

14 Handling errors

Main concepts to be covered

- Defensive programming.
 - Anticipating that things could go wrong.
- Exception handling and throwing.
- Error reporting.

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Some causes of error situations

- Incorrect implementation.
 - Does not meet the specification.
- Inappropriate object request.
 - E.g., invalid index.
- Inconsistent or inappropriate object state.
 - E.g. arising through subclassing

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Not always programmer error

- Errors often arise from the environment:
 - Incorrect URL entered.
 - Network interruption.
- File processing is particular error-prone:
 - Missing files.
 - Lack of appropriate permissions.

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Exploring errors

- Explore error situations through the *address-book* projects.
- Two aspects:
 - Error reporting.
 - Error handling.

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Defensive programming

- Client-server interaction.
 - Should a server assume that clients are well-behaved?
 - Or should it assume that clients are potentially hostile?
- Significant differences in implementation required.

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Issues to be addressed

- How much checking by a server on method calls?
- How to report errors?
- How can a client anticipate failure?
- How should a client deal with failure?

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An example

- Create an AddressBook object.
- Try to remove an entry.
- A runtime error results.
 - Whose 'fault' is this?
- Anticipation and prevention are preferable to apportioning blame.

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Argument values

- Arguments represent a major 'vulnerability' for a server object.
 - Constructor arguments initialize state.
 - Method arguments often contribute to behavior.
- Argument checking is one defensive measure.

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Checking the key

```
public void removeDetails(String key)
{
    if(keyInUse(key)) {
        ContactDetails details = book.get(key);
        book.remove(details.getName());
        book.remove(details.getPhone());
        numberOfEntries--;
    }
}
```

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Server error reporting

- How to report illegal arguments?
 - To the user?
 - Is there a human user?
 - Can they solve the problem?
 - To the client object?
 - Return a diagnostic value.
 - *Throw an exception.*

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Returning a diagnostic

```
public boolean removeDetails(String key)
{
    if(keyInUse(key)) {
        ContactDetails details = book.get(key);
        book.remove(details.getName());
        book.remove(details.getPhone());
        numberOfEntries--;
        return true;
    }
    else {
        return false;
    }
}
```

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Client responses

- Test the return value.
 - Attempt recovery on error.
 - Avoid program failure.
- Ignore the return value.
 - Cannot be prevented.
 - Likely to lead to program failure.
- Exceptions are preferable.

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Exception-throwing principles

- A special language feature.
- No 'special' return value needed.
- Errors cannot be ignored in the client.
 - The normal flow-of-control is interrupted.
- Specific recovery actions are encouraged.

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Throwing an exception

```
/**
 * Look up a name or phone number and return the
 * corresponding contact details.
 * @param key The name or number to be looked up.
 * @return The details corresponding to the key,
 *         or null if there are none matching.
 * @throws NullPointerException if the key is null.
 */
public ContactDetails getDetails(String key)
{
    if (key == null) {
        throw new NullPointerException(
            "null key in getDetails");
    }
    return book.get(key);
}
```

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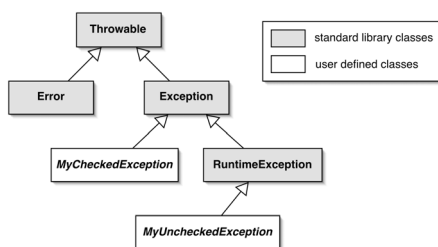
Throwing an exception

- An exception object is constructed:
 - `new ExceptionType("...");`
- The exception object is thrown:
 - `throw ...`
- Javadoc documentation:
 - `@throws ExceptionType reason`

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The exception class hierarchy



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Exception categories

- Checked exceptions
 - Subclass of `Exception`
 - Use for anticipated failures.
 - Where recovery may be possible.
- Unchecked exceptions
 - Subclass of `RuntimeException`
 - Use for unanticipated failures.
 - Where recovery is unlikely.

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The effect of an exception

- The throwing method finishes prematurely.
- No return value is returned.
- Control does not return to the client's point of call.
 - So the client cannot carry on regardless.
- A client may 'catch' an exception.

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Unchecked exceptions

- Use of these is 'unchecked' by the compiler.
- Cause program termination if not caught.
 - This is the normal practice.
- `IllegalArgumentException` is a typical example.

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Argument checking

```
public ContactDetails getDetails(String key)
{
    if(key == null) {
        throw new NullPointerException(
            "null key in getDetails");
    }
    if(key.trim().length() == 0) {
        throw new IllegalArgumentException(
            "Empty key passed to getDetails");
    }
    return book.get(key);
}
```

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Preventing object creation

```
public ContactDetails(String name, String phone, String address)
{
    if(name == null) {
        name = "";
    }
    if(phone == null) {
        phone = "";
    }
    if(address == null) {
        address = "";
    }

    this.name = name.trim();
    this.phone = phone.trim();
    this.address = address.trim();

    if(this.name.length() == 0 && this.phone.length() == 0) {
        throw new IllegalStateException(
            "Either the name or phone must not be blank.");
    }
}
```

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Exception handling

- Checked exceptions are meant to be caught.
- The compiler ensures that their use is tightly controlled.
 - In both server and client.
- Used properly, failures may be recoverable.

