CSE332: Data Abstractions

# Lecture 23: Programming with Locks and Critical Sections

Dan Grossman

Spring 2010

## *Concurrency: where are we*

Done:
- The semantics of locks
- Locks in Java
- Using locks for mutual exclusion: bank-account example

This lecture:
- More bad interleavings (learn to spot these!)
- Guidelines/idioms for shared-memory and using locks correctly
- Coarse-grained vs. fine-grained

Upcoming lectures:
- Readers/writer locks
- Deadlock
- Condition variables
- Data races and memory-consistency models



## *Races*

A race condition occurs when the computation result depends on scheduling (how threads are interleaved)

Bugs that exist only due to concurrency
- No interleaved scheduling with 1 thread

Typically, problem is some *intermediate state* that "messes up" a concurrent thread that "sees" that state



## *Example*

```
class Stack<E> {
  …
  synchronized boolean isEmpty() { … }
  synchronized void push(E val) { … }
  synchronized E pop(E val) {
    if(isEmpty())
      throw new StackEmptyException();
    …
  }
  E peek() {
     E ans = pop();
     push(ans);
     return ans;
  }
}
```

## **peek**, *sequentially speaking*

- In a sequential world, this code is of questionable *style*, but unquestionably *correct*
- The "algorithm" is the only way to write a **peek** helper method if all you had was this interface:

```
interface Stack<E> {
  boolean isEmpty();
  void push(E val);
  E pop(E val);
}

class C {
  static <E> E myPeek(Stack<E> s){ ??? }
}
```



## **peek**, *concurrently speaking*

- **peek** has no *overall* effect on the shared data
  - It is a "reader" not a "writer"
- But the way it's implemented creates an inconsistent *intermediate state*
  - Even though calls to **push** and **pop** are synchronized so there are no data races on the underlying array/list/whatever
- This intermediate state should not be exposed
  - Leads to several wrong interleavings…



## *peek and isEmpty*

- Property we want: If there has been a **push** and no **pop**, then **isEmpty** returns **false**
- With **peek** as written, property can be violated – how?

Thread 1 (**peek**)

```
E ans = pop();

push(ans);

return ans;
```

Thread 2

```
push(x)
boolean b = isEmpty()
```

Time



## *peek and isEmpty*

- Property we want: If there has been a **push** and no **pop**, then **isEmpty** returns **false**
- With **peek** as written, property can be violated – how?

Thread 1 (**peek**)

```
E ans = pop();

push(ans);

return ans;
```

Thread 2

```
push(x)
boolean b = isEmpty()
```

Time

## *peek and push*

- Property we want: Values are returned from **pop** in LIFO order
- With **peek** as written, property can be violated – how?

Time ↓

| Thread 1 (**peek**) | Thread 2 |
|---|---|
| `E ans = pop();` | `push(x)` |
| `push(ans);` | `push(y)` |
| `return ans;` | `E e = pop()` |



## *peek and push*

- Property we want: Values are returned from **pop** in LIFO order
- With **peek** as written, property can be violated – how?

Time ↓

| Thread 1 (**peek**) | Thread 2 |
|---|---|
| `E ans = pop();` | `push(x)` |
| `push(ans);` | `push(y)` |
| `return ans;` | `E e = pop()` |



## *peek and pop*

- Property we want: Values are returned from **pop** in LIFO order
- With **peek** as written, property can be violated – how?

Time ↓

| Thread 1 (**peek**) | Thread 2 |
|---|---|
| `E ans = pop();` | `push(x)` |
| `push(ans);` | `push(y)` |
| `return ans;` | `E e = pop()` |



## *peek and peek*

- Property we want: **peek** doesn't throw an exception if number of pushes exceeds number of pops
- With **peek** as written, property can be violated – how?

Time ↓

| Thread 1 (**peek**) | Thread 2 |
|---|---|
| `E ans = pop();` | `E ans = pop();` |
| `push(ans);` | `push(ans);` |
| `return ans;` | `return ans;` |

## *peek and peek*

- Property we want: **peek** doesn't throw an exception if number of pushes exceeds number of pops
- With **peek** as written, property can be violated – how?

