

Lecture 21: Threads and Concurrency

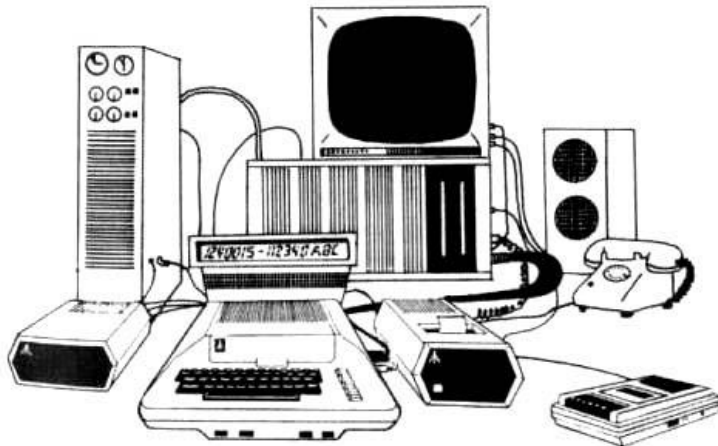
CS 105

Spring 2026

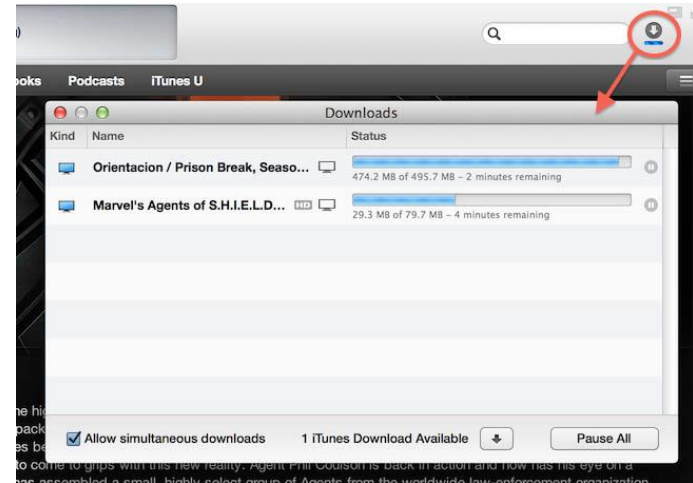
Why Concurrent Programs?



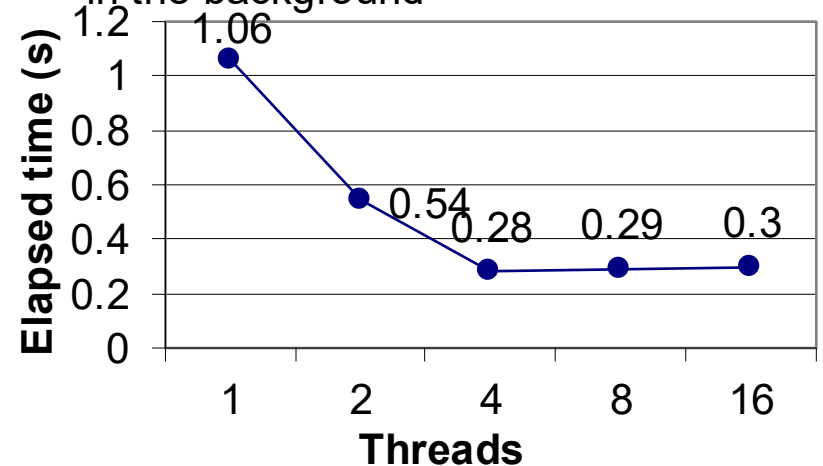
Program Structure: expressing logically concurrent programs



