Recursion I

Overview

```
/*
  - Definition of recursion
  - The call stack
  - countdown example
  - factorial example
  - Recursion and arrays, strings
  - Tips for approaching recursion problems
*/
```

Definition

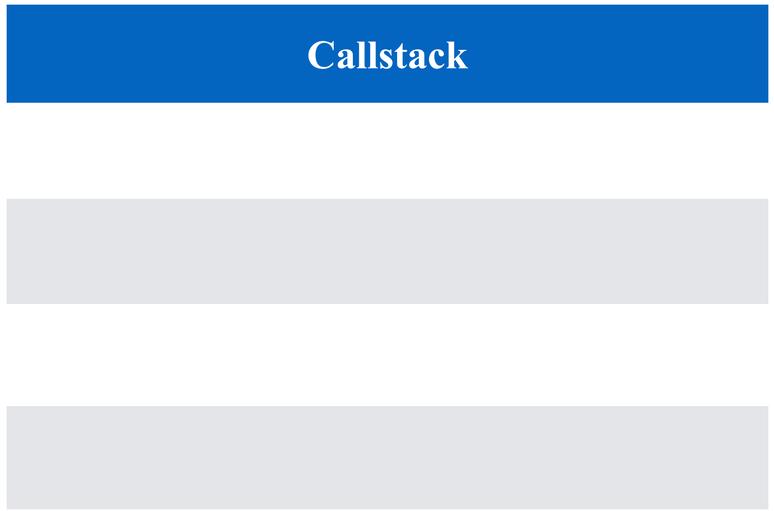
```
1   /* recursion occurs when a function calls itself!  */
2
3   /* recursion is an alternative to iteration (using a loop) */
4
5   /* in the real world, you may see recursion instead of iteration when a
6      recursive solution is:
7        - easier to reason about (recursion helps break big problems into
8          small chunks
9        - easier to read than an iterative solution
10       - won't negatively affect performance too much (recursion can be
11         a memory hog) */
12
13
14
```

The call stack

```
1   /* before we talk about recursion, we have to talk about the call stack */
2
3   /* JS is "single threaded" - can only run one function at a time */
4
5   /* the call stack is the structure JS uses to figure out which function
6      it should be running at any point in time */
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
```

The call stack

```
1   /* whenever we call a function, it's added to the top of the call stack */
2
3   /* JS will execute whatever function is on the top of the stack */
4
5   function first() {
6     console.log('I am first!');
7   }
8
9   function second() {
10    console.log('I am second!');
11  }
12
13  first();
14  second();
```



I am first

The call stack

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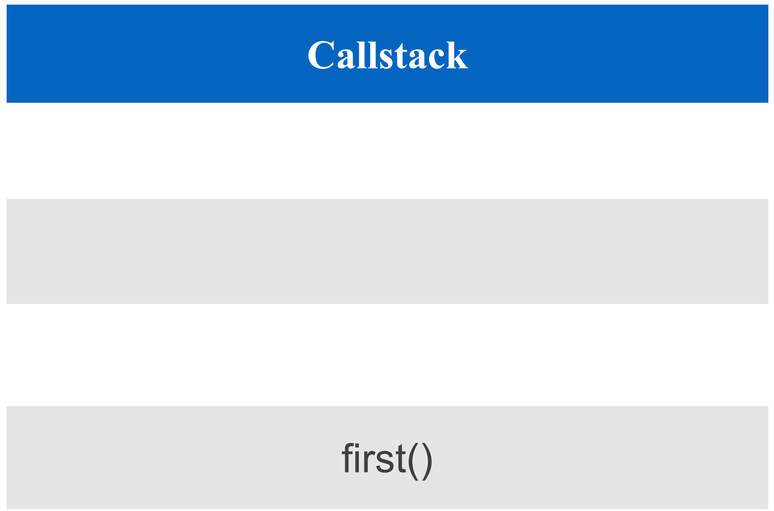

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The call stack

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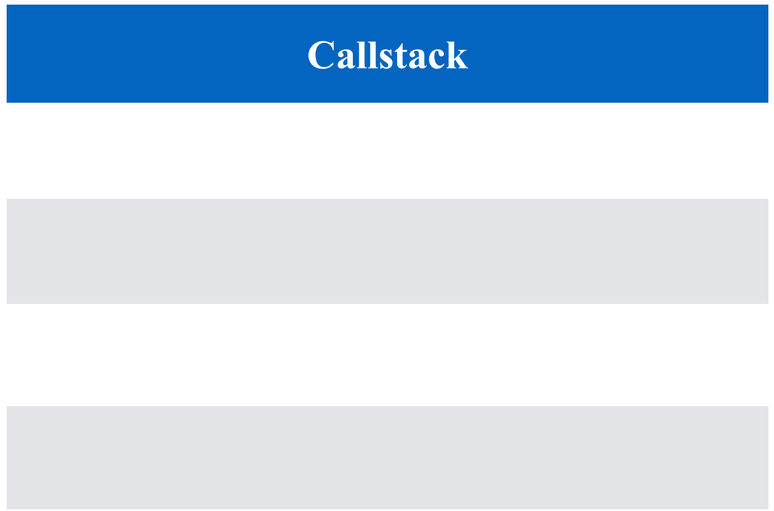