Thread 1 (**peek**)

```
E ans = pop();

push(ans);

return ans;
```

Thread 2

```
E ans = pop();

push(ans);

return ans;
```

Time



## *The fix*

- In short, **peek** needs synchronization to disallow interleavings
  - The key is to make a *larger critical section*
  - Re-entrant locks allow calls to **push** and **pop**

```
class Stack<E> {
  …
  synchronized E peek(){
     E ans = pop();
     push(ans);
     return ans;
  }
}
```

```
class C {
  <E> E myPeek(Stack<E> s){
    synchronized (s) {
       E ans = s.pop();
       s.push(ans);
       return ans;
    }
  }
}
```



## *The wrong "fix"*

- Focus so far: problems from **peek** doing writes that lead to an incorrect intermediate state
- Tempting but wrong: If an implementation of **peek** (or **isEmpty**) does not write anything, then maybe we can skip the synchronization?
- Does not work due to *data races* with **push** and **pop**…



## *Example, again (no resizing or checking)*

```
class Stack<E> {
  private E[] array = (E[])new Object[SIZE];
  int index = -1;
  boolean isEmpty() { // unsynchronized: wrong?!
    return index==-1;
  }
  synchronized void push(E val) {
    array[++index] = val;
  }
  synchronized E pop(E val) {
    return array[index--];
  }
  E peek() { // unsynchronized: wrong!
    return array[index];
  }
}
```

# Why wrong?

- It *looks like* **`isEmpty`** and **`peek`** can "get away with this" since **`push`** and **`pop`** adjust the state "in one tiny step"
- But this code is still *wrong* and depends on language-implementation details you cannot assume
  - Even "tiny steps" may require multiple steps in the implementation: **`array[++index] = val`** probably takes at least two steps
  - Code has a data race, allowing very strange behavior
    - Important discussion in future lecture
- Moral: Don't introduce a data race, even if every interleaving you can think of is correct



# Getting it right

Avoiding race conditions on shared resources is difficult

- Decades of bugs has led to some *conventional wisdom*: general techniques that are known to work

Rest of lecture distills key ideas and trade-offs

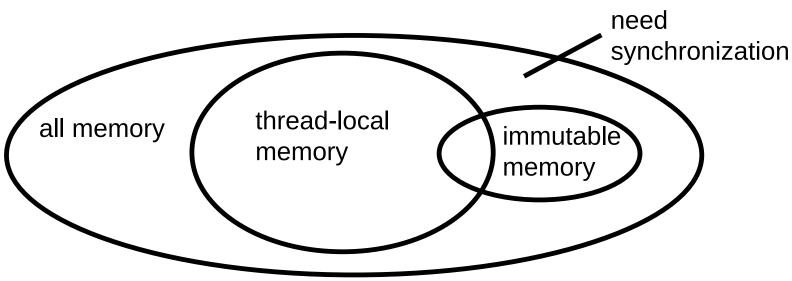
- Parts paraphrased from "Java Concurrency in Practice"
  - Chapter 2 (rest of book more advanced)
- But none of this is specific to Java or a particular book!



# 3 choices

For every memory location (e.g., object field) in your program, you must obey at least one of the following:

1. Thread-local: Don't use the location in > 1 thread
2. Immutable: Don't write to the memory location
3. Synchronized: Use synchronization to control access to the location






# Thread-local

Whenever possible, don't share resources

- Easier to have each thread have its own thread-local *copy* of a resource than to have one with shared updates
- This is correct only if threads don't need to communicate through the resource
  - That is, multiple copies are a correct approach
  - Example: **`Random`** objects
- Note: Since each call-stack is thread-local, never need to synchronize on local variables

*In typical concurrent programs, the vast majority of objects should be thread-local: shared-memory should be rare – minimize it*

# Immutable

Whenever possible, don't update objects
- Make new objects instead

- One of the key tenets of *functional programming* (see CSE341)
  - Generally helpful to avoid *side-effects*
  - Much more helpful in a concurrent setting

- If a location is only read, never written, then no synchronization is necessary!
  - Simultaneous reads are *not* races and *not* a problem

*In practice, programmers usually over-use mutation – minimize it*



# The rest

After minimizing the amount of memory that is (1) thread-shared and (2) mutable, we need guidelines for how to use locks to keep other data consistent

Guideline #0: No data races
- Never allow two threads to read/write or write/write the same location at the same time

*Necessary*: In Java or C, a program with a data race is almost always wrong

*Not sufficient*: Our **peek** example had no data races



# Consistent Locking

Guideline #1: For each location needing synchronization, have a lock that is always held when reading or writing the location

- We say the lock guards the location

- The same lock can (and often should) guard multiple locations

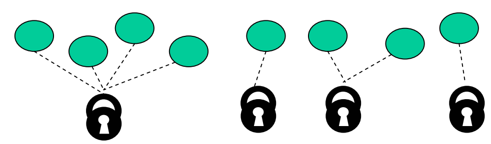
- Clearly document the guard for each location

- In Java, often the guard is the object containing the location
  - **this** inside the object's methods



# Consistent Locking continued

- The mapping from locations to guarding locks is *conceptual*
- It partitions the shared-&-mutable locations into "which lock"