Responsiveness: managing I/O devices



Responsiveness: shifting work to run in the background

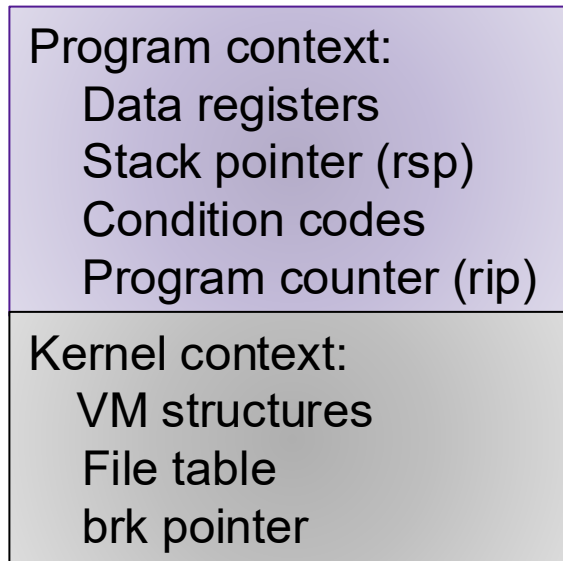


Performance: exploiting multiprocessors

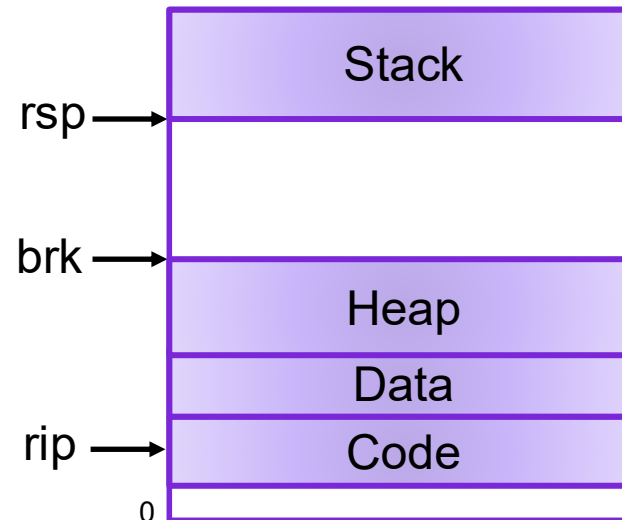
Traditional View of a Process

- Process = process context + (virtual) memory state

Process Control Block

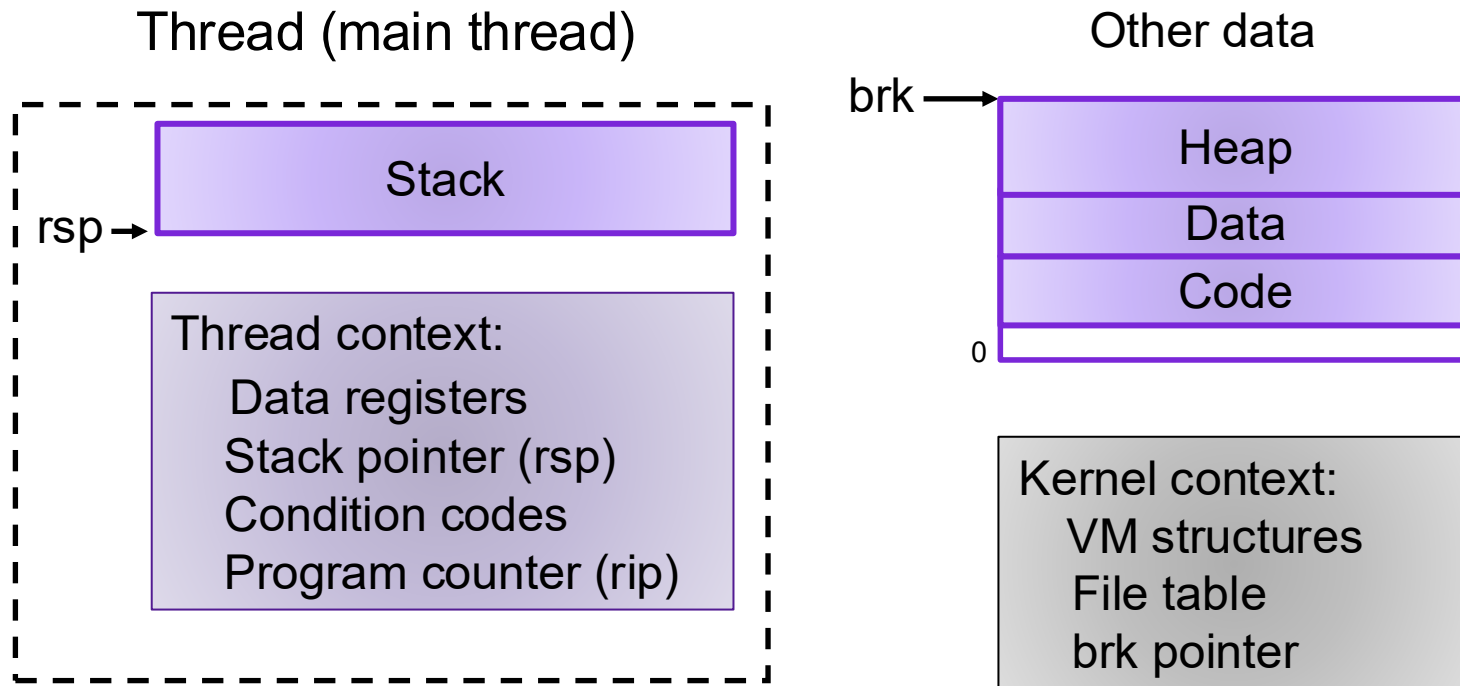


Virtual Memory



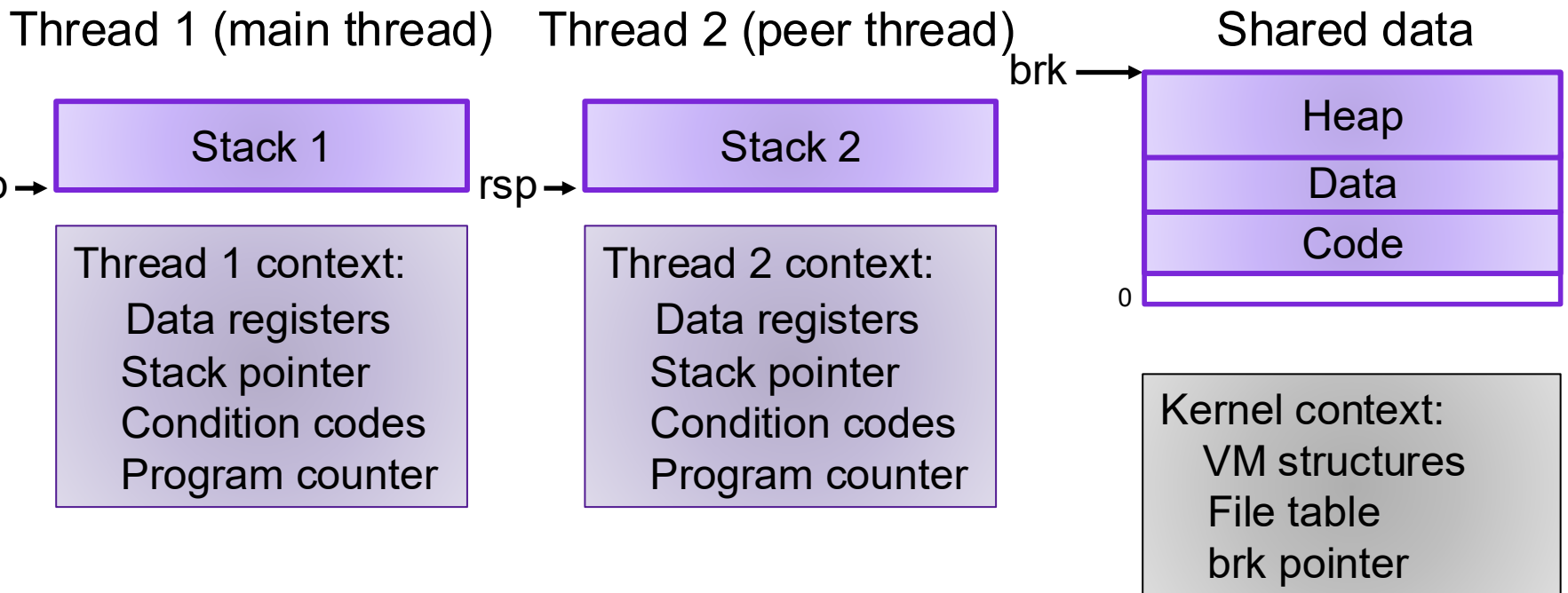
Alternate View of a Process

- Process = thread + other state



A Process With Multiple Threads

- Multiple threads can be associated with a process
 - Each thread has its own logical control flow
 - Each thread has its own stack for local variables
 - Each thread has its own thread id (TID)
 - Each thread shares the same code, data, and kernel context



Threads vs. Processes

- How threads and processes are similar
 - Each has its own logical control flow
 - Each can run concurrently with others (possibly on different cores)
 - Each is scheduled and context switched
- How threads and processes are different
 - Threads share all code and data (except local stacks)
 - Processes (typically) do not
 - Threads are somewhat less expensive than processes
 - Thread control (creating and reaping) is half as expensive as process control
 - ~20K cycles to create and reap a process
 - ~10K cycles (or less) to create and reap a thread
