Princeton University



Computer Science 217: Introduction to Programming Systems

Data Structures

"Programming in the Large" Steps



Design & Implement

- Program & programming style (done)
- Common data structures and algorithms <-- we are here
- Modularity
- Building techniques & tools (done)

Debug

Debugging techniques & tools (done)

Test

Testing techniques (done)

Maintain

Performance improvement techniques & tools

Goals of this Lecture



Help you learn (or refresh your memory) about:

Common data structures: linked lists and hash tables

Why? Deep motivation:

- Common data structures serve as "high level building blocks"
- A power programmer:
 - Rarely creates programs from scratch
 - Often creates programs using high level building blocks

Why? Shallow motivation:

- Provide background pertinent to Assignment 3
- ... esp. for those who have not taken COS 226

Common Task



Maintain a collection of key/value pairs

- Each key is a string; each value is an int
- Unknown number of key-value pairs

Examples

- (student name, grade)
 - ("john smith", 84), ("jane doe", 93), ("bill clinton", 81)
- (baseball player, number)
 - ("Ruth", 3), ("Gehrig", 4), ("Mantle", 7)
- (variable name, value)
 - ("maxLength", 2000), ("i", 7), ("j", -10)

Agenda



Linked lists

Hash tables

Hash table issues

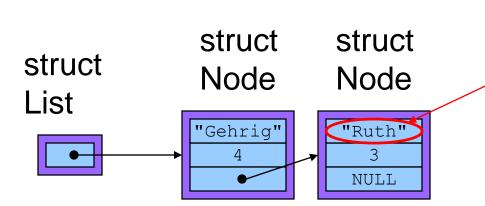
Linked List Data Structure



```
struct Node
{   const char *key;
   int value;
   struct Node *next;
};

struct List
{   struct Node *first;
};
```

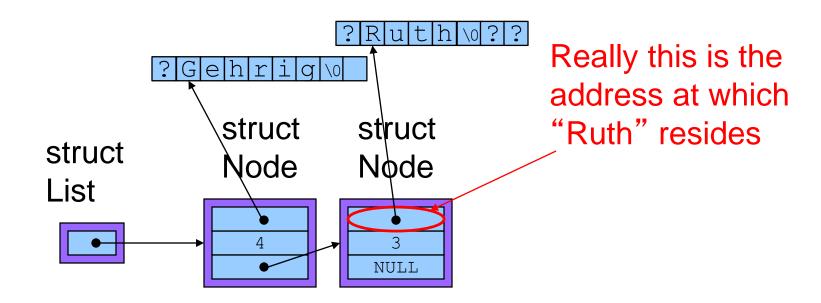
Your Assignment 3 data structures will be more elaborate



Really this is the address at which "Ruth" resides

Linked List Data Structure





Linked List Algorithms



Create

- Allocate List structure; set first to NULL
- Performance: $O(1) \Rightarrow$ fast

Add (no check for duplicate key required)

- Insert new node containing key/value pair at front of list
- Performance: O(1) ⇒ fast

Add (check for duplicate key required)

- Traverse list to check for node with duplicate key
- Insert new node containing key/value pair into list
- Performance: O(n) ⇒ slow

Linked List Algorithms



Search

- Traverse the list, looking for given key
- Stop when key found, or reach end
- Performance: O(n) ⇒ slow

Free

- Free Node structures while traversing
- Free List structure
- Performance: O(n) ⇒ slow

Would it be better to keep the nodes sorted by key?

