

CSE 333

Lecture 20 - intro to concurrency

Hal Perkins

Department of Computer Science & Engineering

University of Washington



Administrivia

HW4 due next Thursday, 11 pm w/usual late days

How's it going?

Remember: no changes allowed in header files, Makefile, or specifications.

Reminder: watch your late days! (4 max per quarter)

Check the “late days remaining” entry in the gradebook

Sections tomorrow: pthread tutorial

Last exercise posted tomorrow, due Monday: pthreads

Goals

Understand concurrency

- why it is useful

- why it is hard

Exposure to concurrent programming styles

- using multiple threads or multiple processes

- using asynchronous or non-blocking I/O

 - “event-driven programming”

Let's imagine you want to...

...build a web search engine.

you need a Web index

an inverted index (a map from “word” to “list of documents containing the word”)

probably *sharded* over multiple files

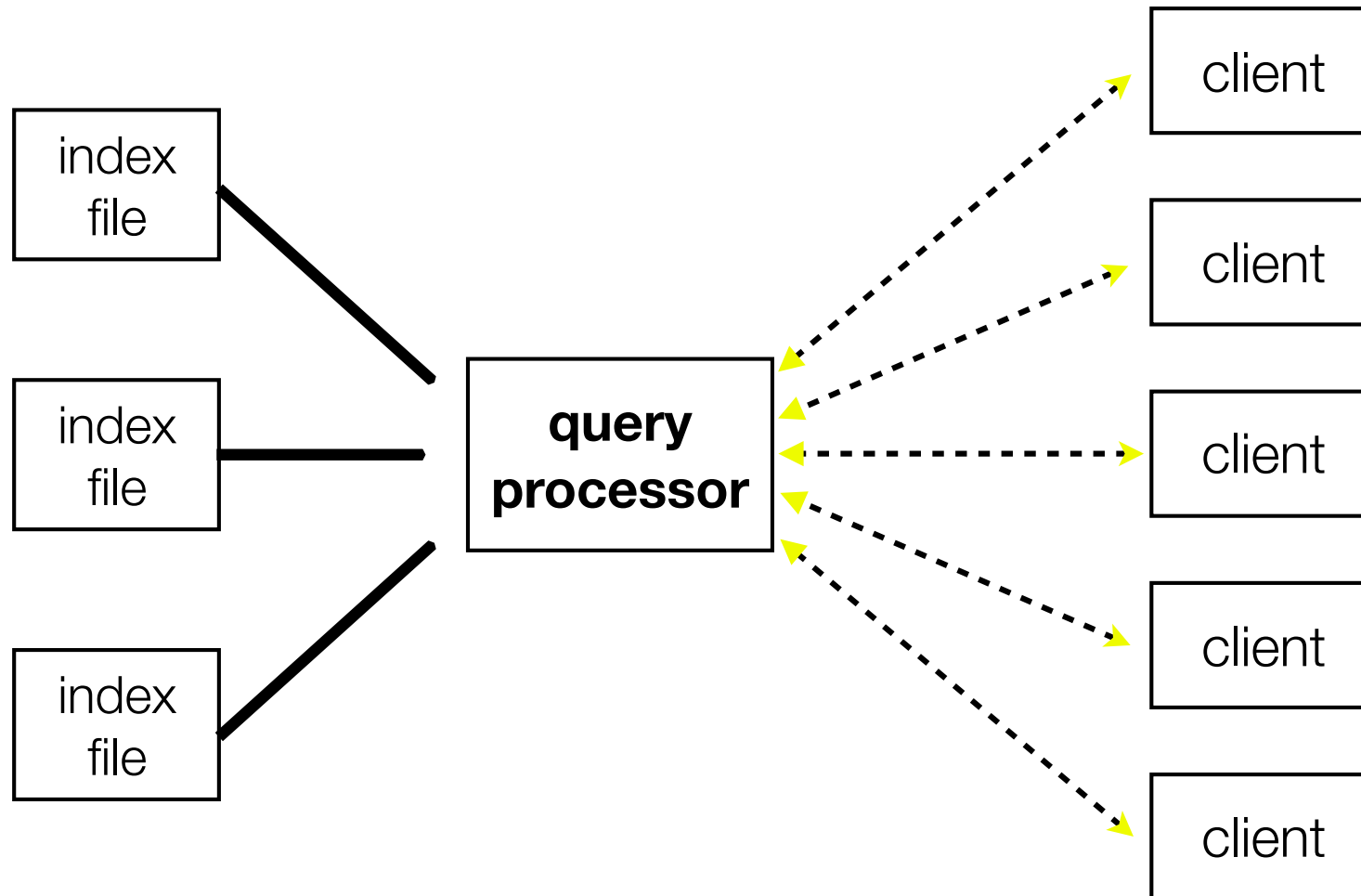
a query processor

accepts a query composed of multiple words

looks up each word in the index

merges the result from each word into an overall result set

Architecturally

