

Class 36: Vectors

Held: Wednesday, 4 November 2009

Summary: We consider *vectors*, an alternative to lists for storing collections of data.

Related Pages:

- EBoard.
- Lab: Vectors.
- Reading: Vectors.
- Due: Exam 2: Control.

Notes:

- Assignment 7 is now ready.
- Fun event Saturday a.m.: Grinnell Destination ImagiNation Fun Run/Walk. More info outside my office or at the back of the room.
- Reading for Friday: Pairs and Pair Structures.

Overview:

- Problems with lists.
- A solution: Vectors.
- Important vector procedures.

List Deficiencies

- Now that we've worked with lists for a while, we've identified some things that make lists inappropriate for some situations.
 - Lists are *expensive* to use; to find the length of a list or to access an element late in the list, you need to `cdr` down the list.
 - Lists are *fixed*; you can't easily change an element of a list.
- At the same time, there are some advantages to lists:
 - Lists are *dynamic*; it is easy to grow and shrink a list.
 - Lists are *inherently recursive*; the type is defined recursively.
 - Lists are *simple*; you can build almost every list operation through just a few basic operations (`car`, `cdr`, `null`, and `null?`).

An Alternative: Vectors

- Vectors provide an alternative to lists.
- They have two primary advantages:
 - Vectors are *indexed*: You can quickly access elements by number.
 - Vectors are *mutable*: You can change the elements of a vector.
- In order to obtain these benefits, vectors lack some key features of lists. In particular,
 - Vectors are *static*: Once you've created a vector, you cannot change its length.
- Some key vector procedures:
 - `(vector val1 ... valn)`: Create a vector
 - `(make-vector length val)`: Make a vector of specified length, with duplicates of *val* as the contents.
 - `(vector-ref vector position)`: Extract a value from a vector.
 - `(vector-set! vector position newvalue)`: Change an element of a vector.
 - `(vector-length vector)`

Lab

- Do the lab.

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