Resources: Getting Started with GDB

A debugger is a program that allows you to monitor your program as it runs, inspecting the flow of the program and the values of variables.

To use \texttt{gdb}, the GNU DeBugger on a C++ program, you must recompile the program, telling the compiler to leave debugger information in the program. This is accomplished by adding the \texttt{-g} option to all \texttt{g++} commands. If you are using a \texttt{Makefile}, edit the file to accomplish this task. Remove any existing object files \texttt{rm *.o}. Then build again \texttt{make}.

To run the debugger on your program (I’ll assume your program is called \texttt{ppm_menu} for now.), launch like this:

\begin{verbatim}
gdb ./ppm_menu
\end{verbatim}

You will now see the \texttt{gdb} prompt. GDB has opened your program, but is not running it yet. Let’s assume you want to watch your program’s flow of execution in a couple of functions named \texttt{imageMenu} and \texttt{takeAction}. You can tell the debugger you want it to pause execution anytime either of these functions are called by setting break points. Like this:

\begin{verbatim}
break imageMenu
break takeAction
\end{verbatim}

Now you can start running the program, in the debugger by using the \texttt{run} command:

\begin{verbatim}
run
\end{verbatim}

The program will execute until one of the break points is reached, or the program terminates. Let’s say that the program enters the \texttt{imageMenu} function and so GDB pauses execution. You can now step through the statements in this function one at a time using the \texttt{next} command.

\begin{verbatim}
next
next
...
next
\end{verbatim}

Every time you say \texttt{next}, gdb will run the next line of code. Along the way, you might want to examine the value of a variable. You can see variable values using the \texttt{print} command. For example, if you wanted to see the value of a variable named \texttt{output_image}, you could say:

\begin{verbatim}
print output_image
\end{verbatim}

If you are done stepping through the program one line at a time and want to continue running the program at full speed, you can use the \texttt{continue} command. The program will continue until another break point is reached, or the program terminates.

If you just want to stop the debugger, use the \texttt{quit} command.

The debugger has many more features, but that should get you started.