 - Thread context switches are less expensive (e.g., don't flush TLB)

Posix Threads Interface

C (Pthreads)

- **Creating and reaping threads**
 - `pthread_create()`
 - `pthread_join()`
- **Determining your thread ID**
 - `pthread_self()`
- **Terminating threads**
 - `pthread_cancel()`
 - `pthread_exit()`
 - `exit()` [terminates all threads]
 - `RET` [terminates current thread]

Python (threading)

- **Creating and reaping threads**
 - `Thread()`
 - `thread.join()`
- **Determining your thread ID**
 - `thread.get_ident()`
- **Terminating threads**
 - `thread.exit()`
 - `RET` [terminates current thread]

The Pthreads "hello, world" Program

```
/*
 * hello.c - Pthreads "hello, world" program
 */
#include "csapp.h"
void* thread(void* vargp);

int main() {

    pthread_t tid;
    pthread_create(&tid, NULL, hello, NULL);
    pthread_join(tid, NULL);
    exit(0);
}
```

Thread ID

Thread attributes
(usually NULL)

Thread routine

Thread arguments
(void* p)

Return value
(void** p)

```
void* hello(void* vargp) { /* thread routine */

    printf("Hello, world!\n");
    return NULL;
}
```

Example: Sharing with Threads

```
char** ptr; /* global var */

int main(){


    pthread_t tid;
    char* msgs[2] = {"Hello from foo",
                    "Hello from bar"};

    ptr = msgs;
    for (int i = 0; i < 2; i++){
        pthread_create(&tid, NULL,
                      fun, (void*) i);
    }
