

CHAPTER 2

SOFTWARE DESIGN

ACRONYMS

ADL	Architecture Description Language
CBD	Component-Based Design
CRC	Class Responsibility Collaborator
DFD	Data Flow Diagram
ERD	Entity Relationship Diagram
IDL	Interface Description Language
MVC	Model View Controller
OO	Object-Oriented
PDL	Program Design Language

INTRODUCTION

Design is defined as both “the process of defining the architecture, components, interfaces, and other characteristics of a system or component” and “the result of [that] process” [1]. Viewed as a process, software design is the software engineering life cycle activity in which software requirements are analyzed in order to produce a description of the software’s internal structure that will serve as the basis for its construction. A software design (the result) describes the software architecture—that is, how software is decomposed and organized into components—and the interfaces between those components. It should also describe the components at a level of detail that enables their construction.

Software design plays an important role in developing software: during software design, software engineers produce various models that form a kind of blueprint of the solution to be implemented. We can analyze and evaluate these models to determine whether or not they will allow us to fulfill the various requirements.

We can also examine and evaluate alternative solutions and tradeoffs. Finally, we can use the resulting models to plan subsequent development activities, such as system verification and validation, in addition to using them as inputs and as the starting point of construction and testing.

In a standard list of software life cycle processes, such as that in ISO/IEC/IEEE Std. 12207, *Software Life Cycle Processes* [2], software design consists of two activities that fit between software requirements analysis and software construction:

- Software architectural design (sometimes called high-level design): develops top-level structure and organization of the software and identifies the various components.
- Software detailed design: specifies each component in sufficient detail to facilitate its construction.

This Software Design knowledge area (KA) does not discuss every topic that includes the word “design.” In Tom DeMarco’s terminology [3], the topics discussed in this KA deal mainly with D-design (decomposition design), the goal of which is to map software into component pieces. However, because of its importance in the field of software architecture, we will also address FP-design (family pattern design), the goal of which is to establish exploitable commonalities in a family of software products. This KA does not address I-design (invention design), which is usually performed during the software requirements process with the goal of conceptualizing and specifying software to satisfy discovered needs and requirements, since this topic is considered to be part of the requirements process (see the Software Requirements KA).

This Software Design KA is related specifically to the Software Requirements, Software

