# NEU CY 5770 Software Vulnerabilities and Security

Instructor: Dr. Ziming Zhao

**Format String Vulnerability** 

# **Brief History of Format String Attacks**

- In the summer of 2000, the security community became aware of a significant new type of vulnerability, identified as format string bugs.
- The issue gained attention when an exploit for the Washington University FTP daemon (WU-FTPD) was posted on the Bugtraq mailing list on June 23, 2000.
- The exploit allowed remote attackers to gain root access to systems running WU-FTPD without authentication if anonymous FTP was enabled.
- The vulnerability was particularly high profile due to WU-FTPD's widespread use on the Internet.

Format string vulnerabilities occur when programmers pass externally supplied data to a printf function (or similar) as, or as part of, the format string argument.

### **Format String Bugs**

Format string vulnerabilities really fall under the umbrella of *input* validation bugs

 the basic problem is that programmers fail to prevent untrusted externally supplied data from being included in the format string argument.

### **Format String Bugs**

Format string bugs are caused by not specifying format string characters in the arguments to functions that utilize the *va\_arg* variable argument lists.

Unlike buffer overflows, in that no stacks are being smashed and no data is being corrupted in large amounts. Instead, when an attacker controls arguments of the function, the intricacies in the variable argument lists allow him to view or overwrite arbitrary data.

Format string bugs are easy to fix, without affecting application logic.

## **C** function with Variable Arguments

- A function where the number of arguments is not known, or is not constant, when the function is written.
- Include <stdarg.h>, which introduce a type va\_list, and three functions/macros that operate on objects of this type, called va\_start, va\_arg, and va\_end.

# **Variable Argument Example: average**

```
#include <stdio.h>
#include <stdarg.h>
double average(int num,...) {
 va list valist;
 double sum = 0.0;
 int i;
 va start(valist, num);
 for (i = 0; i < num; i++) {
   sum += va arg(valist, int);}
 va end(valist);
 return sum/num;}
int main() {
 printf("Average of 2, 3, 4, 5 = %f\n", average(4, 2, 3, 4, 5));
 printf("Average of 5, 10, 15 = %f\n", average(3, 5, 10, 15));
```

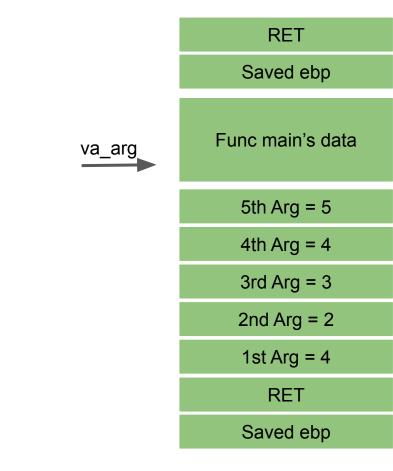
# Average: first call of printf()

	RET					
	Saved ebp					
	Func main's data					
va_arg	5th Arg = 5					
	4th Arg = 4					
	3rd Arg = 3					
	2nd Arg = 2					
	1st Arg = 4					
	RET					
	Saved ebp					

# Variable Argument Example: average\_wrong

```
#include <stdio.h>
#include <stdarg.h>
double average(int num,...) {
 va list valist;
 double sum = 0.0;
 int i;
 va_start(valist, num);
 for (i = 0; i < num; i++) {
   sum += va arg(valist, int);}
 va end(valist);
 return sum/num;}
int main() {
 printf("Average of 2, 3, 4, 5 = %f\n", average(5, 2, 3, 4, 5));
 printf("Average of 5, 10, 15 = %f\n", average(4, 5, 10, 15));
```

# Average\_wrong: first call of printf()



### **C++ Function Overloading cppol**

 Function overloading is a feature in C++ where two or more functions can have the same name but different parameters.

```
#include <stdio.h>

double average(int i, int j, int k) {
    return (i + j + k) / 3;}

double average(int i, int j, int k, int l) {
    return (i + j + k + l) / 4;}

int main() {
    printf("Average of 2, 3, 4, 5 = %f\n", average(2, 3, 4, 5));
    printf("Average of 5, 10, 15 = %f\n", average(5, 10, 15));
}
```

