Google Objective-C Style Guide

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Mike Pinkerton
Greg Miller
Dave MacLachlan

Each style point has a summary for which additional information is available by toggling the accompanying arrow button that looks this way: ▽. You may toggle all summaries with the big arrow button:

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Important Note

Displaying Hidden Details in this Guide

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This style guide contains many details that are initially hidden from view. They are marked by the triangle icon, which you see here on your left. Click it now. You should see "Hooray" appear below.

Hooray! Now you know you can expand points to get more details. Alternatively, there's an "expand all" at the top of this document.

Background

Objective-C is a very dynamic, object-oriented extension of C. It's designed to be easy to use and read, while enabling sophisticated object-oriented design. It is the primary development language for new applications on Mac OS X and the iPhone.

Cocoa is one of the main application frameworks on Mac OS X. It is a collection of Objective-C classes that provide for rapid development of full-featured Mac OS X applications.

Apple has already written a very good, and widely accepted, coding guide for Objective-C. Google has also written a similar guide for C++. This Objective-C guide aims to be a very natural combination of Apple's and Google's general recommendations. So, before reading this guide, please make sure you've read:

- Apple's Cocoa Coding Guidelines
- Google's Open Source C++ Style Guide

Note that all things that are banned in Google's C++ guide are also banned in Objective-C++, unless explicitly noted in this document.

The purpose of this document is to describe the Objective-C (and Objective-C++) coding guidelines and practices that should be used for all Mac OS X code. Many of these guidelines have evolved and been proven over time on other projects and teams. Open-source projects developed by Google conform to the requirements in this guide.

Google has already released open-source code that conforms to these guidelines as part of the Google Toolbox for Mac project (abbreviated GTM throughout this document). Code meant to be shared across different projects is a good candidate to be included in this repository.

Note that this guide is not an Objective-C tutorial. We assume that the reader is familiar with the language. If you are new to Objective-C or need a refresher, please read The Objective-C Programming Language .

Example

They say an example is worth a thousand words so let's start off with an example that should give you a feel for the style, spacing, naming, etc.

An example header file, demonstrating the correct commenting and spacing for an `@interface` declaration

```
//  Foo.h //  AwesomeProject // //  Created by Greg Miller on
6/13/08. //  Copyright 2008 Google, Inc. All rights reserved. //
#import <Foundation/Foundation.h>  // A sample class demonstrating
good Objective-C style. All interfaces, // categories, and protocols
(read: all top-level declarations in a header) // MUST be commented.
Comments must also be adjacent to the object they're // documenting.
// // (no blank line between this comment and the interface)
@interface Foo : NSObject {  @private   NSString *bar_;   NSString
*bam_; }  // Returns an autoreleased instance of Foo. See -
initWithBar: for details // about |bar|. + (id)fooWithBar:(NSString
*)bar;  // Designated initializer. |bar| is a thing that represents a
thing that // does a thing. - (id)initWithBar:(NSString *)bar;  //
Gets and sets |bar_|. - (NSString *)bar; - (void)setBar:(NSString
*)bar;  // Does some work with |blah| and returns YES if the work was
```

```
completed // successfully, and NO otherwise. -
(BOOL)doWorkWithBlah:(NSString *)blah;  @end
```

An example source file, demonstrating the correct commenting and spacing for
the `@implementation` of an interface. It also includes the reference implementations for
important methods like getters and setters, `init`, and `dealloc`.

```
// //  Foo.m //  AwesomeProject // //  Created by Greg Miller on
6/13/08. //  Copyright 2008 Google, Inc. All rights reserved. //
#import "Foo.h"   @implementation Foo  + (id)fooWithBar:(NSString
*)bar {   return [[[self alloc] initWithBar:bar] autorelease]; }  //
Must always override super's designated initializer. - (id)init
{   return [self initWithBar:nil]; }  - (id)initWithBar:(NSString
*)bar {   if ((self = [super init])) {     bar_ = [bar copy];
bam_ = [[NSString alloc] initWithFormat:@"hi %d", 3];   }   return
self; }  - (void)dealloc {   [bar_ release];   [bam_ release];
[super dealloc]; }  - (NSString *)bar {   return bar_; }  -
(void)setBar:(NSString *)bar {   [bar_ autorelease];   bar_ = [bar
copy]; }  - (BOOL)doWorkWithBlah:(NSString *)blah {   // ...   return
NO; }  @end
```

Blank lines before and after `@interface`, `@implementation`, and `@end` are optional. If
your `@interface` declares instance variables, a blank line should come after the closing
brace (`}`).

