flex is not a bad tool to use for doing modest text transformations and for programs that collect statistics on input.

```c
%%
"colour" { printf("color"); } 
"flavour" { printf("flavor"); } 
"clever" { printf("smart"); } 
"smart" { printf("elegant"); } 
"liberal" { printf("conservative"); } 
. { printf("%s", yytext); }

%%
main()
{
  yylex();
}
```

More often than not, though, you’ll want to use flex to generate a scanner that divides the input into tokens that are then used by other parts of your program.
We'll start by recognizing only integers, four basic arithmetic operators, and a unary absolute value operator.

The first five patterns are literal operators, written as quoted strings, and the actions, for now, just print a message saying what matched. The quotes tell flex to use the strings as is, rather than interpreting them as regular expressions.

The sixth pattern matches an integer. The bracketed pattern [0-9] matches any single digit, and the following + sign means to match one or more of the preceding item, which here means a string of one or more digits. The action prints out the string that's matched, using the pointer `yytext` that the scanner sets after each match.

The seventh pattern matches a newline character, represented by the usual C `\n` sequence.

The eighth pattern ignores whitespace. It matches any single space or tab (`\t`), and the empty action code does nothing.
In this simple flex program, there’s no C code in the third section. The flex library (-lfl) provides a tiny main program that just calls the scanner, which is adequate for this example.

By default, the terminal will collect input from the user until he presses Enter/Return.

Then the whole line is pushed to the input filestream of your program.

This is useful because your program does not have to deal with interpreting all keyboard events (e.g. remove letters when Backspace is pressed).
Coroutines are computer-program components that allow multiple entry for suspending and resuming execution at certain locations.

Most programs with flex scanners use the scanner to return a stream of tokens that are handled by a parser.

Each time the program needs a token, it calls yylex(), which reads a little input and returns the token.

When it needs another token, it calls yylex() again. The scanner acts as a coroutine; that is, each time it returns, it remembers where it was, and on the next call it picks up where it left off.
The rule is actually quite simple: If action code returns, scanning resumes on the next call to \texttt{yylex()} ; if it doesn't return, scanning resumes immediately.

\begin{verbatim}
"+"    { return ADD; }
[0-9]+ { return NUMBER; }
[ \t] { /* ignore whitespace */ }
\end{verbatim}
When a flex scanner returns a stream of tokens, each token actually has two parts, the token and the token's value. The token is a small integer. The token numbers are arbitrary, except that token zero always means end-of-file. When bison creates a parser, bison assigns the token numbers automatically starting at 258 (this avoids collisions with literal character tokens, discussed later) and creates a .h with definitions of the tokens numbers. But for now, we'll just define a few tokens by hand:

```
NUMBER = 258,
ADD = 259,
SUB = 260,
MUL = 261,
DIV = 262,
ABS = 263,
EOL = 264 end of line
```
We define the token numbers in a C enum
make `yyval` , the variable that stores
the token value, an integer, which is
adequate for the first version of our
calculator.

For each of the tokens, the scanner
returns the appropriate code for the
token; for numbers, it turns the string
of digits into an integer and stores it
in `yyval` before returning
$ flex fb1-4.l
$ cc lex.yy.c -lfl
$ ./a.out
a / 34 + |45
Mystery character a
262
258 = 34
259
263
258 = 45
264