

# Specification tips and pitfalls

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1. Inherited specifications
2. Aliasing
3. Object invariants
4. Inconsistent assumptions
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## Behavioural subtyping

Suppose `Child` extends `Parent`.

- **Behavioural subtyping** = objects from subclass `Child` “behave like” objects from superclass `Parent`
- **Principle of substitutivity** [Liskov]:  
code will behave “as expected” if we provide an `Child` object where a `Parent` object was expected.

## #1: Specification inheritance and behavioural subtyping

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Behavioural subtyping usually enforced by insisting that

- invariant in subclass is **stronger** than invariant in superclass
- for every method,
  - precondition in subclass is **weaker** (!) than precondition in superclass
  - postcondition in subclass is **stronger** than postcondition in superclass

JML achieves behavioural subtyping by **specification inheritance**: any child class **inherits** the specification of its parent.

## Specification inheritance for method specs

```
class Parent {
    //@ requires i >= 0;
    //@ ensures  \result >= i;
    int m(int i){ ... }
}

class Child extends Parent {
    //@ also
    //@  requires i <= 0
    //@  ensures  \result <= i;
    int m(int i){ ... }
}
```

Keyword **also** indicates there are inherited specs.

Invariants are inherited in subclasses. Eg.

```
class Parent {
    ...
    //@ invariant invParent;
    ... }

class Child extends Parent {
    ...
    //@ invariant invChild;
    ... }
```

the invariant for Child is `invChild && invParent`

## Specification inheritance for method specs

Method `m` in `Child` also has to meet the spec given in `Parent` class. So the complete spec for `Child` is

```
class Child extends Parent {

    /*@   requires i >= 0;
    @    ensures  \result >= i;
    @ also
    @    requires i <= 0
    @    ensures  \result <= i;
    @*/
    int m(int i){ ... }
}
```

What can result of `m(0)` be?

This spec for Child is equivalent with

```
class Child extends Parent {

  /*@   requires i <= 0 || i >= 0;
   @   ensures  \old(i) >= 0 ==> \result >= i;
   @   ensures  \old(i) <= 0 ==> \result <= i;
  @*/
  int m(int i){ ... }
}
```

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## Inherited specifications

So

- Base class specifications apply to subclasses
  - that is, ESC/Java2 enforces *behavioral subtyping*
  - Specs from implemented *interfaces* also must hold for implementing classes
- Be thoughtful about how strict the base class specs should be
- Guard them with `\typeof(this) == \type(...)` if need be
- Restrictions on exceptions such as `normal_behavior` or `signals (E e) false;` will apply to derived classes as well.

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Another example: two Objects that are `==` are always also `equals`. But the converse is not necessarily true. But it is true for objects whose dynamic type is Object.

```
public class Object {
  /*@ ensures (this == o) ==> \result;
  /*@ ensures \typeof(this) == \type(Object)
      ==> (\result == (this==o));
  */
  public boolean equals(Object o);
}
```

True for all Objects

Not necessarily true for subtypes

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## #2: Aliasing

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## A common but non-obvious problem that causes violated invariants is aliasing.

```
public class Alias {
    /*@ non_null */ int[] a = new int[10];
    boolean noneg = true;

    /*@ invariant noneg ==>
        (\forallall int i; 0<=i && i < a.length; a[i]>=0); */

    /*@ requires 0<=i && i < a.length;
    public void insert(int i, int v) {
        a[i] = v;
        if (v < 0) noneg = false;
    }
}
```

### produces

```
Alias.java:12: Warning: Possible violation of object invariant (Invariant)
}
^
```

Associated declaration is "Alias.java", line 5, col 6:

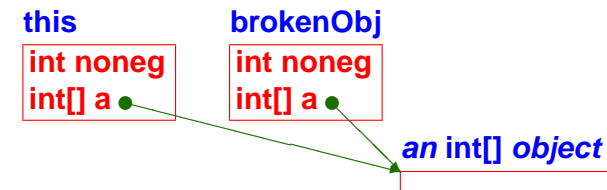
```
/*@ invariant (\forallall int i; 0<=i && i < a.length;
```

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## A full counterexample context (-counterexample option) produces, among lots of other information:

```
brokenObj%0 != this
(brokenObj%0).(a@pre:2.24) == tmp0!a:10.4
this.(a@pre:2.24) == tmp0!a:10.4
```

that is, **this** and some different object (**brokenObj**) share the same **a** object.



