15-213

"The course that gives CMU its Zip!"

Programming with Threads
Dec 6, 2001

Topics

- Shared variables
- The need for synchronization
- Synchronizing with semaphores
- Synchronizing with mutex and condition variables
- Thread safety and reentrancy
- Races and deadlocks

Shared variables in threaded C programs

Question: Which variables in a threaded C program are *shared variables*?

- The answer is not as simple as "global variables are shared" and "stack variables are private".

Requires answers to the following questions:

- What is the memory model for threads?
- How are variables mapped to memory instances?
- How many threads reference each of these instances?

Threads memory model

Conceptual model:

- Each thread runs in the context of a process.
- Each thread has its own separate *thread context.*
  - Thread ID, stack, stack pointer, program counter, condition codes, and general purpose registers.
- All threads share the remaining process context.
  - Code, data, heap, and shared library segments of the process virtual address space.
  - Open files and installed handlers

Operationally, this model is not strictly enforced:

- While register values are truly separate and protected....
- Any thread can read and write the stack of any other thread.

Mismatch between the conceptual and operation model is a source of confusion and errors.

Example of threads accessing another thread's stack

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

int main()
{
    int i;
    pthread_t tid;
    char *msgs[N] = {
        "Hello from foo",
        "Hello from bar"
    };
    ptr = msgs;
    for (i = 0; i < 2; i++)
        Pthread_create(&tid,
            NULL,
            thread,
            (void *)i);
    Pthread_exit(NULL);
}
```

```
/* thread routine */
void *thread(void *vargp)
{
    int myid = (int)vargp;
    static int cnt = 0;

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

Peer threads access main thread's stack indirectly through global ptr variable

Mapping variables to memory instances

Global var: 1 instance (`ptr` [data])

Local automatic vars: 1 instance (`i.m, msgs.m`)

Local automatic var: 2 instances (`myid.p0`[peer thread 0's stack], `myid.p1`[peer thread 1's stack])

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

int main()
{
    int i;
    pthread_t tid;
    char *msgs[N] = {
        "Hello from foo",
        "Hello from bar"
    };
    ptr = msgs;
    for (i = 0; i < 2; i++)
        Pthread_create(&tid,
            NULL,
            thread,
            (void *)i);
    Pthread_exit(NULL);
}
```

```
/* thread routine */
void *thread(void *vargp)
{
    int myid = (int)vargp;
    static int cnt = 0;

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

Local static var: 1 instance (`cnt` [data])

Shared variable analysis

Which variables are shared?

Variable instance	Referenced by main thread?	Referenced by peer thread 0?	Referenced by peer thread 1?
ptr	yes	yes	yes
cnt	no	yes	yes
i.m	yes	no	no
msgs.m	yes	yes	yes
myid.p0	no	yes	no
myid.p1	no	no	yes

Answer: A variable x is shared iff multiple threads reference at least one instance of x. Thus:

- `ptr`, `cnt`, and `msgs` are shared.
- `i` and `myid` are NOT shared.

`badcnt.c`: An improperly synchronized threaded program

```
unsigned int cnt = 0; /* shared */

int main() {
    pthread_t tid1, tid2;
    Pthread_create(&tid1, NULL,
                   count, NULL);
    Pthread_create(&tid2, NULL,
                   count, NULL);

    Pthread_join(tid1, NULL);
    Pthread_join(tid2, NULL);

    if (cnt != (unsigned)NITERS*2)
        printf("BOOM! cnt=%d\n",
               cnt);
    else
        printf("OK cnt=%d\n",
               cnt);
}
```

```
/* thread routine */
void *count(void *arg) {
    int i;
    for (i=0; i<NITERS; i++)
        cnt++;
    return NULL;
}
```

```
linux> badcnt
BOOM! ctr=198841183

linux> badcnt
BOOM! ctr=198261801

linux> badcnt
BOOM! ctr=198269672
```

`ctr` should be equal to 200,000,000. What went wrong?!