Agenda



Linked lists

Hash tables

Hash table issues

Hash Table Data Structure



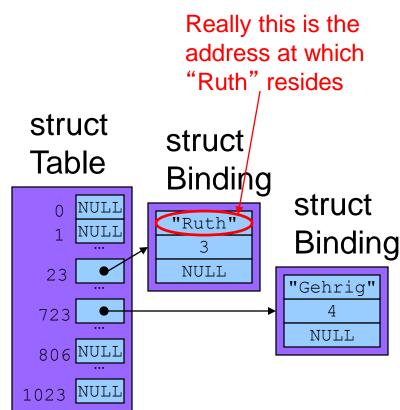
Array of linked lists

```
enum {BUCKET_COUNT = 1024};

struct Binding
{   const char *key;
   int value;
   struct Binding *next;
};

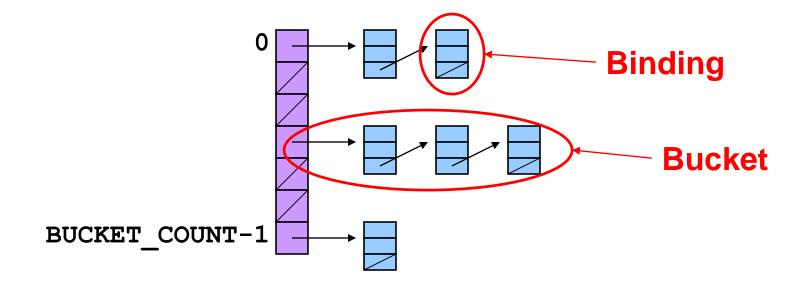
struct Table
{   struct Binding *buckets[BUCKET_COUNT];
};
```

Your Assignment 3 data structures will be more elaborate



Hash Table Data Structure





Hash function maps given key to an integer

Mod integer by **BUCKET_COUNT** to determine proper bucket

Hash Table Example



Example: **BUCKET_COUNT** = 7

Add (if not already present) bindings with these keys:

• the, cat, in, the, hat



```
First key: "the"
```

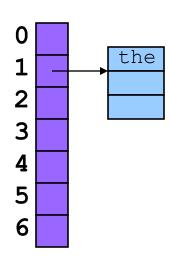
hash("the") = 965156977; 965156977 % 7 = 1

Search buckets[1] for binding with key "the"; not found





Add binding with key "the" and its value to buckets[1]

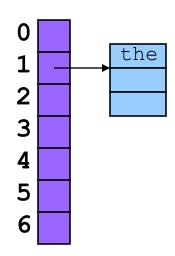




Second key: "cat"

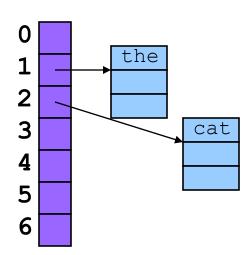
hash("cat") = 3895848756; 3895848756 % 7 = 2

Search buckets [2] for binding with key "cat"; not found





Add binding with key "cat" and its value to buckets [2]

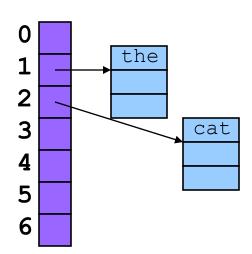




Third key: "in"

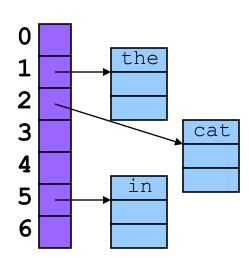
hash("in") = 6888005; 6888005% 7 = 5

Search buckets[5] for binding with key "in"; not found





Add binding with key "in" and its value to buckets [5]



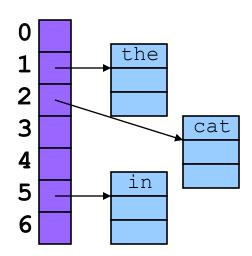


Fourth word: "the"

hash("the") = 965156977; 965156977 % 7 = 1

Search buckets[1] for binding with key "the"; found it!

Don't change hash table

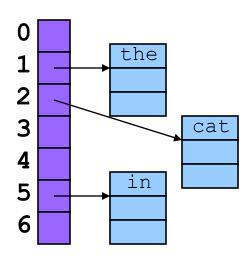




Fifth key: "hat"

hash("hat") = 865559739; 865559739 % 7 = 2

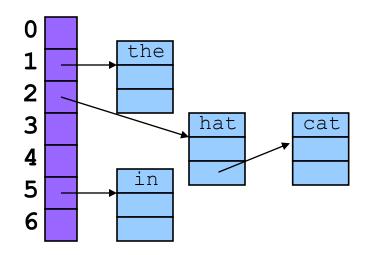
Search buckets[2] for binding with key "hat"; not found





Add binding with key "hat" and its value to buckets [2]

