

DEBUGGING AND TESTING ROBOT PROGRAMS

Debugging and testing robot programs

Table of Contents

Testing strategies	3
How to write an easy to test robot program	4
Using test mode	7

Testing strategies

How to write an easy to test robot program

The command based programming model is designed to simplify creating very easy to write and especially easy to test robot programs. All the pieces come together when it's time to see how your program works so that pieces developed by multiple programmers can be integrated and tested with the main robot program.

Break up the robot into subsystems

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The first step is to break the robot program into subsystems that each represent a separately controlled mechanism on the robot. Each subsystem has methods that operate the mechanism in some way.

Create commands for each robot behavior

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Commands define the behaviors of the robot, that is the operation of the subsystems over time. A command starts a subsystem doing something, then waits until it is finished. Upon completion, the next command can be scheduled. It is the defining of commands for each behavior that is the key to making it easy to test the code as you'll see in the next few sections of this lesson.

Add commands to the SmartDashboard

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Once one more commands are developed, they can be tested by adding them to the SmartDashboard. It's easy to add commands, simply call `SmartDashboard.PutData()` with the command name that should be displayed and the command object itself.

Debugging and testing robot programs

Test commands individually using the SmartDashboard

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When a command is added to the SmartDashboard a button is created on the screen that will, when pressed, schedule the command to run. By doing this you can easily test each command individually to make sure it works. This is a key principle in programming, that is unit test each part of the larger program separately, then you'll have confidence that putting the units (commands) together into a larger program will also work.

Adding commands to the SmartDashboard using RobotBuilder

Adding commands to the SmartDashboard using RobotBuilder

The idea of adding commands to testing pieces of your robot program individually is so useful that a checkbox was added to RobotBuilder to automatically generate SmartDashboard buttons. Just check the box for any command and it will automatically appear as a button that, when pressed, will run the command.

Test commands individually using a joystick button

Test commands individually using a joystick button

In addition to testing commands using the SmartDashboard, you can also "wire" commands to joystick buttons. This is another easy way to verify that commands work as you expect. And, in fact, in your finished robot program, you will likely have a number of commands wired to many of the joystick buttons as a way of controlling the robot.

In this example there is a command called ScoreATube that presumably places a scoring object somewhere. Then there is a JoystickButton object called TubeScoringButton that has as its command the ScoreATube command. When the button is pressed, the command will run.

Combine simple commands into Command Groups

Combine simple commands into Command Groups

Once individual commands are working, they can be combined into Command Groups. Command Groups are commands that each consist of a list of commands to run when scheduled. This is where much of the power of the system comes into play. Suppose the robot needs to score an inner tube by driving forward for some distance, spinning rollers to release the tube for 1 second, moving a wrist joint, and backing up the robot. If there are commands for each of those operations, they can be individually tested, then a command group just lists all the individual commands, and the group is tied to a button. When the button is pressed, all the individual commands in the group run sequentially. Commands can even be scheduled to run in parallel for operations that can happen simultaneously.

Add robot status to the SmartDashboard

Often you want to see the status of the robot by displaying values on the driver station. In the past this was handled with adding lots of print statements to the program and values poured out of the program, usually so fast that it was hard to know what was going on. With the SmartDashboard, you can create a display just by sending values, and they will automatically be displayed in the graphical user interface. In fact, you can change the format of the fields to more appropriate displays. For example, for a gyro, its heading can be displayed as a compass.

In addition display "widgets" or graphical elements can be created as standard Java code and added to the dashboard to make custom dashboards easily by programmers. For more detail see the [section on the SmartDashboard](#).

Debugging and testing robot programs

Using test mode

It is important to verify the operation of the robot before using it for a match, demonstration or other task. So often wires can be pulled loose, circuit breakers are left out, or other issues that might cause the robot to not operate as expected. There are a number of strategies for testing your robot code. You might have a checklist where each subsystem is manually verified using the operator controls. You can also test the autonomous operation this way when the robot is off the ground can the operation can be observed.

Test mode is designed to enable programmers to have a place to put code to verify that all systems on the robot are functioning. In each of the robot program templates there is a place to add test code to the robot. If you use the IterativeRobot template, or use command-based programming you can easily see the operation of all the motors and sensors through the LiveWindow.

Enabling Test mode

Enabling Test mode

Test mode on the robot can be enabled from the Driver Station just like autonomous or teleop. When in test mode, the `test()` methods run. To enable test mode in the Driver Station, select the "Test" button and enable the robot. The test mode code will then run.

Adding Test mode code to your SimpleRobot template

Adding Test mode code to your SimpleRobot template

The SimpleRobot template is the easiest way to get started with robot programming, but it is somewhat limited when you try to add more features to the program. To add test code to a SimpleRobot based program add a method called `test()` (or `Test()` in C++). The test method will be called by the SimpleRobot base class when the robot is put into test mode from the Driver Station.

Debugging and testing robot programs

Here you can add code to automatically test sensors and motors or send LiveWindow data to the SmartDashboard. In this Java example, we are:

1. Adding all the sensors and actuators for the robot to the LiveWindow so that they can be displayed or manipulated
2. Calling LiveWindow.run() periodically when in test mode to cause the values to update.

Additional robot test code can be added in the test method as well. For example, you might want to run some motors and verify that encoders are operating. Code could be easily written to slowly turn a motor and check the encoder values. This would verify that the motor and the encoder are both working properly.

Test mode in the SmartDashboard

Test mode in the SmartDashboard

The above sample code produces the following output when the Driver Station is put into Test mode then enabled. YOU can operate the motors by moving the sliders and read the values of sensors such as the wrist potentiometer.

Notice that the values are grouped by the subsystem names to group related actuators and sensors for easy testing. The subsystem names are supplied in the AddActuator() and AddSensor() method calls as shown in the code examples. This grouping, while not required, makes it much easier to test one subsystem at a time and have all the values next to each other on the screen.

Using Test mode with the IterativeRobot template

Using Test mode with the IterativeRobot template

The IterativeRobot template lends itself quite nicely to testing since it will periodically call the test() method (or Test() in C++) in your robot program. The test() method will be called with each DriverStation update, about every 20ms, and it is a good place to do whatever testing commands or LiveWindow updates are desired for testing. The LiveWindow updating is built into the IterativeRobot template so there is very little that is necessary to do in the program to get LiveWindow updates. Note: this works even if you are using the IterativeRobot template and not doing Command-based programming.

Debugging and testing robot programs

In this example the sensors are registered with the LiveWindow and during the testPeriodic method, simply update all the values by calling the LiveWindow run() method. If your program is causing too much network traffic you can call the run method less frequently by, for example, only calling it every 5 updates for a 100ms update rate.

PID Tuning in Test mode

PID Tuning in Test mode

Tuning PID loops is often a challenging prospect with frequent recompiles of the program to get the correct values. When using the command based programming model, writing PID subsystems to the robot displays and allows adjustment of PID constants with immediate feedback of the results. See more information about PID Tuning using the SmartDashboard in [this section](#) from the SmartDashboard manual.