POSIX I/O, System Calls

CSE 333 Winter 2020

Instructor: Justin Hsia

Teaching Assistants:

Andrew Hu	Austin Chan	Brennan Stein
Cheng Ni	Cosmo Wang	Diya Joy
Guramrit Singh	Mengqi Chen	Pat Kosakanchit
Rehaan Bhimar	Renshu Gu	Travis McGaha
Zachary Keyes		

Administrivia

- Exercise 7 posted *tomorrow*, due Monday (1/27)
  - Comment your code, check linter and valgrind

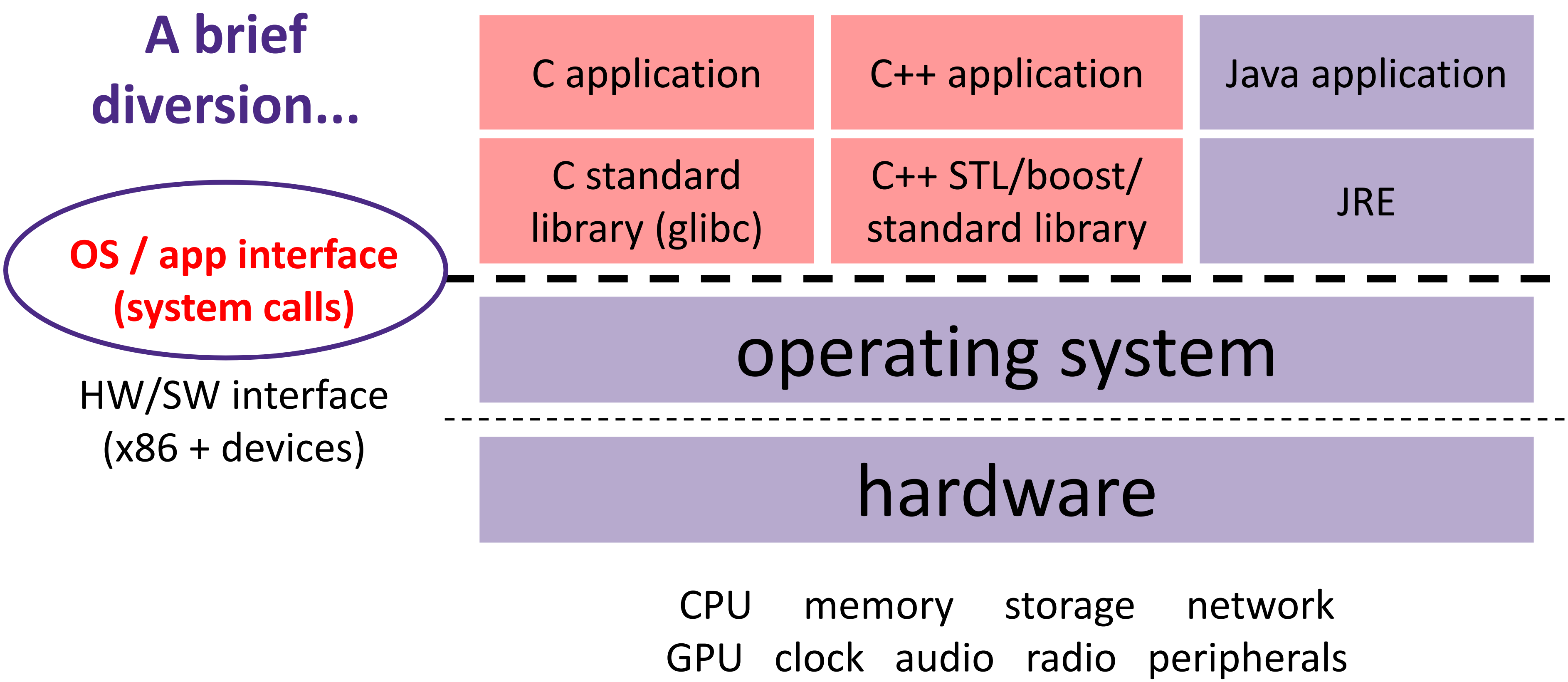
- Homework 1 due tomorrow night (1/23)
  - Watch that `HashTable` doesn't violate the modularity of `LinkedList`
  - Watch for pointer to local (stack) variables
  - Use a debugger (*e.g.* `gdb`) if you're getting segfaults
  - Clean up "to do" comments, but leave "STEP #" markers
  - Late days: don't tag `hw1-final` until you are really ready

- Homework 2 will be released on Friday (1/24)

Lecture Outline

- **POSIX Lower-Level I/O**
- System Calls

Remember This Picture?



We Need To Go Deeper…

- So far we've seen the C standard library to access files
  - Use a provided `FILE*` *stream* abstraction
  - **`fopen`**`()`, **`fread`**`()`, **`fwrite`**`()`, **`fclose`**`()`, **`fseek`**`()`
- These are convenient and portable
  - They are buffered*
  - They are implemented using lower-level OS calls

From C to POSIX

- Most UNIX-en support a common set of lower-level file access APIs: POSIX – Portable Operating System Interface
  - `open()`, `read()`, `write()`, `close()`, `lseek()`
    - Similar in spirit to their `f*()` counterparts from the C std lib
    - Lower-level and unbuffered compared to their counterparts
    - Also less convenient
  - You will have to use these to read file system directories and for network I/O, so we might as well learn them now

open()/close()

- To open a file:
  - Pass in the filename and access mode
    - Similar to **fopen**()
  - Get back a "file descriptor"
    - Similar to FILE* from **fopen**(), but is just an int
    - Defaults: **0** is stdin, **1** is stdout, **2** is stderr

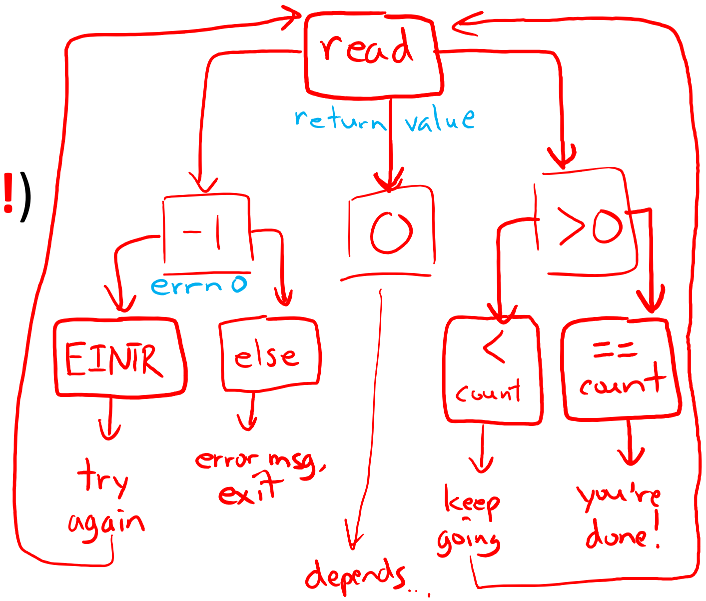
```
#include <fcntl.h>     // for open()
#include <unistd.h>    // for close()
  ...                         filename     access mode
  int fd = open("foo.txt", O_RDONLY);
  if (fd == -1) {
    perror("open failed");
    exit(EXIT_FAILURE);
  }
  ...    file descriptor
  close(fd);
```