    pthread_exit(NULL);
}
```

```
void* fun(void* vargp){

    long myid = (long) vargp;
    static int cnt = 0;

    printf("[%d]: %s (cnt=%d)\n",
           myid, ptr[myid], ++cnt);
    return NULL;
}
```



fun threads reference main thread's stack indirectly through global ptr variable

Mapping Variable Instances to Memory

- Global variables
 - *Def:* Variable declared outside of a function
 - **Virtual memory contains exactly one instance of any global variable**
- Local variables
 - *Def:* Variable declared inside function without `static` attribute
 - **Each thread stack contains one instance of each local variable**
- Local static variables
 - *Def:* Variable declared inside function with the `static` attribute
 - **Virtual memory contains exactly one instance of any local static variable.**

Exercise 1: Shared Variables

```
char** ptr; /* global var */

int main() {

    pthread_t tid;
    char* msgs[2] = {"Hello from foo",
                    "Hello from bar"};

    ptr = msgs;
    for (int i = 0; i < 2; i++) {
        pthread_create(&tid, NULL,
                      fun, (void *)i);
    }
    pthread_exit(NULL);
}
```

```
void* fun(void* vargp) {
    long myid = (long) vargp;
    static int cnt = 0;

    printf("[%d]: %s (cnt=%d)\n",
           myid, ptr[myid], ++cnt);
    return NULL;
}
```

Which variables are shared (aka can be accessed by more than one thread)?

