

The Checker Framework Manual

<http://types.cs.washington.edu/checker-framework/>

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For the impatient: Section 1.2 describes how to **install and use** pluggable type-checkers.

You can also jump directly to the documentation for a particular checker:

- Nullness checker: Section 3, page 13
- Interning checker: Section 4, page 20
- IGJ (immutability) checker: Section 5, page 22
- Javari (immutability) checker: Section 6, page 25
- Lock checker: Section 7, page 27
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1 Introduction

The Checker Framework enhances Java’s type system to make it more powerful and useful. This lets software developers detect and prevent errors in their Java programs.

The Checker Framework comes with 6 checkers for specific types of errors:

1. Nullness checker for null pointer errors (see Section 3)
2. Interning checker for errors in equality testing and interning (see Section 4)
3. IGJ checker for mutation errors (incorrect side effects), based on the IGJ type system (see Section 5)
4. Javari checker for mutation errors (incorrect side effects), based on the Javari type system (see Section 6)
5. Lock checker for concurrency and lock errors, inspired by the Java Concurrency in Practice (JCIP) type system (see Section 7)
6. Tainting checker for trust and security errors (see Section 8)

These checkers are easy to use and are invoked as arguments to `javac`.

The Checker Framework also enables you to write new checkers of your own; see Sections 9 and 13.

1.1 How it works: Pluggable types

The Checker Framework supports adding pluggable type systems to the Java language in a backward-compatible way. Java’s built-in typechecker finds and prevents many errors — but it doesn’t find and prevent *enough* errors. The Checker Framework lets you run an additional typechecker as a plug-in to the `javac` compiler. Your code stays completely backward-compatible: your code compiles with any Java compiler, it runs on any JVM, and your coworkers don’t have to use the enhanced type system if they don’t want to. You can check only part of your program, and type inference tools exist to help you annotate your code.

A type system designer uses the Checker Framework to define type qualifiers and their semantics, and a compiler plug-in (a “checker”) enforces the semantics. Programmers can write the type qualifiers in their programs and use the plug-in to detect or prevent errors. The Checker Framework is useful both to programmers who wish to write error-free code, and to type system designers who wish to evaluate and deploy their type systems.

This document uses the terms “checker”, “checker plugin”, “type-checking compiler plugin”, and “annotation processor” as synonyms.

1.2 Installation

This section describes how to install the binary release of the Checker Framework. The binary release contains everything that you need, both to run checkers and to write your own checkers. As an alternative, the source release (Section 15.3) is useful if you wish to examine or modify the implementation of checkers or of the framework itself.

Requirement: You must have **JDK 6** or later installed. You can get JDK 6 from Sun or elsewhere. If you are using Apple Mac OS X, you can either use Apple’s implementation or SoyLatte.

For Unix/Linux/macOS installation instructions, see Section 1.2.1. For Windows installation instructions, see Section 1.2.2.

1.2.1 Unix/Linux/macOS installation

These instructions assume that you use the `bash` or `sh` shell. If you use a different shell, you may need to slightly adjust the commands.

1. Download the latest Checker Framework distribution and unzip it. You can put it anywhere you like; a standard place is in a new directory named `jsr308`.

```
export JSR308=$HOME/jsr308
mkdir ${JSR308}
cd ${JSR308}
```

```
wget http://types.cs.washington.edu/checker-framework/current/checkers.zip
unzip checkers.zip
```

2. The download includes an updated version of the javac compiler, called the “Type Annotations compiler” or “JSR 308 compiler”, that will be shipped with Java 7. In order to use the updated compiler when you type javac, add the directory ../checkers/binary to your path.

Place the following commands in your .bashrc file (and also execute it on the command line, or log out and back in):

```
export JSR308=$HOME/jsr308
export PATH=$JSR308/checkers/binary:${PATH}
```

3. Verify that the installation works. From the command line, run:

```
javac -version
```

The output should be:

```
javac 1.7.0-jsr308-0.9.8
```

That’s all there is to it! Now you are ready to start using the checkers.

Section 1.3 walks you through a simple example. More detailed instructions for using a checker appear in Section 2.

1.2.2 Windows installation

1. Download the latest Checker Framework distribution and unzip it to create a checkers directory. You can put it anywhere you like; a standard place is in a new directory under C:\Program Files.

- (a) Save the file <http://types.cs.washington.edu/checker-framework/current/checkers.zip> to your Desktop.
- (b) Double-click the checkers.zip file on your computer. Click on the checkers directory, then Select Extract all files, and use C:\Program Files as the destination. You will obtain a new C:\Program Files\checkers folder.

2. The download includes an updated version of the javac compiler, called the “Type Annotations compiler” or “JSR 308 compiler”, that will be shipped with Java 7. In order to use the updated compiler when you type javac, add the directory C:\Program Files\checkers\binary to your path variable. Also set a CHECKERS variable.

To set an environment variable, you have two options: make the change temporarily or permanently.

- To make the change **temporarily**, type at the command shell prompt:

```
path = newdir;%PATH%
```

For example:

```
path = C:\Program Files\checkers\binary;%PATH%
set CHECKERS = C:\Program Files\checkers
```

This is a temporary change that endures until the window is closed, and you must re-do it every time you start a new command shell.

- To make the change **permanently**, Right-click the My Computer icon and select Properties. Select the Advanced tab and click the Environment Variables button. In the System Variables pane, select Path from the list and click Edit. In the Edit System Variable dialog box, move the cursor to the beginning of the string in the Variable Value field and type the full directory name followed by a semicolon (;).

Similarly, set the CHECKERS variable.

This is a permanent change that only needs to be done once ever.

3. Verify that the installation works. From the command line, run:

```
javac -version
```

The output should be:

```
javac 1.7.0-jsr308-0.9.8
```

That's all there is to it! Now you are ready to start using the checkers.

Section 1.3 walks you through a simple example. More detailed instructions for using a checker appear in Section 2.

1.3 Example use: detecting a null pointer bug

To run a checker on a source file, just run `javac` as usual, passing the `-processor` flag. For instance, if you usually run the compiler like this:

```
javac Foo.java Bar.java
```

then you will instead run it like this (where `javac` is the JSR 308 compiler that is distributed with the Checker Framework):

```
javac -processor ProcessorName Foo.java Bar.java
```

(If you usually do your coding within an IDE, you will need to configure the IDE to use the correct version of `javac` and to pass the command-line argument. See your IDE documentation for details.)

1. Let's consider this very simple Java class. One local variable is annotated as `NonNull`, indicating that `ref` must be a reference to a non-null object. Save the file as `GetStarted.java`.

```
import checkers.nullness.quals.*;

public class GetStarted {
    void sample() {
        @NonNull Object ref = new Object();
    }
}
```

2. Run the nullness checker on the class. Either run this from the command line:

```
javac -processor checkers.nullness.NullnessChecker GetStarted.java
```

or compile from within your IDE, which you have customized to use the JSR 308 compiler and to pass the extra arguments.

The compilation should complete without any errors.

3. Let's introduce an error now. Modify `ref`'s assignment to:

```
@NonNull Object ref = null;
```

4. Run the nullness checker again, just as before. This run should emit the following error:

```
GetStarted.java:5: incompatible types.
found   : @Nullable <nulltype>
required: @NonNull Object
        @NonNull Object ref = null;
                                   ^
```

1 error

The type qualifiers (e.g. `@NonNull`) are permitted anywhere that would write a type, including generics and casts; see Section 2.1.

```
@Interned String intern() { ... } // return value
int compareTo(@NonNull String other) { ... } // parameter
@NonNull List<@Interned String> messages; // non-null list of interned Strings
```

2 Using a checker

Finding bugs with a checker plugin is a two-step process:

1. The programmer writes annotations, such as `@NonNull` and `@Interned`, that specify additional information about Java types. (Or, the programmer uses an inference tool to automatically insert annotations in his code: see Sections 3.2.4 and 6.2.2.) It is possible to annotate only part of your code: see Section 11.1.
2. The checker reports whether the program contains any erroneous code — that is, code that is inconsistent with the annotations.

2.1 Writing annotations

The syntax of type qualifier annotations in Java 7 is specified by JSR 308 [Ern08]. Ordinary Java permits annotations on declarations. JSR 308 permits annotations anywhere that you would write a type, including generics and casts. You can also write annotations to indicate type qualifiers for array levels and receivers. Here are a few examples:

```
@Interned String intern() { ... }           // return value
int compareTo(@NonNull String other) { ... } // parameter
String toString() @ReadOnly { ... }        // receiver ("this" parameter)
@NonNull List<@Interned String> messages;  // generics: non-null list of interned Strings
@Interned String @NonNull [] messages;    // arrays: non-null array of interned Strings
myDate = (@ReadOnly Date) readonlyObject; // cast
```

You can also write the annotations within comments, as in `List</*@NonNull*/ String>`. The Type Annotations compiler, which is distributed with the Checker Framework, will still process the annotations. However, your code will remain compilable by people who are not using the JSR 308 or Java 7 compiler. For more details, see Section 11.3.

2.1.1 Distributing your annotated project

If your code contains any annotations (outside of comments, see Section 11.3), or any import statements for the annotations, then your code has a dependency on the annotation declarations. You also will need to provide the annotation declarations as well, if you decide to distribute your project.

For your convenience, inside the the checkers distribution .zip file is a jar file, `checkers-quals.jar`, that only contains the distributed qualifiers. You may include the jar file in your distribution.

Your clients need to have the annotations jar in the classpath when compiling your project. When running it though, they most likely don't require the annotations declarations (unless the annotation classes are loaded via reflection, which would be unusual).

2.2 Running a checker

To run a checker plugin, run the compiler `javac` as usual, but pass the `-processor plugin_class` command-line option. (You might run the compiler from the command line as shown below, or your IDE might run the `javac` command on your behalf, in which case see the IDE documentation to learn how to customize it.) Remember that you must be using the Type Annotations version of `javac`, which you already installed (see Section 1.2).

Two concrete examples (using the Nullness checker) are:

```
javac -processor checkers.nullness.NullnessChecker MyFile.java
javac -processor checkers.nullness.NullnessChecker -sourcepath checkers/jdk/nullness/src MyFile.java
```

For a discussion of the `-sourcepath` argument, see Section 12.2.

The checker is run only on the Java files specified on the command line (or created by another annotation processor). The checker does not analyze other classes (e.g., pre-compiled classes, or classes whose source code is available on the classpath), but it does check the *uses* of those classes in the source code being compiled.

The javac compiler halts compilation as soon as an error is found in a source file. You can pass `-Awarns` in the command-line to treat checker errors as warnings. This option allows you to see all the type-checking errors at once, rather than just the errors in the first file that contains errors.

You can always compile the code without the `-processor` command-line option, but in that case no checking of the type annotations is performed. The annotations are still written to the resulting `.class` files, however.

2.2.1 Checker auto-discovery

“Auto-discovery” makes the javac compiler always run a checker plugin, even if you do not explicitly pass the `-processor` command-line option. This can make your command line shorter, and ensures that your code is checked even if you forget the command-line option.

To enable auto-discovery, place a configuration file named `META-INF/services/javac.annotation.processing.Processor` in your classpath. The file contains the names of the checker plugins to be used, listed one per line. For instance, to run the Nullness and the Interning checkers automatically, the configuration file should contain:

```
checkers.nullness.NullnessChecker
checkers.interning.InterningChecker
```

You can disable this auto-discovery mechanism by passing the `-proc:none` command-line option to javac.

2.2.2 Ant task

If you use the Ant build tool to compile your software, then you can add an Ant task that runs a checker. We assume that your Ant file already contains a compilation target that uses the javac task.

First, set the `jsr308javac` property:

```
<!-- Boilerplate to set jsr308javac property. Is there a better way? -->
<property environment="env"/>
<condition property="isUnix">
  <os family="unix" />
</condition>
<condition property="isWindows">
  <os family="windows" />
</condition>
<target name="init-jsr308javac-unix" if="isUnix">
  <property name="jsr308javac" value="${env.CHECKERS}/binary/javac" />
</target>
<target name="init-jsr308javac-windows" if="isWindows">
  <property name="jsr308javac" value="${env.CHECKERS}/binary/javac.bat" />
</target>
```

The property target makes environment variables (such as your home directory) available to Ant.

Next, duplicate the compilation target, then modify it slightly as indicated in this example, filling in each ellipsis (...) from the original compilation target:

```
<target name="check-nullness"
  description="Check for nullness errors."
  depends="clean,...,init-jsr308javac-unix,init-jsr308javac-windows">
  <javac ...
    fork="yes"
    executable="${jsr308javac}">
    <compilerarg value="-version"/>
    <compilerarg line="-target 5"/>
    <compilerarg line="-processor checkers.nullness.NullnessChecker"/>
    <compilerarg line="-sourcepath ${env.CHECKERS}/jdk/nullness/src"/>
    <compilerarg value="-implicit:class"/>
    <classpath>
      <pathelement location="${env.annotations}/checkers/checkers.jar"/>
      ...
    </classpath>
    ...
  </javac>
</target>
```

In the example, the target is named `check-nullness`, but you can name it whatever you like.

The target assumes the existence of a `clean` target that removes all `.class` files. That is necessary because Ant's `javac` target doesn't re-compile `.java` files for which a `.class` file already exists.

The `executable` and `fork` fields of the `javac` task ensure that an external `javac` program is called. Otherwise, Ant will run `javac` via a Java method call, and there is no guarantee that it will get the JSR 308 version that is distributed with the Checker Framework.

The `-version` compiler argument is just for debugging; you may omit it.

The `-target 5` compiler argument is optional, if you use Java 5 in ordinary compilation when not performing pluggable type-checking.

The `-processor ...` compiler argument indicates which checker to run. You can supply additional arguments to the checker as well.

The `-implicit: class` compiler argument causes annotation processing to be performed on implicitly compiled files. (An implicitly compiled file is one that was not specified on the command line, but for which the source code is newer than the `.class` file.) This is the default, but supplying the argument explicitly suppresses a compiler warning.

2.2.3 Maven plugin

Adam Warski has written a Maven2 plugin that runs a checker. The plugin is available at <http://www.warski.org/checkersplugin.html>.

2.2.4 IntelliJ IDEA

IntelliJ IDEA (Maia release) supports the Type Annotations (JSR-308) syntax.

<http://blogs.jetbrains.com/idea/2009/07/type-annotations-jsr-308-support/>

2.2.5 Eclipse

There are two ways to run a checker from within the Eclipse IDE: via Ant or using an Eclipse plug-in.

Using an Ant task Add an Ant target as described in Section 2.2.2. You can run the Ant target by executing the following steps (instructions copied from http://www.eclipse.org/documentation/?topic=/org.eclipse.platform.doc.user/gettingStarted/qs-84_run_ant.htm):

1. Select `build.xml` in one of the navigation views and choose **Run As > Ant Build...** from its context menu.
2. A launch configuration dialog is opened on a launch configuration for this Ant buildfile.
3. In the **Targets** tab, select the new ant task (e.g., `check-interning`).
4. Click **Run**.
5. The Ant buildfile is run, and the output is sent to the Console view.

Eclipse plug-in A prototype Eclipse plug-in for running a checker is available at <http://types.cs.washington.edu/checker-framework/eclipse/>. The website contains instructions for installing and using the plug-in. The plug-in is experimental now, but some people have used it successfully (and we have fixed all bugs that have been reported so far).

2.2.6 tIDE

tIDE, an open-source Java IDE, supports the Checker Framework. See its documentation at <http://tide.olympic-network.com/>.

2.3 What the checker guarantees

A checker can guarantee that a particular property holds throughout the code. For example, the Nullness checker (Section 3) guarantees that every expression whose type is a `@NonNull` type never evaluates to `null`. The Interning checker (Section 4) guarantees that every expression whose type is an `@Interned` type evaluates to an interned value. The checker makes its guarantee by examining every part of your program and verifying that no part of the program violates the guarantee.

There are some limitations to the guarantee.

- Native methods and reflection can behave in a manner that is impossible for a compiler plugin to check. Such constructs may violate the property being checked. Similarly, deserialization and cloning can create objects that could not result from normal constructor calls, and that therefore may violate the property being checked.
- A compiler plugin can check only those parts of your program that you run it on. If you compile some parts of your program without the `-processor` switch or with the `-AskipClasses` property (in other words, without running the checker), or if you use the `@SuppressWarnings` annotation to suppress some errors or warnings, then there is no guarantee that the entire program satisfies the property being checked. An analogous situation is using an external library that was compiled without being checked by the compiler plugin.
- Your code should pass the Java compiler without errors or warnings. In particular, your code should use generic types, with no uses of raw types. Misuse of generics, including casting away generic types, can cause other errors to be missed.
- The Checker Framework does not yet support annotations on intersection types (see JLS §4.9). As a result, checkers cannot provide guarantees about intersection types.
- Specific checkers may have other limitations; see their documentation for details.

A checker can be useful in finding bugs or in verifying part of a program, even if the checker is unable to verify the correctness of an entire program.

If you find that a checker fails to issue a warning that it should, then please report a bug (see Section 15.2).

