Racket Style Guide

Fall 2016

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1 Introduction

All the Racket code you write in CS 17 must follow all the guidelines in this document.

2 Naming

The designers of Racket snubbed the styles of both the East and West. In Racket, the preferred
style is to use dashes, or hyphens, to name identifiers, as in my–procedure.

3 Formatting

Closing Parentheses  A line of Racket code should never start with a right parenthesis. You
should only ever use right parentheses in the middle or at the end of a line of Racket code. This
convention makes Racket code more concise without sacrificing readability.

These are examples of good Racket style:

\[(\text{define} \ (f \ x) \ (+ \ 17 \ (* \ 18 \ (/ \ x \ 19))))\]
(define (f x)
  (+ 17 (* 18 (/ x 19))))

These are examples of bad Racket style:

(define (f x) (+ 17 (* 18 (/ x 19))))
(define (f x) (+ 17 (* 18 (/ x 19)
  )
  )

Note that this convention is different from the stylistic conventions of many other programming languages, including those you will use in CS 18.

**Square Brackets** To make `cond` expressions easier to read, use square brackets around each clause. Square brackets more clearly delineate the clauses. Square brackets are particularly useful when debugging code with many parentheses.

This is okay:

```
(cond
  ((> x 0) (sqrt x))
  ((= x 0) 0)
  ((< x 0) (make-error "BLURGH")))
```

But this is better:

```
(cond
  [(> x 0) (sqrt x)]
  [(= x 0) 0]
  [(< x 0) (make-error "BLURGH")])
```

**Line Breaks** It can be difficult to read a single line of code with lots of parentheses and nested clauses. For example, try reading this convoluted line of code:

```
(cond [(> x 0) (sqrt x)] [(= x 0) 0] [(< x 0) (make-error "BLURGH")])
```

To fix this, you should add line breaks like this:

```
(cond
  [(> x 0) (sqrt x)]
  [(= x 0) 0]
  [(< x 0) (make-error "BLURGH")])
```
Indentation  DrRacket indents your code for you, so most of the time you should be all set. But if your code ever gets mangled, you can always use the Racket | Reindent All menu entry. Indeed, your code’s indentation should always reflect the running of this command.

Alignment  It can happen that procedure names are too long, or that they take too many arguments, for an entire procedure application to fit on one line. In such cases, there are some acceptable and some unacceptable alignments.

This is acceptable:

\[
(procedure-that-takes-four-arguments (if (zero? num) 15 16) "cats" "lichen" true)
\]

Observe that the first argument is on the same line as the procedure name, and all subsequent arguments are on a new line, aligned with the first argument.

These are not acceptable:

\[
(procedure-that-takes-four-arguments (if (zero? num) 15 16) "cats" "lichen" true)
\]

But you don’t really have to worry too much about the rules of alignment, because DrRacket will align your arguments for you automatically.

Spacing  Although excess white space does not change the functionality of a program, it can impact its readability.

Here is an example good Racket style:

\[
(baz (foo bar) qux)
\]

Here are two examples of bad Racket style:

\[
(baz(foo bar)qux)
(baz ( foo bar ) qux)
\]

This code is less readable, particularly to programmers experienced with LiSP-like programming languages. By abiding by the community’s convention, you ultimately make things easier for everyone, yourself included (even if the preferred style goes against your personal aesthetic).
Predicates  By convention, predicate names in Racket end with a question mark; after all, they are essentially questions. For example, these two predicates are built in to Racket:

1. zero?, which returns true if the input number is zero
2. empty?, which returns true if the input list is empty

When you define your own predicates, you should follow this same convention. That is, you should append to the name of your predicate a question mark.

In fact, we have a little secret. The predicate succ? is not built in to Racket. It is only part of CS 17 Racket. But you wouldn’t know that, since we followed the proper naming convention.

4  Equality

Racket has a variety of built-in procedures used to check whether or not two data are equal.

- (= 17 18) or (= true false)
  Works on numbers and booleans.
- (string=? "foo" "bar")
  Works on strings.
- (equal? (list 1 2 3) 15)
  Works on everything.

Although equal? can be used in all of the above examples, it’s best to use = or string=? instead. First of all, these procedures more precisely specify to the human reader what the code is checking. But more importantly, these procedures can detect errors in your code. For example, (string=? 17 "seventeen") will fail, thereby alerting you to the presence of an error in your code. But (equal? 17 "seventeen") will return false and carry on evaluating your code as if all were well with the world.

You should use equal? only when writing a polymorphic procedure, such as member?.

When checking equality of compound data, you should write your own equality procedure. For example:

(define (posn=? posn1 posn2)
  (and (= (posn-x posn1) (posn-x posn2))
       (= (posn-y posn1) (posn-y posn2))))

(posn=? (make-posn 17 18) (make-posn (+ 15 2) (+ 16 2)))
=> true

(Why does posn=? end with a question mark?)

5  Conditionals

Many expressions can be expressed in a logically equivalent fashion using either cond or if. But cond is almost always preferred to if.
5.1 Prefer Cond to If

If you are working with mixed data, you must use cond, and you must follow the structure of the data definition. For example:

```racket
;;; (listof datum)
;;; - empty
;;; - (cons datum (listof datum))
(cond
  [(empty? alon) "The input list is empty"]
  [(cons? alon) "The input list is not empty"])

;;; shape
;;; - circle
;;; - triangle
;;; - rectangle
(cond
  [(circle? alon) "The input is a circle"]
  [(triangle? alon) "The input is a triangle"]
  [(rectangle? alon) "The input is a rectangle"])
```

But even when you are not working with mixed data, cond is still preferred, for the simple reason that cond expressions warn you when your cases are not exhaustive:

```racket
(define (foo x)
  (cond
    [(> x 0) (sqrt x)]
    [(= x 0) 0]))

(foo -1) => cond: all question results were false
```

In contrast, if requires you to specify a value in both cases, so you run the risk of possibly supplying a bogus value, where you really would have liked to signal an error instead. This bogus value will let your program continue running as if nothing had gone wrong, potentially wreaking havoc somewhere farther along in its execution, which will only make it that much harder to detect the actual source of the error.

