Java and C# in depth

Carlo A. Furia, Marco Piccioni, Bertrand Meyer

C#: exceptions and genericity
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Exceptions
Exceptions

Exceptions are objects
  ▪ They are all descendants of `System.Exception`

  ▪ Raise with a `throw ExceptionObject` instruction
    ```
    throw new AnExceptionClass("ErrorInfo");
    ```

  ▪ In C#, all exceptions are “unchecked” (using Java terminology)
    ▪ May be handled, if desired
    ▪ If the current block does not have an exception handler, the call stack is searched backward for an exception handler
    ▪ If none is found, the unhandled exception terminates the current execution thread
Exception handlers

The scope of the exception handler is denoted by a `try` block

Every `try` block is immediately followed by zero or more `catch` blocks, zero or one `finally` block, or both. At least one of `catch` blocks and `finally` block is required (otherwise, what’s the `try` for?)

```java
public int foo(int b) {
    try {
        if (b > 3) {
            throw new System.Exception();
        }
    } catch (System.Exception e) { b++; }
    finally { b++; }
    return b;
}
```
Exception handlers: catch blocks

```java
    catch (ExceptionType name) {
        /* handler */
    }
```

- Targets exceptions whose type conforms to `ExceptionType`
- `ExceptionType` must be a descendant of `System.Exception`
- `name` behaves as a local variable inside the handler block
- A `catch` block of type `T` cannot follow a `catch` block of type `S` if `T ≤ S` (otherwise the `T`-type block would be shadowed)
- From within a `catch` block the exception being handled can be re-thrown with `throw` (no arguments)
Exception handlers: catch/finally blocks

When an exception of type $T$ is thrown within a `try` block:

- control is transferred to the first (in textual order) catch block whose type $T$ conforms to, if one exists
- then, the control is then transferred to the `finally` block (if it exists)
- finally, execution continues after the `try` block

When no conforming `catch` exists or an exception is re-thrown inside the handler:

- After executing the `finally` block, the exception propagates to the next available enclosing handler

When a `try` block terminates without exceptions:

- the control is transferred to the `finally` block (if it exists)
- then, execution continues after the `try` block
Exception handlers: catch/finally blocks

A **finally** block is **always** executed after the **try** block even if no exceptions are thrown

- Typically used to free resources

Control-flow breaking instruction (**return**, **break**, **continue**) inside a **finally** block are restricted.

- **return** statements cannot occur in **finally** blocks

- **goto**, **break**, and **continue** statements can occur in **finally** blocks only if they do not transfer control outside the **finally** block itself

These restrictions disallow tricky cases that are allowed in Java
Invalid **finally** blocks

Valid Java code but invalid C# code:

```java
public int foo() {
    try {
        return 1;
    }
    finally {
        return 2;
    }
}
```

```java
public void foo() {
    int b = 1;
    while (true) {
        try {
            b++;
            throw new Exception();
        }
        finally {
            b++;
            break;
        }
    }
    b++;
}
```

(Examples from **Martin Nordio**)
Exceptions and assertions (that is, contracts) have partially overlapping purposes: dealing with “special” behaviors

- unacceptable input
- errors in computations
- runtime failures (e.g., I/O or network errors)
- ...
Exceptions vs. assertions

The following guidelines are useful to choose when to use exceptions or assertions:

- **exceptions** define the actions to be taken in case of **exceptional behavior**, to restore a normal behavior
  - they define a “special” behavior that requires special handling
  - an exception occurring is an acceptable runtime behavior
  - exceptions may occur even in correct programs

- **assertions** constitute a **specification** of what the implementation should achieve
  - they define a contract
  - an assertion violation is always an implementation error
  - if the program is correct, checking the assertions is completely useless
Exceptions vs. assertions: examples

A `BankAccount` class defines a public method `FracBonus` to add a fractional bonus to the `Balance`:

```java
void FracBonus(int frac);
    // add 1/frac to Balance
```

Valid inputs: `frac > 0`

Exception or assertion?
A `BankAccount` class defines a public method `FracBonus` to add a fractional bonus to the `Balance`:

```java
void FracBonus(int frac);
// add 1/frac to Balance
```

Valid inputs: `frac > 0`

Exception or assertion?