- At front or back? Doesn't matter
- Inserting at the front is easier, so add at the front



Hash Table Algorithms



Create

- Allocate Table structure; set each bucket to NULL
- Performance: O(1) ⇒ fast

Add

- Hash the given key
- Mod by **BUCKET_COUNT** to determine proper bucket
- Traverse proper bucket to make sure no duplicate key
- Insert new binding containing key/value pair into proper bucket
- Performance: $O(1) \Rightarrow fast$



Hash Table Algorithms



Search

- Hash the given key
- Mod by BUCKET_COUNT to determine proper bucket
- Traverse proper bucket, looking for binding with given key
- Stop when key found, or reach end
- Performance: $O(1) \Rightarrow$ fast

Free

- Traverse each bucket, freeing bindings
- Free Table structure
- Performance: O(n) ⇒ slow

Is the search performance always fast?

Agenda



Linked lists

Hash tables

Hash table issues

How Many Buckets?



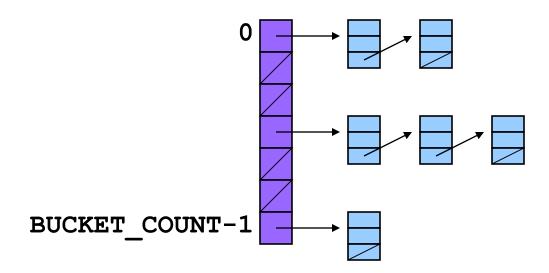
Many!

Too few ⇒ large buckets ⇒ slow add, slow search

But not too many!

Too many ⇒ memory is wasted

This is OK:



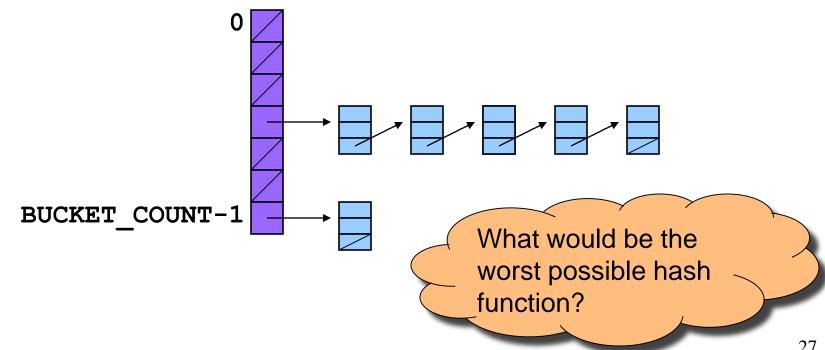
What Hash Function?



Should distribute bindings across the buckets well

- Distribute bindings over the range 0, 1, ..., BUCKET_COUNT-1
- Distribute bindings evenly to avoid very long buckets

This is not so good:



How to Hash Strings?



Simple hash schemes don't distribute the keys evenly enough

- Number of characters, mod BUCKET_COUNT
- Sum the numeric codes of all characters, mod BUCKET_COUNT
- ...

A reasonably good hash function:

- Weighted sum of characters $\mathbf{s_i}$ in the string \mathbf{s}
 - (Σ aⁱs_i) mod BUCKET_COUNT
- Best if a and BUCKET_COUNT are relatively prime.
 - E.g., a = 65599, BUCKET_COUNT = 1024

Why?

How to Hash Strings?



Potentially expensive to compute **\Sigma** a is i

So let's do some algebra ("Horner's rule")