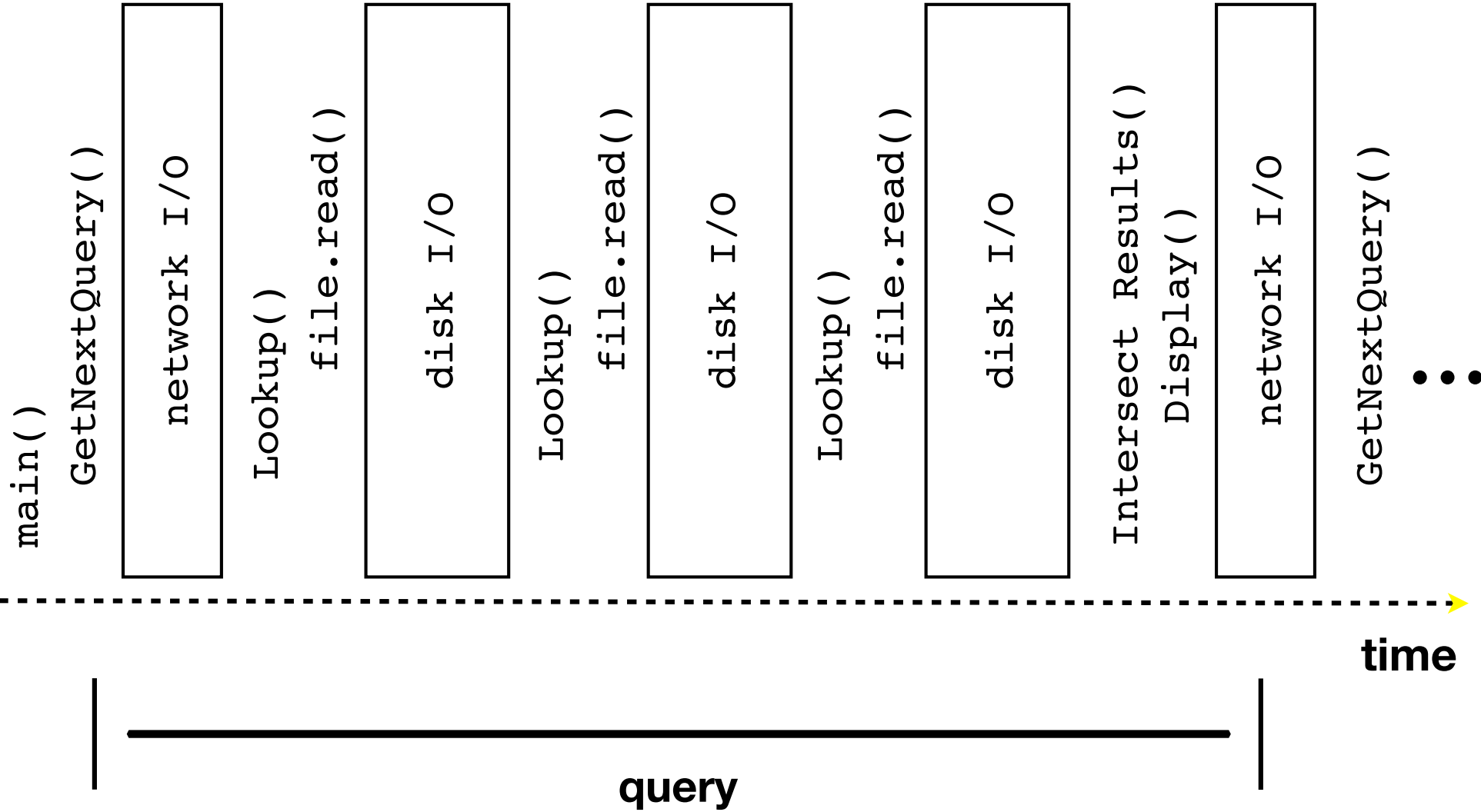


A sequential implementation

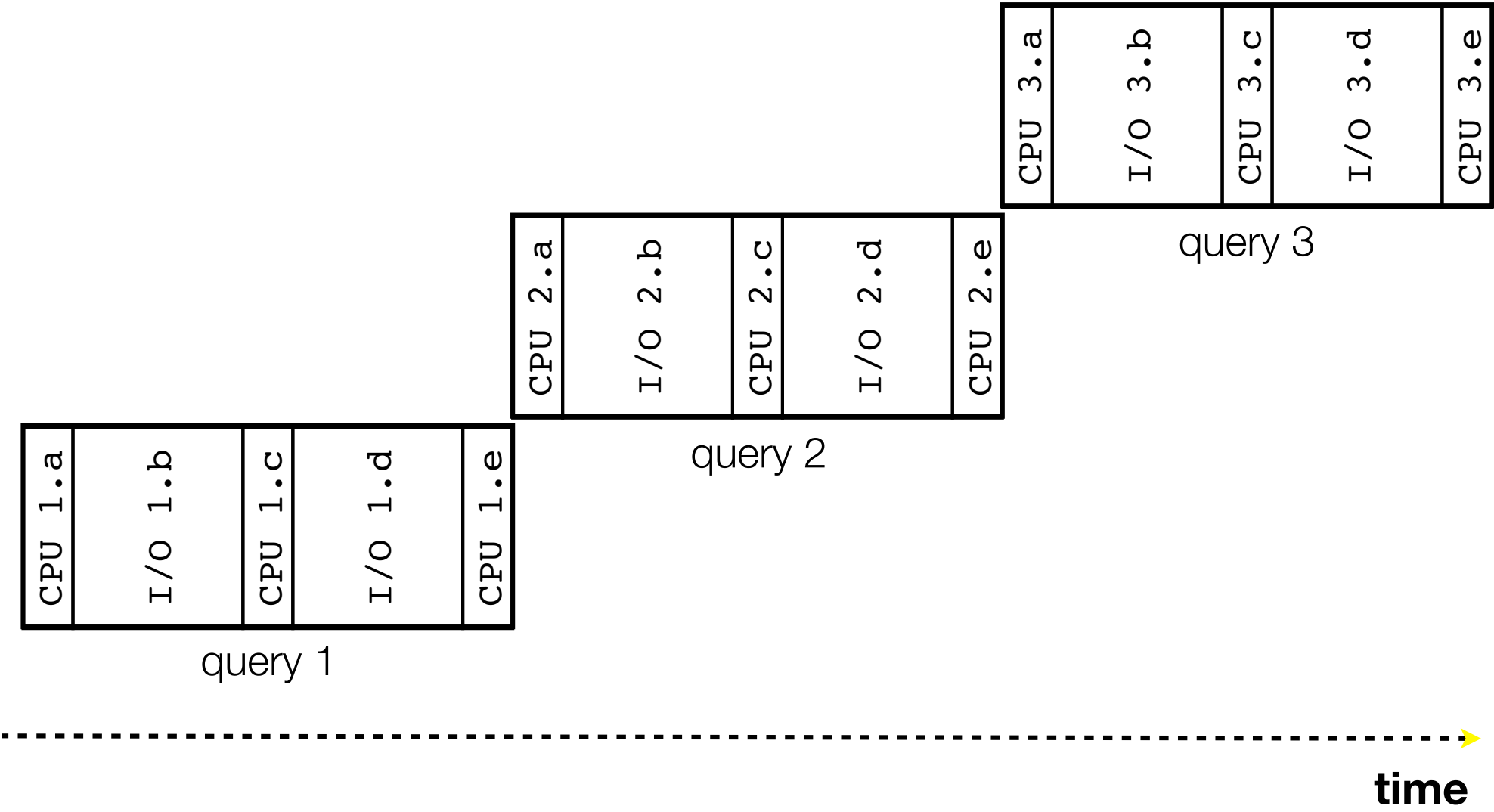
```
doclist Lookup(string word) {
    bucket = hash(word);
    hitlist = file.read(bucket);
    foreach hit in hitlist {
        doclist.append(file.read(hit));
    }
    return doclist;
}

main() {
    while (1) {
        string query_words[] = GetNextQuery();
        results = Lookup(query_words[0]);
        foreach word in query[1..n] {
            results = results.intersect(Lookup(word));
        }
        Display(results);
    }
}
```