Unless an interface or implementation is very short, such as when declaring a handful of
private methods or a bridge class, adding blank lines usually helps readability.

Spacing And Formatting

Spaces vs. Tabs

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Use only spaces, and indent 2 spaces at a time.

We use spaces for indentation. Do not use tabs in your code. You should set your editor to
emit spaces when you hit the tab key.

Line Length

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Each line of text in your code should try to be at most 80 characters long.

Strive to keep your code within 80 columns. We realize that Objective C is a verbose
language and in some cases it may be more readable to extend slightly beyond 80 columns,
but this should definitely be the exception and not commonplace.

If a reviewer asks that you reformat a line because they feel it can be fit in 80 columns and
still be readable, you should do so.

We recognize that this rule is controversial, but so much existing code already adheres to it,
and we feel that consistency is important.

You can make violations easier to spot in Xcode by going to *Xcode > Preferences > Text Editing > Show page guide*.

Method Declarations and Definitions

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One space should be used between the – or + and the return type, and no spacing in the parameter list except between parameters.

Methods should look like this:

```
- (void)doSomethingWithString:(NSString *)theString {    ... }
```

The spacing before the asterisk is optional. When adding new code, be consistent with the surrounding file's style.

If you have too many parameters to fit on one line, giving each its own line is preferred. If multiple lines are used, align each using the colon before the parameter.

```
- (void)doSomethingWith:(GTMFoo *)theFoo
rect:(NSRect)theRect                interval:(float)theInterval
{    ... }
```

When the first keyword is shorter than the others, indent the later lines by at least four spaces. You can do this by making keywords line up vertically, not aligning colons:

```
- (void)short:(GTMFoo *)theFoo     longKeyword:(NSRect)theRect
evenLongerKeyword:(float)theInterval {    ... }
```

Method Invocations

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Method invocations should be formatted much like method declarations. When there's a choice of formatting styles, follow the convention already used in a given source file.

Invocations should have all arguments on one line:

```
[myObject doFooWith:arg1 name:arg2 error:arg3];
```

or have one argument per line, with colons aligned:

```
[myObject doFooWith:arg1                    name:arg2
error:arg3];
```

Don't use any of these styles:

```
[myObject doFooWith:arg1 name:arg2  // some lines with >1 arg
error:arg3];    [myObject doFooWith:arg1                    name:arg2
error:arg3];    [myObject doFooWith:arg1            name:arg2  //
aligning keywords instead of colons          error:arg3];
```

As with declarations and definitions, when the keyword lengths make it impossible to align colons and still have four leading spaces, indent later lines by four spaces and align keywords after the first one, instead of aligning the colons.

```
[myObj short:arg1      longKeyword:arg2      evenLongerKeyword:arg3];
```

@public and @private

The `@public` and `@private` access modifiers should be indented by 1 space.

This is similar to `public`, `private`, and `protected` in C++.

```
@interface MyClass : NSObject {  @public   ...  @private   ... } @end
```

Exceptions

Format exceptions with each `@` label on its own line and a space between the `@` label and the opening brace (`{`), as well as between the `@catch` and the caught object declaration.

If you must use Obj-C exceptions, format them as follows. However, see Avoid Throwing Exceptions for reasons why you should not be using exceptions.

```
@try {   foo(); } @catch (NSException *ex) {   bar(ex); } @finally
{   baz(); }
```

Protocols

There should not be a space between the type identifier and the name of the protocol encased in angle brackets.

This applies to class declarations, instance variables, and method declarations. For example:

```
@interface MyProtocoledClass : NSObject<NSWindowDelegate> {  @private
id<MyFancyDelegate> delegate_; } -
(void)setDelegate:(id<MyFancyDelegate>)aDelegate; @end
```

Blocks

Blocks are preferred to the target-selector pattern when creating callbacks, as it makes code easier to read. Code inside blocks should be indented four spaces.

There are several appropriate style rules, depending on how long the block is:

- If the block can fit on one line, no wrapping is necessary.

