Higher-Order Functions

The Heart and Soul of Functional Programming

Based on original slides by John Hughes and Koen Claessen

What is a “Higher Order” Function?

A function which takes another function as a parameter.

```
even :: Int -> Bool
even n = n`mod` 2 == 0
```

Examples

map even [1, 2, 3, 4, 5] = [False, True, False, True, False]

filter even [1, 2, 3, 4, 5] = [2, 4]

What is the Type of filter?

filter even [1, 2, 3, 4, 5] = [2, 4]

even :: Int -> Bool

filter :: (Int -> Bool) -> [Int] -> [Int]

A function type can be the type of an argument.

filter :: (a -> Bool) -> [a] -> [a]

Quiz: What is the Type of map?

Example

map even [1, 2, 3, 4, 5] = [False, True, False, True, False]

map also has a polymorphic type -- can you write it down?

Quiz: What is the Type of map?

Example

map even [1, 2, 3, 4, 5] = [False, True, False, True, False]

map :: (a -> b) -> [a] -> [b]

List of results

Any function of one argument

Any list of arguments

Quiz: What is the Definition of map?

Example

map even [1, 2, 3, 4, 5] = [False, True, False, True, False]

```
map :: (a -> b) -> [a] -> [b]
map = ?
```

Quiz: What is the Definition of map?

Example

map even [1, 2, 3, 4, 5] = [False, True, False, True, False]

```
map :: (a -> b) -> [a] -> [b]
map f []       = []
map f (x:xs) = f x : map f xs
```

Is this “Just Another Feature”?

NO!!!

- Higher-order functions are the “heart and soul” of functional programming!
- A higher-order function can do *much more* than a “first order” one, because a part of its behaviour can be controlled by the caller.
- We can replace *many similar* functions by *one* higher-order function, parameterised on the differences.

Case Study: Summing a List

```
sum []     = 0
sum (x:xs) = x + sum xs
```

General Idea

Combine the elements of a list using an operator.

Specific to Summing

The operator is +, the base case returns 0.

Case Study: Summing a List

```
sum []       = 0
sum (x:xs) = x + sum xs
```

Replace 0 and + by parameters -- + by a *function*.

```
foldr op z []        = z
foldr op z (x:xs) = x `op` foldr op z xs
```

Case Study: Summing a List

New Definition of sum

```
sum xs = foldr plus 0 xs
   where plus x y = x+y
```

or just…

```
sum xs = foldr (+) 0 xs
```

Just as `fun` lets a function be used as an operator,

so (op) lets an operator be used as a function.