2.4 Tips about writing annotations

2.4.1 Annotations indicate normal behavior

You should use annotations to indicate *normal* behavior. The annotation indicate all the values that you *want* to flow to reference — not every value that might possibly flow there if your program has a bug.

Many methods are guaranteed to throw an exception if they are passed `null` as an argument. Examples include

```
java.lang.Double.valueOf(String)
java.lang.String.contains(CharSequence)
org.junit.Assert.assertNotNull(Object)
com.google.common.base.Preconditions.checkNotNull(Object)
```

`@Nullable` might seem like a reasonable annotation for the parameter, for two reasons. First, `null` is a legal argument with a well-defined semantics: throw an exception. Second, `@Nullable` describes a possible program execution: it might be possible for `null` to flow there, if your program has a bug.

However, it is never useful for a programmer to pass `null`. It is the programmer's intention that `null` never flows there. If `null` does flow there, the program will not continue normally.

Therefore, you should mark such parameters as `@NonNull`, indicating the intended use of the method. When you use the `@NonNull` annotation, the checker is able to issue compile-time warnings about possible run-time exceptions, which is its purpose. Marking the parameter as `@Nullable` would suppress such warnings, which is undesirable.

2.4.2 Subclasses must respect superclass annotations

An annotation indicates a guarantee that a client can depend upon. A subclass is not permitted to *weaken* the contract; for example, if a method accepts `null` as an argument, then every overriding definition must also accept `null`. A

subclass is permitted to *strengthen* the contract; for example, if a method does *not* accept null as an argument, then an overriding definition is permitted to accept null.

As a bad example, consider an erroneous @Nullable annotation at line 141 of `com/google/common/collect/Multiset.java`, version r78:

```
101 public interface Multiset<E> extends Collection<E> {
...
122 /**
123  * Adds a number of occurrences of an element to this multiset.
...
129  * @param element the element to add occurrences of; may be {@code null} only
130  *     if explicitly allowed by the implementation
...
137  * @throws NullPointerException if {@code element} is null and this
138  *     implementation does not permit null elements. Note that if {@code
139  *     occurrences} is zero, the implementation may opt to return normally.
140  */
141  int add(@Nullable E element, int occurrences);
```

There exist implementations of `Multiset` that permit null elements, and implementations of `Multiset` that do not permit null elements. A client with a variable `Multiset ms` does not know which variety of `Multiset` `ms` refers to. However, the @Nullable annotation promises that `ms.add(null, 1)` is permissible. (Recall from Section 2.4.1 that annotations should indicate normal behavior.)

If parameter `element` on line 141 were to be annotated, the correct annotation would be @NonNull. Suppose a client has a reference to same `Multiset ms`. The only way the client can be sure not to throw an exception is to pass only non-null elements to `ms.add()`. A particular class that implements `Multiset` could declare `add` to take a @Nullable parameter. That still satisfies the original contract. It strengthens the contract by promising even more: a client with such a reference can pass any non-null value to `add()`, and may also pass null.

However, the best annotation for line 141 is no annotation at all. The reason is that each implementation of the `Multiset` interface should specify its own nullness properties when it specifies the type parameter for `Multiset`. For example, two clients could be written as

```
class MyNullPermittingMultiset implements Multiset<@Nullable Object> { ... }
class MyNullProhibitingMultiset implements Multiset<@NonNull Object> { ... }
```

or, more generally, as

```
class MyNullPermittingMultiset<E extends @Nullable Object> implements Multiset<E> { ... }
class MyNullProhibitingMultiset<E extends @NonNull Object> implements Multiset<E> { ... }
```

Then, the specification is more informative, and the Checker Framework is able to do more precise checking, than if line 141 has an annotation.

It is a pleasant feature of the Checker Framework that in many cases, no annotations at all are needed on type parameters such as `E` in `MultiSet`.

2.4.3 When to use (and not use) type qualifiers

For some programming tasks, you can use either a Java subclass or a type qualifier. For instance, suppose that your code currently uses `String` to represent an address. You could create a new `Address` class and refactor your code to use it, or you could create a @Address annotation and apply it to some uses of `String` in your code. If both of these are truly possible, then it is probably more foolproof to use the Java class. We do not encourage you to use type qualifiers as a poor substitute for classes. However, sometimes type qualifiers are a better choice.

Using a new class may your code incompatible with existing libraries or clients. Brian Goetz expands on this issues in an article on the pseudo-typedef antipattern [Goe06]. Even if compatibility is not a concern, a code change may

introduce bugs, whereas adding annotations does not change the run-time behavior. It is possible to add annotations to existing code, including code you do not maintain or cannot change. It is possible to annotate primitive types without converting them to wrappers, which would make the code both uglier and slower.

Type qualifiers can be applied to any type, including final classes that cannot be subclassed.

Type qualifiers permit you to remove operations, with a compile-time guarantee. An example is mutating methods that are forbidden by immutable types (see Sections 5 and 5). More generally, type qualifiers permit creating a new supertype, not just a subtype, of an existing Java type.

A final reason is efficiency. Type qualifiers can be more efficient, since there is no no run-time representation such as a wrapper or a separate class, nor introduction of dynamic dispatch for methods that could otherwise be statically dispatched.

2.4.4 Annotations on constructor invocations

In the checkers distributed with the Checker Framework, an annotation on a constructor invocation is equivalent to a cast on a constructor result. That is, the following two expressions have identical semantics: one is just shorthand for the other.

```
new @ReadOnly Date()
(@ReadOnly Date) new Date()
```

However, you should rarely have to use this. The Checker Framework will determine the qualifier on the result, based on the “return value” annotation on the constructor definition. The “return value” annotation appears before the constructor name, for example:

```
class MyClass {
    @ReadOnly MyClass() { ... }
}
```

In general, you should only use this syntax when you know that the cast is guaranteed to succeed. An example from the IGJ checker (section 5) is `new @Immutable MyClass()` or `new @Mutable MyClass()`, where you know that every other reference to the class is annotated `@ReadOnly`.

3 Nullness checker

If the Nullness checker issues no warnings for a given program, then running that program will never throw a null pointer exception. This guarantee enables a programmer to prevent errors from occurring when his program is run. See Section 3.3 for more details about the guarantee and what is checked.

You can control the behavior of the Nullness checker via these `-A` options:

- `flow` (default: on) - option to perform flow-sensitive analysis to infer the nullness of references
- `cast` (default: on) - option to warn against unsafe casts due to nullness, as in `((@NonNull String)null)`
- `nulltest` (default: off) - option to warn against null checks when the reference is guaranteed to be nonnull, as in `"m" == null`.

3.1 Nullness annotations

The Nullness checker uses two separate type hierarchies: one for nullness, and one for rawness (see Section 3.1.1).

The nullness hierarchy contains these qualifiers:

@Nullable indicates a type that includes the null value. The type `Boolean` is nullable; a variable of type `Boolean` always has one of the values `TRUE`, `FALSE`, or `null`.

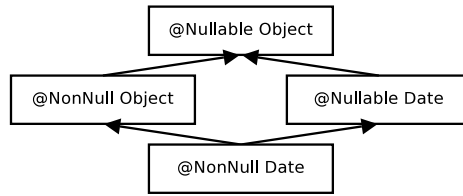


Figure 1: Partial type hierarchy for the Nullness type system. Java’s `Object` is expressed as `@Nullable Object`. Programmers can omit most type qualifiers, because the default annotation (Section 3.2.2) is usually correct.

@Nonnull indicates a type that does not include the null value. The type `boolean` is non-null; a variable of type `boolean` always has one of the values `true` or `false`. The type `@Nonnull Boolean` is also non-null: a variable of type `@Nonnull Boolean` always has one of the values `TRUE` or `FALSE` — never null. Dereferencing an expression of non-null type can never cause a null pointer exception. Furthermore, the object referenced by a `@Nonnull` type is always fully initialized — that is, its `@Nonnull` fields have been set to a non-null value.

@PolyNull indicates qualifier polymorphism. For a description of `@PolyNull`, see Section 10.1.2.

@LazyNonnull indicates a reference that may be null, but if it ever becomes non-null, then it never becomes null again. This is appropriate for lazily-initialized fields, among other uses. When the variable is read, its type is treated as `@Nullable`, but when the variable is assigned, its type is treated as `@Nonnull`.

Because the Nullness checker works intraprocedurally (it analyzes one method at a time), when a `LazyNonnull` field is first read within a method, the field cannot be assumed to be non-null. The benefit of `LazyNonnull` over `Nullable` is its different interaction with flow-sensitive type qualifier refinement. After a check of a `LazyNonnull` field, all subsequent accesses *within that method* can be assumed to be `Nonnull`, even after arbitrary external method calls that have access to the given field.

Figure 1 shows part of the type hierarchy for the Nullness type system.

3.1.1 @Raw annotation for partially-initialized objects

The rawness hierarchy indicates whether an object is fully initialized — that is, whether its fields have all been assigned. This is mostly relevant within the constructor, or for references to `this` that escape the constructor. The rawness hierarchy contains these qualifiers:

@Raw indicates a type that contains a partially-initialized object. In a partially-initialized object, fields that are annotated as `@Nonnull` may be null because the field has not yet been assigned. Within the constructor, `this` has `@Raw` type until all the fields have been assigned.

@NonRaw indicates a type that contains a fully-initialized object. `NonRaw` is the default, so there is little need for a programmer to write this explicitly.

@PolyRaw indicates qualifier polymorphism over rawness (see Section 10.1.2).

During execution of a constructor, every field of non-primitive type starts out with the value `null`. If the field has `@Nonnull` type, its initial value `null` violates the `@Nonnull` type qualifier. In other words, during construction, the object is in an illegal state.

The `@Raw` type annotation represents a partially-initialized object. If a reference has `@Raw` type, then all of its `@Nonnull` fields are treated as `@LazyNonnull`: when read, they are treated as being `@Nullable`, but when written, they are treated as being `@Nonnull`.

The rawness hierarchy is **orthogonal** to the nullness hierarchy. It is legal for a reference to be `@Nonnull @Raw`, `@Nullable @Raw`, `@Nonnull @NonRaw`, or `@Nullable @NonRaw`. The nullness hierarchy tells you about the reference itself: might the reference be null? The rawness hierarchy tells you about the fields in the referred-to object: might those fields be null?

You can suppress warnings related to partially-initialized objects with `@SuppressWarnings("rawness")`. (Do not confuse this with the unrelated `@SuppressWarnings("rawtypes")` annotation for non-instantiated generic types!)

How an object becomes non-raw The Nullness checker issues an error if the constructor fails to initialize any non-null field. This ensures that the object is in a legal (non-raw) state by the time that the constructor exits. This is different than Java’s test for definite assignment (see JLS ch.16), which does not apply to fields because fields have a default value of null.

Within the constructor, `this` has `@Raw` type. As soon as all of the `@NonNull` fields have been initialized, then `this` is treated as non-raw.

Suppose that class `C` extends class `B`, which extends class `A`. Within the `C` constructor, until the superclass constructor is called, `this` has type `@Raw C` and also `@Raw B` and `@Raw A`. After the superclass constructor has been called, then `this` has type `@Raw C` and also `@NonRaw B` and `@NonRaw A`.

A note about the terminology “raw” The name “raw” comes from a research paper that proposed this approach [FL03]. The `@Raw` annotation has nothing to do with the raw types of Java Generics.

3.2 Writing nullness annotations

3.2.1 Implicit qualifiers

As described in Section 10.3, the Nullness checker adds implicit qualifiers, reducing the number of annotations that must appear in your code. For example, enum types are implicitly non-null, so you never need to write `@NonNull MyEnumType`.

For a complete description of all implicit nullness qualifiers, see the Javadoc for `NullnessAnnotatedTypeFactory`.

3.2.2 Default annotation

Unannotated references are treated as if they had a default annotation, using the NNEL (non-null except locals) rule described below. A user may choose a different rule for defaults using the `@DefaultQualifier` annotation; see Section 10.3.1.

Here are three possible default rules you may wish to use. Other rules are possible but are not as useful.

- `@Nullable`: Unannotated types are regarded as possibly-null, or nullable. This default is backward-compatible with Java, which permits any reference to be null. You can activate this default by writing a `@DefaultQualifier("checkers.nullnessquals.Nullable")` annotation on a class or method declaration.
- `@NonNull`: Unannotated types are treated as non-null. You can activate this default via the `@DefaultQualifier("checkers.nullnessquals.NonNull")` annotation.
- Non-null except locals (NNEL): Unannotated types are treated as `@NonNull`, *except* that the unannotated raw type of a local variable is treated as `@Nullable`. (Any generic arguments to a local variable still default to `@NonNull`.) You can activate this default via the `@DefaultQualifier(value="checkers.nullnessquals.NonNull", locations={DefaultLocation.ALL_EXCEPT_LOCALS})` annotation.

The NNEL default leads to the smallest number of explicit annotations in your code [PAC⁺08]. It is what we recommend. If you do not explicitly specify a different default, then NNEL is the default.

3.2.3 Conditional nullness

The Nullness Checker supports a form of conditional nullness types, via the `@AssertNonNullIfTrue`. The annotation on a method declares that some expressions are nonnull, if the method returns true.

Consider `java.io.File`. `File.listFiles()` may return a null, but is specified to return non-null value if `File.isDirectory()` is true. You can declare this relationship in the following way:

```
class File {  
  
    @AssertNonNullIfTrue("list()", "listFiles()")
```

```

public boolean isDirectory() { ... }

public File @Nullable [] listFiles();
}

```

A client that checks that a `File` reference is indeed that of a directory, can then de-reference `File.isDirectory` safely without any nullness check.

```

static void analyze(File file) {
    if (file.isDirectory()) {
        for (File child : file.listFiles()) {
            analyze(child);
        }
    } else {
        ... analyze each file
    }
}

```

3.2.4 Inference of `@NonNull` and `@Nullable` annotations

It can be tedious to write annotations in your code. Two tools exist that can automatically infer annotations and insert them in your source code. (This is different than type qualifier refinement for local variables (Section 10.3.2), which infers a more specific type for local variables and uses them during type-checking but does not insert them in your source code. Type qualifier refinement is always enabled, no matter how annotations on signatures got inserted in your source code.)

Your choice of tool depends on what default annotation (see Section 3.2.2) your code uses. You only need one of these tools.

- Inference of `@Nullable`: If your code uses the standard NNEL (non-null-except-locals) default or the `NonNull` default, then use the `AnnotateNullable` tool of the Daikon invariant detector.
- Inference of `@NonNull`: If your code uses the `Nullable` default, use one of these tools:
 - Julia analyzer,
 - Nit: Nullability Inference Tool
 - Non-null checker and inferencer of the JastAdd Extensible Compiler.

3.3 What the Nullness checker checks

The checker issues a warning in two cases:

1. When an expression of non-`@NonNull` type is dereferenced, because it might cause a null pointer exception. Dereferences occur not only when a field is accessed, but when an array is indexed, an exception is caught, a lock is taken in a synchronized block, and more. For a complete description of all checks performed by the Nullness checker, see the Javadoc for `NullnessVisitor`.
2. When an expression of `@NonNull` type might become null, because it is a misuse of the type: the null value could flow to a dereference that the checker does not warn about.

This example shows both sorts of problems:

```

        Object obj; // might be null
@NonNull Object nobj; // never null
...
obj.toString() // checker warning: dereference might cause null pointer exception
nobj = obj; // checker warning: nobj may become null

```

Parameter passing and return values are checked analogously to assignments.

3.4 Suppressing nullness warnings

The Checker Framework supplies several ways to suppress warnings, most notably the `@SuppressWarnings("nullness")` annotation (see Section 11.2).

The Nullness Checker supports an additional warning suppression key, `nullness:collection-typeargs`. Use of `@SuppressWarnings("nullness:generic.argument")` causes the Nullness Checker to suppress only those warnings related to misuse of generic type arguments. One use for this key is when a class is declared to take only `@NonNull` type arguments, but you want to instantiate the class with a `@NonNull` type argument, as in `List<@Nullable Object>`. For a more complete explanation of this example, see Section 14.8.

The Nullness Checker also permits you to use assertions or method calls to suppress warnings; see below.

3.4.1 Suppressing warnings with assertions and method calls

Occasionally, it is inconvenient or verbose to use the `@SuppressWarnings` annotation. For example, Java does not permit annotations to appear on statements.

For situations when the `@SuppressWarnings` annotation is inconvenient, the Nullness Checker provides two additional ways to suppress warnings: via an `assert` statement or the `castNonNull` method. These are appropriate when the Nullness Checker issues a warning, but the programmer knows for sure that the warning is a false positive, because the value cannot ever be null at run time.

1. Use an assertion. If the string “nullness” appears in the message body, then the Nullness Checker treats the assertion as suppressing a warning and assumes that the assertion always succeeds. For example, the checker assumes that no null pointer exception can occur in code such as

```
assert x != null : "@SuppressWarnings(nullness)";
... x.f ...
```

If the string “nullness” does not appear in the assertion message, then the Nullness Checker treats the assertion as being used for defensive programming, and it warns if the method might throw a nullness-related exception.

