Value Types vs. Reference Types

- Master the pointers in C++/C
- Importance of memory management
Memory
Processor (CPU)
I/O Hub
I/O Controller
Hard Drives

Credit: apple.com
CPU + Memory

• Note that the CPU
  – the “central *processing* unit” is separate from memory, where data are *stored*.
CPU + Memory

- Any data being directly used by a program at any given moment is placed within the CPU on what is called a register.
• While it’s actually more complex than this…
  – Registers are *like* local variables
    • temporary placeholders for values.
  – Memory is *like* a giant, global array.
CPU + Memory

• For now, we’ll settle for this simplification.
  – More details will come in CDA 3101
  – Introduction to Computer Organization.
Memory

- Memory is like a giant set of lockers, where each such locker can hold a set, limited amount of data.
- Each locker has a very precise number assigned to it – in computer terms, it has a unique memory address. (Like a mailbox.)
Memory

• The address of each “locker” is permanently assigned to it.
  – You cannot move (or “give a new address to”) an already existing locker.
  – Thus, to change the address of data being stored, you must move it from one “locker” to another.
Memory

• It is possible to use multiple adjacent “lockers” to store a large data structure.
  – Another name for a “data structure” would be an object, in C++ terms.
  – In this sense, the idea of an “array” is also a “data structure.”
Memory + Arrays

• An *array*, when actually utilized during execution, is a large, contiguous (undi...ed) block of memory.
• The array’s starting location – its *address* within memory – is then stored for future *reference*.
  – All of its data can be found given this starting reference and indices.
Memory + Arrays

- The “first” (typically, index “0”) element of the array is stored directly at the starting address of the array.
- Each subsequent element is then stored at a constant offset from this address.
Working with Data in C++

• Note: while the information on the next few slides is written in a C++ fashion, the underlying principles apply to most computer languages.
• Remember the learning experience from Java to C++/C. You will need to learn new languages in your CS careers.
Working with Data in C++

• At its core, all data within a program are stored as a binary number.
  – These are the famous 0’s and 1’s.
  – Each 0 and 1 is known as a *bit*, or *binary digit*.
  – Eight of these make a *byte*, 1024 bytes make a *kilobyte*, and so forth.
Working with Data in C++

- This “binary number” may be thought of as a value.
- Data which are directly represented on a CPU, within a programming language, by a binary number is considered a value type.
Working with Data in C++

- *(Primitive) value types within C++:*
  - int
  - short
  - long
  - char
  - double
  - float
  - bool

This list is not exhaustive.
Working with Data in C++

• Other values are instead handled through *their memory address*.

• Data which are *referenced* on a CPU, within a programming language, through its address is considered a *reference type*.  
  – Note that the *address itself*, while unseen by the programmer, is also a *value*.

• We call this value… a *pointer*. 
Working with Data in **Java**

- **Reference types** within Java are **all** “classes”/”objects,” and vice-versa.
  - Only the primitive value types are treated “by value” in Java.
- **Note** that these objects, or classes, may be composed of multiple value types.
  - These values must be obtained *through* the whole object’s reference.
In C++, the programmer may choose which way to handle data.

- Objects and arrays may be handled by value (within a function) or through a pointer.
- While primitive types default to “by value,” they may be handled by reference!