

Preface

This book is organised into a large number of brief, self-contained entries.

Admittedly, there is no such thing as a *self-contained entry*. For example, you need some knowledge of English to understand this paragraph. But, the principle is that each entry, of one or two pages, is a conceptual whole as well as a part of a greater whole (see note 20) in the same way that a car has four whole wheels, and not eight half wheels.

Some entries are intended to demonstrate a technique, or introduce an historically contingent fact such as the actual syntax of a contemporary language, or in this case, a specific issue regarding this book. Others are intended to illustrate a more eternal truth. They may be about a contemporary language, but stress a philosophical position or broadly based attitude. Both of these I have called *notions*. Finally, there are entries that are intended to cause the reader to do something other than just nodding their head as a sign of either agreement or an incipient dormant state. These are the exercises.

The distinction can only be arbitrary; the classification is merely a guide to suggest the sense in which the pages are intended.

In many cases, entries that are not specifically labelled as exercises involve generic opportunities for self-study. As this is a book on computer programming, it is natural and strongly advised that the reader try implementing each concept of interest as it arises. With this in mind, I have tried hard not to leave out pragmatic details whose omission would leave the reader with nothing but the illusion of understanding. Nevertheless, actually cutting practice code makes a big difference in the ability of the programmer to use the concepts when the need arises.

At the end of the book are the notes explaining short and simple issues or (paradoxically) issues that are too complex to explain in this book. If a note became too lengthy while being written it was converted into a notion or an exercise.

Theoretical Introduction to Programming

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2006, XI, 358 p. 29 illus., Softcover

ISBN: 978-1-84628-021-4