CSE 374
Programming Concepts & Tools

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Lecture 4 – Shell Variables, More Shell Scripts

Where we are

- We understand most of the bash shell and its “programming language”. Final pieces we’ll consider:
  - Shell variables
    - Defining your own
    - Built-in meanings
    - Exporting
  - Arithmetic
  - For loops
- End with:
  - A long list of gotchas (some bash-specific; some common to shells)
  - Why long shell scripts are a bad idea, etc.

Shell variables

- We already know a shell has state: current working directory, streams, users, aliases, history.
- Its state also includes shell variables that hold **strings**.
  - Always strings even if they are “123” – but you can do math
- Features:
  - Change variables’ values: foo=blah
  - Add new variables: foo=blah or foo=
  - Use variable: ${foo} (braces sometimes optional)
  - Remove variables: unset foo
  - See what variables “are set”: set
- Omitted feature: Functions and local variables (see manual)
- Roughly “all variables are global (visible everywhere)”
- Only assignment is similar to mainstream “real” programming languages

Why variables?

- Variables are useful in scripts, just like in “normal” programming.
- “Special” variables affect shell operation. 3 most (?) common:
  - PATH
  - PS1
  - HOME
- Some variables make sense only when the shell is reading from a script:
  - $#, $n (where n is an integer), $@, $*, $?

Export

- If a shell runs another program (perhaps a bash script), does the other program “see the current variables that are set”?
  - i.e., are the shell variables part of the initial environment of the new program?
- It depends.
  - export foo – yes it will see value of foo
  - export -n foo – no it will not see value of foo
  - Default is no.
- If the other program sets an exported variable, does the outer shell see the change?
- No.
  - Somewhat like “call by value” parameters in conventional languages
  - Remember, each new program (and shell) is launched as a separate processs with its own state, environment, etc.

Arithmetic

- Variables are strings, so k=$i+$j is not addition.
- But ((k=$i+$j)) is (and in fact the $ is optional here).
- So is let k="$i + $j".
- The shell converts the strings to numbers, silently using 0 as necessary.

For loops

- Syntax:

  for v in w_1 w_2 ... w_n

  do

  body

  done

- Execute body n times, with v set to w_i on i^{th} one. (Afterwards, v=w_n).
- Why so convenient?
  - Use a filename pattern after in
  - Use list of argument strings after in: "$@"

Quoting

- Does x=* set x to string-holding-asterisk or string-holding-all-filenames?
- If $x is *, does ls $x list all-files or file named asterisk?
- Are variables expanded in double-quotes? single-quotes?
- Could consult the manual, but honestly it's easier to start a shell and experiment. For example:

```
x="*"
echo x
echo $x
echo "$x"    (Double quotes suppress some substitutions)
echo '$x'    (Single quotes suppress all substitutions)
...
```

Gotchas: A very partial list

1. Typo in variable name on left: create new variable oops=7
2. Typo in variable use: get empty string – ls $oops
3. Use same variable name again: clobber other use HISTFILE=uhoh
4. Spaces in variables: use double-quotes if you mean “one word”
5. Non-number used as number: end up with 0
6. set f=blah: apparently does nothing (assignment in csh)
7. Many, many more…

Shell programming revisited

- How do Java programming and shell programming compare?
- The shell:
  - “shorter”
  - convenient file-access, file-tests, program-execution, pipes
  - crazy quoting rules and syntax
  - also interactive
- Java:
  - none of the previous gotchas
  - local variables, modularity, typechecking, array-checking, . . .
  - real data structures, libraries, regular syntax
- Rough rule of thumb: Don’t write shell scripts over 200 lines?

Treatment of strings

- Suppose foo is a variable that holds the string hello

	Java	Bash
Use variable (get “hello”)	foo	$foo
The string foo	“foo”	foo
Assign variable	foo = hi	foo=hi
Concatenation	foo + “oo”	${foo}oo
Convert to number	library call	silent and implicit

- Moral: In Java, variable-uses are easier than string-constants.
- Opposite in Bash.
- Both biased toward common use.

More on shell programming

- Metapoint: Computer scientists automate and end up accidentally inventing (bad) programming languages. It's like using a screwdriver as a pry bar.
- HW3 in part, will be near the limits of what seems reasonable to do with a shell script (and we'll end up cutting corners as a result)
- There are plenty of attempts to get "the best of both worlds" in a scripting language: Perl, Python, Ruby, . . .
- Personal opinion: it raises the limit to 1000 or 10000 lines? Gets you hooked on short programs.
- Picking the bash shell was a conscious decision to emphasize the interactive side and see "how bad programming can get".
- Next: Regular expressions, grep, sed, others.

Bottom line

- Never do something manually if writing a script would save you time.
- Never write a script if you need a large, robust piece of software.
- Some programming languages try to give the “best of both worlds” – you now have seen two extremes that don’t (Java and bash).