Higher-order Functions

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Topics

- Functions are first-class.
- Using first-class/higher-order functions
- Map and filter
- Next time: getting the semantics right

First-class and higher order functions

Functions are first-class values, can be used or created wherever we use or create any other values:
- Arguments to (higher order) function calls
- Results of (higher order) function bodies
- Stored in cons cells or other data structures
- Bound (named) by variables
- ...

Higher order functions take or return other functions.

Powerful ways to:
- factor out common functionality
- parameterize general patterns with specific behavior

Function closures support lexical scope for nested functions.

Sneak peak:
- Function bodies can use any bindings in scope where function is defined, including from outside the function definition.
- Distinct concept from first-class functions
- Back to this powerful idea soon!
Functions as arguments

(define (map-pair f pair)
  (cons (f (car pair)) (f (cdr pair))))

Elegant strategy for factoring out code for common patterns of data manipulation.

Combines well with anonymous functions.

[See code examples in hof.rkt]

A style point

(if x #t #f)

(lambda (x) (f x))

(n-times (lambda (x) (cdr x)) 2 (list 1 2 3 4))

✓ (n-times cdr 2 (list 1 2 3 4))
Rewrite the list practice functions

- Which functions could be built using map/filter?
- For which functions does this feel more or less elegant than your original implementation?

Generalizing

Our examples of first-class functions so far:
- Take one function as an argument to another function
- Process a number or a list

But first-class functions are useful anywhere for any kind of data
- Pass several functions as arguments
- Put functions in data structures (tuples, lists, etc.)
- Return functions as results
- Write higher-order functions that traverse other data structures

Powerful idioms to:
- factor out and reuse common functionality
- parameterize general patterns with specific behavior
- clearly communicate high-level meaning/intent