SWE 265P
Reverse Engineering and Modeling

Lecture 2

Reality

"Reading code, like writing it, is an iterative process. Don't expect to understand the whole system all at once. If you understand one function or object, you can build on that to gain an understanding of the code that uses it or is used by it."
– Sara Triplett [Lead development actuary, FIS]

Today

- Last week's material
- Basic strategies
- In-class practice
- Principles
- Ping Chen (Google)

Last week's material

- Complexity of modern software, beyond just the source code
- Importance of build systems
- Proper Git pull requests

- Any questions?

Basic strategies

- Top-down comprehension
  - reconstructing knowledge of the domain of the program and mapping this knowledge to the source code
- Bottom-up comprehension
  - reading code statements and mentally chunking or grouping these statements into higher level abstractions, and aggregate these abstractions further until a high-level understanding of the program is attained

Basic strategies

- Systematic comprehension
  - reading the code in detail, tracing through the control-flow and data-flow abstractions in the program to gain a global understanding of it
- Opportunistic comprehension
  - as-needed focusing only on the code relating to the task at hand

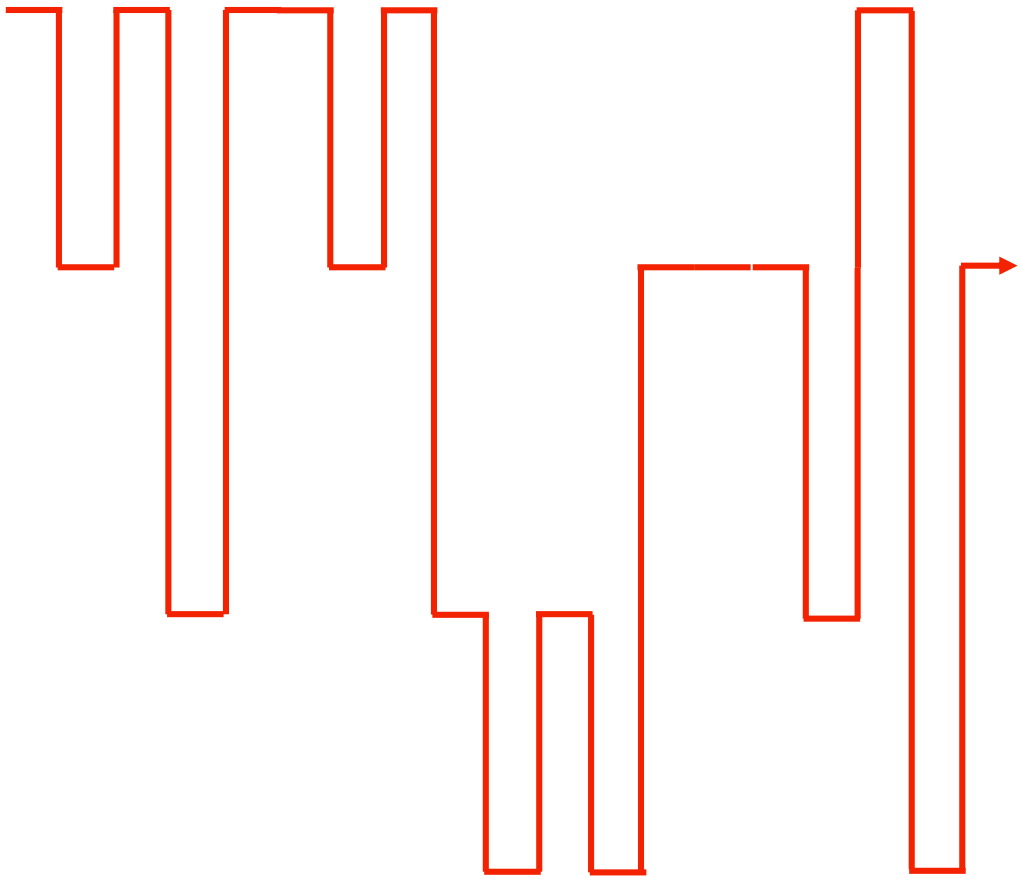
Reality

top-down

bottom-up

systematic

opportunistic



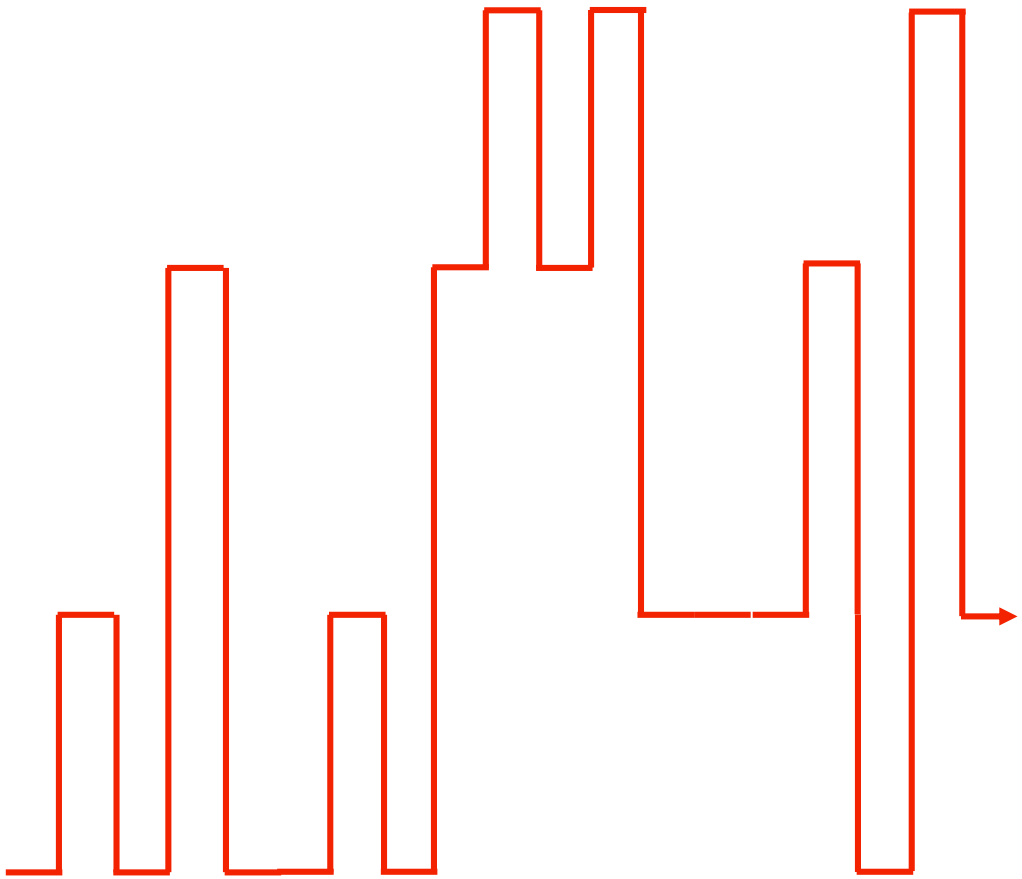
Reality

top-down

bottom-up

systematic

opportunistic



Information foraging theory

- The theory of optimal foraging stipulates that foraging animals attempt to maximize their energy intake (by finding food) over the time required to find that food

- The theory of information foraging stipulates that information seeking humans attempt to maximize the value of processing information and minimize the cost of ‘traveling’ to find that information

Impact of familiarity

Familiar	Non-familiar
Hypothesis-driven	Inference-driven
Beacons	Chunks
Programming plans	Abstractions
Iteration	Iteration

Reality

- Most often, programmers use both
  - use domain knowledge to form hypotheses
  - react to counter evidence with more detailed reading
- Professionals focus on getting a task done, rather than on understanding the code

Goal-driven

- Ultimately, how developers approach the problem of reverse engineering a software system depends on the goal that they have
  - learning
  - fixing a bug
  - reviewing a pull request
  - adding/changing some functionality
  - assessing a component before adopting it
