

UNIX and C Programming (COMP1000)

Lecture 7: Debugging and Testing

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Textbook Reading

For more information, see the weekly reading list on Blackboard.

- ▶ Hanly and Koffman do not cover this material in detail. There are two brief sections:
 - ▶ **Section 5.10: How to Debug and Test Programs**
 - ▶ **Section 6.7: Debugging and Testing a Program System**
- ▶ Optional alternative – Kockan (2005), *Programming in C: A Complete Introduction to the C Programming Language*:
 - ▶ **Chapter 18: Debugging Programs**
(This book is used in Engineering Programming).

Outline

Debugging Principles

Debuggers

Testing

Assertions

Debugging Principles (Overview)

- ▶ Test, test, test!
- ▶ Make sure you know when something goes wrong.
- ▶ Identify the symptoms.
- ▶ Guess what might have caused it.
- ▶ Identify the code where it happened.
- ▶ Determine why it happened.
- ▶ Determine why it *really* happened (the “root cause”).

Logic Errors

- ▶ Your program may compile fine — that doesn't mean it “works”!
- ▶ Many faults cannot be found by the compiler.
- ▶ Valgrind may not find them either (and if it does, it may still require debugging).
- ▶ There are an infinite variety of logic errors:
 - ▶ Off-by-one errors;
 - ▶ Misplaced semicolons (particularly in loops);
 - ▶ Putting parameters in the wrong order;
 - ▶ Overflowing an array;
 - ▶ etc.

Know Your Bugs

- ▶ *Nobody* writes code without making mistakes.
- ▶ You must also be able to fix them.
- ▶ Before you can fix them, you must find them.
- ▶ This is what debugging is all about.

Symptoms / Observations

- ▶ Take note of exactly what happens and what doesn't happen.
- ▶ Is there a segmentation fault?
- ▶ Does the program output an integer instead of a string?
- ▶ Does it “forget” to print something out?
- ▶ Does it output large, seemingly-random numbers?

Hypotheses

- ▶ When you identify a problem, it's useful to guess what the cause might be.
- ▶ Start with the symptoms, and consider *possible* causes.
- ▶ For instance, if you get a segmentation fault:
 - ▶ Maybe you forgot an “&” when using `scanf()` or `fscanf()`.
 - ▶ Maybe you're dereferencing an uninitialised pointer.
 - ▶ Maybe you're trying to read past the end of an array.
- ▶ Use your knowledge and experience (hard at first, but easier as time goes on).
- ▶ Rule out as many possible causes as you can — allows you to narrow down the problem.

Isolating the Problem

- ▶ Identify *where* the problem first appears.
- ▶ Where (in the code) do the first symptoms occur?
- ▶ If it's a memory error, valgrind can tell you the line number (if you compile with -g).
- ▶ Otherwise:
 - ▶ Insert lots of temporary printf() statements, to see which code gets executed;
 - ▶ OR, **use a debugger**, as discussed later (easier and less messy).

Error States

- ▶ Once you know *where*, you must find out *why*.
- ▶ Logic errors often happen when a variable gets the wrong value.
- ▶ For example:
 - ▶ A `char*` variable might be `NULL` instead of a valid pointer.
 - ▶ An `int` might be uninitialised, instead of zero.
 - ▶ An array index might be larger than the array.
- ▶ You have to know:
 1. What values your variables *should* have.
 2. What values they *actually do* have.
 - ▶ If you can't work out (1), you don't know what you're doing!
 - ▶ Debuggers can help with (2).

Don't Treat the Symptoms!

- ▶ You know what line triggers the problem, and why.
- ▶ You know that a certain variable is zero when it should be ten.
- ▶ What should you do?
- ▶ **Certainly not this:**

```
var = 10;           /* No jedi are you, mmmm no. */
```

- ▶ You're not done with the “why” yet.
- ▶ You need to know *why* the variable has the wrong value.
- ▶ Otherwise, you're treating the symptom, not the problem!

