

Specification tips and pitfalls

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Specifications tips and pitfalls

1. **Inherited specifications**
2. **Aliasing**
3. **Object invariants**
4. **Inconsistent assumptions**
5. **Exposed references**
6. **\old**
7. **How to write specs**

#1: Specification inheritance and behavioural subtyping

Behavioural subtyping

Suppose `Child` extends `Parent`.

- **Behavioural subtyping** = objects from subclass `Child` “behave like” objects from superclass `Parent`
- **Principle of substitutivity** [Liskov]:
code will behave “as expected” if we provide an `Child` object where a `Parent` object was expected.

Behavioural subtyping

Behavioural subtyping usually enforced by insisting that

- invariant in subclass is **stronger** than invariant in superclass
- for every method,
 - precondition in subclass is **weaker (!)** than precondition in superclass
 - postcondition in subclass is **stronger** than postcondition in superclass

JML achieves behavioural subtyping by **specification inheritance**: any child class **inherits** the specification of its parent.

Specification inheritance for invariants

Invariants are inherited in subclasses. Eg.

```
class Parent {  
    ...  
    //@ invariant invParent;  
    ... }
```

```
class Child extends Parent {  
    ...  
    //@ invariant invChild;  
    ... }
```

the invariant for Child is `invChild && invParent`

Specification inheritance for method specs

```
class Parent {  
    //@ requires i >= 0;  
    //@ ensures \result >= i;  
    int m(int i){ ... }  
}
```

```
class Child extends Parent {  
    //@ also  
    //@ requires i <= 0;  
    //@ ensures \result <= i;  
    int m(int i){ ... }  
}
```

Keyword **also** indicates there are inherited specs.

Specification inheritance for method specs

Method `m` in `Child` also has to meet the spec given in `Parent` class. So the complete spec for `Child` is

```
class Child extends Parent {  
  
    /*@   requires i >= 0;  
       @   ensures  \result >= i;  
       @ also  
       @   requires i <= 0  
       @   ensures  \result <= i;  
    @*/  
    int m(int i){ ... }  
}
```

What can result of `m(0)` be?

Specification inheritance for method specs

This spec for `Child` is equivalent with

```
class Child extends Parent {  
  
    /*@   requires i <= 0 || i >= 0;  
       @   ensures  \old(i >= 0) ==> \result >= i;  
       @   ensures  \old(i <= 0) ==> \result <= i;  
       @*/  
    int m(int i){ ... }  
}
```

Inherited specifications: trick

Another example: two Objects that are `==` are always also **equals**. But the converse is not necessarily true. But it is true for objects whose dynamic type is `Object`.

```
public class Object {
    //@ ensures (this == o) ==> \result;
    /*@ ensures \typeof(this) == \type(Object)
        ==> (\result == (this==o));
    */
    public boolean equals(Object o);
}
```

True for all Objects

Not necessarily true for subtypes

Inherited specifications

So

- Base class specifications apply to subclasses
 - that is, ESC/Java2 enforces *behavioral subtyping*
 - Specs from implemented *interfaces* also must hold for implementing classes
- Be thoughtful about how strict the base class specs should be
- Guard them with `\typeof(this) == \type(...)` if need be
- Restrictions on exceptions such as `normal_behavior` or `signals (E e) false;` will apply to derived classes as well.

#2: Aliasing

A common but non-obvious problem that causes violated invariants is aliasing.

```
public class Alias {
    /*@ non_null */ int[] a = new int[10];
    boolean noneg = true;

    /*@ invariant noneg ==>
        (\forall int i; 0<=i && i < a.length; a[i]>=0); */

    //@ requires 0<=i && i < a.length;
    public void insert(int i, int v) {
        a[i] = v;
        if (v < 0) noneg = false;
    }
}
```

produces

```
Alias.java:12: Warning: Possible violation of object invariant (Invariant)
    }
    ^
```

Associated declaration is "Alias.java", line 5, col 6:

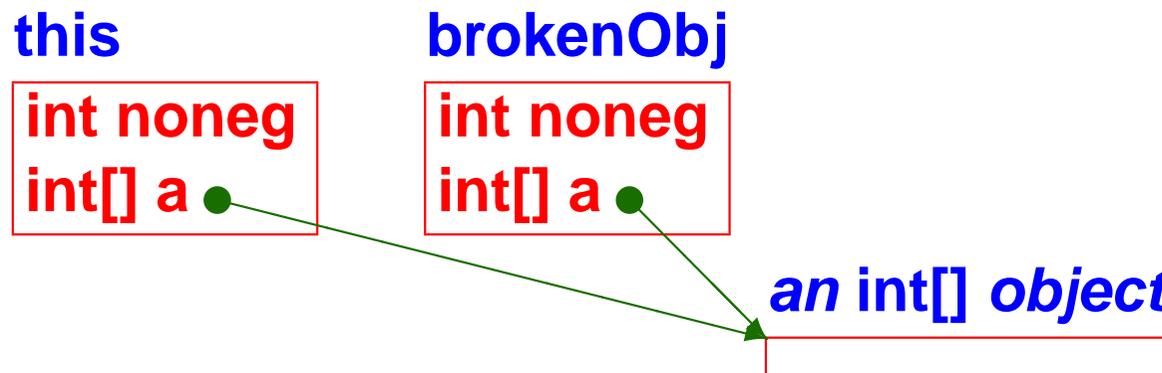
```
/*@ invariant noneg ==> (\forall int i; 0<=i && i < a.length; ...
```

Aliasing

A full counterexample context (**-counterexample** option) produces, among lots of other information:

```
brokenObj%0 != this
(brokenObj%0).(a@pre:2.24) == tmp0!a:10.4
this.(a@pre:2.24) == tmp0!a:10.4
```

that is, **this** and some different object (**brokenObj**) share the same **a** object.



Aliasing

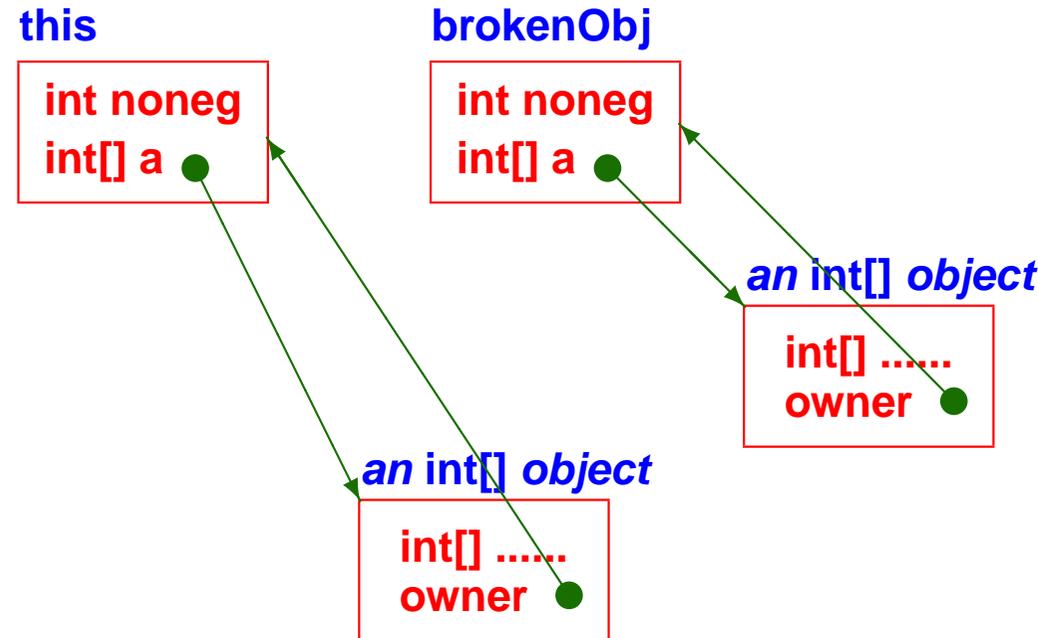
To fix this, declare that **a** is owned only by its parent object:
(**owner** is a ghost field of `java.lang.Object`)

```
public class Alias {
    /*@ non_null */ int[] a = new int[10];
    boolean noneg = true;

    /*@ invariant noneg ==>
        (\forall int i; 0<=i && i < a.length; a[i]>=0); */
    /*@ invariant a.owner == this;

    /*@ requires 0<=i && i < a.length;
    public void insert(int i, int v) {
        a[i] = v;
        if (v < 0) noneg = false;
    }

    public Alias() {
        /*@ set a.owner = this;
    }
}
```



Another example. This one fails on the postcondition.

```
public class Alias2 {
    /*@ non_null */ Inner n = new Inner();
    /*@ non_null */ Inner nn = new Inner();
    //@ invariant n.owner == this;
    //@ invariant nn.owner == this;

    //@ ensures n.i == \old(n.i + 1);
    public void add() {
        n.i++;
        nn.i++;
    }

    Alias2();
}

class Inner {
    public int i;
    //@ ensures i == 0;
    Inner();
}
```