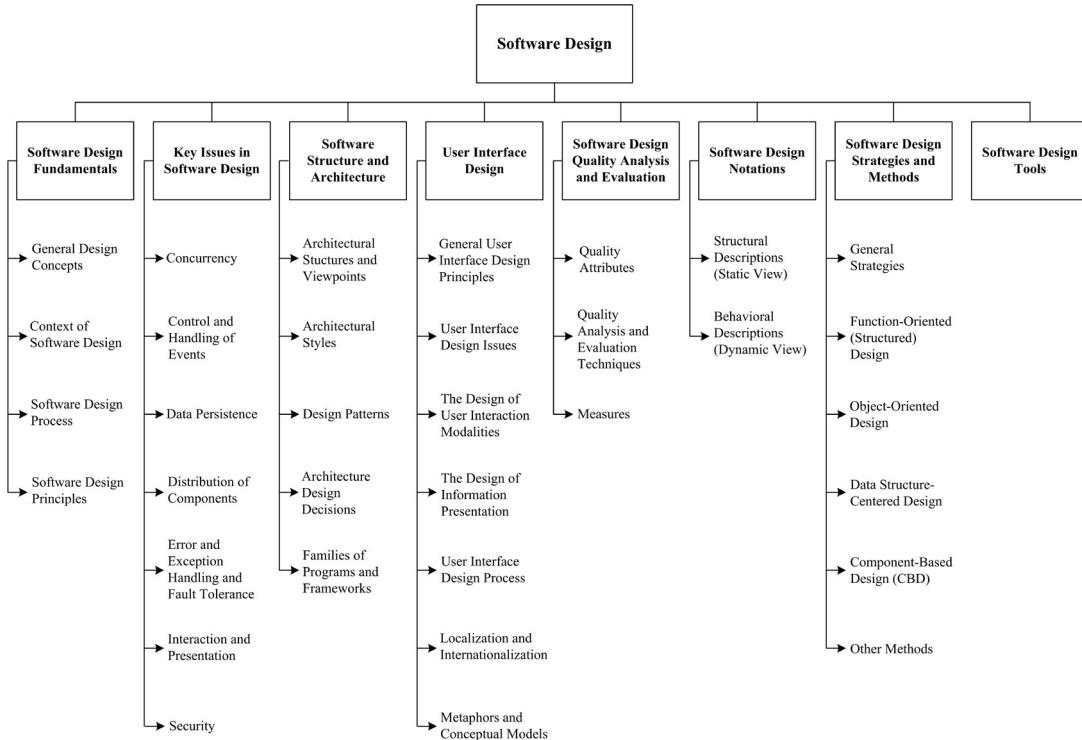


Figure 2.1. Breakdown of Topics for the Software Design KA

Construction, Software Engineering Management, Software Engineering Models and Methods, Software Quality, and Computing Foundations KAs.

BREAKDOWN OF TOPICS FOR SOFTWARE DESIGN

The breakdown of topics for the Software Design KA is shown in Figure 2.1.

1. Software Design Fundamentals

The concepts, notions, and terminology introduced here form an underlying basis for understanding the role and scope of software design.

1.1. General Design Concepts

[4*, c1]

In the general sense, design can be viewed as a form of problem solving. For example, the concept of a wicked problem—a problem with no definitive solution—is interesting in terms of

understanding the limits of design. A number of other notions and concepts are also of interest in understanding design in its general sense: goals, constraints, alternatives, representations, and solutions (see Problem Solving Techniques in the Computing Foundations KA).

1.2. Context of Software Design

[4*, c3]

Software design is an important part of the software development process. To understand the role of software design, we must see how it fits in the software development life cycle. Thus, it is important to understand the major characteristics of software requirements analysis, software design, software construction, software testing, and software maintenance.

1.3. Software Design Process

[4*, c2]

Software design is generally considered a two-step process:

- Architectural design (also referred to as high-level design and top-level design) describes how software is organized into components.
- Detailed design describes the desired behavior of these components.

The output of these two processes is a set of models and artifacts that record the major decisions that have been taken, along with an explanation of the rationale for each nontrivial decision. By recording the rationale, long-term maintainability of the software product is enhanced.

1.4. Software Design Principles

[4*] [5*, c6, c7, c21] [6*, c1, c8, c9]

A *principle* is “a comprehensive and fundamental law, doctrine, or assumption” [7]. Software design principles are key notions that provide the basis for many different software design approaches and concepts. Software design principles include abstraction; coupling and cohesion; decomposition and modularization; encapsulation/information hiding; separation of interface and implementation; sufficiency, completeness, and primitiveness; and separation of concerns.

- *Abstraction* is “a view of an object that focuses on the information relevant to a particular purpose and ignores the remainder of the information” [1] (see Abstraction in the Computing Foundations KA). In the context of software design, two key abstraction mechanisms are parameterization and specification. Abstraction by parameterization abstracts from the details of data representations by representing the data as named parameters. Abstraction by specification leads to three major kinds of abstraction: procedural abstraction, data abstraction, and control (iteration) abstraction.
- *Coupling and Cohesion*. Coupling is defined as “a measure of the interdependence among modules in a computer program,” whereas cohesion is defined as “a measure of the strength of association of the elements within a module” [1].
- *Decomposition and modularization*. Decomposing and modularizing means that large

software is divided into a number of smaller named components having well-defined interfaces that describe component interactions. Usually the goal is to place different functionalities and responsibilities in different components.