The Root Cause

- ▶ **You must keep asking “why” until you reach the actual fault.**
- ▶ This is the “root cause” of the problem.
- ▶ This is what you must actually fix.
- ▶ It may be in a different function.
- ▶ It may be in a different file.
- ▶ Data gets passed all over the program, and faulty data get passed in the same way.

Backtracing

- ▶ Keep going backwards in your code to find the root cause.
- ▶ What if a function returns the wrong value?
⇒ Go to that function and find out why.
- ▶ What if a function parameter has the wrong value?
⇒ Go to the function *call* to see why.
- ▶ This process can be slow and tedious, but is made easier by debuggers.

Debugging Example #1

Imagine...

- ▶ We have a program that:
 - ▶ Reads an int from the user (N).
 - ▶ Allocates an array of that size (with `malloc()`).
 - ▶ Fills the array with the numbers 1 to N .
 - ▶ Finds the sum.
 - ▶ Prints out the sum.
- ▶ If the user enters 1, the program should print 1.
- ▶ If the user enters 2, the program should print 3.
- ▶ If the user enters 3, the program should print 6.
- ▶ etc.

Debugging Example #1 — Symptoms and Hypotheses

- ▶ However, no matter what the user enters, the program *actually* prints a large, seemingly random number (e.g. 482674854).
- ▶ This is a symptom of an underlying defect.
- ▶ We can make a few guesses. Since we're summing an array:
 - ▶ Maybe we're not reading user input properly.
 - ▶ Maybe we're not initialising the array properly.
 - ▶ Maybe we're not initialising the “sum” variable.
- ▶ We can discount one possibility:
 - ▶ The `malloc()` is probably ok — we would expect a segmentation fault if it wasn't.

Debugging Example #1 — Closer Examination

Starting with our hypotheses:

- ▶ Maybe we're not reading user input properly.
 - ▶ Print out the value read.
- ▶ Maybe we're not initialising the array properly.
 - ▶ Assume the user input is correct.
 - ▶ Print out the array after it's been filled.
- ▶ Maybe we're not initialising the “sum” variable.
 - ▶ Assume the array is correct.
 - ▶ Print out the sum variable as we're adding up.

Debuggers

- ▶ A debugger is a tool that helps you debug your software.
- ▶ It lets you poke around inside a running program.
- ▶ It won't “figure out” the problem for you — you still have to do that yourself.

What's available?

- ▶ gdb — the “GNU Debugger” (text based).
- ▶ ddd — the “Data Display Debugger” (graphical, but based on gdb).
- ▶ Any good IDE (Integrated Development Environment) will have a debugger built in:
 - ▶ NetBeans
 - ▶ Eclipse
 - ▶ Visual Studio
 - ▶ etc.
- ▶ (Note: jdb is the Java equivalent of gdb.)

Debugging Information

- ▶ To make proper use of a debugger, your executable file should include debugging information.
- ▶ This is done during compilation.
- ▶ For gcc, use the `-g` flag.

```
[user@pc]$ gcc -g -c source_file.c
```

- ▶ In a makefile, you can add `-g` to your `CFLAGS` variable:

```
CFLAGS = -Wall -pedantic -ansi -g  
...  
gcc $(CFLAGS) -c source_file.c
```

- ▶ Debugging information describes how the machine code maps to the source code.
- ▶ Without it, you'll have to learn machine code!

Breakpoints

- ▶ You can tell the debugger (in advance) to pause your program at a given line.
- ▶ This is called a “breakpoint”.
- ▶ Your program will execute normally, until it hits a breakpoint.
- ▶ Then the program will pause.
- ▶ At this point, you can use other debugger features to find out what's going on.
- ▶ You can then tell the debugger to “continue”.
- ▶ You can add and remove breakpoints:
 - ▶ Before the program is run, AND
 - ▶ While the program is paused.

Stepping

- ▶ You can tell the debugger to execute the program one line (“step”) at a time.
- ▶ You can see exactly how the code behaves:
 - ▶ Which lines are executed.
 - ▶ How variables are modified.
- ▶ If you reach a function call, you have two options:
 - ▶ Stepping “over” will run an entire function call in one step, pausing after the function.
 - ▶ Stepping “into” will run the function line-by-line, pausing after each line.

