Temporal relations

- Instructions executed by a single thread are totally ordered
  - \( A < B < C < \ldots \)
- Absent synchronization, instructions executed by distinct threads must be considered unordered / simultaneous
  - Not \( X < X' \), and not \( X' < X \)

Example

```
main()
A
B
pthread_create()
A'
foo()
C
B'
```

- \( A < B < C \)
- \( A' < B' \)
- \( A < A' \)
- \( C = A' \)
- \( C = B' \)

Critical Sections / Mutual Exclusion

- Sequences of instructions that may get incorrect results if executed simultaneously are called critical sections
- (We also use the term race condition to refer to a situation in which the results depend on timing)
- Mutual exclusion means "not simultaneous"
  - \( A < B \) or \( B < A \)
  - We don’t care which
- Forcing mutual exclusion between two critical section executions is sufficient to ensure correct execution – guarantees ordering
- One way to guarantee mutually exclusive execution is using locks

Critical sections

Possibly incorrect
Correct
Correct

When do critical sections arise?

- One common pattern:
  - read-modify-write of
  - a shared value (variable)
  - in code that can be executed concurrently
    (Note: There may be only one copy of the code (e.g., a procedure), but it can be executed by more than one thread at a time)
- Shared variable:
  - Globals and heap-allocated variables
  - NOT local variables (which are on the stack)
    (Note: Never give a reference to a stack-allocated (local) variable to another thread, unless you’re superhumanly careful …)
Example: buffer management

- Threads cooperate in multithreaded programs
  - to share resources, access shared data structures
  - e.g., threads accessing a memory cache in a web server
  - also, to coordinate their execution
  - e.g., a disk reader thread hands off blocks to a network writer thread through a circular buffer

Example: shared bank account

- Suppose we have to implement a function to withdraw money from a bank account:

  ```c
  int withdraw(account, amount) {
    int balance = get_balance(account);  // read
    balance -= amount;                // modify
    put_balance(account, balance);     // write
    spit out cash;
  }
  ```

- Now suppose that you and your partner share a bank account with a balance of $100.00
  - what happens if you both go to separate ATM machines, and simultaneously withdraw $10.00 from the account?

Interleaved schedules

- The problem is that the execution of the two threads can be interleaved, assuming preemptive scheduling:

  ```c
  int withdraw(account, amount) {
    int balance = get_balance(account);
    balance -= amount;
    put_balance(account, balance);
    spit out cash;
  }
  ```

- What’s the account balance after this sequence?
  - who’s happy, the bank or you?
- How often is this sequence likely to occur?

Other Execution Orders

- Which interleavings are ok? Which are not?

How About Now?

- Morals:
  - Interleavings are hard to reason about
    - We make lots of mistakes
    - Control-flow analysis is hard for tools to get right
  - Identifying critical sections and ensuring mutually exclusive access is … “easier”
Correct critical section requirements

- Correct critical sections have the following requirements
  - mutual exclusion
    - at most one thread is in the critical section
  - progress
    - if thread T is outside the critical section, then T cannot prevent
      thread S from entering the critical section
  - bounded waiting (no starvation)
    - if thread T is waiting on the critical section, then T will
      eventually enter the critical section
      - assumes threads eventually leave critical sections
  - performance
    - the overhead of entering and exiting the critical section is small
      with respect to the work being done within it

Mechanisms for building critical sections

- Spinlocks
  - primitive, minimal semantics; used to build others
- Semaphores (and non-spinning locks)
  - basic, easy to get the hang of, somewhat hard to program
    with
- Monitors
  - higher level, requires language support, implicit operations
  - easier to program with; Java "synchronized()" as an example
- Messages
  - simple model of communication and synchronization based
    on (atomic) transfer of data across a channel
  - direct application to distributed systems

Locks

- A lock is a memory object with two operations:
  - acquire(): obtain the right to enter the critical section
  - release(): give up the right to be in the critical section
- acquire() prevents progress of the thread until the
  lock can be acquired
- (Note: terminology varies: acquire/release, lock/
  unlock)

