

First-Class Functions in Racket



CS251 Programming Languages Spring 2018, Lyn Turbak

Department of Computer Science
Wellesley College

First-Class Values

A value is **first-class** if it satisfies all of these properties:

- It can be named by a variable
- It can be passed as an argument to a function;
- It can be returned as the result of a function;
- It can be stored as an element in a data structure (e.g., a list);
- It can be created in any context.

Examples from Racket: numbers, boolean, strings, characters, lists, ... and **functions!**

6-2

Functions can be Named

```
(define dbl (λ (x) (* 2 x)))  
(define avg (λ (a b) (/ (+ a b) 2)))  
(define pow  
  (λ (base expt)  
    (if (= expt 0)  
        1  
        (* base (pow base (- expt 1))))))
```

Recall syntactic sugar:

```
(define (dbl x) (* 2 x))  
(define (avg a b) (/ (+ a b) 2))  
(define (pow base expt) ...)
```

6-3

Functions can be Passed as Arguments

```
(define app-3-5 (λ (f) (f 3 5)))  
(define sub2 (λ (x y) (- x y)))  
  
(app-3-5 sub2)  
⇒ ((λ (f) (f 3 5)) sub2)  
⇒ ((λ (f) (f 3 5)) (λ (x y) (- x y)))  
⇒ ((λ (x y) (- x y)) 3 5)  
⇒ (- 3 5)  
⇒ -2
```

6-4

More Functions-as-Arguments



What are the values of the following?

```
(app-3-5 avg)
```

```
(app-3-5 pow)
```

```
(app-3-5 (λ (a b) a))
```

```
(app-3-5 +)
```

6-5

Functions can be Returned as Results from Other Functions



```
(define make-linear-function
  (λ (a b) ; a and b are numbers
    (λ (x) (+ (* a x) b))))

(define 4x+7 (make-linear-function 4 7))

(4x+7 0)
(4x+7 1)
(4x+7 2)

(make-linear-function 6 1)
((make-linear-function 6 1) 2)
((app-3-5 make-linear-function) 2)
```

6-6

More Functions-as-Returned-Values



```
(define flip2
  (λ (binop)
    (λ (x y) (binop y x))))

((flip2 sub2) 4 7)
(app-3-5 (flip2 sub2))
((flip2 pow) 2 3)
(app-3-5 (flip2 pow))
(define g ((flip2 make-linear-function) 4 7))
(list (g 0) (g 1) (g 2))
((app-3-5 (flip2 make-linear-function)) 2)
```

6-7

Functions can be Stored in Lists



```
(define funs (list sub2 avg pow app-3-5
                  make-linear-function flip2))

((first funs) 4 7)
((fourth funs) (third funs))
((fourth funs) ((sixth funs) (third funs)))
(((fourth funs) (fifth funs)) 2)
(((fourth funs) ((sixth funs) (fifth funs))) 2)
```

6-8

Functions can be Created in Any Context

- In some languages (e.g., C) functions can be defined only at top-level. One function cannot be declared inside of another.
- Racket functions like `make-linear-function` and `flip2` depend crucially on the ability to create one function inside of another function.

6-9

Python Functions are First-Class!

```
def sub2 (x,y):  
    return x - y  
  
def app_3_5 (f):  
    return f(3,5)
```

```
def make_linear_function(a, b):  
    return lambda x: a*x + b  
  
def flip2 (binop):  
    return lambda x,y: binop(y,x)
```

```
In [2]: app_3_5(sub2)  
Out[2]: -2
```

```
In [3]: app_3_5(flip2(sub2))  
Out[3]: 2
```

```
In [4]: app_3_5(make_linear_function)(2)  
Out[4]: 11
```

```
In [5]: app_3_5(flip2(make_linear_function))(2)  
Out[5]: 13
```

6-10

JavaScript Functions are First-Class!

```
function sub2 (x,y){  
  { return x-y; }  
  
function app_3_5 (f)  
{ return f(3,5); }
```

```
function make_linear_function(a,b) {  
  return function(x) {return a*x + b;};  
}  
  
function flip2(binop) {  
  return function(x,y)  
  { return binop(y,x); }  
}
```

```
> app_3_5(sub2)  
< -2
```

```
> app_3_5(flip2(sub2))  
< 2
```

```
> app_3_5(make_linear_function)(2)  
< 11
```

```
> app_3_5(flip2(make_linear_function))(2)  
< 13
```

6-11

Summary (and Preview!)

*Data and procedures and the values they amass,
Higher-order functions to combine and mix and match,
Objects with their local state, the messages they pass,
A property, a package, a control point for a catch —
In the Lambda Order they are all first-class.
One Thing to name them all, One Thing to define them,
One Thing to place them in environments and bind them,
In the Lambda Order they are all first-class.*

Abstract for the *Revised4 Report on the Algorithmic Language Scheme (R4RS)*, MIT Artificial Intelligence Lab Memo 848b, November 1991



Emblem for the Grand Recursive Order
of the Knights of the Lambda Calculus

6-12