Documentation

The Java™ Tutorials

Trail: Learning the Java Language
Lesson: Numbers and Strings
Section: Numbers

The Java Tutorials have been written for JDK 8. Examples and practices described in this page don't take advantage of improvements introduced in later releases and might use technology no longer available.
See Java Language Changes for a summary of updated language features in Java SE 9 and subsequent releases.
See JDK Release Notes for information about new features, enhancements, and removed or deprecated options for all JDK releases.

Formatting Numeric Print Output

Earlier you saw the use of the `print` and `println` methods for printing strings to standard output (`System.out`). Since all numbers can be converted to strings (as you will see later in this lesson), you can use these methods to print out an arbitrary mixture of strings and numbers. The Java programming language has other methods, however, that allow you to exercise much more control over your print output when numbers are included.

The printf and format Methods

The `java.io` package includes a `PrintStream` class that has two formatting methods that you can use to replace `print` and `println`. These methods, `format` and `printf`, are equivalent to one another. The familiar `System.out` that you have been using happens to be a `PrintStream` object, so you can invoke `PrintStream` methods on `System.out`. Thus, you can use `format` or `printf` anywhere in your code where you have previously been using `print` or `println`. For example,

```
System.out.format(.....);
```

The syntax for these two `java.io.PrintStream` methods is the same:

```
public PrintStream format(String format, Object... args)
```

where `format` is a string that specifies the formatting to be used and `args` is a list of the variables to be printed using that formatting. A simple example would be

```
System.out.format("The value of " + "the float variable is " +
     "%f, while the value of the " + "integer variable is %d, " +
     "and the string is %s", floatVar, intVar, stringVar);
```

The first parameter, `format`, is a format string specifying how the objects in the second parameter, `args`, are to be formatted. The format string contains plain text as well as *format specifiers*, which are special characters that format the arguments of `Object... args`. (The notation `Object... args` is called *varargs*, which means that the number of arguments may vary.)

Format specifiers begin with a percent sign (%) and end with a *converter*. The converter is a character indicating the type of argument to be formatted. In between the percent sign (%) and the converter you can have optional flags and specifiers. There are many converters, flags, and specifiers, which are documented in `java.util.Formatter`

Here is a basic example:

```
int i = 461012;
System.out.format("The value of i is: %d%n", i);
```

The %d specifies that the single variable is a decimal integer. The %n is a platform-independent newline character. The output is:

```
The value of i is: 461012
```

The `printf` and `format` methods are overloaded. Each has a version with the following syntax:

```
public PrintStream format(Locale l, String format, Object... args)
```

To print numbers in the French system (where a comma is used in place of the decimal place in the English representation of floating point numbers), for example, you would use:

```
System.out.format(Locale.FRANCE,
    "The value of the float " + "variable is %f, while the " +
    "value of the integer variable " + "is %d, and the string is %s%n",
    floatVar, intVar, stringVar);
```

An Example

The following table lists some of the converters and flags that are used in the sample program, `TestFormat.java`, that follows the table.

Converters and Flags Used in `TestFormat.java`

Converter	Flag	Explanation
d		A decimal integer.
f		A float.
n		A new line character appropriate to the platform running the application. You should always use %n, rather than \n.
tB		A date & time conversion—locale-specific full name of month.
td, te		A date & time conversion—2-digit day of month. td has leading zeroes as needed, te does not.
ty, tY		A date & time conversion—ty = 2-digit year, tY = 4-digit year.
tl		A date & time conversion—hour in 12-hour clock.
tM		A date & time conversion—minutes in 2 digits, with leading zeroes as necessary.
tp		A date & time conversion—locale-specific am/pm (lower case).
tm		A date & time conversion—months in 2 digits, with leading zeroes as necessary.
tD		A date & time conversion—date as %tm%td%ty
	08	Eight characters in width, with leading zeroes as necessary.
	+	Includes sign, whether positive or negative.
	,	Includes locale-specific grouping characters.
	-	Left-justified..
	.3	Three places after decimal point.
	10.3	Ten characters in width, right justified, with three places after decimal point.

The following program shows some of the formatting that you can do with `format`. The output is shown within double quotes in the embedded comment:

```
import java.util.Calendar;
import java.util.Locale;

public class TestFormat {

    public static void main(String[] args) {
      long n = 461012;
      System.out.format("%d%n", n);      //  -->  "461012"
      System.out.format("%08d%n", n);    //  -->  "00461012"
      System.out.format("%+8d%n", n);    //  -->  " +461012"
      System.out.format("%,8d%n", n);    // -->  " 461,012"
      System.out.format("%+,8d%n%n", n); //  -->  "+461,012"

      double pi = Math.PI;

      System.out.format("%f%n", pi);       // -->  "3.141593"
      System.out.format("%.3f%n", pi);     // -->  "3.142"
      System.out.format("%10.3f%n", pi);   // -->  "     3.142"
      System.out.format("%-10.3f%n", pi);  // -->  "3.142"
      System.out.format(Locale.FRANCE,
                        "%-10.4f%n%n", pi); // -->  "3,1416"

      Calendar c = Calendar.getInstance();
      System.out.format("%tB %te, %tY%n", c, c, c); // -->  "May 29, 2006"

      System.out.format("%tl:%tM %tp%n", c, c, c);  // -->  "2:34 am"
```

```
        System.out.format("%tD%n", c);    // -->  "05/29/06"
    }
}
```

Note: The discussion in this section covers just the basics of the `format` and `printf` methods. Further detail can be found in the `Basic I/O` section of the Essential trail, in the "Formatting" page.
Using `String.format` to create strings is covered in Strings.

The DecimalFormat Class

You can use the `java.text.DecimalFormat` class to control the display of leading and trailing zeros, prefixes and suffixes, grouping (thousands) separators, and the decimal separator. `DecimalFormat` offers a great deal of flexibility in the formatting of numbers, but it can make your code more complex.

The example that follows creates a `DecimalFormat` object, `myFormatter`, by passing a pattern string to the `DecimalFormat` constructor. The `format()` method, which `DecimalFormat` inherits from `NumberFormat`, is then invoked by `myFormatter`—it accepts a `double` value as an argument and returns the formatted number in a string:

Here is a sample program that illustrates the use of `DecimalFormat`:

```
import java.text.*;

public class DecimalFormatDemo {

   static public void customFormat(String pattern, double value ) {
      DecimalFormat myFormatter = new DecimalFormat(pattern);
      String output = myFormatter.format(value);
      System.out.println(value + "  " + pattern + "  " + output);
   }

   static public void main(String[] args) {

      customFormat("###,###.###", 123456.789);
      customFormat("###.##", 123456.789);
      customFormat("000000.000", 123.78);
      customFormat("$###,###.###", 12345.67);
   }
}
```

The output is:

```
123456.789  ###,###.###  123,456.789
123456.789  ###.##  123456.79
123.78  000000.000  000123.780
12345.67  $###,###.###  $12,345.67
```

The following table explains each line of output.

`DecimalFormat.java` Output

Value	Pattern	Output	Explanation
123456.789	###,###.###	123,456.789	The pound sign (#) denotes a digit, the comma is a placeholder for the grouping separator, and the period is a placeholder for the decimal separator.
123456.789	###.##	123456.79	The `value` has three digits to the right of the decimal point, but the `pattern` has only two. The `format` method handles this by rounding up.
123.78	000000.000	000123.780	The `pattern` specifies leading and trailing zeros, because the 0 character is used instead of the pound sign (#).
12345.67	$###,###.###	$12,345.67	The first character in the `pattern` is the dollar sign ($). Note that it immediately precedes the leftmost digit in the formatted `output`.

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