Constants Lesson Outline

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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.

Note that the variable varies, and the constant’s value is constant, at runtime.
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 **literal constant** is a constant whose value is expressed **literally**:

- **int** literal constants
  EXAMPLES: 5, 0, -127, +403298, -385092809
- **float** literal constants
  EXAMPLES: 5.2, 0.0, -127.5, +403298.2348, -3.85092809e+08
- **char** literal constants
  EXAMPLES: 'A', '7', '?'
- character string literal constants
  EXAMPLES: "A", "Henry", "What’s it to ya?"
Literal Constant Example Program

% cat tax1997_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 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);
} /* main */
% 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.
A *named constant* is a constant that has a name.

A named constant is **exactly like a variable, except** 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** 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:

```c
const float pi = 3.1415926;
```
Name Constant Example Program

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

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

    pi = 3.0;
}

% 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 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

% cat tax1997_named.c
#include <stdio.h>

int main ()
{ /* 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);
} /* main */

% 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?
Enter your income:
20000
The 1997 federal income tax on $20000.00
was $1980.00.
1999 Tax Program with Named Constants

% cat tax1999_named.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 */

% gcc -o tax1999_named tax1999_named.c
% tax1999_named
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.