Topic 2

Collections
Objectives

• Define the concepts and terminology related to collections
• Discuss the abstract design of collections
Collections

**Collection**: a group of items that we wish to treat as a conceptual unit

- *Example*: a stamp collection

- In computer science, we have collections of items also
  - *Examples*: stack, queue, list, tree, graph

- The proper choice of a collection for a given problem can affect the efficiency of a solution!
Examples of Collections

• What do collections look like?
  • *Queue*: first item in is first item out
    • e.g. a lineup at a checkout counter
  • *Stack*: last item in is first item out
    • e.g. a stack of plates in the cafeteria
  • *List*: we can have ordered lists or unordered lists
    • e.g. a shopping list; a list of names and phone numbers; a to-do list
Example: stack of plates

New plate is added at the top of the stack, and will be the first one removed.
Example: queue at checkout

First person served will be the one at the front of queue

New person is added to the rear of the queue
Example: ordered list of numbers

New number must be added so that the ordering of the list is maintained

16  23  29  40  51  67  88

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Examples of Collections

- The previous examples are *linear collections*: items are organized in a “straight line”
  - Each item except the first has a unique *predecessor*, and each item except the last has a unique *successor* within the collection
Examples of Collections

• We also have *nonlinear collections*

• **Hierarchical collections**: *trees*
  - items are ordered in an “upside down tree”
  - Each item except the one at the top has a unique predecessor but may have *many* successors

• *Examples*: taxonomies, computer file systems
Example of a tree: computer file system

Root directory of C drive

Documents and Settings
  - Desktop
  - Favorites
  - Start Menu

Program Files
  - Adobe

My Music
  - Microsoft Office
Examples of Collections

• Another nonlinear collection is a graph: items can have many predecessors and many successors
  • Example: maps of airline routes between cities
Example of a graph: airline routes between cities
Abstraction

- In solving problems in computer science, an important design principle is the notion of **abstraction**
- Abstraction separates the **purpose** of an entity from its **implementation**
  - **Example in real life**: a car (we do not have to know how an engine works in order to drive a car)
  - **Examples in computer systems**: a computer, a file
  - **Example in Java**: class, object
Abstraction

- Abstraction provides a way of dealing with the complexity of a large system.
- We will deal with each collection in a general way, as a data abstraction.
- We will think of what we want to do with the collection, independently of how it is done.
  - For example, we may want to add something to a queue, or to remove it from the queue.
Collection as an Abstraction

- Example: think of a queue of customers
  - Suppose *what* we want to do is to deal with the first customer in the queue, i.e. *dequeue* a customer
  - *How* is this dequeue done?
    - We may not need to know, if someone else looked after the details
    - Or, if we are involved in the “how”
      - We may choose to program in Java or some other language
      - There may be several ways of implementing a queue that differ in efficiency
Collection as an Abstraction

• In other words, we want to separate
  • The *interface* of the collection: *what* we need in order to interact with it, i.e. the operations on the collection
    • This is from the perspective of a *user* of the collection
  • The *implementation* of the collection: the underlying details of *how* it is coded
    • This is from the perspective of a *writer* of the collection code
Issues with Collections

• For each collection that we examine, we will consider:
  • How does the collection operate conceptually?
  • How do we formally define its interface?
  • What kinds of problems does it help us solve?
  • In what ways might we implement it?
  • What are the benefits and costs of each implementation?
Abstract Data Types (ADTs)

• **Data type**: a set of values and the operations defined on those values
  • Example: integer data type (**int**)
  • Values? operations?

• **Abstract data type**: a *collection of data* together with the *set of operations on that data*
  • Why *abstract*? It’s a data type whose values and operations are **not** inherently defined in a programming language
  • **Examples**: stack, queue, list, tree
Data Structures

- **Data structure**: a construct within a programming language, used to implement a collection
  - **Example**: array, C++ structure
- So, what is the difference between the terms “abstract data type” and “data structure”?
  - (Note that sometimes the terms are used interchangeably, in generalizations about “data structures”)