Type conversions

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Overview

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Narrowing conversions

- A `narrowing conversion` converts a value to a type that cannot store even approximations of all of the values of the original type
- For example, converting a `double` to a `float` is a `narrowing conversion` in C++ because the rangle of `double` is much larger than that of `float`

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Widening conversions

- A `widening conversion` converts a value to a type that can include at least approximations of all of the values of the original type
- For example, converting an `int` to a `double` is a `widening conversion`

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Narrowing conversions vs. widening conversions

- `Narrowing conversions` are not always safe – sometimes the magnitude of the converted value is changed in the process
  - For example, converting the `double 1.5E25` to an `int` will result in a value that is not in any way related to the original value
- `Widening conversions` are nearly always `safe`, meaning that the approximate magnitude of the converted value is maintained
  - In C++, an `int` to `float` conversion is a `widening conversion`; some precision may be lost
    - For example, in many cases, integers are stored in 32 bits, which allows at least 9 decimal digits of precision
    - However, on my system `float` is also stored as 32 bits, with only about seven digits of precision (b/c of the space used for the sign and exponent)
    - We can lose precision when performing this conversion

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Coercion in expressions

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- Languages, such as C++, that allow `mixed-mode expressions`, must define conventions for implicit operand type conversions
  - This is because the underlying computer hardware does not have binary operations that take operands of different types
- When writing `mixed-mode expressions` in C++ using operands of the primitive built-in types, C++ converts the `narrower` type to the `wider` type

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- A broad range of `coercions` reduces the benefits of `type checking`

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- Had `mixed-mode expressions` been illegal in C++, this error would have been detected through the language's static type checking and reported as an error

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  - This is as easy as writing the expression as `static_cast<double>(a) / b`
  - Of course, `b` will be coerced to a `double` before the expression is evaluated

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Safe type conversions in C++

- A `safe type conversion` always converts the value to an equal value or to the best approximation of an equal value; this includes:
  - `bool` to `char`
  - `bool` to `int`
  - `bool` to `double`
  - `char` to `int`
  - `char` to `double`
  - `int` to `double`

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Unsafe type conversions in C++

- In addition to `safe type conversion`, C++ also allows `unsafe type conversion`
- That is, a value of the respective type is converted into a value of another type that does not equal the original value
  - `double` to `int`
  - `double` to `char`
  - `double` to `bool`
  - `int` to `char`
  - `int` to `bool`
  - `char` to `bool`
- `Unsafe type conversion` are frequently a problem: often we do not suspect that an unsafe conversion is taking place

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- Limitations of computer arithmetic and limitations of arithmetic are responsible for some of the errors we experience
- For instance, one of most common error occurs when the result of an operation cannot be represented in object where it is to be stored
  - This is called `overflow` or `underflow` depending on whether the result is too large or small

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References

- Sebesta, R. W. (2016). *Concepts of programming languages* (11th ed.). Pearson Education.
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