Monitoring Variables

- ▶ Debuggers make it easy to detect an error state (a variable having the wrong value).
- ▶ You don't need any extra `printf()` statements.
- ▶ The debugger can show you the values of any variable or array (when the program is paused).
- ▶ As you step through the code, keep an eye on key variables.
- ▶ Make sure you know what they *should* be.

Watchpoints

- ▶ A “watchpoint” is like a breakpoint — it causes your program to pause.
- ▶ However, you supply an *expression* instead of a line number.
- ▶ Whenever the expression is true, the program will pause (no matter what line is executing).
- ▶ Use watchpoints to:
 - ▶ Find out *where* a variable gets a certain value.
 - ▶ Find out what happens after this occurs.
- ▶ Note: you can only set watchpoints when the program is paused!

Conditional Breakpoints

- ▶ Breakpoint + watchpoint = “conditional breakpoint”.
- ▶ A conditional breakpoint will pause when:
 - ▶ A given line of code is reached, AND
 - ▶ A given expression is true.
- ▶ You could use it to pause the program on the 1000'th iteration of a for loop.

Post Mortem Debugging

- ▶ If your program ends abruptly (e.g. due to seg fault), you can still access debugging information.
- ▶ You can see variables as they were at the time of the crash.
- ▶ They can tell you why the crash occurred.
- ▶ (At this point, you can't step through the code any more).

Using Gdb

- ▶ To use gdb (the GNU Debugger), type:

```
[user@pc]$ gdb ./program
```

- ▶ program is the name of your executable.
 - ▶ No command-line parameters here (see next slide).
- ▶ Gdb will show some copyright, version and disclaimer notices.
- ▶ If gdb says “(no debugging symbols found)”, you forgot to compile with -g.
- ▶ Gdb will then give you this prompt:

```
(gdb)
```

- ▶ This is where you type debugging commands.
 - ▶ (Note: all of the following commands can be abbreviated!)

Gdb Commands — Breakpoints and Running

Setting Breakpoints

To place a breakpoint at the start of function `doStuff()`:

```
(gdb) break doStuff
```

If the function is in a different file:

```
(gdb) break otherfile.c:doStuff
```

You can also give a line number instead of a function name.

Running Your Program

```
(gdb) run
```

If your program needs command-line parameters:

```
(gdb) run param1 param2 ...
```

Gdb Commands — Stepping

Stepping

To step to the next line (and *into* functions):

```
(gdb) step
```

To step to the next line (and *over* functions):

```
(gdb) next
```

Repeating the Last Command

You can repeat the last command by just hitting enter:

```
(gdb)
```

This is useful when stepping, because you do it a lot.

Gdb Commands — Variables and Expressions

Monitoring Variables

To display the value of the variable `var`:

```
(gdb) print var
```

- ▶ This works even if `var` is an entire array.
- ▶ You can print any valid C expression.

Setting Watchpoints

This can't be done until the program is running and paused.

```
(gdb) watch var == 10
```

Gdb Commands — Listing Code

- ▶ You need to see the source code itself.
- ▶ Gdb lets you list code in 10 line chunks.
- ▶ You can list the code around a given line:

```
(gdb) list 13
```

- ▶ You can list the start of a function:

```
(gdb) list doStuff
```

- ▶ To list the *next* 10 lines:

```
(gdb) list
```

- ▶ To list the *previous* 10 lines:

```
(gdb) list -
```

Gdb Commands — Other Commands

Continuing

To continue normal execution, after hitting a breakpoint:

```
(gdb) continue
```

Quitting Gdb

```
(gdb) quit
```

Miscellaneous Commands

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <code>bt</code> | Display a “backtrace”. |
| <code>info breakpoints</code> | Lists all breakpoints. |
| <code>delete <i>n</i></code> | Remove breakpoint <i>n</i> . |
| <code>finish</code> | Step over the rest of the current function. |

DDD

- ▶ To use ddd (the “Data Display Debugger”):

```
[user@pc]$ ddd ./program
```

- ▶ ddd is graphical, and (possibly) easier to use than gdb.
- ▶ However, all the same debugging principles apply.
- ▶ Use the menu to “run”, “step”, etc.
- ▶ Double-click on a variable to display it.