- *Encapsulation and information hiding* means grouping and packaging the internal details of an abstraction and making those details inaccessible to external entities.
- *Separation of interface and implementation*. Separating interface and implementation involves defining a component by specifying a public interface (known to the clients) that is separate from the details of how the component is realized (see encapsulation and information hiding above).
- *Sufficiency, completeness, and primitiveness*. Achieving sufficiency and completeness means ensuring that a software component captures all the important characteristics of an abstraction and nothing more. Primitiveness means the design should be based on patterns that are easy to implement.
- *Separation of concerns*. A concern is an “area of interest with respect to a software design” [8]. A design concern is an area of design that is relevant to one or more of its stakeholders. Each architecture view frames one or more concerns. Separating concerns by views allows interested stakeholders to focus on a few things at a time and offers a means of managing complexity [9].

2. Key Issues in Software Design

A number of key issues must be dealt with when designing software. Some are quality concerns that all software must address—for example, performance, security, reliability, usability, etc. Another important issue is how to decompose, organize, and package software components. This is so fundamental that all design approaches address it in one way or another (see section 1.4, Software Design Principles, and topic 7, Software Design Strategies and Methods). In contrast, other issues “deal with some aspect of software’s behavior that is not in the application domain, but which addresses some of the supporting

domains” [10]. Such issues, which often crosscut the system’s functionality, have been referred to as *aspects*, which “tend not to be units of software’s functional decomposition, but rather to be properties that affect the performance or semantics of the components in systemic ways” [11]. A number of these key, crosscutting issues are discussed in the following sections (presented in alphabetical order).

2.1. Concurrency

[5*, c18]

Design for concurrency is concerned with decomposing software into processes, tasks, and threads and dealing with related issues of efficiency, atomicity, synchronization, and scheduling.

2.2. Control and Handling of Events

[5*, c21]

This design issue is concerned with how to organize data and control flow as well as how to handle reactive and temporal events through various mechanisms such as implicit invocation and call-backs.

2.3. Data Persistence

[12*, c9]

This design issue is concerned with how to handle long-lived data.

2.4. Distribution of Components

[5*, c18]

This design issue is concerned with how to distribute the software across the hardware (including computer hardware and network hardware), how the components communicate, and how middleware can be used to deal with heterogeneous software.

2.5. Error and Exception Handling and Fault Tolerance

[5*, c18]

This design issue is concerned with how to prevent, tolerate, and process errors and deal with exceptional conditions.

2.6. Interaction and Presentation

[5*, c16]

This design issue is concerned with how to structure and organize interactions with users as well as the presentation of information (for example, separation of presentation and business logic using the Model-View-Controller approach). Note that this topic does not specify user interface details, which is the task of user interface design (see topic 4, User Interface Design).

2.7. Security

[5*, c12, c18] [13*, c4]

Design for security is concerned with how to prevent unauthorized disclosure, creation, change, deletion, or denial of access to information and other resources. It is also concerned with how to tolerate security-related attacks or violations by limiting damage, continuing service, speeding repair and recovery, and failing and recovering securely. Access control is a fundamental concept of security, and one should also ensure the proper use of cryptology.

3. Software Structure and Architecture

In its strict sense, a software architecture is “the set of structures needed to reason about the system, which comprise software elements, relations among them, and properties of both” [14*]. During the mid-1990s, however, software architecture started to emerge as a broader discipline that involved the study of software structures and architectures in a more generic way. This gave rise to a number of interesting concepts about software design at different levels of abstraction. Some of these concepts can be useful during the architectural design (for example, architectural styles) as well as during the detailed design (for example, design patterns). These design concepts can also be used to design families of programs (also known as product lines). Interestingly, most of these concepts can be seen as attempts to describe, and thus reuse, design knowledge.

3.1. Architectural Structures and Viewpoints

[14*, c1]

Different high-level facets of a software design can be described and documented. These facets are often called views: “A view represents a partial aspect of a software architecture that shows specific properties of a software system” [14*]. Views pertain to distinct issues associated with software design—for example, the logical view (satisfying the functional requirements) vs. the process view (concurrency issues) vs. the physical view (distribution issues) vs. the development view (how the design is broken down into implementation units with explicit representation of the dependencies among the units). Various authors use different terminologies—like behavioral vs. functional vs. structural vs. data modeling views. In summary, a software design is a multifaceted artifact produced by the design process and generally composed of relatively independent and orthogonal views.

