Conditionals and Value Definitions

August 31, 2012

Conditional Expressions

To express choosing between two alternatives, Scala has a conditional expression `if-else`.

It looks like a `if-else` in Java, but is used for expressions, not statements.

Example:

```
def abs(x: Int) = if (x >= 0) x else -x
```

`x >= 0` is a *predicate*, of type `Boolean`.

Boolean Expressions

Boolean expressions `b` can be composed of

```
true  false       // Constants
!b                // Negation
b && b            // Conjunction
b || b            // Disjunction
```

and of the usual comparison operations:

```
e <= e, e >= e, e < e, e > e, e == e, e != e
```

Rewrite rules for Booleans

Here are reduction rules for Boolean expressions (`e` is an arbitrary expression):

```
!true        -->   false
!false       -->   true
true && e    -->   e
false && e   -->   false
true || e    -->   true
false || e   -->   e
```

Note that `&&` and `||` do not always need their right operand to be evaluated.

We say, these expressions use “short-circuit evaluation”.

Exercise: Formulate rewrite rules for if-else

if (b) e_1 then e_2

if (true) e_1 else e_2

Value Definitions

We have seen that function parameters can be passed by value or be passed by name.

The same distinction applies to definitions.

The `def` form is "by-name", its right hand side is evaluated on each use.

There is also a `val` for, which is "by-value". Example:

def z = 3 + 4
z

```
val x = 2
val y = square(x)
```

The right-hand side of a `val` definition is evaluated at the point of the definition itself.

Afterwards, the name refers to the value.

For instance, `y` above refers to `4`, not `square(2)`.

Value Definitions and Termination

The difference between `val` and `def` becomes apparent when the right hand side does not terminate. Given

```
def loop: Boolean = loop
```

A definition

```
def x = loop
```

is OK, but a definition

```
val x = loop
```

will lead to an infinite loop.

Exercise

Write functions `and` and `or` such that for all argument expressions `x` and `y`:

```
and(x, y)    ==    x && y
or(x, y)     ==    x || y
```

(do not use `||` and `&&` in your implementation)

What are good operands to test that the equalities hold?