CMSC 131: Chapter 18 (Supplement)
Comments and Documentation

Comments

Overview: We have already seen how to write comments.

- Programs are hard to understand, and this can result in errors.
- Good documentation is essential to making your program easy to use and maintain.
- Writing clear documentation is like writing clear prose. It is challenging, and requires careful thought.

Syntactic Rules and Conventions:

- // style comments are confined to a single line.
  - Are best used to explain the meaning of a single line of code.
  - Provide (private) implementation details for a programmer who may be modifying your code.

- /* ... */ block comments can span multiple lines.
  - Are best used to explain the meaning of a block of code.
  - Provide both (private) implementation details as well as (public) interface information.

Principal Types of Documentation

Documentation Comments: Indicated by /** ... */

- Describes the (public) behavior the method, its parameters and their meaning, the return value (if any), and possible errors or exceptions. Should appear at the top of method/class definition.
- To be read by a user of your method or class.

Implementation Comments: Indicated by either // or /* ... */

- Describes the (private/internal) coding and algorithm details.
- Usually appear interspersed throughout the code. Help you understand what the code does.
- To be read by someone programming/modifying the method.
- These comments should not duplicate the code. Rather, they should provide clarifying explanations and point out issues that are not obvious in reading the code.
Common Errors in Commenting

Common errors to avoid:

Too many comments: This can obscure the flow of your program.

Too few comments: Your intent may not be understood.

No comments: "My code is so clear it is self-documenting" (Yeah!)

Uninformative comments:

```java
int total = 0; // initialize integer total to 0
```

Using comments to conceal unclear code: ...just rewrite the code

```java
double a = h * w; // set the area (a) to the height (h) times width (w)
double area = height * width;
```

The "Mystery" comment:

```java
double d = processValue(); // change this (legacy version)
```

Misleading/Erroneous comment: These are dangerous

```java
for (int i = 0; i < a.length-1; i++) // run through the whole array
```

Javadoc Documentation

Javadoc:
Reads your source code and produces formatted documentation as an **HTML file**, which can be viewed in a **web browser**.

How it works:
- To run it from Eclipse, right-click on the project name and select "Export→**Javadoc**".

```
- javadoc is a program (javadoc on Unix/Linux and javadoc.exe on Windows). It scans all the files in your project directory.

- It extracts the **declarations** of your **public methods** and **public instance variables**, from your classes and interfaces.

- It extracts the contents of **block comments** that start with "/\*\*/. Example:

```
/\*
   * This is a javadoc comment.
   */
```
**Javadoc Documentation**

**Class comments**: Immediately prior to each public class, add a javadoc comment that explains what the class does. You can also add the following special "tags", which javadoc recognizes and provides special formatting for:

- @author - the author of the class
- @version - the current software version number
- @see - refer the reader to related classes

Example: In Rational.java

```java
/**
 * This class implements a rational number object,
 * and provides methods for performing arithmetic
 * on rational numbers.
 * @see java.lang.Math
 * @author Schultzie von Wienerschnitzel III
 * @version 3.14159
 */
public class Rational { … }
```

**Sample Javadoc Output**

(Images omitted. These will be provided in the lecture code section of the class web page.)

**Javadoc Documentation**

**Method comments**: Immediately prior to each public method, add a javadoc comment explaining what the class does, the meanings of the parameters, the return value, and any errors. The following tags are recognized:

- @param - give the name and description of each parameter. There should be one for each parameter.
- @return - describe the return value (unless it is void)
- @throws - (Later: we will discuss error exceptions later this semester)
- @deprecated - (Usually for system use: indicates that a method should be avoided, since better alternatives exist)

Example:

```java
/**
 * Multiplies two rational numbers and returns their the product.
 * @param q The first operand.
 * @param r The second operand.
 * @return A reference to a newly created Rational with the sum.
 */
public static Rational multiply(Rational q, Rational r) { … }
```
Example: Prime Number Generator

Commenting Examples: Consider a method that computes all the prime numbers from 2 up to a given value maxNumber.

Prime: A number p > 1 is prime if it is divisible only by itself and 1.

Method: Sieve of Eratosthenes:
- List all the numbers from 2 up to maxNumber.
- For each number, remove all its larger multiples (set to 0).
- Stop when reaching the square root of maxNumber.

Prime Number Generator: Implementation

Implementation Issues:

Array bounds: We want to store values ranging from 2 up to maxNumber. To do this, we will declare the array to have size maxNumber+1. Thus the indices run from [0..maxNumber], but we will simply not use entries 0 and 1.

When to stop? Clearly we could repeat the procedure for all primes up to maxNumber, but this would not be efficient. Any nonprime number is eliminated by its smallest prime divisor.

14 = 2 * 7 will be eliminated by 2
195 = 3 * 5 * 13 will be eliminated by 3
289 = 17 * 17 will be eliminated by 17

We do not need to search beyond the square root of maxNumber, since if it hasn't been eliminated by then, it never will be.
PrimeGenerator: Javadoc comments

/**
 * This class demonstrates an clear and simple use of comments
 * with a single method that generates a list of primes. It also
 * provides an example of how JavaDoc documentation works.
 *
 * @author CMSC 131
 * @version 1.0
 */
public class PrimeGenerator {

/**
 * Returns an array containing the prime numbers between 2 and
 * the given parameter. If there are no primes found, an array
 * of length 0 is returned.
 * @param maxNumber The upper bound on the range of primes.
 * @return An integer array holding the prime numbers.
 */
public static int[] getPrimes( int maxNumber ) {
    // … (continued below)
}

Commenting the getPrimes Method

public static int[] getPrimes( int maxNumber ) {

    /* This is based on the sieve of Eratosthenes. The array values[ ] contains the values
     * from 2 up to maxNumber. Each nonzero value is used to eliminate all its larger multiples. */
    int[] values = new int[maxNumber + 1];  // array of values ranging from 2 to maxNumber
    for ( int i = 2; i <= maxNumber; i++ ) values[i] = i; // initialize values starting at 2

    /* Compute the primes by removing (zeroing) multiples of primes. */
    for ( int i = 2; i <= ( int ) Math.sqrt( maxNumber ); i++ )
        for ( int j = 2*i; j <= maxNumber; j += i ) values[j] = 0;

    /* Count the number of remaining primes */
    int nPrimes = 0;
    for ( int i = 2; i <= maxNumber; i++ )
        if ( values[i] != 0 ) nPrimes++;

    /* Copy the primes to the result array */
    int[] primes = new int[nPrimes];
    int j = 0;
    for ( int i = 2; i <= maxNumber; i++ )
        if ( values[i] != 0 ) primes[j++] = values[i];
    return primes;
}