RACE CONDITIONS AND SYNCHRONIZATION

Reminder
- A “race condition” arises if two threads try and share some data
- One updates it and the other reads it, or both update the data
- In such cases it is possible that we could see the data “in the middle” of being updated
- A “race condition”: correctness depends on the update racing to completion without the reader managing to glimpse the in-progress update
- Synchronization (aka mutual exclusion) solves this

Java Synchronization (Locking)

• Put critical operations in a synchronized block
• The stack object acts as a lock
• Only one thread can own the lock at a time

How locking works
- Only one thread can “hold” a lock at a time
  - If several request the same lock, Java somehow decides which will get it
  - The lock is released when the thread leaves the synchronization block
  - synchronized(someObject) { protected code }
  - The protected code has a mutual exclusion guarantee: At most one thread can be in it
  - When released, some other thread can acquire the lock

Locks are associated with objects
- Every Object has its own built-in lock
  - Just the same, some applications prefer to create special classes of objects to use just for locking
  - This is a stylistic decision and you should agree on it with your teammates or learn the company policy if you work at a company
- Code is “thread safe” if it can handle multiple threads using it… otherwise it is “unsafe”
Visualizing deadlocks

A has a lock on X

B has a lock on Y

Process A

Process B

A wants a lock on Y

B wants a lock on X

Deadlocks always involve cycles

- They can include 2 or more threads or processes in a waiting cycle
- Other properties:
  - The locks need to be mutually exclusive (no sharing of the objects being locked)
  - The application won’t give up and go away (no timer associated with the lock request)
  - There are no mechanisms for one thread to take locked resources away from another thread – no “preemption”

Dealing with deadlocks

- We recommend designing code to either
  - Acquire a lock, use it, then promptly release it, or
  - ... acquire locks in some “fixed” order
- Example, suppose that we have objects a, b, c, ...
- Now suppose that threads sometimes lock sets of objects but always do so in alphabetical order
  - Can a lock-wait cycle arise?
  - ... without cycles, no deadlocks can occur!

Higher level abstractions

- Locking is a very low-level way to deal with synchronization
  - Very nuts-and-bolts
- So many programmers work with higher level concepts. Sort of like ADTs for synchronization
  - We’ll just look at one example today
  - There are many others; take cs4410 to learn more

A producer/consumer example

- Thread A produces loaves of bread and puts them on a shelf with capacity K
  - For example, maybe K=10
- Thread B consumes the loaves by taking them off the shelf
  - Thread A doesn’t want to overload the shelf
  - Thread B doesn’t want to leave with empty arms

Producer/Consumer example

```java
class Bakery {
    int nLoaves = 0;  // Current number of waiting loaves
    final int K = 10;  // Shelf capacity

    public synchronized void produce() {
        while(nLoaves == K) this.wait();  // Wait until not full
        ++nLoaves;
        this.notifyall();                 // Signal: shelf not empty
    }

    public synchronized void consume() {
        while(nLoaves == 0) this.wait();  // Wait until not empty
        --nLoaves;
        this.notifyall();                 // Signal: shelf not full
    }
}
```
Things to notice

- Wait needs to wait on the same object that you used for synchronizing (in our example, “this”, which is this instance of the Bakery)
- Notify wakes up just one waiting thread, notifyall wakes all of them up
- We used a while loop because we can’t predict exactly which thread will wake up “next”

Bounded Buffer

- Here we take our producer/consumer and add a notion of passing something from the producer to the consumer
- For example, producer generates strings
- Consumer takes those and puts them into a file
- Question: why would we do this?
  - Keeps the computer more steadily busy

Bounded Buffer example

```java
class BoundedBuffer<T> {
    int putPtr = 0, getPtr = 0; // Next slot to use
    int available = 0; // Items currently available
    final int K = 10; // buffer capacity
    T[] buffer = new T[K];

    public synchronized void produce(T item) {
        while(available == K) this.wait(); // Wait until not full
        buffer[putPtr++ % K] = item;
        ++available;
        this.notifyall(); // Signal: not empty
    }

    public synchronized T consume() {
        while(available == 0) this.wait(); // Wait until not empty
        --available;
        T item = buffer[getPtr++ % K];
        this.notifyall(); // Signal: not full
        return item;
    }
}
```

Producer/Consumer example

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    int nLoaves = 0; // Current number of waiting loaves
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    public synchronized void produce() {
        while(nLoaves == K) this.wait(); // Wait until not full
        ++nLoaves;
        this.notifyall(); // Signal: shelf not empty
    }

    public synchronized void consume() {
        while(nLoaves == 0) this.wait(); // Wait until not empty
        --nLoaves;
        this.notifyall(); // Signal: shelf not full
    }
}
```

In an ideal world...

- Bounded buffer allows producer and consumer to both run concurrently, with neither blocking
  - This happens if they run at the same average rate
  - ... and if the buffer is big enough to mask any brief rate surges by either of the two
- But if one does get ahead of the other, it waits
  - This avoids the risk of producing so many items that we run out of computer memory for them. Or of accidentally trying to consume a non-existent item.

Trickier example

- Suppose we want to use locking in a BST
- Goal: allow multiple threads to search the tree
- But don’t want an insertion to cause a search thread to throw an exception
Code we're given is thread unsafe

