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What is a Constant?

In mathematics, a constant is a value that cannot change.

In programming, a constant is like a variable, except that its value cannot change.
The Difference Between a Variable and a Constant

The **difference** between a variable and a constant:

- a **variable**’s value can **vary**, but
- a **constant**’s value is **constant**.
Categories of Constants: Literal & Named

There are two categories of constants:

- *literal constants*, whose values are expressed *literally*;
- *named constants*, which have *names*.
Literal Constants

A \textit{literal constant} is a constant whose value is expressed \textit{literally}:

- **int literal constants**
  \textbf{EXAMPLES:} 5, 0, -127, +403298, -385092809

- **float literal constants**
  \textbf{EXAMPLES:} 5.2, 0.0, -127.5, +403298.2348, -3.85092809e+08

- **char literal constants**
  \textbf{EXAMPLES:} 'A', '7', '?'

- **character string literal constants**
  \textbf{EXAMPLES:} "A", "Henry", "What's it to ya?"
Literal Constant Example Program

% cat tax1997_literal.c
#include <stdio.h>
int main ()
{
    float income, tax;
    printf("I'm going to calculate the federal income\n");
    printf(" tax on your 1997 income.\n");
    printf("What was your 1997 income in dollars?\n");
    scanf("%f", &income);
    tax = (income - (4150.0 + 2650.0)) * 0.15;
    printf("The 1997 federal income tax on $%2.2f\n", income);
    printf(" was $%2.2f.\n", tax);
}

% gcc -o tax1997_literal tax1997_literal.c
% tax1997_literal
I'm going to calculate the federal income
tax on your 1997 income.
What was your 1997 income in dollars?
20000
The 1997 federal income tax on $20000.00
was $1980.00.
Named Constants

A named constant is a constant that has a name.

A named constant is exactly like a variable, except that its value is set at compile time (by initializing it) and CANNOT change at runtime.

A named constant is exactly like a literal constant, except that it HAS A NAME.

In a named constant declaration, we indicate that it’s a constant via the const attribute, and we MUST initialize it:

const float pi = 3.1415926;
Name Constant Example Program

% cat circlecalc.c
#include <stdio.h>

int main ()
{
    const float pi = 3.1415926;
    const float diameter_factor = 2.0;
    float radius, circumference, area;

    printf("I'm going to calculate a circle's\n");
    printf(" circumference and area.\n");
    printf("What's the radius of the circle?\n");
    scanf("%f", &radius);
    circumference = pi * radius * diameter_factor;
    area = pi * radius * radius;
    printf("The circumference is %f\n", circumference);
    printf(" and the area is %f.\n", area);
} /* main */

% gcc -o circlecalc circlecalc.c
% circlecalc
I'm going to calculate a circle's circumference and area.
What's the radius of the circle?
5
The circumference is 31.415924 and the area is 78.539810.
The Value of a Named Constant Can’t Be Changed

% cat constassign.c
#include <stdio.h>

int main ()
{ /* main */
    const float pi = 3.1415926;

    pi = 3.0;
} /* main */

% gcc -o constassign constassign.c
constassign.c: In function ‘main’:
constassign.c:7: error: assignment of read-only variable ‘pi’
Why Literal Constants Are BAD BAD BAD

When you embed numeric literal constants in the body of your program, you make it much harder to maintain and upgrade your program.
1997 Tax Program with Numeric Literal Constants

% cat tax1997_literal.c
#include <stdio.h>

int main ()
{
    float income, tax;

    printf("I'm going to calculate the federal income\n");
    printf(" tax on your 1997 income.\n");
    printf("What was your 1997 income in dollars?\n");
    scanf("%f", &income);
    tax = (income - (4150.0 + 2650.0)) * 0.15;
    printf("The 1997 federal income tax on $%2.2f\n", income);
    printf(" was $%2.2f.\n", tax);
}

% gcc -o tax1997_literal tax1997_literal.c
% tax1997_literal
I'm going to calculate the federal income
tax on your 1997 income.
What was your 1997 income in dollars?
20000
The 1997 federal income tax on $20000.00
was $1980.00.
1999 Tax Program with Numeric Literal Constants

% cat tax1999_literal.c
#include <stdio.h>

int main ()
{ /* main */
    float income, tax;

    printf("I'm going to calculate the federal income\n");
    printf("  tax on your 1999 income.\n");
    printf("What was your 1999 income in dollars?\n");
    scanf("%f", &income);
    tax = (income - (4300.0 + 2750.0)) * 0.15;
    printf("The 1999 federal income tax on $%2.2f\n", income);
    printf("  was $%2.2f.\n", tax);
} /* main */

% gcc -o tax1999_literal tax1999_literal.c
% tax1999_literal
I'm going to calculate the federal income
tax on your 1999 income.
What was your 1999 income in dollars?
20000
The 1999 federal income tax on $20000.00
  was $1942.50.
Why Named Constants Are Good

When you use named constants in the body of your program instead of literal constants, you **isolate** the constant values in the declaration section, making them **trivial** to find and to change.
1997 Tax Program with Named Constants

```c
#include <stdio.h>

int main ()
{
    const float standard_deduction = 4150.0;
    const float single_exemption = 2650.0;
    const float tax_rate = 0.15;
    const int tax_year = 1997;
    float income, tax;

    printf("I'm going to calculate the federal income tax\n");
    printf(" on your \%d income.\n", tax_year);
    printf("What was your \%d income in dollars?\n", tax_year);
    scanf("\%f", &income);
    tax = (income - (standard_deduction + single_exemption)) * tax_rate;
    printf("The \%d federal income tax on \$%2.2f\n", tax_year, income);
    printf(" was \$%2.2f.\n", tax);
}

% gcc -o tax1997_named tax1997_named.c
% tax1997_named
I'm going to calculate the federal income tax
on your 1997 income.
What was your 1997 income in dollars?
20000
The 1997 federal income tax on $20000.00
was $1980.00.
```
1999 Tax Program with Named Constants

```c
#include <stdio.h>

int main ()
{ /* main */
    const float standard_deduction = 4300.0;
    const float single_exemption = 2750.0;
    const float tax_rate = 0.15;
    const int tax_year = 1999;
    float income, tax;

    printf("I'm going to calculate the federal income tax\n");
    printf(" on your %d income.\n", tax_year);
    printf("What was your %d income in dollars?\n", tax_year);
    scanf("%f", &income);
    tax = (income - (standard_deduction + single_exemption)) * tax_rate;
    printf("The %d federal income tax on $%2.2f\n", tax_year, income);
    printf(" was $%2.2f.\n", tax);
} /* main */
```