I am first
I am second

The call stack

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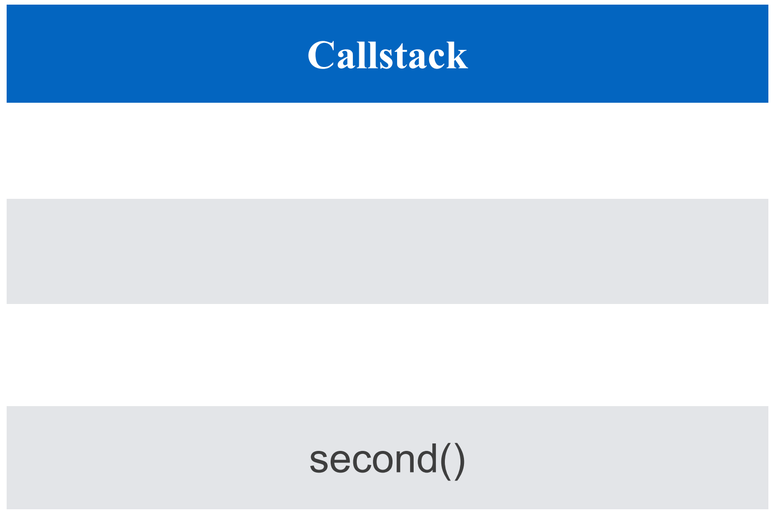
8
9   function second() {
10    console.log('I am second!');
11  }
12
13  first();
14  second();
```



I am first
I am second

The call stack

```
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2
3   /* JS will execute whatever function is on the top of the stack */
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5   function first() {
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7   }
8
9   function second() {
10    console.log('I am second!');
11  }
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13  first();
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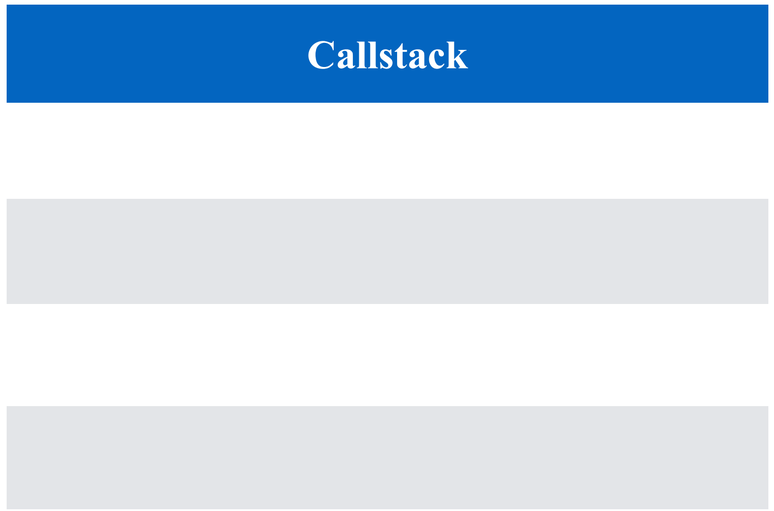
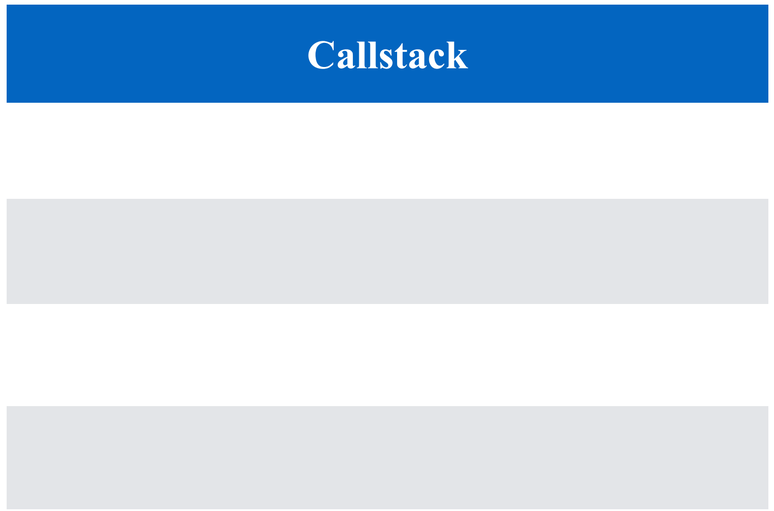
```



The call stack

```
1   function first() {
2     console.log('I am first!');
3     second();
4     console.log('First is finished');
5   }
6
7   function second() {
8     console.log('I am second!');
9   }
10
11  first();
12
13
14
```



I am first

The call stack