- If it has to wrap, the closing brace should line up with the first character of the line on which the block is declared.
- Code within the block should be indented four spaces.
- If the block is large, e.g. more than 20 lines, it is recommended to move it out-of-line into a local variable.
- If the block takes no parameters, there are no spaces between the characters ^{. If the block takes parameters, there is no space between the ^(characters, but there is one space between the) { characters.
- Two space indents inside blocks are also allowed, but should only be used when it's consistent with the rest of the project's code.

```
// The entire block fits on one line. [operation
setCompletionBlock:^{ [self onOperationDone]; }];  // The block can
be put on a new line, indented four spaces, with the // closing brace
aligned with the first character of the line on which // block was
declared. [operation setCompletionBlock:^{     [self.delegate
newDataAvailable]; }];  // Using a block with a C API follows the
same alignment and spacing // rules as with Objective-C.
dispatch_async(fileIOQueue_, ^{      NSString* path = [self
sessionFilePath];     if (path) {         // ...      } });  // An
example where the parameter wraps and the block declaration fits //
on the same line. Note the spacing of |^(SessionWindow *window) {| //
compared to |^{| above. [[SessionService sharedService]
loadWindowWithCompletionBlock:^(SessionWindow *window) {         if
(window) {          [self windowDidLoad:window];       } else
{          [self errorLoadingWindow];        }       }];  // An
example where the parameter wraps and the block declaration does //
not fit on the same line as the name. [[SessionService sharedService]
loadWindowWithCompletionBlock:        ^(SessionWindow *window)
{           if (window) {               [self
windowDidLoad:window];             } else {                [self
errorLoadingWindow];            }          }];  // Large blocks can
be declared out-of-line. void (^largeBlock)(void) = ^{     // ... };
[operationQueue_ addOperationWithBlock:largeBlock];
```

Naming

Naming rules are very important in maintainable code. Objective-C method names tend to be very long, but this has the benefit that a block of code can almost read like prose, thus rendering many comments unnecessary.

When writing pure Objective-C code, we mostly follow standard Objective-C naming rules. These naming guidelines may differ significantly from those outlined in the C++ style guide. For example, Google's C++ style guide recommends the use of underscores between words in variable names, whereas this guide recommends the use of intercaps, which is standard in the Objective-C community.

Any class, category, method, or variable name may use all capitals for initialisms within the name. This follows Apple's standard of using all capitals within a name for initialisms such as URL, TIFF, and EXIF.

When writing Objective-C++, however, things are not so cut and dry. Many projects need to implement cross-platform C++ APIs with some Objective-C or Cocoa, or bridge between a C++ back-end and a native Cocoa front-end. This leads to situations where the two guides are directly at odds.

Our solution is that the style follows that of the method/function being implemented. If you're in an `@implementation` block, use the Objective-C naming rules. If you're implementing a method for a C++ `class`, use the C++ naming rules. This avoids the situation where instance variable and local variable naming rules are mixed within a single function, which would be a serious detriment to readability.

File Names

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File names should reflect the name of the class implementation that they contain -- including case. Follow the convention that your project uses.

File extensions should be as follows:

`.h`	C/C++/Objective-C header file
`.m`	Objective-C implementation file
`.mm`	Objective-C++ implementation file
`.cc`	Pure C++ implementation file
`.c`	C implementation file

File names for categories should include the name of the class being extended, e.g. `GTMNSString+Utils.h` or `GTMNSTextView+Autocomplete.h`

Objective-C++

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Within a source file, Objective-C++ follows the style of the function/method you're implementing.

In order to minimize clashes between the differing naming styles when mixing Cocoa/Objective-C and C++, follow the style of the method being implemented. If you're in an `@implementation` block, use the Objective-C naming rules. If you're implementing a method for a C++ `class`, use the C++ naming rules.

```
// file: cross_platform_header.h  class CrossPlatformAPI
{  public:    ...    int DoSomethingPlatformSpecific();  // impl on
each platform  private:    int an_instance_var_; };  // file:
mac_implementation.mm #include "cross_platform_header.h"  // A
typical Objective-C class, using Objective-C naming. @interface
MyDelegate : NSObject {  @private    int instanceVar_;
CrossPlatformAPI* backEndObject_; } -
(void)respondToSomething:(id)something; @end @implementation
MyDelegate - (void)respondToSomething:(id)something {    // bridge
from Cocoa through our C++ backend    instanceVar_ = backEndObject-
>DoSomethingPlatformSpecific();    NSString* tempString = [NSString
stringWithInt:instanceVar_];    NSLog(@"%@", tempString); } @end  //
The platform-specific implementation of the C++ class, using // C++
naming. int CrossPlatformAPI::DoSomethingPlatformSpecific()
{    NSString* temp_string = [NSString
stringWithInt:an_instance_var_];    NSLog(@"%@", temp_string);
return [temp_string intValue]; }
```

Class Names

Class names (along with category and protocol names) should start as uppercase and use mixed case to delimit words.

In *application-level* code, prefixes on class names should generally be avoided. Having every single class with same prefix impairs readability for no benefit. When designing code to be shared across multiple applications, prefixes are acceptable and recommended (e.g. `GTMSendMessage`).

