Everything you (n)ever wanted to know about C++'s Lambdas

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Introduction

What is a Lambda Expression in C++?

cube is a lambda ...

```
int main() {
    auto cube = [](int x) { return x * x * x; };
    return cube(3);
}
```

godbolt.org/z/zBE2_n

is even is a lambda ...

```
#include <algorithm>
#include <vector>

int main() {
    std::vector<int> xs{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7};
    auto is_even = [](int x) { return x % 2 == 0; };
    return std::count_if(xs.begin(), xs.end(), is_even);
}
```

godbolt.org/z/kWx7qu

Syntax

C++'s Lambda Expression

The simplest (and most boring) lambda

```
1 auto x = []{};
```

...no capturing, takes no parameters and returns nothing

A slightly more "useful" lambda

```
int main() {
    auto x = [] { return 5; };
    return x();
}
```

godbolt.org/z/DrnSSE

...is equivalent to

```
int main() {
    struct {
        auto operator()() const {
            return 5;
        }
     } x;
    return x();
}
```

godbolt.org/z/R8qx3Q

```
#!/usr/bin/env python3

if __name__ == '__main__':
    f = {k: lambda x: x + k for k in range(3)}

    for k in range(3):
        print(f[k](2), end='')
```

2

4 5

10

11

```
#!/usr/bin/env python3
from functools import partial

if __name__ == '__main__':
    f = {k: partial(lambda x, k: x + k, k=k) for k in range(3)}
    # f = {k: lambda x, k=k: x + k for k in range(3)}
    # ... would change API

for k in range(3):
    print(f[k](2), end='')
```

Now prints: 234

```
#include <functional>
#include <iostream>
#include <map>
int main() {
    std::unordered_map<int, std::function<int(int)>> f;
    for (int k = 0; k < 3; k++) {
        f.emplace(k, [](int x) { return x + k; });
    for (int i = 0; i < 3; i++) {
        std::cout << f[i](2);
```

godbolt.org/z/QssJXN

10 11

12

13 14 15

```
#include <functional>
#include <iostream>
#include <map>
int main() {
    std::unordered_map<int, std::function<int(int)>> f;
    for (int k = 0; k < 3; k++) {
        f.emplace(k, [k](int x) { return x + k; });
    for (int i = 0; i < 3; i++) {
        std::cout << f[i](2);
```

godbolt.org/z/qHFY32

10 11

12

13 14 15

```
#include <functional>
   #include <iostream>
   #include <map>
5
   int main() {
        std::unordered map<int, std::function<int(int)>> f;
        int k = 0;
        for (; k < 3; k++) {
            f.emplace(k, [\&k](int x) \{ return x + k; \});
10
11
12
        for (int i = 0; i < 3; i++) {
13
            std::cout << f[i](2);
14
15
16
```

godbolt.org/z/-FTWqI

C++'s Lambda Expression

Capturing rules

- → [x]: captures x by value
- → [&x]: captures x by reference
- → [=]: captures all variables (used in the lambda) by value
- → [&]: captures all variables (used in the lambda) by reference
- \rightarrow [=, &x]: captures variables like with [=], but x by reference
- \rightarrow [&, x]: captures variables like with [&], but x by value

Capturing by value

```
int main() {
    int i = 1;
    auto z = [i](int y) {
        return i + y;
    }(3);
    return z;
}
```

godbolt.org/z/bHveG8

...or equivalently

```
class X {
    private:
        int i;
 4
   public:
        X(int i): i(i) {}
        int operator()(int y) const {
            return i + y;
10
    };
11
12
13
    // potentially lots of lines of code
14
15
    int main() {
        int i = 1;
16
17
        auto z = X\{i\}(3);
18
        return z:
19
```

godbolt.org/z/8tiwby

Capturing by reference

```
int main() {
    int i = 1;
    auto z = [&i](int y) {
        return i + y;
    }(3);
    return z;
}
```