### C++ Overloading Example

000044-4								
000011ed <avera< td=""><td></td><td>0f 1e</td><td>£L.</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>endbr3</td><td></td></avera<>		0f 1e	£L.				endbr3	
11ed: 11f1:	T 3 (	0T 16	TD					
12.00 (17.	367						push	%ebp
11f2:	89 €						mov	%esp,%ebp
11f4:		ec 38					sub	\$0x38,%esp
11f7:		eb 06					call	12e7 <x86.get_pc_thunk.ax></x86.get_pc_thunk.ax>
11fc:		d8 20					add	\$0x2dd8,%eax
1201:		8b 0c		00	00	00	MOV	%gs:0x14,%ecx
1208:		4d f4					MOV	%ecx,-0xc(%ebp)
120b:	31 (						хог	%ecx,%ecx
120d:	d9 6						fldz	111/1/2011
120f:		5d e8					fstpl	-0x18(%ebp)
1212:		45 Oc					lea	0xc(%ebp),%eax
1215:		45 e					MOV	%eax,-0x20(%ebp)
1218:		45 e4	00	00	00	00	movl	\$0x0,-0x1c(%ebp)
121f:	eb :						jmp	123e <average+0x51></average+0x51>
1221:		45 e					MOV	-0x20(%ebp),%eax
1224:		50 04					lea	0x4(%eax),%edx
1227:		55 e6					MOV	%edx,-0x20(%ebp)
122a:	8b (						MOV	(%eax),%eax
122c:	89	45 d4					MOV	%eax,-0x2c(%ebp)
122f:	db 4	45 d4					fildl	-0x2c(%ebp)
1232:	dd 4	45 e8					fldl	-0x18(%ebp)
1235:	de d	c1					faddp	%st,%st(1)
1237:	dd !	5d e8					fstpl	-0x18(%ebp)
123a:	83 4	45 e4	01				addl	\$0x1,-0x1c(%ebp)
123e:	8b 4	45 e4					mov	-0x1c(%ebp),%eax
1241:	3b 4	45 08					стр	0x8(%ebp),%eax
1244:	7c (	db					jl	1221 <average+0x34></average+0x34>
1246:	db 4	45 08					fildl	0x8(%ebp)
1249:	dd 4	45 e8					fldl	-0x18(%ebp)
124c:	de t	f1					fdivp	%st,%st(1)
124e:	8b 4	45 f4					MOV	-0xc(%ebp),%eax
1251:	65	33 05	14	00	00	00	хог	%gs:0x14,%eax
1258:	74 (	07					je	1261 <average+0x74></average+0x74>
125a:	dd d	d8					fstp	%st(0)
125c:	e8 (	0f 01	00	00			call	1370 < stack_chk_fail_local>
1261:	c9						leave	
1262:	<b>c</b> 3						ret	

```
0000000000001149 < Z7averageiii>:
                f3 Of 1e fa
                                         endbr64
    1149:
    114d:
                55
                                         push
                                                %гьр
    114e:
                48 89 e5
                                         mov
                                                 %rsp,%rbp
    1151:
                89 7d fc
                                                 %edi,-0x4(%rbp)
                                         MOV
    1154:
                89 75 f8
                                                 %esi,-0x8(%rbp)
                                         MOV
                89 55 f4
                                                 %edx,-0xc(%rbp)
    1157:
                                         MOV
                                                 -0x4(%rbp),%edx
    115a:
                8b 55 fc
                                         MOV
    115d:
                8b 45 f8
                                                 -0x8(%rbp),%eax
                                         MOV
                01 c2
                                         add
                                                 %eax,%edx
    1160:
                8b 45 f4
                                                 -0xc(%rbp),%eax
    1162:
                                         MOV
    1165:
                01 d0
                                         add
                                                 %edx,%eax
    1167:
                48 63 d0
                                         movslq %eax,%rdx
    116a:
                48 69 d2 56 55 55 55
                                         imul
                                                $0x55555556,%rdx,%rdx
    1171:
                48 c1 ea 20
                                         shr
                                                 $0x20,%rdx
    1175:
                c1 f8 1f
                                                 $0x1f, %eax
                                         sar
    1178:
                89 d1
                                                %edx,%ecx
                                         MOV
    117a:
                29 c1
                                         sub
                                                 %eax,%ecx
    117c:
                89 c8
                                                 %ecx, %eax
                                         MOV
    117e:
                f2 Of 2a c0
                                         cvtsi2sd %eax,%xmm0
    1182:
                5d
                                         pop
                                                 %гьр
                c3
    1183:
                                         retq
0000000000001184 < Z7averageiiii>:
    1184:
                f3 0f 1e fa
                                         endbr64
    1188:
                55
                                         push
                                                %rbp
    1189:
                48 89 e5
                                                 %rsp,%rbp
                                         MOV
                                                 %edi,-0x4(%rbp)
    118c:
                89 7d fc
                                         MOV
    118f:
                89 75 f8
                                                 %esi,-0x8(%rbp)
                                         mov
    1192:
                89 55 f4
                                                 %edx,-0xc(%rbp)
                                         MOV
    1195:
                89 4d f0
                                                %ecx.-0x10(%rbp)
                                         MOV
```

