C++ (C# & Java, too) concrete objects and essential application data

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- For Chicago C++ Users' Group September 27, 2016
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Agenda Background: C and its successors The problem Why do we care? Elementary data items 1. Text data 2. Numeric data 3. Discrete data Soniscrete data Further discussions

Background

The original C language (c. 1979) lacked

(why?) built-in data types for:

- a. text (character-string) data items
- b. decimal numeric data items
- c. independent discrete data items
- But applications (esp. business/commercial) need to store and manipulate such data items.
- COBOL, PL/I, and other older programming languages supported decimal and text data as built-in types.

Was that a good idea? Is there a better way?

What could be done about that? a. Within the **original C language**? clumsy, extremely error-prone standard library for quasi-string handling (arrays of char with null terminator) Forget it! strcpy(s1,s2), etc. Often a separate statement for each operation, like assembly language programming. Another opinion (What was he thinking?)! "One of the great strengths of C from its earliest days has been its ability to manipulate sequences of characters." -- P. J. Plauger, C/C++ Users Journal, July, 1995 no standard decimal facility; just do your own scaling, as we did on early binary computers.

What could be done about that?

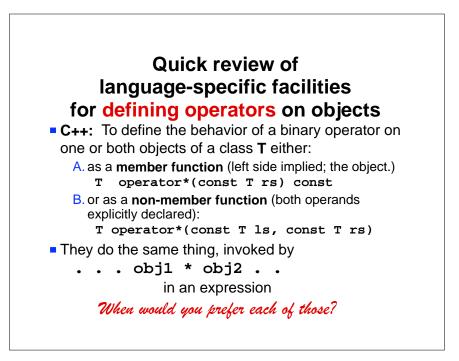
- b. With object-oriented languages
 - (C++, Java, C#) derived from C?
 - Early realization that the facilities for defining O.O classes could also be used to define string and decimal types.
 - Therefore, major breakthrough! We don't need to build those types into the language. Just provide library classes.

(But that took a while and still isn't fully satisfactory.)

The trap

- The existence of string and decimal library classes misled naive programmers
 - They assumed that their data items declared as instances of those classes) were object oriented.
 - Wrong! Those string and decimal classes were just substitutes for *primitive* types that are built into other programming languages. They do not support the properties of most application data.
 - Data items that are just instances of those classes lack the automated power and error protection that we associate with the benefits of OOT.

Let's look at some examples . . .



language-specific facilities for defining operators on objects

- C++ (continued): For efficiency it is strongly recommended that we:
 - Define the compound-assignment operator as primitive:
 - T& operator*=(const T rs)
 - Define the simple arithmetic operator in terms of the corresponding compound assignment operator:

```
T operator*(const T ls, const T rs)
    {T result = ls;
    return ls *= rs;
```

} Why is this recommended?

language-specific facilities for defining operators on objects

- C#: You can't define the compound assignment operators, just the simple ones:
 - But users can still use the compound assignment operators. We hope the compiler figures out how to avoid creating a new object for *=
- Java: Hopeless!
 - You can't overload operators or use ordinary expression syntax for your own classes! You have to define named functions, so the user codes
 - . . obj1.multiply(obj2) . . in an expression.
 - Such code is hard to read, but usually better than not defining objects at all.

Why doesn't Java support operator overloading?

- Java doesn't support value objects. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Value_object
- Strange notions about readability:
- "... The language designers decided (after much debate) that overloaded operators were a neat idea, but the code that relied on them became hard to read and understand."—David Flanagan: Java in a Nutshell, 1996, O'Reilly & Associates, p. 35.
- "One of the major problems with operator overloading is that it gives the programmer the power to easily write code that is difficult to read."—Paul Tyma, Gabriel Torok, and Troy Downing: Java Primer Plus, 1996, Waite Group Press, p. 254

Part 1 (of 3) Text (or string) data items

The standard string classes in C++, Java, and C#

Examples:

- 1. short fixed-length identifiers
- 2. names of people
- 3. book titles
- Other necessary string classes

Standard string classes

- C++, Java, and C# all provide a standard library string class:
 - -The good:
 - Natural expression syntax for manipulating data
 - The usual (expected) operators and functions
 - Huge maximum length

Good start, but is it sufficient?