godbolt.org/z/xazquF

...or equivalently

```
class X {
    private:
        int& i;
 4
   public:
        X(int& i): i(i) {}
        int operator()(int y) /*const*/ {
            return i + y;
10
    };
11
12
13
    // potentially lots of lines of code
14
15
    int main() {
        int i = 1;
16
17
        auto z = X\{i\}(3);
18
        return z:
19
```

godbolt.org/z/3ycaAW

```
#include <iostream>
int main() {
   int i = 1;
   auto x = [i]() { return ++i; };
   std::cout << i << x() << i;
}</pre>
```

godbolt.org/z/nv83nh

```
#include <iostream>
int main() {
   int i = 1;
   auto x = [i]() mutable { return ++i; };
   std::cout << i << x() << i;
}</pre>
```

godbolt.org/z/Gs995r

```
#include <iostream>
int main() {
   int i = 1;
   auto x = [&i]() mutable { return ++i; };
   std::cout << i << x() << i;
}</pre>
```

godbolt.org/z/gEhwLt

```
#include <iostream>
int main() {
    auto x = [i=0]() mutable { return ++i; };
    std::cout << x() << x();
}</pre>
```

godbolt.org/z/iLqPrn

```
#include <iostream>
#include <utility>

int main() {
    auto x = [i=0, j=1]() mutable {
        i = std::exchange(j, j + i);
        return i;
};

for (int i = 0; i < 5; ++i) {
        std::cout << x();
}

}</pre>
```

godbolt.org/z/eTdadM

 $Ben\ Deane, \textit{std}:: \textit{exchange Patterns: Fast, Safe, Expressive, and Probably Underused}\ on\ \texttt{fluentcpp.com}$

C++'s Lambda Expression

Remember, lambda expressions are pure syntactic sugar and are equivalent to structs with an appropriate operator()() overload...

```
#include <iostream>
int main() {
    auto x = [] { return 1; };
    auto y = x;
    std::cout << x() << y();
}</pre>
```

godbolt.org/z/i_AnMx

```
#include <iostream>

int main() {
    int i = 1;
    int j = 2;
    auto x = [&i, j] { return i + j; };
    i = 4;
    j = 6;
    auto y = x;
    std::cout << x() << y();
}</pre>
```

godbolt.org/z/35Q3uR

```
#include <iostream>
#include <memory>

int main() {
    auto x = [i=std::make_unique<int>(1)] { return *i; };
    auto y = x;
    std::cout << x () << y();
}</pre>
```

godbolt.org/z/u-6mxM

```
#include <iostream>

int main() {
    auto x = [i=0]() mutable { return ++i; };

auto y = x;
    x();
    x();
    x();
    y();
    y();
    std::cout << x();

11 }</pre>
```

godbolt.org/z/U-CLpA

```
#include <iostream>

int main() {
    auto x = [] { static int i = 0; return ++i; };
    auto y = x;
    x();
    x();
    x();
    y();
    y();
    std::cout << x();
}</pre>
```

godbolt.org/z/_8QjoA

Fibonacci (again):

```
#include <utility>
   int main() {
       auto fib = [i=0, j=1]() mutable {
            struct Result {
                int &i, &j;
                auto next() {
9
                    i = std::exchange(j, j + i);
10
                    return *this;
                }
11
            };
12
            return Result{.i=i, .j=j}.next();
13
       };
14
15
        fib().next().next(); // mutate state
16
        return fib().i;
17
18
```

godbolt.org/z/m9s7ei

Let us now try to interact with the state of the Lambda ...

```
#include <utility>
    int main() {
        auto fib = [i=0, j=1]() mutable {
            struct Result {
                int &i, &j;
                auto next() {
                     i = std::exchange(j, j + i);
10
                     return *this;
11
12
            return Result{.i=i, .j=j}.next();
13
        };
14
15
16
        auto r = fib();
        r.i = 2; // mutate state
17
        r.j = 3; // mutate state
18
        return fib().j; // 5
19
20
```