Reading from a File

try to read count bytes

```
ssize_t read(int fd, void* buf, size_t count);
```

- Returns the number of bytes read
  - Might be fewer bytes than you requested (!!!)
  - Returns 0 if you're already at the end-of-file
  - Returns -1 on error (and sets errno)



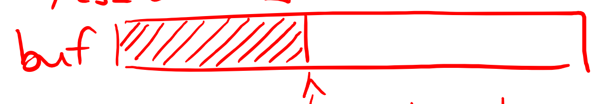
- There are some surprising error modes (check errno)
  - EBADF: bad file descriptor
  - EFAULT: output buffer is not a valid address
  - EINTR: read was interrupted, please try again (ARGH!!!! 😤😠)
  - And many others…

these are defined in errno.h

One way to `read()` n bytes

- Which is the correct completion of the blank below?
  - Vote at http://PollEv.com/justinh

if first read only got n/3 bytes:
bytes_left = 2n/3



want next read to start writing here

```
char* buf = ...;  // buffer of size n
int bytes_left = n;
int result;       // result of read()

while (bytes_left > 0) {
  result = read(fd, ______, bytes_left);
  if (result == -1) {
    if (errno != EINTR) {
      // a real error happened,
      // so return an error result
    }
    // EINTR happened,
    // so do nothing and try again
    continue;
  }
  bytes_left -= result;
}
```

A. buf

B. buf + bytes_left

C. buf + bytes_left - n

D. buf + n - bytes_left

E. We're lost…

One method to `read()` n bytes

```
int fd = open(filename, O_RDONLY);
char* buf = ...;  // buffer of appropriate size
int bytes_left = n;
int result;

while (bytes_left > 0) {
  result = read(fd, buf + (n - bytes_left), bytes_left);
  if (result == -1) {
    if (errno != EINTR) {
      // a real error happened, so return an error result
    }
    // EINTR happened, so do nothing and try again
    continue;
  } else if (result == 0) {
    // EOF reached, so stop reading
    break;
  }
  bytes_left -= result;
}

close(fd);
```

prevent infinite loop if EOF reached

Other Low-Level Functions

- Read man pages to learn about:
  - `write()` – write data
    - `#include <unistd.h>`
  - `fsync()` – flush data to the underlying device
    - `#include <unistd.h>`
  - `opendir()`, `readdir()`, `closedir()` – deal with directory listings
    - Make sure you read the section 3 version (*e.g.* `man 3 opendir`)
    - `#include <dirent.h>`

- A useful shortcut sheet (from CMU): http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~guna/15-123S11/Lectures/Lecture24.pdf

C Standard Library vs. POSIX

- C std lib implements a subset of POSIX
  - *e.g.* POSIX provides directory manipulation that C std lib doesn't
- C std lib implements automatic buffering
- C std lib has a nicer API

- The two are similar but C std lib builds on top of POSIX
  - Choice between high-level and low-level
  - Will depend on the requirements of your application

Lecture Outline

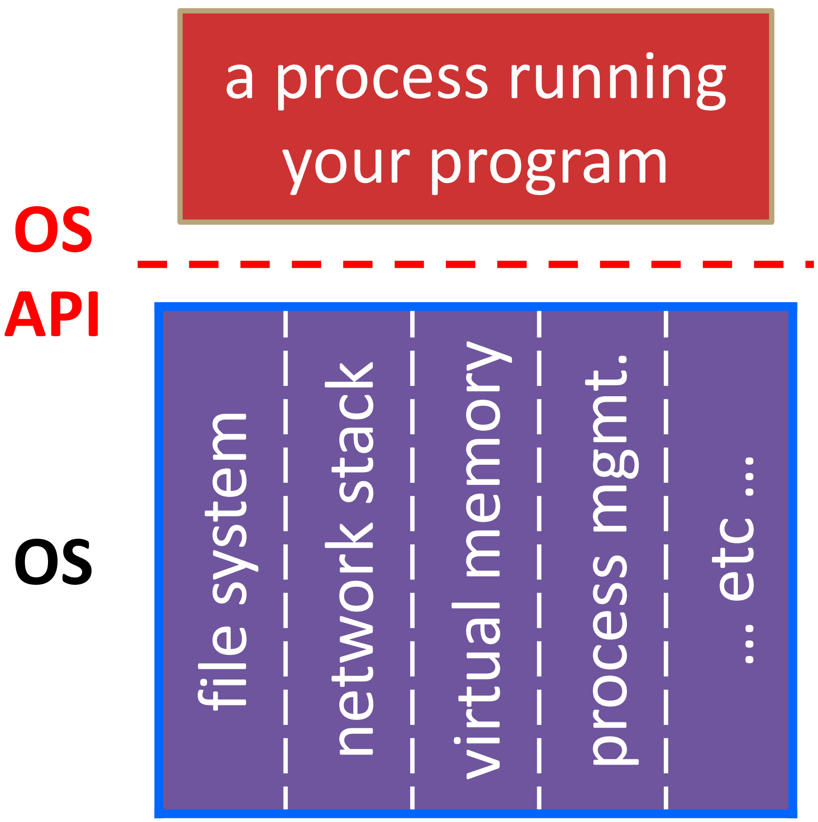
- POSIX Lower-Level I/O
- **System Calls**

What's an OS?

- Software that:
  - Directly interacts with the hardware
    - OS is trusted to do so; user-level programs are not
    - OS must be ported to new hardware; user-level programs are portable
  - Manages (allocates, schedules, protects) hardware resources
    - Decides which programs can access which files, memory locations, pixels on the screen, etc. and when
  - Abstracts away messy hardware devices
    - Provides high-level, convenient, portable abstractions (*e.g.* files, disk blocks)

OS: Abstraction Provider

- The OS is the "layer below"
  - A module that your program can call (with system calls)
  - Provides a powerful OS API – POSIX, Windows, etc.