```
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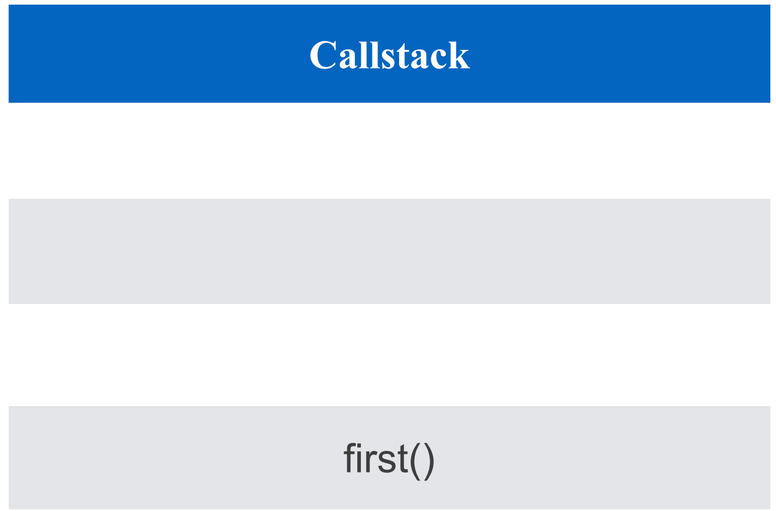
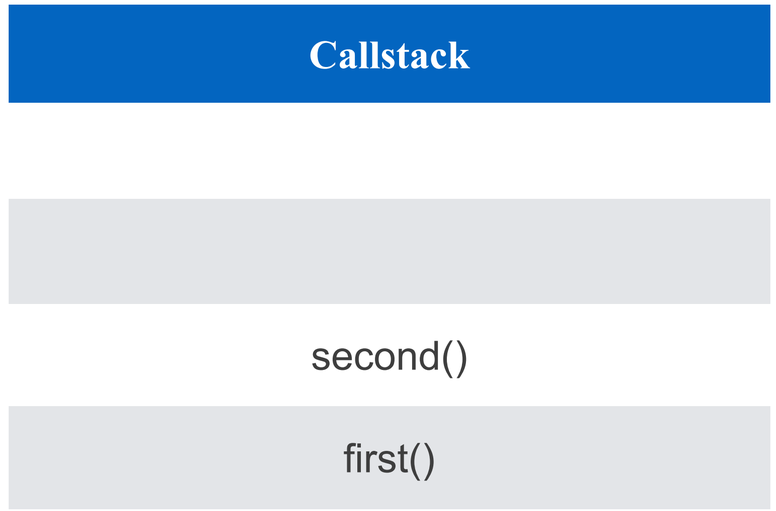
2     console.log('I am first!');
3     second();
4     console.log('First is finished');
5   }
6
7   function second() {
8     console.log('I am second!');
9   }
10
11  first();
12
13
14
```



The call stack

```
1   function first() {
2     console.log('I am first!');
3     second();
4     console.log('First is finished');
5   }
6
7   function second() {
8     console.log('I am second!');
9   }
10
11  first();
12
13
14
```

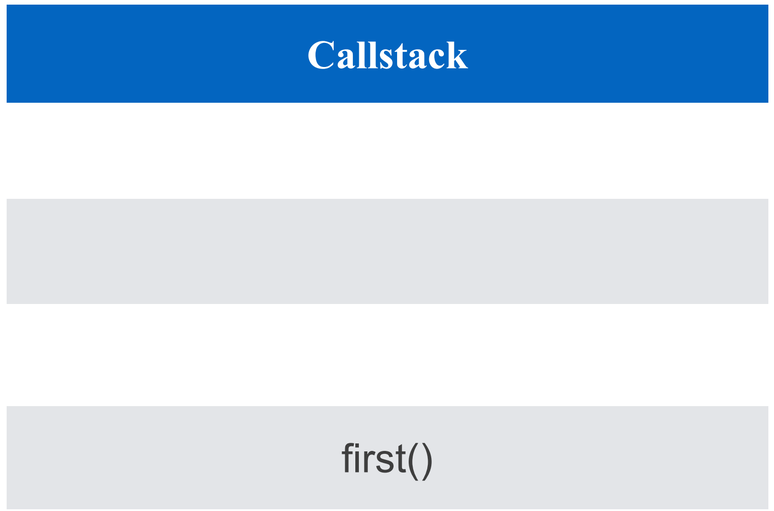
```
I am first
I am second
```



The call stack

```
I am first
I am second
First is finished
```

```
1   function first() {
2     console.log('I am first!');
3     second();
4     console.log('First is finished'); // first "paused" while second ran
5   }
6
7   function second() {
8     console.log('I am second!');
9   }
10
11  first();
12
13
14
```



The call stack

```
I am first
I am second
First is finished
```

```
1   function first() {
2     console.log('I am first!');
3     second();
4     console.log('First is finished'); // first "paused" while second ran
5   }
6
7   function second() {
8     console.log('I am second!');
9   }
10
11  first();
12
13
14
```

example: countdown

5
4
3
2
1

```
1   /* write a function that counts down to 1 */
2
3   function countdown(num) {
4     for (let i = num; i >= 1; i--) {
5       console.log(i);
6     }
7   }
8
9   countdown(5);
10
11
12
13
14
```

example: countdown

5
4
3
2
1

