



UNIVERSITY OF
RICHMOND

CMSC 240 Lecture 23

CMSC 240 Software Systems Development
Fall 2023

Today – C++ Security Risks

1. Buffer overflow
2. Integer overflow and underflow
3. Pointer initialization
4. Incorrect type conversion
5. Format string vulnerability



#1 Buffer Overflow

- **Definition:** Writing more data to a buffer than it can hold
- **Causes:** Lack of bounds checking, use of unsafe functions (strcpy, gets, etc.)
- **Consequences:** Memory corruption, unexpected behavior, security vulnerabilities
- **Prevention:** Using safe functions (strncpy, snprintf, etc.), bounds checking, stack canaries

#2 Integer Overflow and Underflow

- **Definition:** Wrapping around the maximum (overflow) or minimum (underflow) value of an integer type
- **Causes:** Arithmetic operations exceeding the limits of the data type
- **Consequences:** Incorrect calculations, control flow issues
- **Prevention:** Checking for overflow/underflow, using larger data types, using libraries for safe arithmetic

#3 Pointer Initialization

- **Definition:** Setting a pointer to a valid address before use
- **Causes:** Uninitialized pointers contain garbage values
- **Consequences:** Unpredictable behavior, crashes, security risks
- **Prevention:** Always initialize pointers, preferably to `nullptr`

#4 Incorrect Type Conversion

- **Definition:** Converting data between types in an unsafe manner
- **Causes:** Implicit conversions, C-style casts
- **Consequences:** Data corruption, loss of precision, security vulnerabilities
- **Prevention:** Using C++ style casts (`static_cast`), type-safe conversions

#5 Format String Vulnerability

- **Definition:** Using user input in format strings without proper sanitization
- **Causes:** Passing user input directly to `printf` like functions
- **Consequences:** Information leakage, arbitrary code execution
- **Prevention:** Never use user input as the format string, always specify format specifiers

Format Specifiers for `printf`

- **%d** or **%i**: Signed decimal integer
- **%u**: Unsigned decimal integer
- **%f**: Decimal floating point
- **%e**: Scientific notation using e
- **%x**: Unsigned hexadecimal integer
- **%s**: Null-terminated string
- **%c**: Character
- **%p**: Pointer address (printed in hexadecimal)

Format Specifiers for `printf`

```
#include <stdio>

int main()
{
    printf("Number is %d, floating point is %f, hex is %x \n", 123, 3.141592, 255);

    return 0;
}
```

Format Specifiers for `printf`

```
#include <cstdio>
#include <iostream>
using namespace std;

int main()
{
    // C style
    printf("Number is %d, floating point is %f, hex is %x \n", 123, 3.141592, 255);

    // C++ style
    cout << "Number is " << 123 << ", floating point is " << 3.141592 << ", hex is " << hex << 255 << endl;

    return 0;
}
```