Overloading & operator overloading

Ben Langmead
ben.langmead@gmail.com
www.langmead-lab.org

Source markdown available at github.com/BenLangmead/c-cpp-notes
Overloading & operator overloading

C++ compiler can distinguish functions with same name but different parameters

```cpp
#include <iostream>

using std::cout; using std::endl;

void output_type(int) { cout << "int" << endl; }
void output_type(float) { cout << "float" << endl; }

int main() {
    output_type(1); // int argument
    output_type(1.f); // float argument
    return 0;
}
```
Overloading

$ g++ -c print_type.cpp -std=c++11 -pedantic -Wall -Wextra
$ g++ -o print_type print_type.o
$ ./print_type
int
float

But it cannot distinguish functions with same name & parameters but different return types
```cpp
#include <iostream>

using std::cout; using std::endl;

int get_one() { return 1; }
float get_one() { return 1.0f; }

int main() {
    int i = get_one();
    float f = get_one();
    cout << i << ' ' << f << endl;
    return 0;
}
```
$ g++ -c print_type.cpp -std=c++11 -pedantic -Wall -Wextra
print_type.cpp: In function 'float get_one()':
print_type.cpp:6:7: error: ambiguating new declaration of 'float get_one()'
  float get_one() { return 1.0f; }
     ^~~~~~~
print_type.cpp:5:7: note: old declaration 'int get_one()'
  int get_one() { return 1; }
     ^~~~~~~
Operator overloading

Operators like + and << are like functions

\( a + b \) is like \( \text{plus}(a, b) \) or \( a.\text{plus}(b) \)

\( a + b + c \) is like \( \text{plus}(\text{plus}(a, b), c) \)
classes override member functions to customize their behavior

Operator overloading is when we do something similar for operators

We’ve been using it:

```cpp
string msg("Hello"), name;
cin >> name; // >> is an operator
cout << msg << ", "; // << is an operator
cout << (name + '!') << endl; // << and + are operators
```
cout << works with many types, but not all:

```cpp
#include <iostream>
#include <vector>

using std::cout; using std::endl;
using std::vector;

int main() {
    vector<int> vec = {1, 2, 3};
    cout << vec << endl;
    return 0;
}
```
Operator overloading

```bash
$ g++ -c insertion_eg1.cpp -std=c++11 -pedantic -Wall -Wextra
insertion_eg1.cpp: In function 'int main()':
insertion_eg1.cpp:9:10: error: no match for 'operator<<' (operand types are
'std::ostream {aka std::basic_ostream<char>}' and 'std::vector<int>'
    cout << vec << endl;
          ~~~~~~~~~~~~~
In file included from /usr/include/c++/7/iostream:39:0,
    from insertion_eg1.cpp:1:
/usr/include/c++/7/iostream:108:7: note: candidate: std::basic_ostream<_CharT,
_Traits>::__ostream_type& std::basic_ostream<_CharT,
_Traits>::operator<<((std::basic_ostream<_CharT, _Traits>::__ostream_type&
(*)(std::basic_ostream<_CharT, _Traits>::__ostream_type&)) [with _CharT = char;
_Traits = std::char_traits<char>; std::basic_ostream<_CharT,
_Traits>::__ostream_type = std::basic_ostream<char>]
    operator<<(__ostream_type& (*__pf)(__ostream_type&))
          ^~~~~~~~~~~
/usr/include/c++/7/iostream:108:7: note: no known conversion for argument 1
from 'std::vector<int>' to 'std::basic_ostream<char>::__ostream_type&
(*)(std::basic_ostream<char>::__ostream_type&) {aka std::basic_ostream<char>&
(*)(std::basic_ostream<char>&)}'
/usr/include/c++/7/iostream:117:7: note: candidate: std::basic_ostream<_CharT,
_Traits>::__ostream_type& std::basic_ostream<_CharT,
_Traits>::operator<<(std::basic_ostream<_CharT, _Traits>::__ios_type&
(*)(std::basic_ostream<_CharT, _Traits>::__ios_type&)) [with _CharT = char;
_Traits = std::char_traits<char>; std::basic_ostream<_CharT,
_Traits>::__ios_type = std::basic_ostream<char>; std::basic_ostream<_CharT,
_Traits>::__ios_type = std::basic_ios<char>]
    operator<<(__ios_type& (*__pf)(__ios_type&))
          ^~~~~~~~~~~
```

```
std::vector<int> vec = {1, 2, 3};
std::cout << vec << std::endl;
```
We can make it work by defining the appropriate operator overload:

```cpp
#include <iostream>
#include <vector>

using std::cout; using std::endl;
using std::vector;

std::ostream& operator<<(std::ostream& os, const vector<int>& vec) {
    for(vector<int>::const_iterator it = vec.cbegin(); it != vec.cend(); ++it)
    {
        os << *it << ' ';
    }
    return os;
}

int main() {
    const vector<int> vec = {1, 2, 3};
    cout << vec << endl; // now this will work!
    return 0;
}
```
$ g++ -c insertion_eg2.cpp -std=c++11 -pedantic -Wall -Wextra
$ g++ -o insertion_eg2 insertion_eg2.o
$ ./insertion_eg2
1 2 3
std::ostream is a C++ output stream