```
1   /* let's refactor our solution, writing a function that takes a number and
2      and logs it out */
3
4   function countdown(num) {
5     console.log(num);
6   }
7
8   countdown(5);
9   countdown(4);
10  countdown(3);
11  countdown(2); // notice, no loops!
12  countdown(1); // how do the arguments change between calls?
13
14
```

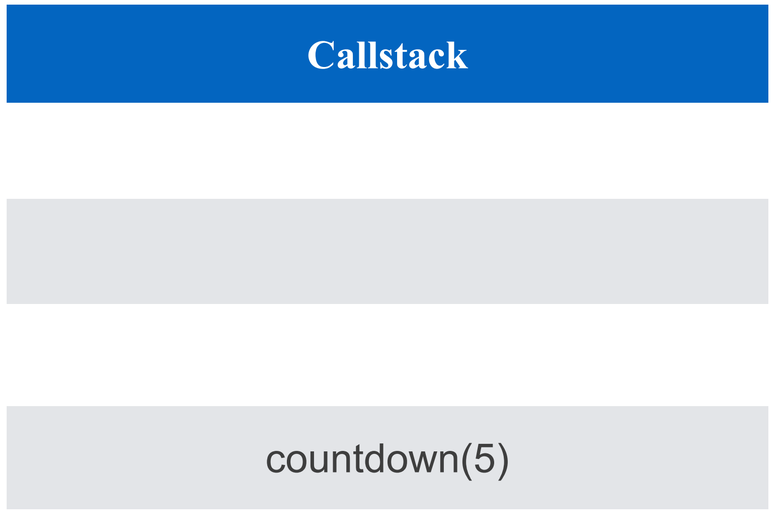
example: countdown

```
1   /* every time we called countdown, we subtracted one from the previous
2      num */
3
4   /* instead of manually calling countdown over and over, why not have
5      countdown call itself, subtracting one from num each time? */
6
7   function countdown(num) {
8     console.log(num);
9     countdown(num - 1);
10  }
11
12  countdown(5);
13
14
```

Callstack

example: countdown

```
1   /* every time we called countdown, we subtracted one from the previous
2      num */
3
4   /* instead of manually calling countdown over and over, why not have
5      countdown call itself, subtracting one from num each time? */
6
7   function countdown(num) {
8     console.log(num);
9     countdown(num - 1);
10  }
11
12  countdown(5);
13
14
```



example: countdown

```
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2      num */
3
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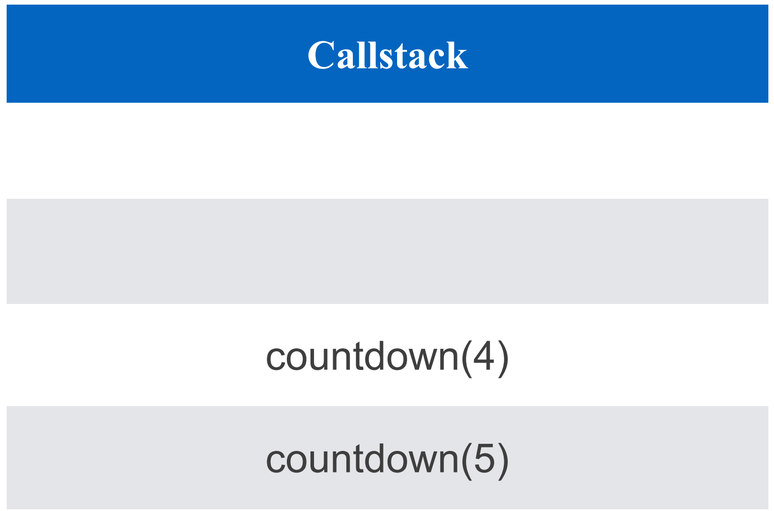
6
7   function countdown(num) {
8     console.log(num);
9     countdown(num - 1);
10  }
11
12  countdown(5);
13
14
```



example: countdown

5
4
3

```
1   /* every time we called countdown, we subtracted one from the previous
2      num */
3
4   /* instead of manually calling countdown over and over, why not have
5      countdown call itself, subtracting one from num each time? */
6
7   function countdown(num) {
8     console.log(num);
9     countdown(num - 1);
10  }
11
12  countdown(5);
13
14
```

Callstack

countdown(3)

countdown(4)

countdown(5)

example: countdown

5
4
3
2

```
1   /* every time we called countdown, we subtracted one from the previous
2      num */
3
4   /* instead of manually calling countdown over and over, why not have
5      countdown call itself, subtracting one from num each time? */
6
7   function countdown(num) {
8     console.log(num);
9     countdown(num - 1);
10  }
11
12  countdown(5);
13
14
```

Callstack
countdown(2)
countdown(3)
countdown(4)
countdown(5)

example: countdown

5
4
3
2
1

