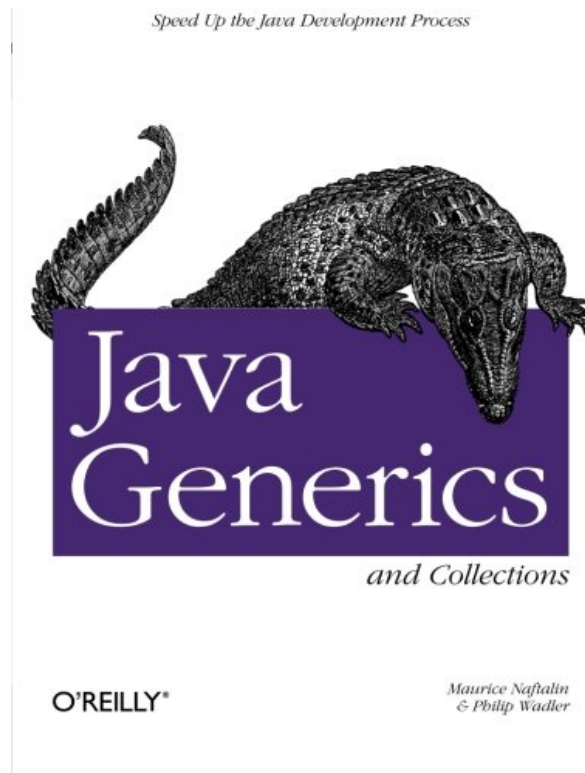# JAVA GENERICS AND COLLECTIONS BY MAURICE NAFTALIN, PHILIP WADLER

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Review
"This is a very good book on two fairly focused topics - generics and collections. If you plan to make best use of either or both, buy a copy." - Ian Elliot, VSJ, April 2007

About the Author

Maurice Naftalin is Director of Software Development at Morningside Light Ltd., a software consultancy in the United Kingdom. Maurice consults mainly in object-oriented technologies and teaches Java classes part-time at Learning Tree. He has three decades' experience as a programmer, team leader, and commercial trainer.

Philip Wadler is a professor of theoretical computer science at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, where his research focuses on functional and logic programming. He co-authored the Generic Java standard that became the basis for generics in Sun's Java 5.0 and also contributed to the XQuery language standard base. Professor Wadler received his Ph.D., in computer science from Carnegie-Mellon University and co-wrote "Introduction to Functional Programming" (Prentice-Hall).

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This comprehensive guide shows you how to master the most importantchanges to Java since it was first released. Generics and the greatlyexpanded collection libraries have tremendously increased the power ofJava 5 and Java 6. But they have also confused many developers whohaven't known how to take advantage of these new features.

Java Generics and Collections covers everything from the mostbasic uses of generics to the strangest corner cases. It teaches youeverything you need to know about the collections libraries, so you'llalways know which collection is appropriate for any given task, andhow to use it.

Topics covered include:

- Fundamentals of generics: type parameters and generic methods
- Other new features: boxing and unboxing, foreach loops, varargs
- Subtyping and wildcards
- Evolution not revolution: generic libraries with legacy clients andgeneric clients with legacy libraries
- Generics and reflection
- Design patterns for generics
- Sets, Queues, Lists, Maps, and their implementations
- Concurrent programming and thread safety with collections
- Performance implications of different collections

Generics and the new collection libraries they inspired take Java to anew level. If you want to take your software development practice toa new level, this book is essential reading.

Philip Wadler is Professor of Theoretical Computer Science at theUniversity of Edinburgh, where his research focuses on the design ofprogramming languages. He is a co-designer of GJ, work thatbecame the basis for generics in Sun's Java 5.0.

Maurice Naftalin is Technical Director at Morningside Light Ltd., a software consultancy in the United Kingdom. He has most recently served as an architect and mentor at NSB Retail Systems plc, and as the leader of the client development team of a major UK government social service system.

"A brilliant exposition of generics. By far the best book on thetopic, it provides a crystal clear tutorial that starts with thebasics and ends leaving the reader with a deep understanding of boththe use and design of generics."
Gilad Bracha, Java Generics Lead, Sun Microsystems

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Most helpful customer reviews

25 of 25 people found the following review helpful.
Excellent explanation of Java generics and its usage
By calvinnme
The intent of Generics is make your Java code type-safer. While Java is a strongly typed language, it lacks type-safety when it comes to using collections. Generics were added to the Java programming language in 2004 as part of J2SE 5.0. Unlike C++ templates, generic Java code generates only one compiled version of a generic class. Generic Java classes can only use object types as type parameters -- primitive types are not allowed. Thus a List of type Integer, which uses a primitive wrapper class is legal, while a List of type int is not legal.