- -The bad: (complicating programming)
 - No fixed-length objects
 - ► No contiguous objects within a containing structure.
 - Separate incompatible format & style for (Java) stringBuffer.

Text example 1: fixed-length identifiers

- Many data items used as identifiers (SSN, ISBN, UPC, AcctNo, etc.):
 - have either fixed length or varying length with a small maximum
 - may contain digits, letters, and some punctuation
- Declaring them instances of string is extremely inefficient and complicates programming:
 - non-contiguous storage complicates and slows I-O, comparisons, parameter passing, etc.
 - may accept illegal characters, absurd length, etc.
 - unnecessary length field wastes space
 - What can we do instead in C++?

A C++ Solution:

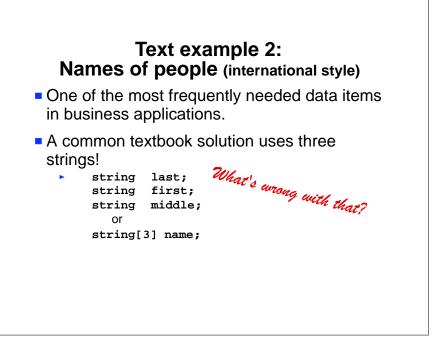
Fixed-length strings can occupy contiguous storage within a containing structure. class Book { Cstring<14> ISBN;

 So when we (shallow) move or copy a Book object, the ISBN moves right along with it.
 What's a Cstring? (more later)

Fixed-length contiguous strings

C++'s class template facility allows us to define a constant-length string class in which:

- The string value is stored **inside** the containing structure, i.e. within a containing record.
 There are no pointers to non-contiguous memory.
- That simplifies programming and yields efficient code.
- Downside: Compiler may generate near-duplicate code if you define multiple Cstring classes.
 - i.e. Cstring<8> is a separate class from Cstring<10>!



Text example 2: Names of people (continued)

- Common textbook solution uses three strings!
 - string last; string first; Of string[3] name; string middle;

-Each component

- occupies non-contiguous storage pointed to from a containing record
- can be between 0 and 65535 (wow!) characters!
- carries a length field (2 bytes? 4 bytes?)
- -Can we tell **George Herbert Walker Bush** and **Cher** to change their names?
- -What if we need to store a Chinese name? Sun Yat-sen, Mao Zedong

One better solution: (There are others)

- Single string with comma following family name: <familyname>,<given names>
- No other restrictions on punctuation
 - Examples: Bush,George Herbert Walker De Gaulle,Charles Mao,Zedong
 - Need to specify maximum size for the whole name (why? how big?)

Advantages? Disadvantages?

One better solution: (continued)

- Advantages:
 - Easy to sort and compare
 - Easy to reformat for polite envelope address, etc.
 George Herbert Walker Bush
 - Much less wasted storage than multiple strings.
 - Accommodates non-European-style names, as long as there's a family name having no embedded comma
 - Allows hyphens and other punctuation (except comma) within any component.
 - Flexible length of each component. Max. size applies to whole name, not to each component.
- Disadvantage:
 - Still non-contiguous with containing record (Are we stuck with that awkwardness?)

Text example 3: Book

(or other literary or performed work) title

- Why do we need a standard?
- Why not just use:
 - what the publisher provides?
 - whatever is printed on the cover?

Problems with titles

- Where would you expect to find in a sorted catalog:
 - "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire"
 - "Das Kapital"?
 - "A Tale of Two Cities"?
 - "La Traviata"?

For most purposes that list is already sorted (assuming that's the <u>external</u> representation)! What's the absolute simplest acceptable standard?

Possible solutions for the internal representation of titles

- a. Move the prefix article to the end, with a separator character that never appears within a title:
 - title = "Tale of Two Cities^A";
- b. Or use two strings:
 - titlePfx ="The";
 - titleBody
 - ="Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire";
- c. Again we must specify a maximum length. *Any other good ideas?*

Summary: Classes for text data items: Do we need more than string?

- string is a relatively recent addition to the C++ standard class library (and thus to the language)
 - huge maximum size
 - non-contiguous memory
 - Java and C# emulated it, more or less
- What else could anyone possibly need? Doesn't that serve any conceivable requirement?