2. Use the `NullnessUtils.castNonNull` method.

TODO: copy text from its documentation.

A potential disadvantage of using the `castNonNull` method is that your code becomes dependent on the Checker Framework at run time as well as at compile time. You can avoid this by copying the implementation of `castNonNull` into your own code, and possibly renaming it if you do not like the name. Be sure to retain the documentation that indicates that your copy is intended for use only to suppress warnings and not for defensive programming.

3.4.2 Suppressing warnings on nullness-checking routines

One way to suppress warnings in the Nullness Checker is to use method `castNonNull`. (Section 3.4.1 gives other techniques.)

This section explains why the Nullness Checker introduces a new method rather than re-using the `assert` statement (as in `assert x != null`) or an existing method such as:

```
org.junit.Assert.assertNotNull(Object)
com.google.common.base.Preconditions.checkNotNull(Object)
```

In each case, the assertion or method indicates an application invariant, a fact that should always be true. There are two distinct reasons a programmer may have written the invariant, depending on whether the programmer is 100% sure that the application invariant holds.

1. A programmer might write it as **defensive programming**. This causes the program to throw an exception, which is useful for debugging because it gives an earlier run-time indication of the error. A programmer would use an assertion in this way if the programmer is not 100% sure that the application invariant holds.

2. A programmer might write it to **suppress** false positive **warning messages** from a checker. A programmer would use an assertion this way if the programmer is 100% sure that the application invariant holds, and the can never be null at run time.

With assertions and existing methods like JUnit's `assertNotNull`, there is no way of knowing the programmer's intent in using the method. Guessing wrong would make the Nullness Checker less useful. Different programmers or codebases may use them in different ways. And, different checking tools issue different false warnings that need to be suppressed.

As an example of using assertions for defensive programming, some style guides suggest using assertions or method calls to indicate nullness. A programmer might write

```
String s = ...
assert s != null;    // or: assertNotNull(s);    or: checkNotNull(s);
... Double.valueOf(s) ...
```

A programming error might cause `s` to be null, in which case the code would throw an exception at run time. If the assertion caused the Nullness Checker to assume that `s` is not null, then the Nullness Checker would issue no warning for this code. That would be undesirable, because the whole purpose of the Nullness Checker is to give a compile-time warning about possible run-time exceptions. Furthermore, if the programmer uses assertions for defensive programming systematically throughout the codebase, then many useful Nullness Checker warnings would be suppressed.

Because it is important to distinguish between the two uses of assertions (defensive programming vs. suppressing warnings), the Checker Framework introduces the `NullnessUtils.castNonNull` method. Unlike existing assertions and methods, `castNonNull` is intended only to suppress false warnings that are issued by the Nullness Checker, not for defensive programming.

If you know that a particular codebase uses the `assert` statement or a nullness-checking method not for defensive programming but to indicate facts that are guaranteed to be true (that is, these assertions will never fail at run time), then you can cause the Nullness Checker to suppress warnings related to them, just as it does for `castNonNull`. For a method, annotate its definition just as `NullnessUtils.castNonNull` is annotated (see the source code for the Checker Framework). Also, be sure to document the intention, so that programmers do not accidentally misuse them for defensive programming.

If you are annotating a codebase that already contains precondition checks, such as:

```
public String get(String key, String def) {
    checkNotNull(key, "key"); //NOI18N
    ...
}
```

then you should mark the appropriate parameter as `@NonNull` (which is the default). This will prevent the checker from issuing a warning about the `checkNotNull` call.

3.5 Examples

3.5.1 Tiny examples

To try the Nullness checker on a source file that uses the `@NonNull` qualifier, use the following command (where `javac` is the JSR 308 compiler that is distributed with the Checker Framework):

```
javac -processor checkers.nullness.NullnessChecker examples/NullnessExample.java
```

Compilation will complete without warnings.

To see the checker warn about incorrect usage of annotations (and therefore the possibility of a null pointer exception at run time), use the following command:

```
javac -processor checkers.nullness.NullnessChecker examples/NullnessExampleWithWarnings.java
```

The compiler will issue three warnings regarding violation of the semantics of `@NonNull`.

edu.umd.cs.findbugs.annotations.NonNull	checkers.nullnessquals.NonNull
javax.annotation.Nonnull	checkers.nullnessquals.NonNull
org.jetbrains.annotations.NotNull	checkers.nullnessquals.NonNull
edu.umd.cs.findbugs.annotations.Nullable	checkers.nullnessquals.Nullable
edu.umd.cs.findbugs.annotations.CheckForNull	checkers.nullnessquals.Nullable
edu.umd.cs.findbugs.annotations.UnknownNullness	checkers.nullnessquals.Nullable
javax.annotation.Nullable	checkers.nullnessquals.Nullable
javax.annotation.CheckForNull	checkers.nullnessquals.Nullable
org.jetbrains.annotations.Nullable	checkers.nullnessquals.Nullable

Figure 2: Refactoring for converting nullness annotations from FindBugs, the JSR 305 proposal, and IntelliJ to the Checker Framework.

3.5.2 Annotated library

Three libraries that or annotated with nullness qualifiers are:

- The Nullness checker itself.
- The Daikon invariant detector. Run the command `make check-nullness`.
- The annotation scene library. To run the Nullness checker on the annotation scene library, first download the scene library suite (which includes build dependencies for the scene library as well as its source code) and extract it into your checkers installation. The checker can then be run on the annotation scene library with Apache Ant using the following commands:

```
cd checkers
ant -f scene-lib-test.xml
```

You can view the annotated source code, which contains `@NonNull` annotations, in the `checkers/scene-lib-test/src/annotations/` directory.

3.6 Other tools for nullness checking

The Checker Framework’s nullness annotation is similar to annotations used in IntelliJ IDEA, FindBugs, JML, the JSR 305 proposal, and others. Also see Section 15.5 for a comparison to other tools.

You might prefer to use the Checker Framework because it has a more powerful analysis that can warn you about more null pointer errors in your code.

If you have already annotated your code with a different nullness annotation, you can reuse that effort by converting them to the Checker Framework’s nullness annotations. Perform the refactoring described in Figure 2.

Alternately, the Checker Framework can process those other annotations (as well as its own, if they also appear in your program). The Checker Framework has its own definition of the annotations on the left side of Figure 2, so that they can be used as type qualifiers. The Checker Framework interprets them according to the right side of Figure 2.

The Checker Framework may issue more or fewer errors than another tool. This is expected, since each tool uses a different analysis. Remember that the Checker Framework aims at soundness: never failing to report a possible null dereference, while at the same time limiting false reports.

Because some of the names are the same (`NonNull`, `Nullable`), it is unpleasant to use nullness annotations from multiple different packages in the same codebase. You can import at most one of the annotations with conflicting names; the other(s) must be written out fully rather than imported. Also, note FindBugs’s non-standard meaning for `@Nullable` (Section 3.6.2).

3.6.1 Which tool is right for you?

Different tools are appropriate in different circumstances. Here is a brief comparison with FindBugs, but similar points apply to other tools.

The reason you might want to use the Checker Framework instead of FindBugs is that FindBugs has a less powerful nullness analysis that reports fewer errors. However, FindBugs does not require you to annotate your code as thoroughly as the Checker Framework does. Depending on the importance of your code, you may wish to do no nullness checking; the cursory checking of FindBugs; or the thorough checking of the Checker Framework. You might even want to ensure that both tools run, for example if your coworkers or some other organization are still using FindBugs. If you know that you will eventually want to use the Checker Framework, there is no point using FindBugs first; it is easier to go straight to using the Checker Framework.

FindBugs can find other errors in addition to nullness errors; here we focus on its nullness checks. Even if you use FindBugs for its other features, you may want to use the Checker Framework for analyses that can be expressed as pluggable type-checking, such as detecting nullness errors.

Regardless of whether you wish to use the FindBugs nullness analysis, you may continue running all of the other FindBugs analyses at the same time as the Checker Framework; there are no interactions among them.

If FindBugs (or any other tool) discovers a nullness error that the Checker Framework does not, please report it to us (see Section 15.2) so that we can enhance the Checker Framework.

3.6.2 Compatibility note about FindBugs @Nullable

FindBugs suppresses all warnings at uses of a @Nullable variable. (This inevitably surprises programmers! You have to use @CheckForNull to indicate a nullable variable that FindBugs should check.) For example:

```
// declare getObject() to possibly return null
@Nullable Object getObject() { ... }

void myMethod() {
    // FindBugs issues no warning about calling toString on a possibly-null reference
    @Nullable Object o = getObject();
    o.toString();
}
```

The Checker Framework does not emulate this behavior of FindBugs, even if you are using FindBugs annotations. The Checker Framework will issue more warnings than FindBugs, and some of them may be about real bugs in your program. If you wish to suppress warnings at a specific client use where the value is known to be non-null, you should do that at the client use. For example:

```
void myMethod() {
    // Two ways to make the Checker Framework not issue a warning, if
    // the programmer knows this particular invocation won't return null:

    @Nullable Object o1 = getObject();
    assert o1 != null;
    o1.toString();

    @SuppressWarnings("nullness")
    @NonNull o2 = getObject();
    o2.toString();
}
```

4 Interning checker

If the Interning checker issues no warnings for a given program, then all reference equality tests (i.e., “==”) in that program operate on interned types. Interning is a design pattern in which the same object is used whenever two different objects would be considered equal. Interning is also known as canonicalization or hash-consing, and it is

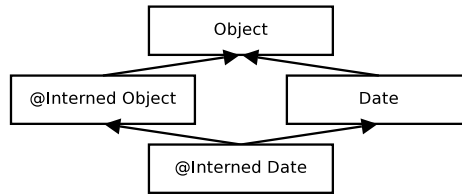


Figure 3: Type hierarchy for the Interning type system.

related to the flyweight design pattern. Interning can save memory and can speed up testing for equality by permitting use of `==`; however, use of `==` on non-interned values can result in subtle bugs. For example:

```

Integer x = new Integer(22);
Integer y = new Integer(22);
System.out.println(x == y); // prints false!
  
```

The Interning checker helps programmers to prevent such bugs. The Interning checker also helps to prevent performance problems that result from failure to use interning. (See Section 2.3 for caveats to the checker's guarantees.)

4.1 Interning annotations

Two qualifiers are part of the Interning type system.

@Interned indicates a type that includes only interned values (no non-interned values).

@PolyInterned indicates qualifier polymorphism. For a description of `@PolyInterned`, see Section 10.1.2.

4.2 Annotating your code with @Interned

In order to perform checking, you must annotate your code with the `@Interned` type annotation, which indicates a type for the canonical representation of an object:

```

String s1 = ...; // type is (uninterned) "String"
@Interned String s2 = ...; // Java type is "String", but checker treats it as "Interned String"
  
```

The type system enforced by the checker plugin ensures that only interned values can be assigned to `s2`.

To specify that *all* objects of a given type are interned, annotate the class declaration:

```

public @Interned class MyInternedClass { ... }
  
```

This is equivalent to annotating every use of `MyInternedClass`, in a declaration or elsewhere. For example, enum classes are implicitly so annotated.

4.2.1 Implicit qualifiers

As described in Section 10.3, the Interning checker adds implicit qualifiers, reducing the number of annotations that must appear in your code. For example, String literals and the null literal are always considered interned, and object creation expressions (using `new`) are never considered `@Interned` unless they are annotated as such, as in

```

@Interned Double internedDoubleZero = new @Interned Double(0); // canonical representation for Double zero
  
```

For a complete description of all implicit interning qualifiers, see the Javadoc for `InterningAnnotatedTypeFactory`.

4.3 What the Interning checker checks

Objects of an `@Interned` type may be safely compared using the “`==`” operator.

The checker issues a warning in two cases:

1. When a reference (in)equality operator (“`==`” or “`!=`”) has an operand of non-`@Interned` type.
2. When a non-`@Interned` type is used where an `@Interned` type is expected.

This example shows both sorts of problems:

```
        Object obj;
@Interned Object iobj;
...
if (obj == iobj) { ... } // checker warning: reference equality test is unsafe
iobj = obj;              // checker warning: iobj's referent may no longer be interned
```

The checker also issues a warning when `.equals` is used where `==` could be safely used. You can disable this behavior via the `javac -Alint` command-line option, like so: `-Alint=-dotequals`.

For a complete description of all checks performed by the checker, see the Javadoc for `InterningVisitor`.

4.4 Examples

To try the Interning checker on a source file that uses the `@Interned` qualifier, use the following command (where `javac` is the JSR 308 compiler that is distributed with the Checker Framework):

```
javac -processor checkers.interning.InterningChecker examples/InterningExample.java
```

Compilation will complete without warnings.

To see the checker warn about incorrect usage of annotations, use the following command:

```
javac -processor checkers.interning.InterningChecker examples/InterningExampleWithWarnings.java
```

The compiler will issue a warning regarding violation of the semantics of `@Interned`.

The Daikon invariant detector (<http://groups.csail.mit.edu/pag/daikon/>) is also annotated with `@Interned`. From directory `java`, run `make check-interning`.

5 IGJ (immutability) checker

IGJ is a Java language extension that helps programmers to avoid mutation errors (unintended side effects). If the IGJ checker issues no warnings for a given program, then that program will never change objects that should not be changed. This guarantee enables a programmer to detect and prevent mutation-related errors. (See Section 2.3 for caveats to the guarantee.)

5.1 IGJ and Mutability

IGJ permits a programmer to express that a particular object should never be modified via any reference (object immutability), or that a reference should never be used to modify its referent (reference immutability). Once a programmer has expressed these facts, an automatic checker analyzes the code to either locate mutability bugs or to guarantee that the code contains no such bugs.

To learn the details of the IGJ language and type system, please see the ESEC/FSE 2007 paper “Object and reference immutability using Java generics” [ZPA⁺07]. The IGJ checker supports Annotation IGJ (Section 5.5), which is slightly different dialect of IGJ than that described in the ESEC/FSE paper.

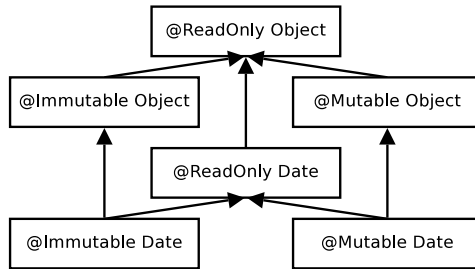


Figure 4: Type hierarchy for three of IGJ’s type qualifiers.

5.2 IGJ Annotations

Each object is either immutable (it can never be modified) or mutable (it can be modified). The following qualifiers are part of the IGJ type system.

@Immutable An immutable reference always refers to an immutable object. Neither the reference, nor any aliasing reference, may modify the object.

@Mutable A mutable reference refers to a mutable object. The reference, or some aliasing mutable reference, may modify the object.

@ReadOnly A readonly reference cannot be used to modify its referent. The referent may be an immutable or a mutable object. In other words, it is possible for the referent to change via an aliasing mutable reference, even though the referent cannot be changed via the readonly reference.

@AssignsFields is similar to **@Mutable**, but permits only limited mutation — assignment of fields — and is intended for use by constructor helper methods.

@I simulates mutability overloading or the template behavior of generics. It can be applied to classes, methods, and parameters. See Section 5.5.3.

For additional details, see [ZPA⁺07].

5.3 What the IGJ checker checks

The IGJ checker issues an error whenever mutation happens through a readonly reference, when fields of a readonly reference which are not explicitly marked with **@Assignable** are reassigned, or when a readonly expression is assigned to a mutable variable. The checker also emits a warning when casts increase the mutability access of a reference.

5.4 Implicit qualifiers

As described in Section 10.3, the IGJ checker adds implicit qualifiers, reducing the number of annotations that must appear in your code.

For a complete description of all implicit nullness qualifiers, see the Javadoc for `NullnessAnnotatedTypeFactory`. The default annotation (for types that are unannotated and not given an implicit qualifier) is as follows:

- **@Mutable** for almost all references. This is backward-compatible with Java, since Java permits any reference to be mutated.
- **@ReadOnly** for local variables. This qualifier may be refined by flow-sensitive local type refinement (see Section 10.3.2).
- **@ReadOnly** for type parameter and wildcard bounds. For example,

```
interface List<T extends Object> { ... }
```

is defaulted to

```
interface List<T extends @ReadOnly Object> { ... }
```

This default is not backward-compatible — that is, you may have to explicitly add `@Mutable` annotations to some type parameter bounds in order to make unannotated Java code type-check under IGJ. However, this reduces the number of annotations you must write overall (since most variables of generic type are in fact not modified), and permits more client code to type-check (otherwise a client could not write `List<@ReadOnly Date>`).

5.5 Annotation IGJ Dialect

The IGJ checker supports the Annotation IGJ dialect of IGJ. The syntax of Annotation IGJ is based on type annotations.

The syntax of the original IGJ dialect [ZPA⁺07] was based on Java 5’s generics and annotation mechanisms. The original IGJ dialect was not backward-compatible with Java (either syntactically or semantically). The dialect of IGJ checked by the IGJ checker corrects these problems.

