

JAVA GENERICS

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Java Is Strongly Typed

- Or is it?
- I can write:

```
Double myDouble = new Double (12.3);  
ArrayList myList = new ArrayList ();  
myList.add (myDouble);  
Integer myInt = (Integer) myList.get (0);  
// compiles OK!
```

- What does this do?
 - Creates an ArrayList, which is a data structure holding type Object
 - Puts a Double in (OK since a Double in an object)
 - Takes that object out, tries to cast it into an Integer
 - Program barfs at runtime... in general, leads to lots o' bugs!
- This was the official “Java Programming Style” (TM) in 1998

Why'd People Code This Way?

- Everyone justifiably avoids copying/pasting code
- Want to write `ArrayList` (or other class) just once
 - And have it work with any type you send in
- Only way to do this way back when...
 - Is to hard code in the class the “highest” type that could ever go in
 - For a generic container this is “Object”
 - That way, you can put anything in
 - Then when you take it out, “downcast” to get original object back
- So despite evils of coding this way...
 - Was better than the alternative of copying/pasting code

Early On, Java Designers Realized Not Good

- Thus, idea of a “generic” type was introduced
- In modern Java, can now say:

```
Double myDouble = new Double (12.3);  
ArrayList <Double> myList = new ArrayList <Double> ();  
myList.add (myDouble);  
Integer myInt = (Integer) myList.get (0);  
// won't even compile!
```

- What's the diff?
 - Everything is almost exactly the same
 - But now, can tell the compiler that ArrayList holds only objects of type Double
 - Done via the “diamond” notation
 - As such, the compiler can catch the error in the last line

This Might Seem Like a Small Change

- But casting was a real problem in old-school Java
- In our trivial example, clear what is in the container
- But in general case, we have no idea
- People used type “Object” all over the place
- Practiced “cast and pray” programming
 - With generics, no need to ever cast again*
 - Except to do numeric conversions

*well, except for a few little problems...
(more at the end of this lecture/next time)

Historical Note

- Generics (aka “templates” in other languages)
 - Have been around for a long time
- Are a key feature of Ada, for example
- Many people vehemently argue that Java generics are unique
 - In particular, Java-heads seem really insecure wrt C++ templates
 - Java generics **are** unique in the sense that every realization of idea has its quirks
- But the goal is always the same, regardless of language
 - Allow people to easily re-use code (no copying and pasting) in a type-safe way

Let's Examine (Somewhat) Complex Example

- Fortunately, we can add complexity piece by piece
 - So hopefully not overwhelming
- Key thing: my example is NOT restricted to simple containers
 - In practice, most use of generics happens with simple containers
 - Things like using an “ArrayList <Double>” instead of an array list of “Object”s
 - I'll try to show you that the generic mechanism can be more powerful!

Let's Examine (Somewhat) Complex Example

- Say we want to have a generic set of objects
- And we want to associate with that set...
 - A method that computes the sum over all of the objects in the set
 - We want this code to be trivially reusable for **any** type where sum makes sense
 - How would you accomplish this?
 - Use generics!

Our First Generic Interface

```
interface ISummable <T> {  
    void addYourselfTo (T addToMe);  
}
```

- OK, so what's the deal here?
- We have defined an interface called “ISummable”
 - We've seen plenty of interfaces before!
- The only difference is that **this interface is parameterized**
 - Something can implement “ISummable of type T” only if it has the ability to add itself to an object of type T
 - Where T is some (any) arbitrary type
 - Ex: something can implement “ISummable of type Double” only if it has the ability to add itself to an object of type Double

Now Let's Use ISummable

- Please note I'm gonna skip the abstract class only for clarity

- Don't want to make generics more puzzling than they already are

```
class ChrisInt extends ISummable <ChrisInt> {  
    private Integer myVal;  
  
    public ChrisInt (int val) {myVal = val;}  
  
    public void addYourselfTo (ChrisInt addToMe) {  
        addToMe.myVal += myVal;  
    }  
}
```

- What's going on here?

- You're telling the world that ChrisInt can sum itself with ChrisInt objects

- And the compiler will make sure you are telling the truth!