Shocking discovery in programs we've examined

- Many data items declared simply as instances of string shouldn't be!
- They should be instances of a specific class in order to enforce:
 - maximum (& minimum) length
 - formatting and editing rules
 - conversion rules
 - sorting sequence
 - default value, if any
- Those classes can use standard string internally when it's appropriate.

So, which data items are contracted as each structure. Seneral text No definite format or structure. Wide range of size Seneral text Wide range of size Seneral text Sener

Our (IDI) string classes earlier (before std. string) we implemented four string classes, which we still find useful to localizing common kinds of processing: Dstring: Dynamic ike what became the standard library string class. Fstring: Fixed length truncate if too long, pad if too short Vstring: Varying length up to a maximum like PL/I varying eddedt Avoids re-allocation upon += (non const) Cstring: Constant length contiguous with containing struct (mostly short)

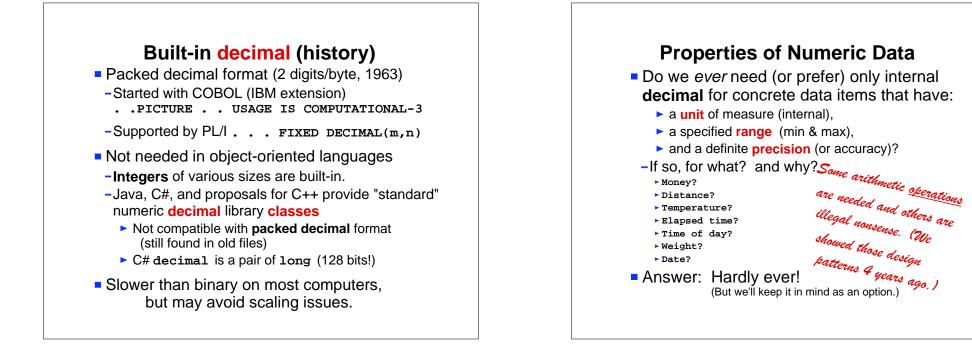
Can we get those four string classes?

Sure but not immediately:

- We're revising the C++ version to substitute standard library string for our original Dstring
- That's easy but the other three classes all interact with Dstring, so they have to be changed and thoroughly tested, too.
- When time permits, we'll do the same for the C# equivalents.
- If you're interested, contact me at cweisert@acm.org (773) 736-9661

Part 2 of 3 Numeric data items

- Issues with decimal scaling
- -Do application programs really need internal (member) decimal? If so, why?
- Examples:
 - -Money
 - -Date
 - -Angle
 - . . .



The argument <u>for</u> internal decimal

- Except for negative powers of 2 (1/2, 1/16, etc.) fractional quantities, such as 1/10, are non-terminating in binary representation.
 - Careless programmer may generate \$44.99999999, unacceptable to end users and fussy auditors.
- Let's look first at amounts of money, since money has received considerable attention (and misinformation) in articles, textbooks, courses, and even language design.

Standard library decimal classes

- Standard library classes
 - C++ Proposal to add Decimal classes decimal32, decimal64, decimal128 (See next page)
 - Java BigDecimal Class (Precludes ordinary expression syntax in computations)
 - C# a decimal item consumes 16 bytes! (This is a .Net standard representation)
- NOTE: None of those is compatible with IBM 360 packed decimal (2 digits per byte), common in old files.

So, when do we need them?

"Proposal to Add Decimal Floating Point Support to C++" http://www.open-std.org/jtc1/sc22/wg21/docs/papers/2012/n3407.html

• "In many areas, especially in finance, exact values need to be processed and the inputs are commonly decimal. Unfortunately, decimal values cannot, in general, be represented accurately using binary floating points even when the decimal values only uses a few digits. Instead, the values become an approximation. As long as the values are carefully processed the original decimal value can be restored from a binary floating point (assuming reasonable restrictions on the number of decimal digits). However, computations and certain conversions introduce subtle errors (e.g. double to float and back to double, even if float is big enough to restore the original decimal value). As a result, the processing of exact decimal values using binary floating points is very error prone."

• Wrong! Binary arithmetic is perfectly accurate with integer scaling. Just pick the right units!

The counter argument

- But avoiding such cases is easy and natural without internal decimal
- Define a Money class (or USMoney, etc.)
 - Just represent the object in integer cents (or whatever the finest increment will be)
 - Apply scaling at input time and output (display) time
 - Addition and subtraction of such money items work fine in a natural way.
 - So does multiplication or division by a pure number, e.g. a percentage or quantity calculation.
 - That was easy (and commonly done 50 years ago) without OOP. It's even easier with OOP.

