Introduction

You’ve probably run a program that crashed and gave you a message about an “exception” such as:

- `ArithmeticException`: for example, if you try to divide by zero.
- `ArrayIndexOutOfBoundsException`: if you try to access an element beyond the beginning or end of an array.
- `NullPointerException`: if you try to access a member of an object through a null reference.

We’re going to examine:

- how exceptions work
- when to write code that “throws” (signals) them
- how to use code that throws them

A program

```java
public class AbuseArray {
    /** Set the first n elements of a to v. */
    Requires: 0 <= n < a.length. */
    public static void init(int[] a, int n, int v) {
        for (int i=0; i != n; i++) {
            a[i] = v;
        }
    }

    public static void main(String[] args) {
        int[] myArray = new int[10];
        init(myArray, 25, -1);
    }
}
```

What happens when we run it?

Exception in thread "main"
java.lang.ArrayIndexOutOfBoundsException
    at AbuseArray.init(AbuseArray.java:6)
    at AbuseArray.main(AbuseArray.java:12)

An exception is an unexpected event, interrupting the normal flow of control.

Think of this as a violation of a contract: something happened that prevented the code from meeting its specification.

Where Do Exceptions Come From?

Java has a class called `Exception`, with descendants like `ArrayIndexOutOfBoundsException` for more specific kinds of problems. You can also define your own descendants.

When something goes wrong, a called method can construct an instance of the appropriate kind of exception and throw it (using a throw statement, which we’ll see later).

This causes the called method to abort immediately, without returning a value. The calling method then has a choice of dealing with the exception, or else it also aborts to the method that called it, and so on.

This game of “hot potato” continues until one of the methods on the call stack deals with the exception; otherwise it lands in the user’s lap.
An Approach to Exception Handling

What do we mean by “dealing” with an exception? If we call a method and get an exception, then:

- we violated the method’s preconditions, or
- the method, or a method called during execution of the method, violated some method’s preconditions, or
- the method (or a method called during its execution) noticed it couldn’t ensure its postconditions

Questions

Do we prepare for the worst every single time we call a method?

How do we ‘recover’? Isn’t that harder than writing correct code in the first place?

These are difficult and subtle questions, which we mostly avoid in this course.

Our Approach

In your assignments for this course, you will usually be expected to use exceptions to produce good debugging information.

Catching an Exception

```java
/** Add Strings (representing requests) from in to q, until the String "done", or the queue is full. */

public static void getRequests(Queue q, BufferedReader in)
    throws IOException {

    String s = in.readLine();
    while (!s.equals("done")) {
        try {
            q.enqueue(s);
            s = in.readLine();
        } catch (QueueFullException qfe) {
            return;
        }
    }
}
```

The catch block is skipped entirely if nothing goes wrong.

Question: Why bother with the try block? Won’t the method return anyway if an exception occurs?

Exercise: Define a new type of exception: TruncatedException. Make getRequests throw it if the queue gets full, instead of proceeding.

Exception objects

Exceptions are objects, and have (at least) the members defined in Exception. We could have added more members to QueueFullException.

In a catch clause we can use the exception like a parameter.

When we construct an Exception, we can give it a string as a message. A catch clause can access the message via getMessage(). If the exception isn’t caught, the message gets printed automatically.

A good example of this is in the Java API: if we call add(Component) on a JFrame, we get an exception with the helpful error message:

Do not use javax.swing.JFrame.add(0) use javax.swing.JFrame.getContentPane().add() instead

Exercise: Make CircularQueue put a message into the exception it throws, and getRequests() print it out.
IOException

If `readLine()` throws an IOException in the try block of `getRequests(Queue, BufferedReader)`, the exception won't get caught there and will propagate to the calling method as usual. It would be better style to move `readLine()` outside the try block.

So `getRequests()` might throw an IOException, and must declare this in its header with “throws IOException”.

The header informs callers of `getRequests()` that they might get an IOException; those callers must catch the exception or declare that they might throw an IOException.

Notice however that even though `q` or `in` could be null and thus `getRequests()` could throw a NullPointerException, we don’t have to declare this fact.

Why not?

Preventable Exceptions: IOException

Writing try blocks, or declaring all exceptions we might throw (even ones we’re pretty sure we won’t) is time-consuming and buries the main logic of the program under all the exception code.

For people who use exceptions mainly for debugging, it’s of even less use.

We want the compiler to assume that we’re paying attention to the preconditions of methods we’re calling. We shouldn’t have to tell it that we’re doing so every single time.

Question: We didn’t make `QueueFullException` a RuntimeException. What changes does this force us to make to our programs?

Exercise: Add an `isFull()` method to `Queue`, modify `enqueue()` appropriately, and change `QueueFullException` to be a RuntimeException.

Non-Runtime Exceptions and Errors

But there are still exceptions that are impossible or too inefficient to prevent.

For example when we call `readLine()`, we can’t know if the user is going to rip the keyboard out of the computer in the middle of typing the line.

So we must prepare to deal with them in a try block, or tell the compiler that we don’t care.
But what if there’s no reasonable way to deal with a particular problem?

For example, what if the program runs out of memory? Then we probably don’t even have memory space to run code that tries to deal with the problem.

These kinds of problems are signalled by throwing an Error.

More about Catching

You can have multiple catch clauses.

```java
/** Add each line of input (representing requests) from in to q, until the String "done", or
the queue is full, or an IOException occurs. */
public static void getRequests(Queue q,
        BufferedReader in) {
    try {
        String s = in.readLine();
        while (!s.equals("done")) {
            q.enqueue(s);
            s = in.readLine();
        } catch (QueueFullException qfe) {
            return;
        }
    } catch (IOException e) {
        System.out.println(
                "Problem reading input!");
    }
}
```

Summary: When to Use Exceptions

Remember that an exception indicates a contract violation.

It occurs when something prevented the code from meeting its specification. There are two possibilities:

- The client failed to ensure that the preconditions were met before calling a method.
- The preconditions were met, but something else prevented the method from making its postconditions true.

These are the only times when you should throw an exception.

Often, an existing Java exception class is appropriate, so you can just throw an instance of it. If not, define your own exception class.