File System
- open(), read(), write(), close(), …

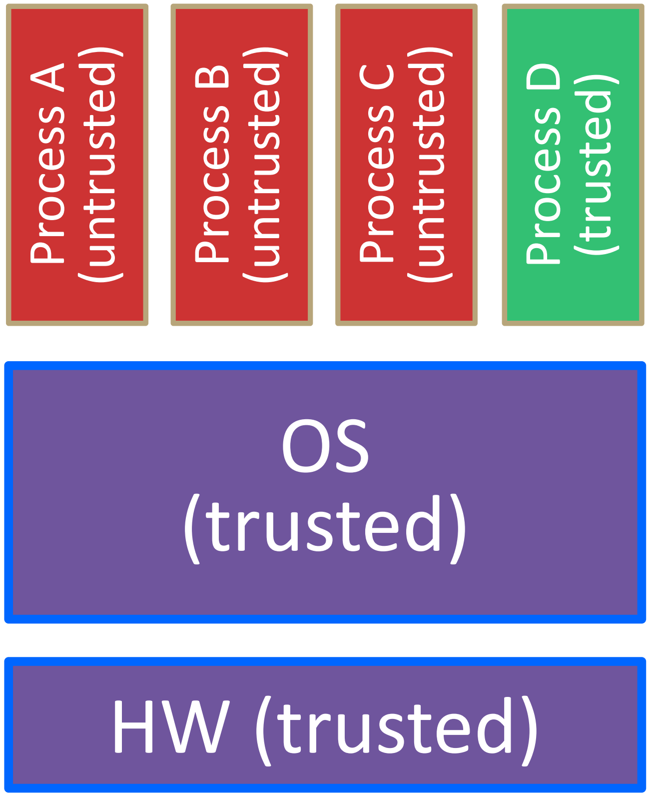
Network Stack
- connect(), listen(), read(), write(), ...

Virtual Memory
- brk(), shm_open(), …

Process Management
- fork(), wait(), nice(), …

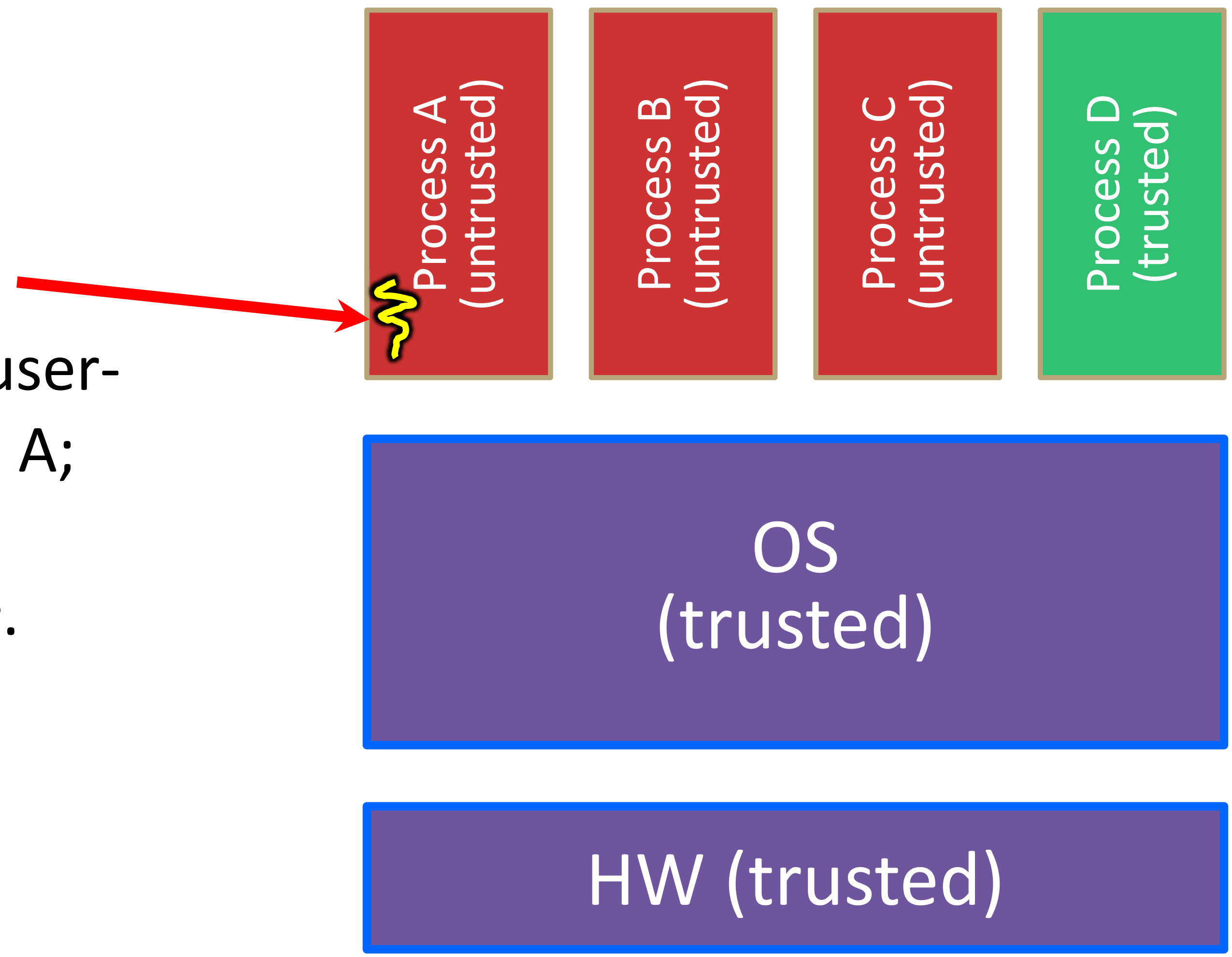
OS: Protection System

- OS isolates process from each other
  - But permits controlled sharing between them
    - Through shared name spaces (*e.g.* file names)
- OS isolates itself from processes
  - Must prevent processes from accessing the hardware directly
- OS is allowed to access the hardware
  - User-level processes run with the CPU (processor) in unprivileged mode
  - The OS runs with the CPU in privileged mode
  - User-level processes invoke system calls to safely enter the OS