Can write to it, can’t read from it

It is cout’s type

- cout can be passed as parameter of type std::ostream& os
- const std::ostream& won’t work, since it disallows writing
Operator overloading

When we see this:

```cpp
cout << "Hello " << 1 << ' ' << 2;
```

This is what really happens:

```cpp
operator<<(operator<<(operator<<(operator<<(cout, "Hello"), 1), ' '), 2)
```

- First, we `cout << "Hello"`
- That `returns` `cout`, which becomes the new left operand
- Then we `cout << 1`, returning `cout` as new left operand
- Then we `cout << ' '`, returning `cout`
- ...
Operator overloading

```cpp
std::ostream& operator<<(std::ostream& os, const vector<int>& vec) {
    for(vector<int>::const_iterator it = vec.cbegin();
        it != vec.cend(); ++it)
    {
        os << *it << ' ';
    }
    return os;
}
```

Allows `vector<int>` to appear in a typical `cout <<` chain

- Taking `std::ostream& os` in the first parameter & returning `os` enables chaining
- Taking `const vector<int>&` as the second parameter allows `vector<int>` to appear as the right operand in `operator<<` call
- Passing by const reference avoids needless copying
Can also overload operator with a member function

class Complex {
public:
    Complex(double r, double i) : real(r), imaginary(i) { }

    Complex operator+(const Complex& rhs) const {
        // left operand is the current object ("myself")
        // right operand is rhs
        // return value is a new Complex
        Complex result(real + rhs.real, imaginary + rhs.imaginary);
        return result; // Note: return type can't be `Complex&`
    }

private:
    double real, imaginary;
};
Operator overloading

Say we want to be able to print a Complex with cout <<

class Complex {
public:
    ...
private:
    double real, imaginary;
};

Would this work?

std::ostream& operator<<(std::ostream& os, const Complex& d) {
    os << d.real << " + " << d.imaginary + "i";
    return os;
}
Operator overloading

No, because real & imaginary are private

Can we make operator<< be a member function for Complex?

No; operator<< takes std::ostream as left operand, but a member function has to take the *object itself* as left operand
Operator overloading

Can’t be a member, but also needs access to private members??

Solution: a friend function:

class Complex {
    public:
        ...

        friend std::ostream& operator<<(std::ostream& os, Complex c);

    private:
        double real, imaginary;
    };

std::ostream& operator<<(std::ostream& os, Complex c) {
    os << c.real << " + " << c.imaginary << 'i';
    return os;
}
operator<< is a separate, non-member function

It is also a friend of Complex, as declared here:

```cpp
class Complex {
public:
    ...
    friend std::ostream& operator<<(std::ostream& os, Complex c);
    ...
};
```

A friend of a class can access its private members

- Like a “backstage pass”
## Operator overloading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access modifier</th>
<th>Any function</th>
<th>Derived-class members</th>
<th>Same-class members &amp; friends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>public</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protected</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>private</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Often, friend is to be avoided, and signals bad design.

A common exception is when `operator<<` must access private fields.
When using a member function to overload an operator, sometimes the return value is “myself”

E.g. consider the += compound operator

```c
int c = 0;
c += (c += 2);
```

Recall that the result of an assignment (including compound assignment) is the value assigned

Here, `(c += 2)` both sets `c` to 2 and evaluates to 2

Then outer `c += (...)` sets `c` to 4
Now for Complex:

Complex c(0.0, 0.0);
c += (c += Complex(2.0, 2.0));
Can return “myself” by returning *this from operator+= as below

Member functions have implicit pointer argument this: a pointer to “myself,” the current object

class Complex {
public:
    ...
    Complex operator+=(const Complex& rhs) {
        real += rhs.real;
        imaginary += rhs.imaginary;
        return *this;
    }
    ...
};
Operator overloading

Operators we can overload:

+  -  *  /  %  ^  &  |  ~
!  ->  =  <  >  <=  >=  ++  --
<<  >>  ==  !=  &&  ||  +=  -=  /=
%=  ^=  &=  |=  *=  <<=  >>=  []  ()

These are common:

- +, -, +, = (e.g. Complex)
- *, -> (e.g. iterators)
- [ ] (e.g. vector)
- = (most things that can be copied)
- ==, <, >, <=, >= (things that can be compared)
Overloading allowed only when one or both operands are a user-defined type, like a class

This won’t work (thank goodness):

```cpp
int operator+(int a, int b) {
    return a - b;
}
```

Can’t change operator’s precedence, associativity, or # operands
To allow Date to work with std::sort, we only have to add operator::<

class Date {
public:
    ...
    bool operator<(const Date& rhs) const {
        if(year < rhs.year) return true;
        if(year > rhs.year) return false;
        if(month < rhs.month) return true;
        if(month > rhs.month) return false;
        return day < rhs.day;
    }
    ...
};