### Format string functions

#### **Functionality**

- used to convert simple C datatypes to a string representation
- allow to specify the format of the representation
- process the resulting string (output to stderr, stdout, syslog, ...)

#### How the format function works

- the format string controls the behaviour of the function
- it specifies the type of parameters that should be printed
- parameters are saved on the stack (pushed)
- saved either directly (by value), or indirectly (by reference)

#### The calling function

 has to know how many parameters it pushes to the stack, since it has to do the stack correction, when the format function returns

### Format string function prototypes

```
PRINTF(3)

NAME

printf, fprintf, dprintf, sprintf, snprintf, vprintf, vfprintf, vdprintf, vsprintf, vsnprintf - formatted output conversion

SYNOPSIS

int printf(const char *format, ...);
int fprintf(FILE *stream, const char *format, ...);
int dprintf(int fd, const char *format, ...);
int sprintf(char *str, const char *format, ...);
int sprintf(char *str, size_t size, const char *format, ...);
int snprintf(char *str, size_t size, const char *format, ...);
```

# The format string family

```
fprintf — prints to a FILE stream
printf — prints to the 'stdout' stream
sprintf — prints into a string
snprintf — prints into a string with length checking
vfprintf — print to a FILE stream from a va_arg structure
vprintf — prints to 'stdout' from a va_arg structure
vsprintf — prints to a string from a va_arg structure
vsnprintf — prints to a string with length checking from a va_arg structure
```

setproctitle — set argv[]
syslog — output to the syslog facility
others like err\*, verr\*, warn\*, vwarn\*

## What is a Format String?

C string (ASCII string) that contains the text to be written. It can optionally contain embedded **format specifiers** that are replaced by the values specified in subsequent additional arguments and formatted as requested.

A format specifier follows this prototype: %[flags][width][.precision][length]specifier

% is \x25

http://www.cplusplus.com/reference/cstdio/printf/

### **Specifiers**

# A format specifier follows this prototype: %[flags][width][.precision][length]specifier

Where the *specifier character* at the end is the most significant component, since it defines the type and the interpretation of its

corresponding argument:

specifier	Output	Example
d or i	Signed decimal integer	392
u	Unsigned decimal integer	7235
0	Unsigned octal	610
X	Unsigned hexadecimal integer	7fa
X	Unsigned hexadecimal integer (uppercase)	7FA
f	Decimal floating point, lowercase	392.65
F	Decimal floating point, uppercase	392.65
e	Scientific notation (mantissa/exponent), lowercase	3.9265e+2
E	Scientific notation (mantissa/exponent), uppercase	3.9265E+2
g	Use the shortest representation: %e or %f	392.65
G	Use the shortest representation: %E or %F	392.65
a	Hexadecimal floating point, lowercase	-0xc.90fep-2
Α	Hexadecimal floating point, uppercase	-0XC.90FEP-2
С	Character	a
S	String of characters	sample
p	Pointer address	b8000000
n	Nothing printed. The corresponding argument must be a pointer to a signed int. The number of characters written so far is stored in the pointed location.	
%	A % followed by another % character will write a single % to the stream.	%

