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Subject: Re: About keywords and positional parameters  
Posted by [David Fanning](#) on Fri, 08 Nov 2002 20:32:19 GMT  
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JD Smith (jdsmith@as.arizona.edu) writes:

> Just to be clear, I've never actually used this method (using  
> `arg_present()` essentially as an input test) in real-life code... it's  
> not really all that helpful. In fact, I wrote it just to get under  
> your skin, what with your braggadocious claim that you could never  
> know if a keyword is *\*used\** ;). From my perspective, there are only  
> three real cases worth keeping track of:  
>  
> 1. An input keyword: Use `n_elements()` to see if it's present, or  
> `keyword_set()` if it's intended to be a boolean.  
> 2. An output keyword: Use `arg_present()` if computing the output is  
> actually optional in your program, and you want to save the  
> trouble of calculating it if the caller didn't ask for it.  
> 3. An input/output keyword: Use a combination of the above two,  
> reserving `n_elements/keyword_set` for input tests, and `arg_present`  
> for output tests.

JD and I don't really need to be having this conversation, because both of us know perfectly well how to handle keywords correctly (and neither of us would probably ever have a need to know if a keyword was "used" or not). But for the sake of completeness, and for the edification of the 63.58% of IDL programmers (according to an informal survey I've taken) that use `KEYWORD_SET` incorrectly in their programs, I reiterate: `KEYWORD_SET` [capitals deliberate] should be used **ONLY** for keywords that have Boolean values. :-)

Cheers,

David

P.S. Let's just say that if everyone ripped `KEYWORD_SET` out of their code and substituted `N_ELEMENTS` the world would probably be a better place. (Or, at the very least, more functional.)

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