3.2. Architectural Styles

[14*, c1, c2, c3, c4, c5]

An architectural style is “a specialization of element and relation types, together with a set of constraints on how they can be used” [14*]. An architectural style can thus be seen as providing the software’s high-level organization. Various authors have identified a number of major architectural styles:

- General structures (for example, layers, pipes and filters, blackboard)
- Distributed systems (for example, client-server, three-tiers, broker)
- Interactive systems (for example, Model-View-Controller, Presentation-Abstraction-Control)
- Adaptable systems (for example, microkernel, reflection)
- Others (for example, batch, interpreters, process control, rule-based).

3.3. Design Patterns

[15*, c3, c4, c5]

Succinctly described, a pattern is “a common solution to a common problem in a given context” [16]. While architectural styles can be viewed as

patterns describing the high-level organization of software, other design patterns can be used to describe details at a lower level. These lower level design patterns include the following:

- Creational patterns (for example, builder, factory, prototype, singleton)
- Structural patterns (for example, adapter, bridge, composite, decorator, façade, flyweight, proxy)
- Behavioral patterns (for example, command, interpreter, iterator, mediator, memento, observer, state, strategy, template, visitor).

3.4. Architecture Design Decisions

[5*, c6]

Architectural design is a creative process. During the design process, software designers have to make a number of fundamental decisions that profoundly affect the software and the development process. It is useful to think of the architectural design process from a decision-making perspective rather than from an activity perspective. Often, the impact on quality attributes and tradeoffs among competing quality attributes are the basis for design decisions.

3.5. Families of Programs and Frameworks

[5*, c6, c7, c16]

One approach to providing for reuse of software designs and components is to design families of programs, also known as software product lines. This can be done by identifying the commonalities among members of such families and by designing reusable and customizable components to account for the variability among family members.

In object-oriented (OO) programming, a key related notion is that of a framework: a partially completed software system that can be extended by appropriately instantiating specific extensions (such as plug-ins).

4. User Interface Design

User interface design is an essential part of the software design process. User interface design should ensure that interaction between the human and the machine provides for effective operation

and control of the machine. For software to achieve its full potential, the user interface should be designed to match the skills, experience, and expectations of its anticipated users.

4.1. General User Interface Design Principles [5*, c29-web] [17*, c2]¹

- *Learnability*. The software should be easy to learn so that the user can rapidly start working with the software.
- *User familiarity*. The interface should use terms and concepts drawn from the experiences of the people who will use the software.
- *Consistency*. The interface should be consistent so that comparable operations are activated in the same way.
- *Minimal surprise*. The behavior of software should not surprise users.
- *Recoverability*. The interface should provide mechanisms allowing users to recover from errors.
- *User guidance*. The interface should give meaningful feedback when errors occur and provide context-related help to users.
- *User diversity*. The interface should provide appropriate interaction mechanisms for diverse types of users and for users with different capabilities (blind, poor eyesight, deaf, colorblind, etc.).

4.2. User Interface Design Issues [5*, c29-web] [17*, c2]

User interface design should solve two key issues:

- How should the user interact with the software?
- How should information from the software be presented to the user?

User interface design must integrate user interaction and information presentation. User interface design should consider a compromise between the most appropriate styles of interaction

and presentation for the software, the background and experience of the software users, and the available devices.

4.3. The Design of User Interaction Modalities [5*, c29-web] [17*, c2]

User interaction involves issuing commands and providing associated data to the software. User interaction styles can be classified into the following primary styles:

- *Question-answer*. The interaction is essentially restricted to a single question-answer exchange between the user and the software. The user issues a question to the software, and the software returns the answer to the question.
- *Direct manipulation*. Users interact with objects on the computer screen. Direct manipulation often includes a pointing device (such as a mouse, trackball, or a finger on touch screens) that manipulates an object and invokes actions that specify what is to be done with that object.
- *Menu selection*. The user selects a command from a menu list of commands.
- *Form fill-in*. The user fills in the fields of a form. Sometimes fields include menus, in which case the form has action buttons for the user to initiate action.
- *Command language*. The user issues a command and provides related parameters to direct the software what to do.
- *Natural language*. The user issues a command in natural language. That is, the natural language is a front end to a command language and is parsed and translated into software commands.

