Chapter 8: Recursion

Presentation slides for

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Recursion

Recursion is a fundamental programming technique that can provide elegant solutions certain kinds of problems.

Chapter 8 focuses on:

- thinking in a recursive manner
- programming in a recursive manner
- the correct use of recursion
- examples using recursion
- recursion in sorting
- recursion in graphics
Recursive Thinking

- **Recursion** is a programming technique in which a method can call itself to solve a problem.

- A *recursive definition* is one which uses the word or concept being defined in the definition itself; when defining an English word, a recursive definition usually is not helpful.

- But in other situations, a recursive definition can be an appropriate way to express a concept.

- Before applying recursion to programming, it is best to practice thinking recursively.
Recursive Definitions

Consider the following list of numbers:

24, 88, 40, 37

A list can be defined recursively

A LIST is a: number
or a: number comma LIST

That is, a LIST is defined to be a single number, or a number followed by a comma followed by a LIST

The concept of a LIST is used to define itself
Recursive Definitions

- The recursive part of the LIST definition is used several times, ultimately terminating with the non-recursive part:

  ```
  number comma LIST
  24 , 88, 40, 37

  number comma LIST
  88 , 40, 37

  number comma LIST
  40 , 37

  number
  37
  ```
Infinite Recursion

- All recursive definitions must have a non-recursive part.
- If they don't, there is no way to terminate the recursive path.
- A definition without a non-recursive part causes infinite recursion.
- This problem is similar to an infinite loop with the definition itself causing the infinite “loop”.
- The non-recursive part often is called the base case.
Recursive Definitions

- Mathematical formulas often are expressed recursively

- \( N! \), for any positive integer \( N \), is defined to be the product of all integers between 1 and \( N \) inclusive

- This definition can be expressed recursively as:
  
  \[
  1! = 1 \\
  N! = N \times (N-1)! 
  \]

- The concept of the factorial is defined in terms of another factorial until the base case of \( 1! \) is reached
Recursive Definitions

\[
5! = 5 \times 4! = 4 \times 3! = 3 \times 2! = 2 \times 1! = 1
\]
Recursive Programming

- A method in Java can invoke itself; if set up that way, it is called a recursive method.

- The code of a recursive method must be structured to handle both the base case and the recursive case.

- Each call to the method sets up a new execution environment, with new parameters and new local variables.

- As always, when the method execution completes, control returns to the method that invoked it (which may be an earlier invocation of itself).
Consider the problem of computing the sum of all the numbers between 1 and any positive integer \( N \), inclusive.

This problem can be expressed recursively as:

\[
\sum_{i=1}^{N} = N + \sum_{i=1}^{N-1} = N + (N-1) + \sum_{i=1}^{N-2} = \text{etc.}
\]
public int sum (int num) {
    int result;
    if (num == 1) {
        result = 1;
    } else {
        result = num + sum (num - 1);
    }
    return result;
}
Recursive Programming

```plaintext
main
  sum(3)
    sum
      sum(2)
        sum(1)
          result = 1
          result = 3
          result = 6
```
Recursion vs. Iteration

- Just because we can use recursion to solve a problem, doesn't mean we should.

- For instance, we usually would not use recursion to solve the sum of 1 to N problem, because the iterative version is easier to understand; in fact, there is a formula which is superior to both recursion and iteration!

- You must be able to determine when recursion is the correct technique to use.
Recursion vs. Iteration

- Every recursive solution has a corresponding iterative solution.

- For example, the sum (or the product) of the numbers between 1 and any positive integer \( N \) can be calculated with a for loop.

- Recursion has the overhead of multiple method invocations.

- Nevertheless, recursive solutions often are more simple and elegant than iterative solutions.
Indirect Recursion

- A method invoking itself is considered to be *direct recursion*.

- A method could invoke another method, which invokes another, etc., until eventually the original method is invoked again.

- For example, method $m_1$ could invoke $m_2$, which invokes $m_3$, which in turn invokes $m_1$ again until a base case is reached.

- This is called *indirect recursion*, and requires all the same care as direct recursion.

- It is often more difficult to trace and debug.
Indirect Recursion
Maze Traversal

- We can use recursion to find a path through a maze; a path can be found from any location if a path can be found from any of the location’s neighboring locations.

- At each location we encounter, we mark the location as “visited” and we attempt to find a path from that location’s “unvisited” neighbors.

- Recursion keeps track of the path through the maze.

- The base cases are an prohibited move or arrival at the final destination.
Maze Traversal

- See MazeSearch.java (page 473)
- See Maze.java (page 474)
The *Towers of Hanoi* is a puzzle made up of three vertical pegs and several disks that slide on the pegs.

The disks are of varying size, initially placed on one peg with the largest disk on the bottom with increasingly smaller disks on top.

The goal is to move all of the disks from one peg to another according to the following rules:

- We can move only one disk at a time
- We cannot place a larger disk on top of a smaller disk
- All disks must be on some peg except for the disk in transit between pegs
Towers of Hanoi

- A solution to the three-disk Towers of Hanoi puzzle
- See Figures 8.5 and 8.6
Towers of Hanoi

➢ To move a stack of N disks from the original peg to the destination peg
   • move the topmost N - 1 disks from the original peg to the extra peg
   • move the largest disk from the original peg to the destination peg
   • move the N-1 disks from the extra peg to the destination peg
   • The base case occurs when a “stack” consists of only one disk

➢ This recursive solution is simple and elegant even though the number of move increases exponentially as the number of disks increases

➢ The iterative solution to the Towers of Hanoi is much more complex
Towers of Hanoi

- See `SolveTowers.java` (page 479)
- See `TowersOfHanoi.java` (page 480)
Recursion in Sorting

Some sorting algorithms can be implemented recursively

We will examine two:

• Merge sort
• Quick sort
Merge Sort

- Merge sort divides a list in half, recursively sorts each half, and then combines the two lists.

- At the deepest level of recursion, one-element lists are reached.

- A one-element list is already sorted.

- The work of the sort comes in when the sorted sublists are merge together.

- Merge sort has efficiency $O(n \log n)$.

- See RecursiveSorts.java (page 483).
Quick Sort

- Quick sort partitions a list into two sublists and recursively sorts each sublist
- Partitioning is done by selecting a pivot value
- Every element less than the pivot is moved to the left of it
- Every element greater than the pivot is moved to the right of it
- The work of the sort is in the partitioning
- Quick sort has efficiency $O(n \log n)$
- See `RecursiveSorts.java` (page 483)
Consider the task of repeatedly displaying a set of tiled images in a mosaic in which one of the tiles contains a copy of the entire collage.

The base case is reached when the area for the “remaining” tile shrinks to a certain size.

See *TiledPictures.java* (page 490)
A fractal is a geometric shape that can consist of the same pattern repeated in different scales and orientations.

The Koch Snowflake is a particular fractal that begins with an equilateral triangle.

To get a higher order of the fractal, the middle of each edge is replaced with two angled line segments.
Fractals

- See Figure 8.9
- See KochSnowflake.java (page 493)
- See KochPanel.java (page 496)
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