The differences between the Annotation IGJ dialect and the original IGJ dialect are as follows.

5.5.1 Semantic Changes

- Annotation IGJ does not permit covariant changes in generic type arguments, for backward compatibility with Java. In ordinary Java, types with different generic type arguments, such as `Vector<Integer>` and `Vector<Number>`, have no subtype relationship, even if the arguments (`Integer` and `Number`) do. The original IGJ dialect changed the Java subtyping rules to permit safely varying a type argument covariantly in certain circumstances. For example,

```
Vector<Mutable, Integer> <: Vector<ReadOnly, Integer>
                          <: Vector<ReadOnly, Number>
                          <: Vector<ReadOnly, Object>
```

- Annotation IGJ supports array immutability. The original IGJ dialect did not permit the (im)mutability of array elements to be specified, because the generics syntax used by the original IGJ dialect cannot be applied to array elements.

5.5.2 Syntax Changes

- Immutability is specified through type annotations [Ern08] (Section 5.2), not through a combination of generics and annotations. Use of type annotations makes Annotation IGJ backward compatible with Java syntax.
- Templating over Immutability: The annotation `@I(id)` is used to template over immutability. See Section 5.5.3.

5.5.3 Templating Over Immutability: @I

`@I` is a template annotation over IGJ Immutability annotations. It acts similarly to type variables in Java’s generic types, and the name `@I` mimics the standard `<I>` type variable name used in code written in the original IGJ dialect. The annotation value string is used to distinguish between multiple instances of `@I` — in the generics-based original dialect, these would be expressed as two type variables `<I>` and `<J>`.

Usage on classes A class annotated with `@I` could be declared with any IGJ Immutability annotation. The actual immutability that `@I` is resolved to dictates the immutability type for all the non-static appearances of `@I` with the same value as the class declaration.

Example:

```
@I
public class FileDescriptor {
    private @Immutable Date creationData;
    private @I Date lastModData;
```



```

    public @I Date getLastModDate() @ReadOnly { }
}

...
void useFileDescriptor() {
    @Mutable FileDescriptor file =
        new @Mutable FileDescriptor(...);
    ...
    @Mutable Data date = file.getLastModDate();
}

```

In the last example, @I was resolved to @Mutable for the instance file.

Usage on methods For example, it could be used for method parameters, return values, and the actual IGJ immutability value would be resolved based on the method invocation.

For example, the below method `getMidpoint` returns a `Point` with the same immutability type as the passed parameters if `p1` and `p2` match in immutability, otherwise @I is resolved to @ReadOnly:

```
static @I Point getMidpoint(@I Point p1, @I Point p2) { ... }
```

The @I annotation value distinguishes between @I declarations. So, the below method `findUnion` returns a collection of the same immutability type as the *first* collection parameter:

```
static <E> @I("First") Collection<E> findUnion(@I("First") Collection<E> coll,
                                             @I("Second") Collection<E> col2) { ... }
```

5.6 Examples

To try the IGJ checker on a source file that uses the IGJ qualifier, use the following command (where `javac` is the JSR 308 compiler that is distributed with the Checker Framework).

```
javac -processor checkers.igj.IGJChecker examples/IGJExample.java
```

The IGJ checker itself is also annotated with IGJ annotations.

6 Javari (immutability) checker

Javari [TE05, QTE08] is a Java language extension that helps programmers to avoid mutation errors that result from unintended side effects. If the Javari checker issues no warnings for a given program, then that program will never change objects that should not be changed. This guarantee enables a programmer to detect and prevent mutation-related errors. (See Section 2.3 for caveats to the guarantee.) The Javari webpage (<http://groups.csail.mit.edu/pag/javari/>) contains papers that explain the Javari language and type system. By contrast to those papers, the Javari checker uses an annotation-based dialect of the Javari language.

The Javarifier tool infers Javari types for an existing program; see Section 6.2.2.

Also consider the IGJ checker (Section 5). The IGJ type system is more expressive than that of Javari, and the IGJ checker is a bit more robust. However, IGJ lacks a type inference tool such as Javarifier.

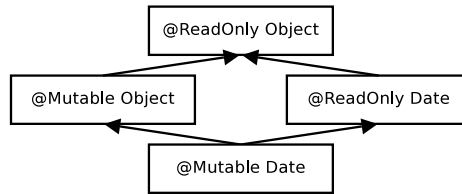


Figure 5: Type hierarchy for Javari’s ReadOnly type qualifier.

6.1 Javari annotations

Five annotations are part of the Javari type system.

A programmer can write five annotations: `@ReadOnly`, `@Mutable`, `@Assignable`, `@PolyRead`, and `@QReadOnly`.

@ReadOnly indicates a type that provides only read-only access. A reference of this type may not be used to modify its referent, but aliasing references to that object might change it.

@Mutable indicates a mutable type.

@Assignable is a field annotation, not a type qualifier. It indicates that the given field may always be assigned, no matter what the type of the reference used to access the field.

@QReadOnly corresponds to Javari’s “? readonly” for wildcard types. An example of its use is `List<@QReadOnly Date>`. It allows only the operations which are allowed for both readonly and mutable types.

@PolyRead (previously named `@RoMaybe`) specifies polymorphism over mutability; it simulates mutability overloading. It can be applied to methods and parameters. See Section 10.1.2 and the `@PolyRead` Javadoc for more details.

6.2 Writing Javari annotations

6.2.1 Implicit qualifiers

As described in Section 10.3, the Javari checker adds implicit qualifiers, reducing the number of annotations that must appear in your code.

For a complete description of all implicit nullness qualifiers, see the Javadoc for `JavariAnnotatedTypeFactory`.

6.2.2 Inference of Javari annotations

It can be tedious to write annotations in your code. The Javarifier tool (<http://groups.csail.mit.edu/pag/javari/javarifier/>) infers Javari types for an existing program. It automatically inserts Javari annotations in your Java program or in in `.class` files.

This has two benefits: it relieves the programmer of the tedium of writing annotations (though the programmer can always refine the inferred annotations), and it annotates libraries, permitting checking of programs that use those libraries.

6.3 What the Javari checker checks

The checker issues an error whenever mutation happens through a readonly reference, when fields of a readonly reference which are not explicitly marked with `@Assignable` are reassigned, or when a readonly expression is assigned to a mutable variable. The checker also emits a warning when casts increase the mutability access of a reference.

6.4 Examples

To try the Javari checker on a source file that uses the Javari qualifier, use the following command (where `javac` is the JSR 308 compiler that is distributed with the Checker Framework). Alternately, you may specify just one of the test files.

```
javac -processor checkers.javari.JavariChecker tests/javari/*.java
```

The compiler should issue the errors and warnings (if any) specified in the .out files with same name.

To run the test suite for the Javari checker, use `ant javari-tests`.

The Javari checker itself is also annotated with Javari annotations.

7 Lock checker

The Lock checker prevents certain kinds of concurrency errors. If the Lock checker issues no warnings for a given program, then the program holds the appropriate lock every time that it accesses a variable.

Note: This does *not* mean that your program has no concurrency errors. (You might have forgotten to annotate that a particular variable should only be accessed when a lock is held. You might release and re-acquire the lock, when correctness requires you to hold it throughout a computation. And, there are other concurrency errors that cannot, or should not, be solved with locks.) However, ensuring that your program obeys its locking discipline is an easy and effective way to eliminate a common and important class of errors.

7.1 Lock annotations

The Lock checker uses two annotations. One is a type qualifier, and the other is a method annotation.

@GuardedBy indicates a type whose value may be accessed only when the given lock is held. See the GuardedBy Javadoc for an explanation of the argument. The lock acquisition and the value access may be arbitrarily far in the future; or, if the value is never accessed, the lock never need be held.

@Holding is a method annotation (not a qualifier). It indicates that when the method is called, the given lock must be held by the caller. In other words, the given lock is already held at the time the method is called.

7.1.1 Examples

Most often, field values are annotated with @GuardedBy, but other uses are possible.

A return value may be annotated with @GuardedBy:

```
@GuardedBy("MyClass.myLock") Object myMethod() { ... }

// reassignments without holding the lock are OK.
@GuardedBy("MyClass.myLock") Object x = myMethod();
@GuardedBy("MyClass.myLock") Object y = x;
Object z = x; // ILLEGAL (assuming no lock inference),
              // because z can be freely accessed.
x.toString() // ILLEGAL because the lock is not held
synchronized(MyClass.myLock) {
    y.toString(); // OK: the lock is held
}
```

A parameter may be annotated with @GuardedBy:

```
void helper1(@GuardedBy("MyClass.myLock") Object a) {
    a.toString(); // ILLEGAL: the lock is not held
    synchronized(MyClass.myLock) {
        a.toString(); // OK: the lock is held
    }
}
@Holding("MyClass.myLock")
```

```

void helper2(@GuardedBy("MyClass.myLock") Object b) {
    b.toString(); // OK: the lock is held
}
void helper3(Object c) {
    c.toString(); // OK: no lock constraints
}
void helper4(@GuardedBy("MyClass.myLock") Object d) {
    d.toString(); // ILLEGAL: the lock is not held
}
void myMethod2(@GuardedBy("MyClass.myLock") Object e) {
    helper1(e); // OK to pass to another routine without holding the lock
    e.toString(); // ILLEGAL: the lock is not held
    synchronized (MyClass.myLock) {
        helper2(e);
        helper3(e);
        helper4(e); // OK, but helper4's body still does not type-check
    }
}

```

7.1.2 Discussion of @Holding

A programmer might choose to use the `@Holding` method annotation in two different ways: to specify a higher-level protocol, or to summarize intended usage. Both of these approaches are useful, and the Lock checker supports both.

Higher-level synchronization protocol `@Holding` can specify a higher-level synchronization protocol that is not expressible as locks over Java objects. By requiring locks to be held, you can create higher-level protocol primitives without giving up the benefits of the annotations and checking of them.

Method summary that simplifies reasoning `@Holding` can be a method summary that simplifies reasoning. In this case, the `@Holding` doesn't necessarily introduce a new correctness constraint; the program might be correct even if the lock were acquired later in the body of the method or in a method it calls, so long as the lock is acquired before accessing the data it protects.

Rather, here `@Holding` expresses a fact about execution: when execution reaches this point, the following locks are already held. This fact enables people and tools to reason intra- rather than inter-procedurally.

In Java, it is always legal to re-acquire a lock that is already held, and the re-acquisition always works. Thus, whenever you write

```

@Holding("myLock")
void myMethod() {
    ...
}

```

it would be equivalent, from the point of view of which locks are held during the body, to write

```

void myMethod() {
    synchronized (myLock) { // no-op: re-acquire a lock that is already held
        ...
    }
}

```

The advantages of the `@Holding` annotation include:

- The annotation documents the fact that the lock is intended to already be held.

- The Lock Checker enforces that the lock is held when the method is called, rather than masking a programmer error by silently re-acquiring the lock.
- The `synchronized` statement can deadlock if, due to a programmer error, the lock is not already held. The Lock Checker prevents this type of error.
- The annotation has no run-time overhead. Even if the lock re-acquisition succeeds, it still consumes time.

7.1.3 Relationship to annotations in *Java Concurrency in Practice*

The book *Java Concurrency in Practice* [GPB⁺06] defines a `@GuardedBy` annotation that is the inspiration for ours. The book's `@GuardedBy` serves two related purposes:

- When applied to a field, it means that the given lock must be held when accessing the field. The lock acquisition and the field access may be arbitrarily far in the future.
- When applied to a method, it means that the given lock must be held by the caller at the time that the method is called — in other words, at the time that execution passes the `@GuardedBy` annotation.

One rationale for reusing the annotation name for both purposes in JCIP is that there are fewer annotations to learn. Another rationale is that both variables and methods are “members” that can be “accessed”; variables can be accessed by reading or writing them (`putfield`, `getfield`), and methods can be accessed by calling them (`invokevirtual`, `invokeinterface`). In both cases, `@GuardedBy` creates preconditions for accessing so-annotated members.

The Lock checker renames the method annotation to `@Holding`, and it generalizes the `@GuardedBy` annotation into a type qualifier that can apply not just to a field but to an arbitrary type (including the type of a parameter, return value, local variable, generic type parameter, etc.). This makes the annotations more expressive and also more amenable to automated checking. It also accommodates the distinct (though related) meanings of the two annotations.

8 Tainting checker

The tainting checker prevents certain kinds of trust errors. If the checker issues no warning for a given program, then the program only uses trusted values and sanitizes all tainted references before use.

Using tainted references before sanitizing them expose the application to security vulnerabilities. For example, web applications that construct database queries with user input are venerable to SQL injection.

Note: This does *not* mean that your program is free from trust errors. (You might have forgotten to annotation a particular method requires trusted references only.)

8.1 Tainting annotations

The Tainting type system uses one annotation: `@Untainted`. The annotation indicates a type that includes only untainted trusted values.

Any type not marked as `Untainted` is treated as tainted untrusted.

8.2 Writing `@Untainted` annotations

In order to use the tainting checker, you must annotate your code with `@Untainted` type annotation, to mark operations that require trusted operations.

It is helpful to start annotating the secure kernel boundary entry points. To secure against SQL injection attacks, it is useful to start annotating the `Statement` class; the execute operations may only operate on untainted queries (Section 12 describes how you can annotate external libraries)

```
public boolean execute(@Untainted String sql) throws SQLException;
public boolean executeUpdate(@Untainted String sql) throws SQLException;
```

The Tainting checker, in turn, will verify that no untainted value may flow into any of these methods.

9 Basic checker

The Basic checker enforces only subtyping rules. It operates over annotations specified by a user on the command line. Thus, users can create a simple type checker without writing any code beyond definitions of the type qualifier annotations.

The Basic checker can accommodate all of the type system enhancements that can be declaratively specified (see Section 13). This includes type introduction rules (implicit annotations, e.g., literals are implicitly considered `@NonNull`) via the `@ImplicitFor` meta-annotation, and other features such as flow-sensitive type qualifier inference (Section 10.3.2) and qualifier polymorphism (Section 10.1.2).

The Basic checker is also useful to type system designers who wish to experiment with a checker before writing code; the Basic checker demonstrates the functionality that a checker inherits from the Checker Framework.

For type systems that require special checks (e.g., warning about dereferences of possibly-null values), you will need to write code and extend the framework as discussed in Section 13.

9.1 Using the Basic checker

The Basic checker is used in the same way as other checkers (using the `-processor` option; see Section 2), except that it requires an additional annotation processor argument via the standard “-A” switch:

- `-Aquals`: this option specifies a comma-no-space-separated list of the fully-qualified class names of the annotations used as qualifiers in the custom type system. It serves the same purpose as the `@TypeQualifiers` annotation used by other checkers (see section 13.5).

The annotations listed in `-Aquals` must be accessible to the compiler during compilation in the classpath. In other words, they must already be compiled before you run the Basic checker with `javac`; it is not sufficient to supply their source files on the command line.

To suppress a warning issued by the basic checker, use a `@SuppressWarnings` annotation, with the argument being the unqualified, uncapitalized name of any of the annotations passed to `-Aquals`.

9.2 Basic checker example

Consider a hypothetical `Encrypted` type qualifier, which denotes that the representation of an object (such as a `String`, `CharSequence`, or `byte[]`) is encrypted. To use the Basic checker for the `Encrypted` type system, follow three steps.

1. Define an annotation for the `Encrypted` qualifier:

```
package myquals;

import checkersquals.*;

/**
 * Denotes that the representation of an object is encrypted.
 * ...
 */
@TypeQualifier
@SubtypeOf(Unqualified.class)
public @interface Encrypted {}
```

Don't forget to compile this class:

```
$ javac myquals/Encrypted.java
```

The resulting `.class` file should either be on your classpath, or on the processor path (set via the `-processorpath` command-line option to `javac`).

2. Write `@Encrypted` annotations in your program:

```

import myquals.Encrypted;

...

public @Encrypted String encrypt(String text) {
    // ...
}

// Only send encrypted data!
public void sendOverInternet(@Encrypted String msg) {
    // ...
}

void sendText() {
    // ...
    @Encrypted String ciphertext = encrypt(plaintext);
    sendOverInternet(ciphertext);
    // ...
}

void sendPassword() {
    String password = getUserPassword();
    sendOverInternet(password);
}

```

You may also need to add `@SuppressWarnings` annotations to the `encrypt` and `decrypt` methods.

3. Invoke the compiler with the Basic checker, specifying the `@Encrypted` annotation using the `-Aquals` option. You should add the `Encrypted` classfile in the processor classpath:

```
$ javac -processorpath myqualspath -processor checkers.basic.BasicChecker -Aquals=myquals.Encrypted Y
```

```

YourProgram.java:42: incompatible types.
found   : java.lang.String
required: @myquals.Encrypted java.lang.String
    sendOverInternet(password);
                ^

```

10 Advanced type system features

You may wish to skim or skip this section on first reading. After you have used a checker for a little while and want to be able to express more sophisticated and useful types, or to understand more about how the Checker Framework works, you can return to it.