4.4. The Design of Information Presentation [5*, c29-web] [17*, c2]

Information presentation may be textual or graphical in nature. A good design keeps the information presentation separate from the information itself. The MVC (Model-View-Controller) approach is an effective way to keep information presentation separating from the information being presented.

¹ Chapter 29 is a web-based chapter available at <http://ifs.host.cs.st-andrews.ac.uk/Books/SE9/WebChapters/>.

Software engineers also consider software response time and feedback in the design of information presentation. Response time is generally measured from the point at which a user executes a certain control action until the software responds with a response. An indication of progress is desirable while the software is preparing the response. Feedback can be provided by restating the user's input while processing is being completed.

Abstract visualizations can be used when large amounts of information are to be presented.

According to the style of information presentation, designers can also use color to enhance the interface. There are several important guidelines:

- Limit the number of colors used.
- Use color change to show the change of software status.
- Use color-coding to support the user's task.
- Use color-coding in a thoughtful and consistent way.
- Use colors to facilitate access for people with color blindness or color deficiency (e.g., use the change of color saturation and color brightness, try to avoid blue and red combinations).
- Don't depend on color alone to convey important information to users with different capabilities (blindness, poor eyesight, color-blindness, etc.).

4.5. User Interface Design Process

[5*, c29-web] [17*, c2]

User interface design is an iterative process; interface prototypes are often used to determine the features, organization, and look of the software user interface. This process includes three core activities:

- *User analysis.* In this phase, the designer analyzes the users' tasks, the working environment, other software, and how users interact with other people.
- *Software prototyping.* Developing prototype software help users to guide the evolution of the interface.
- *Interface evaluation.* Designers can observe users' experiences with the evolving interface.

4.6. Localization and Internationalization

[17*, c8, c9]

User interface design often needs to consider internationalization and localization, which are means of adapting software to the different languages, regional differences, and the technical requirements of a target market. Internationalization is the process of designing a software application so that it can be adapted to various languages and regions without major engineering changes. Localization is the process of adapting internationalized software for a specific region or language by adding locale-specific components and translating the text. Localization and internationalization should consider factors such as symbols, numbers, currency, time, and measurement units.

4.7. Metaphors and Conceptual Models

[17*, c5]

User interface designers can use metaphors and conceptual models to set up mappings between the software and some reference system known to the users in the real world, which can help the users to more readily learn and use the interface. For example, the operation "delete file" can be made into a metaphor using the icon of a trash can.

When designing a user interface, software engineers should be careful to not use more than one metaphor for each concept. Metaphors also present potential problems with respect to internationalization, since not all metaphors are meaningful or are applied in the same way within all cultures.

5. Software Design Quality Analysis and Evaluation

This section includes a number of quality analysis and evaluation topics that are specifically related to software design. (See also the Software Quality KA.)

5.1. Quality Attributes

[4*, c4]

Various attributes contribute to the quality of a software design, including various "-ilities" (maintainability, portability, testability, usability)

and “-nesses” (correctness, robustness). There is an interesting distinction between quality attributes discernible at runtime (for example, performance, security, availability, functionality, usability), those not discernible at runtime (for example, modifiability, portability, reusability, testability), and those related to the architecture’s intrinsic qualities (for example, conceptual integrity, correctness, completeness). (See also the Software Quality KA.)

5.2. Quality Analysis and Evaluation Techniques

[4*, c4] [5*, c24]

Various tools and techniques can help in analyzing and evaluating software design quality.