Part I of this book provides a thorough introduction to generics. Generics are a powerful, and sometimes controversial, new feature of the Java programming language. This part of the book describes generics, using the Collections Framework as a source of examples.

The first five chapters focus on the fundamentals of generics. Chapter 1 gives an overview of generics and other new features in Java 5, including boxing, foreach loops, and functions with a variable number of arguments. Chapter 2 reviews how subtyping works and explains how wildcards let you use subtyping in connection with generics. Chapter 3 describes how generics work with the Comparable interface, which requires a notion of bounds on type variables. Chapter 4 looks at how generics work with various declarations, including constructors, static members, and nested classes. Chapter 5 explains how to evolve

legacy code to exploit generics, and how ease of evolution is a key advantage of the design of generics in Java. Once you have these five chapters under your belt, you will be able to use generics effectively in most basic situations.

The next four chapters treat advanced topics. Chapter 6 explains how the same design that leads to ease of evolution also necessarily leads to a few rough edges in the treatment of casts, exceptions, and arrays. The fit between generics and arrays is the worst rough corner of the language, so two principles are formulated to help work around the problems. Chapter 7 explains new features that relate generics and reflection, including the newly generified type "Class T" and additions to the Java library that support reflection of generic types. Chapter 8 contains advice on how to use generics effectively in practical coding. Checked collections, security issues, specialized classes, and binary compatibility are all considered. Chapter 9 presents five extended examples, looking at how generics affect five well-known design patterns: Visitor, Interpreter, Function, Strategy, and Subject-Observer. The following is a list of chapters in part one:

Chapter 1. Introduction

Chapter 2. Subtyping and Wildcards

Chapter 3. Comparison and Bounds

Chapter 4. Declarations

Chapter 5. Evolution, Not Revolution

Chapter 6. Reification

Chapter 7. Reflection

Chapter 8. Effective Generics

Chapter 9. Design Patterns

Part II is about the Java Collections Framework, which is a set of interfaces and classes in the packages java.util and java.util.concurrent. They provide client programs with various models of how to organize their objects, and various implementations of each model. These models are sometimes called abstract data types, and they are needed because different programs need different ways of organizing their objects. In one situation, you might want to organize your program's objects in a sequential list because their ordering is important and there are duplicates. In another, a set might be the right data type because now ordering is unimportant and you want to discard the duplicates. These two data types and others are represented by different interfaces in the Collections Framework, and there are examples of their use in chapter 10. However, none of these data types has a single "best" implementation--that is, one implementation that is better than all the others for all the operations. For example, a linked list may be better than an array implementation of lists for inserting and removing elements from the middle, but much worse for random access. So choosing the right implementation for a program involves knowing how it will be used as well as what is available.

This part of the book starts with an overview of the Framework and then looks in detail at each of the main interfaces and the standard implementations of them. Finally the book examines the special-purpose implementation and generic algorithms provided in the Collections class. The following is a list of chapters

in part two:

Overall, this is a very good book on the subject of Java generics, and I highly recommend it.

29 of 32 people found the following review helpful.
Good, but could be better
By gGuthrie
Java generics are a welcome and important addition to the Java language, but because of their Erasure based implementation, they are somewhat limited and confusing to use.

This book is good in that it does cover many of the issues, and some interesting applications, but is I think limited in both explanations, and examples. Their section on Generics and Design patterns is a welcome one, but very short, and not very long on rationale or depth on other applications. If the examples they show is the only impact of generics on design patterns, something is wrong!

The standard Generics tutorials by Bracha and Langer, and the IBM DeveloperWorks series by Allen are more complete, and more descriptive, and free! I found the lumping of collections together with Generics ok, but a bit indicative that they ran out of real generics material. They are also IMHO a bit defensive on the long contested Erasure approach, but do explain their viewpoint well. They fault the C# and C++ approaches too quickly, noting the problems but not the corresponding solutions provided. Hopefully next versions of Java will (soon) provide reified versions of generics, it looks like it is in process now.

I did think it a worthwhile read, but not as much as expected.

16 of 17 people found the following review helpful.
Average, Nothing Exciting... not much more than its online alternative...
By J. Brutto
It's a decent reference and a great read to go over generics and the collections framework. But don't get me wrong, it's nothing you can't get from just reading the Sun-provided API documentation or tutorials covering the topics.

It's comprehensive, sure... but the examples lean to near overkill on each topic in some areas. In other areas, there just isn't enough information or example code to really drive home the ideas.

It's average and worth the read. Not worth keeping around, though. It's one of those "read-once-then-give-it-to-a-friend" books. Like I said, though: you should definitely read this book if you're looking for more information on these topics. You'll just find yourself hitting resources online for more information in areas you are particularly interested in (concurrency w/ collections, for example).

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