CS 520

Theory and Practice of Software Engineering
Fall 2019

Reasoning about Programs

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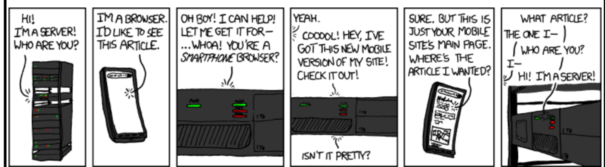
Reasoning about programs



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Ways to verify your code

- The hard way:
  - Make up some inputs
  - If it doesn't crash, ship it
  - When it fails in the field, attempt to debug
- The easier way:
  - Reason about possible behavior and desired outcomes
  - Construct simple tests that exercise that behavior
- Another way that can be easy
  - Prove that the system does what you want
    - Rep invariants are preserved
    - Implementation satisfies specification
  - Proof can be formal or informal (today, we will be informal)
  - Complementary to testing

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Reasoning about code

- Determine what facts are true during execution
  - x > 0
  - for all nodes n: n.next.previous == n
  - array a is sorted
  - x + y == z
  - if x != null, then x.a > x.b
- Applications:
  - Ensure code is correct (via reasoning or testing)
  - Understand why code is incorrect

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Forward reasoning

- You know what is true before running the code
  What is true after running the code?
- Given a precondition, what is the postcondition?
- Applications:
  Representation invariant holds before running code
  Does it still hold after running code?
- Example:
  ```
  // precondition: x is even
  x = x + 3;
  y = 2x;
  x = 5;
  // postcondition: ??
  ```

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Backward reasoning

- You know what you want to be true after running the code
  What must be true beforehand in order to ensure that?
- Given a postcondition, what is the corresponding precondition?
- Applications:
  (Re-)establish rep invariant at method exit: what's required?
  Reproduce a bug: what must the input have been?
- Example:
  ```
  // precondition: ??
  x = x + 3;
  y = 2x;
  x = 5;
  // postcondition: y > x
  ```
- How did you (informally) compute this?

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Forward vs. backward reasoning

- Forward reasoning is more intuitive for most people
  - Helps understand what will happen (simulates the code)
  - Introduces facts that may be irrelevant to goal
    - Set of current facts may get large
  - Takes longer to realize that the task is hopeless
- Backward reasoning is usually more helpful
  - Helps you understand what should happen
  - Given a specific goal, indicates how to achieve it
  - Given an error, gives a test case that exposes it

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Forward reasoning example

```
assert x >= 0;
i = x;
    // x ≥ 0 & i = x
z = 0;
    // x ≥ 0 & i = x & z = 0
while (i != 0) {        ⇐ What property holds here?
  z = z + 1;
  i = i –1;             ⇐ What property holds here?
}
    // x ≥ 0 & i = 0 & z = x
assert x == z;
```

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Backward reasoning

Technique for backward reasoning:

- Compute the weakest precondition (wp)
- There is a wp rule for each statement in the programming language
- Weakest precondition yields strongest specification for the computation (analogous to function specifications)

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Assignment

```
// precondition: ??
x = e;
// postcondition: Q
```

Precondition: Q with all (free) occurrences of x replaced by e

- Example:

```
// assert: ??
x = x + 1;
// assert x > 0
```

Precondition = (x+1) > 0

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Method calls

```
// precondition: ??
x = foo();
// postcondition: Q
```

- If the method has no side effects: just like ordinary assignment
- If it has side effects: an assignment to every variable it modifies

Use the method specification to determine the new value

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If statements

```
// precondition: ??
if (b) S1 else S2
// postcondition: Q
```

Essentially case analysis:

wp("if (b) S1 else S2", Q) =

(b ⇒ wp("S1", Q)

∧ ¬ b ⇒ wp("S2", Q))

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If: an example

```
// precondition: ??
if (x == 0) {
   x = x + 1;
} else {
   x = (x/x);
}
// postcondition:  x ≥ 0
```

Precondition:

wp("if (x==0) {x = x+1} else {x = x/x}", $x \geq 0$) =

= ($x = 0 \Rightarrow$ wp("x = x+1", $x \geq 0$)

  & $x \neq 0 \Rightarrow$ wp("x = x/x", $x \geq 0$))