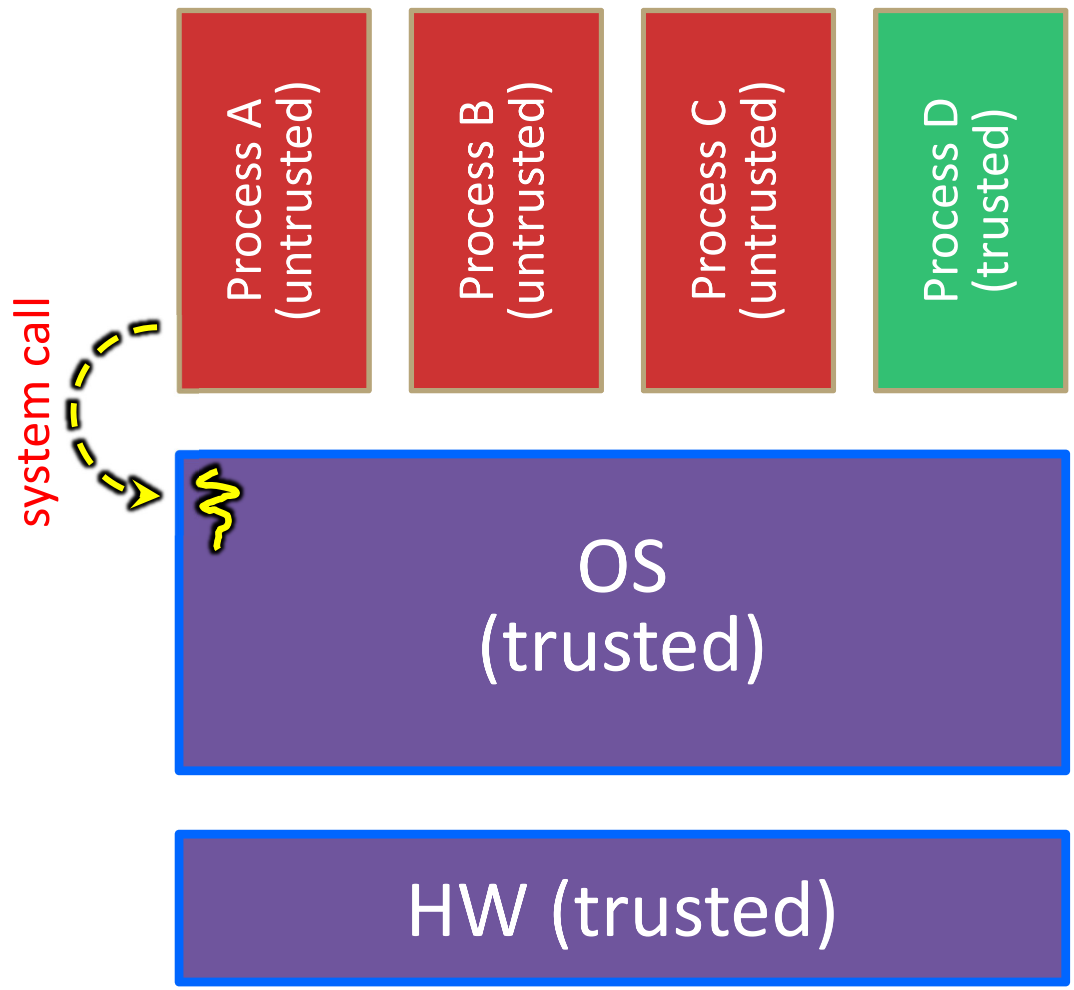
System Call Trace (high-level view)

A CPU (thread of execution) is running user-level code in Process A; the CPU is set to *unprivileged mode*.



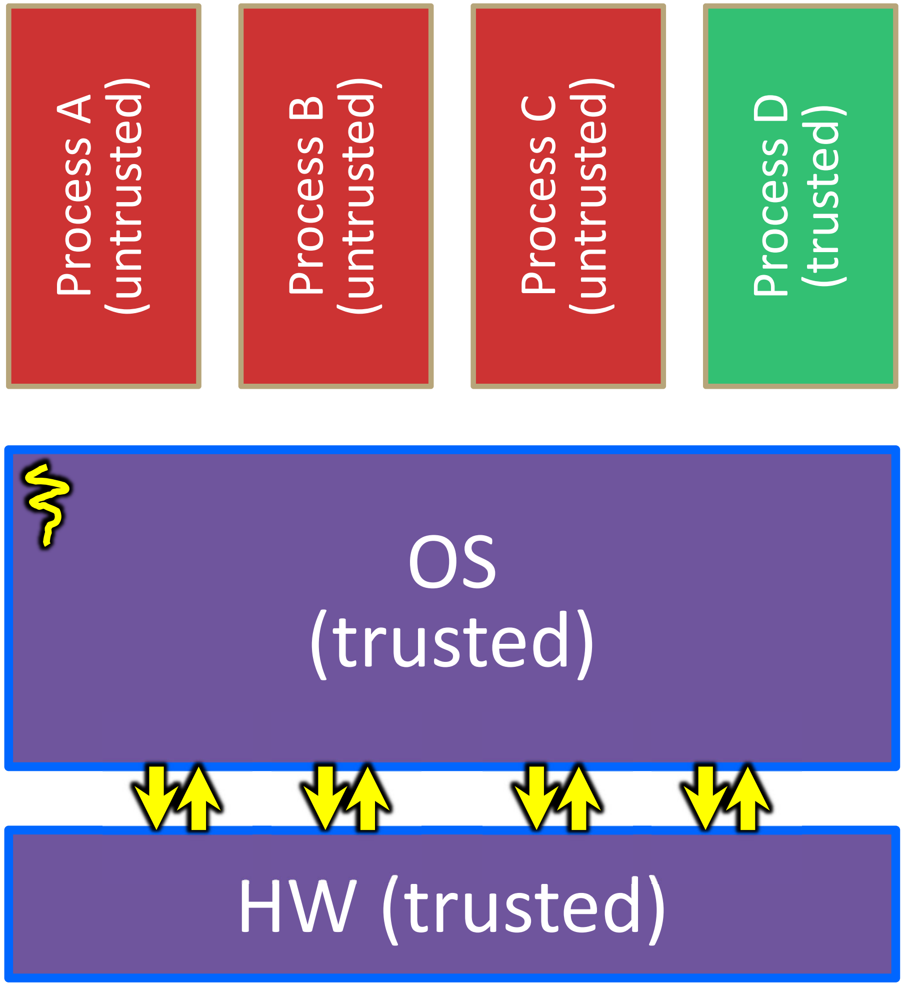
System Call Trace (high-level view)

Code in Process A invokes a system call; the hardware then sets the CPU to *privileged mode* and traps into the OS, which invokes the appropriate system call handler.