godbolt.org/z/xpLDpb

...or slightly more conveniently:

```
#include <utility>
    int main() {
        auto fib = [i=0, j=1]() mutable {
            struct Result {
                int &i, &j;
                auto next(int n = 1) {
                     while (n-- > 0) {
                         i = std::exchange(j, j + i);
10
11
                     return *this;
12
13
            };
14
            return Result{.i=i, .j=j}.next();
15
        };
16
17
        return fib().next(3).j; // 5
18
19
```

godbolt.org/z/aN3sNi

```
#include <utility>
    int main() {
        auto fib = [i=0, j=1]() mutable {
            struct Result {
                int &i, &j;
                auto next(int n = 1) {
                    while (n-- > 0) {
                         i = std::exchange(j, j + i);
10
11
                    return *this;
12
13
            };
14
15
            return Result{.i=i, .j=j}.next();
        };
16
17
        return fib().next(10).j; // 144
18
19
```

```
# g92 -03
| main:
19| mov eax, 144
19| ret
```

godbolt.org/z/ok7Za-

godbolt.org/z/ok7Za-

Best Practices

(partially taken from "Effective Modern C++" by Scott Meyers)

Use Lambdas in STL algorithm

```
#include <algorithm>
#include <vector>

std::vector<int> get_ints();

int main() {
    auto ints = get_ints();
    auto in_range = [](int x) { return x > 0 && x < 10; };
    return *std::find_if(ints.begin(), ints.end(), in_range);
}</pre>
```

godbolt.org/z/y-343Z

Use Lambdas in STL algorithm

godbolt.org/z/J7cccJ

Stop pollution of namespace with helper variables

```
#include <cmath>
   #include <iostream>
    int main() {
        auto y = [] < typename T > (T \times) {
            T mean = 1.;
            T width = 3.;
            auto norm = 1. / std::sqrt(2. * M PI);
            auto arg = (x - mean) / width;
            return norm * std::exp(-.5 * arg * arg);
10
        \{(.5);
11
12
13
        std::cout << y;
14
```

godbolt.org/z/NC6DKj

Allow variables to be const

```
#include <vector>
 2
    std::vector<int> get ints();
 5
    int main() {
        auto ints = get ints();
        const auto sum = [&ints] {
            int acc = 0;
            for (auto& x: ints) acc += x;
            return acc:
10
11
        }();
12
13
        return sum;
14
```

godbolt.org/z/p_I8hF

Avoid default capture modes

Below, there is a dangling pointer lurking in the wings ...

```
void add_filter() {
   auto divisor = get_magic_number();
   filters.emplace_back([&](int x) { return x % divisor == 0; });
}
```

This error becomes more obvious, when explicit capturing is used:

```
void add_filter() {
    auto divisor = get_magic_number();
    filters.emplace_back([&divisor](int x) { return x % divisor == 0; });
}
```

Avoid default capture modes

Mitigation of copy & paste bugs:

[&divisor] indicates that there is an *external* dependency and it is not enough to "just copy" the lambda function if needed elsewhere.

(off-topic: check out this interesting article about copy & paste bugs in real world applications: "The Last Line Effect" by the PVS-Studio team, www.viva64.com/en/b/0260/)

Does the following implementation looks fine?

```
struct Widget {
   int divisor = 2;

   void add_filter() const {
      filters.emplace_back([=](int x) { return x % divisor == 0; });
   };
};
```

...given a sufficient implementation of filters

No! Horrible code! Capturing only applies to non-static local variables. Why does this work?

Capturing only applies to non-static local variables. Why does this work?

```
Widget::add_filter() const {
    filters.emplace_back([=](int x) { return x % divisor == 0; });
}
```

...but this fails

```
Widget::add_filter() const {
    filters.emplace_back([](int x) { return x % divisor == 0; });
}
```

...and this also

```
Widget::add_filter() const {
    filters.emplace_back([divisor](int x) { return x % divisor == 0; });
}
```

There is no local variable divisor! But what happes is the following

```
Widget::add_filter() const {
    filters.emplace_back([=](int x) {
        return x % divisor == 0;
    });
}
```

copies (implicitly) this pointer (until C++17), i.e.

```
Widget::add_filter() const {
    auto copy_of_this = this;
    filters.emplace_back([copy_of_this](int x) {
        return x % copy_of_this->divisor == 0;
    });
}
```

...welcome to the world of undefined behavior, when Widget goes out of scope!