Assembly code for counter loop

C code for counter loop

```
for (i=0; i<NITERS; i++)
    ctr++;
```

Corresponding asm code (gcc -O0 -fforce-mem)

Head (H_i)

```
.L9:
        movl -4(%ebp),%eax
        cmpl $99999999,%eax
        jle .L12
        jmp .L10
```

Load ctr (L_i)
Update ctr (U_i)
Store ctr (S_i)

```
.L12:
        movl ctr,%eax       # Load
        leal 1(%eax),%edx   # Update
        movl %edx,ctr       # Store
```

Tail (T_i)

```
.L11:
        movl -4(%ebp),%eax
        leal 1(%eax),%edx
        movl %edx,-4(%ebp)
        jmp .L9
.L10:
```

Concurrent execution

Key idea: In general, any sequentially consistent interleaving is possible, but some are incorrect!

- I_i denotes that thread i executes instruction I
- $\%eax_i$ is the contents of %eax in thread i's context

i (thread)	$instr_i$	$\%eax_1$	$\%eax_2$	ctr
1	H_1	-	-	0
1	L_1	0	-	0
1	U_1	1	-	0
1	S_1	1	-	1
2	H_2	-	-	1
2	L_2	-	1	1
2	U_2	-	2	1
2	S_2	-	2	2
2	T_2	-	2	2
1	T_1	1	-	2

OK

Concurrent execution (cont)

Incorrect ordering: two threads increment the counter, but the result is 1 instead of 2.

i (thread)	$instr_i$	$\%eax_1$	$\%eax_2$	ctr
1	H_1	-	-	0
1	L_1	0	-	0
1	U_1	1	-	0
2	H_2	-	-	0
2	L_2	-	0	0
1	S_1	1	-	1
1	T_1	1	-	1
2	U_2	-	1	1
2	S_2	-	1	1
2	T_2	-	1	1

Oops!

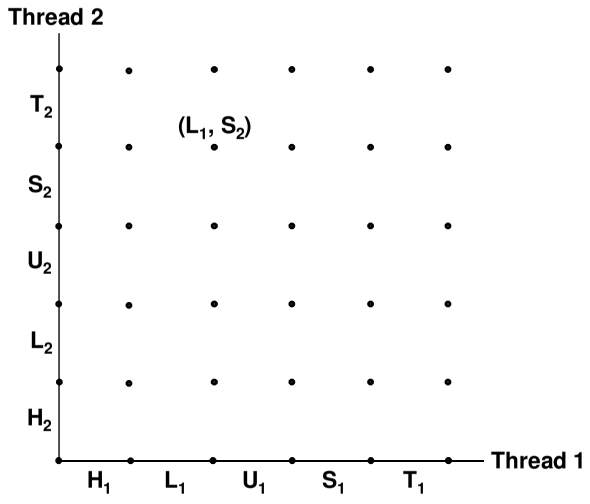
Concurrent execution (cont)

How about this ordering?

i (thread)	$instr_i$	$\%eax_1$	$\%eax_2$	ctr
1	H_1			
1	L_1			
2	H_2			
2	L_2			
2	U_2			
2	S_2			
1	U_1			
1	S_1			
1	T_1			
2	T_2			

We can clarify our understanding of concurrent execution with the help of the *progress graph*

Progress graphs



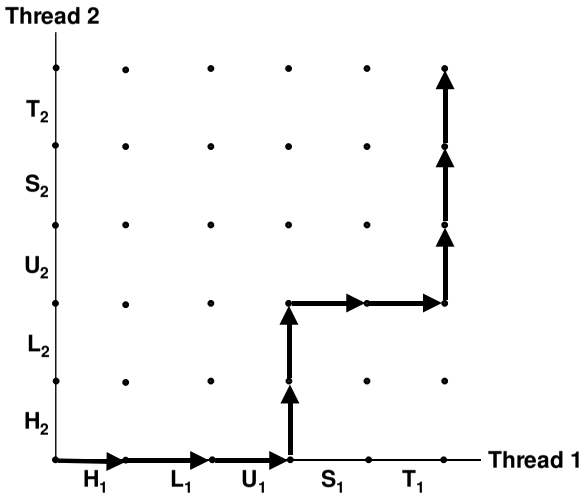
A *progress graph* depicts the discrete *execution state space* of concurrent threads.

Each axis corresponds to the sequential order of instructions in a thread.

Each point corresponds to a possible *execution state* ($Inst_1$, $Inst_2$).

