

C Programming Language: Chapter Notes

Daniel Duggan

November 29, 2025

An operator is a symbol that acts on data in some way. For example +, -, % etc.

A statement is a complete instruction that tells a program to do something e.g. an if statement, a while statement etc.

1 Chapter 2 Notes: Input and Output Functions

C provides powerful yet simple functions for performing input and output operations. Two of the most commonly used are `printf()` and `scanf()`, both defined in the `<stdio.h>` header file.

1.1 The `printf()` Function

The `printf()` function is used to send formatted output to the standard output stream (usually the screen). Its general form is:

```
1 printf("control string", expressions);
```

Listing 1: General form of `printf()`

The control string contains ordinary characters, which are printed as they appear, and conversion specifications, each beginning with a % character, which tell `printf()` how to format and display the corresponding expressions.

| Specifier | Meaning |
|-----------|---|
| %d | prints an integer value |
| %f | prints a floating-point value |
| %c | prints a single character |
| %s | prints a string of characters |
| %02d | prints an integer padded with zeros (e.g. 05) |
| %.2f | prints a floating-point number to 2 decimal places |
| %.3f | prints a floating-point number to 3 decimal places |
| %6.2f | prints a floating-point number in a field width of 6, with 2 digits after the decimal point |
| %5d | prints an integer in a field width of 5 characters (right-aligned by default) |

The general form of a format specification is:

`%[flags][width].[precision][length]specifier`

where:

- **width** specifies the minimum number of characters to print.
- **precision** controls the number of digits after the decimal point for floating-point numbers, or the maximum number of characters printed for strings.
- **0** flag pads numbers with zeros instead of spaces.
- The output is right-justified by default; use the - flag for left-justification.

For example:

```

1 #include <stdio.h>
2
3 int main(void) {
4     int hour = 9, minute = 5;
5     float temperature = 18.437;
6
7     printf("The time is %d:%02d\n", hour, minute);
8     printf("Temperature: %.2f\degree C\n", temperature);
9     printf("Temperature (3dp): %.3f\degree C\n", temperature);
10    printf("Right-aligned field (width 6): %6.2f\n", temperature);
11    printf("Left-aligned field: %-6.2f\n", temperature);
12
13    return 0;
14 }

```

Listing 2: Example of `printf()` usage

This will print:

```

The time is 9:05
Temperature: 18.44°C
Temperature (3dp): 18.437°C
Right-aligned field (width 6): 18.44
Left-aligned field: 18.44

```

Here:

- `%.2f` rounds to 2 decimal places.
- `%.3f` rounds to 3 decimal places.
- `%6.2f` ensures the total printed field occupies at least 6 characters.
- `%-6.2f` left-aligns the number within that 6-character field.
- `%02d` pads with leading zeros if the integer has fewer than 2 digits.

1.2 The `scanf()` Function

The `scanf()` function reads formatted input from the standard input stream (usually the keyboard). Its general form is:

```
1 scanf("control string", address list);
```

Listing 3: General form of `scanf()`

The control string works similarly to that of `printf()`, using format specifiers to determine the type of data being read. Each variable to be read must be preceded by an `&` (address-of operator), because `scanf()` needs to know where to store the input value.

| Specifier | Meaning |
|------------------|---|
| <code>%d</code> | reads an integer value |
| <code>%f</code> | reads a floating-point value |
| <code>%c</code> | reads a single character |
| <code>%s</code> | reads a string of characters (stops at whitespace) |
| <code>%lf</code> | reads a double-precision floating-point number |
| <code>%3d</code> | reads at most 3 digits of an integer (useful for limiting input length) |
| <code>%5s</code> | reads at most 5 characters into a string (prevents overflow) |

The general form of a `scanf()` conversion specification is:

$\%[width][length]specifier$

where:

- **width** limits the number of characters read for that input item.
- **length** is used for type modifiers such as `l` (for long) or `lf` (for double).

For example:

```
1 #include <stdio.h>
2
3 int main(void) {
4     int hour, minute;
5     float temperature;
6
7     printf("Enter a 24-hour time (hh:mm): ");
8     scanf("%d:%d", &hour, &minute);
9
10    printf("Enter current temperature: ");
11    scanf("%f", &temperature);
12
13    printf("You entered %02d:%02d and %.3f\n", hour, minute, temperature);
14
15    return 0;
16 }
```

Listing 4: Example of `scanf()` usage

If the user inputs:

```
09:30
18.437
```

the program will output:

```
You entered 09:30 and 18.437°C
```

The precision specifier in `scanf()` (such as `%3d` or `%5s`) does not control rounding or decimal places — instead, it limits the number of characters `scanf()` reads from the input buffer. This prevents reading too many characters into a variable or string.

1.3 Important Notes and Common Pitfalls

- **Always match format specifiers to variable types.** Using the wrong one (for example, reading a float with `%d`) can lead to undefined behaviour.
- **Use & in `scanf()`.** Forgetting it causes the program to overwrite memory at an undefined location, often leading to crashes. `scanf("%d", n);` is incorrect — it should be `scanf("%d", &n);`.
- **Width and precision serve different purposes.** In `printf()`, width controls field size and precision controls decimal places. In `scanf()`, width controls the *maximum number of characters read*.
- **Whitespace handling:** `scanf()` skips leading whitespace (spaces, newlines, tabs) for most format specifiers except `%c`, which reads the next character literally — even if it's a newline.
- **%s stops at whitespace.** It reads characters until the first space, tab, or newline. To read full lines of text including spaces, use `fgets()` instead.
- **Input validation:** If the user types a non-numeric value when `%d` or `%f` is expected, `scanf()` fails and leaves variables unchanged. Always check its return value (the number of items successfully read).
- **Clearing the input buffer:** After using `scanf()`, unwanted newline characters can remain in the input buffer and affect the next input. To safely handle mixed input (e.g. reading both numbers and characters), use:

```
1 while (getchar() != '\n'); // clear leftover characters
2
```

- **Printing special characters:** To print a percent sign, use `%%`. For example:

```
1 printf("Progress: 100%% complete\n");
2
```

1.4 Summary

- `printf()` is used for formatted output; `scanf()` for formatted input.
- Both functions use format specifiers beginning with % to handle different data types.
- Field width and precision control output spacing and rounding for `printf()`, but input limits for `scanf()`.
- Each variable in `scanf()` must be preceded by &.
- `scanf()` skips whitespace for most specifiers but not for `%c`.
- `printf()` allows control of output precision, padding, and alignment.
- Always ensure the types of variables match their format specifiers.