- Software design reviews: informal and formalized techniques to determine the quality of design artifacts (for example, architecture reviews, design reviews, and inspections; scenario-based techniques; requirements tracing). Software design reviews can also evaluate security. Aids for installation, operation, and usage (for example, manuals and help files) can be reviewed.
- Static analysis: formal or semiformal static (nonexecutable) analysis that can be used to evaluate a design (for example, fault-tree analysis or automated cross-checking). Design vulnerability analysis (for example, static analysis for security weaknesses) can be performed if security is a concern. Formal design analysis uses mathematical models that allow designers to predicate the behavior and validate the performance of the software instead of having to rely entirely on testing. Formal design analysis can be used to detect residual specification and design errors (perhaps caused by imprecision, ambiguity, and sometimes other kinds of mistakes). (See also the Software Engineering Models and Methods KA.)
- Simulation and prototyping: dynamic techniques to evaluate a design (for example, performance simulation or feasibility prototypes).

5.3. Measures

[4*, c4] [5*, c24]

Measures can be used to assess or to quantitatively estimate various aspects of a software design; for example, size, structure, or quality. Most measures that have been proposed depend on the approach used for producing the design. These measures are classified in two broad categories:

- Function-based (structured) design measures: measures obtained by analyzing functional decomposition; generally represented using a structure chart (sometimes called a hierarchical diagram) on which various measures can be computed.
- Object-oriented design measures: the design structure is typically represented as a class diagram, on which various measures can be computed. Measures on the properties of the internal content of each class can also be computed.

6. Software Design Notations

Many notations exist to represent software design artifacts. Some are used to describe the structural organization of a design, others to represent software behavior. Certain notations are used mostly during architectural design and others mainly during detailed design, although some notations can be used for both purposes. In addition, some notations are used mostly in the context of specific design methods (see topic 7, Software Design Strategies and Methods). Please note that software design is often accomplished using multiple notations. Here, they are categorized into notations for describing the structural (static) view vs. the behavioral (dynamic) view.

6.1. Structural Descriptions (Static View)

[4*, c7] [5*, c6, c7] [6*, c4, c5, c6, c7]
[12*, c7] [14*, c7]

The following notations, mostly but not always graphical, describe and represent the structural aspects of a software design—that is, they are

used to describe the major components and how they are interconnected (static view):

- Architecture description languages (ADLs): textual, often formal, languages used to describe software architecture in terms of components and connectors.
- Class and object diagrams: used to represent a set of classes (and objects) and their interrelationships.
- Component diagrams: used to represent a set of components (“physical and replaceable part[s] of a system that [conform] to and [provide] the realization of a set of interfaces” [18]) and their interrelationships.
- Class responsibility collaborator cards (CRCs): used to denote the names of components (class), their responsibilities, and their collaborating components’ names.
- Deployment diagrams: used to represent a set of (physical) nodes and their interrelationships, and, thus, to model the physical aspects of software.
- Entity-relationship diagrams (ERDs): used to represent conceptual models of data stored in information repositories.
- Interface description languages (IDLs): programming-like languages used to define the interfaces (names and types of exported operations) of software components.
- Structure charts: used to describe the calling structure of programs (which modules call, and are called by, which other modules).

6.2. Behavioral Descriptions (Dynamic View)

[4*, c7, c13] [5*, c6, c7] [6*, c4, c5, c6, c7]
[14*, c8]

The following notations and languages, some graphical and some textual, are used to describe the dynamic behavior of software systems and components. Many of these notations are useful mostly, but not exclusively, during detailed design. Moreover, behavioral descriptions can include a rationale for design decision such as how a design will meet security requirements.

