

601.220 Intermediate Programming

Pointer Operations

Outline

- Pointer operations
- Pointer arithmetic for arrays
- Pointer difference type
- Pointers and c-strings

Pointer Operations

- Assignment
- Comparisons
- Arithmetic

Pointer Assignment

- `ptr1 = ptr2;` assignment works for pointers of the same type
- only the memory address in `ptr2` is copied
- they reference the same memory location
 - `*ptr1 = 10;` leads to `*ptr2 == 10` being true

Pointer Comparisons

- `ptr1 == ptr2` and `ptr1 != ptr2` compare the addresses inside the pointer variables for equality (do they point to the same memory location?)
- `ptr == NULL` will check if `ptr` is 0 (good initialization value to use)
- `ptr1 < ptr2` compares addresses
 - useful if pointer variables reference memory in the same array for example (similar to comparing indices)

Pointer Arithmetic

- Operators `+`, `-`, `+=`, `-=` can be used with other pointers or integers for the 2nd operand
- Most often used on pointers into arrays
- Doesn't add the actual number, it adds that number times how many bytes each element takes up based on the pointer base type
 - for variable `int * p`, code `p+1` will in fact add 4 bytes (`sizeof(int)`) to `p`'s address

Pointer Arithmetic and Arrays

- For a declared array like `int a[10]`, `a` is “really” just a (non-modifiable) address that starts a block of memory.
- Writing `a` is generally the same as writing `&a[0]`
- `a[3]` is a synonym for `*(a + 3)` (offset three from pointer to start of array)
- `&a[3]` is a synonym for `a + 3`

Pointer Arithmetic and Arrays - example

```
// pointerArith.c:
#include <stdio.h>
#include <stdlib.h>
int main() {

    int array[] = {2, 4, 6};

    printf("array[1] = %d, ", array[1]);
    printf(" *(array + 1) = %d, ", *(array+1));
    printf(" array = %p\n", (void *) array);
    printf(" &array[1] = %p, ", (void *) &array[1]);
    printf(" array + 1 = %p\n", (void *) (array + 1));
    return 0;
}
```

```
$ gcc -std=c99 -Wall -Wextra -pedantic pointerArith.c
$ ./a.out
array[1] = 4, *(array + 1) = 4, array = 0x7ffec6ceab1c
&array[1] = 0x7ffec6ceab20, array + 1 = 0x7ffec6ceab20
```


Checkpoint Poll!

What is the correct output?

```
#include <stdio.h>

int main() {
    int a[] = {1, 1, 2, 3, 4};
    printf("%d ", (*a) + 7);
    printf("%d ", *(a + 4));
    printf("%d ", *(&a[1] + 1));
    return 0;
}
```

A. 2 4 3

B. 8 4 2

C. 8 5 2

D. 7 4 2

E. The program does not compile and/or has an error.

Pointer difference (subtraction)

- `ptrdiff_t` is a predefined type in library `stddef.h`
- this is the resulting type when subtracting pointers (memory addresses)
- essentially equivalent to the long integer type

```
// pointerDiff.c:
#include <stdio.h>
#include <stddef.h>
int main() {

    int array[] = {2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16};
    int * start = &array[0]; // first element address
    int * end = &array[7]; // last element address
    ptrdiff_t capacity = end - start + 1; // number of elements in array

    printf("start = %p, ", (void *) start);
    printf("end = %p, ", (void *) end);
    printf("capacity = %ld\n", capacity); // print as long int
    return 0;
}

$ gcc -std=c99 -Wall -Wextra -pedantic pointerDiff.c
$ ./a.out
start = 0x7ffcd6663220, end = 0x7ffcd666323c, capacity = 8
```

Checkpoint Poll!

What is the correct output?

```
char str1[] = "original";  
char * str2;  
  
str2 = str1;  
*str2 = '0';  
str2 += 3;  
*str2 = 'G';  
str2 += 3;  
  
printf("%s %s\n", str1, str2);
```

- A. original Original
- B. original OriGinal
- C. OriGinal OriGinal
- D. OriGinal al
- E. The program does not compile and/or has an error.

Pointers vs. C-strings - common errors

Given these declarations

```
char str1[] = "original";  
char * str2;
```

- Why is this bad code? `strcpy(str2, str1);`
- Why is this bad code? `str1 += 3;`
- Why doesn't `str2 = str1;` make a copy of "original"?

Pointers vs. C-strings - common error explanations

Given these declarations

```
char str1[] = "original";  
char * str2;
```

- `strcpy(str2, str1);` will crash because memory for `str2` was never allocated
- `str1 += 3;` will not compile because we cannot change the address stored in a statically declared array variable
- `str2 = str1;` only copies the memory address stored in `str1`, not the whole array