# **Specifiers**

# A format specifier follows this prototype: %[flags][width][.precision][length]specifier

flags	description					
957	Left-justify within the given field width; Right justification is the default (see width sub-specifier).					
	Forces to preced the result with a plus or minus sign (+ or -) even for positive numbers. By default, only negative numbers are preceded with a - sign.					
(space)	If no sign is going to be written, a blank space is inserted before the value.					
#	Used with 0, x or X specifiers the value is preceeded with 0, 0x or 0X respectively for values different than zero. Used with a, A, e, E, f, F, g or G it forces the written output to contain a decimal point even if no more digits follow. By default, if no digits follow, no decimal point is written.					
0	Left-pads the number with zeroes (0) instead of spaces when padding is specified (see width sub-specifier).					

width	description
(number,	Minimum number of characters to be printed. If the value to be printed is shorter than this number, the result is padded with blank spaces. The value is not truncated even if the result is larger.
*	The <i>width</i> is not specified in the <i>format</i> string, but as an additional integer value argument preceding the argument that has to be formatted.

.precision	description
. number	For integer specifiers (d, i, o, u, x, X): precision specifies the minimum number of digits to be written. If the value to be written is shorter than this number, the result is padded with leading zeros. The value is not truncated even if the result is longer. A precision of 0 means that no character is written for the value 0.  For a, A, e, E, f and F specifiers: this is the number of digits to be printed after the decimal point (by default, this is 6).  For g and G specifiers: This is the maximum number of significant digits to be printed.  For s: this is the maximum number of characters to be printed. By default all characters are printed until the ending null character is encountered.  If the period is specified without an explicit value for precision, 0 is assumed.
.*	The <i>precision</i> is not specified in the <i>format</i> string, but as an additional integer value argument preceding the argument that has to be formatted.

### **Specifiers**

# A format specifier follows this prototype: %[flags][width][.precision][length]specifier

The *length* sub-specifier modifies the length of the data type. This is a chart showing the types used to interpret the corresponding arguments with and without *length* specifier (if a different type is used, the proper type promotion or conversion is performed, if allowed):

	specifiers						
length	d i	иохХ	fFeEgGaA	С	S	р	n
(none)	int	unsigned int	double	int	char*	void*	int*
hh	signed char	unsigned char		92 20			signed char*
h	short int	unsigned short int					short int*
l	long int	unsigned long int		wint_t	wchar_t*		long int*
11	long long int	unsigned long long int		20			long long int*
j	intmax_t	uintmax_t					intmax_t*
Z	size_t	size_t		3			size_t*
t	ptrdiff_t	ptrdiff_t		0			ptrdiff_t*
L			long double				

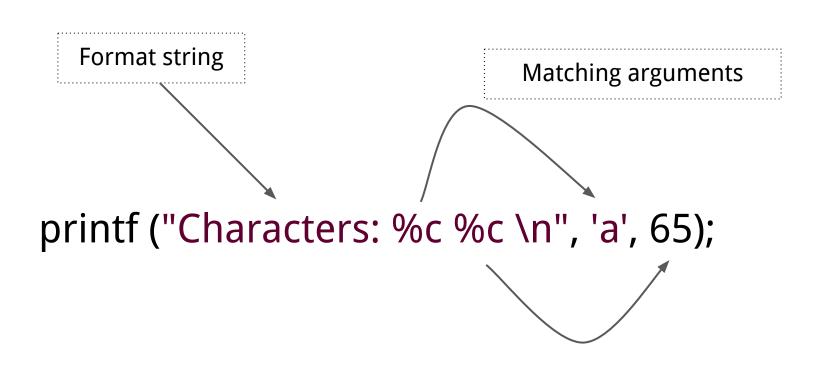
Note regarding the c specifier: it takes an int (or wint\_t) as argument, but performs the proper conversion to a char value (or a wchar t) before formatting it for output.

## **Format String Examples**

```
printf ("Characters: %c %c \n", 'a', 65);
printf ("Decimals: %d %ld\n", 1977, 650000L);
printf ("Preceding with blanks: %10d \n", 1977);
printf ("Preceding with zeros: %010d \n", 1977);
printf ("Some different radices: %d %x %o %#x %#o \n", 100, 100, 100, 100, 100);
printf ("floats: %4.2f %+.0e %E \n", 3.1416, 3.1416, 3.1416);
printf ("Width trick: %*d \n", 5, 10);
printf ("%s \n", "A string");
```

```
Characters: a A
Decimals: 1977 650000
Preceding with blanks: 1977
Preceding with zeros: 0000001977
Some different radices: 100 64 144 0x64 0144
floats: 3.14 +3e+000 3.141600E+000
Width trick: 10
A string
```