System Call Trace (high-level view)

Because the CPU executing the thread that's in the OS is in privileged mode, it is able to use *privileged instructions* that interact directly with hardware devices like disks.

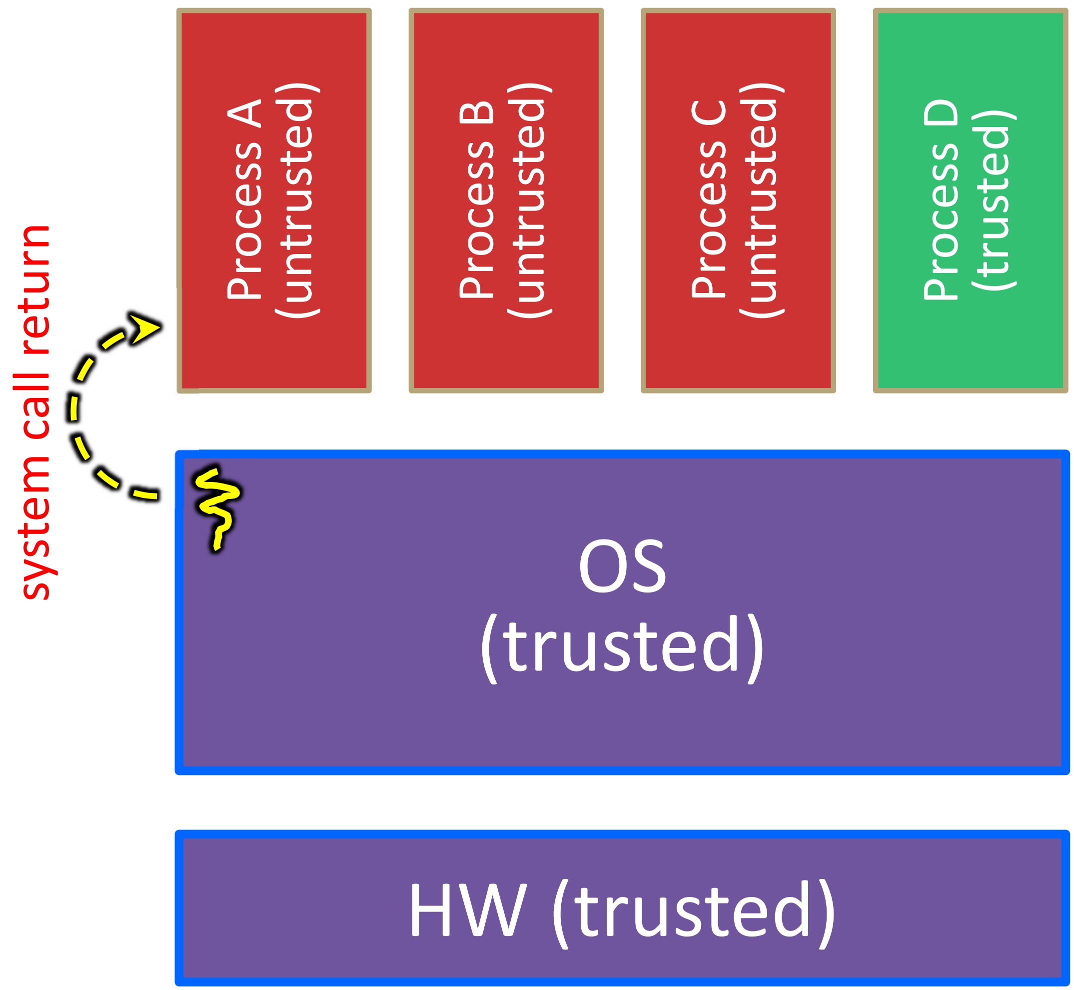


System Call Trace (high-level view)

Once the OS has finished servicing the system call, which might involve long waits as it interacts with HW, it:

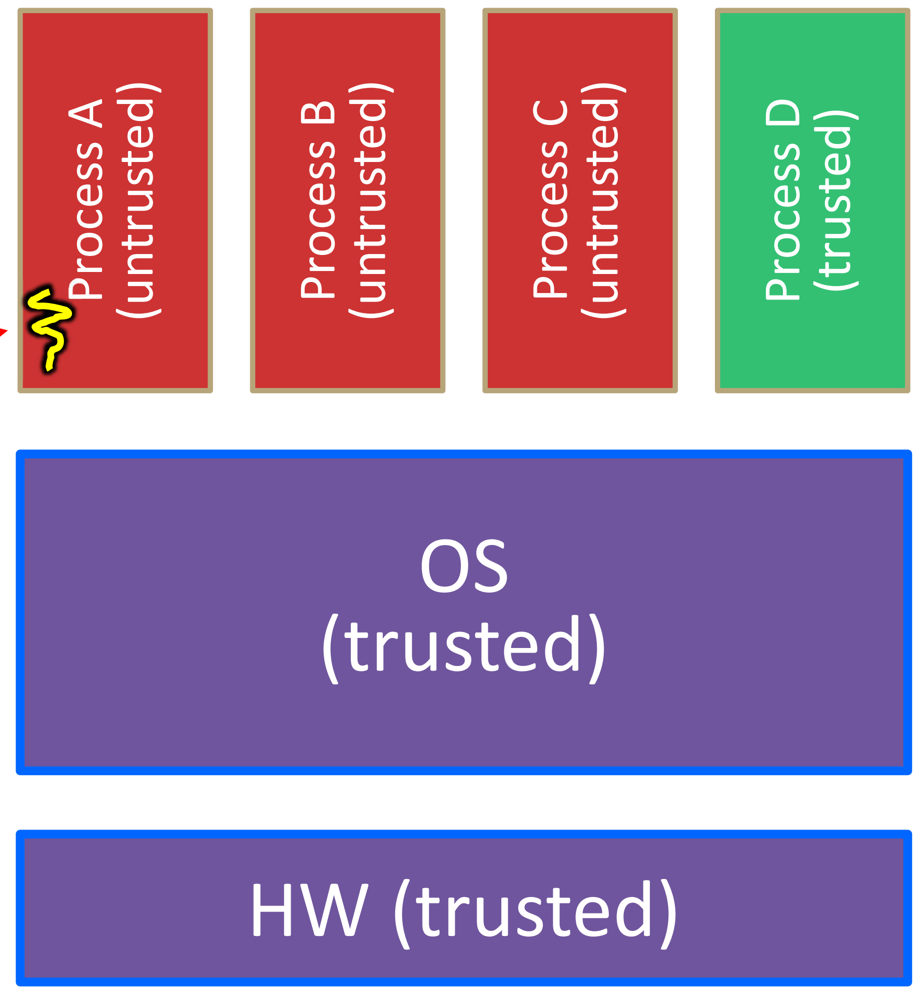
(1) Sets the CPU back to unprivileged mode and

(2) Returns out of the system call back to the user-level code in Process A.