```
1   /* every time we called countdown, we subtracted one from the previous
2      num */
3
4   /* instead of manually calling countdown over and over, why not have
5      countdown call itself, subtracting one from num each time? */
6
7   function countdown(num) {
8     console.log(num);
9     countdown(num - 1);
10  }
11
12  countdown(5);
13
14
```

Callstack
countdown(1)
countdown(2)
countdown(3)
countdown(4)
countdown(5)

example: countdown

5
4
3
2
1
0

```
1   /* every time we called countdown, we subtracted one from the previous
2      num */
3
4   /* instead of manually calling countdown over and over, why not have
5      countdown call itself, subtracting one from num each time? */
6
7   function countdown(num) {
8     console.log(num);
9     countdown(num - 1);
10  }
11
12  countdown(5);
13
14
```

Callstack
countdown(0)
countdown(1)
countdown(2)
countdown(3)
countdown(4)
countdown(5)

example: countdown

```
5
4
3
2
1
0
-1
```

```
1  /* every time we called countdown, we subtracted one from the previous
      num */

2  /* instead of manually calling countdown over and over, why not have
      countdown call itself, subtracting one from num each time? */

3
4  function countdown(num) {
5    console.log(num);
6    countdown(num - 1);
7  }
8
9
10
11
```

Callstack
countdown(-1)
countdown(0)
countdown(1)
countdown(2)
countdown(3)
countdown(4)
countdown(5)

example: countdown

```
5
4
3
2
1
0
-1
-2
```

```
1   /* every time we called countdown, we subtracted one from the previous
2      num */
3
4   /* instead of manually calling countdown over and over, why not have
5      countdown call itself, subtracting one from num each time? */
6
7   function countdown(num) {
8     console.log(num);
9     countdown(num - 1);
10  }
11
12  countdown(5);
13
14
```

Callstack
countdown(-2)
countdown(-1)
countdown(0)
countdown(1)
countdown(2)
countdown(3)
countdown(4)
countdown(5)

example: countdown

```
5
4
3
2
1
0
-1
-2
(and so on)
```

```
1   /* every time we called countdown, we subtracted one from the previous
2      num */
3
4   /* instead of manually calling countdown over and over, why not have
5      countdown call itself, subtracting one from num each time? */
6
7   function countdown(num) {
8     console.log(num);
9     countdown(num - 1);
10  }
11
12  countdown(5);
13
14
```

Callstack
(and so on)
countdown(-2)
countdown(-1)
countdown(0)
countdown(1)
countdown(2)
countdown(3)
countdown(4)
countdown(5)

example: countdown

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1   /* every time we called countdown, we subtracted one from the previous
2      num */
3
4   /* instead of manually calling countdown over and over, why not have
5      countdown call itself, subtracting one from num each time? */
6
7   function countdown(num) {
8     console.log(num);
9     countdown(num - 1);
10  }
11
12  countdown(5);
13
14
```

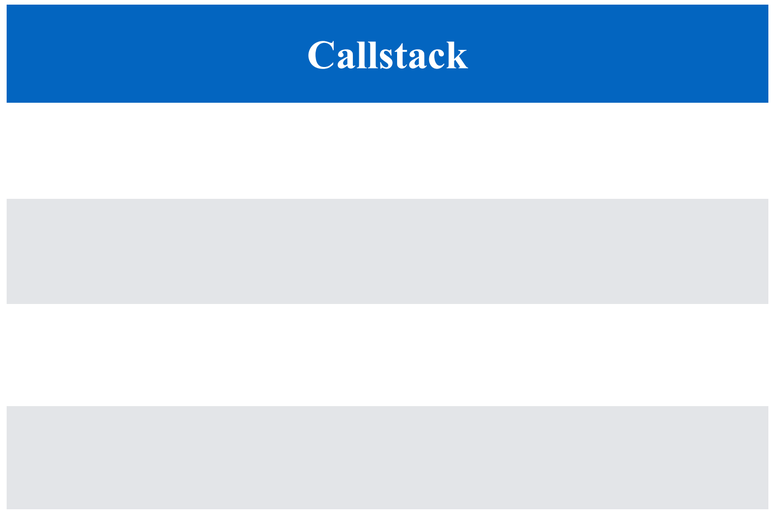
```
5
4
3
2
1
0
-1
-2
-3
-4
-5
-6
-7
-8
-9
-10
-11
 RangeError:
Maximum call stack
size exceeded
```

example: countdown

```
1   /* that started off so promisingly! */
2
3   /* because our function was instructed to call itself every time, the
4      function ends up calling itself forever until our computer runs out of
5      memory */
6
7   /* let's write in a stop condition so the function eventually stops
8      calling itself */
9
10
11
12
13
14
```

example: countdown

```
1   function countdown(num) {
2     // here's our stop condition, commonly known as the 'base case'
3     if (num < 1) {
4       console.log('done!');
5     }
6     // here's our 'recursive case'
7     else {
8       console.log(num);
9       countdown(num - 1);
10    }
11  }
12
13  countdown(3);
14
```



