Advanced C# Constructs

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Semester 1 2021/22

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Advanced C# Features

We will cover the following *advanced* C# features:

- Collections
- Indexers
- Generics
- Exceptions
- Delegates

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Collections

- *Collections* provide a general framework for putting objects of the same type together.
- Examples are arrays, or pre-defined classes Stack, List, Queue, Dictionary.
- Constructs are available to iterate over all elements of a collection.
- A user-defined class can be made a collection by implementing certain interfaces such as `IEnumerable` or `ICollection`.

[0] http://www.macs.hw.ac.uk/~hwloidl/Courses/F21SC/Samples/container.cs

Indexers

- **Indexers make it possible to *treat a class as if it were an array.***
- **An indexer is a special kind of property.**
- **It defines get and set methods, which are parametrised by an index argument.**
- **Read and write uses of the class in array notation are then translated into calls to these get and set methods.**

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Indexer Example

```
1  public class ListBox {
2    private string[] strings;
3    private int ctr = 0;
4
5    public ListBox (params string[] initStrs) {
6      strings = new String[256];
7      foreach (string s in initStrs) {
8        strings[ctr++] = s;
9      }
10   }
11   public void Add (string s) {
12    if (ctr >= strings.Length) {
13          // ToDo: handle overflow
14    } else {
15          strings[ctr++] = s;
16   }  }
```

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Indexer Example (cont'd)

```
1  // indexer
2  public string this[int index] {
3    get {
4      if (index<0 || index>=strings.Length) {
5        // handle error case
6      } else {
7        return strings[index];
8      }
9    }
10   set {
11     if (index >= ctr) {
12       // handle error case
13     }  else {
14       strings[index] = value;
15     }
16   } }
17 public int GetNumEntries() { return ctr; }  }
```

Using the Indexer

We can now treat the ListBox class like an array of strings, eg.

```
1 for (int i = 0; i<lbt.GetNumEntries(); i++) {
2   Console.WriteLine("lbt[{0}]: {1}", i, lbt[i]);
3 }
```

[0] http://www.macs.hw.ac.uk/~hwloidl/Courses/F21SC/Samples/indexers1.cs

Using the Indexer

We can now treat the ListBox class like an array of strings, eg.

```
1 for (int i = 0; i<lbt.GetNumEntries(); i++) {
2   Console.WriteLine("lbt[{0}]: {1}", i, lbt[i]);
3 }
```

Object `lbt` is treated like an array

[0] http://www.macs.hw.ac.uk/~hwloidl/Courses/F21SC/Samples/indexers1.cs

Generics

- So far we always had to specify the concrete element type of a collection.
- *Generics* offer the possibility to *leave the type of an element undefined*.
- To this end a *type-variable* is specified.
- An example is the pre-defined List class:
  `public class List<T> { ... }`
- `T` is a type-variable, which stands for the element type of the list.
- The methods in the class work over any basis type T, i.e. they are *polymorphic*.
- When using the list you specify the element type, eg.
  `List<int> myList = new List<int>();`

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Generic Classes

- Other pre-defined generic classes are:
  - `List<T>`
  - `Stack<T>`
  - `Queue<T>`
  - `Dictionary<K,V>`
- It is possible to restrict the type variable:

```
1 public class Node<T> where T:IComparable
```

- It can only be instantiated for a type that implements the `IComparable` interface.

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Generic Interfaces

- **Several generic interfaces can be implemented to make iteration over collections simpler.**
- **With an implementation of the `IEnumerable<T>` interface it is possible to use a `foreach` loop on the collection.**

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Generic Interface Example

```
1  public class ListBox : IEnumerable<String> {
2    private string[] strings;
3    private int ctr = 0;
4
5    // enumerator
6    public IEnumerator<string> GetEnumerator() {
7     foreach (string s in strings) {
8       yield return s;
9    }
10   // required to fulfill IEnumerable
11   System.Collections.IEnumerator System.Collections.
        IEnumerable.GetEnumerator(){
12     throw new NotImplementedException();
13   }
```

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Using the Enumerator

Now we can use a foreach loop on a `ListBox lbt`:

```
1 foreach (string s in lbt) {
2   Console.WriteLine("Value: {0}", s);
3 }
```

Using the Enumerator

Now we can use a foreach loop on a `ListBox lbt`:

Object `lbt` is used as a container

```
1 foreach (string s in lbt) {
2   Console.WriteLine("Value: {0}", s);
3 }
```

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Exceptions

- *Exceptions* provide language constructs to deal with foreseen error cases in the code.
- For example when accessing an array an exception should be thrown if the index is out of range.
- An exception is an object that contains information about the error.
- An exception handler then deals with the error case.
- The handler can be defined in the method itself, or in any of the calling methods.
- *No exception should be unhandled.*

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Exceptions Example

Checking for array bounds in `ListBox`:

```
1 public string this[int index] {
2   get {
3     if (index <0 || index>=strings.Length)    {
4       throw new OutOfBoundsException();
5     } else {
6       return strings[index];
7     }
8   }
```

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Exceptions Example

A concrete exception class must inherit from the Exception class:

```
1 public class OutOfBoundsException : System.Exception {
2     public OutOfBoundsException(string msg) {
3       base(msg);
4     }
5 }
```

