Day 15: Security & Performance

`perlsec`

Benchmark module
(if you like)
Homework Review
Security
Think Like a Hacker

• How can I affect this script?
  – Outside data (@ARGV, files, environment, …)
  – Perfectly crafted
  – Too much, too little, malformed, out of range, …
  – No limits to creativity

• What can I cause the script to do?
  – Crash
  – Change the system
  – Change the results
  – eval(), s///e, s///ee
What Is Wrong With This Script?

```perl
if (scalar(@ARGV) != 1) {
    die "$0: need filename argument\n";
}

my $filename = $ARGV[0];

my $fh = "rm -f *.txt |'

open($fh, $filename) or die "...: $!\n";
my @lines = <$fh> or die "...: $!\n";
close($fh) or die "...: $!\n";

for (my $i = 0; $i < scalar(@lines); $i++) {
    print "$i: $lines[$i]"
}
```
Problems With open()

- Filename argument is more than filename

```
open(FH, "< foo")  # read
open(FH, "> foo")  # create/(over)write
open(FH, ">>& foo")  # create/append
open(FH, "foo |")  # run command, read output (like `foo`)
```

```
open(FH, $unchecked_variable)  # ERROR
```
Safer open()

- *Always* use the three-argument version, even for reads.

```perl
if (scalar(@ARGV) != 1) {
  die "$0: need filename argument\n"
}

my $fname = $ARGV[0];

open(my $fh, '<', $fname) or die "\n...: $!\n"
my @lines = <$fh> or die "\n...: $!\n"
close($fh) or die "\n...: $!\n";
```
Problems With system()

- Purpose is to invoke system commands...
- May invoke shell and hence shell interpretation

```perl
system("curl $url");
URL; rm -f ...
--silent -V; rm -f ...
--upload-file /etc/passwd URL

system("... $variable_name ...");
```
Safer system()

- Use separate arguments whenever possible
- If you *must* use shell characters, validate everything

```perl
system('curl', '--silent', $url);
# what if $url = '-V; rm -f ...'?
% curl --silent '-V; rm -f ...'
```
A Little Bit of Help: **use taint**

- Perl will *try to help* you identify dangerous values
- Marks all data that comes from “outside”:  
  - Command-line arguments  
  - Data from a filehandle (including STDIN)  
  - Environment variables  
  - Results of certain system calls (e.g., readlink)
- Passed to all copies of tainted data
- Cannot use tainted data directly to:  
  - Modify file or directory  
  - Run a command
- **Does NOT** automatically make a script secure!!!!!!!!!
use taint;

my $date = $ARGV[0];    # $date is tainted
my $filename1 = "data-$date.txt";  # tainted

# next line would cause Perl to exit script
open(my $fh, '>', $filename1) or die "...";

(my $ok_date = $date) =~ s/\W+/_/g;  # ok now
my $filename2 = "data-$ok_date.txt";  # ok
open(my $fh, '>', $filename2) or die "...";
Just because you’re paranoid doesn’t mean they’re not out to get you
Performance
CPU Cycles Are Cheap…

- Your time versus the computer’s time
  - 1 hour to save 50 ms/run — worth it?
  - 1 hour to save 1 hour/run — worth it?

- Moore’s Law: next month’s CPU will be 10% faster*

- Waste the computer’s time, not yours

- If you need a LOT of computing power, use CHTC

* horribly inaccurate representation of Moore’s actual statement…
But...
We should forget about small efficiencies, say about 97% of the time: premature optimization is the root of all evil.

— Donald Knuth, 1974
The Other 3% of the Time...
Easy Metrics

• Use the shell’s `time` command

```bash
% perl homework-15.pl input-15.txt
Done!
% time perl homework-15.pl input-15.txt
Done!

real    0m3.928s
user    0m3.907s
sys     0m0.012s
%```
More Detailed Metrics

- Use `Time::HiRes` to measure “wall” time (not CPU)
- Start with just a few
- Think binary search

```
use Time::HiRes qw/time/;
my $t_start = time();
initialize();
do_something();
my $t_mid = time();
doSomethingElse();
wrap_up();
my $t_end = time();
printf "Part 1: %.1f s\n", $t_mid - $t_start;
printf "Part 2: %.1f s\n", $t_end - $t_mid;
```
Very Detailed Metrics

- Use **Benchmark**
- Good for comparing alternatives directly

```perl
use Benchmark qw/cmpthese/;
my $x = 3;
cmpthese( -1,
    { 'a' => sub{ $x * $x },
      'b' => sub{ $x ** 2 },
    } );
```

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>b</th>
<th>a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>4745709/s</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>5420446/s</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Memory Is Cheap...

• … and fast
• … but limited
• Running out of memory is bad… but hard to do

```perl
open(my $fh, '<', $file) or die "...";

# Option 1: Read ALL lines into memory
my @lines = <$fh>;
foreach my $line (@lines);

# Option 2: Only 1 line in memory at a time
while (my $line = <$fh>) { ... }
```
Disk Is Cheap…

• … and huge
• … but slow
• Do as little I/O as is reasonable
• Also watch out for too many open filehandles

```perl
open(my $fh, '<', $file) or die "...";
my @lines = <$fh>;
close($fh);
...

my @lines_again = @lines;
```
Things to Avoid

- **CPU**
  - Inefficient algorithms
  - Needless repetition
  - Expensive operations inside tight loops

- **Memory**
  - Too much stuff in memory
  - Needless copies

- **Disk**
  - Needless reads/writes
  - Many small open/close operations

- **ALWAYS USE METRICS!!!**
Homework
Fix Me!

• Homework provides a simple script
• Likely contains security, performance, and correctness problems
• Make it better!
• *Extra:* Give before/after performance metrics!
Evaluations

- Instructor: CARTWRIGHT
- Course #: 368
- Section #: 3