Synchronization: Basics

CS351: Systems Programming
Day 26: Nov. 22, 2022

Instructor:
Nik Sultana

Slides adapted from Bryant and O’Hallaron
Shared Variables in Threaded C Programs

- **Question:** Which variables in a threaded C program are shared?
  - The answer is not as simple as “*global variables are shared*” and “*stack variables are private*”

- **Def:** A variable \( x \) is *shared* if and only if multiple threads reference some instance of \( x \).

- **Requires answers to the following questions:**
  - What is the memory model for threads?
  - How are instances of variables mapped to memory?
  - How many threads might reference each of these instances?
Threads Memory Model

- **Conceptual model:**
  - Multiple threads run within the context of a single process
  - Each thread has its own separate thread context
    - Thread ID, stack, stack pointer, PC, condition codes, and GP 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:**
  - Register values are truly separate and protected, but...
  - Any thread can read and write the stack of any other thread

*The mismatch between the conceptual and operation model is a source of confusion and errors*
Example Program to Illustrate Sharing

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

int main()
{
    long i;
    pthread_t tid;
    char *msgs[2] = {
        "Hello from foo",
        "Hello from bar"
    };

    ptr = msgs;
    for (i = 0; i < 2; i++)
        Pthread_create(&tid, 
            NULL,
            thread, 
            (void *)i);
    Pthread_exit(NULL);
}

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

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

Peer 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.
Mapping Variable Instances to Memory

Global var: 1 instance (ptr [data])

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

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

Local static var: 1 instance (cnt [data])
Shared Variable Analysis

■ Which variables are shared?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable instance</th>
<th>Referenced by main thread?</th>
<th>Referenced by peer thread 0?</th>
<th>Referenced by peer thread 1?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ptr</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cnt</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.m</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>msgs.m</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>myid.p0</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>myid.p1</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

■ 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
Synchronizing Threads

- Shared variables are handy...

- ...but introduce the possibility of nasty synchronization errors.
Improper Synchronization

```c
/* 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, thread, &niters);
    Pthread_create(&tid2, NULL, thread, &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 *thread(void *vargp)
{
    long i, niters = *(long *)vargp;

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

```bash
linux> ./badcnt 10000
OK cnt=20000
linux> ./badcnt 10000
BOOM! cnt=13051
```

`cnt` should equal 20,000.

What went wrong?
Assembly Code for Counter Loop

C code for counter loop in thread i

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

Asm code for thread i

```assembly
movq (%rdi), %rcx
testq %rcx,%rcx
jle .L2
movl $0, %eax
.L3:
    movq cnt(%rip),%rdx
    addq $1, %rdx
    movq %rdx, cnt(%rip)
    addq $1, %rax
    cmpq %rcx, %rax
    jne .L3
.L2:
```

H_i: Head
L_i: Load cnt
U_i: Update cnt
S_i: Store cnt
T_i: Tail
Concurrent Execution

**Key idea:** In general, any sequentially consistent interleaving is possible, but some give an unexpected result!

- $I_i$ denotes that thread $i$ executes instruction $I$
- $\%rdx_i$ is the content of $\%rdx$ in thread $i$’s context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>i (thread)</th>
<th>instr$_i$</th>
<th>$%rdx_1$</th>
<th>$%rdx_2$</th>
<th>cnt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>$H_1$</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>$L_1$</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>$U_1$</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>$S_1$</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>$H_2$</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>$L_2$</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>$U_2$</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>$S_2$</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>$T_2$</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>$T_1$</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thread 1 critical section
Thread 2 critical section

OK
In Concurrent Execution (cont)

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>i (thread)</th>
<th>instr_i</th>
<th>%rdx_1</th>
<th>%rdx_2</th>
<th>cnt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>H_1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>L_1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>U_1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>H_2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>L_2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>S_1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>T_1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>U_2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>S_2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>T_2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Oops!
Concurrent Execution (cont)

- How about this ordering?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>i (thread)</th>
<th>instr&lt;sub&gt;i&lt;/sub&gt;</th>
<th>%rdx&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt;</th>
<th>%rdx&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt;</th>
<th>cnt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>H&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>L&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>H&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>L&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>U&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>S&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>U&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>S&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>T&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>T&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Oops!

- We can analyze the behavior using a progress graph
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 (Inst₁, Inst₂).

E.g., \((L₁, S₂)\) denotes state where thread 1 has completed \(L₁\) and thread 2 has completed \(S₂\).
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 some shared variable) should not be interleaved.

Sets of states where such interleaving occurs form unsafe regions.
Critical Sections and Unsafe Regions

**Def:** A trajectory is *safe* iff it does not enter any unsafe region.

**Claim:** A trajectory is correct (wrt cnt) iff it is safe.
Enforcing Mutual Exclusion

- **Question:** How can we guarantee a safe trajectory?

- **Answer:** We must *synchronize* the execution of the threads so that they can never have an unsafe trajectory.
  - i.e., need to guarantee *mutually exclusive access* for each critical section.

- **Classic solution:**
  - Semaphores (Edsger Dijkstra)

- **Other approaches (out of our scope)**
  - Mutex and condition variables (Pthreads)
  - Monitors (Java)
Semaphores

- **Semaphore**: non-negative global integer synchronization variable. Manipulated by $P$ and $V$ operations.

- $P(s)$
  - If $s$ is nonzero, then decrement $s$ by 1 and return immediately.
    - Test and decrement operations occur atomically (indivisibly)
  - If $s$ is zero, then suspend thread until $s$ becomes nonzero and the thread is restarted by a $V$ operation.
  - After restarting, the $P$ operation decrements $s$ and returns control to the caller.

- $V(s)$:
  - Increment $s$ by 1.
    - Increment operation occurs atomically
  - If there are any threads blocked in a $P$ operation waiting for $s$ to become non-zero, then restart exactly one of those threads, which then completes its $P$ operation by decrementing $s$.

- **Semaphore invariant**: $(s >= 0)$
C Semaphore Operations

Pthreads functions:

```c
#include <semaphore.h>

int sem_init(sem_t *s, 0, unsigned int val); /* s = val */
int sem_wait(sem_t *s); /* P(s) */
int sem_post(sem_t *s); /* V(s) */
```

CS:APP wrapper functions:

```c
#include "csapp.h"

void P(sem_t *s); /* Wrapper function for sem_wait */
void V(sem_t *s); /* Wrapper function for sem_post */
```
badcnt.c: Improper Synchronization

```c
/* 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, thread, &niters);
    Pthread_create(&tid2, NULL, thread, &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 *thread(void *vargp)
{
    long i, niters = *(long *)vargp;
    for (i = 0; i < niters; i++)
        cnt++;
    return NULL;
}

How can we fix this using semaphores?
Using Semaphores for Mutual Exclusion

- **Basic idea:**
  - Associate a unique semaphore *mutex*, initially 1, with each shared variable (or related set of shared variables).
  - Surround corresponding critical sections with $P(mutex)$ and $V(mutex)$ operations.

- **Terminology:**
  - *Binary semaphore*: semaphore whose value is always 0 or 1
  - *Mutex*: binary semaphore used for mutual exclusion
    - P operation: “locking” the mutex
    - V operation: “unlocking” or “releasing” the mutex
    - “Holding” a mutex: locked and not yet unlocked.
  - *Counting semaphore*: used as a counter for set of available resources.
goodcnt.c: Proper Synchronization

- Define and initialize a mutex for the shared variable cnt:

```c
volatile long cnt = 0; /* Counter */
sem_t mutex; /* Semaphore that protects cnt */
Sem_init(&mutex, 0, 1); /* mutex = 1 */
```

- Surround critical section with P and V:

```c
for (i = 0; i < niters; i++) {
    P(&mutex);
    cnt++;
    V(&mutex);
}
```

Warning: It’s orders of magnitude slower than badcnt.c.
Why Mutexes Work

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 that cannot be entered by any trajectory.

Initially $s = 1$
Summary

- Programmers need a clear model of how variables are shared by threads.

- Variables shared by multiple threads must be protected to ensure mutually exclusive access.

- Semaphores are a fundamental mechanism for enforcing mutual exclusion.
Fourth lab assignment

- **Good overall! Keep it up!**
- **Zero/low grades:** go over the code with TA.
- **Promising grades:** TA feedback will help advance more.
Heads up

- **Practice Test is on Blackboard**
  From 14th Nov until 8pm on 28th Nov

- **Final Exam is in ~2 weeks**
  - Wednesday 7th December at 10:30am
  - On Blackboard. (Ensure adequate browser + WiFi + quiet location.)
  - Exam Review on 1st December
    “**Preparation:** Revise CS:APP 1-3,6-12”
  - Scope: entire course
  - *Keep reading the textbook!*

- **Last lab deadline is in ~1 week**
  With grace or penalty days, the last possible submission is on Saturday 2nd December.
Per-lecture feedback

- Better sooner rather than later!
- I can help with issues sooner.
- There is a per-lecture feedback form.
- The form is anonymous. (It checks that you’re at Illinois Tech to filter abuse, but I don’t see who submitted any of the forms.)
- https://forms.gle/qoeEbBuTYXo5FiU1A
- I’ll remind about this at each lecture.