Acquire/Release

- Threads pair up calls to acquire() and release()
  - between acquire() and release(), the thread holds the
    lock
  - acquire() does not return until the caller "owns" (holds)
    the lock
    - at most one thread can hold a lock at a time
  - What happens if the calls aren’t paired (I acquire, but neglect
    to release)?
  - What happens if the two threads acquire different locks (I
    think that access to a particular shared data structure is
    mediated by lock A, and you think it’s mediated by lock B)?
    - (granularity of locking)
Using locks

• What happens when green tries to acquire the lock?

```c
int withdraw(account, amount) {
    acquire(lock);
    balance = get_balance(account);
    balance -= amount;
    put_balance(account, balance);
    release(lock);
    spit out cash;
}
```

Spinlocks

• How do we implement spinlocks? Here’s one attempt:

```c
struct lock_t {
    int held = 0;
}
void acquire(lock) {
    while (lock->held);
    lock->held = 1;
}
void release(lock) {
    lock->held = 0;
}
```

• Why doesn’t this work?
  – where is the race condition?

Implementing spinlocks (cont.)

• Problem is that implementation of spinlocks has critical sections, too!
  – the acquire/release must be atomic
    • atomic == executes as though it could not be interrupted
    • code that executes “all or nothing”
  – need help from the hardware
    • atomic instructions
      • test-and-set, compare-and-swap, ...
      • disable/enable interrupts
        • to prevent context switches

Spinlocks redux: Hardware Test-and-Set

• CPU provides the following as one atomic instruction:

```c
bool test_and_set(bool *flag) {
    bool old = *flag;
    *flag = True;
    return old;
}
```

• Remember, this is a single atomic instruction …

Implementing spinlocks using Test-and-Set

• So, to fix our broken spinlocks:

```c
lock lock;
void acquire(lock) {
    int old = lock->held;
    lock->held = 1;
    return old;
}
void release(lock) {
    lock->held = 0;
}
```

• mutual exclusion? (at most one thread in the critical section)
• progress? (T outside cannot prevent S from entering)
• bounded waiting? (waiting T will eventually enter)
• performance? (low overhead (modulo the spinning part ...))
Reminder of use …

- How does a thread blocked on an "acquire" (that is, stuck in a test-and-set loop) yield the CPU?
  - calls yield (spin-then-block)
  - there's an involuntary context switch (e.g., timer interrupt)

Problems with spinlocks

- Spinlocks work, but are wasteful!
  - if a thread is spinning on a lock, the thread holding the lock cannot make progress
    - You'll spin for a scheduling quantum
  - (pthread_spin_t)
- Only want spinlocks as primitives to build higher-level synchronization constructs
  - Why is this okay?
- We'll see later how to build blocking locks
  - But there is overhead - can be cheaper to spin
    - (pthread_mutex_t)

Another approach: Disabling interrupts

- Only available to the kernel
  - Can't allow user-level to disable interrupts!
- Insufficient on a multiprocessor
  - Each processor has its own interrupt mechanism
- "Long" periods with interrupts disabled can wreak havoc with devices
- Just as with spinlocks, you only want to use disabling of interrupts to build higher-level synchronization constructs

Race conditions

- Informally, we say a program has a race condition (aka "data race") if the result of an executing depends on timing
  - i.e., is non-deterministic
- Typical symptoms
  - I run it on the same data, and sometimes it prints 0 and sometimes it prints 4
  - I run it on the same data, and sometimes it prints 0 and sometimes it crashes

Summary

- Synchronization introduces temporal ordering
- Adding synchronization can eliminate races
- Synchronization can be provided by locks, semaphores, monitors, messages …
- Spinlocks are the lowest-level mechanism
  - primitive in terms of semantics – error-prone
  - implemented by spin-waiting (crude) or by disabling interrupts (also crude, and can only be done in the kernel)
- In our next exciting episode …
  - semaphores are a slightly higher level abstraction
    - Importantly, they are implemented by blocking, not spinning
    - Locks can also be implemented in this way
    - monitors are significantly higher level
    - utilize programming language support to reduce errors