An exception is caught by attaching an exception handler to the code, eg.

```
1 try {
2     x = lbt[i]; // dangerous code
3  } catch (OutOfBoundsException e) {
4     Console.WriteLine("Index␣out␣of␣bounds;␣msg:␣{0}",
          e.Message);
5 }
```

Delegates

- ***Delegates*** **are the objected-oriented technique for defining** ***higher-order functions*****, i.e.** ***functions that can take other functions as arguments*****.**
- **A delegate refers to a** ***method.***
- **To declare a delegate the type of a method is specified, e.g.**

```
1 public delegate int FindResult(object o1, object
      o2);
```

- **A concrete method can be instantiated for the delegate if it matches its result and parameter types.**
- **Anonymous methods or lambda abstractions can also be instantiated for a delegate.**

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Delegates Example

We design a class for storing and playing media, eg.

```
1 public class MediaStorage {
2   public delegate int PlayMedia();
3   public void ReportResult(PlayMedia playerDelegate) {
4     if (playerDelegate() == 0) {
5       Console.WriteLine("Media␣played␣successfully");
6     } else {
7       Console.WriteLine("Error␣in␣playing␣media.");
8     }
9 }
```

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Delegates Discussion

- In the `ReportResult` method the `playerDelegate` is called, which refers to a concrete method without fixing it in the code.
- At compile time only the type of the delegate needs to be known.
- At run-time the delegate must be instantiated with one concrete method.
- This is the same abstraction step as it is done for data when using an (abstract) class as base type, and instantiating it with a sub-class at run-time.

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Delegates Example (cont'd)

Now the ReportResult method can be applied for different kinds of players, eg.

```
1 public class AudioPlayer {
2    private int audioPlayerStatus;
3    public int PlayAudioFile() {
4       Console.WriteLine("Playing␣audio␣file");
5       audioPlayerStatus = 0;
6       return audioPlayerStatus;
7    }
8  }
```

Using Delegates

To use the delegate we instantiate it to a concrete player.

```
1  MediaStorage ms = new MediaStorage();
2  AudioPlayer aPlayer = new AudioPlayer();
3  VideoPlayer vPlayer = new VideoPlayer();
4  // instantiate the delegate
5  MediaStorage.PlayMedia aDelegate =
6    new MediaStorage.PlayMedia(aPlayer.PlayAudioFile);
7  MediaStorage.PlayMedia vDelegate =
8    new MediaStorage.PlayMedia(vPlayer.PlayVideoFile);
9  // provide instances to the method using the delegate
10 ms.ReportResult(aDelegate);
11 ms.ReportResult(vDelegate);
```

[0] http://www.macs.hw.ac.uk/~hwloidl/Courses/F21SC/Samples/delegates1.cs

Delegates and GUIs

- One frequent application of delegates is in GUI programming, when handling *events.*
- An event is for example a mouse click.
- In the GUI code a delegate is used to refer to the method that will handle the mouse click.
- In the application code an instance for the delegate is provided to perform the actual work.
- This achieves a separation of concerns between the GUI and the application.

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Another Delegate Example

We want to implement a way to apply a function twice.

```
1  class TestClass {
2    public static int Double(int val) {
3      return val*2;
4    }
5
6    public static void Main(string []args) {
7      ...
8      Console.WriteLine("Applying␣double␣once␣on␣{0}␣
           gives␣{1}",
9        x, TestClass.Double(x));
10     Console.WriteLine("Applying␣double␣twice␣on␣{0}␣
           gives␣{1}",
11       x, Twice.twice(Double, x));
12     }
13   }
14 }
```

How can we implement a class `Twice` with a method `twice`?

```
1  // simple higher-order example, using delegates
2  // this class takes an int -> int function and applies
       it twice
3  public class Twice {
4    // delegate, specifying the type of the function
       argument
5    public delegate int Worker(int i);
6
7    // the higher-order function twice applies the
8    // worker function twice
9    public static int twice(Worker worker, int x) {
10     return worker(worker(x));
11   }
12 }
```

[0] http://www.macs.hw.ac.uk/~hwloidl/Courses/F21SC/Samples/delegates2.cs

Anonymous Methods

- When instantiating a delegate with a very short method it is cumbersome to define a method only to provide an instance to the delegate.
- In these cases *anonymous methods* can be used, e.g. for increasing its argument:
  ```
  delegate(ref int counter) { counter++; }
  ```
- This form can be used instead of the name of a concrete method.

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Lambda Expressions

- *Lambda expressions* are a generalisation of anonymous methods.
- They behave like (unnamed) functions in a functional language, e.g. double a value: `(int i) => { 2*i };`
- or just: `i => 2*i`
- Whereas anonymous methods can only be used in the context of delegates, lambda expressions can be used wherever a method is expected.
- This is used for example in the Language Integrated Query (LINQ) engine of C# for accessing databases.

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Summary

- These advanced features provide powerful tools of abstraction, to generate re-usable code.
- They enable structured control over *collections*, adapting language features such as foreach loops to user-defined classes.
- They enable the *abstraction over types, through generics.*
- They enable the *abstraction over methods, through delegates,* in a way similar to abstracting data through class hierarchies.
- Be aware of these language concepts when you design your application: their use can save a lot of code and programming effort.

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Exercises

- Modify the *binary search tree* example, using generics over the element type. Implement an indexer, for direct access to the i-th element, and an enumerator, to enable foreach loops.
- Use *delegates* to define a method that applies a method to every element of a tree.

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