• (by example, for string s of length 5, a=65599):

```
\begin{split} \mathbf{h} &= \mathbf{\Sigma} 65599^{\text{i}} * \mathbf{s}_{\text{i}} \\ \mathbf{h} &= 65599^{\text{o}} * \mathbf{s}_{\text{o}} + 65599^{\text{i}} * \mathbf{s}_{\text{1}} + 65599^{\text{2}} * \mathbf{s}_{\text{2}} + 65599^{\text{3}} * \mathbf{s}_{\text{3}} + 65599^{\text{4}} * \mathbf{s}_{\text{4}} \\ \text{Direction of traversal of s doesn't matter, so...} \\ \mathbf{h} &= 65599^{\text{o}} * \mathbf{s}_{\text{4}} + 65599^{\text{i}} * \mathbf{s}_{\text{3}} + 65599^{\text{2}} * \mathbf{s}_{\text{2}} + 65599^{\text{3}} * \mathbf{s}_{\text{1}} + 65599^{\text{4}} * \mathbf{s}_{\text{0}} \\ \mathbf{h} &= 65599^{\text{4}} * \mathbf{s}_{\text{0}} + 65599^{\text{3}} * \mathbf{s}_{\text{1}} + 65599^{\text{2}} * \mathbf{s}_{\text{2}} + 65599^{\text{1}} * \mathbf{s}_{\text{3}} + 65599^{\text{0}} * \mathbf{s}_{\text{4}} \\ \mathbf{h} &= (((((\mathbf{s}_{\text{0}}) * 65599 + \mathbf{s}_{\text{1}}) * 65599 + \mathbf{s}_{\text{2}}) * 65599 + \mathbf{s}_{\text{3}}) * 65599) + \mathbf{s}_{\text{4}} \end{split}
```

How to Hash Strings?



Yielding this function

```
size_t hash(const char *s, size_t bucketCount)
{    size_t i;
    size_t h = 0;
    for (i=0; s[i]!='\0'; i++)
        h = h * 65599 + (size_t)s[i];
    return h % bucketCount;
}
```



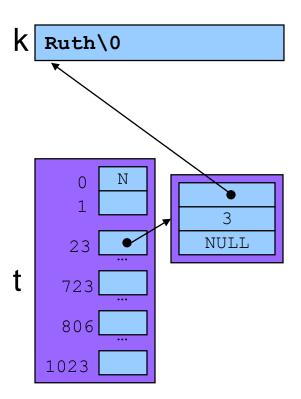
Suppose **Table add()** function contains this code:

```
void Table_add(struct Table *t, const char *key, int value)
{     ...
     struct Binding *p =
         (struct Binding*)malloc(sizeof(struct Binding));
     p->key = key;
     ...
}
```



Problem: Consider this calling code:

```
struct Table *t;
char k[100] = "Ruth";
...
Table_add(t, k, 3);
```

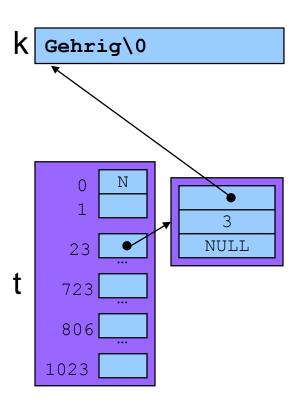




Problem: Consider this calling code:

```
struct Table *t;
char k[100] = "Ruth";
...
Table_add(t, k, 3);
strcpy(k, "Gehrig");
```

What happens if the client searches t for "Ruth"? For Gehrig?





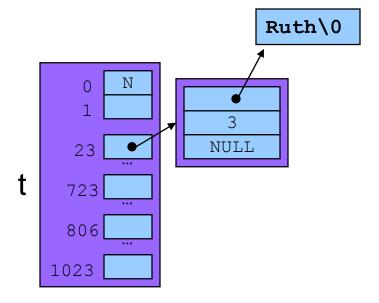
Solution: **Table_add()** saves a **defensive copy** of the given key



Now consider same calling code:

```
struct Table *t;
char k[100] = "Ruth";
...
Table_add(t, k, 3);
```



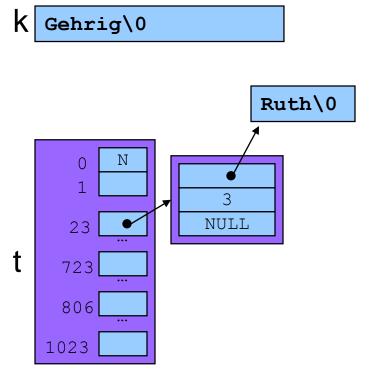




Now consider same calling code:

```
struct Table *t;
char k[100] = "Ruth";
...
Table_add(t, k, 3);
strcpy(k, "Gehrig");
```

Hash table is not corrupted



Who Owns the Keys?