Default capturing by value can be misleading and gives the impression that a lambda is self-contained:

```
static auto divisor = 1;
filters.emplace_back([=](int x) { return x % divisor == 0; });
++divisor;
```

Above, divisor is not copied! (as one may have guessed seeing [=])

Stop using std::bind

Stop using std::bind

...and prefer lambda expression, since

- → this increases readability,
- → lambdas are much more flexible,
- → std::bind can potentially introduce additional overhead at run-time, whereas lambdas are default constexpr

Stop using std::function

Stop using std::function

- → std::function add multiple copies of passed object (consider using drop-in replacements such as delegates*)
- → may cause heap allocation
- → is just a wrapper ...

...deduce type of lambda via auto or template deduction, if possible (cf. exercise)

*codereview.stackexchange.com/questions/14730/impossibly-fast-delegate-in-c11

Consider two lambdas

```
1 auto f1 = [] { return 1; };
2 auto f2 = [](int x) { return x; };
```

Is it possible to combine both lambdas (by inheritance) in one common type X?

```
1  X combined{f1, f2};
2  auto a = combined();  // should return 1
3  auto b = combined(42); // should return 42
```

```
struct X: F1, F2 {
    X(F1 f1, F2 f2): F1(std::move(f1)), F2(std::move(f2)) {}

using F1::operator();
using F2::operator();
};
```

...but what is the type of a lambda / what are F1 and F2?

According to the C++17 standard, will this compile?

```
#include <iostream>
   template <typename F1, typename F2> struct X: F1, F2 {
        X(F1 f1, F2 f2): F1(std::move(f1)), F2(std::move(f2)) {}
        using F1::operator();
        using F2::operator();
   };
8
   int main() {
        auto f1 = [] { return 1; };
10
        auto f2 = [](int x) { return x; };
11
        X combined{f1, f2};
12
        std::cout << combined() << combined(2); // should print "12"</pre>
13
14
```

godbolt.org/z/nMNbMZ

According to the C++14 standard, will this compile?

```
#include <iostream>
   template <typename F1, typename F2> struct X: F1, F2 {
        X(F1 f1, F2 f2): F1(std::move(f1)), F2(std::move(f2)) {}
        using F1::operator();
        using F2::operator();
   };
8
   int main() {
        auto f1 = [] { return 1; };
10
        auto f2 = [](int x) { return x; };
11
        X combined{f1, f2};
12
        std::cout << combined() << combined(2); // should print "12"</pre>
13
14
```

godbolt.org/z/nMNbMZ

What are the deduced types of auto / what are the types of f1 and f2?

```
1 auto f1 = [] { return 1; };
2 auto f2 = [](int x) { return x; };
```

Use decltype to find out!

```
1 X<decltype(f1), decltype(f2)> combined{f1, f2};
```

...or extract this to a factory function make_combined

```
#include <iostream>
   template <typename F1, typename F2> struct X: F1, F2 {
       X(F1 f1, F2 f2): F1(std::move(f1)), F2(std::move(f2)) {}
       using F1::operator();
        using F2::operator();
   };
8
9
   template <typename F1, typename F2> auto make combined(F1&& f1, F2&& f2) {
        return X<std::decay t<F1>, std::decay t<F2>>{std::forward<F1>(f1),
10
                                                      std::forward<F2>(f2)}:
11
   }
12
13
   int main() {
14
15
       auto f1 = [] { return 1; };
        auto f2 = [](int x) \{ return x; \};
16
17
        auto combined = make combined(f1, f2);
        std::cout << combined() << combined(2); // should print "12"
18
19
```