Category Names

Category names should start with a 2 or 3 character prefix identifying the category as part of a project or open for general use. The category name should incorporate the name of the class it's extending.

For example, if we want to create a category on `NSString` for parsing, we would put the category in a file named `GTMNSString+Parsing.h`, and the category itself would be named `GTMStringParsingAdditions` (yes, we know the file name and the category name do not match, but this file could have many separate categories related to parsing). Methods in that category should share the prefix (`gtm_myCategoryMethodOnAString:`) in order to prevent collisions in Objective-C which only has a single namespace. If the code isn't meant to be shared and/or doesn't run in a different address-space, the method naming isn't quite as important.

There should be a single space between the class name and the opening parenthesis of the category.

Objective-C Method Names

Method names should start as lowercase and then use mixed case. Each named parameter should also start as lowercase.

The method name should read like a sentence if possible, meaning you should choose parameter names that flow with the method name.
(e.g. `convertPoint:fromRect:` or `replaceCharactersInRange:withString:`).
See [Apple's Guide to Naming Methods](#) for more details.

Accessor methods should be named the same as the variable they're "getting", but they should *not* be prefixed with the word "get". For example:

```
- (id)getDelegate;  // AVOID
```

```
- (id)delegate;     // GOOD
```

This is for Objective-C methods only. C++ method names and functions continue to follow the rules set in the C++ style guide.

Variable Names

Variables names start with a lowercase and use mixed case to delimit words. Class member variables have trailing underscores. For example: *myLocalVariable*, *myInstanceVariable_*. Members used for KVO/KVC bindings may begin with a leading underscore *iff* use of Objective-C 2.0's `@property` isn't allowed.

Common Variable Names

Do *not* use Hungarian notation for syntactic attributes, such as the static type of a variable (int or pointer). Give as descriptive a name as possible, within reason. Don't worry about saving horizontal space as it is far more important to make your code immediately understandable by a new reader. For example:

```
int w; int nerr; int nCompConns; tix = [[NSMutableArray alloc] init];
obj = [someObject object]; p = [network port];
```

```
int numErrors; int numCompletedConnections; tickets =
[[NSMutableArray alloc] init]; userInfo = [someObject object]; port =
[network port];
```

Instance Variables

Instance variables are mixed case and should be suffixed with a trailing underscore, e.g. *usernameTextField_*. However, we permit an exception when binding to a member variable using KVO/KVC and Objective-C 2.0 cannot be used (due to OS release constraints). In this case, it is acceptable to prefix the variable with an underscore, per Apple's accepted practices for key/value naming. If Objective-C 2.0 can be used, `@property` and `@synthesize` provide a solution that conforms to the naming guidelines.

Constants

Constant names (#defines, enums, const local variables, etc.) should start with a lowercase *k* and then use mixed case to delimit words, i.e. *kInvalidHandle*, *kWritePerm*.

Comments

Though a pain to write, they are absolutely vital to keeping our code readable. The following rules describe what you should comment and where. But remember: while comments are very important, the best code is self-documenting. Giving sensible names to types and variables is much better than using obscure names and then trying to explain them through comments.

When writing your comments, write for your audience: the next contributor who will need to understand your code. Be generous — the next one may be you!

Remember that all of the rules and conventions listed in the C++ Style Guide are in effect here, with a few additional points, below.

File Comments

Start each file with a basic description of the contents of the file, followed by an author, and then followed by a copyright notice and/or license boilerplate.

Legal Notice and Author Line

Every file should contain the following items, in order:

- a basic description of the contents of the file
- an author line
- a copyright statement (for example, `Copyright 2008 Google Inc.`)
- license boilerplate if neccessary. Choose the appropriate boilerplate for the license used by the project (e.g. Apache 2.0, BSD, LGPL, GPL)

If you make significant changes to a file that someone else originally wrote, add yourself to the author line. This can be very helpful when another contributor has questions about the file and needs to know whom to contact about it.

Declaration Comments

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Every interface, category, and protocol declaration should have an accompanying comment describing its purpose and how it fits into the larger picture.

```
// A delegate for NSApplication to handle notifications about app //
launch and shutdown. Owned by the main app controller. @interface
MyAppDelegate : NSObject {   ... } @end
```

If you have already described an interface in detail in the comments at the top of your file feel free to simply state "See comment at top of file for a complete description", but be sure to have some sort of comment.

Additionally, each method in the public interface should have a comment explaining its function, arguments, return value, and any side effects.

Document the synchronization assumptions the class makes, if any. If an instance of the class can be accessed by multiple threads, take extra care to document the rules and invariants surrounding multithreaded use.

