



Safer Code

Nullability and Null Operators in C#

Jeremy Clark
www.jeremybytes.com
[@jeremybytes](https://twitter.com/jeremybytes)

Nullability in C#

- What are nullable reference types?
- What Nullability Is
- What Nullability Is Not
- Nullability Operators
 - ?. and ?[]
 - !
 - ?? and ??=

Value Types vs. Reference Types

Value Types

- Stored on the stack
- Cannot be null*
- Default is “bitwise zero”
 - `int = 0; bool = false`
- Ex: `int`, `bool`, `enum`, `struct`

Reference Types

- Stored on the heap (with memory address in the stack)
- Cannot be forced non-null*
- Default is “null”
- Ex: `string`, `List<int>`, `class`

Value Type Nullability

Non-Nullable

- `int`
- Cannot be null
`int i = null; // error`
- Default value is 0
`int i; // i = 0`

Nullable

- `Nullable<int>`
`int?`
- Can be null
`int? i = null; // valid`
- Default value is null
`int? i; // i = null`

Enabling Nullability*

- Project Level

```
<Nullable>enable</Nullable>
```

- Code Level

```
#nullable enable
```

* More correctly: enabling non-nullability

Reference Type Nullability

Default

- `string`
- Can be null
`string s = null; // valid`
- Default value is null
`string s; // s = null`

Nullable enabled

- `string`
- Cannot be null
`string s = null; // warning`
- Default value is null*
`string s; // s = null`

*Compiler warning

Nullability Enabled

Non-Nullable

- `string`
- Cannot be null
`string s = null; // warning`
- Default value is null*
`string s; // s = null`
`// compiler warning`

Nullable

- `string?`
- Can be null
`string? s = null; // valid`
- Default value is null
`string? s; // s = null`

Nullable Contexts

Context	Dereference warnings	Assignment warnings	Reference types	? suffix	! operator
<code>disable</code>	Disabled	Disabled	All are nullable	Can't be used	Has no effect
<code>enable</code>	Enabled	Enabled	Non-nullable unless declared with ?	Declares nullable type	Suppresses warnings for possible <code>null</code> assignment
<code>warnings</code>	Enabled	Not applicable	All are nullable, but members are considered <i>not null</i> at opening brace of methods	Produces a warning	Suppresses warnings for possible <code>null</code> assignment
<code>annotations</code>	Disabled	Disabled	Non-nullable unless declared with ?	Declares nullable type	Has no effect

<https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/dotnet/csharp/nullable-references#nullable-contexts>



What Nullability Is

- A way to get *compile-time* warnings about possible null references.
- A way to make the intent of your code more clear.

What Nullability Is Not

- NOT a way to prevent null reference exceptions at runtime.
- NOT a way to prevent someone from passing a null to your method.
- NOT a way to prevent someone from assigning a null to an object.

Null Conditional Operators

- `? and ?[]`
- Ex: `tokenSource?.Cancel();`
 - If “tokenSource” is not null, “Cancel()” is called.
 - If “tokenSource” is null, “Cancel()” is **not** called.

Note: the null check is thread-safe.

Null Forgiving Operator

- !
- If the compiler issues an incorrect warning, the “!” can be used to suppress the warning.
- Ex: `task.Exception!.Flatten()`

Null Coalescing Operator

- ??
- Can be used to provide an alternate value if something is null.
- Ex: `return people ?? new List<Person>();`
 - If “people” is not null, it is returned.
 - If “people” is null, a new empty list is returned.

Null Coalescing Operator

- `??=`
- Can be combined with “=” to do coalescing and assignment at the same time.
- Ex: `people ??= new List<Person>();`
 - If “people” is not null, the value is unchanged.
 - If “people” is null, an empty list is assigned.

A Note about “var”

- Using “var” results in a nullable type.

```
var people = new List<Person>();
```

 (local variable) List<Person>? people





What Nullability Is

- A way to get *compile-time* warnings about possible null references.
- A way to make the intent of your code more clear.



What Nullability Is Not

- NOT a way to prevent null reference exceptions at runtime.
- NOT a way to prevent someone from passing a null to your method.
- NOT a way to prevent someone from assigning a null to an object.

Nullability Operators

? . / ?[] (Null Conditional Operators)

```
tokenSource?.Cancel();
```

! (Null Forgiving Operator)

```
task.Exception!.Flatten().InnerExceptions
```

?? / ??= (Null Coalescing Operators)

```
return result ?? new List<Person>();
```



Resources

Code Samples & Resources

<https://github.com/jeremybytes/sdd-2023>



Thank You!

Jeremy Clark

- www.jeremybytes.com
- jeremy@jeremybytes.com
- [@jeremybytes](https://twitter.com/jeremybytes)

<https://github.com/jeremybytes/sdd-2023>