  - vulnerability analysis
  - …

Let’s practice: JPacMan1

- Use IntelliJ to clone https://github.com/SWE-265P/jpacman1
- Open the project

JPacMan goal #1 (fixing a bug)

- Fix the direction that PacMan moves, because right now it moves in the direction opposite of the key that the player presses

JPacMan goal #2 (change to the code)

- Change the amount earned per pellet to 25 points

Let’s practice: JPacMan2

- Use IntelliJ to clone https://github.com/SWE-265P/jpacman2
- Open the project

JPacMan goal #3 (learn)

- How does JPacMan animate the PacMan character?

JPacMan goal #4 (learn)

- Are there fruits in this particular implementation of PacMan?

Let’s practice: JPacMan3

- Use IntelliJ to clone https://github.com/SWE-265P/jpacman3
- Open the project

JPacMan goal #5 (code review)

- By what rules does the cyan ghost move?

JPacMan goal #6 (change functionality)

- Each keystroke makes PacMan move 2 spots

Principles

- Respect old code and the wisdom it contains
- Accept you cannot understand it all
- Realize every situation is unique
- Check the details
- Verify assumptions
- Proceed with change carefully
- Leave the code in a better place than you found it

Homework (team)

- With your team, decide upon a large open source system that you want to use as the basis for your course project
  - 100,000 lines of code or more
- Claim your open source system with a pull request for projects.md
- Each open source system can only be claimed by a single team
- Must claim your system by Sunday morning, 9am

Homework (individual)

- Continue to explore JPacMan3 by answering the following questions:
  - what is the role of EmptySprite?
  - what is the role of MOVE_INTERVAL and INTERVAL_VARIATION?
  - if you wanted to add a fruit, which files would you need to change?

- Answers should be submitted in a simple, written document, perhaps with code snippets embedded
  - document to be submitted as a pull request
  - deadline is Wednesday at 3pm

Homework (continued)

- How to read code without ripping your hair out
  - https://medium.com/launch-school/how-to-read-source-code-without-ripping-your-hair-out-e066472bbe8d
- 7 Ways to improve your code reading skills
  - https://dzone.com/articles/7-ways-to-improve-your-code-reading-skill
- How to read source code
  - https://github.com/aredridel/how-to-read-code/blob/master/how-to-read-code.md

Homework (continued)

- Make sure to regularly update your personal diary, including an entry for today's lecture

Break

And now…

- …welcome Ping!