10.1 Polymorphism and generics

10.1.1 Generics (parametric polymorphism or type polymorphism)

The Checker Framework fully supports qualified Java generic types (also known in the literature as “parametric polymorphism”). Before running a checker, we recommend that you eliminate raw types (e.g., `List` as opposed to `List<...>`) from your code. Using generics helps prevent type errors just as using a pluggable type-checker does.

When instantiating a generic type, clients supply the qualifier along with the type argument, as in `List<@NonNull String>`.

The declaration (that is, the implementation) of a generic class may use the `extends` clause to restrict the types and qualifiers that may be used for instantiating. For example, given the declaration `class MyClass<T extends @NonNull Object> { ... }`, a client could use `MyClass<@NonNull String>` but not `MyClass<@Nullable String>`.

Style note: When using the Nullness checker (Section 3), programmers sometimes write `extends @NonNull Object` even though it's the default. The reason is that code with no `extends` clause, like

```
class C<T> { ... }
```

typically means that class `C` can be instantiated with any type argument at all. But in the Nullness type system, to permit all type arguments, to obtain that effect one must write

```
class C<T extends @Nullable Object> { ... }
```

Type annotations on generic type variables A type annotation on a generic type variable overrides/ignores any type qualifier (in the same type hierarchy) on the corresponding actual type argument. For example, `@Nullable T` applies the type qualifier `@Nullable` to the (unqualified) Java type of the type argument `T`.

Here is an example of applying a type annotation to a generic type variable:

```
class MyClass2<T> {
    ...
    @Nullable T = null;
    ...
}
```

The type annotation does not restrict how `MyClass2` may be instantiated (only the optional `extends` clause on the declaration of type variable `T` would do so). In other words, both `MyClass2<@NonNull String>` and `MyClass2<@Nullable String>` are legal, and in both cases `@Nullable T` means `@Nullable String`. In `MyClass2<@Interned String>`, `@Nullable T` means `@Nullable @Interned String`.

10.1.2 Qualifier polymorphism

The Checker Framework also supports type *qualifier* polymorphism for methods, which permits a single method to have multiple different qualified type signatures.

A polymorphic qualifier's definition is marked with `@PolymorphicQualifier`. For example, `@PolyNull` is a polymorphic type qualifier for the Nullness type system:

```
@PolymorphicQualifier
public @interface PolyNull { }
```

A method written using a polymorphic qualifier conceptually has multiple versions, somewhat like a template in C++. In each version, the polymorphic qualifier has been replaced by another qualifier from the hierarchy. See the examples below in Section 10.1.2.

The method body must type-check with all signatures. A method call is type-correct if it type-checks under any signature.

Polymorphic qualifiers can be used within a method body. They may not be used on classes or fields.

Examples of using polymorphic qualifiers As an example of the use of `@PolyNull`, method `Class.cast` returns null if and only if its argument is null:

```
@PolyNull T cast(@PolyNull Object obj) { ... }
```

This is like writing:


```
@NonNull T cast( @NonNull Object obj) { ... }
@Nullable T cast(@Nullable Object obj) { ... }
```

except that the latter is not legal Java, since it defines two methods with the same Java signature.

As another example, consider

```
@PolyNull T max(@PolyNull T x, @PolyNull T y);
```

which is like writing

```
@NonNull T max( @NonNull T x, @NonNull T y);
@Nullable T max(@Nullable T x, @Nullable T y);
```

One way of thinking about which one of the two `max` variants is selected is that the nullness annotations of (the declared types of) both arguments are *unified* to a type that is a subtype of both. If both arguments are `@NonNull`, their unification is `@NonNull`, and the result is `@NonNull`. But if even one of the arguments is `@Nullable`, then the result is `@Nullable`.

It does not make sense to write only a single instance of a polymorphic qualifier in a method definition, as in

```
void m(@PolyNull Object obj)
```

which expands to

```
void m(@NonNull Object obj)
void m(@Nullable Object obj)
```

which is no different than writing just

```
void m(@Nullable Object obj)
```

The benefit of polymorphic qualifiers comes when one is used multiple times in a method, since then each instance turns into the same type qualifier. Most frequently, the polymorphic qualifier appears on both the return type and at least one formal parameter. It can also be useful to have polymorphic qualifiers on (only) multiple formal parameters, especially if the method side-effects one of its arguments. For example, consider

```
void moveBetweenStacks(Stack<@PolyNull Object> s1, Stack<@PolyNull Object> s2) {
    s1.push(s2.pop());
}
```

In this case, if it is acceptable to rewrite your code to use Java generics, the code can be even cleaner:

```
<T> void moveBetweenStacks(Stack<T> s1, Stack<T> s2) {
    s1.push(s2.pop());
}
```

10.2 Unused fields and dependent types

Sometimes, the type of a field depends on the qualifier on the receiver. The Checker Framework supports two varieties of such a field: fields that may not be used if the receiver has a given qualifier, and fields whose qualifier changes based on the qualifier of the receiver.

10.2.1 Unused fields

A Java subtype can have more fields than its supertype. You can simulate the same effect for type qualifiers: a given field may not be accessed via a reference with a supertype qualifier, but can be accessed via a reference with a subtype qualifier.

This permits you to restrict use of a field to certain contexts.

The `@Unused` annotation on a field declares that the field may not be accessed via a receiver of the given qualified type (or any supertype).

10.2.2 Dependent types

A variable has a *dependent type* if its type depends on some other value or type.

The Checker Framework supports a form of dependent types, via the `@Dependent` annotation. This annotation changes the type of a field or variable, based on the qualified type of the receiver (`this`). This can be viewed as a more expressive form of polymorphism (see Section 10.1). It can also be seen as a way of linking the meanings of two type qualifier hierarchies.

When the `@Unused` annotation is sufficient, you should use it instead of `@Dependent`.

10.2.3 Example

Suppose we have a class `Person` and a field `spouse` that is non-null if the person is married. We could declare this as

```
class Person {
    ...
    // non-null if this person is married
    @Nullable Person spouse;
    ...
}
```

Now, suppose that we have defined the qualifier hierarchy in which `@Single` (meaning “not married”) is a super-type of `@Married`. A more informative declaration would be

```
class Person {
    ...
    @Nullable @Dependent(result=NonNull.class, when=Married.class) Person spouse;
    ...
}
```

If a person is known to be `@Married`, the `spouse` field is known to be non-null:

```
class Person {
    ...

    void celebrateWeddingAnniversary() @Married {
        System.out.println("Happy anniversary, "
            + spouse.toString()); // no possible null pointer exception
    }

    ...
}
```

Without the `@Dependent` annotation on the declaration of the `spouse` variable, the Nullness Checker would complain that `toString` was being invoked on a possibly-null value.

An even better declaration is

```
class Person {
    ...
    @Unused(when=Single.class) @NonNull Person spouse;
    ...
}
```

Then, if a person is known to be `@Married` (or more appropriately non-`@Single`), the `spouse` field is known to be non-null. Also, if a person is known to be `@Single`, the `spouse` field may not be accessed:

```
@Single Person person = ...;
Person spouse = person.spouse; // invalid field access
...
```

10.3 The effective qualifier on a type (defaults and inference)

A checker sometimes treats a type as having a slightly different qualifier than what is written on the type — especially if the programmer wrote no qualifier at all. Most readers can skip this section on first reading, because you will probably find the system simply “does what you mean”, without forcing you to write too many qualifiers in your program.

The following steps determine the effective qualifier on a type — the qualifier that the checkers treat as being present.

1. The type system adds implicit qualifiers. Implicit qualifiers can be built into a type system (Section 13.3), in which case the type system’s documentation should explain all of the type system’s implicit qualifiers. Or, a programmer may introduce an implicit annotations on each use of class *C* by writing a qualifier on the declaration of class *C*.
 - Example 1 (built-in): In the Nullness type system, `enum` values are never null, nor is a method receiver.
 - Example 2 (built-in): In the Interning type system, string literals and `enum` values are always interned.
2. If a type qualifier is present in the source code, that qualifier is used. If the type has an implicit qualifier, then it is an error to write an explicit qualifier that is equal to (redundant with) or a supertype of (weaker than) the implicit qualifier. A programmer may strengthen (write a subtype of) an implicit qualifier, however.
3. If there is no implicit or explicit qualifier on a type, then a default qualifier may be applied; see Section 10.3.1. At this point, every type has a qualifier.
4. The type system may refine a qualified type on a local variable — that is, treat it as a subtype of how it was declared or defaulted. This refinement is always sound and has the effect of eliminating false positive error messages. See Section 10.3.2.

10.3.1 Default qualifier for unannotated types

A type system designer, or an end-user programmer, can cause unannotated references to be treated as if they had a default annotation.

There are several defaulting mechanisms, for convenience and flexibility. When determining the default qualifier for a use of a type, the following rules are used in order, until one applies.

- Use the innermost user-written `@DefaultQualifier`, as explained in this section.
- Use the default specified by the type system designer (Section 13.2.3).
- Use `@Unqualified`, which the framework inserts to avoid ambiguity and simplify the programming interface for type system designers. Users do not have to worry about this detail.

The end-user programmer specifies a default qualifier by writing the `@DefaultQualifier` annotation on a package, class, method, or variable declaration. The argument to `@DefaultQualifier` is the fully qualified `String` name of an annotation, and its optional second argument indicates where the default applies. If the second argument is omitted, the specified annotation is the default in all locations. See the Javadoc of `DefaultQualifier` for details.

For example, using the Nullness type system (Section 3):

```
import checkersquals.*; // for DefaultQualifier[s]

@DefaultQualifier("checkers.nullness.quals.NonNull"),
class MyClass {
```

```

public boolean compile(File myFile) { // myFile has type "@NonNull File"
    if (!myFile.exists())           // no warning: myFile is non-null
        return false;
    @Nullable File srcPath = ...; // must annotate to specify "@Nullable File"
    ...
    if (srcPath.exists())           // warning: srcPath might be null
        ...
}

@DefaultQualifier("checkers.igjquals.Nullable")
public boolean isJavaFile(File myfile) { // myFile has type "@Nullable File"
    ...
}
}

```

If you wish to write multiple `@DefaultQualifier` annotations at a single location, use `@DefaultQualifiers` instead. For example:

```

@DefaultQualifiers({
    @DefaultQualifier("checkers.nullnessquals.NonNull"),
    @DefaultQualifier("checkers.igjquals.Mutable")
})

```

If `@DefaultQualifier[s]` is placed on a package (via the `package-info.java` file), then it applies to the given package *and* all subpackages.

Recall that an annotation on a class definition indicates an implicit qualifier (Section 10.3) that can only be strengthened, not weakened. This can lead to unexpected results when if the default qualifier applies to a class definition. Thus, you may want to put explicit qualifiers on class declarations (which prevents the default from taking effect), or exclude class declarations from defaulting.

When a default qualifier may not be specified Sometimes, the meaning of an unannotated reference is determined by the type system. For example, in the Interning type system, each type is either unqualified, or it has the `@Intermed` qualifier. In such a case, specifying a default for unannotated types is not sensible.

In other cases, the type hierarchy has an explicit qualifier for every possible meaning. For example, the Nullness type system has `@Nullable` types and `@NonNull` types. It has no built-in meaning for unannotated types; a user may specify a default qualifier.

Permitting users to specify defaults is a reason you may wish to make your type hierarchy “complete”, in the sense that there is a qualifier for every location in the hierarchy.

10.3.2 Automatic type refinement (flow-sensitive type qualifier inference)

In order to reduce the burden of annotating types in your program, the checkers soundly treat certain variables and expressions as having a subtype of their declared or defaulted (Section 10.3.1) type. This functionality never introduces unsoundness or causes an error to be missed: it merely suppresses false positive warnings.

By default, all checkers, including new checkers that you write, can take advantage of this functionality. Most of the time, users don’t have to think about, and may not even notice, this feature of the framework. The checkers simply do the right thing even when a programmer forgets an annotation on a local variable, or when a programmer writes an unnecessarily general type in a declaration.

If you are curious or want more details about this feature, then read on.

As an example, the Nullness checker (Section 3) can automatically determine that certain variables are non-null, even if they were explicitly or by default annotated as nullable. A variable or expression can be treated as `@NonNull` from the time that it is either assigned a non-null value or checked against null (e.g., via an assertion, `if` statement,

or being dereferenced), until it might be re-assigned (e.g., via an assignment that might affect this variable, or via a method call that might affect this variable).

As with explicit annotations, the implicitly non-null types permit dereferences and assignments to explicitly non-null types, without compiler warnings.

Consider this code, along with comments indicating whether the Nullness checker (Section 3) issues a warning. Note that the same expression may yield a warning or not depending on its context.

```
// Requires an argument of type @NonNull String
void parse(@NonNull String toParse) { ... }

// Argument does NOT have a @NonNull type
void lex(String toLex) {
    parse(toLex);        // warning: toLex might be null
    if (toLex != null) {
        parse(toLex);    // no warning: toLex is known to be non-null
    }
    parse(toLex);        // warning: toLex might be null
    toLex = new String(...);
    parse(toLex);        // no warning: toLex is known to be non-null
}
```

If you find instances where you think a value should be inferred to have (or not have) a given annotation, but the checker does not do so, please submit a bug report (see Section 15.2) that includes a small piece of Java code that reproduces the problem.

Type inference is never performed for method parameters of non-private methods and for non-private fields, because unknown client code could use them in arbitrary ways. The inferred information is never written to the `.class` file as user-written annotations are.

The inference indicates when a variable can be treated as having a subtype of its declared type — for instance, when an otherwise nullable type can be treated as a `@NonNull` one. The inference never treats a variable as a supertype of its declared type (e.g., an expression of `@NonNull` type is never inferred to be treated as possibly-null).

11 Handling warnings and legacy code

11.1 Checking partially-annotated programs: handling unannotated code

Sometimes, you wish to type-check only part of your program. You might focus on the most mission-critical or error-prone part of your code. When you start to use a checker, you may not wish to annotate your entire program right away. You may not have source code (or enough knowledge to annotate) the libraries that your program uses.

If annotated code uses unannotated code, then the checker may issue warnings. For example, the Nullness checker (Section 3) will warn whenever an unannotated method result is used in a non-null context:

```
@NonNull myvar = unannotated_method();    // WARNING: unannotated_method may return a null value
```

If the call can return null, you should fix the bug in your program by removing the `@NonNull` annotation in your own program.

If the library call never returns null, there are several ways to eliminate the compiler warnings.

1. Annotate `unannotated_method` in full. This approach provides the the strongest guarantees, but may require you to annotate additional methods that `unannotated_method` calls. See Section 12 for a discussion of how to annotate libraries for which you have no source code.
2. Annotate only the signature of `unannotated_method`, and suppress warnings in its body. Two ways to suppress the warnings are via a `@SuppressWarnings` annotation or by not running the checker on that file (see Section 11.2).

3. Suppress all warnings related to uses of `unannotated_method` via the `skipClasses` processor option (see Section 11.2). Since this can suppress more warnings than you may expect, it is usually better to annotate at least the method's signature. If you choose the boundary between the annotated and unannotated code wisely, then you only have to annotate the signatures of a few classes/methods (e.g., the public interface to a library or package).

Section 12 discusses adding annotations to signatures when you do not have source code available. Section 11.2 discusses suppressing warnings.

If you annotate additional libraries, please share them with us so that we can distribute the annotations with the Checker Framework; see Section 15.2.

11.2 Suppressing warnings

You may wish to suppress checker warnings because of unannotated libraries or un-annotated portions of your own code, because of application invariants that are beyond the capabilities of the type system, because of checker limitations, because you are interested in only some of the guarantees provided by a checker, or for other reasons. You can suppress warnings via

- the `@SuppressWarnings` annotation,
- the `-AskipClasses` command-line option,
- the `javac -Alint` command-line option, or
- not using the `-processor` switch to `javac`.

You can suppress specific errors and warnings by use of the `@SuppressWarnings("annotationname")` annotation, for example `@SuppressWarnings("interning")`. This may be placed on program elements such as a class, method, or local variable declaration. It is good practice to suppress warnings in the smallest possible scope. For example, if a particular expression causes a false positive warning, you should extract that expression into a local variable and place a `@SuppressWarnings` annotation on the variable declaration. As another example, if you have annotated the signatures but not the bodies of the methods in a class or package, put a `@SuppressWarnings` annotation on the class declaration or on the package's `package-info.java` file.

You can suppress all errors and warnings at all uses of a given class. Set the `-AskipClasses` command-line option to a regular expression that matches classes for which warnings and errors should be suppressed. For example, if you use `"-AskipClasses=^java\."` on the command line (with appropriate quoting) when invoking `javac`, then the checkers will suppress all warnings within those classes, all warnings relating to invalid arguments, and all warnings relating to incorrect use of the return value.

You can suppress an entire class of warnings via `javac`'s `-Alint` command-line option. The `-Alint` option uses the same syntax as `javac`'s `-Xlint` option. Following `-Alint=`, write a list of option names. If the option name is preceded by a hyphen (`-`), that disables the option; otherwise it enables it. For example: `-Alint=-dotequals` causes the Interning checker (Section 4) not to output advice about when `a.equals(b)` could be replaced by `a==b`.