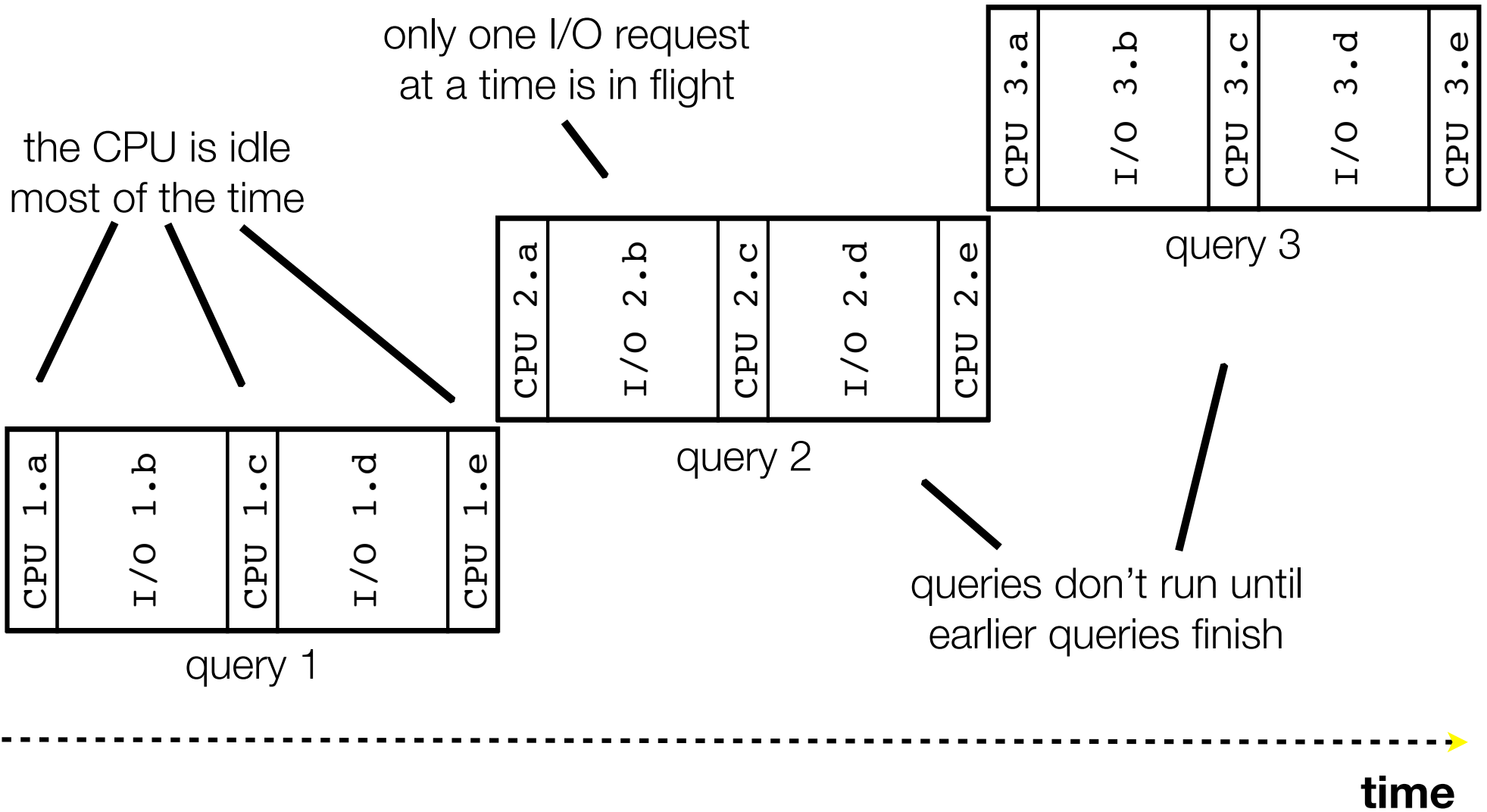
Visually



Simplifying



Simplifying



Sequentiality can be inefficient

Only one query is being processed at a time

all other queries queue up behind the first one

The CPU is idle most of the time

it is “blocked” waiting for I/O to complete

disk I/O can be very, very slow

At most one I/O operation is in flight at a time

misses opportunities to speed I/O up

separate devices in parallel, better scheduling of single device, ...