Then the hash table owns its keys

- That is, the hash table owns the memory in which its keys reside
- Hash_free() function must free the memory in which the key resides

Summary



Common data structures and associated algorithms

- Linked list
 - (Maybe) fast add
 - Slow search
- Hash table
 - (Potentially) fast add
 - (Potentially) fast search
 - Very common

Hash table issues

- Hashing algorithms
- Defensive copies
- Key ownership

Princeton University



Computer Science 217: Introduction to Programming Systems

Debugging (Part 2)



"Programming in the Large" Steps



Design & Implement

- Program & programming style (done)
- Common data structures and algorithms
- Modularity
- Building techniques & tools (done)

Test

Testing techniques (done)

Debug

Debugging techniques & tools <-- we are still here

Maintain

Performance improvement techniques & tools

Goals of this Lecture



Help you learn about:

 Debugging strategies & tools related to dynamic memory management (DMM) *

Why?

- Many bugs occur in code that does DMM
- DMM errors can be difficult to find
 - DMM error in one area can manifest itself in a distant area
- A power programmer knows a wide variety of DMM debugging strategies
- A power programmer knows about tools that facilitate DMM debugging

* Management of heap memory via malloc(), calloc(), realloc(), and free()

Agenda



(9) Look for common DMM bugs

- (10) Diagnose seg faults using gdb
- (11) Manually inspect malloc calls
- (12) Hard-code malloc calls
- (13) Comment-out free calls
- (14) Use Meminfo
- (15) Use Valgrind

Look for Common DMM Bugs



Some of our favorites:

```
int *p; /* value of p undefined */
...
*p = somevalue;
```

```
char *p; /* value of p undefined */
...
fgets(p, 1024, stdin);
```

```
int *p;
...
p = (int*)malloc(sizeof(int));
...
*p = 5;
...
free(p);
...
*p = 6;
```



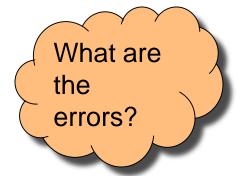
Look for Common DMM Bugs



Some of our favorites:

```
int *p;
...
p = (int*)malloc(sizeof(int));
...
*p = 5;
...
p = (int*)malloc(sizeof(int));
```

```
int *p;
...
p = (int*)malloc(sizeof(int));
...
*p = 5;
...
free(p);
...
free(p);
```



Agenda



- (9) Look for common DMM bugs
- (10) Diagnose seg faults using gdb
- (11) Manually inspect malloc calls
- (12) Hard-code malloc calls
- (13) Comment-out free calls
- (14) Use Meminfo
- (15) Use Valgrind

Diagnose Seg Faults Using GDB



Segmentation fault ⇒ make it happen in gdb

- Then issue the gdb where command
- Output will lead you to the line that caused the fault
 - But that line may not be where the error resides!

Agenda



- (9) Look for common DMM bugs
- (10) Diagnose seg faults using gdb
- (11) Manually inspect malloc calls
- (12) Hard-code malloc calls
- (13) Comment-out free calls
- (14) Use Meminfo
- (15) Use Valgrind

Manually Inspect Malloc Calls



Manually inspect each call of malloc()

Make sure it allocates enough memory

Do the same for calloc() and realloc()

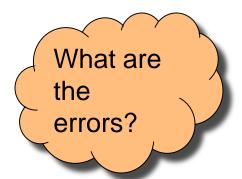
Manually Inspect Malloc Calls



Some of our favorites:

```
char *s1 = "hello, world";
char *s2;
s2 = (char*)malloc(strlen(s1));
strcpy(s2, s1);
```

```
char *s1 = "Hello";
char *s2;
s2 = (char*)malloc(sizeof(s1));
strcpy(s2, s1);
```



```
long double *p;
p = (long double*)malloc(sizeof(long double*));
```

```
long double *p;
p = (long double*)malloc(sizeof(p));
```

Agenda



- (9) Look for common DMM bugs
- (10) Diagnose seg faults using gdb
- (11) Manually inspect malloc calls
- (12) Hard-code malloc calls
- (13) Comment-out free calls
- (14) Use Meminfo
- (15) Use Valgrind