Why wouldn't we do that?

Popular mythology and a C# "solution"

From the stackoverflow web site: http://stackoverflow.com/guestions/316727/ is-a-double-really-unsuitable-for-money

This question was posed:

"I always tell in c# a variable of type double is not suitable for money. All weird things could happen. But I can't seem to create an example to demonstrate some of these issues. Can anyone provide such an example?"

What were some of the interesting replies?

Some early replies

1. "Very, very unsuitable. Use decimal.

double x = 3.65, y = 0.05, z = 3.7; Console.WriteLine((x + y) == z); // false "

2. "You will get odd errors effectively caused by rounding. In addition, comparisons with exact values are extremely tricky you usually need to apply some sort of epsilon to check for the actual value being "near" a particular one. Here's a concrete example:

```
class Test
{ static void Main()
       double x = 0.1;
       double y = x + x + x;
       Console.WriteLine(y == 0.3); // Prints False
 }
}
```

What was the real problem here?

And some utter confusion

3. "Yes it's unsuitable.

If I remember correctly **double** has about 17 significant numbers, so normally rounding errors will take place far behind the decimal point. Most financial software uses 4 decimals behind the decimal point, that leaves 13 decimals to work with so the maximum number you can work with for single operations is still very much higher than the USA national debt. But rounding errors will add up over time. If your software runs for a long time you'll eventually start losing cents. Certain operations will make this worse. For example adding large amounts to small amounts will cause a significant loss of precision.

You need fixed point datatypes for money operations, most people don't mind if you lose a cent here and there but accountants aren't like most people."

And the last word?

6. "Actually floating-point **double** is perfectly well suited to representing amounts of money as long as you pick a suitable unit.

See http://www.idinews.com/moneyRep.html

So is fixed-point **long**. Either consumes 8 bytes, surely preferable to the 16 consumed by a **decimal** item." – **Conrad Weisert, June 8, 2015**

But with a final dissent!

"Linking an article you wrote that disagrees with decades of common practices and expert options that floating-point is unsuitable for financial transaction representations is going to have to have a little more backup than a single page."

- MuertoExcobito June 8 , 2015 at 15:42

No further discussion has been posted after a year!

Finally: a few sane clarifications

- 4. "Depending on where you live, using 64 bit integers to represent cents or pennies or kopeks or whatever is the smallest unit in your country will usually work just fine. For example, 64 bit signed integers representing cents can represent values up to 92,223 trillion dollars. 32 bit integers are usually unsuitable."
- 5. "My understanding is that most financial systems express currency using integers -- i.e., counting everything in cents. IEEE double precision actually can represent all integers exactly in the range -2^53 through +2^53. (Hacker's Delight, pg. 262) If you use only addition, subtraction and multiplication, and keep everything to integers within this range then you should see no loss of precision."



Money Conclusion

- The issue wasn't whether floating point is "suitable" for representing money.
- The issue was simply the choice of unit for the internal representation.
 - -Either double or long works just fine for representing integer pennies (or whatever the smallest unit is),
 - -and either of them also
 - consumes much less space (half) than the popular decimal class objects
 - yields fast computation on most computer architectures.

So what good are those standard library decimal classes?

- So far, organizations I've worked with have found **no use** for them in representing application data in ordinary business or scientific applications.
- They may be useful in theoretical number-theory research studies.
 - Anything else?

Numeric example 2: Date

C++, Java, & C# provide standard Date classes.

Some combined with TimeOfDay

(Is that a good idea?)

- Some impose weird representation conventions (e.g. January is month 0, 2000 was year 100)
- and amateurish function names

(Date is both the day-of-month function

and the class name!)

Few provide necessary operations

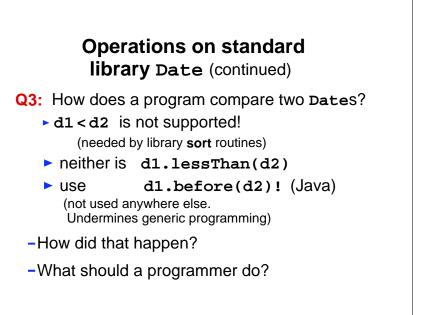
(Which ones are necessary?)