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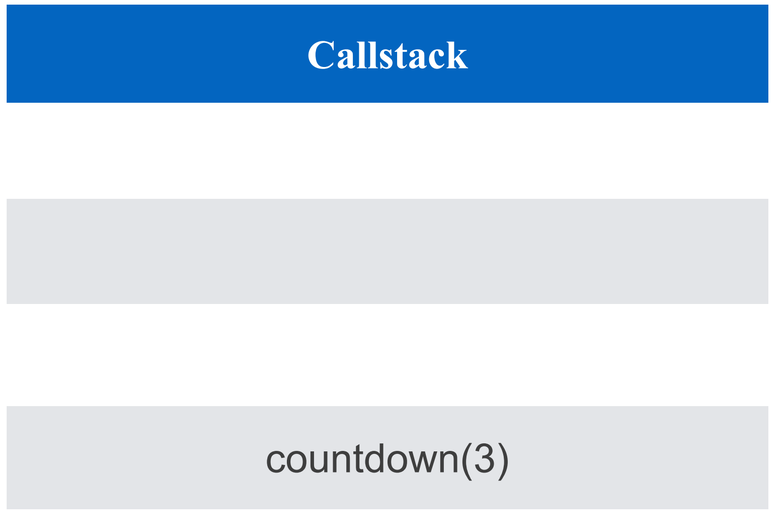

example: countdown

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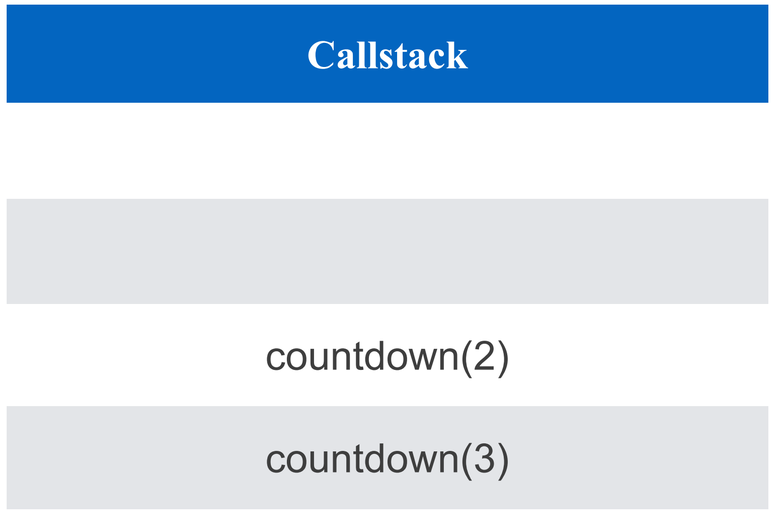
```



3
2
1

example: countdown

```
1   function countdown(num) {
2     // here's our stop condition, commonly known as the 'base case'
3     if (num < 1) {
4       console.log('done!');
5     }
6     // here's our 'recursive case'
7     else {
8       console.log(num);
9       countdown(num - 1);
10    }
11  }
12
13  countdown(3);
14
```

Callstack

countdown(1)

countdown(2)

countdown(3)

example: countdown

```
3
2
1
done!
```

```
1   function countdown(num) {
2     // here's our stop condition, commonly known as the 'base case'
3     if (num < 1) {
4       console.log('done!');
5     }
6     // here's our 'recursive case'
7     else {
8       console.log(num);
9       countdown(num - 1);
10    }
11  }
12
13  countdown(3);
14
```

Callstack
countdown(0)
countdown(1)
countdown(2)
countdown(3)

example: countdown

```
3
2
1
done!
```

```
1   function countdown(num) {
2     // here's our stop condition, commonly known as the 'base case'
3     if (num < 1) {
4       console.log('done!');
5     }
6     // here's our 'recursive case'
7     else {
8       console.log(num);
9       countdown(num - 1);
10    }
11  }
12
13  countdown(3);
14
```

Callstack

countdown(1)

countdown(2)

countdown(3)

example: countdown

