

## Software Engineering — A brief look into other aspects of programming

Writing code is just one aspect of crafting software and applications. You need to understand design, testing, deployment, licensing, security, monitoring, managing, and support of software. One who does all (or most of) that is often called a *software engineer* (as opposed to a programmer). While you will need some experience before you can get hired to design and develop some business-critical software (entry-level jobs are usually in programming and support), you should become familiar with a few concepts and terms. (Qu: Why?) (These topics are covered more thoroughly in the advanced Java course.) See [monster.com](http://monster.com) for a sample SE job description. Note that the U.S. Federal government allows the title “software engineer” for almost any computer-related field, but some states (and some other countries) have high standards for a title including the word “engineer”. [Florida](http://Florida) is one state where this is true. Professionals (in the legal sense) are held to a higher standard of work and conduct than non-professionals.

In COP-2805 (Java II), we will learn more about these topics, techniques, and tools. For now, a few of the concepts should suffice:

### JavaBean Standards

**Some classes define *getter* and *setter* (*accessor* and *mutator*) methods, for each of the object’s properties.** In general, this is a bad idea. Fields are only there to support the methods, and as an implementation issue are usually declared `private`. Sometimes, however, it is a good idea. For example `Graphics.setXXX` methods.

But too many such methods are a symptom of a poor design. Avoid the mistake of have “dumb” objects, each with getters/setters (essentially, just database records wrapped in objects), and one “brain” main method that does all the work. This is not object-oriented! However, the *JavaBean* standard for objects requires a pair of methods for each *property*, with names `getPropname` and `setPropname`. Boolean properties may use `isPropname` for the getter instead.

### When to Define Methods

Start with class and object design (below). The initial methods should correspond to the *messages* (or *commands*) invoked on objects. These methods define the possible *behavior* of the objects and should be generally declared `public`. Should these methods be unwieldy, you can define methods to remove duplicated code or to simplify or shorten the methods. Such methods should be declared as `private` as they are just implementation methods, and you should feel free to change them.

(*Rule of thumb*: Keep methods focused on a single task, and shorter than a screenful or “pageful”.)

Some methods are *basic utility methods* (such as `Math.cos`) that don’t depend on any object. Such methods should be defined as `static`. General utility methods that can be reused in other projects should be `public` and be coded to be general purpose, if convenient.

Actually, the initial design is to decide what classes to have, and the responsibilities of each. For each class, then you decide what public methods are needed to meet those responsibilities.

**In class program:** Show **MsgBox.java**, **MsgBox2.java**, **MsgBox3.java** programs that has main ask the user for a line of input and then prints it within a box. Have students complete similar program that invokes a method *boxMsg(String message)* to draw the box around the String using `System.out.print()` and/or `System.out.println()` for output (Hint: Use `String.length()`):

```
+-----+
| Danger Will Robinson! |
+-----+
```

Q: the `drawLine` method of `MsgBox`, what parameters should it take to make it more generally reusable in other applications? Ans: indent, char to draw with.

### Design Guidelines for Methods and Classes: Abstraction and Encapsulation

**Abstraction:** the process of finding the essential (and **relevant for the current problem**) methods (behaviors) and fields (properties) of classes. You *abstract* the objects in the problem domain to decide what the classes should be; you can write a verbal description and examine all the nouns.

Each class should be concerned with a single entity (or set of related operations, when creating *utility* classes such as `java.lang.Math`). Note that a single entity in the problem domain may be represented by several objects in your program (ex: HCC new registration system, what are the objects?). The reason is to keep each class focused on a single concept (“separation of concerns”).

A class is *cohesive* if its methods and properties relate to a single abstraction.

Use **top-down design** for the methods discovered above. This may lead to additional `private` methods.

The instance (and class) variables define the properties of the objects. (Q: What does an object have to “know” or “remember” between method calls?)

**Encapsulation** is putting related items in a single place, and then hiding (making “private”) the implementation details. (Most properties are private.)

**Coupling** is the amount classes are related to each other (that is, how “spread out” your abstractions are). Proper encapsulation reduces coupling.

The methods define what the object’s behavior, what it can do. Usually there are methods for reading and changing the values of the properties. (Better than having public properties, since that increases *coupling* and lowers the *data-hiding* and *encapsulation* that is so desirable to decrease debugging and maintenance costs. Also mention *cohesion*.)