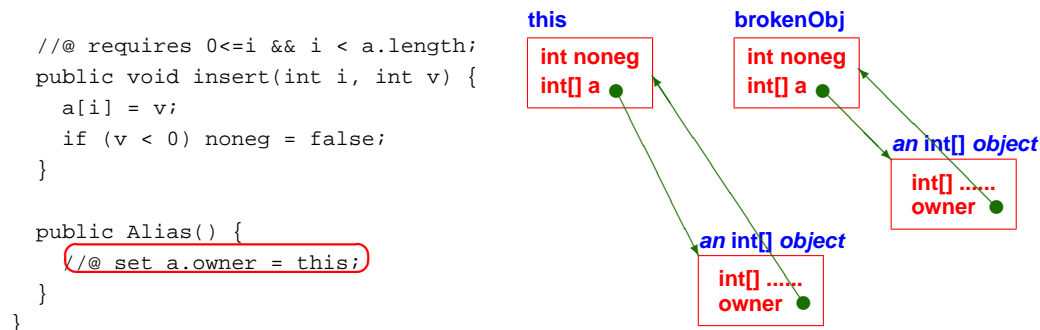
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## Aliasing

## To fix this, declare that **a** is owned only by its parent object: ( **owner** is a ghost field of java.lang.Object )

```
public class Alias {
    /*@ non_null */ int[] a = new int[10];
    boolean noneg = true;

    /*@ invariant (\forallall int i; 0<=i && i < a.length;
        noneg ==> (a[i]>=0)); */
    /*@ invariant a.owner == this;
```



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## Aliasing

## Another example. This one fails on the postcondition.

```
public class Alias2 {
    /*@ non_null */ Inner n = new Inner();
    /*@ non_null */ Inner nn = new Inner();
    /*@ invariant n.owner == this;
    /*@ invariant nn.owner == this;

    /*@ ensures n.i == \old(n.i + 1);
    public void add() {
        n.i++;
        nn.i++;
    }

    Alias2();
}

class Inner {
    public int i;
    /*@ ensures i == 0;
    Inner();
}
```

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- The counterexample context shows

```
this.(nn:3.24) == tmp0!n:10.4
tmp2!nn:11.4 == tmp0!n:10.4
```

- These hint that **n** and **nn** are references to the same object.
- If we add the invariant **//@ invariant n != nn;** to forbid aliasing between these two fields, then all is well.

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### #3: Write object invariants

- Be sure that class invariants are about the object at hand.
- Statements about all objects of a class may indeed be true, but they are difficult to prove, especially for automated provers.
- For example, if a predicate **P** is supposed to hold for objects of type **T**, then do **not** write  

```
//@ invariant (\forallall T t; P(t));
```
- Instead, write  

```
//@ invariant P(this);
```
- The latter will make a more provable postcondition at the end of a constructor.

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- Aliasing is a serious difficulty in verification
- Handling aliasing is an active area of research, related to handling frame conditions
- It is all about knowing what is modified and what is not
- These **owner** fields or the equivalent create a form of encapsulation that can be checked by ESC/Java to control what might be modified by a given operation
- There is a proposal to add so-called **universes** to JML to provide a more advanced form of alias control.

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### #4: Inconsistent assumptions

If you have inconsistent specifications you can prove anything:

```
public class Inconsistent {
    public void m() {
        int a,b,c,d;
        //@ assume a == b;
        //@ assume b == c;
        //@ assume a != c;
        //@ assert a == d; // Passes, but inconsistent
        //@ assert false; // Passes, but inconsistent
    }
}
```

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## #4: Inconsistent assumptions

### Another example:

```
public class Inconsistent2 {
    public int a,b,c,d;
    //@ invariant a == b;
    //@ invariant b == c;
    //@ invariant a != c;

    public void m() {
        //@ assert a == d; // Passes, but inconsistent
        //@ assert false; // Passes, but inconsistent
    }
}
```

We hope to put in checks for this someday!