What we want...concurrency

A version of the program that executes multiple **tasks** simultaneously

it could execute multiple **queries** at the same time

while one is waiting for I/O, another can be executing on the CPU

or, it could execute queries one at a time, but issue **I/O requests** against different files/disks simultaneously

it could read from several different index files at once, processing the I/O results as they arrive

Concurrency != parallelism

parallelism is when multiple CPUs work simultaneously on 1 job

One way to do this

Use multiple **threads** or **processes**

as a query arrives, **fork** a new thread (or process) to handle it

the thread reads the query from the console, issues read requests against files, assembles results and writes to the console

the thread uses blocking I/O; the thread alternates between consuming CPU cycles and blocking on I/O

the OS context switches between threads / processes

while one is blocked on I/O, another can use the CPU

multiple threads' I/O requests can be issued at once

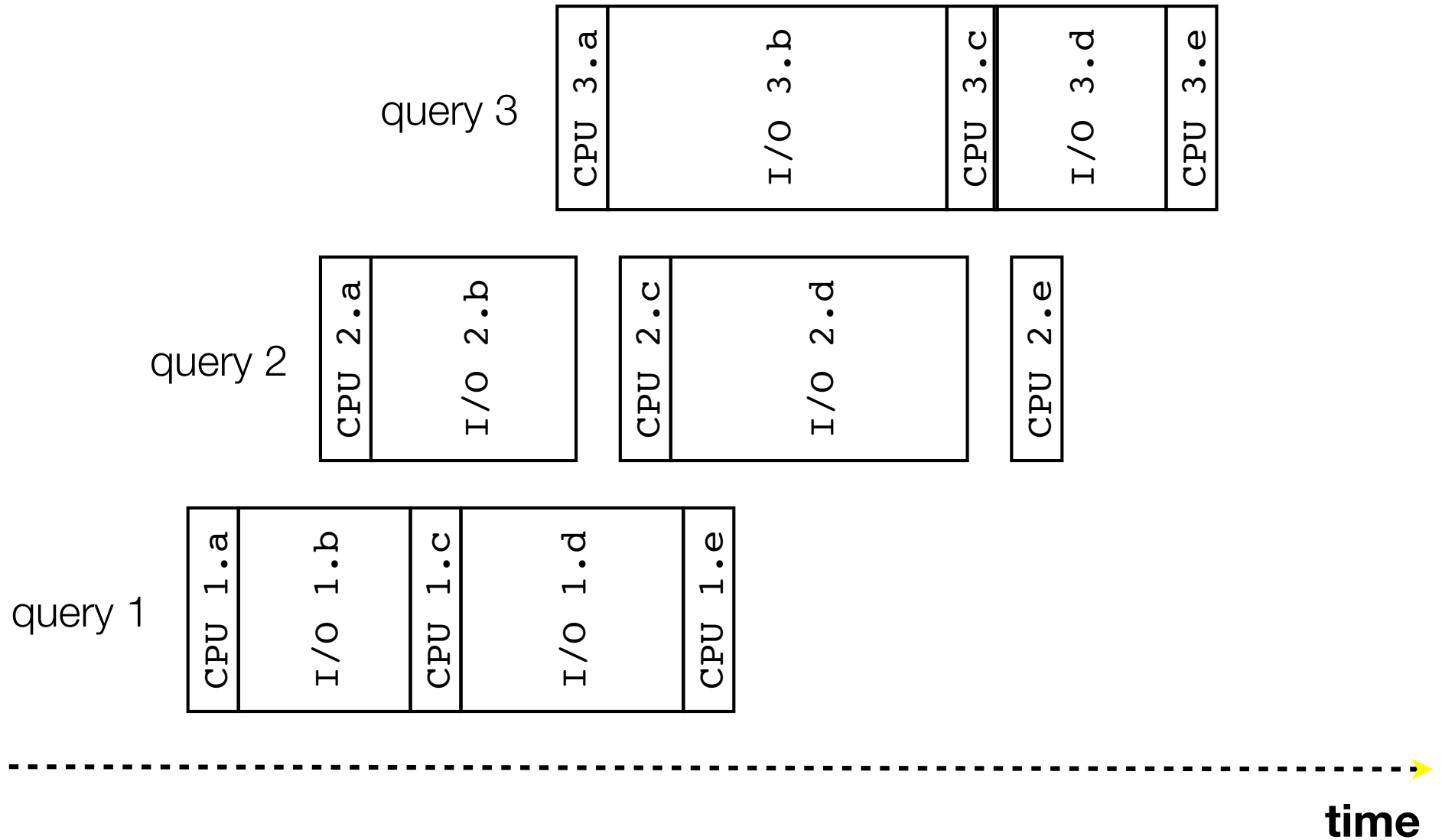
Multithreaded pseudocode

```
main() {
  while (1) {
    string query_words[] = GetNextQuery();
    ForkThread(ProcessQuery());
  }
}
```

```
doclist Lookup(string word) {
  bucket = hash(word);
  hitlist = file.read(bucket);
  foreach hit in hitlist
    doclist.append(file.read(hit));
  return doclist;
}

ProcessQuery() {
  results = Lookup(query_words[0]);
  foreach word in query[1..n] {
    results = results.intersect(Lookup(word));
  }
  Display(results);
}
```