- ptr
- cnt
- i
- msgs
- myid

Exercise 1: Shared Variables

- Which variables are shared?
 - A variable x is shared iff multiple threads reference at least one instance of x .

<i>Variable instance</i>	<i>Referenced by main thread?</i>	<i>Referenced by peer thread 0?</i>	<i>Referenced by peer thread 1?</i>
<code>ptr</code>			
<code>cnt</code>			
<code>i.main</code>			
<code>msgs.main</code>			
<code>myid.fun0</code>			
<code>myid.fun1</code>			

Why not Concurrent Programs?

```
/* Global shared variable */
volatile long cnt = 0; /* Counter */

int main(int argc, char** argv) {
    long niters;
    pthread_t tid1, tid2;

    niters = atoi(argv[1]);
    pthread_create(&tid1, NULL,
                  count_func, &niters);
    pthread_create(&tid2, NULL,
                  count_func, &niters);
    pthread_join(tid1, NULL);
    pthread_join(tid2, NULL);

    /* Check result */
    if (cnt != (2 * niters))
        printf("BOOM! cnt=%ld\n", cnt);
    else
        printf("OK cnt=%ld\n", cnt);
    exit(0);
}
```

```
/* Thread routine */
void* count_func(void* vargp) {
    long i, niters;
    niters = *((long*) vargp);

    for (i = 0; i < niters; i++) {
        cnt++;
    }

    return NULL;
}
```

Assembly Code for Counter Loop

C code for counter loop in thread i

```
for (i = 0; i < niters; i++){  
    cnt++;  
}
```

<pre>movq (%rdi), %rcx testq %rcx,%rcx jle .L2 movl \$0, %eax</pre>	}	H_i : Head
<pre>.L3: movq cnt(%rip), %rdx addq \$1, %rdx movq %rdx, cnt(%rip)</pre>		
<pre>addq \$1, %rax cmpq %rcx, %rax jne .L3 .L2:</pre>	}	T_i : Tail

Race conditions

- A race condition is a timing-dependent error involving shared state
 - whether the error occurs depends on thread schedule
- program execution/schedule can be non-deterministic
- compilers and processors can re-order instructions

A concrete example...

- You and your roommate share a refrigerator. Being good roommates, you both try to make sure that the refrigerator is always stocked with milk.
- **Liveness:** if you are out of milk, someone buys milk
- **Safety:** you never have more than one quart of milk



Algorithm 1:

```
if (milk == 0) {           // no milk
    milk++;                // buy milk
}
```

A problematic schedule

You		Your Roommate	
3:00	Look in fridge; out of milk		
3:05	Leave for store		
3:10	Arrive at store	3:10	Look in fridge; out of milk
3:15	Buy milk	3:15	Leave for store
3:20	Arrive home; put milk in fridge	3:20	Arrive at store
		3:25	Buy milk
		3:30	Arrive home; put milk in fridge

Safety violation:
You have too much milk and it spoils

Solution 1: Leave a note

- You and your roommate share a refrigerator. Being good roommates, you both try to make sure that the refrigerator is always stocked with milk.



Algorithm 2:

```
if (milk == 0) {           // no milk
    if (note == 0) {      // no note
        note = 1;        // leave note
        milk++;          // buy milk
        note = 0;        // remove note
    }
}
```

Solution 2: Leave note before check note

- You and your roommate share a refrigerator. Being good roommates, you both try to make sure that the refrigerator is always stocked with milk.