## **Matching Format Tokens and Arguments**



```
int foo()
     int a = 0;
     int b = 0;
     printf("a is %d; b is %d\n", a, b);
     printf("[Changing a and b..]%n12345%n\n", &a, &b);
     printf("a is %d; b is %d\n", a, b);
     printf("[Changing a and b..]%020d %n%n\n", 50, &a, &b);
     printf("a is %d; b is %d\n", a, b);
     printf("[Changing a and b..]floats: %010.2f%n\n", 3.1416, &a);
     printf("a is %d.\n", a);
     return 0;
```

### **POSIX Extension: n\$**

n\$

*n* is the number of the parameter to display using this format specifier, allowing the parameters provided to be output multiple times, using varying format specifiers or in different orders. If any single placeholder specifies a parameter, all the rest of the placeholders MUST also specify a parameter.

For example, printf("%2\$d %2\$#x; %1\$d %1\$#x",16,17) produces 17 0x11; 16 0x10

# How could this go wrong? printf(user\_input)!

- The format string determines how many arguments to look for.
- What if the caller does not provide the same number of the arguments? More than the function (e.g. printf) looks for? Or fewer than the function looks for?
- What if the format string is not hard-coded? The user can provide the format string.

# Format string vulnerability is considered as a programming bug

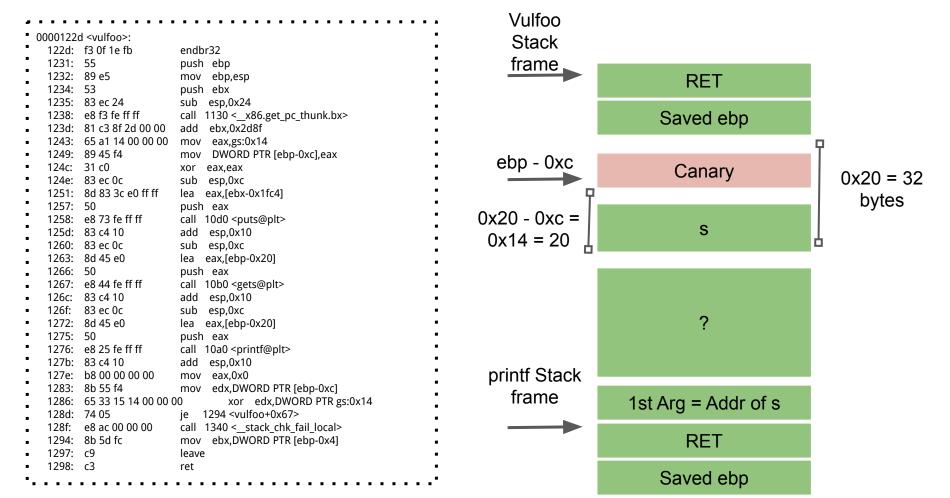
Wrong usage - user controls the format string.

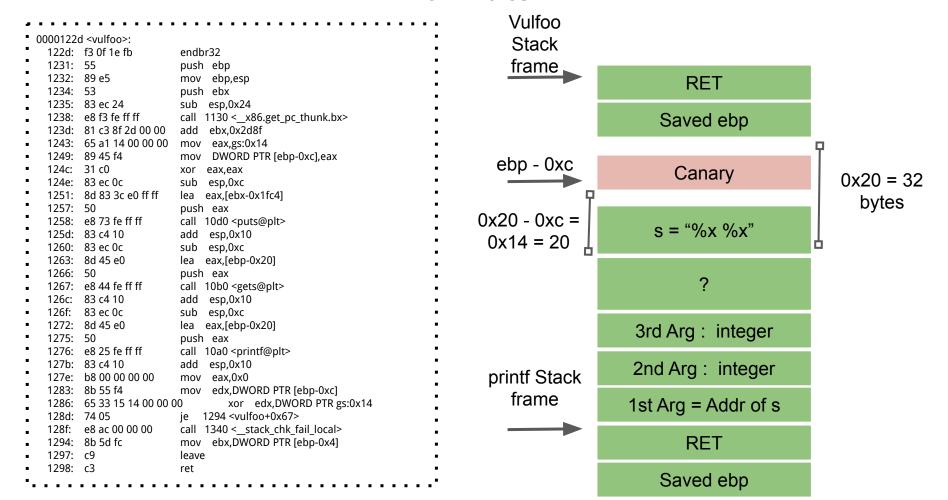
int func (char \*user) { printf (user); }