Implementation Comments

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Use vertical bars to quote variable names and symbols in comments rather than quotes or naming the symbol inline.

This helps eliminate ambiguity, especially when the symbol is a common word that might make the sentence read like it was poorly constructed. E.g. for a symbol "count":

```
// Sometimes we need |count| to be less than zero.
```

or when quoting something which already contains quotes

```
// Remember to call |StringWithoutSpaces("foo bar baz")|
```

Object Ownership

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Make the pointer ownership model as explicit as possible when it falls outside the most common Objective-C usage idioms.

Instance variables which are pointers to objects derived from NSObject are presumed to be retained, and should be either commented as weak or declared with the __weak lifetime qualifier when applicable. Similarly, declared properties must specify a weak or assign property attribute if they are not retained by the class. An exception is instance variables labeled as IBOutlets in Mac software, which are presumed to not be retained.

Where instance variables are pointers to CoreFoundation, C++, and other non-Objective-C objects, they should always be declared with the __strong and __weak type modifiers to indicate which pointers are and are not retained. CoreFoundation and other non-Objective-C object pointers require explicit memory management, even when building for automatic reference counting or garbage collection. When the __weak type modifier is not allowed (e.g. C++ member variables when compiled under clang), a comment should be used instead.

Be mindful that support for automatic C++ objects encapsulated in Objective-C objects is disabled by default, as described here.

Examples of strong and weak declarations:

```
@interface MyDelegate : NSObject {  @private   IBOutlet NSButton
*okButton_;  // normal NSControl; implicitly weak on Mac only
AnObjcObject* doohickey_;  // my doohickey   __weak MyObjcParent
*parent_;  // so we can send msgs back (owns me)    // non-NSObject
pointers...   __strong CWackyCPPClass *wacky_;  // some cross-
platform object   __strong CFDictionaryRef *dict_; }
@property(strong, nonatomic) NSString *doohickey; @property(weak,
nonatomic) NSString *parent; @end
```

Cocoa and Objective-C Features

Member Variables Should Be @private

link ▽

Member variables should be declared @private.

```
@interface MyClass : NSObject {  @private   id myInstanceVariable_; }
// public accessors, setter takes ownership – (id)myInstanceVariable;
– (void)setMyInstanceVariable:(id)theVar; @end
```

Identify Designated Initializer

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Comment and clearly identify your designated initializer.

It is important for those who might be subclassing your class that the designated initializer be clearly identified. That way, they only need to subclass a single initializer (of potentially several) to guarantee their subclass' initializer is called. It also helps those debugging your class in the future understand the flow of initialization code if they need to step through it.

Override Designated Initializer

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When writing a subclass that requires an `init...` method, make *sure* you override the superclass' designated initializer.

If you fail to override the superclass' designated initializer, your initializer may not be called in all cases, leading to subtle and very difficult to find bugs.

Overridden NSObject Method Placement

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It is strongly recommended and typical practice to place overridden methods of `NSObject` at the top of an `@implementation`.
This commonly applies (but is not limited) to the `init...`, `copyWithZone:`, and `dealloc` methods. `init...` methods should be grouped together, followed by the `copyWithZone:` method, and finally the `dealloc`method.

Initialization

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Don't initialize variables to `0` or `nil` in the init method; it's redundant.

All memory for a newly allocated object is initialized to 0 (except for *isa*), so don't clutter up the `init` method by re-initializing variables to 0 or `nil`.

Avoid +new

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Do not invoke the `NSObject` class method `new`, nor override it in a subclass. Instead, use `alloc` and `init` methods to instantiate retained objects.

Modern Objective-C code explicitly calls `alloc` and an `init` method to create and retain an object. As the `new` class method is rarely used, it makes reviewing code for correct memory management more difficult.

Keep the Public API Simple

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Keep your class simple; avoid "kitchen-sink" APIs. If a method doesn't need to be public, don't make it so. Use a private category to prevent cluttering the public header.

Unlike C++, Objective-C doesn't have a way to differentiate between public and private methods — everything is public. As a result, avoid placing methods in the public API unless

they are actually expected to be used by a consumer of the class. This helps reduce the likelihood they'll be called when you're not expecting it. This includes methods that are being overridden from the parent class. For internal implementation methods, use a category defined in the implementation file as opposed to adding them to the public header.

```
// GTMFoo.m #import "GTMFoo.h"  @interface GTMFoo
(PrivateDelegateHandling) - (NSString *)doSomethingWithDelegate;  //
Declare private method @end  @implementation
GTMFoo(PrivateDelegateHandling) ... - (NSString
*)doSomethingWithDelegate {   // Implement this method } ... @end
```

Before Objective-C 2.0, if you declare a method in the private `@interface`, but forget to implement it in the main `@implementation`, the compiler will *not* object. (This is because you don't implement these private methods in a separate category.) The solution is to put the functions within an `@implementation` that specifies the category.