Multithreaded, visually



Whither threads?

Advantages

you (mostly) write sequential-looking code

if you have multiple CPUs / cores, threads can run in **parallel**

Disadvantages

if your threads share data, need locks or other **synchronization**

very bug-prone and difficult to debug

threads can introduce overhead

lock contention, context switch overhead, and other issues

need language support for threads

One alternative

Fork **processes** instead of threads

advantages:

no shared memory between processes, so no need to worry about concurrent accesses to shared variables / data structures

no need for language support; OS provides “fork”

disadvantages:

more overhead than threads to create, context switch

cannot easily share memory between processes, so typically share through the file system

Another alternative

Use **asynchronous** or **non-blocking** I/O

your program begins processing a query

when your program needs to read data to make further progress, it registers interest in the data with the OS, then switches to a different query

the OS handles the details of issuing the read on the disk, or waiting for data from the console (or other devices, like the network)

when data becomes available, the OS lets your program know

your program (almost never) blocks on I/O

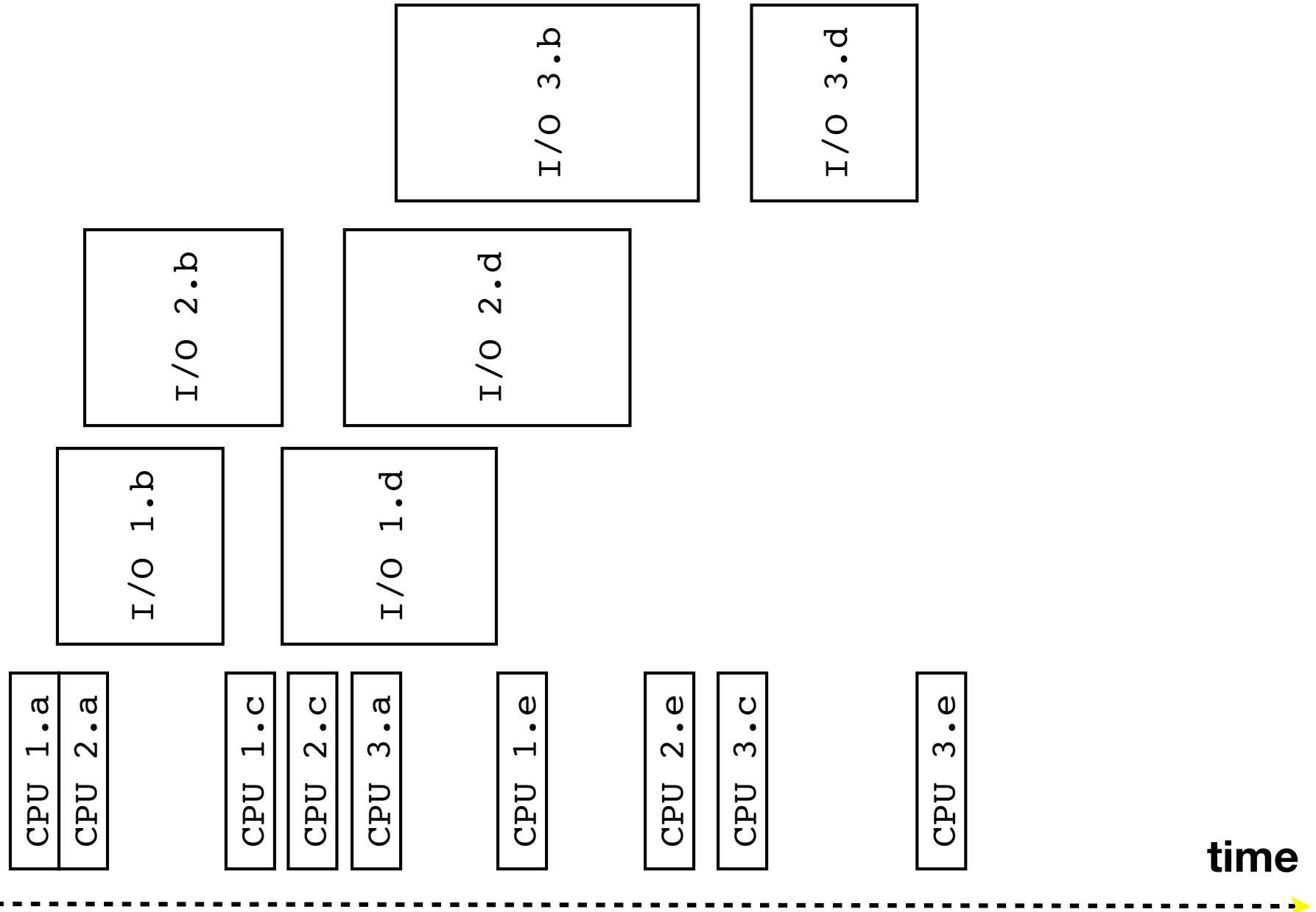
Event-driven programming

Your program is structured as an *event-loop*

```
void dispatch(task, event) {
    switch(task.state) {
        case READING_FROM_CONSOLE:
            query_words = event.data;
            async_read(index, query_words[0]);
            task.state = READING_FROM_INDEX;
            return;
        case READING_FROM_INDEX:
            ...etc.
    }
}

while(1) {
    event = OS.GetNextEvent( );
    task = lookup(event);
    dispatch(task, event);
}
```

