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CSE 374

# Programming Concepts & Tools

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Lecture 4 – Shell Variables, More Shell Scripts

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# Where we are

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- 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

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- 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?

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- 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

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- 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 process with its own state, environment, etc.

# Arithmetic

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- 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

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- Syntax:
  - for v in  $w_1 w_2 \dots w_n$
  - do
  - body
  - done
- Execute body n times, with v set to  $w_i$  on  $i^{\text{th}}$  iteration (Afterwards,  $v=w_n$ )
- Why so convenient?
  - Use a filename pattern after in
  - Use list of argument strings after in: "\$@"
    - Not "\$\*" – that doesn't handle arguments with embedded blanks the way you (usually) want

# Quoting

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- 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

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1. Typo in variable name on left: create new variable  
oops=7
2. Typo in variable use: get empty string – Is \$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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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)