Algorithm 3:

```
note1 = 1
if (note2 == 0) { // no note from
                    roommate
    if (milk == 0) { // no milk
        milk++;      // buy milk
    }
}
note1 = 0
```

Solution 3: Keep checking for note

- You and your roommate share a refrigerator. Being good roommates, you both try to make sure that the refrigerator is always stocked with milk.



Algorithm 4:

```
note1 = 1
while (note2 == 1) { // wait until
    ;                // no note
}
if (milk == 0) {    // no milk
    milk++;         // buy milk
}
note1 = 0
```

Solution 4: Take turns

- You and your roommate share a refrigerator. Being good roommates, you both try to make sure that the refrigerator is always stocked with milk.



Algorithm 5:

```
note1 = 1
turn = 2
while (note2 == 1 and turn == 2) {
    ;
}
if (milk == 0) {           // no milk
    milk++;                // buy milk
}
note1 = 0
```

Locks

- A **lock** (aka a mutex) is a synchronization primitive that provides mutual exclusion. When one thread holds a lock, no other thread can hold it.
 - a lock can be in one of two states: locked or unlocked
 - a lock is initially unlocked
- function **acquire(&lock)** waits until the lock is unlocked, then atomically sets it to locked
- function **release(&lock)** sets the lock to unlocked

Atomic Operations

- Solution: hardware primitives to support synchronization
- A machine instruction that (atomically!) reads and updates
- Example: `xchg src, dest`
 - one instruction
 - semantics: $TEMP \leftarrow DEST; DEST \leftarrow SRC; SRC \leftarrow TEMP;$

Solution 5: use a lock

- You and your roommate share a refrigerator. Being good roommates, you both try to make sure that the refrigerator is always stocked with milk.



Algorithm 6:

```
acquire(&lock)
if (milk == 0) {           // no milk
    milk++;                // buy milk
}
release(&lock)
```

Programming with Locks

C (pthreads)

- Defines lock type `pthread_mutex_t`
- functions to create/destroy locks:
 - `int pthread_mutex_init(&lock, attr);`
 - `int pthread_mutex_destroy(&lock);`
- functions to acquire/release lock:
 - `int pthread_mutex_lock(&lock);`
 - `int pthread_mutex_unlock(&lock);`

Python (threading)

- Defines class `Lock`
- constructor to create locks:
 - `Lock()`
 - destroyed by garbage collector
- functions to acquire/release lock:
 - `lock.acquire()`
 - `lock.release()`

Exercise 2: Locks

```
/* Global shared variable */
volatile long cnt = 0; /* Counter */

int main(int argc, char** argv) {
    long niters;
    pthread_t tid1, tid2;

    niters = atoi(argv[1]);
    pthread_create(&tid1, NULL,
                  count_func, &niters);
    pthread_create(&tid2, NULL,
                  count_func, &niters);
    pthread_join(tid1, NULL);
    pthread_join(tid2, NULL);

    /* Check result */
    if (cnt != (2 * niters))
        printf("BOOM! cnt=%ld\n", cnt);
    else
        printf("OK cnt=%ld\n", cnt);
    exit(0);
}
```

```
/* Thread routine */
void* count_func(void* vargp) {
    long i, niters;
    niters = *((long*) vargp);

    for (i = 0; i < niters; i++) {
        cnt++;
    }

    return NULL;
}
```

- TODO: Modify this example to guarantee correctness

Problems with Locks

1. Locks are slow

- threads that fail to acquire a lock on the first attempt must "spin", which wastes CPU cycles
- threads get scheduled and de-scheduled while the lock is still locked

2. Using locks correctly is hard

- hard to ensure all race conditions are eliminated
- easy to introduce synchronization bugs (deadlock, livelock)

Better Synchronization Primitives

- Semaphores
 - stateful synchronization primitive
- Condition variables
 - event-based synchronization primitive