godbolt.org/z/dmBP8E

According to the C++17 standard, will this compile?

```
#include <iostream>
    template <typename F1, typename F2> struct X: F1, F2 {
        using F1::operator();
        using F2::operator();
 5
6
7
    };
    int main() {
        auto f1 = [] { return 1; };
        auto f2 = [](int x) \{ return x; \};
10
        X combined{f1, f2};
11
        std::cout << combined() << combined(2); // should print "12"</pre>
12
13
```

godbolt.org/z/MhrL87

According to the C++17 standard, will this compile?

```
#include <iostream>
   template <typename F1, typename F2> struct X: F1, F2 {
        using F1::operator();
5
        using F2::operator();
6
   };
   template <typename F1, typename F2>
   X(F1, F2) -> X<std::decay t<F1>, std::decay t<F2>>;
10
11
   int main() {
        auto f1 = [] { return 1; };
12
        auto f2 = [](int x) \{ return x; \};
13
        X combined{f1, f2};
14
        std::cout << combined() << combined(2); // should print "12"</pre>
15
16
```

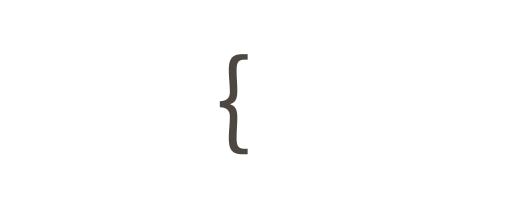
godbolt.org/z/qDYu3G

Variadic Templates

```
#include <iostream>
2
   template <typename... Fs> struct X: Fs... {
        using Fs::operator()...;
5
   };
6
   template <tvpename... Fs>
   X(Fs...) -> X<std::decay t<Fs>...>;
9
10
   int main() {
        auto f1 = [] { return 1; };
11
        auto f2 = [](int x) \{ return x; \};
12
        auto f3 = [](double x) \{ return -x; \};
13
        X combined{f1, f2, f3};
14
        std::cout << combined() << '\n' // should print "1"</pre>
15
                  << combined(2) << '\n' // should print "2"
16
                  << combined(3.4) << '\n'; // should print "-3.4"
17
18
```

godbolt.org/z/T8wYP2

Why?



std::variant

An enum class models a **choice between values**:

```
enum class Oven { on, off };
```

std::variant models a choice between types:

```
struct on { double temperature; };
struct off {};
using Oven = std::variant<on, off>;
```

std::variant

An aggregate type of some simple shapes ...

```
struct Shape {
    enum class Type { Circle, Box } type;

    union {
        struct { double radius; } circle;
        struct { double width, height; } box;
    } geometry;
};
```

std::variant

...and an outer function that calculates the respective area

```
auto area(const Shape& shape) {
        switch(shape.type) {
            case Shape::Type::Circle: {
                const auto& g = shape.geometry.circle;
                return M PI * g.radius * g.radius;
            case Shape::Type::Box: {
                const auto& g = shape.geometry.box;
                return g.width * g.height;
10
11
12
        assert(false);
13
        __builtin_unreachable();
14
15
```

```
#include <cassert>
#include <cmath>
struct Shape {
    enum class Type { Circle, Box } type;
    union {
        struct { double radius; } circle;
        struct { double width, height; } box;
    } geometry;
};
auto area(const Shape& shape) {
    switch(shape.type) {
        case Shape::Type::Circle: {
            const auto& g = shape.geometry.circle;
            return M PI * g.radius * g.radius;
        case Shape::Type::Box: {
[\ldots]
```

