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CIS 200; Fall 2019

Optionals allow us to mix data types in larger structures (like arrays) by declaring the array as type [Any] (or as a common superclass), and then casting them more specifically when we access them from the array. Optionals also provide a smooth way of handling cases where a value that our program is expecting to use doesn't exist (or is nil). This is done via conditional declarations like guard-let and if-let.

The original instructions for this lab seemed to want us to typecast Optional-String input data into Ints (using the as? operator) that could be mathematically manipulated later in the program. I tinkered with this for about 3 hours before finally realizing that the base classes of these data types were just too dissimilar to use as? in this manner. However, as a result of my experiments I learned how to use mixed-type arrays so I don't feel like I wasted my time.