You can also compile parts of your code without use of the `-processor` switch to `javac`. No checking is done during such compilations.

Finally, some checkers have special rules. For example, the Nullness checker (Section 3) uses `assert` statements that contain null checks to suppress warnings (Section 3.4.1).

11.3 Writing annotations in comments for backward compatibility

Sometimes, your code needs to be compilable by people who are not using the Type Annotations or Java 7 compiler.

11.3.1 Annotations in comments

A Java 4 compiler does not permit use of annotations, and a Java 5 compiler only permits annotations on declarations (but not on generic arguments, casts, method receiver, etc.).

For compatibility with all Java versions, you may write any annotation inside a `/*...*/` Java comment, as in `List</*@NonNull*/ String>`. The Type Annotations compiler treats the code exactly as if you had not written the `/*` and `*/`. In other words, the Type Annotations compiler will recognize the annotation, but your code will still compile with any other Java compiler.

(**Note:** This is a feature of the Type Annotations compiler that is distributed along with the Checker Framework. It is not supported by the mainline OpenJDK compiler, which will ignore annotations written in comments. This is the only difference between the Type Annotations compiler and the OpenJDK compiler.)

In a single program, you may write some annotations in comments, and others without comments.

By default, the compiler ignores any comment that contains spaces at the beginning or end, or between the `@` and the annotation name. In other words, it reads `/*@NonNull*/` as an annotation but ignores `/* @NonNull*/` or `/*@ NonNull*/` or `/*@NonNull */`. This feature enables backward compatibility with code that contains comments that start with `@` but are not annotations. (The ESC/Java [FLL⁺02], JML [LBR06], and Splint [Eva96] tools all use `“/*@”` or `“/* @”` as a comment marker.) Compiler flag `-XDTA:spacesincomments` causes the compiler to parse annotation comments even when they contain spaces. You may need to use `-XDTA:spacesincomments` if you use Eclipse’s “Source > Correct Indentation” command, since it inserts space in comments. But the annotation comments are less readable with spaces, so you may wish to disable inserting spaces: in the Formatter preferences, in the Comments tab, unselect the “enable block comment formatting” checkbox.

11.3.2 Import statements

When writing source code with annotations, it is more convenient to write a short form such as `@NonNull` instead of `@checkers.nullness.quals.NonNull`. There are two ways to do this.

- Write an import statement like: `import checkers.nullness.quals.*;`
A disadvantage of this is that everyone who compiles the code (even using a non-JSR-308 compiler) must have the annotation definitions (e.g., the `checkers.jar` or `checkers-quals.jar` file) on their classpath. The reason is that a Java compiler issues an error if an imported package is not on the classpath. See Section 2.1.1.
- When you compile the code, set the shell environment variable `jsr308_imports`. This permits your code to compile whether or not the Type Annotations compiler is being used.
In bash, you could write `export jsr308_imports='checkers.nullness.quals.*'`, or prefix the `javac` command by `jsr308_imports='checkers.nullness.quals.*'`. Alternately, you can set the system variable via the `javac` command line argument `-J-Djsr308_imports="checkers.nullness.quals.*"`.
You can specify multiple packages separated by the classpath separator (same as the file path separator: `;` for Windows, and `:` for Unix and Mac.). For example, to implicitly import the Nullness and Interning qualifiers, set `jsr308_imports` to `checkers.nullness.quals.*:checkers.interning.quals.*`.

11.3.3 Migrating away from annotations in comments

If your codebase currently uses annotations in comments, but you are willing to use only compilers that support type annotations (such as any Java 7 compiler), then you can remove the comment characters around your annotations. This Unix command will do so, for all Java files in the current working directory or any subdirectory.

```
find . -type f -name '*.java' -print \  
  | xargs grep -l -P '/\*\s*@[([^\s/]+)\s*\*/' \  
  | xargs perl -pi.bak -e 's|/\*\s*@[([^\s/]+)\s*\*/|@|1|g'
```

You can customize this command:

- To process comments with embedded spaces and asterisks, change two instances of `“[^\s/]”` to `“[^\s*/]”`.
- To ignore comments with leading or trailing spaces, remove the four instances of `“\s*”`.
- To not make backups, remove `“.bak”`.

If you are using implicit import statements (Section 11.3.2), you may also need to introduce explicit import statements into your code.

12 Annotating libraries

When annotated code uses an unannotated library, a checker may issue warnings. As described in Section 11.1, the best way to correct this problem is to add annotations to the library (though you can instead suppress all warnings related to an unannotated library by use of the `-AskipClasses` command-line option). If you have source code for the library, you can easily add the annotations. This section tells you how to add annotations to a library for which you have no source code, because the library is distributed only in binary (`.class` or `.jar`) form. It is also useful if you do not wish to edit the library's source code.

The Checker Framework distribution contains annotations for popular libraries, such as the JDK. If you annotate additional libraries, please share them with us so that we can distribute the annotations with the Checker Framework; see Section 15.2.

You can determine the correct annotations for a library either automatically by running an inference tool, or manually by reading the documentation. Presently, type inference tools are available for the Nullness (Section 3.2.4) and Javari (Section 6.2.2) type systems.

You can make the annotations known to the JSR 308 compiler (and thus to the checkers) in two ways.

- You can use the stub class generation tool to create a “stub file” file containing classes with no method bodies, and annotate the stub classes file. Then, you can supply the stub files to the checker when compiling/checking your program. Section 12.1 describes how to use the stub class generation tools.
- You can annotate the compiled `.jar` or `.class` files using the annotation file utilities (<http://types.cs.washington.edu/annotation-file-utilities/>). First, express the annotations textually as an annotation index file, and then the tools insert them in the compiled library class files. See the Annotation File Utilities documentation for full details.

12.1 Using stub classes

A stub file contains “stub classes” that contain annotated signatures. A checker uses those annotated signatures at compile time, instead of or in addition to annotations that appear in the library.

Section 12.1.1 describes how to create stub classes. Section 12.1.2 describes how to use stub classes. These sections illustrate stub classes via the example of creating a `@Interned`-annotated version of `java.lang.String`. (You don't need to repeat these steps, since such a stub class is already included in the Checker Framework distribution; see file `checkers/src/checkers/interning/jdk.astub`, which is reproduced in Section 12.1.3.)

12.1.1 Creating a stub file

1. Create a stub file by running the stub class generator. (`checkers.jar` must be on your classpath.)

```
cd nullness-stub
java checkers.util.stub.StubGenerator java.lang.String > String.astub
```

Supply it with the fully-qualified name of the class for which you wish to generate a stub class. The stub class generator prints the stub class to standard out, so you may wish to redirect its output to a file.

2. Add import statements for the annotations. So you would need to add the following import statement at the beginning of the file:

```
import checkers.interningquals.Interned;
```

3. Add annotations to the stub class. For example, you might annotate the `String.intern()` method as follows:

```
@Interned String intern();
```

You may also remove irrelevant parts of the stub file; see Section 12.1.3.

12.1.2 Using a stub file

When you run `javac` with a given checker/processor, you can specify a list of the stub files or directories using `-Astubs=file_or_path_name`. The stub path entries are delimited by `File.pathSeparator` (‘:’ for Linux and Mac, ‘;’ for Windows). When you supply a stub directory, the checker only considers the enclosed stub files whose names end with `.astub`.

The `-Astubs` argument causes the Checker Framework to read annotations from annotated stub classes in preference to the unannotated original library classes.

```
javac -processor checkers.interning.InterningChecker -Astubs=String.astub:stubs MyFile.java MyOtherFile.java ...
```

12.1.3 Stub file format

The stub file format is designed for simplicity, readability, and compactness. It reads like a Java file but contains only the necessary information for type checking.

As an illustration, the stub file for the Interning type system (Section 4) is as follows. This file appears as `checkers/src/checkers/interning/jdk.astub` in the Checker Framework distribution.

```
import checkers.interningquals.Interned;

package java.lang;

// All instances of Class are interned.
@Interned class Class<T> { }

class String {
    // The only interning-related method in the JDK.
    @Interned String intern();
}
```

You can use a regular Java file as a stub file. However, you can omit information that is not relevant to pluggable type-checking; this makes the stub file smaller and easier for people to read and write. You can also put annotated signatures for multiple classes in a single stub file.

The stub file format differs from Java source code in the following ways:

Method bodies: The stub class does not require method bodies for classes; any method body may be replaced by a semicolon (;), as in an interface or abstract method declaration.

Method declarations: You only have to specify the methods that you need to annotate. Any method declaration may be omitted, in which case the checker reads its annotations from the library. (If you are using a stub class, then typically the library’s version is unannotated.)

Non-type-related specifiers: Non-type-related Java specifiers (e.g., `public`, `final`, `volatile`) may be omitted.

Import statements: The only required import statements are the ones to import type annotations. Such imports must be at the beginning of the file. Other import statements are optional.

Multiple classes and packages: The stub file format permits having multiple classes and packages. The packages are separated by a package statement: `package my.package;`. Each package declaration may occur only once; in other words, all classes from a package must appear together.

12.1.4 Known problems

The Checker Framework stub file reader has several limitations:

- It does not handle `enums`.
- It does not handle non-type annotations (e.g. IGJ’s `Assignable`).
- It does not handle arrays yet.

12.2 Using skeleton files (distributed annotated JDKs)

The Checker Framework distribution contains annotated JDKs at the path `checkers/jdk/[checker-name]/src`. These are in another format called “skeleton classes”. We are currently working on converting the skeleton files into stub files.

1. When you run `javac`, add a `-sourcepath` argument to indicate where to find the skeleton classes. Supply `-sourcepath` in addition to whatever other arguments you usually use, including `-classpath`. The `-sourcepath` argument causes the compiler to read annotations from annotated skeleton classes in preference to the unannotated original library classes. However, the compiler will use the originals on the classpath if no file is available on the sourcepath.

```
javac -processor checkers.nullness.NullnessChecker -sourcepath checkers/jdk/nullness/src my_source_files
```
2. Run the compiled code as usual. Do *not* include the skeleton files on the classpath. If a skeleton method is called instead of the true library method, then your program will throw a `RuntimeException`.

13 How to create a new checker

This section describes how to extend the Checker Framework to create a checker — a type-checking compiler plugin that detects bugs or verifies their absence. After a programmer annotates a program, the checker plugin verifies that the code is consistent with the annotations. If you only want to *use* a checker, you do not need to read this section.

Writing a simple checker is easy! For example, here is a complete, useful type checker:

```
@TypeQualifier
@SubtypeOf(Unqualified.class)
public @interface Encrypted {}
```

This checker is so short because it builds on the Basic Checker (Section 9). See Section 9.2 for more details about this particular checker.

You can also customize a tpestate checker. Two of these are available. One is by Adam Warski: <http://www.warski.org/tpestate.html>. The other is by Daniel Wand: <http://tpestate.ewand.de/>.

The rest of this section contains many details for people who want to more write powerful checkers. You won't need all of the details, at least at first. In addition to reading this section of the manual, you may find it helpful to examine the implementations of the checkers that are distributed with the Checker Framework, or to create your checker by modifying another one. The Javadoc documentation of the framework and the checkers is in the distribution and is also available online at <http://types.cs.washington.edu/checker-framework/current/doc/>.

If you write a new checker, let us know so we can mention it here, link to it from our webpages, or include it in the Checker Framework distribution.

13.1 The parts of a checker

The Checker Framework provides abstract base classes (default implementations), and a specific checker overrides as little or as much of the default implementations as necessary. Sections 13.2–13.5 describe the components of a type system as written using the Checker Framework:

- 13.2 **Type qualifiers and hierarchy.** You define the annotations for the type system and the subtyping relationships among qualified types (for instance, that `@NonNull Object` is a subtype of `@Nullable Object`).
- 13.3 **Type introduction rules.** For some types and expressions, a qualifier should be treated as present even if a programmer did not explicitly write it. For example, in the Nullness type system every literal other than `null` has a `@NonNull` type; examples of literals include `"some string"` and `java.util.Date.class`.
- 13.4 **Type rules.** You specify the the type system semantics (type rules), violation of which yields a type error. There are two types of rules. Your checker automatically inherits rules related to the type hierarchy, such as that every assignment and pseudo-assignment satisfies a subtyping relationship. You write any additional rules. For example, in the Nullness type system, only references with a `@NonNull` type may be dereferenced.

13.5 Interface to the compiler. The compiler interface indicates which annotations are part of the type system, which command-line options and `@SuppressWarnings` annotations the checker recognizes, etc.

13.2 Annotations: Type qualifiers and hierarchy

A type system designer specifies the qualifiers in the type system and the type hierarchy that relates them.

Type qualifiers are defined as Java annotations [Dar06]. In Java, an annotation is defined using the Java `@interface` keyword. Write the `@TypeQualifier` annotation on the annotation definition to indicate that the annotation represents a type qualifier (e.g., `@NonNull` or `@Interned`) and should be processed by the checker. For example:

```
// Define an annotation for the @NonNull type qualifier.
@TypeQualifier
public @interface NonNull { }
```

(An annotation that is written on an annotation definition, such as `@TypeQualifier`, is called a *meta-annotation*.)

The type hierarchy induced by the qualifiers can be defined either declaratively via meta-annotations (Section 13.2.1), or procedurally through subclassing `QualifierHierarchy` or `TypeHierarchy` (Section 13.2.2).

13.2.1 Declaratively defining the qualifier and type hierarchy

Declaratively, the type system designer uses two meta-annotations (written on the declaration of qualifier annotations) to specify the qualifier hierarchy.

- `@SubtypeOf` denotes that a qualifier is the subtype of another qualifier or qualifiers, specified as an array of class literals. For example, for any type T , `@NonNull T` is a subtype of `@Nullable T`:

```
@TypeQualifier
@SubtypeOf( { Nullable.class } )
public @interface NonNull { }
```

(The actual definition of `NonNull` is slightly more complex.)

`@SubtypeOf` accepts multiple annotation classes as an argument, permitting the type hierarchy to be an arbitrary DAG. For example, in the IGJ type system (Section 5.2), `@Mutable` and `@Immutable` induce two mutually exclusive subtypes of the `@ReadOnly` qualifier.

As a special case, the root qualifier needs to be annotated with `@Subtype({ })`. The root qualifier is the qualifier that is a supertype of all other qualifiers. `Nullable` is the root of the Nullness type system, hence is defined as:

```
@TypeQualifier
@SubtypeOf( { } )
public @interface Nullable { }
```

All type qualifiers, except for polymorphic qualifiers, need to be properly annotated with `SubtypeOf`.

If the root of the hierarchy is the unqualified type, then its children will use `@SubtypeOf(Unqualified.class)`, but no `@SubtypeOf({ })` annotation on the root is necessary. For an example, see the `Encrypted` type system of Section 13.

- `@PolymorphicQualifier` denotes that a qualifier is a polymorphic qualifier. For example:

```
@TypeQualifier
@PolymorphicQualifier
public @interface PolyNull { }
```

For a description of polymorphic qualifiers, see Section 10.1.2. A polymorphic qualifier needs no `@SubtypeOf` meta-annotation and need not be mentioned in any other `@SubtypeOf` meta-annotation.

The declarative and procedural mechanisms for specifying the hierarchy can be used together. In particular, when using the `@SubtypeOf` meta-annotation, further customizations may be performed procedurally (Section 13.2.2) by overriding the `isSubtype` method in the checker class (Section 13.5). However, the declarative mechanism is sufficient for most type systems.

13.2.2 Procedurally defining the qualifier and type hierarchy

While the declarative syntax suffices for many cases, more complex type hierarchies can be expressed by overriding, in `BaseTypeChecker`, either `createQualifierHierarchy` or `createTypeHierarchy` (typically only one of these needs to be overridden). For more details, see the Javadoc of those methods and of the classes `QualifierHierarchy` and `TypeHierarchy`.

The `QualifierHierarchy` class represents the qualifier hierarchy (not the type hierarchy), e.g., `Mutable` is a subtype of `ReadOnly`. A type-system designer may subclass `QualifierHierarchy` to express customized qualifier relationships (e.g., relationships based on annotation arguments).

The `TypeHierarchy` class represents relationships between annotated types, rather than merely type qualifiers, e.g., `@Mutable Date` is a subtype of `@ReadOnly Date`. The default `TypeHierarchy` uses `QualifierHierarchy` to determine all subtyping relationships. The default `TypeHierarchy` handles generic type arguments, array components, type variables, and wild-cards in a similar manner to the Java standard subtype relationship but with taking qualifiers into consideration. Some type systems may need to override that behavior. For instance, the Java Language Specification specifies that two generic types are subtypes only if their type arguments are identical: for example, `List<Date>` is not a subtype of `List<Object>`, or of any other generic `List`. (In the technical jargon, the generic arguments are “invariant”.) The Javari type system overrides this behavior to allow some type arguments to change covariantly in a type-safe manner (e.g., `List<@Mutable Date>` is a subtype of `List<@QReadOnly Date>`).