- Activity diagrams: used to show control flow from activity to activity. Can be used to represent concurrent activities.
- Communication diagrams: used to show the interactions that occur among a group of objects; emphasis is on the objects, their links, and the messages they exchange on those links.
- Data flow diagrams (DFDs): used to show data flow among elements. A data flow diagram provides “a description based on modeling the flow of information around a network of operational elements, with each element making use of or modifying the information flowing into that element” [4*]. Data flows (and therefore data flow diagrams) can be used for security analysis, as they offer identification of possible paths for attack and disclosure of confidential information.
- Decision tables and diagrams: used to represent complex combinations of conditions and actions.
- Flowcharts: used to represent the flow of control and the associated actions to be performed.
- Sequence diagrams: used to show the interactions among a group of objects, with emphasis on the time ordering of messages passed between objects.
- State transition and state chart diagrams: used to show the control flow from state to state and how the behavior of a component changes based on its current state in a state machine.
- Formal specification languages: textual languages that use basic notions from mathematics (for example, logic, set, sequence) to rigorously and abstractly define software component interfaces and behavior, often in terms of pre- and postconditions. (See also the Software Engineering Models and Methods KA.)
- Pseudo code and program design languages (PDLs): structured programming-like languages used to describe, generally at the detailed design stage, the behavior of a procedure or method.

7. Software Design Strategies and Methods

There exist various general strategies to help guide the design process. In contrast with general strategies, methods are more specific in that they generally provide a set of notations to be used with the method, a description of the process to be used when following the method, and a set of guidelines for using the method. Such methods are useful as a common framework for teams of software engineers. (See also the Software Engineering Models and Methods KA).

7.1. General Strategies

[4*, c8, c9, c10] [12*, c7]

Some often-cited examples of general strategies useful in the design process include the divide-and-conquer and stepwise refinement strategies, top-down vs. bottom-up strategies, and strategies making use of heuristics, use of patterns and pattern languages, and use of an iterative and incremental approach.

7.2. Function-Oriented (Structured) Design

[4*, c13]

This is one of the classical methods of software design, where decomposition centers on identifying the major software functions and then elaborating and refining them in a hierarchical top-down manner. Structured design is generally used after structured analysis, thus producing (among other things) data flow diagrams and associated process descriptions. Researchers have proposed various strategies (for example, transformation analysis, transaction analysis) and heuristics (for example, fan-in/fan-out, scope of effect vs. scope of control) to transform a DFD into a software architecture generally represented as a structure chart.

7.3. Object-Oriented Design

[4*, c16]

Numerous software design methods based on objects have been proposed. The field has evolved from the early object-oriented (OO)

design of the mid-1980s (noun = object; verb = method; adjective = attribute), where inheritance and polymorphism play a key role, to the field of component-based design, where meta-information can be defined and accessed (through reflection, for example). Although OO design's roots stem from the concept of data abstraction, responsibility-driven design has been proposed as an alternative approach to OO design.

7.4. Data Structure-Centered Design

[4*, c14, c15]

Data structure-centered design starts from the data structures a program manipulates rather than from the function it performs. The software engineer first describes the input and output data structures and then develops the program's control structure based on these data structure diagrams. Various heuristics have been proposed to deal with special cases—for example, when there is a mismatch between the input and output structures.

7.5. Component-Based Design (CBD)

[4*, c17]

A software component is an independent unit, having well-defined interfaces and dependencies that can be composed and deployed independently. Component-based design addresses issues related to providing, developing, and integrating such components in order to improve reuse. Reused and off-the-shelf software components should meet the same security requirements as new software. Trust management is a design concern; components treated as having a certain degree of trustworthiness should not depend on less trustworthy components or services.

7.6. Other Methods

[5*, c19, c21]

Other interesting approaches also exist (see the Software Engineering Models and Methods KA). Iterative and adaptive methods implement software increments and reduce emphasis on rigorous software requirement and design.

Aspect-oriented design is a method by which software is constructed using aspects to implement the crosscutting concerns and extensions that are identified during the software requirements process. Service-oriented architecture is a way to build distributed software using web services executed on distributed computers. Software systems are often constructed by using services from different providers because standard protocols (such as HTTP, HTTPS, SOAP) have been designed to support service communication and service information exchange.

8. Software Design Tools

[14*, c10, Appendix A]

Software design tools can be used to support the creation of the software design artifacts during the software development process. They can support part or whole of the following activities:

- to translate the requirements model into a design representation;
- to provide support for representing functional components and their interface(s);
- to implement heuristics refinement and partitioning;
- to provide guidelines for quality assessment.