E.g., (L_1, S_2) denotes state where thread 1 has completed L_1 and thread 2 has completed S_2.

Trajectories in progress graphs

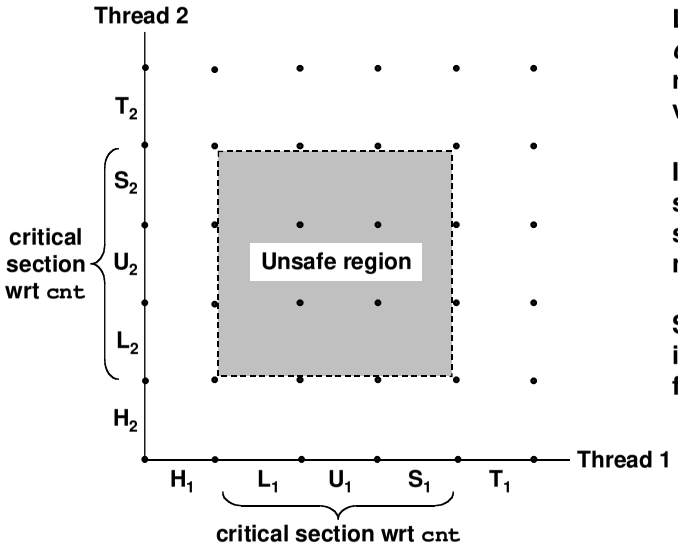


A *trajectory* is a sequence of legal state transitions that describes one possible concurrent execution of the threads.

Example:

H1, L1, U1, H2, L2, S1, T1, U2, S2, T2

Critical sections and unsafe regions

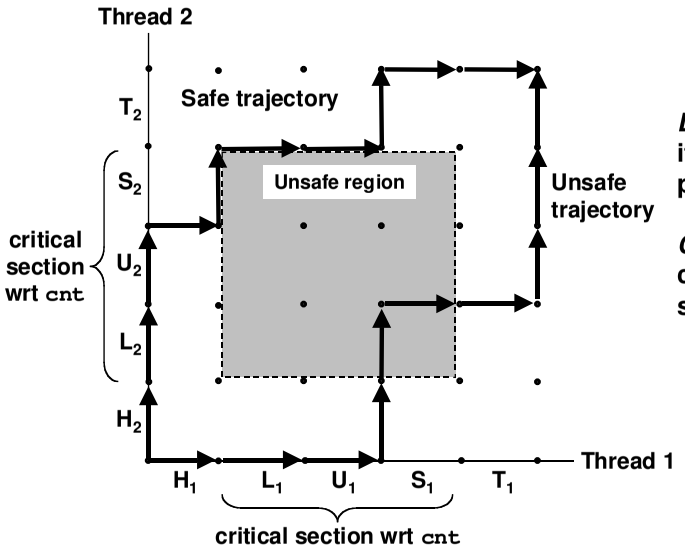


L, U, and S form a *critical section* with respect to the shared variable `cnt`.

Instructions in critical sections (wrt to some shared variable) should not be interleaved.

Sets of states where such interleaving occurs form *unsafe regions*.

Safe and unsafe trajectories



Def: A trajectory is *safe* iff it doesn't touch any part of an unsafe region.

Claim: A trajectory is correct (wrt `cnt`) iff it is safe.

Synchronizing with semaphores

Question: How can we guarantee a safe trajectory?

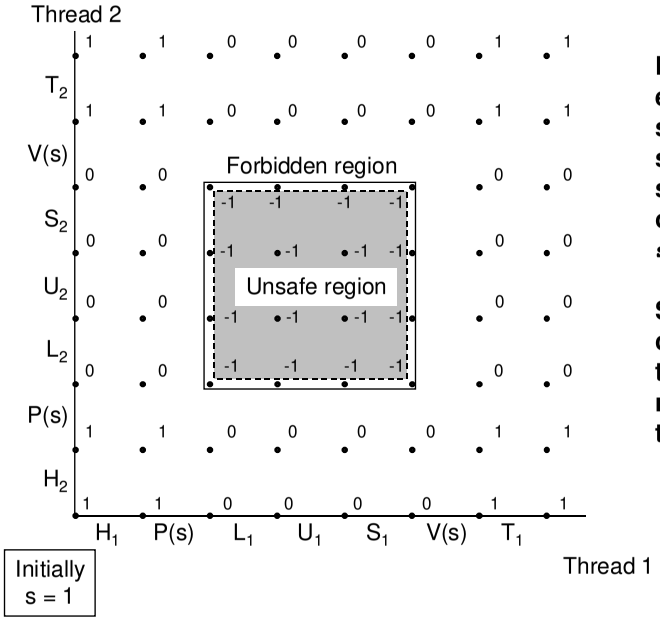
- We must *synchronize* the threads so that they never enter an unsafe state.