Debugging Example #2

- ▶ The following slide shows a short piece of code, which:
 - ▶ Reads an `int` from the user.
 - ▶ Fills an array with that value.
 - ▶ Prints out the array.
- ▶ However, there's a problem:
- ▶ If the user enters a number less than 10, the program freezes!
- ▶ (Any number ≥ 10 seems to work fine.)

Debugging Example #2 — The Code

```
#define LENGTH 10

int main(void) {
    int array[LENGTH];
    int i, number;
    number = readInt(); /* Assume readInt works */

    for(i = 0; i <= LENGTH; i++) {
        array[i] = number;
    }

    printArray(array, LENGTH); /* Assume this works */
    return 0;
}
```

Debugging Example #2 — Breakpoints

- ▶ How can we debug this?
- ▶ We must determine what part of the code is freezing.
- ▶ We set two breakpoints:
 1. Right before the `for` loop (but after the `readInt()` call).
 2. Right after the `for` loop.
- ▶ Then we type “run” in `gdb`:
 - ▶ We hit the 1st breakpoint every time.
 - ▶ We only hit the 2nd breakpoint when `number >= 10`.
- ▶ Therefore, it's the `for` loop.

Debugging Example #2 — Watchpoints

- ▶ It looks like we have an infinite loop.
- ▶ But how can this loop be infinite?

```
for(i = 0; i <= LENGTH; i++) {  
    array[i] = number;  
}
```

- ▶ The `i` variable is incremented each iteration.
- ▶ We know that `LENGTH` is 10 — it's a constant.
- ▶ When `i > 10`, the loop should end.
- ▶ So, we set a watchpoint to check for that expression.
- ▶ The watchpoint is never hit!
- ▶ For some reason, `i` is never greater than 10.

Debugging Example #2 — Stepping

- ▶ We need to find out exactly what the `for` loop is doing.
- ▶ Starting at the first breakpoint, we:
 - ▶ “step” through the loop,
 - ▶ use “`print i`” to test the value of `i` at each iteration.
- ▶ `i` seems to increment ok.
- ▶ However, when `i == 10`, something strange happens.
- ▶ The statement “`array[i] = number;`” causes `i` to jump backwards.

Debugging Example #2 — Solution

- ▶ Eventually, we realise that we're overflowing the array.
- ▶ The array has 10 elements (0–9).
- ▶ `array[10]` is outside the array.
- ▶ On a hunch, we do the following:

```
(gdb) print &i
```

```
(gdb) print &array[10]
```

- ▶ ...and we discover that the memory addresses are the same!
- ▶ In other words, `array[10]` is actually `i`.
- ▶ We overwrote the for loop index, creating an infinite loop.
- ▶ (Our mistake was using "`i <= LENGTH`" instead of "`i < LENGTH`".)

Testing

- ▶ Without testing, you have no idea what might be wrong with your code.
- ▶ Before (and after) you debug, you must test.
- ▶ Testing should not be an afterthought!
- ▶ The idea is to *break* your code.
- ▶ As a tester, you should be as pedantic, vicious and perverse as possible.
- ▶ You must also be systematic.
- ▶ You have to *want* your code to fail.
- ▶ Then you can fix it.

Automation and Repeatability

- ▶ As much as possible, testing should be *automated*.
- ▶ Automation leads to *repeatability*.
- ▶ If you repeat a test, you should be *guaranteed* the same outcome.
- ▶ If you know exactly what tests your program passes, then you (and your users) can have confidence using it.
- ▶ That's why you build a test harness.

Automated Test Harnesses

- ▶ Your test harness should call your functions to check whether they produce the right answers.
- ▶ Your test harness *should not* read anything from the user.
- ▶ User input may change from one test to another.
- ▶ So, the test outcome (pass or fail) may also change.
- ▶ Some input may trigger a fault, while other input does not.
- ▶ If your test harness is automated, then the tests it performs are (probably) repeatable.