- It'll check to see you have method “public void addYourselfTo (ChrisInt)”

We Can Build This Up Further

- Let's say we now want our set that can automatically sum itself
- Just have:

```
class SummableSet <T extends ISummable <T>> {  
  
}
```

- What is this saying?

- Class “SummableSet” is parameterized on a type
- That type is “<T extends ISummable <T>>”
- This will match any type that is declared using

```
class SomeTypeHere extends ISummable <SomeTypeHere> {}
```

- And for this declaration to hold, the class must provide a method of the form

```
public void addYourselfTo (SomeTypeHere foo) {}
```

Implementing SummableSet

```
class SummableSet <T extends ISummable <T>> {
    ArrayList <T> myData = new ArrayList <T> ();

    void addItem (T addMe) {
        myData.add (addMe);
    }

    T getSum () {
        T sum = null;
        for (T curItem : myData) {
            if (sum != null)
                curItem.addYourselfTo (sum);
            else
                sum = curItem;
        }
        return sum;
    }
}
```

Using SummableSet

- Easy!

```
SummableSet <ChrisInt> foo = new SummableSet <ChrisInt> ();  
...  
ChrisInt result = foo.getSum ();
```

- So what do we get from this?

- We can now use “SummableSet” over any type that can be added to itself
- And the compiler checks everything, so there’s no possibility of type errors
- In the “old-school” Java way of doing things, there would have been several casts
- Using generics, there is little room for error!

Using SummableSet

- Can easily create a SummableSet of polynomials...

— First define the “Polynomial” class

```
class Polynomial implements ISummable <Polynomial> {  
  
    private ArrayList <Double> coefs = new ArrayList<Double> ();  
    ...  
  
    public void addYourselfTo (Polynomial addToMe) {  
        int i = 0;  
        // this nasty code adds my coefs to his  
        for (; i < coefs.size () && i < addToMe.coefs.size (); i++) {  
            addToMe.coefs.set (i, addToMe.coefs.get (i) + coefs.get (i));  
        }  
        // and then inserts any additional coefs to the other one  
        for (; i < coefs.size (); i++) {  
            addToMe.coefs.add (coefs.get (i));  
        }  
    }  
}
```

Using SummableSet

- Can easily create a SummableSet of polynomials...

— First define the “Polynomial” class

```
class Polynomial implements ISummable <Polynomial> {
```

- And then we’re good to go!

```
SummableSet <Polynomial> foo =  
    new SummableSet <Polynomial> ();
```

A Few Thoughts

- As intimated before...
 - Much use of generics is for simple containers
 - So you get class definitions like:

```
class Stack <T> { }
```
 - This is fine and useful
- But you are using the generic mechanism at its full power when
 - The type argument implements some interface
 - Because then you can implement **algorithms** in a generic way
 - You abstract out the ops you need from the data being operated on by the alg
 - Put them in an interface
 - Don't worry about anything else
- This is exactly what we did with “SummableSet”

How Does This Differ From “Classic” Inher.?

- Consider what our example looks like w/o generics:

```
class SummableSet {
    ArrayList <ISummable> myData =
        new ArrayList <ISummable> ();

    void addItem (ISummable addMe) {
        myData.add (addMe);
    }
    ...
}
```

- What are the key diffs?

How Does This Differ From “Classic” Inher.?

- Consider what our example looks like w/o generics:

```
class SummableSet {
    ArrayList <ISummable> myData =
        new ArrayList <ISummable> ();

    void addItem (ISummable addMe) {
        myData.add (addMe);
    }
    ...
}
```

- What are the key diffs?

- Someone is free to put *anything* implementing ISummable into SummableSet
- Can mix all sorts of different types in there
- How to deal with “addYourselfTo” to make sure we don’t add mismatched types?
- Well, in each implementation, would need to cast to verify correctness...

How Does This Differ From “Classic” Inher.?

```
class ChrisInt extends ISummable {  
    private Integer myVal;  
  
    public ChrisInt (int val) {myVal = val;}  
  
    public void addYourselfTo (ISummable addToMe) {  
        ChrisInt temp = (ChrisInt) addToMe;  
        temp.myVal += myVal;  
    }  
}
```

- Note the cast: could fail at runtime! Really bad!
- With generics, compiler prevents any of these errors

Questions?