System Call Trace (high-level view)

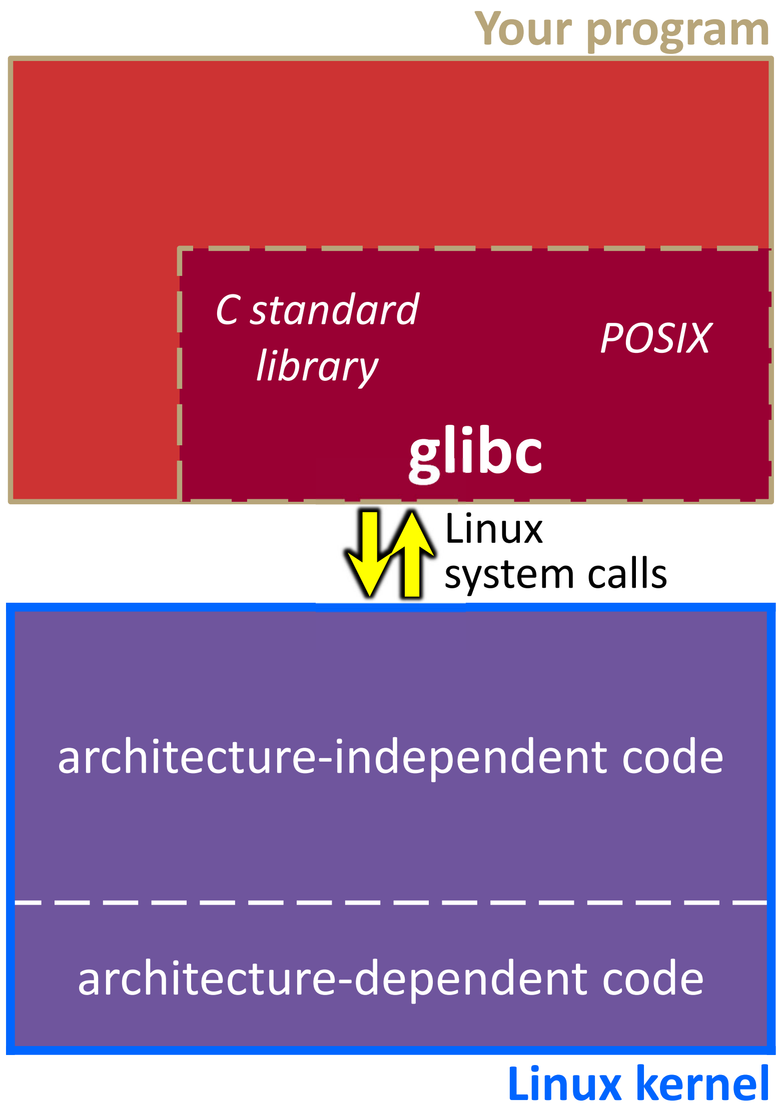
The process continues executing whatever code is next after the system call invocation.



Useful reference:
CSPP ' 8.1–8.3
(the 351 book)

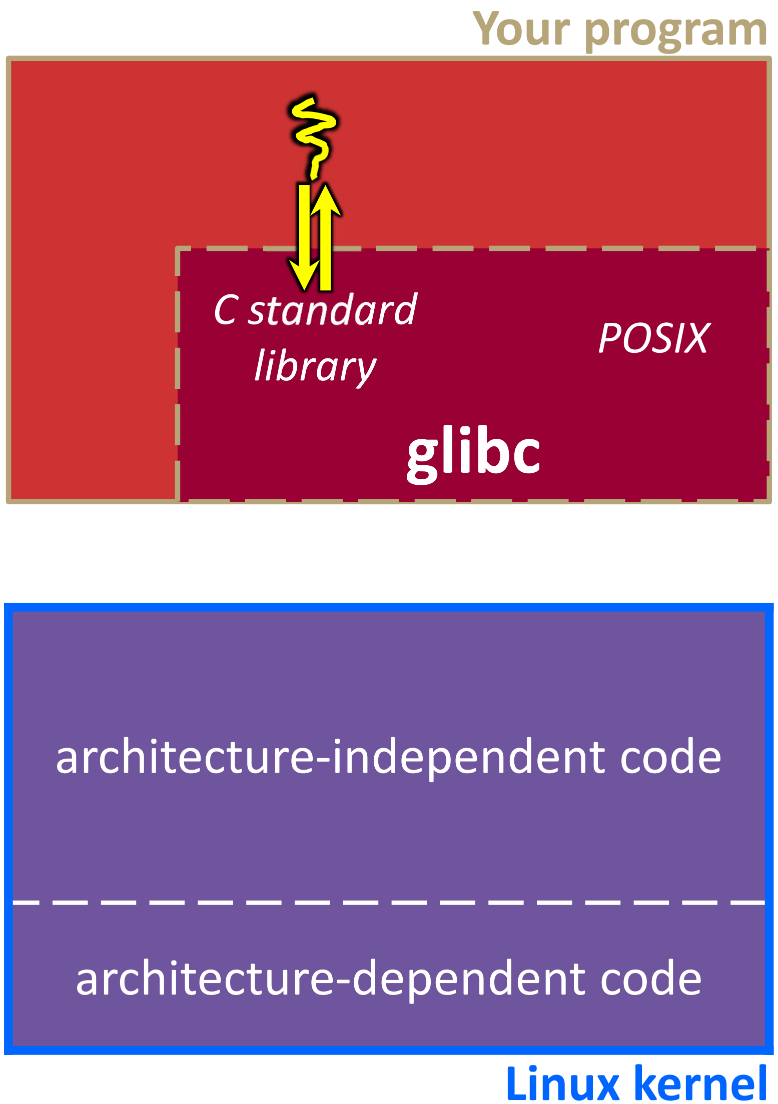
"Library calls" on x86/Linux

- A more accurate picture:
  - Consider a typical Linux process
  - Its thread of execution can be in one of several places:
    - In your program's code
    - In `glibc`, a shared library containing the C standard library, POSIX, support, and more
    - In the Linux architecture-independent code
    - In Linux x86-64 code