## What makes for good comments?

**Know your audience;** generally experienced programmers. The important thing about comments is that you don't write them for yourself. You write them for future maintainers (possibly your own future self).

A fellow visits a construction site and asks a worker what he's doing; "I'm mixing concrete." Another worker says "I'm putting up a wall." A third says "I'm building a school." They all described *what* they were doing, but from different perspectives. **A goal of writing good documentation is to anticipate the readers' perspectives.**

And if you were to ask *why* any of the worthies above were doing what they were doing they'd answer "so I can pay the bills" or "because I enjoy working with my hands".

There are different types of comments:

**What comments refer to the actual steps taken.** Use *what* comments to describe what a chunk (also called a code *fragment* or *snippet*) of code is doing. Simple, clear code needs fewer *what* comments. If during a code review you ask the author what a chunk of code is doing, it either means that their code is unclear and/or the *what* comments are deficient. Complex formulas and algorithms need *what* comments.

**Why comments refer to the reasons for writing the code in a particular way.** A *why* comment is for explaining a particular implementation decision, especially if it's not the "obvious" design choice. If the obvious choice is to use an `int` but you use a `double` or (even stranger) a `String`, a *why* comment is useful.

**A third type of comment is a *how* comment.** These are for libraries and reusable modules, and tell the reader how to use your code with their code. The Java "doc" (or "API") comments for Java SE is an example of this. (Such docs are usually extracted from comments in the source code.) *How* comments are used to describe how to use a method, field, or class. Generally, only `public` methods and fields need these. *How* comments might describe method argument types and ranges, return value type and range, method semantics, pre- and post- conditions, and use cases (example code). *What* and *why* comments are generally not included in such API docs.

A fourth type of comment is a *who* comment. These are the comments you must have at the top of each source code file to identify the author(s) (who wrote the code) and purpose of the code. If any of the code came from others, include references. If your code is under any sort of license, you can include a link to the license (or just provide a copy in the comments). If the code is online or you use online systems to manage the software development process (code review, issue tracker, wiki), have links for those as well. Every organization will have different rules for this.

**Bad comments should be eliminated.** Some examples of bad/useless comments include "`//initialize variables`", "`x = 2; //set x to 2`", "`num = num + 1; // add 1 to num`", etc.

Often you can eliminate such bad comments by choosing better names. For example, “`p = n * e + t; // Compute price`” can be written as “`price = quantity * priceEach + tax;`”. The same applies to method names.

## Programming Style and Program Development Process

Programs are read more often than they are written. Others must read your code. Don't program sloppily, thinking you'll “pretty it up later”. That never happens!

First, design your program; don't design “at the keyboard” (writing code before you know what the code is supposed to do). Once you have the main design worked out (not necessarily all the details), only then should you start writing code.

Every organization has a definition of acceptable “program style”. Fortunately each language has a generally accepted style documented someplace, and usually organizations follow that closely. Code that violates the style rules is deemed unacceptable (and there are automatic style checkers used). The exact style followed by a team of developers does not matter as much as the fact that they all follow the same style rules.

While many work-flows are possible when crafting software, here's a procedure that saves time and works well with the few tools and techniques you already know:

**Start with the “what” comments.** Decide on (public) class and method names to begin. Put in empty public methods (except for their comments), with the correct *method signatures*. These are called *stub methods* (or simply “*stubs*”). At this point you have a do-nothing *skeleton* program that will compile without errors. (Non-void stub methods also need a “fake” return statement or they won't compile, e.g. “`return 0; //Stub`”.) The comments here are *what* comments: a list of tasks done by that method, in the correct order. **If you cannot add complete *what* comments to your skeleton program, you do not understand the task yet.**

Sometimes you may not know what the steps should be. It is perfectly reasonable to play with code, to see what might work. But once you have the right idea, throw away that experimental code and add in the *what* comments you now know to be correct.

**It is far, far easier to follow the correct style rules as you type, then to use sloppy programming and try to make it nicer later.** Remember that you may need to show others your code before you are done, and if they cannot understand it or it is too difficult for them to read it, you will not get any feedback other than “*clean up this mess*”. (Some IDEs can enforce style rules for you.)