 Don't even think about using those ugly standard library classes in a serious program.

Operations on standard (C++)

library Date (common confusion)

- Q1: What's the result of adding one date to another date?
 - I own two textbooks that define overloaded + for two Dates yielding a Date result!
 - So what Date is July 4, 1776 + September 7, 1941 ?
- **Q2:** What's the result of **subtracting** one date from another date?
 - Standard Date classes don't support this operation, which should yield a Duration (no. of days).
 - So what is January 1, 2017 - December 25, 2016?



Conclusion for Dates

- Applications need a pair of related interacting classes:
 - Date (point-in-time) (See note below)
 - Days (extent-of-time or duration)
- Date range must span the Gregorian (or an alternative) calendar and beyond.
- See http://www.idinews.com/NoDate.html for more details.
- Note: Whether to combine date and time of day in a single value is controversial (and messy) and depends upon the application. We needn't discuss it here.

Numeric example 3: Angle

- Angle follows the same pattern as Money, Weight, ElapsedTime, except for one minor issue.
 - It's the additive design pattern, but the result of any operation must be between -pi and +pi
- Q: Why would a programmer using a language that supports OOP choose not to use an Angle class for any application that deals with plane angles?
 - Why don't C++, Java, and C# standard libraries, which already provide all the trigonometric functions, provide those classes?

Anti-OOP libraries

- The three C-like languages provide the usual trigonometric fuctions as library routines, but no standard class to define the angles themselves!
 - It's as if they wanted to discourage the use of the object paradigm.
 - Java is (as expected) the worst or the three, because it doesn't support expression syntax for objects.
 - ► That's like coding in Fortran.

Part 3 of 3 Discrete data items

- Definition
- Small examples:
- Large examples:

Discrete (or coded) data items

- Possible values:
 - May be a small stable list (maritalStatus) or a large (even unlimited) frequently changing One (telephoneNumber),
 - Never enter into arithmetic calculations.
 - But some may be compared for sequence (with the relational operators) or sorted in lists,
 - Some may be used as identifiers (Part 1 of this presentation), usually internally string Of Cstring.

Two broad categories:

- Small number of possible values: **sex** (or gender) of a person or animal
 - maritalStatus
 - color of a product
- Large number of possible values:
 - ► telephoneNumber "Number" in the data name
 - postalCode (ZIP) doesn't make it a numeric item.

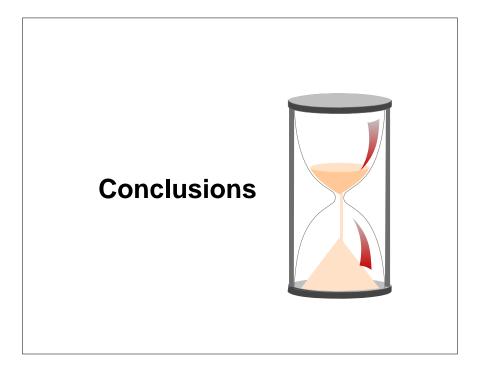
 - What would?
- We never do arithmetic on them, but we may sort them.

Why bother with discrete item classes?

- Assures compliance with standard forms:
- -Is the customer's phone number
 - (202) 393-1200?
 - 202 393-1200?
 - 202 3931200?
 - (202) EXecutive-3 1200?
 - ► (202) EX3-1200?
- Why do we care?
 - Can we produce a sorted list?
 - Will we avoid errors? 202 393120
 - Can we avoid mischievous input (919) 393-1200?

An obvious construct for small number of values that don't change often

- maritalStatus is a good example
 - unknown
 - single
 - married
 - divorced
 - widowed
- The enum type is obvious for internal representation.



Summary questions

- Q1: The O.O. languages support primitive (non-O.O., built-in, inherited from C) data. Is it wrong to declare application data items as instances of those primitive types?
- Q2: What about instances of string and decimal?
- Q3: What about Java? Manipulating primitive data versus objects is almost two separate languages, and expression syntax is ugly.

I hope you're convinced that with object-oriented technology:

- Every numeric data item that has a specified:
 - unit of measure,
 - range,
 - precision
- and every text data item that identifies (or helps to identify) an object
- and every discrete data item that gives the value of an option property

should be an instance of a well-defined error-free, simple, and flexible **class**.