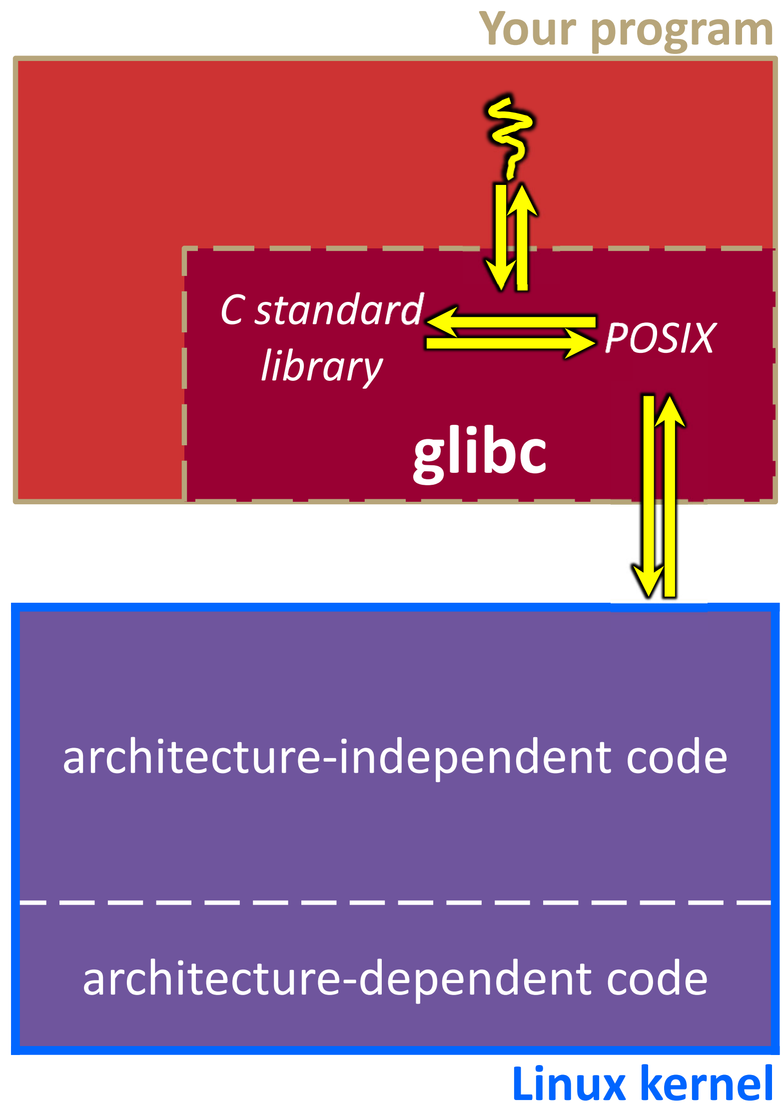
"Library calls" on x86/Linux: Option 1

- Some routines your program invokes may be entirely handled by `glibc` without involving the kernel
  - *e.g.* **`strcmp`**`()` from `stdio.h`
  - There is some initial overhead when invoking functions in dynamically linked libraries (during loading)
    - But after symbols are resolved, invoking `glibc` routines is basically as fast as a function call within your program itself!



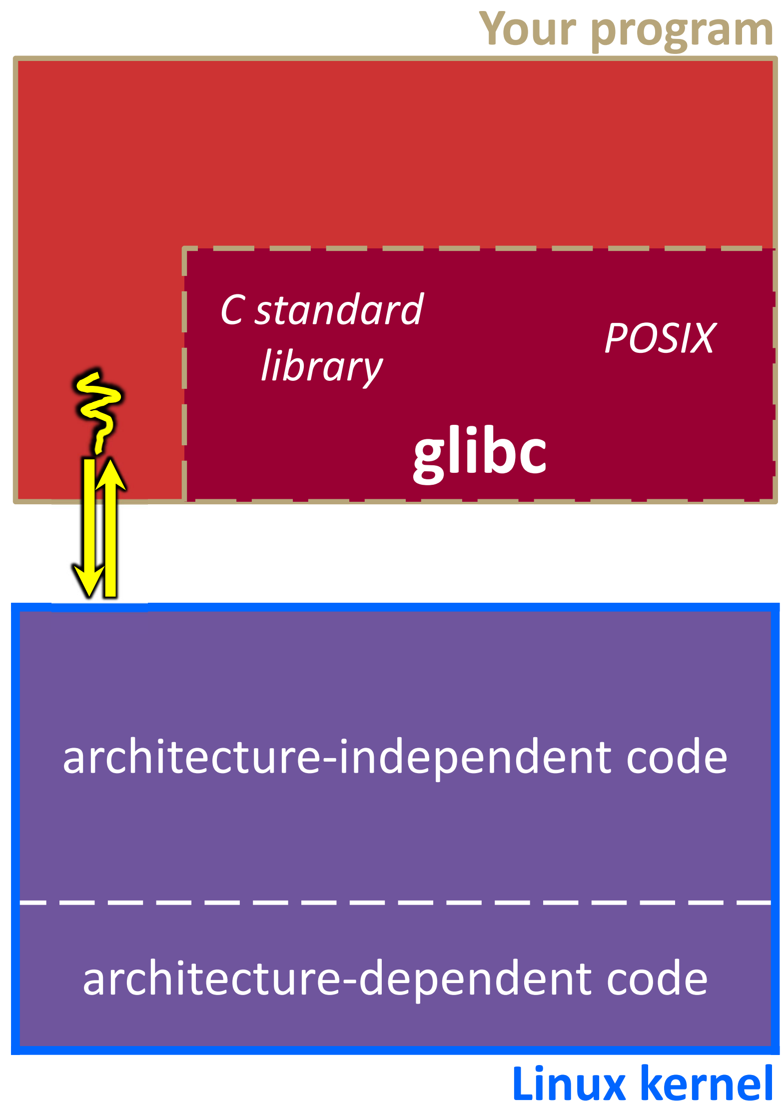
"Library calls" on x86/Linux: Option 2

- Some routines may be handled by `glibc`, but they in turn invoke Linux system calls
  - *e.g.* POSIX wrappers around Linux `syscalls`
    - POSIX **`readdir()`** invokes the underlying Linux **`readdir()`**
  - *e.g.* C `stdio` functions that read and write from files
    - **`fopen()`**, **`fclose()`**, **`fprintf()`** invoke underlying Linux **`open()`**, **`close()`**, **`write()`**, etc.



