

Class 32: Vectors

Held: Friday, March 16, 2007

Summary: Today we consider vectors, which serve as alternates to lists. Vectors differ from lists in three primary ways: vectors have fixed size, vectors are indexed, and vectors are mutable.

Related Pages:

- EBoard.
- Lab: Vectors.
- Reading: Vectors.

Due

- Project Report 1

Notes:

- Thanks for your patience on Wednesday. Eldest son came in first, so we're heading off to state in a month or so. (On a Saturday, this time.)
- Have a great break!

Overview:

- Problems with lists.
- A solution: Vectors.
- Lab.

List Deficiencies

- Now that we've worked with lists for a while, we've identified some things that make lists inappropriate for some situations.
 - Lists are *expensive* to use; to find the length of a list or to access an element late in the list, you need to cdr down the list.
 - Lists are *fixed*; you can't easily change an element of a list.
- At the same time, there are some advantages to lists:
 - Lists are *dynamic*; it is easy to grow and shrink a list.
 - Lists are *inherently recursive*; the type is defined recursively.
 - Lists are *simple*; you can build almost every list operation through just a few basic operations (`car`, `cdr`, `null`, and `null?`).

An Alternative: Vectors

- Vectors provide an alternative to lists.
- They have two primary advantages:
 - Vectors are *indexed*: You can quickly access elements by number.
 - Vectors are *mutable*: You can change the elements of a vector.
- In order to obtain these benefits, vectors lack some key features of lists. In particular,
 - Vectors are *static*: Once you've created a vector, you cannot change its length.
- Some key vector procedures:
 - `(vector val1 ... valn)`: Create a vector
 - `(make-vector length val)`: Make a vector of specified length, with duplicates of *val* as the contents.
 - `(vector-ref vector position)`: Extract a value from a vector.
 - `(vector-set! vector position newvalue)`: Change an element of a vector.

Lab

- Do the lab.
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