If you are using Objective-C 2.0, you should instead declare your private category using a [class extension](), for example:

```
@interface GMFoo () { ... }
```

which will guarantee that the declared methods are implemented in the `@implementation` section by issuing a compiler warning if they are not.

Again, "private" methods are not really private. You could accidentally override a superclass's "private" method, thus making a very difficult bug to squash. In general, private methods should have a fairly unique name that will prevent subclasses from unintentionally overriding them.

Finally, Objective-C categories are a great way to segment a large `@implementation` section into more understandable chunks and to add new, application-specific functionality to the most appropriate class. For example, instead of adding "middle truncation" code to a random object in your app, make a new category on `NSString`).

#import and #include

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`#import` Objective-C/Objective-C++ headers, and `#include` C/C++ headers.

Choose between `#import` and `#include` based on the language of the header that you are including.

- When including a header that uses Objective-C or Objective-C++, use `#import`.
- When including a standard C or C++ header, use `#include`. The header should provide its own [#define guard]().

Some Objective-C headers lack `#define` guards, and expect to be included only by `#import`. As Objective-C headers may only be included in Objective-C source files and other Objective-C headers, using `#import`across the board is appropriate.

Standard C and C++ headers without any Objective-C in them can expect to be included by ordinary C and C++ files. Since there is no `#import` in standard C or C++, such files will be

included by `#include` in those cases. Using `#include` for them in Objective-C source files as well means that these headers will always be included with the same semantics.

This rule helps avoid inadvertent errors in cross-platform projects. A Mac developer introducing a new C or C++ header might forget to add `#define` guards, which would not cause problems on the Mac if the new header were included with `#import`, but would break builds on other platforms where `#include` is used. Being consistent by using `#include` on all platforms means that compilation is more likely to succeed everywhere or fail everywhere, and avoids the frustration of files working only on some platforms.

```
#import <Cocoa/Cocoa.h> #include <CoreFoundation/CoreFoundation.h>
#import "GTMFoo.h" #include "base/basictypes.h"
```

Use Root Frameworks

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Include root frameworks over individual files.

While it may seem tempting to include individual system headers from a framework such as Cocoa or Foundation, in fact it's less work on the compiler if you include the top-level root framework. The root framework is generally pre-compiled and can be loaded much more quickly. In addition, remember to use `#import` rather than `#include` for Objective-C frameworks.

```
#import <Foundation/Foundation.h>      // good
```

```
#import <Foundation/NSArray.h>         // avoid #import
<Foundation/NSString.h> ...
```

Prefer To autorelease At Time of Creation

link ▽

When creating new temporary objects, `autorelease` them on the same line as you create them rather than a separate `release` later in the same method.

While ever so slightly slower, this prevents someone from accidentally removing the `release` or inserting a `return` before it and introducing a memory leak. E.g.:

```
// AVOID (unless you have a compelling performance reason)
MyController* controller = [[MyController alloc] init]; // ... code
here that might return ... [controller release];
```

```
// BETTER MyController* controller = [[[MyController alloc] init]
autorelease];
```

Autorelease Then Retain

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Assignment of objects follows the `autorelease` then `retain` pattern.

When assigning a new object to a variable, one must first release the old object to avoid a memory leak. There are several "correct" ways to handle this. We've chosen the "autorelease then retain" approach because it's less prone to error. Be aware in tight loops it can fill up the autorelease pool, and may be slightly less efficient, but we feel the tradeoffs are acceptable.

```
- (void)setFoo:(GMFoo *)aFoo {    [foo_ autorelease];  // Won't
dealloc if |foo_| == |aFoo|    foo_ = [aFoo retain]; }
```

Avoid Accessors During init and dealloc

link ▽

Instance subclasses may be in an inconsistent state during `init` and `dealloc` method execution, so code in those methods should avoid invoking accessors.

Subclasses have not yet been initialized or have already deallocated when `init` and `dealloc` methods execute, making accessor methods potentially unreliable. Whenever practical, directly assign to and release ivars in those methods rather than rely on accessors.

```
- (id)init {    self = [super init];    if (self) {      bar_ =
[[NSMutableString alloc] init];  // good    }    return self; }    -
(void)dealloc {    [bar_ release];                            // good
[super dealloc]; }
```

```
- (id)init {    self = [super init];    if (self) {      self.bar =
[NSMutableString string];  // avoid    }    return self; }    -
(void)dealloc {    self.bar = nil;                           // avoid
[super dealloc]; }
```

Dealloc Instance Variables in Declaration Order

link ▽

`dealloc` should process instance variables in the same order the `@interface` declares them, so it is easier for a reviewer to verify.

