_;
    id = id_;
    entranceYear = std::stoi(id_.substr(0, 4));
  }
};
```

How are these members actually initialized in this constructor?

- First, before entering the function body, `name`, `id` and `entranceYear` are default-initialized. `name` and `id` are initialized to empty strings.
- Then, the assignments in the function body take place.

Constructor initializer list

[Best practice] Always use an initializer list in a constructor.

- Not all types can be default-initialized. Not all types can be assigned to. (Any counterexamples?)

Constructor initializer list

[Best practice] Always use an initializer list in a constructor.

Not all types can be default-initialized. Not all types can be assigned to.

- References `T &` cannot be default-initialized, and cannot be assigned to.
- `const` objects of built-in types cannot be default-initialized.
- `const` objects cannot be assigned to.
- A class can choose to allow or disallow default initialization or assignment. It depends on the design. ⇒ See next page.

Moreover, if a data member is default-initialized and then assigned when could have been initialized directly, it may lead to low efficiency.

Default constructors

A special constructor that takes no parameters.

- Guess what it's for?

Default Constructors

A special constructor that takes no parameters.

- It defines the behavior of **default-initialization** of objects of that class type, since no arguments need to be passed when calling it.

```
class Point2d {
  double x, y;
public:
  Point2d() : x(0), y(0) {} // default constructor
  Point2d(double x_, double y_) : x(x_), y(y_) {}
};

Point2d p1;       // calls default ctor, (0, 0)
Point2d p2(3, 4); // calls Point2d(double, double), (3, 4)
Point2d p3();     // Is this calling the default ctor?
```

Default constructors

A special constructor that takes no parameters.

- It defines the behavior of **default-initialization** of objects of that class type, since no arguments need to be passed when calling it.

```
class Point2d {
  double x, y;
public:
  Point2d() : x(0), y(0) {} // default constructor
  Point2d(double x_, double y_) : x(x_), y(y_) {}
};

Point2d p1;        // calls default ctor, (0, 0)
Point2d p2(3, 4); // calls Point2d(double, double), (3, 4)
Point2d p3();      // Is this calling the default ctor?
```

Be careful! `p3` is a **function** that takes no parameters and returns `Point2d`.

Is a default constructor needed?

First, if you need to use arrays, you almost certainly need a default constructor:

```
Student s[1000]; // All elements are default-initialized
                 // by the default constructor.
Student s2[1000] = {a, b}; // The first two elements are initialized to
                           // `a` and `b`. The rest are initialized by the
                           // default constructor.
```

A `std::vector` does not require that:

```
// In this code, the default constructor of `Student` is not called.
std::vector<Student> students;
for (auto i = 0; i != n; ++i)
  students.push_back(some_student());
```

Is a default constructor needed?

If a class has no user-declared constructors, the compiler will try to synthesize a default constructor.

```
class X {}; // No user-declared constructors.
X x; // OK: calls the compiler-synthesized default constructor
```

The synthesized default constructor initializes the data members as follows:

- If a data member has an in-class initializer, it is initialized according to the in-class initializer.
- Otherwise, default-initialize that member. If it cannot be default-initialized, the compiler will give up -- no default constructor is generated.

Is a default constructor needed?

If a class has any user-declared constructors but no default constructor, the compiler **will not** synthesize a default constructor.

You may ask for a default constructor with `= default;`:

```
class Student {
public:
  Student(const std::string &name_, const std::string &id_, int ey)
    : name(name_), id(id_), entranceYear(ey) {}

  Student(const std::string &name_, const std::string &id_)
    : name(name_), id(id_), entranceYear(std::stoi(id_.substr(0, 4))) {}

  Student() = default;
};
```

Is a default constructor needed?

It depends on the **design**:

- If the class has a default constructor, what should be the behavior of it? Is there a reasonable "default state" for your class type?

For `Student`: What is a "default student"?

Is a default constructor needed?

It depends on the **design**:

- If the class has a default constructor, what should be the behavior of it? Is there a reasonable "default state" for your class type?

For `Student`: What is a "default student"?

- There seems to be no such thing as a "default student" (in a normal design). Therefore, `Student` should not have a default constructor.

Is a default constructor needed?

[Best practice] **When in doubt, leave it out.** If the class does not have a "default state", it should not have a default constructor!

- Do not define one arbitrarily or letting it `= default`. This leads to pitfalls.
- Calling the default constructor of something that has no "default state" should result in a **compile error**, instead of being allowed arbitrarily.

Summary

Members of a class

- A class can have data members and member functions.
- Access control: `private`, `public`.
  - One difference between `class` and `struct`: Default access.
- The `this` pointer: has type `X *` (`const X *` in `const` member functions). It points to the object on which the member function is called.
- `const` member function: guarantees that no modification will happen.

Summary

The followings hold for **all constructors**, no matter how they are defined:

- A constructor initializes **all** data members in order in which they are declared.
- The initialization of **all** data members is done before the function body of a constructor is executed.

In a constructor, a member is initialized as follows:

- If there is an initializer for it in the initializer list, use it.
- Otherwise, if it has an in-class initializer, use it.
- Otherwise, it is default-initialized. If it cannot be default-initialized, it leads to a compile-error.

Summary

Default constructors

- The default constructor defines the behavior of default-initialization.
- The default constructor is the constructor with an empty parameter list.
- If we have not defined **any constructor**, the compiler will try to synthesize a **default constructor** as if it were defined as `ClassName() {}`.
    - The compiler may fail to do that if some member has no in-class initializer and is not default-initializable. In that case, the compiler gives up (without giving an error).
- We can use `= default` to ask for a synthesized default constructor explicitly.

Notes

[1] Every *non-* `static` member belongs to an object. All data members mentioned in the slides of this lecture are non- `static`.

[2] A `const` member function cannot modify its data members, unless that member is marked `mutable`.

[3] A constructor does not have a return type according to the standard. But it behaves as if its return type is `void`. Some compilers (such as Clang) may also treat it as if it returns `void`.

[4] In-class initializers cannot be provided in the form `(...)`. The parentheses here will be treated as part of a function declaration.