

Reflection

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Two components involved in reflection

- ▶ **Introspection**

A program can observe, and therefore reason about its own state.

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Two components involved in reflection

- ▶ **Introspection**

A program can observe, and therefore reason about its own state.

- ▶ **Intercession**

A program can modify its execution state or alter its own interpretation or meaning.

Reflection in Java

Simple example of introspection

```
Employee e = new Manager(...);  
...  
if (e instanceof Manager){  
    ...  
}
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What if we don't know the type that we want to check in advance?

Reflection in Java

Simple example of introspection

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Employee e = new Manager(...);  
...  
if (e instanceof Manager){  
    ...  
}
```

What if we don't know the type that we want to check in advance?

Suppose we want to write a function to check if two different objects are both instances of the same class?

```
public static boolean classequal(Object o1, Object o2){  
    ...  
    // return true iff o1 and o2 point to objects of same type  
    ...  
}
```

Reflection in Java ...

```
public static boolean classequal(Object o1, Object o2){...}
```

- ▶ Can't use `instanceof`
 - ▶ Will have to check across all defined classes
 - ▶ This is not even a fixed set!
- ▶ Can't use generic type variables
 - ▶ The following code is syntactically disallowed

```
if (o1 instance of T) { ...}
```

Introspection in Java

Can extract the class of an object using `getClass()`

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import java.lang.reflect.*;

class MyReflectionClass{
    ...
    public static boolean classequal(Object o1, Object o2){
        return (o1.getClass() == o2.getClass());
    }
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```

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    }
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```

What does `getClass()` return?

- ▶ An object of type `Class` that encodes class information

The class `Class`

A version of `classequal` that explicitly uses this fact

```
import java.lang.reflect.*;

class MyReflectionClass{
    ...
    public static boolean classequal(Object o1, Object o2){
        Class c1, c2;
        c1 = o1.getClass();
        c2 = o2.getClass();
        return (c1 == c2);
    }
}
```

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- ▶ For each currently loaded class `C`, Java creates an object of type `Class` with information about `C`

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- ▶ For each currently loaded class `C`, Java creates an object of type `Class` with information about `C`
- ▶ Encoding execution state as data — **reification**
 - ▶ Representing an abstract idea in a concrete form

Using the `Class` object

Can create new instances of a class at runtime

```
...  
Class c = obj.getClass();  
Object o = c.newInstance();  
    // Create a new object of same type as obj  
...
```

Using the `Class` object

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```

Can also get hold of the class object using the name of the class

```
...  
String s = "Manager".  
Class c = Class.forName(s);  
Object o = c.newInstance();  
...
```


Using the `Class` object

Can create new instances of a class at runtime

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Can also get hold of the class object using the name of the class

```
...  
String s = "Manager".  
Class c = Class.forName(s);  
Object o = c.newInstance();  
...
```

..., or, more compactly

```
...  
Object o = Class.forName("Manager").newInstance();  
...
```

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 - ▶ All three: modifiers `static`, `private` etc

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- ▶ Constructors, methods and fields themselves have structure
 - ▶ Constructors: arguments
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 - ▶ All three: modifiers `static`, `private` etc
- ▶ Additional classes `Constructor`, `Method`, `Field`
- ▶ Use `getConstructors()`, `getMethods()` and `getFields()` to obtain constructors, methods and fields of `C` in an array.

The class `Class` ...

Extracting information about constructors, methods and fields

```
...  
Class c = obj.getClass();  
Constructor[] constructors = c.getConstructors();  
Method[] methods = c.getMethods();  
Field[] fields = c.getFields();  
...
```

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Extracting information about constructors, methods and fields

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...
```

`Constructor`, `Method`, `Field` in turn have functions to get further details

The class `Class` ...

Example: Get the list of parameters for each constructor

```
...  
Class c = obj.getClass();  
Constructor[] constructors = c.getConstructors();  
for (int i = 0; i < constructors.length; i++){  
    Class params[] = constructors[i].getParameterTypes();  
    ..  
}
```

Each parameter list is a list of types

- ▶ Return value is an array of type `Class []`

The class `Class` ...

We can also invoke methods and examine/set values of fields.

```
...
Class c = obj.getClass();
..
Method[] methods = c.getMethods();
Object[] args = { ... }
    // construct an array of arguments
methods[3].invoke(obj,args);
    // invoke methods[3] on obj with arguments args
...
```

The class `Class` ...

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Method[] methods = c.getMethods();
Object[] args = { ... }
    // construct an array of arguments
methods[3].invoke(obj,args);
    // invoke methods[3] on obj with arguments args
...

Field[] fields = c.getFields();
Object o = fields[2].get(obj);
    // get the value of fields[2] from obj
...
fields[3].set(obj,value);
    // set the value of fields[3] in obj to value
...
```

Reflection and security

- ▶ Can we extract information about private methods, fields, ... ?
- ▶ `getConstructors()`, ... only return publicly defined values
- ▶ Separate functions to also include private components
 - ▶ `getDeclaredConstructors()`
 - ▶ `getDeclaredMethods()`
 - ▶ `getDeclaredFields()`
- ▶ Should this be allowed to all programs?
- ▶ Security issue!
- ▶ Access to private components may be restricted

Using reflection

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Using reflection

- ▶ [BlueJ](#), a programming environment to learn Java
- ▶ Can define and compile Java classes
- ▶ For compiled code, create object, invoke methods, examine state
- ▶ Uses reflective capabilities of Java — [BlueJ](#) need not internally maintain “debugging” information about each class
- ▶ Look up <http://www.bluej.org>

Limitations of Java reflection

- ▶ Cannot create or modify classes at run time

- ▶ The following is not possible

```
Class c = new Class(.....);
```

- ▶ Note that **BlueJ** must invoke Java compiler before you can use a new class

Limitations of Java reflection

- ▶ Cannot create or modify classes at run time

- ▶ The following is not possible

```
Class c = new Class(. . . .);
```

- ▶ Note that **BlueJ** must invoke Java compiler before you can use a new class
- ▶ Languages such as **Smalltalk** allow redefining methods at run time