= $(x = 0 \Rightarrow x + 1 \geq 0)$ & $(x \neq 0 \Rightarrow x/x \geq 0)$

= $1 \geq 0$ & $1 \geq 0$

= true

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Reasoning About Loops

- A loop represents an unknown number of paths
  - Case analysis is problematic
  - Recursion presents the same issue
- Cannot enumerate all paths
  - That is what makes testing and reasoning hard

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Loops: values and termination

```
// assert x ≥ 0 & y = 0
while (x != y) {
    y = y + 1;
}
// assert x = y
```

1) Pre-assertion guarantees that $x \geq y$

2) Every time through loop

$x \geq y$ holds and, if body is entered, $x > y$

y is incremented by 1

x is unchanged

Therefore, y is closer to x (but $x \geq y$ still holds)

3) Since there are only a finite number of integers between x and y, y will eventually equal x

4) Execution exits the loop as soon as x = y

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Understanding loops by induction

- We just made an inductive argument
  Inducting over the number of iterations
- Computation induction
  Show that conjecture holds if zero iterations
  Assume it holds after n iterations and show it holds after n+1
- There are two things to prove:
  Some property is preserved (known as "partial correctness")
    loop invariant is preserved by each iteration
  The loop completes (known as "termination")
    The "decrementing function" is reduced by each iteration

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Loop invariant for the example

```
// assert x ≥ 0 & y = 0
while (x != y) {
    y = y + 1;
}
// assert x = y
```

- So, what is a suitable invariant?
- What makes the loop work?

Loop Invariant (LI) = $x \geq y$

When you start, LI holds

While in the loop, LI holds

After the loop, postcondition holds

1) $x \geq 0$ & $y = 0 \Rightarrow$ LI

2) LI & $x \neq y$ {y = y+1;} LI

3) (LI & $\neg(x \neq y)$) $\Rightarrow$ x = y

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Is anything missing?

```
// assert x ≥ 0 & y = 0
while (x != y) {
    y = y + 1;
}
// assert x = y
```

Does the loop terminate?

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Decrementing Function

- Decrementing function D(X)
  - Maps state (program variables) to some well-ordered set
  - This greatly simplifies reasoning about termination
- Consider: `while (b) S;`
- We seek D(X), where X is the state, such that
  1. An execution of the loop reduces the function's value: LI & b {S} $D(X_{post}) < D(X_{pre})$
  2. If the function's value is minimal, the loop terminates: (LI & D(X) = minVal) $\Rightarrow \neg$b

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Proving Termination

```
// assert x ≥ 0 & y = 0
// Loop invariant: x ≥ y
// Loop decrements: (x-y)
while (x != y) {
     y = y + 1;
}
// assert x = y
```

- Is "x-y" a good decrementing function?

1. Does the loop reduce the decrementing function's value?
   // assert (y != x); let d_{pre} = (x – y)
   y = y + 1;
   // assert ($x_{post} - y_{post}$) < d_{pre}
2. If the function has minimum value, does the loop exit?
   (x >= y & x – y = 0) → (x = y)

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Choosing Loop Invariant

- For straight-line code, the wp (weakest precondition) function gives us the appropriate property
- For loops, you have to guess:
  - The loop invariant
  - The decrementing function
- Then, use reasoning techniques to prove the goal property
- If the proof doesn't work:
  - Maybe you chose a bad invariant or decrementing function
    - Choose another and try again
  - Maybe the loop is incorrect
    - Fix the code
- Automatically choosing loop invariants is a research topic

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In practice

I don't routinely write loop invariants

I do write them when I am unsure about a loop and when I have evidence that a loop is not working

- Add invariant and decrementing function if missing
- Write code to check them
- Understand why the code doesn't work
- Reason to ensure that no similar bugs remain

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More on Induction

- Induction is a very powerful tool

$$2^n = 1 + \sum_{k=1}^{n} 2^{k-1}$$

Proof by induction: Base Case

For n=1, $1 + \sum_{k=1}^{1} 2^{k-1} = 1 + 2^0 = 1 + 1 = 2 = 2^1$

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Inductive Step

Assume $2^m = 1 + \sum_{k=1}^{m} 2^{k-1}$ and show that $2^{m+1} = 1 + \sum_{k=1}^{m+1} 2^{k-1}$

$$2^{m+1} = 1 + \sum_{k=1}^{m+1} 2^{k-1} = 1 + \sum_{k=1}^{m} 2^{k-1} + 2^m = 2^m + 2^m = 2 \times 2^m = 2^{m+1}$$

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Is Induction Too Powerful?

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