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## #5: Exposed references

Problems can arise when a reference to an internal object is exported from a class:

```
public class Exposed {
    /*@ non_null */ private int[] a = new int[10];
    //@ invariant a.length > 0 && a[0] >= 0;

    //@ ensures \result != null;
    //@ ensures \result.length > 0;
    //@ pure
    public int[] getArray() { return a; }
}

class X {
    void m(/*@ non_null */ Exposed e) {
        e.getArray()[0] = -1; // unchecked invariant violation
    }
}
```

- ESC/Java does not check that every allocated object still satisfies its invariants.
- Similar hidden problems can result if public fields are modified directly.

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## #6: \old

**\old** is used to indicate evaluation in the pre-state in a postcondition expression.

Consider specifying

```
public static native void arraycopy(Object[] src, int srcPos,
                                     Object[] dest, int destPos, int length)
```

Try:

```
ensures (\forallall int i; 0<=i && i<length; dest[destPos+i] == src[srcPos+i])
```

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**\old** is used to indicate evaluation in the pre-state in a postcondition expression.

### Consider specifying

```
public static native void arraycopy(Object[] src, int srcPos,
                                   Object[] dest, int destPos, int length);
```

**Try:**

```
ensures (\forall int i; 0<=i && i<length; dest[destPos+i] == src[srcPos+i]);
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**Wrong!**

**\old** is used to indicate evaluation in the pre-state in a postcondition expression.

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```

**Wrong!**

**Besides exceptions and invalid arguments, don't forget aliasing - **dest** and **src** may be the same array:**

```
ensures (\forall int i; 0<=i && i<length;
        dest[destPos+i] == \old(src[srcPos+i]));
```

**And don't forget the other elements:**

```
ensures (\forall int i; (0<=i && i<destPos) ||
        (destPos+length <= i && i < destPos.length);
        dest[i] == \old(dest[i]));
```

**\old** is used to indicate evaluation in the pre-state in a postcondition expression.

### Consider specifying

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public static native void arraycopy(Object[] src, int srcPos,
                                   Object[] dest, int destPos, int length);
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**Try:**

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ensures (\forall int i; 0<=i && i<length; dest[destPos+i] == src[srcPos+i]);
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**Wrong!**

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```
ensures (\forall int i; 0<=i && i<length;
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```

**In postcondition**

```
ensures (\forall int i; 0<=i && i<length;
        dest[destPos+i] == \old(src[srcPos+i]));
public static native void arraycopy(Object[] src, int srcPos,
                                   Object[] dest, int destPos, int length);
```

**shouldn't we write **\old(length)** instead of **length**?**

### In postcondition

```
ensures (\forall int i; 0<=i && i<length;
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shouldn't we write `\old(length)` instead of `length`?

And `\old(dest)[...]` instead of `dest[...]`?

### In postcondition

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ensures (\forall int i; 0<=i && i<length;
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shouldn't we write `\old(length)` instead of `length`?

And `\old(dest)[...]` instead of `dest[destPos+i]`?

Strictly speaking: yes. But because this is so easy to get forget, **any mention of an argument `x` in postcondition means `\old(x)`.**

### In postcondition

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ensures (\forall int i; 0<=i && i<length;
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shouldn't we write `\old(length)` instead of `length`?

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Strictly speaking: yes. But because this is so easy to get forget, **any mention of an argument `x` in postcondition means `\old(x)`.**

This means it's impossible to refer to the new value of `length` in postcondition of `arraycopy`. But this value is unobservable for clients anyway.

## #7: How to write specs



## Getting started

- Start with foundation and library routines

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- For each field: is there an invariant for this field?
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- Add **pre-** and **post-conditions** to limit the inputs and outputs of each method.

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- For each class: what **invariant** expresses the self-consistency of the internal data?
- Add **pre-** and **post-conditions** to limit the inputs and outputs of each method.
- Add possible unchecked **exceptions** to throws clauses.
- Start with simple specifications; proceed to complex ones as they have value.

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## Finally

- Specification is **tricky** - getting it right is hard, even with tools
- **Try it** - a substantial research gap is experience on industrial-scale sets of code
- **Communicate** - we are willing to offer advice
- **Share** your experience - tools will get better and we will all learn better techniques for successful specification (use JML and ESC/Java mailing lists)

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- Separate conjunctions to get information about which conjunct is violated. Use

```
requires A;
requires B;
```

**not**

```
requires A && B;
```

- Use **assert** statements to find out what is going wrong.
- Use **assume** statements *that you KNOW are correct* to help the prover along.

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