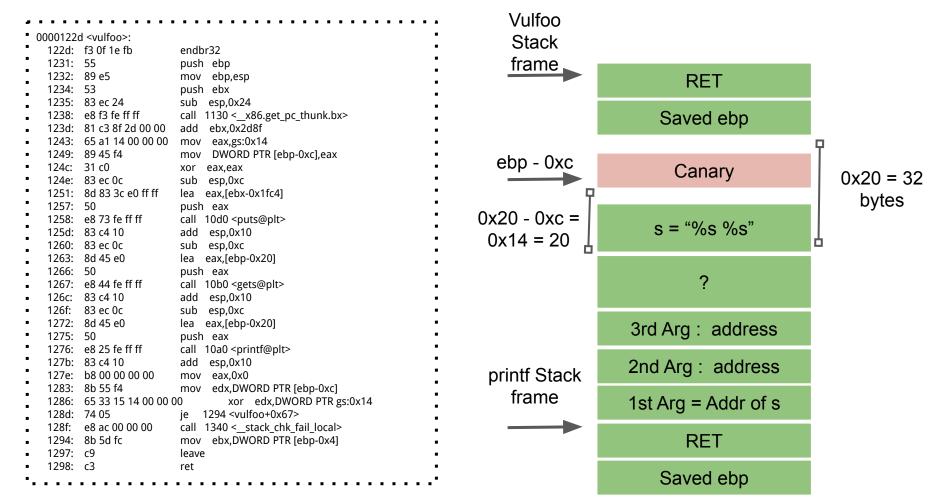
Correct usage - format string is hard-coded.

int func (char \*user) { printf ("%s", user); }

```
int vulfoo()
{
     char s[20];
     printf("What is your input?\n");
     gets(s);
     printf(s);
     return 0;
int main() {
     return vulfoo();
```







# What can we do by abusing the format string?

• View part of the stack

%x.%x.%x.%x.%x.%x

%08x.%08x.%08x.%08x.%08x

Crash the program

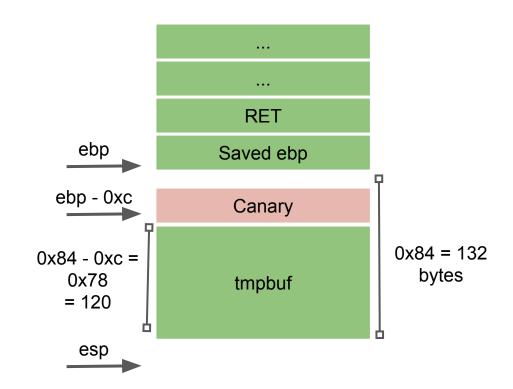
%s%s%s%s%s%s

%n%n%n

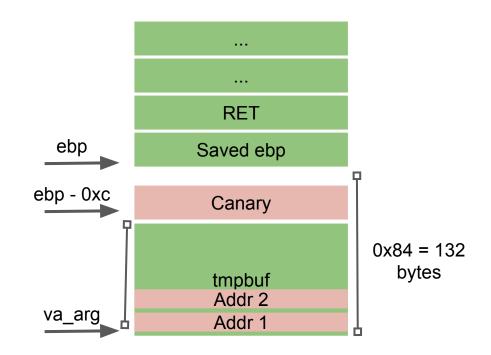
```
char *p1 = CENSORED;
char *p2 = CENSORED;
int vulfoo()
       char tmpbuf[120];
       gets(tmpbuf);
       printf(tmpbuf);
       return 0;
int main() {
       printf("Secret are at %p and %p. Can you read them?\n", p1, p2);
       return vulfoo();
```