Looking ahead: For another session?

- Tonight we've focused on elementary (text, numeric, & discrete) data items and we've drawn useful conclusions.
- What about composite data (entities, records, structures). Which principles that we just discussed apply to them, too, and how? In particular:
 - The notorious Person class
- What about container classes? (Java calls them "collections")

BONUS TOPPIC (*optional*) I've been asked to show again the electric circuits example that we examined three years ago: It illustrates the power of OOP in simulating real-world systems. It will take about six minutes Those who aren't interested are free to leave now, without hurting the speaker's feelings.

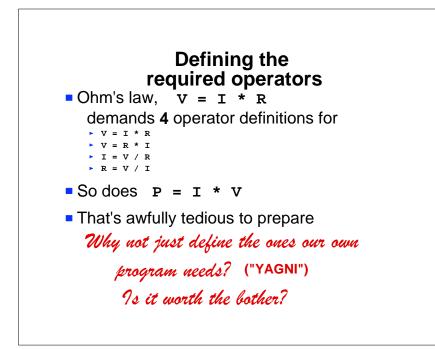
Direct Current Electrical Quantities

Some types (classes) required:

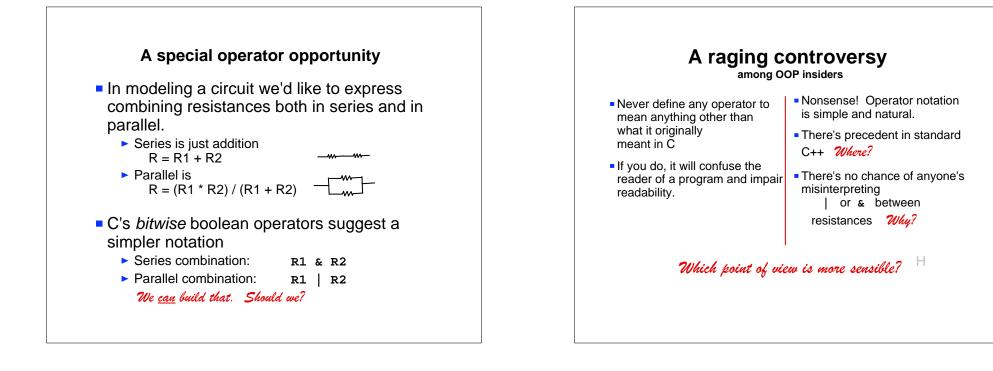
Data type	Unit of measure
Potential	Volts
Current	Amperes
Power	Watts
Resistance	Ohms

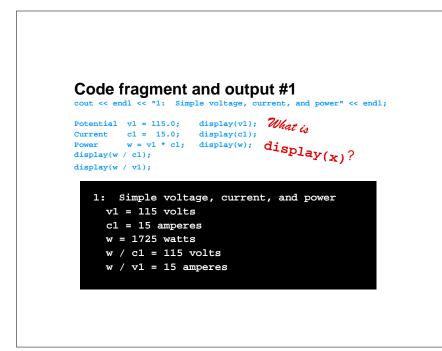
Some operations:

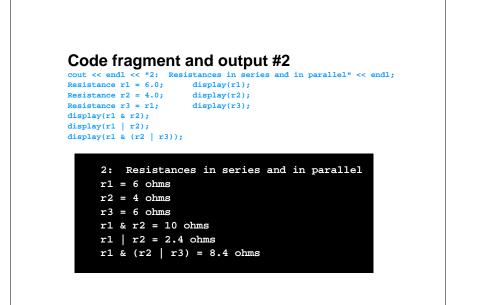
- power = voltage * current
- voltage = current * resistance



A troublesome operator issue Electrical engineers often want to combine the two earlier formulas V = I * R and P = I * V into P = I * I * R What would we need to define to support that? What problems arise? No problem if the user-programmer parenthesizes P = I * (I * R) but must we require that?







- 3: More complicated computations
- 115 volts across 4 ohms gives 28.75 amperes 15 amperes through 4 ohms requires 60 volts and uses 900 watts
- 4 60-watt bulbs use 240 watts and draw 2.08696 amperes at 115 volts
- A 115 volts, 15 amperes circuit can support 28 60-watt light bulbs.

Thank you

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