A code reviewer checking a new or revised `dealloc` implementation needs to make sure that every retained instance variable gets released.

To simplify reviewing `dealloc`, order the code so that the retained instance variables get released in the same order that they are declared in the `@interface`. If `dealloc` invokes other methods that release instance variables, add comments describing what instance variables those methods handle.

Setters copy NSStrings

link ▽

Setters taking an `NSString`, should always `copy` the string it accepts.

Never just `retain` the string. This avoids the caller changing it under you without your knowledge. Don't assume that because you're accepting an `NSString` that it's not actually an `NSMutableString`.

```
- (void)setFoo:(NSString *)aFoo {   [foo_ autorelease];   foo_ =
[aFoo copy]; }
```

Avoid Throwing Exceptions

link ▽

Don't `@throw` Objective-C exceptions, but you should be prepared to catch them from third-party or OS calls.

We do compile with `-fobjc-exceptions` (mainly so we get `@synchronized`), but we don't `@throw`. Use of `@try`, `@catch`, and `@finally` are allowed when required to properly use 3rd party code or libraries. If you do use them please document exactly which methods you expect to throw.

Do not use the `NS_DURING`, `NS_HANDLER`, `NS_ENDHANDLER`, `NS_VALUERETURN` and `NS_VOIDRETURN` macros unless you are writing code that needs to run on Mac OS X 10.2 or before.

Also be aware when writing Objective-C++ code that stack based objects are not cleaned up when you throw an Objective-C exception. Example:

```
class exceptiontest {  public:   exceptiontest()
{ NSLog(@"Created"); }   ~exceptiontest() { NSLog(@"Destroyed"); } };
void foo() {   exceptiontest a;   NSException *exception =
[NSException exceptionWithName:@"foo"
reason:@"bar"
userInfo:nil];   @throw exception; }  int main(int argc, char
*argv[]) {   GMAutoreleasePool pool;   @try {     foo();   }
@catch(NSException *ex) {     NSLog(@"exception raised");   }
return 0; }
```

will give you:

```
2006-09-28 12:34:29.244 exceptiontest[23661] Created 2006-09-28
12:34:29.244 exceptiontest[23661] exception raised
```

Note that the destructor for *a* never got called. This is a major concern for stack based smartptrs such as `shared_ptr` and `linked_ptr`, as well as any STL objects that you may want to use. Therefore it pains us to say that if you must use exceptions in your Objective-C++ code, use C++ exceptions whenever possible. You should never re-throw an Objective-C exception, nor are stack based C++ objects (such as `std::string`, `std::vector`etc.) allowed in the body of any `@try`, `@catch`, or `@finally` blocks.

nil Checks

link ▽

Use `nil` checks for logic flow only.

Use `nil` checks for logic flow of the application, not for crash prevention. Sending a message to a `nil` object is handled by the Objective-C runtime. If the method has no return result, you're good to go. However if there is one, there may be differences based on runtime architecture, return size, and OS X version (see Apple's documentation for specifics).

Note that this is very different from checking C/C++ pointers against `NULL`, which the runtime does not handle and will cause your application to crash. You still need to make sure you do not dereference a `NULL` pointer.

BOOL Pitfalls

Be careful when converting general integral values to `BOOL`. Avoid comparing directly with `YES`.

`BOOL` is defined as an unsigned char in Objective-C which means that it can have values other than `YES` (1) and `NO` (0). Do not cast or convert general integral values directly to `BOOL`. Common mistakes include casting or converting an array's size, a pointer value, or the result of a bitwise logic operation to a `BOOL` which, depending on the value of the last byte of the integral result, could still result in a `NO` value. When converting a general integral value to a `BOOL` use ternary operators to return a `YES` or `NO` value.

You can safely interchange and convert `BOOL`, `_Bool` and `bool` (see C++ Std 4.7.4, 4.12 and C99 Std 6.3.1.2). You cannot safely interchange `BOOL` and `Boolean` so treat `Booleans` as a general integral value as discussed above. Only use `BOOL` in Objective C method signatures.