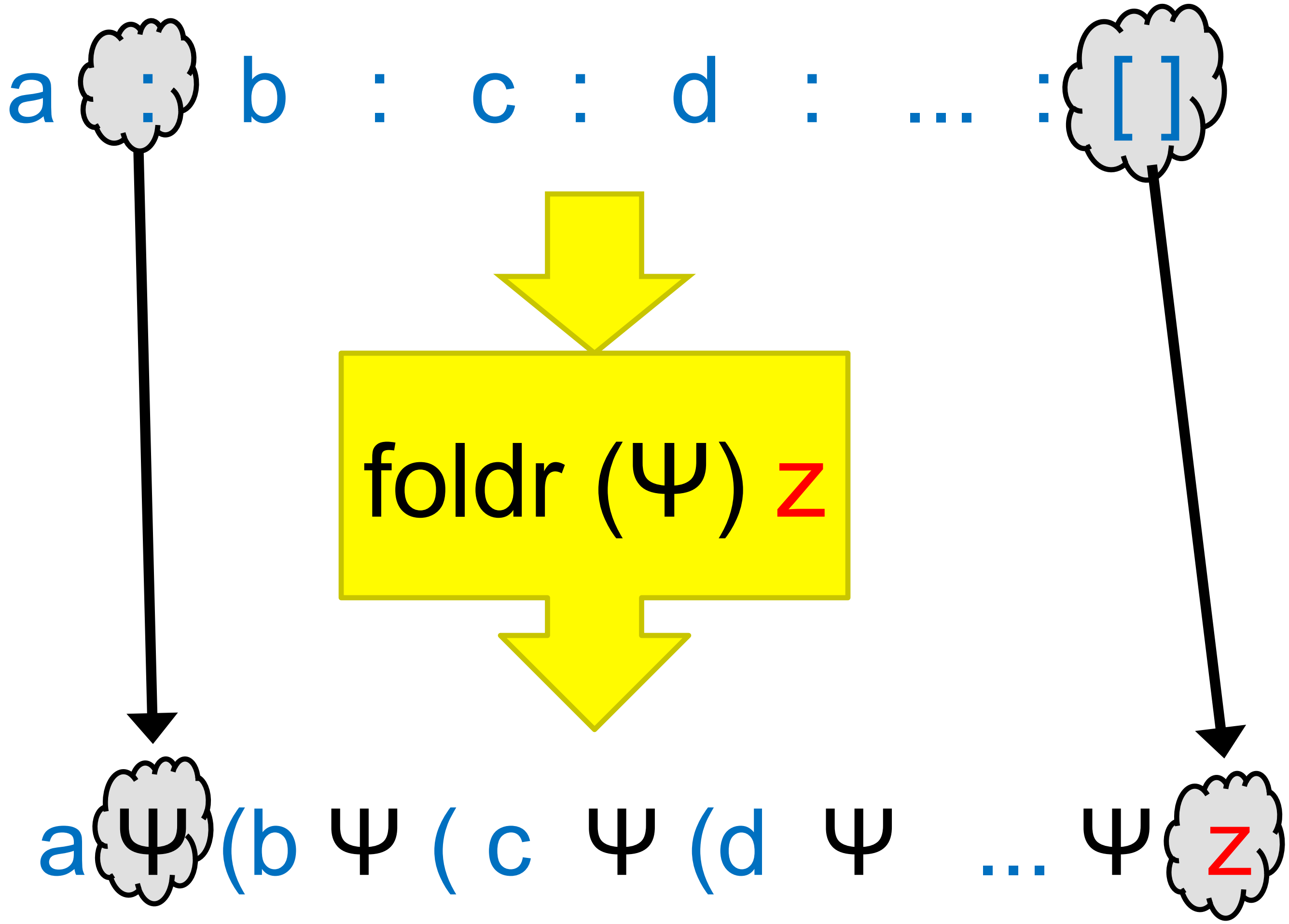
Applications

Combining the elements of a list is a *common* operation.

Now, instead of writing a recursive function, we can just use foldr!

```
product xs      = foldr (*) 1 xs
and xs          = foldr (&&) True xs
concat xs       = foldr (++) [] xs
maximum (x:xs) = foldr max x xs
```

An Intuition About foldr



The operator “:” is replaced by Ψ and [ ] is replaced by z.

An Intuition About foldr

```
foldr op z []     = z
foldr op z (x:xs) = x `op` foldr op z xs
```

Example

foldr op z (a:(b:(c:[]))) = a `op` foldr op z (b:(c:[]))

= a `op` (b `op` foldr op z (c:[]))

= a `op` (b `op` (c `op` foldr op z []))

= a `op` (b `op` (c `op` z))

The operator “:” is replaced by `op`, [] is replaced by z.

Quiz

What is

```
foldr (:) [ ] xs
```

Quiz

What is

foldr (:) [ ] xs

Replaces ":" by ":", and [] by [] -- *no change*!

The result is equal to xs.

Quiz

What is

foldr (:) ys xs

Quiz

What is

foldr (:) ys xs

foldr (:) ys (a:(b:(c:[ ])))

= a:(b:(c:ys))

The result is xs++ys!

xs++ys = foldr (:) ys xs

Quiz

What is

```
foldr (:) ys xs
```

Quiz

What is

```
foldr snoc [] xs
    where snoc y ys = ys++[y]
```

```
foldr snoc [] (a:(b:(c:[])))
        = a `snoc` (b `snoc` (c `snoc` []))
        = (([] ++ [c]) ++ [b] ++ [a]
```

The result is reverse xs!

```
reverse xs = foldr snoc [] xs
    where snoc y ys = ys++[y]
```

λ-expressions

```
reverse xs = foldr snoc [] xs
   where snoc y ys = ys++[y]
```

It's a nuisance to need to define snoc, which we only use once! A λ-expression lets us define it where it is used.

```
reverse xs = foldr (λy ys -> ys++[y]) [] xs
```