**Use indenting and blank lines to improve readability;** they don't slow down your program! Use the proper indentation style shown in class and in the examples. For most programs, you should indent 3-4 spaces each time. (Use spaces, never tabs. Most editors have settings to convert tab to spaces for you.) Keep your lines shorter than 80 characters. Remember you can always break up long lines into two or more shorter ones.

Now you are ready to write actual code. Add declarations for the variables and objects you've decided to use. Choose an appropriate type for your variables, planning for the future if the values become large (to avoid overflow; see below). Choose descriptive names and use a consistent naming style.

To write the Java code for the methods of your classes, start working on one class and one method at a time. Look at the *what* comments in that method, and pick one of them to implement for now. Put the code for that one task below the comment you already have. As you code, you can add other comments of course. And if your design changes (“*Drat! This won't work!*” or “*Ah-Ha! A brainstorm!*”), you can alter the *what* comments as well.

After each *chunk* of a few lines is coded (using correct style!), save the file and then check for *syntax errors* by compiling. Do not move onto the next chunk until what you've done so far compiles without error. Finding and fixing bugs in a few lines is far easier than finding and fixing bugs in dozens or hundreds of lines.

**Math related logic errors** include overflow/underflow (ex: byte  $b = 100 + 100$ );, floating point divide by zero (+Infinity, -Infinity, NaN), and floating point round-off errors (which require special comparison techniques). **A programmer must ensure this doesn't happen.**

In 11/2012, the Stockholm Stock Exchange received an order for 4.3 billion futures at a unit price of 107,000 SEK. This order would have cost nearly 460 SEK trillion, or 131 times the entire GDP of Sweden. The bug that caused this false order brought the exchange to a halt. It appeared to be an integer underflow that created the 4.2 billion future order.

Other issues to watch for include security concerns and compliance with various laws and regulations.

## Debugging

Just because your code compiles does not mean it is error (bug) free! You need to run the program with carefully selected input and verify the output is expected. This is known as testing. But, what if it isn't right and the tests fail? You need to locate the point in your code where you did something wrong (or forgot to do something), then fix it. This is known as *debugging*.

To aid debugging, you can use `System.out.println()` to print the values of variables and expressions at different points in your code. The bug will be between the last print statement showing correct values and the next print statement showing incorrect values. These print statements are called *scaffolding* and are meant to be removed from the final working program. You put scaffolding before some formula to show the values used, and afterwards to show the result; in loops to see how many times to loop goes around, etc. (IDEs have other debugging tools but scaffolding is an easy technique and works well.)

If you are unsure where the bug is (and assuming there is only one!), put the print statement showing the input data and the results near the end. If the results are wrong,

the error is earlier in your code. You can move the print statement to half-way between the last position and the top. (If you have multiple scaffold statements, move the one showing the wrong results half-way between its current position and the previous print statement showing correct results.) This is known as *bisection*.

It's not always the case a developer has source code they can modify with scaffolding. In some cases, you need to debug software from a third party without source code available. With source code, you can use the debuggers built into IDEs such as Eclipse or NetBeans. There are stand-alone debuggers as well that don't require source. Some include the primitive command line tool `jdb` (part of the JDK), [Jswat](#), and [YourKit](#).

*Demo JDK 8 monitoring and debugging tools:* Start some Java app (Davmail is good), then run `jvisualvm`. (Add some plugins esp. visual GC.) Other tools: `jps`, then `jmap -heap PID`. Also: `jmap -histo:live PID`. To browse the heap, use `jmap -dump:live,format=b,file=dump.dat PID`, and then `jhat dump.dat` and open browser to `http://localhost:7000/`. Also `show jconsole PID`.

**Don't re-invent the wheel!** Reuse an existing class if one exists that will do the job. When creating your own classes, think about designing in some features that will allow you and others to reuse your class in future applications. This is what the huge number of Java packages (of classes) is for.

Try to write efficient, readable code that minimizes round-off errors (by re-arranging formulas). For example: Calculate a common expression once and store the result in a variable. **Declare variables as needed**, and initialize at the same time.

**Testing:** Most classes represent objects such as `Person`, `Color`, `Button`, etc., and are not full programs. You can add a `main` method to such classes, solely to test each method of that class: have your main method create an object of the class and call its methods with test data. Then print the result and the expected result. This sort of testing (sometimes called *ad-hoc*) is better than no testing at all, but better testing is very important in the real world and will be discussed in the future.