Furthermore, cond is visually more appealing. All questions are lined up nicely for simultaneous consideration. This is not the case for if expressions, which are nested for “readability”:

```racket
(define (bar x)
  (if (> x 0) (sqrt x)
    (if (= x 0) 0 x)))

(bar -1) => -1 ;; bogus value
```

The only time that if might be preferred to cond is when the data are not mixed and the decision is binary. For example:
(if (= x 17)
   (+ x x)
   (* x x))

can be used in place of:

(cond
  [(= x 17) (+ x x)]
  [else (* x x)])

But even here, cond expressions are more easily extensible than if expressions. Suppose we want to augment our code with a third clause. The logic is immediate within the cond expression:

(cond
  [(= x 15) (- x x)]
  [(= x 17) (+ x x)]
  [else (* x x)])

Finally, only use an else clause within a cond expression when you are certain that the questions above else cover all other cases of interest. By adding an else clause, you are telling Racket that it is okay to turn off error-checking. You are assuming the burden of error-checking yourself!

5.2 Concise Conditionals and Results

You should never write something like (equal? my-boolean true). Instead, just use my-boolean.

Similarly, do not use a cond or an if expression to first evaluate a predicate, and then return true or false. For example, (= x 17) is equivalent to and should replace both

(if (= x 17)
  true
  false)

and

(cond
  [(= x 17) true]
  [else false])

In the next example, the two possible values of the if expression are nearly identical, so writing them out twice in full is redundant.

(if (zero? num)
  (procedure-that-takes-lots-of-arguments 15 "cats" "lichen" true)
  (procedure-that-takes-lots-of-arguments 16 "cats" "lichen" true)))

This code can be rewritten more concisely like this:
(procedure—that—takes—lots—of—arguments
  (if (zero? num) 15 16)
  "cats"
  "lichen"
  true)

5.3 To Nest or Not to Nest?

Sometimes, you will need to test multiple conditions simultaneously. For example, you may want to
do one thing when two lists are empty, something else when just one is empty, and something else
etirely when neither is empty.

Here are two acceptable ways of structuring combinations of conditionals:

(define (check-empty list1 list2)
  (cond
    [(
     (and (empty? list1) (empty? list2)) "both lists are empty"]
    [(
     (and (empty? list1) (cons? list2)) "list one is empty"]
    [(
     (and (cons? list1) (empty? list2)) "list two is empty"]
    [(
     (and (cons? list1) (cons? list2)) "both lists are non-empty"]))

(define (check-empty list1 list2)
  (cond
    [(empty? list1)
      (cond
        [(empty? list2) "both lists are empty"]
        [(cons? list2) "list one is empty"])]
    [(cons? list1)
      (cond
        [(empty? list2) "list two is empty"]
        [(cons? list2) "both lists are non-empty"])]))

Each of these two styles emphasizes a slightly different way of organizing and thinking about the
possible cases. Generally speaking, either is acceptable, but certain problems may lend themselves
towards more readable code using one structure rather than the other.

Just as cond is preferred to if when coding up a single test, cond is again preferred to if when
nesting tests. For example, the following is considered bad style:

(define (check-empty list1 list2)
  (cond
    [(empty? list1)
      (if (empty? list2) "both lists are empty" "list one is empty")]
    [(cons? list2)
      (if (empty? list2) "list two is empty" "both lists are non-empty")])

7
6 Verbosity

Simplify if expressions There are a number of equivalent ways to express the same conditional logic. In almost all cases, shorter expressions are preferred:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbose</th>
<th>Concise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(if expr true false)</td>
<td>expr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(if expr expr false)</td>
<td>expr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(if expr false true)</td>
<td>(not expr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(if (not expr) x y)</td>
<td>(if expr y x)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(if x true y)</td>
<td>(or x y)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(if x false y)</td>
<td>(and x y)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(if x y true)</td>
<td>(and (not x) y)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When an if expression is used for argument selection, it can be embedded within a procedure application to improve readability, as follows:

;; Duplication of (f a b ..) application
(if c (f a b x) (f a b y))

;; Can be eliminated by embedding the if
(f a b (if c x y))

Don’t rewrap procedures When applying a procedure to another procedure, don’t rewrap the procedure if it already does what you need it to do. Here are two examples:

;; VERBOSE
(lambda (x y) (cons x y))

;; CONCISE
cons

;; VERBOSE
(define (select x y) (filter x y))

;; CONCISE
(define select filter)

7 Conclusion

Coding style is, of course, a matter of style, and some circumstances better lend themselves to one style than to another. Sometimes this distinction is a matter of opinion; if you are ever unclear about whether there is a preferred style, ask a TA.

And always remember: you are not writing code only for yourself. Code is something you will likely share with your peers and others. So it behooves you to follow the language conventions of
whatever language you find yourself programming in. Otherwise, you will confuse not only yourself, but anyone you share your code with.

Please let us know if you find any mistakes, inconsistencies, or confusing language in this or any other CS17 document by filling out the anonymous feedback form:

http://cs.brown.edu/courses/cs017/feedback