On the keyboard:

```
reverse xs = foldr (\y ys -> ys++[y]) [] xs
```

Defining unlines

unlines [“abc”, “def”, “ghi”] = “abc\ndef\nghi\n”

unlines [xs,ys,zs] = xs ++ “\n” ++ (ys ++ “\n” ++ (zs ++ “\n” ++ []))

unlines xss = foldr (λxs ys -> xs++“\n”++ys) [] xss

Just the same as

unlines xss = foldr join [ ] xss

where join xs ys = xs ++ “\n” ++ ys

Further Standard Higher-Order Functions

Another Useful Pattern

Example: takeLine “abc\ndef” = “abc”

used to define lines.

```
takeLine []        = []
takeLine (x:xs)
     | x/=´\n´     = x:takeLine xs
     | otherwise = []
```

General Idea

Take elements from a list while a condition is satisfied.

Specific to takeLine

The condition is that the element is not ´\n´.

Generalising takeLine

```
takeLine []        = []
takeLine (x:xs)
   | x/=´\n´       = x : takeLine xs
   | otherwise     = []
```

```
takeWhile p []     = []
takeWhile p (x:xs)
       | p x         = x : takeWhile p xs
       | otherwise = []
```

New Definition

takeLine xs = takeWhile (λx -> x/=´\n´) xs

or takeLine xs = takeWhile (/=´\n´) xs

Notation: Sections

As a shorthand, an operator with *one* argument stands for a function of the other…

- map (+1) [1,2,3] = [2,3,4]
- filter (<0) [1,-2,3] = [-2]
- takeWhile (0<) [1,-2,3] = [1]

(a¤) b = a¤b
(¤a) b = b¤a

Note that expressions like (*2+1) are not allowed.

Write λx -> x*2+1 instead.

Defining lines

We use

- takeWhile p xs -- returns the longest *prefix* of xs
  -- whose elements satisfy p.
- dropWhile p xs -- returns the rest of the list.

```
lines []  = []
lines xs = takeWhile (/=´\n´) xs :
                  lines (tail (dropWhile (/=´\n´) xs))
```

General idea Break a list into segments whose elements share some property.

Specific to lines The property is: “are not newlines”.

Quiz: Properties of takeWhile and dropWhile

takeWhile, dropWhile :: (a -> Bool) -> [a] -> [a]

Can you think of a property that connects takeWhile and dropWhile?

Hint: Think of a property that connects take and drop

Use **import** Text.Show.Functions

```
prop_TakeWhile_DropWhile p xs =
   takeWhile p xs ++ dropWhile p xs == (xs :: [Int])
```

Generalising lines

```
segments p [] = []
segments p xs = takeWhile p xs :
                    segments p (drop 1 (dropWhile p xs))
```

Example

segments (>=0) [1,2,3,-1,4,-2,-3,5]

= [[1,2,3], [4], [ ], [5]]

segments is not a standard function.

lines xs = segments (/=´\n´) xs

Quiz: Comma-Separated Lists

Many Windows programs store data in files as “comma separated lists”, for example

1,2,hello,4

Define commaSep :: String -> [String]

so that

commaSep “1,2,hello,4” == [“1”, “2”, “hello”, “4”]

Quiz: Comma-Separated Lists

Many Windows programs store data in files as “comma separated lists”, for example

1,2,hello,4

Define commaSep :: String -> [String]

so that

commaSep “1,2,hello,4” == [“1”, “2”, “hello”, “4”]

```
commaSep xs = segments (/=´,´) xs
```

Defining words

We can *almost* define words using segments -- but

segments (not . isSpace) “a b” = [“a”, “”, “b”]

Function composition
(f . g) x = f (g x)

which is not what we want -- there should be no empty words.

words xs = filter (/=“”) (segments (not . isSpace) xs)

Partial Applications

Haskell has a trick which lets us write down many functions easily. Consider this valid definition:

```
sum = foldr (+) 0
```

foldr was defined with 3 arguments. It's being called with 2.
What's going on?

Partial Applications

```
sum = foldr (+) 0
```

Evaluate sum [1,2,3]

= {replacing sum by its definition}

foldr (+) 0 [1,2,3]

Now foldr has the *right* number of arguments!

= {by the behaviour of foldr}

1 + (2 + (3 + 0))

= 6

Partial Applications

Any function may be called with fewer arguments than it was defined with.

The result is a *function* of the remaining arguments.