```
3
2
1
done!
```

```
1   function countdown(num) {
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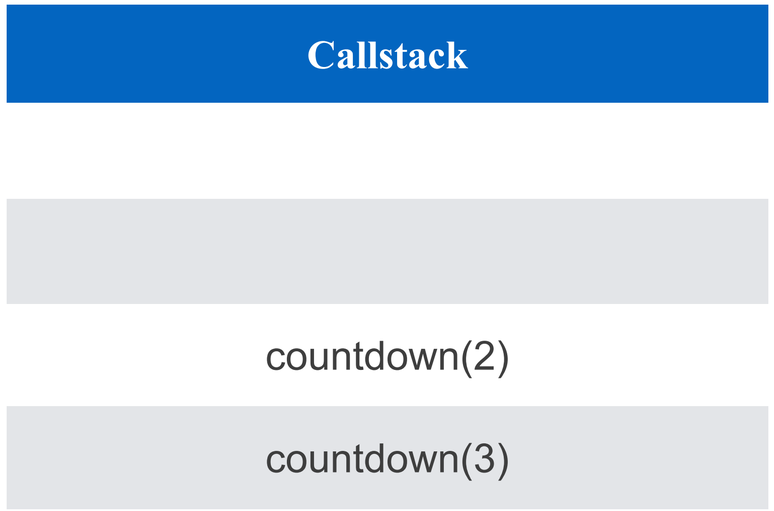
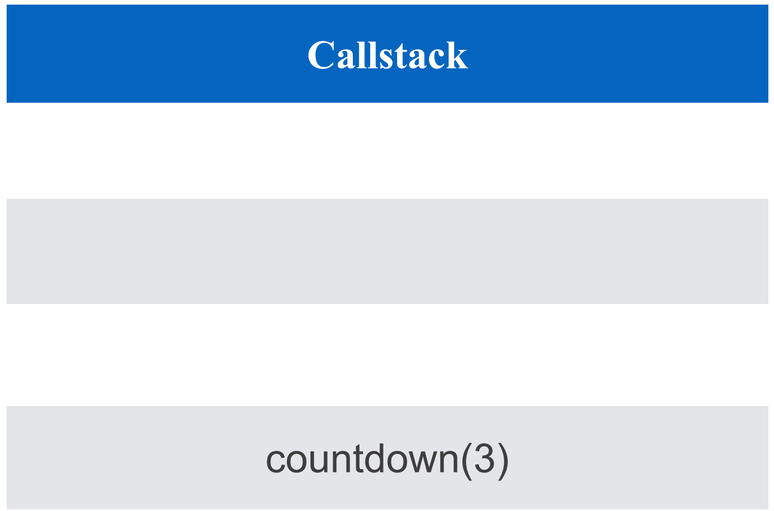
14
```



example: countdown

```
3
2
1
done!
```

```
1   function countdown(num) {
2     // here's our stop condition, commonly known as the 'base case'
3     if (num < 1) {
4       console.log('done!');
5     }
6     // here's our 'recursive case'
7     else {
8       console.log(num);
9       countdown(num - 1);
10    }
11  }
12
13  countdown(3);
14
```



example: countdown

```
3
2
1
done!
```

```
1   function countdown(num) {
2     // here's our stop condition, commonly known as the 'base case'
3     if (num < 1) {
4       console.log('done!');
5     }
6     // here's our 'recursive case'
7     else {
8       console.log(num);
9       countdown(num - 1);
10    }
11  }
12
13  countdown(3);
14
```

Callstack

example: countdown

```
1   /* two takeaways from countdown: */
2
3   /* 1. you need to define a base case! */
4
5   /* 2. your recursive case must change the input to the function so that
6         you will eventually trigger the base case! */
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
```

Returning from recursive calls

```
1   /* recursion becomes more complicated when the function must return a
2      value */
3
4   /* good practice is to start by defining a base case */
5
6   /* base cases are often occur when there is a simple input that expects a
7      simple output (e.g., the sum of a single number is that number) */
8
9   /* test that the base case works before working with the recursive
10     case! */
11
12
13
14
```

example: factorial

```
1   /* define a function, factorial, that take a number and returns the
2      factorial of that number */
3
4   /* as a reminder:
5      0! === 1
6      1! === 1
7      2! === 2 (2 * 1)
8      3! === 6 (3 * 2 * 1)
9      4! === 24 (4 * 3 * 2 * 1)
10     5! === 120 (5 * 4 * 3 * 2 * 1) */
11
12
13
14  /* what look like simple inputs/outputs we can use to build a base
       case? */
```

1
1

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6   }
7
8   factorial(0);
9   factorial(1);
10
11
12
13
14
```

example: factorial

```
1   /* ok, base case is set, just need to remember that our recursive case
2      has bring num closer and closer to 1 or 0 so we eventually
3      hit our base case */
4
5   /* notice an interesting pattern!
6
7      0! === 1
8      1! === 1
9      2! === 2 (2 * factorial(1))
10     3! === 6 (3 * factorial(2))
11     4! === 24 (4 * factorial(3))
12     5! === 120 (5 * factorial(4)) */
13
14
```

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     // TODO
8   }
9
10  /* it's best to write your recursive case using the simplest possible
11     input that will result in a recursive call */
12  let result = factorial(2);
13  console.log(result);
14
```

1
undefined

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     // we know we have to call factorial again in the recursive case
8     // if num === 2, what do we get if we call factorial again with num - 1?
9     console.log(factorial(num - 1));
10  }
11
12  let result = factorial(2);
13  console.log(result);
14
```

2
undefined

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     // from that pattern we noticed earlier, we know 2! === 2 * 1!
8     console.log(num * factorial(num - 1));
9   }
10
11  let result = factorial(2);
12  console.log(result);
13
14
```

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     // just have to return the result now
8     let result = num * factorial(num - 1);
9     return result;
10  }
11
12  let result = factorial(2);
13  console.log(result);
14
```

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     let result = num * factorial(num - 1);
8     return result;
9   }
10
11  let result = factorial(5);
12  console.log(result);
13
14
```

call stack	return value

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     let result = num * factorial(num - 1);
8     return result;
9   }
10
11  let result = factorial(5);
12  console.log(result);
13
14
```

call stack	return value
factorial(5)	5 * factorial(4)