- **The counterexample context shows**

```
this.(nn:3.24) == tmp0!n:10.4  
tmp2!nn:11.4 == tmp0!n:10.4
```

- **These hint that `n` and `nn` are references to the same object.**
- **If we add the invariant `//@ invariant n != nn;` to forbid aliasing between these two fields, then all is well.**

- **Aliasing is a serious difficulty in verification**
- **Handling aliasing is an active area of research, related to handling frame conditions**
- **It is all about knowing what is modified and what is not**
- **These **owner** fields or the equivalent create a form of encapsulation that can be checked by ESC/Java to control what might be modified by a given operation**
- ****universes** have now been added to JML to provide a more advanced form of alias control.**

#3: Write object invariants

- Be sure that class invariants are about the object at hand.
- Statements about all objects of a class may indeed be true, but they are difficult to prove, especially for automated provers.
- For example, if a predicate P is supposed to hold for objects of type T , then do **not** write

```
//@ invariant (\forall T t; P(t));
```

- **Instead, write**

```
//@ invariant P(this);
```

- **The latter will make a more provable postcondition at the end of a constructor.**

#4: Inconsistent assumptions

If you have inconsistent specifications you can prove anything:

```
public class Inconsistent {
    public void m() {
        int a,b,c,d;
        //@ assume a == b;
        //@ assume b == c;
        //@ assume a != c;
        //@ assert a == d; // Passes, but inconsistent
        //@ assert false; // Passes, but inconsistent
    }
}
```

#4: Inconsistent assumptions

Another example:

```
public class Inconsistent2 {
    public int a,b,c,d;
    //@ invariant a == b;
    //@ invariant b == c;
    //@ invariant a != c;

    public void m() {
        //@ assert a == d; // Passes, but inconsistent
        //@ assert false; // Passes, but inconsistent
    }
}
```

We hope to put in checks for this someday!

#5: Exposed references

Problems can arise when a reference to an internal object is exported from a class:

```
public class Exposed {
    /*@ non_null */ private int[] a = new int[10];
    //@ invariant a.length > 0 && a[0] >= 0;

    //@ ensures \result != null;
    //@ ensures \result.length > 0;
    //@ pure
    public int[] getArray() { return a; }
}
class X {
    void m(/*@ non_null */ Exposed e) {
        e.getArray()[0] = -1; // unchecked invariant violation
    }
}
```

- **ESC/Java does not check that every allocated object still satisfies its invariants.**
- **Similar hidden problems can result if public fields are modified directly.**

#6: \old

\old is used to indicate evaluation in the pre-state in a postcondition expression.

Consider specifying

```
public static native void arraycopy(Object[] src, int srcPos,  
                                   Object[] dest, int destPos, int length);
```

Try:

```
ensures (\forall int i; 0<=i && i<length; dest[destPos+i] == src[srcPos+i]);
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Besides exceptions and invalid arguments, don't forget aliasing - **dest** and **src** may be the same array:

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ensures (\forall int i; 0<=i && i<length;  
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```
ensures (\forall int i; 0<=i && i<length;
         dest[destPos+i] == \old(src[srcPos+i]));
```

And don't forget the other elements:

```
ensures (\forall int i; (0<=i && i<destPos) ||
         (destPos+length <= i && i < destPos.length);
         dest[i] == \old(dest[i]));
```

In postcondition

```
ensures (\forall int i; 0<=i && i<length;  
        dest[destPos+i] == \old(src[srcPos+i]));  
public static native void arraycopy(Object[] src, int srcPos,  
        Object[] dest, int destPos, int length);
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shouldn't we write `\old(length)` instead of `length`?

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And `\old(dest)[...]` instead of `dest[destPos+i]`?
Strictly speaking: yes. But because this is so easy to get forget, any mention of an argument `x` in postcondition means `\old(x)`.

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forget, any mention of an argument `x` in postcondition
means `\old(x)`.**

**This means it's impossible to refer to the new value of `length` in
postcondition of `arraycopy`. But this value is unobservable for
clients anyway.**

#7: How to write specs

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- Start with simple specifications; proceed to complex ones as they have value.

Getting started

- **Separate conjunctions to get information about which conjunct is violated. Use**

```
requires A;
```

```
requires B;
```

not

```
requires A && B;
```

- Use **assert** statements to find out what is going wrong.
- Use **assume** statements *that you KNOW are correct* to help the prover along.

- Specification is **tricky** - getting it right is hard, even with tools
- **Try it** - a substantial research gap is experience on industrial-scale sets of code
- **Communicate** - we are willing to offer advice
- **Share** your experience - tools will get better and we will all learn better techniques for successful specification (use JML and ESC/Java mailing lists)