

19.2 Recursion

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 17 marks

KEY WORDS recursion 递归 • call stack 调用栈 • stack frame 栈帧 • recursive case 递归情形
• stack overflow 栈溢出

Objective

Build the skills to answer exam questions on **recursion** 递归 — base/recursive cases, tracing, and how the compiler uses the call stack.

You must be able to:

- explain **recursion** (base case + recursive case)
- **trace** a recursive function
- explain what the **compiler** / **call stack** does for each call

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a question type used later — follow the steps and you can do the Practice and Exam-style questions yourself.

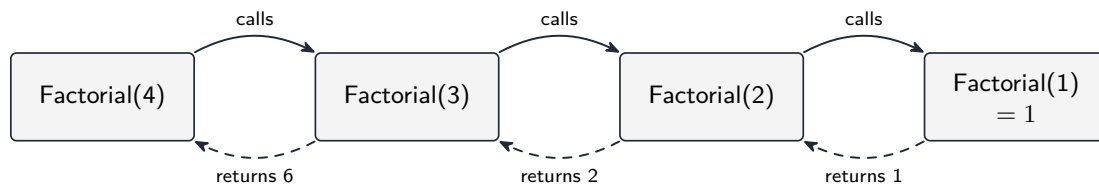
■ What recursion is

A **recursive** function calls **itself** with a smaller input, until a **base case** stops it:

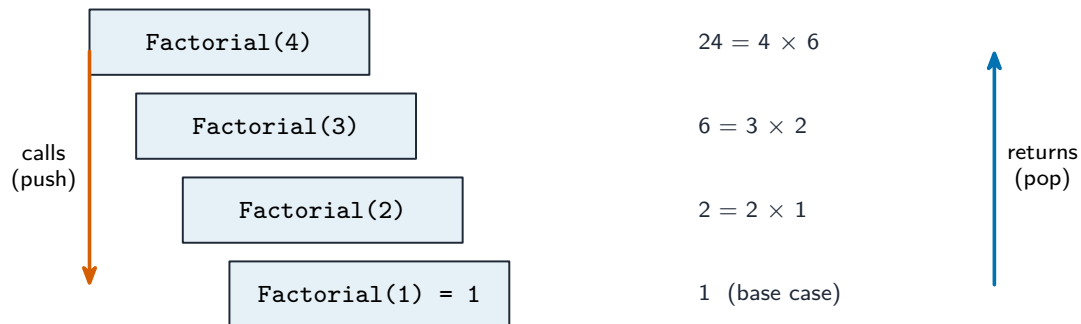
```
FUNCTION Factorial(n : INTEGER) RETURNS INTEGER
  IF n = 0 OR n = 1 THEN
    RETURN 1 // base case
  ELSE
    RETURN n * Factorial(n - 1) // recursive case
  ENDIF
ENDFUNCTION
```

■ Tracing

Factorial(4) calls down to the base case, then the returns **unwind** back up:



result: 24



Recursion builds up a call stack

■ The call stack

The compiler gives every call its own **stack frame** holding its **parameters**, **local variables** and **return address**. On return, the value is passed back, the frame is **popped**, and execution resumes at the return address — so calls don't overwrite each other's variables. Missing the base case → **infinite recursion** → **stack overflow**.

■ Recursion vs iteration

Any recursive routine can be rewritten as an **iterative** one (a loop, plus your own stack if needed). Iteration usually uses **less memory** (no stack frames) and runs faster; recursion is often **shorter and clearer** for self-similar problems (trees, divide-and-conquer).

2 Practice

Now apply the methods above.

2.1 State what a **base case** is.

[1]

2.2 State what the **recursive case** does.

[1]

2.3 State what happens if a recursive function has **no base case**. [1]

2.4 State **two** things each **stack frame** holds. [2]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Describe what is meant by **recursion**. [2]

3.2 Trace `Factorial(4)`. State the value **returned** at each level of the recursion. [3]

3.3 Explain what happens on the **call stack** each time a recursive function is called. [3]

3.4 Give **one** feature that makes a problem suitable for recursion, and **one** example application. [2]

3.5 State **one** advantage and **one** disadvantage of writing a routine **recursively** instead of **iteratively**. [2]