`assertion`:
this is a requirement imposed on clients of the method
Exceptions vs. assertions: examples

Using exceptions:

- In class `BankAccount`:
  ```java
  void FracBonus(int frac) {
    if (frac <= 0)
      throw new Exception("Wrong input");
    Bonus = Bonus * 1/frac;
  }
  ```

- In clients of `BankAccount`:
  ```java
  BankAccount ba;
  int x;
  // ...
  try {
    ba.FracBonus(x)
  }
  catch (Exception e) {
    if (e.Message == "Wrong input") {
      x = -x + 1; ba.FracBonus(x);
    }
  }
  ```
Using assertions:

- In class `BankAccount`:
  ```java
  void FracBonus(int frac) {
    Assert(frac > 0);
    Bonus = Bonus * 1/frac;
  }
  ```

- In clients of `BankAccount`:
  ```java
  BankAccount ba;
  int x;
  // ...
  if (!(x > 0)) { x = -x + 1; }
  ba.FracBonus(x);
  ```
Exceptions vs. assertions: examples

A `BankAccount` class defines a public method `LoadBalance` to read a new value of `Balance` from file:

```java
void LoadBalance(String fileName);
// read a new value
// of Balance from fileName
```

Valid inputs:

- `fileName` is the name of an existing file
- the file can be opened correctly
- the content reads as an integer
- ...

Exception or assertion?
Exceptions vs. assertions: examples

A `BankAccount` class defines a public method `LoadBalance` to read a new value of `Balance` from file:

Valid inputs:

- `fileName` is the name of an existing file
- the file can be opened correctly
- the content reads as an integer
- ...

Exception or assertion?

- `exception`:
  an invalid input is a runtime error that requires extra measures but doesn’t depend on the implementation being incorrect
Exceptions vs. assertions: examples

Using assertions:

- In class `BankAccount`:
  ```csharp
  void LoadBalance(string fileName) {
    Assert(fileName != null);
    Assert(fileName != "") ;
    Assert(System.IO.File.Exists(fileName));
    TextReader tr = new StreamReader(fileName);
    int result;
    bool ok = Int32.TryParse(tr.ReadLine(), out result);
    Assert(ok);
    return result;
  }
  ```

- In clients of `BankAccount`:
  ```csharp
  BankAccount ba; string fn;
  // read file name from user into fn
  // redo the checks and notify user if they go wrong
  if (fn == "") {
    Console.WriteLine("Invalid filename");
  }
  // ...
  ```
Exceptions vs. assertions: examples

Using exceptions:

- In class `BankAccount`:
  ```csharp
  void LoadBalance(string fileName) {
      TextReader tr = new StreamReader(fileName);
      return Convert.ToInt32(tr.ReadLine());
  }
  ```

- In clients of `BankAccount`:
  ```csharp
  BankAccount ba;
  string fn;
  // read file name from user into fn
  // catch assertions and notify user accordingly
  try {
      ba.LoadBalance(fn)
  }
  catch (ArgumentException e) {
      Console.WriteLine("Invalid filename");
  }
  // ...
  ```
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Genericity in C#
Generics

C#’s genericity mechanism, available since C# 2.0

Most common use:
- Use (and implement) generic type-safe containers
  ```csharp
  List<String> safeBox = new List<String>();
  ```
- Compile-time type-checking is enforced

More sophisticated uses:
- Custom generic classes and methods
- Bounded genericity
  ```csharp
  public T test <T> (T x) where T:Interface1, Interface2
  ```
Generic classes

A **generic class** is a class parameterized w.r.t. one or more generic types.

```
public <T> class Cell {
    public T val { get; set; };
}
```

To instantiate a generic class we must provide an actual type for the generic parameters.

```
Cell<String> c = new Cell<String>();
```
Generic classes

The generic parameters of a generic class may constrain the valid actual types.

```java
public class Cell<T> where T:S { ... }
```

This is valid only if `X` is a subtype of `S`:

```java
Cell<X> c = new Cell<X>();
```

The constrains may involve multiple types.

```java
public class C<T> where T: A, IB
```

This is valid only if `Y` is a subtype of both `A` and `IB`:

```java
C<Y> c = new C<Y>();
```
Type inference: implicit types

When creating an instance of a generic class, the compiler is often able to infer the generic type from the context. In such cases, we can omit the type and use `var` instead.

```
var c = new Cell<String>();
```

is equivalent to:

```
Cell<String> c = new Cell<String>();
```

In general, `var` can be used for every variable declaration where the compiler can figure out the types.

```
var x = new String[12];
var y = 12;
var z = 12.4 + 5 + "OK"; // String "17.4OK"
```
A generic method is a method parameterized w.r.t. one or more generic types.

```java
public U downcast <U> (T x) where U:T {
    return (U) x;
}
```

