Parameters

Parameters have the same properties—automatic storage duration and block scope—as local variables. In fact, the only real difference between parameters and local variables is that each parameter is initialized automatically when a function is called (by being assigned the value of the corresponding argument).

10.2 External Variables

Passing arguments is one way to transmit information to a function. Functions can also communicate through *external variables*—variables that are declared outside the body of any function.

The properties of external variables (or *global variables*, as they're sometimes called) are different from those of local variables:

- *Static storage duration.* External variables have static storage duration, just like local variables that have been declared `static`. A value stored in an external variable will stay there indefinitely.
- *File scope.* An external variable has *file scope:* it is visible from its point of declaration to the end of the enclosing file. As a result, an external variable can be accessed (and potentially modified) by all functions that follow its declaration.

Example: Using External Variables to Implement a Stack

To illustrate how external variables might be used, let's look at a data structure known as a *stack*. (Stacks are an abstract concept, not a C feature; they can be implemented in most programming languages.) A stack, like an array, can store multiple data items of the same type. However, the operations on a stack are limited: we can either *push* an item onto the stack (add it to one end—the "stack top") or *pop* it from the stack (remove it from the same end). Examining or modifying an item that's not at the top of the stack is forbidden.

One way to implement a stack in C is to store its items in an array, which we'll call `contents`. A separate integer variable named `top` marks the position of the stack top. When the stack is empty, `top` has the value 0. To push an item on the stack, we simply store the item in `contents` at the position indicated by `top`, then increment `top`. Popping an item requires decrementing `top`, then using it as an index into `contents` to fetch the item that's being popped.

Based on this outline, here's a program fragment (not a complete program) that declares the `contents` and `top` variables for a stack and provides a set of functions that represent operations on the stack. All five functions need access to the `top` variable, and two functions need access to `contents`, so we'll make `contents` and `top` external.