3

5

6

8

9

11

12 13

14

15

16

17 18

19 20

Using std::variant instead

```
#include <cmath>
   #include <variant>
   struct Circle { double radius; };
   struct Box { double width, height; };
   using Shape = std::variant<Circle, Box>;
   auto area(const Shape& shape) {
        struct {
            auto operator()(const Circle& c) const {
10
                return M PI * c.radius * c.radius;
11
12
13
            auto operator()(const Box& b) const {
                return b.width * b.height;
14
15
        } visitor;
16
17
18
        return std::visit(visitor, shape);
19
```

godbolt.org/z/nkvKi2



Q: What is the output of the program?

```
#include <algorithm>
   #include <iostream>
   #include <variant>
   #include <vector>
 5
    template <typename... Fs> struct X: Fs... {
        using Fs::operator()...;
    template <typename... Fs> X(Fs...) -> X<std::decay t<Fs>...>;
10
    int main() {
11
        int a = 0; double b = 0.;
12
        X visitor{[\&a](int x) { a += x; },
13
                   [\&b](double \times) \{ b += x; \} \};
14
        std::vector<std::variant<int, double>> v{1, 1.9, 2, 2.1};
15
        std::for_each(v.begin(), v.end(), [&visitor](const auto &x) {
16
17
            std::visit(visitor, x);
        });
18
19
        std::cout << a << ' ' << b:
20
```

godbolt.org/z/8j3M7v

Q: What is the output of the program?

```
#include <algorithm>
   #include <iostream>
   #include <variant>
   #include <vector>
5
   template <typename... Fs> struct X: Fs... {
        using Fs::operator()...;
   template <typename... Fs> X(Fs...) -> X<std::decay t<Fs>...>;
10
   int main() {
11
        int a = 0; double b = 0.;
12
        X visitor{[\&a](int x) { a += x; },
13
                  [\&b](double \times) \{ b += x; \} \};
14
        std::vector<std::variant<int, double, const char*>> v{1, 1.9, 2, 2.1, "foo"};
15
        std::for_each(v.begin(), v.end(), [&visitor](const auto& x) {
16
17
            std::visit(visitor, x);
        });
18
19
        std::cout << a << b;
20
```

godbolt.org/z/qYwPjF

Using plain old structs

```
#include <algorithm>
   #include <iostream>
   #include <variant>
   #include <vector>
5
   struct X {
        int &a; double &b;
        auto operator()(int x) { a += x; };
        auto operator()(double x) { b += x; };
10
   };
11
   int main() {
12
        int a = 0; double b = 0.;
13
        X visitor{.a=a, .b=b};
14
        std::vector<std::variant<int, double>> v{1, 1.9, 2, 2.1};
15
        std::for_each(v.begin(), v.end(), [&visitor](const auto& x) {
16
17
            std::visit(visitor, x);
        });
18
19
        std::cout << a << b;
20
```

godbolt.org/z/E6SNXT

Nota bene

One could also use a generic lambda...

```
#include <algorithm>
   #include <iostream>
   #include <variant>
   #include <vector>
5
   int main() {
        int a = 0; double b = 0.;
        std::vector<std::variant<int, double>> v{1, 1.9, 2, 2.1};
        std::for each(v.begin(), v.end(), [&a, &b](const auto& x) {
            std::visit([&a, &b](auto x) {
10
                if constexpr (std::is same v < int, decltype(x)>) a += x;
11
                else b += x;
12
            }, x);
13
        });
14
15
        std::cout << a << b;
16
```

godbolt.org/z/Dcdmoi

...however, no check for exhaustiveness at compile-time here!

Q: What is the output of the program?

```
#include <iostream>
   #include <variant>
    struct A { auto f() { return 1; }};
    struct B { auto g() { return 2; }};
 6
    int main() {
        std::visit([](auto x) {
            using X = decltype(x);
            if constexpr (std::is same v<X, A>) {
10
                std::cout << x.f();
11
            } else if constexpr (std::is_same_v<X, B>) {
12
                std::cout << x.g();
13
            } else {
14
15
                std::cout << x.palim();</pre>
16
17
        }, std::variant<A, B>{A{}});
18
```

godbolt.org/z/Dyy9mg

std::variant evaluation at compile-time

godbolt.org/z/b988jT

5

10

11 12