Hard-Code Malloc Calls



Temporarily change each call of malloc() to request a large number of bytes

- Say, 10000 bytes
- If the error disappears, then at least one of your calls is requesting too few bytes

Then incrementally restore each call of malloc() to its previous form

When the error reappears, you might have found the culprit

Do the same for calloc() and realloc()

Agenda



- (9) Look for common DMM bugs
- (10) Diagnose seg faults using gdb
- (11) Manually inspect malloc calls
- (12) Hard-code malloc calls
- (13) Comment-out free calls
- (14) Use Meminfo
- (15) Use Valgrind

Comment-Out Free Calls



Temporarily comment-out every call of free()

- If the error disappears, then program is
 - Freeing memory too soon, or
 - Freeing memory that already has been freed, or
 - Freeing memory that should not be freed,
 - Etc.

Then incrementally "comment-in" each call of free()

When the error reappears, you might have found the culprit

Agenda



- (9) Look for common DMM bugs
- (10) Diagnose seg faults using gdb
- (11) Manually inspect malloc calls
- (12) Hard-code malloc calls
- (13) Comment-out free calls
- (14) Use Meminfo
- (15) Use Valgrind

Use Meminfo



Use the **Meminfo** tool

- Simple tool
- Initial version written by Dondero
- Current version written by COS 217 alumnus RJ Liljestrom
- Reports errors after program execution
 - Memory leaks
 - Some memory corruption
- User-friendly output

Appendix 1 provides example buggy programs

Appendix 2 provides Meminfo analyses

Agenda



- (9) Look for common DMM bugs
- (10) Diagnose seg faults using gdb
- (11) Manually inspect malloc calls
- (12) Hard-code malloc calls
- (13) Comment-out free calls
- (14) Use Meminfo
- (15) Use Valgrind

Use Valgrind



Use the Valgrind tool

- Complex tool
- Written by multiple developers, worldwide
 - See www.valgrind.org
- Reports errors during program execution
 - Memory leaks
 - Multiple frees
 - Dereferences of dangling pointers
 - Memory corruption
- Comprehensive output
 - But not always user-friendly

Use Valgrind



Appendix 1 provides example buggy programs

Appendix 3 provides Valgrind analyses

Summary



Strategies and tools for debugging the DMM aspects of your code:

- Look for common DMM bugs
- Diagnose seg faults using gdb
- Manually inspect malloc calls
- Hard-code malloc calls
- Comment-out free calls
- Use Meminfo
- Use Valgrind



leak.c

```
1. #include <stdio.h>
2. #include <stdlib.h>
3. int main(void)
4. { int *pi;
5. pi = (int*)malloc(sizeof(int));
6. *pi = 5;
7. printf("%d\n", *pi);
8. pi = (int*)malloc(sizeof(int));
9. *pi = 6;
10. printf("%d\n", *pi);
11.
     free(pi);
12. return 0;
13. }
```

Memory leak:

Memory allocated at line 5 is leaked



doublefree.c

```
1. #include <stdio.h>
2. #include <stdlib.h>
3. int main(void)
4. { int *pi;
5.  pi = (int*)malloc(sizeof(int));
6.  *pi = 5;
7.  printf("%d\n", *pi);
8.  free(pi);
9.  free(pi);
10.  return 0;
11. }
```

Multiple free:

Memory allocated at line 5 is freed twice



danglingptr.c

```
1. #include <stdio.h>
2. #include <stdlib.h>
3. int main(void)
4. { int *pi;
5.  pi = (int*)malloc(sizeof(int));
6.  *pi = 5;
7.  printf("%d\n", *pi);
8.  free(pi);
9.  printf("%d\n", *pi);
10.  return 0;
11. }
```

Dereference of dangling pointer:

Memory accessed at line 9 already was freed



toosmall.c

```
1. #include <stdio.h>
2. #include <stdlib.h>
3. int main(void)
4. { int *pi;
5. pi = (int*)malloc(1);
6. *pi = 5;
7. printf("%d\n", *pi);
8. free(pi);
9. return 0;
10. }
```

Memory corruption:

Too little memory is allocated at line 5 Line 6 corrupts memory

Appendix 2: Meminfo



Meminfo can detect memory leaks:

```
$ gcc217m leak.c -o leak
$ leak
$ ls
   .. leak.c leak meminfo30462.out
$ meminforeport meminfo30462.out
Errors:
  ** 4 un-freed bytes (1 block) allocated at leak.c:5
Summary Statistics:
  Maximum bytes allocated at once: 8
  Total number of allocated bytes: 8
Statistics by Line:
         Bytes Location
             -4 leak.c:11
              4 leak.c:5
             4 leak.c:8
                 TOTAL
Statistics by Compilation Unit:
                 leak.c
                 TOTAL
```

Appendix 2: Meminfo



Meminfo can detect memory corruption:

```
$ gcc217m toosmall.c -o toosmall
$ toosmall
$ ls
      toosmall.c toosmall meminfo31891.out.
$ meminforeport meminfo31891.out
Errors:
   ** Underflow detected at toosmall.c:8 for memory allocated at toosmall.c:5
Summary Statistics:
  Maximum bytes allocated at once: 1
  Total number of allocated bytes: 1
Statistics by Line:
         Bytes Location
             1 toosmall.c:5
             -1 toosmall.c:8
              0 TOTAL
Statistics by Compilation Unit:
              0 toosmall.c
                 TOTAL
```

Appendix 2: Meminfo



Meminfo caveats:

- Don't mix .o files built with gcc217 and gcc217m
- meminfo*.out files can be large
 - Should delete frequently
- Programs built with gcc217m run slower than those built with gcc217
 - Don't build with gcc217m when doing timing tests



Valgrind can detect memory leaks:

```
$ gcc217 leak.c -o leak
$ valgrind leak
==31921== Memcheck, a memory error detector
==31921== Copyright (C) 2002-2012, and GNU GPL'd, by Julian Seward et al.
==31921== Using Valgrind-3.8.1 and LibVEX; rerun with -h for copyright info
==31921== Command: leak
==31921==
==31921==
==31921== HEAP SUMMARY:
==31921== in use at exit: 4 bytes in 1 blocks
==31921== total heap usage: 2 allocs, 1 frees, 8 bytes allocated
==31921==
==31921== LEAK SUMMARY:
==31921== definitely lost: 4 bytes in 1 blocks
==31921== indirectly lost: 0 bytes in 0 blocks
==31921== possibly lost: 0 bytes in 0 blocks
==31921== still reachable: 0 bytes in 0 blocks
==31921==
                 suppressed: 0 bytes in 0 blocks
==31921== Rerun with --leak-check=full to see details of leaked memory
==31921==
==31921== For counts of detected and suppressed errors, rerun with: -v
==31921== ERROR SUMMARY: 0 errors from 0 contexts (suppressed: 6 from 6)
```



Valgrind can detect memory leaks:

```
$ valgrind --leak-check=full leak
==476== Memcheck, a memory error detector
==476== Copyright (C) 2002-2012, and GNU GPL'd, by Julian Seward et al.
==476== Using Valgrind-3.8.1 and LibVEX; rerun with -h for copyright info
==476== Command: leak
==476==
==476==
==476== HEAP SUMMARY:
==476== in use at exit: 4 bytes in 1 blocks
==476== total heap usage: 2 allocs, 1 frees, 8 bytes allocated
==476==
==476== 4 bytes in 1 blocks are definitely lost in loss record 1 of 1
==476== at 0x4A069EE: malloc (vg replace malloc.c:270)
==476== by 0x400565: main (leak.c:5)
==476==
==476== LEAK SUMMARY:
==476== definitely lost: 4 bytes in 1 blocks
==476== indirectly lost: 0 bytes in 0 blocks
==476==
            possibly lost: 0 bytes in 0 blocks
==476== still reachable: 0 bytes in 0 blocks
==476==
               suppressed: 0 bytes in 0 blocks
==476==
==476== For counts of detected and suppressed errors, rerun with: -v
==476== ERROR SUMMARY: 1 errors from 1 contexts (suppressed: 6 from 6)
```