Classic solution: Dijkstra's P and V operations on *semaphores.*

- *semaphore:* non-negative integer synchronization variable.
  - P(s): [`while (s == 0) wait(); s--;`]
    - » Dutch for "Proberen" (test)
  - V(s): [`s++;`]
    - » Dutch for "Verhogen" (increment)
- OS guarantees that operations between brackets [ ] are executed indivisibly.
  - Only one P or V operation at a time can modify s.
  - When `while` loop in P terminates, only that P can decrement s.

Semaphore invariant: *(s >= 0)*

Safe sharing with semaphores



Provide mutually exclusive access to shared variable by surrounding critical section with P and V operations on semaphore s (initially set to 1).

Semaphore invariant creates a *forbidden region* that encloses unsafe region and is never touched by any trajectory.

POSIX semaphores

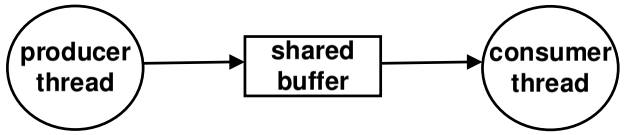
```
/* initialize semaphore sem to value */
/* pshared=0 if thread, pshared=1 if process */
void Sem_init(sem_t *sem, int pshared, unsigned int value) {
  if (sem_init(sem, pshared, value) < 0)
    unix_error("Sem_init");
}

/* P operation on semaphore sem */
void P(sem_t *sem) {
  if (sem_wait(sem))
    unix_error("P");
}

/* V operation on semaphore sem */
void V(sem_t *sem) {
  if (sem_post(sem))
    unix_error("V");
}
```


Sharing with POSIX semaphores

```
/* goodcnt.c - properly sync'd
counter program */
#include "csapp.h"
#define NITERS 10000000

unsigned int cnt; /* counter */
sem_t sem;        /* semaphore */

int main() {
    pthread_t tid1, tid2;

    Sem_init(&sem, 0, 1);

    /* create 2 threads and wait */
    ...

   if (cnt != (unsigned)NITERS*2)
        printf("BOOM! cnt=%d\n", cnt);
    else
        printf("OK cnt=%d\n", cnt);
    exit(0);
}
```

```
/* thread routine */
void *count(void *arg)
{
    int i;

    for (i=0; i<NITERS; i++) {
        P(&sem);
        cnt++;
        V(&sem);
    }
    return NULL;
}
```


Signaling with semaphores



Common synchronization pattern:

- **Producer waits for slot, inserts item in buffer, and "*signals*" consumer.**
- **Consumer waits for item, removes it from buffer, and "signals" producer.**
  - "signals" in this context has nothing to do with Unix signals

Examples

- **Multimedia processing:**
  - Producer creates MPEG video frames, consumer renders the frames
- **Event-driven graphical user interfaces**
  - Producer detects mouse clicks, mouse movements, and keyboard hits and inserts corresponding events in buffer.
  - Consumer retrieves events from buffer and paints the display.

Producer-consumer (1-buffer)

```
/* buf1.c - producer-consumer
on 1-element buffer */
#include "csapp.h"

#define NITERS 5

void *producer(void *arg);
void *consumer(void *arg);

struct {
  int buf; /* shared var */
  sem_t full; /* sems */
  sem_t empty;
} shared;
```

```
int main() {
  pthread_t tid_producer;
  pthread_t tid_consumer;

  /* initialize the semaphores */
  Sem_init(&shared.empty, 0, 1);
  Sem_init(&shared.full,  0, 0);

  /* create threads and wait */
  Pthread_create(&tid_producer, NULL,
                 producer, NULL);
  Pthread_create(&tid_consumer, NULL,
                 consumer, NULL);
  Pthread_join(tid_producer, NULL);
  Pthread_join(tid_consumer, NULL);

  exit(0);
}
```