Consistent locking is:

- *Not sufficient*: It prevents all data races, but still allows higher-level races (exposed intermediate states)
  - Our **peek** example used consistent locking

- *Not necessary*: Can change the locking protocol dynamically…

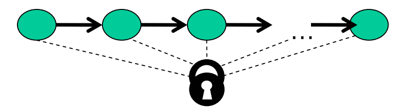
# Beyond consistent locking

- Consistent locking is an excellent guideline
  - A “default assumption” about program design
- But it isn’t required for correctness: Can have different program phases use different invariants
  - Provided all threads coordinate moving to the next phase
- Example from Project 3, Version 5:
  - A shared grid being updated, so use a lock for each entry
  - But after the grid is filled out, all threads except 1 terminate
    - So synchronization no longer necessary (thread local)
  - And later the grid becomes immutable
    - Makes synchronization doubly unnecessary

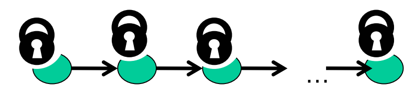


# Lock granularity

Coarse-grained: Fewer locks, i.e., more objects per lock
- Example: One lock for entire data structure (e.g., array)
- Example: One lock for all bank accounts



Fine-grained: More locks, i.e., fewer objects per lock
- Example: One lock per data element (e.g., array index)
- Example: One lock per bank account



“Coarse-grained vs. fine-grained” is really a continuum



# Trade-offs

Coarse-grained advantages
- Simpler to implement
- Faster/easier to implement operations that access multiple locations (because all guarded by the same lock)
- Much easier: operations that modify data-structure shape

Fine-grained advantages
- More simultaneous access (performance when coarse-grained would lead to unnecessary blocking)

Guideline #2: Start with coarse-grained (simpler) and move to fine-grained (performance) only if *contention* on the coarser locks becomes an issue. Alas, often leads to bugs.



# Example: Hashtable

- Coarse-grained: One lock for entire hashtable
- Fine-grained: One lock for each bucket

Which supports more concurrency for **`insert`** and **`lookup`**?

Which makes implementing **`resize`** easier?
- How would you do it?

If a hashtable has a **`numElements`** field, maintaining it will destroy the benefits of using separate locks for each bucket

## *Critical-section granularity*

A second, orthogonal granularity issue is critical-section size

- How much work to do while holding lock(s)

If critical sections run for too long:

- Performance loss because other threads are blocked

If critical sections are too short:

- Bugs because you broke up something where other threads should not be able to see intermediate state

Guideline #3: Don't do expensive computations or I/O in critical sections, but also don't introduce race conditions



## *Example*

Suppose we want to change the value for a key in a hashtable without removing it from the table

- Assume **lock** guards the whole table

*Papa Bear's critical section was too long*

*(table locked during expensive call)*

```
synchronized(lock) {
  v1 = table.lookup(k);
  v2 = expensive(v1);
  table.remove(k);
  table.insert(k,v2);
}
```



## *Example*

Suppose we want to change the value for a key in a hashtable without removing it from the table

- Assume **lock** guards the whole table

*Mama Bear's critical section was too short*

*(if another thread updated the entry, we will lose an update)*

```
synchronized(lock) {
  v1 = table.lookup(k);
}
v2 = expensive(v1);
synchronized(lock) {
  table.remove(k);
  table.insert(k,v2);
}
```



## *Example*

Suppose we want to change the value for a key in a hashtable without removing it from the table

- Assume **lock** guards the whole table

*Baby Bear's critical section was just right*

*(if another update occurred, try our update again)*

```
done = false;
while(!done) {
  synchronized(lock) {
    v1 = table.lookup(k);
  }
  v2 = expensive(v1);
  synchronized(lock) {
    if(table.lookup(k)==v1) {
      done = true;
      table.remove(k);
      table.insert(k,v2);
}}}
```

## *Atomicity*

An operation is *atomic* if no other thread can see it partly executed

- Atomic as in "(appears) indivisible"
- Typically want ADT operations atomic, even to other threads running operations on the same ADT

Guideline #4: Think in terms of what operations need to be *atomic*

- Make critical sections just long enough to preserve atomicity
- *Then* design the locking protocol to implement the critical sections correctly

*That is: Think about atomicity first and locks second*



## *Don't roll your own*

- It is rare that you should write your own data structure
  - Provided in standard libraries
  - Point of CSE332 is to understand the key trade-offs and abstractions
- Especially true for concurrent data structures
  - Far too difficult to provide fine-grained synchronization without data races
  - Standard thread-safe libraries like **`ConcurrentHashMap`** written by world experts

Guideline #5: Use built-in libraries whenever they meet your needs