Valgrind can detect multiple frees:

```
$ gcc217 doublefree.c -o doublefree
$ valgrind doublefree
==31951== Memcheck, a memory error detector
==31951== Copyright (C) 2002-2012, and GNU GPL'd, by Julian Seward et al.
==31951== Using Valgrind-3.8.1 and LibVEX; rerun with -h for copyright info
==31951== Command: doublefree
==31951==
==31951== Invalid free() / delete / delete[] / realloc()
==31951== at 0x4A063F0: free (vg replace malloc.c:446)
==31951== by 0x4005A5: main (doublefree.c:9)
==31951== Address 0x4c2a040 is 0 bytes inside a block of size 4 free'd
==31951== at 0x4A063F0: free (vg replace malloc.c:446)
==31951== by 0x400599: main (doublefree.c:8)
==31951==
==31951==
==31951== HEAP SUMMARY:
==31951== in use at exit: 0 bytes in 0 blocks
==31951== total heap usage: 1 allocs, 2 frees, 4 bytes allocated
==31951==
==31951== All heap blocks were freed -- no leaks are possible
==31951==
==31951== For counts of detected and suppressed errors, rerun with: -v
==31951== ERROR SUMMARY: 1 errors from 1 contexts (suppressed: 6 from 6)
```



Valgrind can detect dereferences of dangling pointers:

```
$ gcc217 danglingptr.c -o danglingptr
$ valgrind danglingptr
==336== Memcheck, a memory error detector
==336== Copyright (C) 2002-2012, and GNU GPL'd, by Julian Seward et al.
==336== Using Valgrind-3.8.1 and LibVEX; rerun with -h for copyright info
==336== Command: danglingptr
==336==
==336== Invalid read of size 4
==336==
          at 0x40059E: main (danglingptr.c:9)
==336== Address 0x4c2a040 is 0 bytes inside a block of size 4 free'd
==336== at 0x4A063F0: free (vg replace malloc.c:446)
==336== by 0x400599: main (danglingptr.c:8)
==336==
==336==
==336== HEAP SUMMARY:
==336== in use at exit: 0 bytes in 0 blocks
==336== total heap usage: 1 allocs, 1 frees, 4 bytes allocated
==336==
==336== All heap blocks were freed -- no leaks are possible
==336==
==336== For counts of detected and suppressed errors, rerun with: -v
==336== ERROR SUMMARY: 1 errors from 1 contexts (suppressed: 6 from 6)
```



Valgrind can detect memory corruption:

```
$ qcc217 toosmall.c -o toosmall
$ valgrind toosmall
==436== Memcheck, a memory error detector
==436== Copyright (C) 2002-2012, and GNU GPL'd, by Julian Seward et al.
==436== Using Valgrind-3.8.1 and LibVEX; rerun with -h for copyright info
==436== Command: toosmall
==436==
==436== Invalid write of size 4
==436== at 0x40056E: main (toosmall.c:6)
==436== Address 0x4c2a040 is 0 bytes inside a block of size 1 alloc'd
==436== at 0x4A069EE: malloc (vg replace malloc.c:270)
==436== by 0x400565: main (toosmall.c:5)
==436==
==436== Invalid read of size 4
==436== at 0x400578: main (toosmall.c:7)
==436== Address 0x4c2a040 is 0 bytes inside a block of size 1 alloc'd
==436== at 0x4A069EE: malloc (vg replace malloc.c:270)
==436== by 0x400565: main (toosmall.c:5)
==436==
```

Continued on next slide



Valgrind can detect memory corruption (cont.):

Continued from previous slide

```
==436==
==436== HEAP SUMMARY:
==436== in use at exit: 0 bytes in 0 blocks
==436== total heap usage: 1 allocs, 1 frees, 1 bytes allocated
==436==
==436== All heap blocks were freed -- no leaks are possible
==436==
==436== For counts of detected and suppressed errors, rerun with: -v
==436== ERROR SUMMARY: 2 errors from 2 contexts (suppressed: 6 from 6)
```



Valgrind caveats:

- Not intended for programmers who are new to C
 - Messages may be cryptic
- Suggestion:
 - Observe line numbers referenced by messages
 - Study code at those lines
 - Infer meanings of messages