13.2.3 Defining a default annotation

A type system designer may set a default annotation. A user may override the default; see Section 10.3.1.

The type system designer may specify a default annotation declaratively, using the `@DefaultQualifierInHierarchy` meta-annotation. Note that the default will apply to any source code that the checker reads, including stub libraries, but will not apply to compiled `.class` files that the checker reads.

Alternately, the type system designer may specify a default procedurally, by calling the `QualifierDefaults.setAbsoluteDefault` method. You may do this even if you have declaratively defined the qualifier hierarchy; see the `Nullness` checker’s implementation for an example.

Recall that defaults are distinct from implicit annotations; see Sections 10.3 and 13.3.

13.2.4 Bottom qualifier

It is usually a good idea to have a bottom qualifier in your type hierarchy — a qualifier that is a (direct or indirect) subtype of every other qualifier. The reason is that this is the natural type for the `null` value, which is can be viewed as having any type at all.

Users should never write the bottom qualifier explicitly; it is merely used for the `null` value.

You might write the bottom qualifier like this:

```
package myTypeQuals;

import checkers.quals.*;
import com.sun.source.tree.Tree;

@TypeQualifier
@SubtypeOf({Prototype.class, NonPrototype.class})
@ImplicitFor(trees={Tree.Kind.NULL_LITERAL})
public @interface PrototypeBottom {}
```

13.3 Type Factory: Implicit annotations

For some types and expressions, a qualifier should be treated as present even if a programmer did not explicitly write it. For example, every literal (other than `null`) has a `@NonNull` type.

The implicit annotations may be specified declaratively and/or procedurally.

13.3.1 Declaratively specifying implicit annotations

The `@ImplicitFor` meta-annotation indicates implicit annotations. When written on a qualifier, `ImplicitFor` specifies the trees (AST nodes) and types for which the framework should automatically add that qualifier.

In short, the types and trees can be specified via any combination of five fields:

- `trees`: an array of `com.sun.source.tree.Tree.Kind`, e.g., `NEW_ARRAY` or `METHOD_INVOCATION`
- `types`: an array of `TypeKind`, e.g., `ARRAY` or `BOOLEAN`
- `treeClasses`: an array of class literals for classes implementing `Tree`, e.g., `LiteralTree.class` or `ExpressionTree.class`
- `typeClasses`: an array of class literals for classes implementing `javax.lang.model.type.TypeMirror`, e.g., `javax.lang.model.type.PrimitiveType`. Often you should use a subclass of `AnnotatedTypeMirror`
- `stringPatterns`: an array of regular expressions that will be matched against string literals, e.g., `"[01]+"` for a binary number. Useful for annotations that indicate the format of a string.

For example, consider the definitions of the `@NonNull` and `@Nullable` type qualifiers:

```
@TypeQualifier
@SubtypeOf( { Nullable.class } )
@ImplicitFor(
    types={TypeKind.PACKAGE},
    typeClasses={AnnotatedPrimitiveType.class},
    trees={
        Tree.Kind.NEW_CLASS,
        Tree.Kind.NEW_ARRAY,
        Tree.Kind.PLUS,
        // All literals except NULL_LITERAL:
        Tree.Kind.BOOLEAN_LITERAL, Tree.Kind.CHAR_LITERAL, Tree.Kind.DOUBLE_LITERAL, Tree.Kind.FLOAT_LITERAL,
        Tree.Kind.INT_LITERAL, Tree.Kind.LONG_LITERAL, Tree.Kind.STRING_LITERAL
    })
public @interface NonNull { }

@TypeQualifier
@SubtypeOf({})
@ImplicitFor(trees={Tree.Kind.NULL_LITERAL})
public @interface Nullable { }
```

For more details, see the Javadoc for the `ImplicitFor` annotation, and the Javadoc for the javac classes that are linked from it. (You only need to understand a small amount about the javac AST, such as the `Tree.Kind` and `TypeKind` enums. All the information you need is in the Javadoc, and Section 13.8 can help you get started.)

13.3.2 Procedurally specifying implicit annotations

The Checker Framework provides a representation of annotated types, `AnnotatedTypeMirror`, that extends the standard `TypeMirror` interface but integrates a representation of the annotations into a type representation. A checker's *type factory* class, given an AST node, returns the annotated type of that expression. The Checker Framework's abstract *base type factory* class, `AnnotatedTypeFactory`, supplies a uniform, Tree-API-based interface for querying the annotations on a program element, regardless of whether that element is declared in a source file or in a class file. It also handles default annotations, and it optionally performs flow-sensitive local type inference.

`AnnotatedTypeFactory` inserts the qualifiers that the programmer explicitly inserted in the code. Yet, certain constructs should be treated as having a type qualifier even when the programmer has not written one. The type system designer may subclass `AnnotatedTypeFactory` and override `annotateImplicit(Tree, AnnotatedTypeMirror)` and `annotateImplicit(Element, AnnotatedTypeMirror)` to account for such constructs.

13.4 Visitor: Type rules

A type system's rules define which operations on values of a particular type are forbidden.

The framework provides a *base visitor class*, `BaseTypeVisitor`, that performs type-checking at each node of a source file's AST. It uses the visitor design pattern to traverse Java syntax trees as provided by Sun's Tree API, and issues a warning whenever the type system induced by the type qualifier is violated.

A checker's visitor overrides one method in the base visitor for each special rule in the type qualifier system. Most type-checkers override only a few methods in `BaseTypeVisitor`. For example, the visitor for the Nullness type system of Section 3 consists of a single 4-line method that warns if an expression of nullable type is dereferenced, as in:

```
myObject.hashCode(); // invalid dereference
```

By default, `BaseTypeVisitor` performs subtyping checks that are similar to Java subtype rules, but taking the type qualifiers into account. `BaseTypeVisitor` issues these errors:

- invalid assignment (`type.incompatible`) when an assignment from an expression type to an incompatible type. The assignment may be a simple assignment, or pseudo-assignment like return expressions or argument passing in a method invocation
In particular, in every assignment and pseudo-assignment, the left-hand side of the assignment is a supertype of (or the same type as) the right-hand side. For example, this assignment is not permitted:

```
@Nullable Object myObject;  
@NonNull Object myNonNullObject;  
...  
myNonNullObject = myObject; // invalid assignment
```

- invalid generic argument (`generic.argument.invalid`) when a type is bound to an incompatible generic type variable
- invalid method invocation (`method.invocation.invalid`) when a method is invoked on an object whose type is incompatible with the method receiver type
- invalid overriding parameter type (`override.parameter.invalid`) when a parameter in a method declaration is incompatible with that parameter in the overridden method's declaration
- invalid overriding return type (`override.return.invalid`) when a parameter in a method declaration is incompatible with that parameter in the overridden method's declaration
- invalid overriding receiver type (`override.receiver.invalid`) when a receiver in a method declaration is incompatible with that receiver in the overridden method's declaration

13.5 The checker class: Compiler interface

A checker's entry point is a subclass of `BaseTypeChecker`. This entry point, which we call the checker class, serves two roles: an interface to the compiler and a factory for constructing type-system classes.

Because the Checker Framework provides reasonable defaults, oftentimes the checker class has no work to do. Here are the complete definitions of the checker classes for the Interning and Nullness checkers:

```
@TypeQualifiers({ Interned.class, PolyInterned.class })  
@SupportedLintOptions({"dotequals"})  
public final class InterningChecker extends BaseTypeChecker { }  
  
@TypeQualifiers({ Nullable.class, Raw.class, NonNull.class, PolyNull.class })  
@SupportedLintOptions({"flow", "cast", "cast:redundant"})  
public class NullnessChecker extends BaseTypeChecker { }
```

The checker class must be annotated by `@TypeQualifiers`, which lists the annotations that make up the type hierarchy for this checker (including polymorphic qualifiers), provided as an array of class literals. Each one is a type qualifier whose definition bears the `@TypeQualifier` meta-annotation (or is returned by the `BaseTypeChecker.getSupportedTypeQualifiers` method).

The checker class bridges between the compiler and the checker plugin. It invokes the type-rule check visitor on every Java source file being compiled, and provides a simple API, `report`, to issue errors using the compiler error reporting mechanism.

Also, the checker class follows the factory method pattern to construct the concrete classes (e.g., visitor, factory) and annotation hierarchy representation. It is a convention that, for a type system named `Foo`, the compiler interface (checker), the visitor, and the annotated type factory are named as `FooChecker`, `FooVisitor`, and `FooAnnotatedTypeFactory`. `BaseTypeChecker` uses the convention to reflectively construct the components. Otherwise, the checker writer must specify the component classes for construction.

A checker can customize the default error messages through a `Properties`-loadable text file named `messages.properties` that appears in the same directory as the checker class. The property file keys are the strings passed to `report` (like `type.incompatible`) and the values are the strings to be printed (`cannot assign ...`). The `messages.properties` file only need to mention the new messages that the checker defines. It is also allowed to override messages defined in superclasses, but this is rarely needed.

13.5.1 Bundling multiple checkers

Users need to specify the checker class name in command line `-processor` flag to invoke each checker. When multiple related checkers need to be run together as a unit, users will have to pass each checker class name, like:

```
javac -processor DistanceUnitChecker -processor SpeedUnitChecker ... files ...
```

Alternatively, an aggregate checker class is declared to combine these multiple checkers. `AggregateChecker` forms a convenient base class for such situation, where the checkers can be declared in one method, like the following:

```
public class UnitCheckers extends AggregateChecker {
    protected abstract Collection<Class<? extends SourceChecker>>
        getSupportedCheckers() {
        return Arrays.asList(DistanceUnitChecker.class, SpeedUnitChecker);
    }
}
```

Now, users can simply pass `UnitCheckers` a single argument to the commandline:

```
javac -processor UnitCheckers ... files ...
```

13.6 Testing framework

[This section should discuss the testing framework that is used for testing the distributed checkers.]

13.7 Debugging options

The Checker Framework provides debugging options that can be helpful when writing checker. These are provided via the standard `javac` “-A” switch, which is used to pass options to an annotation processor.

- `-Anomsgtext`: use message keys (such as “`type.invalid`”) rather than full message text when reporting errors or warnings
- `-Ashowchecks`: print debugging information for each pseudo-assignment check (as performed by `BaseTypeVisitor`; see Section 13.4 above)
- `-Afilenames`: prints the name of each file before type-checking it

The following example demonstrates how these options are used:

```

$ javac -processor checkers.interning.InterningChecker \
  examples/InternedExampleWithWarnings.java -Ashowchecks -Anomsgtext -Afilenames

[InterningChecker] InterningExampleWithWarnings.java
success (line 18): STRING_LITERAL "foo"
  actual: DECLARED @checkers.interningquals.Interned java.lang.String
  expected: DECLARED @checkers.interningquals.Interned java.lang.String
success (line 19): NEW_CLASS new String("bar")
  actual: DECLARED java.lang.String
  expected: DECLARED java.lang.String
examples/InterningExampleWithWarnings.java:21: (not.interned)
  if (foo == bar)
      ^
success (line 22): STRING_LITERAL "foo == bar"
  actual: DECLARED @checkers.interningquals.Interned java.lang.String
  expected: DECLARED java.lang.String
1 error

```

You can use any standard debugger to observe the execution of your checker. Set the main class to `com.sun.tools.javac.Main` and the bootclasspath to include the JSR308 langtools.

13.8 javac implementation survival guide

The implementation of Sun's javac compiler can be a bit daunting to a newcomer, and its documentation does not particularly help a newcomer to get oriented. But do not lose heart! This section helps you to understand the small part of javac that you need in order to write a checker. Other useful resources include the Java Infrastructure Developer's guide at http://wiki.netbeans.org/Java_DevelopersGuide and the compiler mailing list archives at <http://news.gmane.org/gmane.comp.java.openjdk.compiler.devel> (subscribe at <http://mail.openjdk.java.net/mailman/listinfo/compiler-dev>).

The Checker Framework uses Sun's Tree API to access a program's AST. This is specific to the Sun JDK. In the future, the Checker Framework can be migrated to use the Java Model AST of JSR 198 (Extension API for Integrated Development Environments) [Cro06], which gives access to the entire source code of a method in an implementation-neutral way.

A `Tree` is an AST node; it represents an arbitrary code snippet such as a method definition, a block, a statement, etc.

The `Tree` interface has many subinterfaces, that specify what kind of node is being handled. Trees are usually processed by a class implementing the `TreeVisitor` interface, through the `accept` method on `Tree`. Common implementations of `TreeVisitor` that you may want to extend are `SimpleTreeVisitor`, that visits a single node based on its type, `TreeScanner`, that visits all subnodes recursively, and `TreePathScanner`, that visits all subnodes recursively and stores the `TreePath` corresponding to the currently visited `Tree`. (Also note that the iterator given by `TreePath` used to have an implementation bug.)

In order to determine the kind of an object that extends `Tree`, use the `getKind` method, as opposed to the `instanceof` operator, since a `Tree` implementation might opt to implement more than one interface from this API. There is a utility class to perform operations on trees, `Trees`, but the framework is intended to do all the low-level tree processing, so you probably should not need to use this class.

An `Element` represents a program element such as packages, classes or methods. `Element` has 5 subinterfaces: `ExecutableElement` represents methods, constructors or initializers (anything invocable); `PackageElement` represents package elements, and contain package information; `TypeElement` represents the element of a class or an interface (note that `TypeElement` is an `Element`, not a `Type`; the corresponding `Type` is represented by `DeclaredType`; `TypeParameterElement` represents an element of a formal type parameter of a something with generics, and `VariableElement` represents the element associated with a variable. There is an `ElementVisitor` interface for visiting objects that `Element`, in a similar manner to the `Tree` visitors, with similar provided implementations. Use the `asType` method from `Element` to obtain a `TypeMirror` for the element.

Again, `Element` is an interface, so use `getKind()` to obtain the kind of an `Element`, as opposed to the `instanceof` operator, since an implementation of `Element` might also implement other element interfaces. There is an utility class

for handling elements, `Elements`; the appropriate instance can be obtained by using the `getElementUtils` method on the `ProcessingEnvironment` object visible on factories and checkers. The framework should do most of the element processing that requires `Elements`, unless you are doing something non-trivial.

A `TypeMirror` represents a Java type. It is yet another interface you should be familiar with, with various subinterfaces, notable ones being `DeclaredType` for class and interface types, and `ExecutableType` for method, constructor and initializer types.

Note that a `MethodTree` resolves into a `ExecutableType`, while a `MethodInvocationTree` resolves into a `DeclaredType` if the return type is a class or an interface, an `ArrayType` if the return type is an array, a `NoType` if the return type is void, or a `PrimitiveType` if the return type is primitive.

Not every `Tree` corresponds to an `Element` (such as a `BlockTree`), not every `Tree` corresponds to a `TypeMirror` (again, such as a `BlockTree`), and not every `TypeMirror` has a corresponding `Element` (such as primitive types or arrays).

As one could expect by this point, `TypeMirror` is an interface, so use the appropriate `getKind()` method to distinguish the types, as opposed to the `instanceof` operator, since those are interfaces, and more than one can be implemented by a same object.

Note that the `TypeMirror` API makes no guarantees that the same type will always be represented by the same object; use the method recommended on the API if you need to compare two types.

`TypeVisitor` and implementations of visitors for `TypeMirror` are provided, but those classes should not be used or extended directly on the framework, since all checker plugin classes are meant to visit `AnnotatedTypeMirror` instead, modifying the annotations as needed. A `Types` utility class is provided by the `ProcessingEnvironment` as well, if you need to do more complex operations with types. In general, you should use `AnnotatedTypeMirror` and its subclasses as opposed to using `TypeMirror` and its subinterfaces.

An `AnnotatedTypeMirror` (defined in the Checker Framework, not in `javac`) represents an annotated type — a type along with all its annotations. It is modeled after Sun's `TypeMirror`. Similarly modeled visitors are presented: a `AnnotatedTypeVisitor` interface, implemented by `SimpleAnnotatedTypeVisitor` for visiting just one node, `AnnotatedTypeScanner` for visiting every node recursively.

In short: a `Tree` represents some snippet of code, an `Element` represents some program element, and a `TypeMirror` represents a Java type, but you usually should use `AnnotatedTypeMirror`, provided by the Checker Framework, instead of `TypeMirror`, as our implementation carries along with the types the annotation information at every node level. The `AnnotatedTypeFactory` (or its extension on your framework plugin) is responsible for producing `AnnotatedTypeMirror` objects for `Tree` and `Element` parameters it receives; those `AnnotatedTypeMirror` objects are then processed by the visitor class and checked by the checker class on your checker plugin.

14 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

These are some common questions about the Checker Framework and about pluggable type-checking in general. Feel free to suggest improvements to the answers, or other questions to include here.

There is a separate FAQ for the type annotations syntax (<http://types.cs.washington.edu/jsr308/jsr308-faq.html>).

14.1 Are type annotations easy to read and write?

The paper *Practical pluggable types for Java* [PAC⁺08] discusses case studies in which programmers found type annotations to be natural to read and write. The code continued to feel like Java, and the type-checking errors were easy to comprehend and often led to real bugs.