Canary enabled; NX enabled

```
0000120d <vulfoo>:
  120d: f3 0f 1e fb
                           endbr32
  1211: 55
                           push ebp
  1212: 89 e5
                           mov ebp,esp
  1214: 53
                           push ebx
  1215: 81 ec 84 00 00 00 sub esp,0x84
  121b: e8 f0 fe ff ff
                           call 1110 < x86.get pc thunk.bx>
                                ebx,0x2db0
  1220: 81 c3 b0 2d 00 00
                          add
  1226: 65 a1 14 00 00 00
                                 eax,gs:0x14
                           mov
                                 DWORD PTR [ebp-0xc],eax
  122c: 89 45 f4
  122f: 31 c0
                               eax,eax
  1231: 83 ec 0c
                           sub
                                esp,0xc
  1234: 8d 85 7c ff ff ff
                               eax,[ebp-0x84]
  123a: 50
                           push eax
  123b: e8 60 fe ff ff
                           call 10a0 <gets@plt>
  1240: 83 c4 10
                                esp,0x10
  1243: 83 ec 0c
                                esp,0xc
  1246: 8d 85 7c ff ff ff
                               eax,[ebp-0x84]
                           lea
  124c:
         50
                           push eax
        e8 3e fe ff ff
                           call 1090 <printf@plt>
  124d:
  1252: 83 c4 10
                                esp,0x10
  1255:
        b8 00 00 00 00
                                 eax.0x0
                           mov
                                 edx,DWORD PTR [ebp-0xc]
  125a: 8b 55 f4
  125d: 65 33 15 14 00 00 00
                                    xor edx, DWORD PTR gs:0x14
                               126b <vulfoo+0x5e>
  1264: 74 05
  1266: e8 e5 00 00 00
                           call 1350 < stack chk fail local>
  126b: 8b 5d fc
                                 ebx,DWORD PTR [ebp-0x4]
  126e: c9
                           leave
  126f: c3
                           ret
```



```
0000120d <vulfoo>:
  120d: f3 0f 1e fb
                           endbr32
  1211: 55
                           push ebp
  1212: 89 e5
                           mov ebp,esp
  1214: 53
                           push ebx
  1215: 81 ec 84 00 00 00 sub esp,0x84
  121b: e8 f0 fe ff ff
                           call 1110 < x86.get pc thunk.bx>
                                ebx,0x2db0
  1220: 81 c3 b0 2d 00 00
                          add
  1226: 65 a1 14 00 00 00
                                 eax,gs:0x14
                           mov
                                 DWORD PTR [ebp-0xc],eax
  122c: 89 45 f4
  122f: 31 c0
                               eax,eax
  1231: 83 ec 0c
                           sub
                                esp,0xc
  1234: 8d 85 7c ff ff ff
                               eax,[ebp-0x84]
  123a: 50
                           push eax
                           call 10a0 <gets@plt>
  123b: e8 60 fe ff ff
  1240: 83 c4 10
                                esp,0x10
  1243: 83 ec 0c
                                esp,0xc
  1246: 8d 85 7c ff ff ff
                               eax,[ebp-0x84]
                           lea
  124c:
         50
                           push eax
        e8 3e fe ff ff
                           call 1090 <printf@plt>
  124d:
  1252: 83 c4 10
                                esp,0x10
  1255:
        b8 00 00 00 00
                                 eax.0x0
                           mov
                                 edx,DWORD PTR [ebp-0xc]
  125a: 8b 55 f4
  125d: 65 33 15 14 00 00 00
                                    xor edx, DWORD PTR gs:0x14
                               126b <vulfoo+0x5e>
  1264: 74 05
  1266: e8 e5 00 00 00
                           call 1350 < stack chk fail local>
  126b: 8b 5d fc
                                 ebx,DWORD PTR [ebp-0x4]
  126e: c9
                           leave
  126f: c3
                           ret
```



### **Arbitrary Memory Read**

./formats2 < /tmp/exploit

```
int vulfoo(char *argv1)
       char buf[20];
       FILE *fp = NULL;
       printf(argv1);
       printf("\n");
      while (1)
             fp = fopen("/tmp/exploit", "r");
              if (fp)
                     break;}
      fread(buf, 1, 100, fp);
      fclose(fp);
       remove("/tmp/exploit");
       return 0;}
```

```
int main(int argc, char*argv[]) {
     if (argc != 3)
        return 0;
      printf("print_flag() is at %p\n", print_flag);
      vulfoo(argv[1]);
        return 0;
```

Canary enabled