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     let result = num * factorial(num - 1);
8     return result;
9   }
10
11  let result = factorial(5);
12  console.log(result);
13
14
```

call stack	return value
factorial(4)	4 * factorial(3)
factorial(5)	5 * factorial(4)

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     let result = num * factorial(num - 1);
8     return result;
9   }
10
11  let result = factorial(5);
12  console.log(result);
13
14
```

call stack	return value
factorial(3)	3 * factorial(2)
factorial(4)	4 * factorial(3)
factorial(5)	5 * factorial(4)

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     let result = num * factorial(num - 1);
8     return result;
9   }
10
11  let result = factorial(5);
12  console.log(result);
13
14
```

call stack	return value
factorial(2)	2 * factorial(1)
factorial(3)	3 * factorial(2)
factorial(4)	4 * factorial(3)
factorial(5)	5 * factorial(4)

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     let result = num * factorial(num - 1);
8     return result;
9   }
10
11  let result = factorial(5);
12  console.log(result);
13
14
```

call stack	return value
factorial(1)	=> 1
factorial(2)	2 * factorial(1)
factorial(3)	3 * factorial(2)
factorial(4)	4 * factorial(3)
factorial(5)	5 * factorial(4)

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     let result = num * factorial(num - 1);
8     return result;
9   }
10
11  let result = factorial(5);
12  console.log(result);
13
14
```

call stack	return value
factorial(2)	2 * 1
factorial(3)	3 * factorial(2)
factorial(4)	4 * factorial(3)
factorial(5)	5 * factorial(4)

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     let result = num * factorial(num - 1);
8     return result;
9   }
10
11  let result = factorial(5);
12  console.log(result);
13
14
```

call stack	return value
factorial(2)	=> 2
factorial(3)	3 * factorial(2)
factorial(4)	4 * factorial(3)
factorial(5)	5 * factorial(4)

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     let result = num * factorial(num - 1);
8     return result;
9   }
10
11  let result = factorial(5);
12  console.log(result);
13
14
```

call stack	return value
factorial(3)	3 * 2
factorial(4)	4 * factorial(3)
factorial(5)	5 * factorial(4)

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     let result = num * factorial(num - 1);
8     return result;
9   }
10
11  let result = factorial(5);
12  console.log(result);
13
14
```

call stack	return value
factorial(3)	=> 6
factorial(4)	4 * factorial(3)
factorial(5)	5 * factorial(4)

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     let result = num * factorial(num - 1);
8     return result;
9   }
10
11  let result = factorial(5);
12  console.log(result);
13
14
```

call stack	return value
factorial(4)	4 * 6
factorial(5)	5 * factorial(4)

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     let result = num * factorial(num - 1);
8     return result;
9   }
10
11  let result = factorial(5);
12  console.log(result);
13
14
```

call stack	return value
factorial(4)	=> 24
factorial(5)	5 * factorial(4)

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     let result = num * factorial(num - 1);
8     return result;
9   }
10
11  let result = factorial(5);
12  console.log(result);
13
14
```

call stack	return value
factorial(5)	5 * 24

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     let result = num * factorial(num - 1);
8     return result;
9   }
10
11  let result = factorial(5);
12  console.log(result);
13
14
```

call stack	return value
factorial(5)	=> 120

example: factorial

```
1   function factorial(num) {
2     // base case: num is 0 or 1
3     if (num === 0 || num === 1) {
4       return 1;
5     }
6     // recursive case: num must get closer to 0 or 1
7     let result = num * factorial(num - 1);
8     return result;
9   }
10
11  let result = factorial(5);
12  console.log(result);
13
14
```

call stack	return value

example: factorial

```
1   /* three takeaways from factorial: */
2
3   /* 1. define your base case first, using simple inputs/outputs */
4
5   /* 2. define your base case, and test it using the simplest possible
6         input that results in one recursive call to the base case */
7
8   /* 3. test your function against more-complex inputs */
9
10
11
12
13
14
```

recursion and iterables

```
1   /* you can use recursion with any data type in JS */
2
3   /* if you're asked to recurse through arrays or strings, the base case
4      often occurs when the iterable is empty or has a length of one */
5
6   /* imagine finding the sum of numbers in an array */
7
8   sumArray([4]); // if array.length === 1, the sum is easy to calculate
9
10  /* if the base case required the iterable to have a length of 1 or 0, it
11     must mean that the recursive case has to reduce the length of the
12     iterable with every recursive call */
13
14  /* note: nested arrays can be approached differently; see next unit! */
```

other recursion hints

```
1   /* cannot emphasize enough: start with the base case! */
2
3   /* cannot emphasize enough: test recursive case with simplest possible
4      input that will result in one recursive call to the base case */
5
6   /* ask yourself: what type of thing should my function return? base case
7      and recursive case should return the same type of thing! */
8
9   /* use console.logs or debugger to debug */
10
11
12
13
14
```

Recap

```
/*
  - Definition of recursion
  - The call stack
  - countdown example
  - factorial example
  - Recursion and arrays, strings
  - Tips for approaching recursion problems
*/
```