2 Chapter 5 Notes: Selection Statements

2.1 Relational Operators

| Symbol | Meaning |
|--------|--------------------------|
| < | less than |
| > | greater than |
| <= | less than or equal to |
| >= | greater than or equal to |

The relational operators produce 0 when false and 1 when true e.g. `1 < 2` produces 1 (true). `1 > 2` produces 0 (false).

The expression `i < j < k` doesn't have the meaning one may expect, as < is left associative. It is equivalent to `(i < j) < k` i.e. it tests whether `i` is less than `j`, and then the 1 or 0 is compared with the value of `k`.

To test if `j` lies within `i` and `k`, the correct expression is `i < j && j < k`.

2.2 Equality Operators

| Symbol | Meaning |
|-----------------|--------------|
| <code>==</code> | equal to |
| <code>!=</code> | not equal to |

Like the relational operators, the equality operators are left associative and produce 0 or 1. However, they have *lower precedence* than the relational operators, meaning the expression `i < j == j < k` is equivalent to `(i < j) == (j < k)`.

2.3 Logical Operators

| Symbol | Meaning |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| ! | logical negation |
| <code>&&</code> | logical <i>and</i> |
| <code> </code> | logical <i>or</i> |

The logical operators often produce 0 or 1 as their result. They behave as follows:

- `!expr` has the value 1 if `expr` has the value 0.
- `expr1 && expr2` has the value 1 if both expressions are non-zero.
- `expr1 || expr2` has the value 1 if either `expr1` or `expr2` (or both) has a non-zero value.

2.4 if statement

An if statement takes the form

```
1 if (expression) statement
```

Listing 5: if statement

If you want numerous statements, one can use the curly braces:

```
1 if (line_num == max_lines){  
2     line_num = 0;  
3     page_num++;  
4 }  
5
```

Curly braces can be added to if and if else statements even when not strictly required to aid in readability:

```
1 #include <stdio.h>  
2  
3 int main(void) {  
4     int score = 85;  
5  
6     // Even though braces aren't strictly required for single statements,  
7     // adding them improves clarity and helps prevent future errors.  
8     if (score >= 90) {  
9         printf("Grade: A\n");  
10    } else if (score >= 80) {  
11        printf("Grade: B\n");  
12    } else {  
13        printf("Grade: C or below\n");  
14    }  
15  
16    return 0;  
17 }
```

Listing 6: Using curly braces for readability in if-else statements

2.4.1 Dangling else Problem

An else statement belongs to the nearest if statement that hasn't already been paired with an else. Using curly braces aids in recognising which else statement belongs to which if statement.

2.5 Conditional Expressions

C provides an operator that allows an expression to produce one of two values depending on the value of a condition. This operator consists of two symbols (?) and (:) which have to be used in the following way.

```
1 expr1 ? expr2 : expr3
```

Listing 7: Using curly braces for readability in if-else statements

The expressions can be of any type. This operator is unique in C in that it requires 3 operands instead of the usual one or two and is therefore called the ternary operator. It is read as "if *expr1* then *expr2* else *expr3*".

expr1 is evaluated, if it is not 0, then *expr2* is evaluated and its value is the value of the expression. If *expr1* is 0, then the value of *expr3* is the value of the expression as a whole. For example:

```
1 i = 1;  
2 j = 2;  
3 k = i>j ? i : j; // if i is greater than j, k is value of i (1), else it is value of  
4 // j (2).  
5 k = (i>=0 ? i : 0) + j; // k is now 3 (i is greater than 0, so expr2 is evaluated, and  
// has +j added to it)
```

2.6 Boolean Types

None in C89. Need to define a macro if else braces

```
1 #define BOOL int
2 .
3 .
4 .
5     BOOL flag
```

In C99 there are boolean types declared basicstyle

```
1 _Bool flag
```

where *_Bool* is an unsigned integer type that can only be assigned 0 or 1. Giving value greater than 1 usually causes it to be assigned 1. The header file <stdbool.h> can also be used which makes it easier to work with boolean values. It provides a macro, *bool*, that stands for *_Bool*.

2.7 Switch Statement

Similar to a case statement in VHDL/Ada. Its syntax is:

```
1 switch (expression) {
2     case constant-expression : statements
3     ...
4     case constant-expresion : statements
5     default : statements
6 }
```

For example:

```
1 int grade = 2;
2
3 switch (grade) {
4     case 1:
5         printf("Grade: A\n");
6         break;
7     case 2:
8         printf("Grade: B\n");
9         break;
10    case 3:
11        printf("Grade: C\n");
12        break;
13    default:
14        printf("Grade: F (fail)\n");
15        break;
16 }
17 }
```

Here, the value of the variable grade is tested against different values. As int grade = 2, when case 2 is executed, the statement inside this case will execute. Each case ends with a break; to prevent "fall-through". Without the break;, the next case is evaluated even if the condition doesn't match.