Producer-consumer (cont)

Initially: empty = 1, full = 0.

```
/* producer thread */
void *producer(void *arg) {
  int i, item;

  for (i=0; i<NITERS; i++) {
    /* produce item */
    item = i;
    printf("produced %d\n",
            item);

    /* write item to buf */
    P(&shared.empty);
    shared.buf = item;
    V(&shared.full);
  }
  return NULL;
}
```

```
/* consumer thread */
void *consumer(void *arg) {
  int i, item;

  for (i=0; i<NITERS; i++) {
    /* read item from buf */
    P(&shared.full);
    item = shared.buf;
    V(&shared.empty);

    /* consume item */
    printf("consumed %d\n",
            item);
  }
  return NULL;
}
```


Limitations of semaphores

Semaphores are sound and fundamental, but they have limitations.

- **Difficult to broadcast a signal to a group of threads.**
  - e.g., *barrier synchronization:* no thread returns from the barrier function until every other thread has called the barrier function.
- **Impossible to do timeout waiting.**
  - e.g., wait for at most 1 second for a condition to become true.

For these we must use Pthreads *mutex* and *condition variables.*

Synchronizing with mutex and condition variables

Semaphores can be used for two different kinds of synchronization:

- **Safe sharing (e.g. `goodcnt.c`) and**
- **Signaling (e.g. `prodcons.c`).**

Pthreads interface provides two different mechanisms for these functions:

- **Safe sharing: operations on mutexes.**
- **Signaling: operations on condition variables**
  - discussed in text

Basic operations on mutex variables

```
int pthread_mutex_init(pthread_mutex_t *mutex,
                       pthread_mutexattr_t *attr)
```

Initializes a mutex variable (`mutex`) with some attributes (`attr`).

- attributes are usually NULL.
- like initializing a mutex semaphore to 1.

```
int pthread_mutex_lock(pthread_mutex_t *mutex)
```

Indivisibly waits for `mutex` to be unlocked and then locks it.

- like `P(mutex)`

```
int pthread_mutex_unlock(pthread_mutex_t *mutex)
```

Unlocks `mutex`.

- like `V(mutex)`

Thread-safe functions

Functions called from a thread must be *thread-safe.*

We identify four (non-disjoint) classes of thread-unsafe functions:

- Class 1: Failing to protect shared variables.
- Class 2: Relying on persistent state across invocations.
- Class 3: Returning a pointer to a static variable.
- Class 4: Calling thread-unsafe functions.

Thread-unsafe functions

Class 1: Failing to protect shared variables.

- Fix: use Pthreads lock/unlock functions or P/V operations.
- Issue: synchronization operations will slow down code.
- Example: `goodcnt.c`

Thread-safe functions (cont)

Class 2: Relying on persistent state across multiple function invocations.

- The `my_read()` function called by `readline()` buffers input in a `static` array.

```
static ssize_t
my_read(int fd, char *ptr)
{
    static int read_cnt = 0;
    static char *read_ptr,
    static char *read_buf[MAXLINE];
    ...
}
```

- Fix: Rewrite function so that caller passes in all necessary state.

```
static ssize_t
my_read_r(Rline *rptr, char *ptr)
{
   ...
}
```

Thread-safe functions (cont)

Class 3: Returning a pointer to a `static` variable.

- Fixes:
  - 1. Rewrite so caller passes pointer to `struct`.
    - » Issue: Requires changes in caller and callee.
  - 2. "Lock-and-copy"
    - » Issue: Requires only simple changes in caller (and none in callee)
    - » However, caller must free memory.

```
struct hostent
*gethostbyname(char name)
{
  static struct hostent h;
  <contact DNS and fill in h>
  return &h;
}
```

```
hostp = Malloc(...));
gethostbyname1_r(name, hostp);
```

```
struct hostent
*gethostbyname_ts(char *name)
{
  struct hostent *q = Malloc(...);
  Pthread_mutex_lock(&mutex);
  p = gethostbyname(name);
  *q = *p;
  Pthread_mutex_unlock(&mutex);
  return q;
}
```


Thread-safe functions

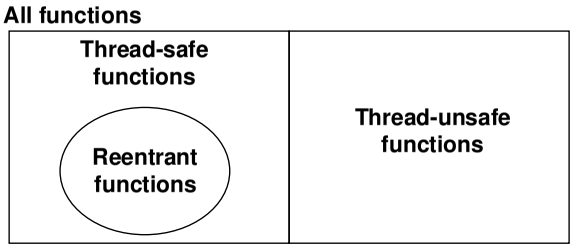
Class 4: Calling thread-unsafe functions.

