

Class 27: Preconditions, Revisited

Held: Friday, 7 March 2008

Summary: We consider preconditions and programming techniques for ensuring that preconditions are met.

Related Pages:

- EBoard.
- Lab: Verifying Preconditions.
- Reading: Verifying Preconditions.
- Due: Quiz 6.

Notes:

- I will continue to reserve time at the start of class for topics you would like to discuss.
- Are there questions on Exam 2? (Q&A appear in the EBoard.)
- EC for Saturday's concert, the weekend play, and Mary B James.
- Assignment 7 (due after break) is now available. It does, however, require the next few readings/labs.
- Monday's reading: Local Procedure Bindings.

Overview:

- Verifying preconditions.
- The throw procedure.
- Husk and Kernel programming.

Preconditions

- Remember: Documentation is a contract, be careful.
- Even if you don't write documentation (or don't write careful documentation), you should reflect on your expectations for parameters.
- We call those expectations the preconditions of the procedure.
- In some cases, you may want to explicitly test to ensure that the preconditions are met.
 - Testing lets you provide more useful error messages.
 - Testing prevents dangerous results from being returned.

Reporting Failure

- When a precondition fails, you want to stop computation immediately and report the error.
- In Scheme, you can do so with error or throw
 - The one to use depends on the version of Scheme you are using.

- Our Scheme interpreter uses throw.

Husk and Kernel Programming

- Particularly for recursive procedures, it is inefficient to check preconditions at every recursive call
 - If the preconditions were met for the first call, they should be met for every subsequent call.
 - Hence, programmers tend to use what I refer to as “Iowa’s Great Contribution to Programming”: The Husk-and-Kernel approach
 - The husk checks the preconditions and, if all preconditions are met, calls the kernel.
 - The kernel does the real work.
 - Corn serves as the metaphor: The husk protects the kernel, and the kernel is the valuable part.
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