
CSE 413

Programming Languages &
Implementation

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Autumn 2012

Ruby Containers, Blocks, and Procs

The Plan

- Ruby container data structures
- Blocks and control structures (iterators, etc.)
- Blocks and first-class closures

- Later:
 - Duck typing
 - Inheritance
 - Modules and mixins

Containers in Ruby

- Like most scripting languages, Ruby provides very general container classes
- Two major kinds
 - Arrays: ordered by position
 - Hashes: collections of <key, value> pairs
 - Often known as associative arrays, maps, or dictionaries
 - Unordered

Ruby Arrays

- Instances of class **Array**
- Create with an array literal, or **Array.new**

```
words = [ "how", "now", "brown", "cow" ]  
stuff = [ "thing", 413, nil ]  
seq = Array.new
```
- Indexed with `[]` operator, 0-origin; negative indices count from right

```
words[0]   stuff[2]   words[-2]  
seq[1] = "something"
```

Ruby Hashes

- Instances of class `Hash`
- Create with an hash literal, or `Hash.new`

```
pets = { "spot"=>"dog", "puff"=>"cat" }  
tbl = Array.new
```

- Indexed with `[]` operator

```
pets["puff"]    pets["fido"]  
Pets["cheeta"] = "monkey"
```

- Can use almost anything as key type; can use anything as element type

Containers and Iterators

- All containers respond to the message “each”, executing a block of code for each item in the container

```
words.each { puts "another word" }
```

```
words.each { | w | puts w }
```

Blocks

- A block is a sequence of statements surrounded by `{ ... }` or `do ... end`
- Blocks must appear immediately following the method call that executes them, on the same line
- Blocks may have 1 or more parameters at the beginning surrounded by `| ... |`
 - Initialized by the method that runs (executes, “calls”) the block

Blocks as Closures

- Blocks can access variables in surrounding scopes

```
Wordlist = ""  
words.each { |w| wordlist = wordlist +  
              w + " " }
```

- These are almost, but not quite, first-class closures (some differences in scope rules compared to Racket)

More Block Uses

- Besides iterating through containers, blocks are used in many other contexts

```
3.times { puts "hello" }
```

```
n = 0
```

```
100.times { | k | n += k }
```

```
puts "sum of 0 + ... + 99 is " + n
```

Block Execution

- Any method call can be followed by a block. The block is executed by the method – when depends on the method
- A block is executed in the context of the method call
 - Block has access to variables at the call location
 - Return in a block returns from surrounding method(!)

```
def search(x, words)
  words.each { | w | if x==w return }
  puts "not found"
end
```

yield

- Any method call can be followed by a trailing block. A method “calls” the block with a `yield` statement.

```
def repeat
```

```
  yield
```

```
  yield
```

```
end
```

```
repeat { puts "hello" }
```

Output:

```
hello
```

```
hello
```

yield with arguments

- If the block has parameters, use expressions with yield to pass arguments

```
def xvii
  yield 17
end
xvii { | n | puts n+1 }
```

- This is exactly how an iterator works

Blocks are “second-class”

- Blocks (and methods) are not objects in Ruby – i.e., not things that can be passed around as first-class values
- All a method can do with a block is `yield` to it (i.e., call it)
 - Can’t return it, store it in an object, etc.
 - But can also turn blocks into real closures (next slide)

First-class closures

- Implicit block arguments and `yield` are often sufficient
- But when you want a closure that can be returned, stored, passed as an argument:
 - The built-in `Proc` class
 - `Lambda` method of `Object` takes a block and makes a `Proc`
 - Instances of `Proc` have a `call` method that can be used to execute them

Creating Procs: examples

- Create a `Proc` object explicitly

```
p = Proc.new { | x, y | x+y }  
...  
p.call(x,y)
```

- Use Object's `lambda` method

```
is_positive = lambda { |x| x > 0 }
```

Procs vs. Lambdas

- A Proc is a block wrapped in an object – and behaves just like a block
 - In particular, a return in a Proc will return from the *surrounding* method where the Proc's closure was created
 - Error if that method has already terminated
- A Lambda is more like a method
 - Return just exits from the lambda