- Calling one thread-unsafe function makes an entire function thread-unsafe.
  - Since `readline()` calls the thread-unsafe `my_read()` function, it is also thread_unsafe.
- Fix: Modify the function so it calls only thread-safe functions
  - Example: `readline_r()` is a thread-safe version of `readline()` that calls the thread-safe `my_read_r()` function.

Reentrant functions

A function is *reentrant* iff it accesses NO shared variables when called from multiple threads.

- Reentrant functions are a proper subset of the set of thread-safe functions.



- NOTE: The fixes to Class 2 and 3 thread-unsafe functions require modifying the function to make it reentrant.

Thread-safe library functions

All functions in the Standard C Library (at the back of your K&R text) are thread-safe.

Most Unix system calls are thread-safe, with a few exceptions:

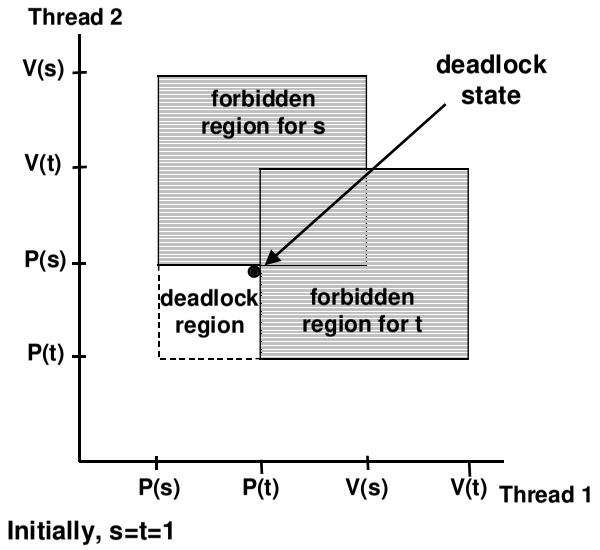
Thread-unsafe function	Class	Reentrant version
`asctime`	3	`asctime_r`
`ctime`	3	`ctime_r`
`gethostbyaddr`	3	`gethostbyaddr_r`
`gethostbyname`	3	`gethostbyname_r`
`inet_ntoa`	3	`(none)`
`localtime`	3	`localtime_r`
`rand`	2	`rand_r`

Races

A *race* occurs when the correctness of the program depends on one thread reaching point x before another thread reaches point y.

```
/* a threaded program with a race */
int main() {
    pthread_t tid[N];
    int i;
    for (i = 0; i < N; i++)
        Pthread_create(&tid[i], NULL, thread, &i);
    for (i = 0; i < N; i++)
        Pthread_join(tid[i], NULL);
    exit(0);
}

/* thread routine */
void *thread(void *vargp) {
    int myid = *((int *)vargp);
    printf("Hello from thread %d\n", myid);
    return NULL;
}
```


Deadlock



Initially, s=t=1

Locking introduces the potential for *deadlock:* waiting for a condition that will never be true.

Any trajectory that enters the *deadlock region* will eventually reach the *deadlock state*, waiting for either `s` or `t` to become nonzero.

Other trajectories luck out and skirt the deadlock region.

***Unfortunate fact:* deadlock is often non-deterministic.**

Threads summary

Threads provide another mechanism for writing concurrent programs.

Threads are growing in popularity

- **Somewhat cheaper than processes.**
- **Easy to share data between threads.**

However, the ease of sharing has a cost:

- **Easy to introduce subtle synchronization errors.**
- **Tread carefully with threads!**

For more info:

- **D. Butenhof, "Programming with Posix Threads", Addison-Wesley, 1997.**