Notice the different position of the generic parameter:

- **C#**: `public T foo <T> (T x);`
- **Java**: `public <T> T foo (T x);`
Generic methods

Client must provide actual types for the generic parameters only when the compiler cannot infer them from context.

```java
public U downcast <U> (T x) where U:T

Person p = new Person();

Employee e = downcast(p); // error: which type
    // among all subtypes of Employee?
Employee e = downcast<Employee>(p); // OK
var e = downcast<Employee>(p); // OK

public static void a2c <G> (G[] a, IList<G> c)
a2c (new String[8], new List<String>()); // OK
```
Generics: features and limitations

Unlike Java, genericity is supported natively by .NET bytecode

Hence, basically all limitations of Java generics disappear:

- Can instantiate generic parameter with value types
- At runtime you can tell the difference between `List<Integer>` and `List<String>`
- Exception classes can be generic classes
- Can instantiate a generic type parameter
  - provided a clause `where T : new()` constrains the parameter to have a default constructor
- Can get the default value of a generic type parameter
  `T t = default(T);`
- Arrays with elements of a generic type parameter can be instantiated
- A static member can reference a generic type parameter
- Another consequence is that raw types (unchecked generic types without any type argument) don’t exist in C#
Generics and inheritance

- Let S be a subtype of T (i.e. S ≤ T)

There is no inheritance relation between:

SomeGenericClass<S> and SomeGenericClass<T>

In particular: the former is not a subtype of the latter

However, let AClass be a non-generic type:

- S<AClass> is a subtype of T<AClass>

There’s no C# equivalent of Java’s wildcards, but C#'s full-fledged genericity mechanisms normally provide alternative ways to achieve the same designs.

However, C# doesn’t have lower-bounded genericity
Consider a method of class \textbf{F}:

\begin{verbatim}
public static void foo(List<Vehicle> x){
    // add a Truck to the end of list 'x'
    x.add(new Truck());
}
\end{verbatim}

If \texttt{List<Car>} were a subtype of \texttt{List<Vehicle>}, this would be valid code:

\begin{verbatim}
var cars = new List<Car>();
cars.add(new Car());
F.foo(cars);
\end{verbatim}

But now a \texttt{List<Car>} would contain a \texttt{Truck}, which is not a \texttt{Car}!
Consider the following hierarchy of classes:

What should be the signature of a method `drawShapes` that takes a list of `Shape` objects and draws all of them?

- `DrawShapes( List<Shape> shapes )`
  - this doesn’t work on a `List<Circle>`, which is not a subtype of `List<Shape>"`
Replacing wildcards in C# : example

What should be the signature of a method `drawShapes` that takes a list of `Shape` objects and draws all of them?

First solution: use a helper class with bounded genericity

```csharp
class DrawHelper <T> where T: Shape {
    public static void DrawShapes( List<T> shapes)
}
```

Client usage:

```csharp
DrawHelper<Shape>.DrawShapes(listOfShapes);
DrawHelper<Circle>.DrawShapes(listOfCircles);
```

The compiler may be able to infer the generic type argument from context.
Replacing wildcards in C#: example

What should be the signature of a method `drawShapes` that takes a list of `Shape` objects and draws all of them?

Second solution: use a generic method inside `Shape`

```csharp
public static void DrawShapes<T> (List<T> shapes)
    where T:Shape
```

Client usage:

```csharp
Shape.DrawShapes<Shape> (listOfShapes);
Shape.DrawShapes<Circle> (listOfCircles);
```

The compiler may be able to infer the generic type argument from context.
Collections

A classic example of separating interface from implementation

Some library interfaces from `System.Collections.Generic`:

- `ICollection<E>`
  - `int Count`;
    - number of elements in the collection
  - `void add(E item)`
  - `bool remove(E item)`
    - returns whether the collection actually changed
  - `IEnumerator<E> GetEnumerator()`

- `IEnumerator<E>`
  - `bool MoveNext()`
    - Moves to the next element; returns `false` if the enumerator has passed the end of the collection
  - `E Current`
    - returns the current element in the enumeration
Collections: some implementations

- **List**: indexed, dynamically growing
- **LinkedList**: doubly-linked list
- **HashSet**: unordered, rejects duplicates
- **TreeSet**: ordered, rejects duplicates
- **Dictionary**: key/value associations
- **SortedDictionary**: key/value associations, sorted keys