Asynchronous, event-driven



Non-blocking vs. asynchronous

Non-blocking I/O (network, console)

your program enables non-blocking I/O on its fd's

your program issues `read()`, `write()` system calls

if the read/write would **block**, the system call returns immediately

program can ask the OS which fd's are readable/writable

program can choose to block while no fds are ready

Asynchronous I/O (disk)

program tells the OS to begin reading / writing

the "begin_read" or "begin_write" returns immediately

when the I/O completes, OS delivers an event to the program

Why the difference?

Non-blocking I/O is for networks

according to Linux, the disk never **blocks** your program

it just delays it

but, reading from the network can truly block your program

a remote computer may wait arbitrarily long before sending data

Asynchronous I/O is for files

primarily used to hide disk latency

asynchronous I/O system calls are messy and complicated :(

instead, typically use a threadpool to emulate asynchronous I/O

Whither events?

Advantages

- don't have to worry about locks and “race conditions”

- for some kinds of programs, especially GUIs, leads to a very simple and intuitive program structure

 - one event handler for each UI event

Disadvantages

- can lead to very complex structure for programs that do lots of disk and network I/O

 - sequential code gets broken up into a jumble of small event handlers

 - you have to package up all task state between handlers

One way to think about it

Threaded code:

each thread executes its task sequentially, and per-task state is naturally stored in the thread's stack

OS and thread scheduler switch between threads for you

Event-driven code:

you are the scheduler

you have to bundle up task state into continuations; tasks do not have their own stacks

See you on Friday!