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The throws clause

- Methods throwing a checked exception must include a throws clause:

```
public void saveToFile(String destinationFile)
    throws IOException
```

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The try statement

- Clients catching an exception must protect the call with a try statement:

```
try {  
    Protect one or more statements here.  
}  
catch(Exception e) {  
    Report and recover from the exception here.  
}
```

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The try statement

```
1. Exception thrown from here  
try {  
    addressbook.saveToFile(filename);  
    tryAgain = false;  
}  
2. Control transfers to here  
catch(IOException e) {  
    System.out.println("Unable to save to " + filename);  
    tryAgain = true;  
}
```

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Catching multiple exceptions

```
try {  
    ...  
    ref.process();  
    ...  
}  
catch(EOFException e) {  
    // Take action on an end-of-file exception.  
    ...  
}  
catch(FileNotFoundException e) {  
    // Take action on a file-not-found exception.  
    ...  
}
```

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Defining new exceptions

- Extend RuntimeException for an unchecked or Exception for a checked exception.
- Define new types to give better diagnostic information.
 - Include reporting and/or recovery information.

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```
public class NoMatchingDetailsException extends Exception  
{  
    private String key;  
  
    public NoMatchingDetailsException(String key)  
    {  
        this.key = key;  
    }  
  
    public String getKey()  
    {  
        return key;  
    }  
  
    public String toString()  
    {  
        return "No details matching '" + key +  
            "' were found.";  
    }  
}
```

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Assertions

- Used for *internal* consistency checks.
 - E.g. object state following mutation.
- Used during development and normally removed in production version.
 - E.g. via a compile-time option.
- Java has an *assert statement*.

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Java Assertion Statement

- Two forms available:
 - `assert boolean-expression`
 - `assert boolean-expression : expression`
- The boolean-expression expresses something that should be true at this point.
- An `AssertionError` is thrown if the assertion is false.

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Assert Statement

```
public void removeDetails(String key)
{
    if (key == null) {
        throw new IllegalArgumentException("...");
    }
    if (keyInUse(key)) {
        ContactDetails details = book.get(key);
        book.remove(details.getName());
        book.remove(details.getPhone());
        numberOfEntries--;
    }
    assert !keyInUse(key);
    assert consistentSize() :
        "Inconsistent book size in removeDetails";
}
```

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Guidelines for Assertions

- They are not an alternative to throwing exceptions.
- Use for internal checks.
- Remove from production code.
- Don't include normal functionality:
`// Incorrect use:`
`assert book.remove(name) != null;`

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Error recovery

- Clients should take note of error notifications.
 - Check return values.
 - Don't 'ignore' exceptions.
- Include code to attempt recovery.
 - Will often require a loop.

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Attempting recovery

```
// Try to save the address book.
boolean successful = false;
int attempts = 0;
do {
    try {
        addressbook.saveToFile(filename);
        successful = true;
    }
    catch (IOException e) {
        System.out.println("Unable to save to " + filename);
        attempts++;
        if (attempts < MAX_ATTEMPTS) {
            filename = an alternative file name;
        }
    }
} while (!successful && attempts < MAX_ATTEMPTS);
if (!successful) {
    Report the problem and give up;
}
```

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Error avoidance

- Clients can often use server query methods to avoid errors.
 - More robust clients mean servers can be more trusting.
 - Unchecked exceptions can be used.
 - Simplifies client logic.
- May increase client-server coupling.

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Avoiding an exception

```
// Use the correct method to put details
// in the address book.
if (book.keyInUse(details.getName()) ||
    book.keyInUse(details.getPhone())) {
    book.changeDetails(details);
}
else {
    book.addDetails(details);
}
```

The `addDetails` method could now throw an unchecked exception.

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Exceptions and overriding

Requirements of the substitution principle:

- It should always be safe to replace an object of a base class with an object of a sub class.
- In particular, exception handlers for base class method calls should work equally well for calls to overriding methods of the sub class.
- All checked exceptions thrown by calls to overriding methods must be type compatible with exceptions that could be thrown by calls to overridden methods in the base class.

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Exceptions and overriding

Type compatibility rule for throws clauses:

- The set of exceptions A declared in the throws clause in an overriding method must be type compatible with the set of exceptions B declared in the throws clause in the overridden method.
- A is type compatible with B if for every exception type E_1 in A, there is an exception type E_2 in B such that E_1 is a subtype of E_2 .

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Exceptions and overriding Example

```
public class E1 extends Exception {}
public class E2 extends E1 {}
public class E3 extends Exception {}
```

```
public class Base {
    public void f() throws E1 {}
    public void g() throws E1,E3 {}
    public void h() throws E2 {}
}
```

```
public class Sub extends Base {
    ... see the following slides
}
```

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Exceptions and overriding Example

```
public class Sub extends Base {
    public void f() {}
    public void f() throws E1 {}
    public void f() throws E2 {}
    public void f() throws E1,E2 {}

    public void f() throws E3 {}
    public void f() throws E1,E3 {}
    public void f() throws E2,E3 {}
    ...
}
```

These are correct
overridings of f

... but NONE
of these

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Exceptions and overriding Example

```
public class Sub extends Base {
    ...
    public void g() {}
    public void g() throws E1 {}
    public void g() throws E2 {}
    public void g() throws E3 {}
    public void g() throws E1,E2 {}
    public void g() throws E1,E3 {}
    public void g() throws E2,E3 {}
    public void g() throws E1,E2,E3 {}
    ...
}
```

These are correct
overridings of g

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Exceptions and overriding Example

```
public class Sub extends Base {  
    ...  
    public void h() {}  
    public void h() throws E2 {}  
  
    public void h() throws E1 {}  
    public void h() throws E3 {}  
    public void h() throws E1,E2 {}  
    public void h() throws E1,E3 {}  
    public void h() throws E2,E3 {}  
    public void h() throws E1,E2,E3 {}  
}
```

These are correct
overridings of h

... but NONE
of these

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Review

- Runtime errors arise for many reasons.
 - An inappropriate client call to a server object.
 - A server unable to fulfill a request.
 - Programming error in client and/or server.

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Review

- Runtime errors often lead to program failure.
- Defensive programming anticipates errors
 - in both client and server.
- Exceptions provide a reporting and recovery mechanism.

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