Unit Testing

- ▶ “Unit testing” tests small parts of your code at a time.
- ▶ It’s much easier to test small things.
- ▶ A function is the smallest piece of code you can realistically test.
- ▶ Each unit test should be placed inside its own “test...()” function.
- ▶ For instance, when testing the `calc()` function, call your unit test “`testCalc()`”.

Writing Unit Tests

- ▶ Select (manually) a few sample inputs.
- ▶ Determine (manually) what the function should export.
- ▶ Hard code these into the test function.
- ▶ Pass each sample input into the function to be tested.
- ▶ For each function call:
 - ▶ Record the actual answer.
 - ▶ Compare the actual answer to the expected answer.
 - ▶ Output a message if they differ (i.e. if the test fails).

Unit Testing — Example

A unit test for the factorial() function:

```
void testFactorial(void) {  
    int inputs[] = {0, 1, 10};  
    int expected[] = {1, 1, 3628800};  
    int i, actual;  
  
    for(i = 0; i < 3; i++) {  
        actual = factorial(inputs[i]);  
        if(expected[i] != actual) {  
            printf("FAIL: factorial(%d) == %d",  
                inputs[i], actual);  
        }  
    }  
}
```

Test Suites

- ▶ A test suite is a collection of related tests.
- ▶ For example:

```
void testSuiteMath(void) {  
    testFactorial();  
    testFibonacci();  
    testQuantumChromodynamics();  
}
```

- ▶ Test suites can incorporate other test suites (hierarchically).
- ▶ Your test harness (main()) should run all test suites.

Regression Testing

- ▶ A “regression” happens when a defect is introduced into a previously-working program.
- ▶ Obviously, we’d like to stop this from happening.
- ▶ This is easy, if you have a comprehensive set of unit tests.
- ▶ Simply run your (automated) test harness after a modification.
- ▶ Your existing test code can tell you if there’s been a regression.
- ▶ This is why you write unit tests!
- ▶ (This isn’t fool-proof, but it’s a very good idea.)

Assertions

- ▶ Many languages provide an “assert” statement.
- ▶ In C, you can write:

```
#include <assert.h>
...
assert(x == y);
```

- ▶ `assert` is a macro that verifies a boolean condition.
- ▶ If the condition is `TRUE`, nothing happens.
- ▶ If the condition is `FALSE`, the program immediately aborts with a message like:

```
prog: prog.c:8: func: Assertion 'x == y' failed.
Aborted
```

- ▶ This gives you the source file, line number and condition.

How to Use Assertions

- ▶ asserts can remain in your code permanently.
- ▶ They trap errors, like a “passive” kind of testing.
- ▶ They also help document your code.
- ▶ Only use assert to check for **logic errors** (**not** I/O errors, user errors, etc.)

Disabling Assertions

- ▶ Assertions may degrade performance a bit.
- ▶ After your code is thoroughly debugged, you can disable them at compile-time:

```
[user@pc]$ gcc -D NDEBUG=1 ...
```

- ▶ Leave the asserts in your code. When disabled, they simply do nothing.

Assertions — Bad Example

```
int readPositive(void) {  
    int input;  
    printf("Enter a positive integer: ");  
    scanf("%d", &input);  
    assert(input > 0); /* Part of the algorithm. */  
    return input;  
}
```

- ▶ Here, the whole program will abort if the input is invalid.
- ▶ This is *not* user friendly!
- ▶ Never use asserts to check for user errors, I/O errors, etc.
- ▶ Never use asserts as part of your algorithm.

Assertions — Good Example

```
int readPositive(void) {  
    int input;  
    do {  
        printf("Enter a positive integer: ");  
        scanf("%d", &input);  
        while(input <= 0);  
        assert(input > 0); /* Sanity check. */  
        return input;  
    }  
}
```

- ▶ Here, the assertion *should* always be TRUE.
- ▶ If it's FALSE, we have a **logic error**.
- ▶ That's a *good reason* to abort the whole program.