Using logical operators (`&&`, `||` and `!`) with `BOOL` is also valid and will return values that can be safely converted to `BOOL` without the need for a ternary operator.

```
- (BOOL)isBold {   return [self fontTraits] & NSFontBoldTrait; } -
(BOOL)isValid {   return [self stringValue]; }
```

```
- (BOOL)isBold {   return ([self fontTraits] & NSFontBoldTrait) ?
YES : NO; } - (BOOL)isValid {   return [self stringValue] != nil; } -
(BOOL)isEnabled {   return [self isValid] && [self isBold]; }
```

Also, don't directly compare `BOOL` variables directly with `YES`. Not only is it harder to read for those well-versed in C, the first point above demonstrates that return values may not always be what you expect.

```
BOOL great = [foo isGreat]; if (great == YES)   // ...be great!
```

```
BOOL great = [foo isGreat]; if (great)   // ...be great!
```

Properties

Properties in general are allowed with the following caveat: properties are an Objective-C 2.0 feature which will limit your code to running on the iPhone and Mac OS X 10.5 (Leopard) and higher. Dot notation is allowed only for access to a declared `@property`.

Naming

A property's associated instance variable's name must conform to the trailing _ requirement. The property's name should be the same as its associated instance variable without the trailing _. The optional space between the `@property` and the opening parenthesis should be omitted, as seen in the examples.

Use the @synthesize directive to rename the property correctly.

```
@interface MyClass : NSObject {  @private   NSString *name_; }
@property(copy, nonatomic) NSString *name; @end  @implementation
MyClass @synthesize name = name_; @end
```

Location

A property's declaration must come immediately after the instance variable block of a class interface. A property's definition must come immediately after the @implementation block in a class definition. They are indented at the same level as the @interface or @implementation statements that they are enclosed in.

```
@interface MyClass : NSObject {  @private   NSString *name_; }
@property(copy, nonatomic) NSString *name; @end  @implementation
MyClass @synthesize name = name_; - (id)init { ... } @end
```

Use Copy Attribute For Strings

NSString properties should always be declared with the copy attribute.

This logically follows from the requirement that setters for NSStrings always must use copy instead of retain.

Atomicity

Be aware of the overhead of properties. By default, all synthesized setters and getters are atomic. This gives each set and get calls a substantial amount of synchronization overhead. Declare your properties nonatomicunless you require atomicity.

Dot notation

Dot notation is idiomatic style for Objective-C 2.0. It may be used when doing simple operations to get and set a @property of an object, but should not be used to invoke other object behavior.

```
NSString *oldName = myObject.name; myObject.name = @"Alice";
```

```
NSArray *array = [[NSArray arrayWithObject:@"hello"] retain];
NSUInteger numberOfItems = array.count;  // not a property
array.release;                           // not a property
```

Interfaces Without Instance Variables

link ▽

Omit the empty set of braces on interfaces that do not declare any instance variables.

```
@interface MyClass : NSObject // Does a lot of stuff -
(void)fooBarBam; @end
```

```
@interface MyClass : NSObject { } // Does a lot of stuff -
(void)fooBarBam; @end
```

Automatically Synthesized Instance Variables

For code that will run on iOS only, use of automatically synthesized instance variables is preferred.

When synthesizing the instance variable, use `@synthesize var = var_;` as this prevents accidentally calling `var = blah;` when `self.var = blah;` is intended.

```
// Header file @interface Foo : NSObject // A guy walks into a bar.
@property(nonatomic, copy) NSString *bar; @end  // Implementation
file @interface Foo () @property(nonatomic, retain) NSArray *baz;
@end  @implementation Foo @synthesize bar = bar_; @synthesize baz =
baz_; @end
```

Cocoa Patterns

Delegate Pattern

Delegate objects should not be retained.

A class that implements the delegate pattern should:

1. Have an instance variable named *delegate_* to reference the delegate.
2. Thus, the accessor methods should be named `delegate` and `setDelegate:`.
3. The *delegate_* object should not be retained.

Model/View/Controller

Separate the model from the view. Separate the controller from the view and the model. Use `@protocol`s for callback APIs.

- Separate model from view: don't build assumptions about the presentation into the model or data source. Keep the interface between the data source and the presentation abstract. Don't give the model knowledge of its view. (A good rule of thumb is to ask yourself if it's possible to have multiple presentations, with different states, on a single instance of your data source.)
- Separate controller from view and model: don't put all of the "business logic" into view-related classes; this makes the code very unusable. Make controller classes to host this code, but ensure that the controller classes don't make too many assumptions about the presentation.
- Define callback APIs with `@protocol`, using `@optional` if not all the methods are required. (Exception: when using Objective-C 1.0, `@optional` isn't available, so use a category to define an "informal protocol".)

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Mike Pinkerton
Greg Miller
Dave MacLachlan