```java
class BST {
  Object name;      // Name of this node
  Object value;     // Value of associated with that name
  BST left, right;  // Children of this node

  // Constructor
  public void BST(Object who, Object what) { name = who; value = what; }

  // Returns value if found, else null
  public Object get(Object goal) {
    if(name.equals(goal)) return value;
    if(name.compareTo(goal) < 0) return left==null? null: left.get(goal);
    return right==null? null: right.get(goal);
  }

  // Updates value if name is already in the tree, else adds new BST node
  public void put(Object goal, Object value) {
    if(name.equals(goal)) { this.value = value; return; }
    if(name.compareTo(goal) < 0) {
      if(left == null) { left = new BST(goal, value); return; }
      left.put(goal, value);
    } else {
      if(right == null) { right = new BST(goal, value); return; }
      right.put(goal, value);
    }
  }
}
```

Attempt #1

- Just make both put and get synchronized:
  - public synchronized Object get(...) {
  - public synchronized void put(...) {
  - Let's have a look....

Safe version: Attempt #1

```java
class BST {
  Object name;      // Name of this node
  Object value;     // Value of associated with that name
  BST left, right;  // Children of this node

  // Constructor
  public void BST(Object who, Object what) { name = who; value = what; }

  // Returns value if found, else null
  public synchronized Object get(Object goal) {
    if(name.equals(goal)) return value;
    if(name.compareTo(goal) < 0) return left==null? null: left.get(goal);
    return right==null? null: right.get(goal);
  }

  // Updates value if name is already in the tree, else adds new BST node
  public synchronized void put(Object goal, Object value) {
    if(name.equals(goal)) { this.value = value; return; }
    if(name.compareTo(goal) < 0) {
      if(left == null) { left = new BST(goal, value); return; }
      left.put(goal, value);
    } else {
      if(right == null) { right = new BST(goal, value); return; }
      right.put(goal, value);
    }
  }
}
```

Attempt #1

- Just make both put and get synchronized:
  - public synchronized Object get(...) {
  - public synchronized void put(...) {
  - This works but it kills ALL concurrency
  - Only one thread can look at the tree at a time
  - Even if all the threads were doing "get!"

Visualizing attempt #1

Put(Ernie, eb0)  Get(Martin)...
resumes
must wait!

Attempt #2

- put uses synchronized in method declaration
- So it locks every node it visits
- get tries to be fancy:
  ```java
  // Returns value if found, else null
  public Object get(Object goal) {
    synchronized(this) {
      if(name.equals(goal)) return value;
      if(name.compareTo(goal) < 0) return left==null? null: left.get(goal);
      return right==null? null: right.get(goal);
    }
  }
  ```
  - Actually this is identical to attempt 1! It only looks different but in fact is doing exactly the same thing
Attempt #3

Risk: "get" (read-only) threads sometimes look at nodes without locks, but "put" always updates those same nodes.

According to JDK rules this is unsafe.

```
// Returns value if found, else null
public Object get(Object goal) {
    boolean checkLeft = false, checkRight = false;
    synchronized(this) {
        if(name.equals(goal)) return value;
        if(name.compareTo(goal) < 0) {
            if (left==null) return null; else checkLeft = true;
        } else {
            if(right==null) return null; else checkRight = true;
        }
    }
    if (checkLeft) return left.get(goal);
    if (checkRight) return right.get(goal);
    /* Never executed but keeps Java happy */ return null;
}
```

Reinquishes lock on this – next lines are "unprotected"

Attempt #4

This version is safe: only accesses the shared variables left and right while holding locks

```
// Returns value if found, else null
public Object get(Object goal) {
    BST checkLeft = null, checkRight = null;
    synchronized(this) {
        if(name.equals(goal)) return value;
        if(name.compareTo(goal) < 0) {
            if (left==null) return null; else checkLeft = left;
        } else {
            if(right==null) return null; else checkRight = right;
        }
        if (checkLeft != null) return checkleft.get(goal);
        if (checkRight != null) return checkright.get(goal);
        /* Never executed but keeps Java happy */ return null;
    }
```

More tricky things to know about

With priorities Java can be very annoying
- ALWAYS runs higher priority threads before lower priority threads if scheduler must pick
- The lower priority ones might never run at all

Consequence: risk of a "priority inversion"
- High priority thread t1 is waiting for a lock, t2 has it
- Thread t2 is runnable, but never gets scheduled because t3 is higher priority and "busy"

Summary

- Use of multiple processes and multiple threads within each process can exploit concurrency
  - Which may be real (multicore) or "virtual" (an illusion)
  - But when using threads, beware!
  - Must lock (synchronize) any shared memory to avoid non-determinism and race conditions
  - Yet synchronization also creates risk of deadlocks
  - Even with proper locking concurrent programs can have other problems such as "livelock"
- Serious treatment of concurrency is a complex topic (covered in more detail in cs3410 and cs4410)
- Nice tutorial at http://docs.oracle.com/javase/tutorial/essential/concurrency/index.html