If f ::Int -> Bool -> Int -> Bool

then f 42 :: Bool -> Int -> Bool

f 42 True :: Int -> Bool

f 42 True 42 :: Bool

Bracketing Function Calls and Types

We say function application "brackets to the left"

function types "bracket to the right"

If f ::Int -> (Bool -> (Int -> Bool))

then f 3 :: Bool -> (Int -> Bool)

(f 3) True :: Int -> Bool

((f 3) True) 4 :: Bool

Functions really take only *one* argument, and return (in this case) a function expecting more as a result.

Designing with Higher-Order Functions

- Break the problem down into a series of small steps, each of which can be programmed using an existing higher-order function.
- Gradually “massage” the input closer to the desired output.
- Compose together all the massaging functions to get the result.

Example: Counting Words

Input

A string representing a text containing many words. For example

“hello clouds hello sky”

Output

A string listing the words in order, along with how many times each word occurred.

“clouds: 1\nhello: 2\nsky: 1”

clouds: 1
hello: 2
sky: 1

Step 1: Breaking Input into Words

“hello clouds\nhello sky”

words

[“hello”, “clouds”, “hello”, “sky”]

Step 2: Sorting the Words

[“hello”, “clouds”, “hello”, “sky”]

sort

[“clouds”, “hello”, “hello”, “sky”]

Digression: The groupBy Function

groupBy :: (a -> a -> Bool) -> [a] -> [[a]]

groupBy p xs

breaks xs into segments [x1,x2…], such that p x1 xi is True for each xi in the segment.

groupBy (<) [3,2,4,3,1,5] = [[3], [2,4,3], [1,5]]

groupBy (==) “hello” = [“h”, “e”, “ll”, “o”]

Step 3: Grouping Equal Words

[“clouds”, “hello”, “hello”, “sky”]

groupBy (==)

[[“clouds”], [“hello”, “hello”], [“sky”]]

Step 4: Counting Each Group

[[“clouds”], [“hello”, “hello”], [“sky”]]

↓

map (λws -> (head ws, length ws))

↓

[(“clouds”,1), (“hello”, 2), (“sky”,1)]

Step 5: Formatting Each Group

[(“clouds”,1), (“hello”, 2), (“sky”,1)]

map (λ(w,n) -> w ++ “: ” ++ show n)

[“clouds: 1”, “hello: 2”, “sky: 1”]

Step 6: Combining the Lines

[“clouds: 1”, “hello: 2”, “sky: 1”]

↓

unlines

↓

“clouds: 1\nhello: 2\nsky: 1\n”

clouds: 1
hello: 2
sky: 1

The Complete Definition

```
countWords :: String -> String
countWords = unlines
                  . map (λ(w,n)-> w++”:”++show n)
                  . map (λws->(head ws, length ws))
                  . groupBy (==)
                  . sort
                  . words
```

Quiz: A property of Map

map :: (a -> b) -> [a] -> [b]

Can you think of a property that merges two consecutive uses of map?

```
prop_MapMap :: (Int -> Int) -> (Int -> Int) -> [Int] -> Bool
prop_MapMap f g xs =
  map f (map g xs) == map (f . g) xs
```

The Optimized Definition

```
countWords :: String -> String
countWords
  = unlines
  . map (λws-> head ws ++ “:” ++ show(length ws))
  . groupBy (==)
  . sort
  . words
```

Where Do Higher-Order Functions Come From?

- Generalise a repeated pattern: define a function to avoid repeating it.

- Higher-order functions let us abstract patterns that are *not exactly the same*, e.g. Use + in one place and * in another.

- **Basic idea**: name common code patterns, so we can use them without repeating them.

Must I Learn All the Standard Functions?

Yes and No…

- **No**, because they are just defined in Haskell. You can reinvent any you find you need.
- **Yes**, because they capture very frequent patterns; learning them lets you solve many problems with great ease.

”Stand on the shoulders of giants!”

Summary

When to build HOFs

How to feed HOFs

- Named definition
- Lambda expressions
- Sections
- Partial application
- Composition

Lessons

- Higher-order functions take functions as parameters, making them *flexible* and useful in very many situations.
- By writing higher-order functions to capture common patterns, we can reduce the work of programming dramatically.
- λ-expressions, partial applications, function composition and sections help us create functions to pass as parameters, without a separate definition.
- Haskell provides many useful higher-order functions; break problems into small parts, each of which can be solved by an existing function.

Reading

- /learnyouahaskell.com/higher-order-functions