You don't have to take our word for it, though. You can try the Checker Framework for yourself.

The difficulty of adding and verifying annotations depends on your program. If your program is well-designed and -documented, then skimming the existing documentation and writing type annotations is extremely easy. Otherwise, you may find yourself spending a lot of time trying to understand, reverse-engineer, or fix bugs in your program, and then just a moment writing a type annotation that describes what you discovered. This process inevitably improves your code. You must decide whether it is a good use of your time. For code that is not causing trouble now and is

unlikely to do so in the future (the code is bug-free, and you do not anticipate changing it or using it in new contexts), then the effort of writing type annotations for it may not be justified.

14.2 Will my code become cluttered with type annotations?

As with any language feature, it is possible to write ugly code that over-uses annotations. However, in normal use, very few annotations need to be written. Figure 1 of the paper Practical pluggable types for Java [PAC⁺08] reports data for over 350,000 lines of type-annotated code:

- 1 annotation per 62 lines for nullness annotations (@NonNull, @Nullable, etc.)
- 1 annotation per 1736 lines for interning annotations (@Interned)
- 1 annotation per 27 lines for immutability annotations (IGJ type system)

Furthermore, these numbers are for annotating existing code. New code that is written with the type annotation system in mind is cleaner and more correct, so it requires even fewer annotations.

In other words, annotations do not clutter code, and they are used much less frequently than generic types, which Java programmers find acceptable.

14.3 Can a pluggable type-checker give an absolute guarantee of correctness?

Each checker looks for certain errors. You can use multiple checkers, but even then your program might still contain other kinds of errors.

If you run a pluggable checker on only part of the code of a program, then you do not get a guarantee that all parts of the program satisfy the type system (that is, are error-free). An example is a framework that clients are intended to extend. In this case, you should recommend that clients run the pluggable checker. There is no way to force users to do so, so you may want to retain dynamic checks or use other mechanisms to detect errors.

There are other circumstances in which a static type-checker may fail to detect a possible type error. In Java, these include arrays, casts, raw types, reflection, separate compilation (bytecodes from unverified sources), native code, etc. (For details, see section 2.3.) Java uses dynamic checks for most of these, so that the type error cannot cause a security vulnerability or a crash. The pluggable type-checkers inherit many (not all) of these weaknesses of Java type-checking, but do not currently have built-in dynamic checkers. Writing dynamic checkers would be an interesting and valuable project.

Even if a tool such as a pluggable checker cannot give an ironclad guarantee of correctness, it is still useful. It can find errors, excluding certain types of possible problems (e.g., restricting the possible class of problems), and increasing confidence in a piece of software.

14.4 When should I use type qualifiers, and when should I use subclasses?

In brief, use subtypes when you can, and use type qualifiers when you cannot use subtypes. For more details, see section 2.4.3.

14.5 How do I create a new checker?

In addition to using the checkers that are distributed with the Checker Framework, you can write your own checker to check specific properties that you care about. Thus, you can find and prevent the bugs that are most important to you.

Section 13 gives complete details regarding how to write a checker. It also suggests places to look for more help, such as the Checker Framework API documentation (Javadoc) and the source code of the distributed checkers.

To whet your interest and demonstrate how easy it is to get started, here is an example of a complete, useful type checker.

```
@TypeQualifier
@SubtypeOf(Unqualified.class)
public @interface Encrypted { }
```

Section 9.2 explains this checker and tells you how to run it.

14.6 Why not just use a bug detector (like FindBugs)?

Pluggable type-checking finds more bugs than a bug detector does, for any given variety of bug.

A bug detector like FindBugs [HP04, HSP05], JLint [Art01], or PMD [Cop05] aims to find *some* of the most obvious bugs in your program. It uses a lightweight analysis, then uses heuristics to discard some of its warnings. Thus, even if the tool prints no warnings, your code might still have errors — maybe the analysis was too weak to find them, or the tool’s heuristics classified the warnings as likely false positives and discarded them.

A type checker aims to find *all* the bugs (of certain varieties). It requires you to write type qualifiers in your program, or to use a tool that infers types. Thus, it requires more work from the programmer, and in return it gives stronger guarantees.

Each tool is useful in different circumstances, depending on how important your code is and your desired level of confidence in your code. For more details on the comparison, see section 15.5. For a case study that compared the nullness analysis of FindBugs, JLint, PMD, and the Checker Framework, see section 6 of the paper “Practical pluggable types for Java” [PAC⁺08].

14.7 How does pluggable type-checking compare with JML?

JML, the Java Modeling Language [LBR06], is a language for writing formal specifications. JML aims to be more expressive than pluggable type-checking. JML is not as practical as pluggable type-checking.

A programmer can write a JML specification that describes arbitrary facts about program behavior. Then, the programmer can use formal reasoning or a theorem-proving tool to verify that the code meets the specification. Run-time checking is also possible. By contrast, pluggable type-checking can express a more limited set of properties about your program.

The JML toolset is less mature. For instance, if your code uses generics or other features of Java 5, then you cannot use JML. However, JML has a run-time checker, which the Checker Framework currently lacks.

14.8 Why are the type parameters to `List` and `Map` annotated as `@NonNull`?

If you try to write `List<@Nullable Object>`, or to use a nullable type parameter to certain other collections (including `AbstractCollection`, `Collection`, `List`, `Map`, and `Queue`), you will get a type error, because their type parameter is annotated as `@NonNull`.

This is in conformance with the Javadoc specification of those classes. The Javadoc contains text such as:

Some list implementations have restrictions on the elements that they may contain. For example, some implementations prohibit null elements,

For example, calling this method might result in a null pointer exception:

```
static void addNull(List l) {
    l.add(null);
}
```

The Checker Framework is designed to warn you whenever your code might throw a null pointer exception. If you want to be safe, you will never put `null` in a `List` of unknown provenance, because that `List` might not accept null.

By contrast, this code is OK because `ArrayList` is documented to support null elements:

```
static void addNull(ArrayList l) {
    l.add(null);
}
```

A similar argument applies to `Map`. For example, `ConcurrentHashMap` and `Hashtable` implement `Map` but do not permit `null` to be used as a key or value.

If you know that any objects that can be passed as the parameter will definitely support `null`, then you can suppress the warning:

```
@SuppressWarnings("nullness:generic.argument")
static void addNull(List l) {
    l.add(null);
}
```

You need to use `@SuppressWarnings("nullness:generic.argument")` whenever you use a collection that may contain `null` elements in contradiction to its documentation. Fortunately, such uses are relatively rare.

For more details, see Section 3.4.

14.9 How can I do run-time monitoring of properties that were not statically checked?

Currently, the Checker Framework has no support for adding code to check, at run time, code that was not checked (see Section 11 for reasons that code might not be checked). An exception is the Nullness Checker, which has ways to dynamically check nullness via assertions and casts (the `NullnessUtils.castNonNull` method).

More general support would be an interesting and valuable project. If you are able to add run-time verification functionality, we would gladly welcome it as a contribution to the Checker Framework.

15 Troubleshooting and getting help

15.1 Common problems and solutions

To verify that you are using the compiler you think you are, you can add `-version` to the command line. For instance, instead of running `javac -g MyFile.java`, you can run `javac -version -g MyFile.java`. Then, `javac` will print out its version number in addition to doing its normal processing.

- If you get the error

```
com.sun.tools.javac.code.Symbol$CompletionFailure: class file for com.sun.source.tree.Tree not found
```

then you are using the source installation and file `tools.jar` is not on your classpath. See the installation instructions (Section 1.2).

- If you get an error such as

```
package checkers.nullness.quals does not exist
```

despite no apparent use of `import checkers.nullness.quals.*`; in the source code, then perhaps `jsr308_imports` is set as a Java system property, a shell environment variable, or a command-line option (see Section 11.3.2). You can solve this by unsetting the variable/option, or by ensuring that the `checkers.jar` file is on your classpath.

- If a checker seems to be ignoring the annotation on a method, then it is possible that the checker is reading the method's signature from its `.class` file, but the `.class` file was not created by the JSR 308 compiler. You can check whether the annotations actually appear in the `.class` file by using the `javap` tool.

If the annotations do not appear in the `.class` file, here are two ways to solve the problem:

- Re-compile the method's class with the JSR 308 compiler. This will ensure that the type annotations are written to the class file, even if no type-checking happens during that execution.
- Pass the method's file explicitly on the command line when type-checking, so that the compiler reads its source code instead of its `.class` file.

- If the compiler reports that it cannot find a method that appears in the JDK or another external library, then maybe the skeleton file for that class is incomplete. You can edit it to add the missing method. The libraries appear, for example, at `checkers/jdk/nullness/src/` for the Nullness checker.

The error might take one of these forms:

```
method sleep in class Thread cannot be applied to given types
cannot find symbol: constructor StringBuffer(StringBuffer)
```

15.1.1 Known problems in the framework

- The framework may not parse annotations from skeleton files if the skeleton files are older than the classfiles. Running `ant touch-jdk` solves this problem, by applying the `touch` program to each distributed skeleton file.
- The framework is missing a check for type argument subtyping in method invocations if the type arguments are inferred.
- The checks for enclosed types are not yet fully tested.

15.1.2 Known problems in the Nullness checker

- The Nullness checker is often able to determine that a call to `Map.get()` will not return null. This enables the checker to avoid issuing false positive warnings, in circumstances like the following.

```
@NonNull String value;
if (myMap.containsKey(key)) {
    value = myMap.get(key);
}
for (String keyInMap : myMap.keySet()) {
    value = myMap.get(keyInMap);
}
```

The Nullness checker can sometimes fail to issue a warning if the map is modified or re-assigned between the check of `containsKey` and the call to `get`.

- The Nullness checker issues a warning when a constructor does not initialize every non-null field. However, because the checker does not fully implement all of Java's definite assignment rules (e.g., for `finally` blocks), the checker sometimes issues a false positive warning. The checker's behavior is sound but unnecessarily restrictive. If you encounter this problem in practice, please submit a bug report so that we can improve the checker.

15.2 How to report problems

If you have a problem with any checker, or with the Checker Framework, please file a bug at <http://code.google.com/p/checker-framework/issues/list>.

Alternately (especially if your communication is not a bug report), you can send mail to checker-framework-dev@googlegroups.com. We welcome suggestions, annotated libraries, bug fixes, new features, new checker plugins, and other improvements.

Please ensure that your bug report is clear and that it is complete. Otherwise, we may be unable to understand it or to reproduce it, either of which would prevent us from fixing the bug. Your bug report will be most helpful if you:

- Add `-verbose` to the `javac` options. This causes the compiler to output a lot of debugging information.
- Indicate exactly what you did. Show the exact commands (don't merely describe them in words). Don't skip any steps.
- Include all files that are necessary to reproduce the problem. This includes every file that is used by any of the commands you reported, and possibly other files as well.
- Indicate exactly what the result was (don't merely describe it in words). Also indicate what you expected the result to be — remember, a bug is a difference between desired and actual outcomes.
- Indicate which version of the JSR 308 compiler and Checker Framework you are using. You can determine the compiler version by running `javac -version`.

15.3 Installing the source release

The binary release (Section 1.2) contains everything that most users need, both to use the distributed checkers and to write your own checkers. This section describes how to install from source. Doing so permits you to examine and modify the implementation of the distributed checkers and of the checker framework. It may also help you to debug problems more effectively.

You have two options. You can obtain the source code from its version control repository, or you can obtain a packaged source release.

To obtain the source code from the version control repository, do

```
mkdir -p ~/jsr308
hg clone https://checker-framework.googlecode.com/hg/ checker-framework
```

The rest of this section discusses how to install the source release.

15.3.1 The short instructions (for Linux only)

The following commands install the JSR 308 `javac` compiler and the Checker Framework, or update an existing installation. It currently works only on **Linux**. For more details, or if anything goes wrong, see the comments in the `Makefile-jsr308-install` file.

1. Execute the following commands:

```
cd
wget -nv -N http://types.cs.washington.edu/checker-framework/current/Makefile-jsr308-install
make -f Makefile-jsr308-install
```

2. Set some environment variables according to the instructions at the top of file `Makefile-jsr308-install`.

15.3.2 The longer instructions

The following instructions give detailed steps for installing the source release of the Checker Framework.

1. Download and install the JSR 308 implementation; follow the instructions at <http://types.cs.washington.edu/checker-framework/current/README-jsr308.html#installing>. This creates a `jsr308-langtools` directory.
2. Download the Checker Framework distribution zipfile from <http://types.cs.washington.edu/checker-framework/current/checkers.zip>, and unzip it to create a `checkers` directory. We recommend that the `checkers` directory and the `jsr308-langtools` directory be siblings. Example commands:

```
cd $JSR308
wget http://types.cs.washington.edu/checker-framework/current/checkers.zip
unzip checkers.zip
```

You will also need to adjust the path to `javac` in any Ant buildfiles, etc.

3. Optionally edit property `compiler.lib` in file `checkers/build.properties`. You don't have to do this if the `checkers` directory and the `jsr308-langtools` directory are siblings.
4. Add to your classpath: `$JSR308/jsr308-langtools/lib/tools.jar` and `$JSR308/checkers/checkers.jar`. (If you do not do this, you will have to supply the `-cp` option whenever you run `javac` and use a checker plugin.)

Example commands:

```
export JSR308=${HOME}/jsr308
export CLASSPATH=${CLASSPATH}:$JSR308/jsr308-langtools/lib/tools.jar:$JSR308/checkers/checkers.jar
```

5. Test that everything works:
 - Run `ant all-tests` in the `checkers` directory:

```
cd checkers
ant all-tests
```

- Run the Nullness checker examples (see Section 3.5).

JSR 308 extends the Java language to permit annotations to appear on types, as in `List<@NonNull String>` (see Section 2.1). This change will be part of the Java 7 language. We recommend that you write annotations in comments, as in `List</*@NonNull*/ String>` (see Section 11.3). The JSR 308 compiler still reads such annotations, but this syntax permits you to use a compiler other than the JSR 308 compiler. For example, you can compile your code with a Java 5 compiler, and you can use a checker as an external tool in an IDE.

15.3.3 Building from source

Building (compiling) the checkers and framework from source creates the `checkers.jar` file. A pre-compiled `checkers.jar` is included in the distribution, so building it is optional. It is mostly useful for people who are developing compiler plug-ins (type-checkers). If you only want to *use* the compiler and existing plug-ins, it is sufficient to use the pre-compiled version.

1. Edit `checkers/build.properties` file so that the `compiler.lib` property specifies the location of the JSR 308 `javac.jar` library. (If you also installed the JSR 308 compiler from source, and you made the `checkers` and `jsr308-langtools` directories siblings, then you don't need to edit `checkers/build.properties`.)
2. Run `ant` in the `checkers` directory:

```
cd checkers
ant
```

15.4 Learning more

The technical paper “Practical pluggable types for Java” [PAC⁺08] (<http://www.cs.washington.edu/homes/mernst/pubs/pluggable-checkers-issta2008.pdf>) gives more technical detail about many aspects of the Checker Framework and its implementation. The technical paper also describes a few features that are part of the distribution but are not yet documented in this manual. Finally, the technical paper describes case studies in which each of the checkers found previously-unknown errors in real software.

15.5 Comparison to other tools

A pluggable type-checker, such as those created by the Checker Framework, aims to help you prevent or detect all errors of a given variety. An alternate approach is to use a bug detector such as FindBugs, JLint, or PMD.

A pluggable type-checker differs from a bug detector in several ways:

- A type-checker aims to find *all* errors. Thus, it can verify the *absence* of errors: if the type checker says there are no null pointer errors in your code, then there are none. (This guarantee only holds for the code it checks, of course; see Section 2.3.)

A bug detector aims to find *some* of the most obvious errors. Even if it reports no errors, then there may still be errors in your code.

Both types of tools may issue false positive warnings; see Section 11.2.

- A type-checker requires you to annotate your code with type qualifiers, or to run an inference tool that does so for you. A bug detector may not require annotations. This means that it may be easier to get started running a bug detector.

- A type-checker may use more a more sophisticated and complete analysis. A bug detector typically does a more lightweight analysis, coupled with heuristics to suppress false positives.

As one example, a type-checker can take advantage of annotations on generic type parameters, such as `List<@NonNull String>`, permitting it to be much more precise for code that uses generics.

A case study [PAC⁺08, §6] compared the Checker Framework's nullness checker with those of FindBugs, JLint, and PMD. The case study was on a well-tested program in daily use. The Checker Framework tool found 8 nullness errors. None of the other tools found any errors.

15.6 Credits and changelog

The Checker Framework distribution was developed in the MIT Program Analysis Group, with prime contributions from Mahmood Ali, Telmo Correa, Michael D. Ernst, and Matthew M. Papi. Many users have provided valuable feedback, for which we are grateful.

Differences from previous versions of the checkers and framework can be found in the `changelog-checkers.txt` file. This file is included in the checkers distribution and is also available on the web at <http://types.cs.washington.edu/checker-framework/current/changelog-checkers.txt>.

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