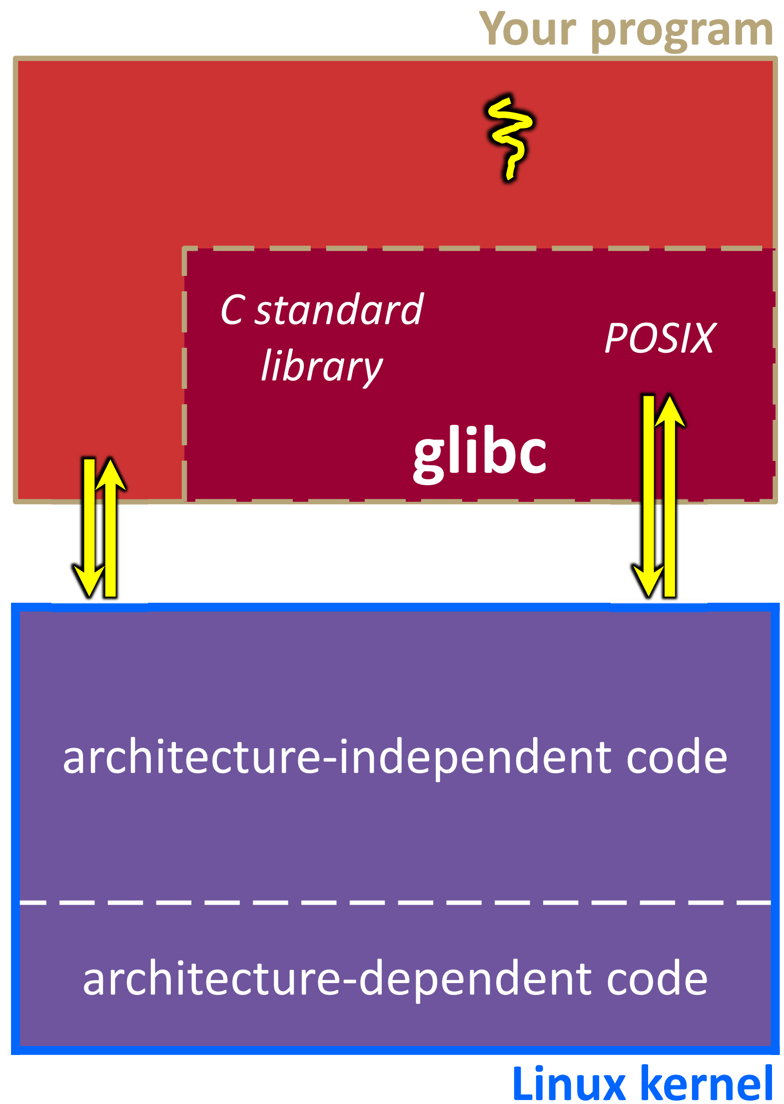
"Library calls" on x86/Linux: Option 3

- Your program can choose to directly invoke Linux system calls as well
  - Nothing is forcing you to link with `glibc` and use it
  - But relying on directly-invoked Linux system calls may make your program less portable across UNIX varieties



Details on x86/Linux

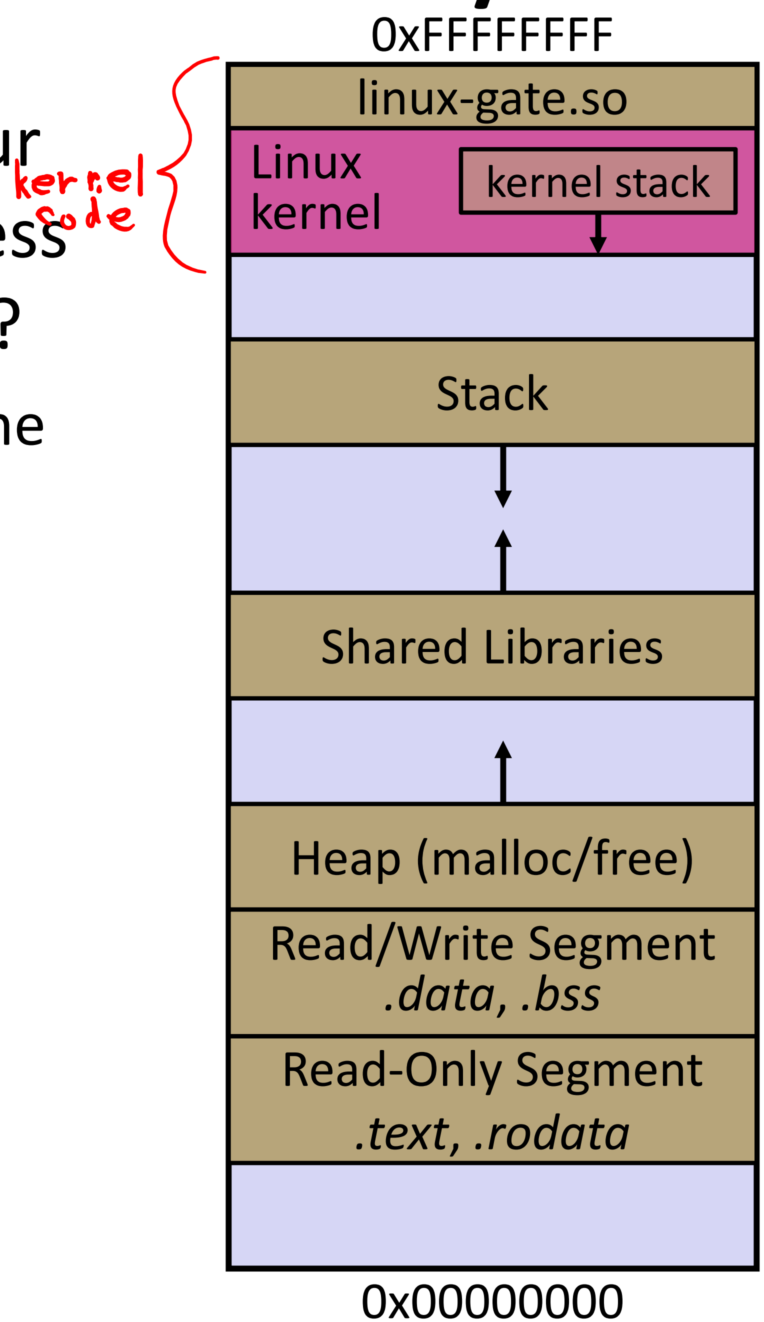
- Let's walk through how a Linux system call actually works
  - We'll assume *32-bit x86* using the modern `SYSENTER` / `SYSEXIT` x86 instructions
    - x86-64 code is similar, though details always change over time, so take this as an example – not a debugging guide

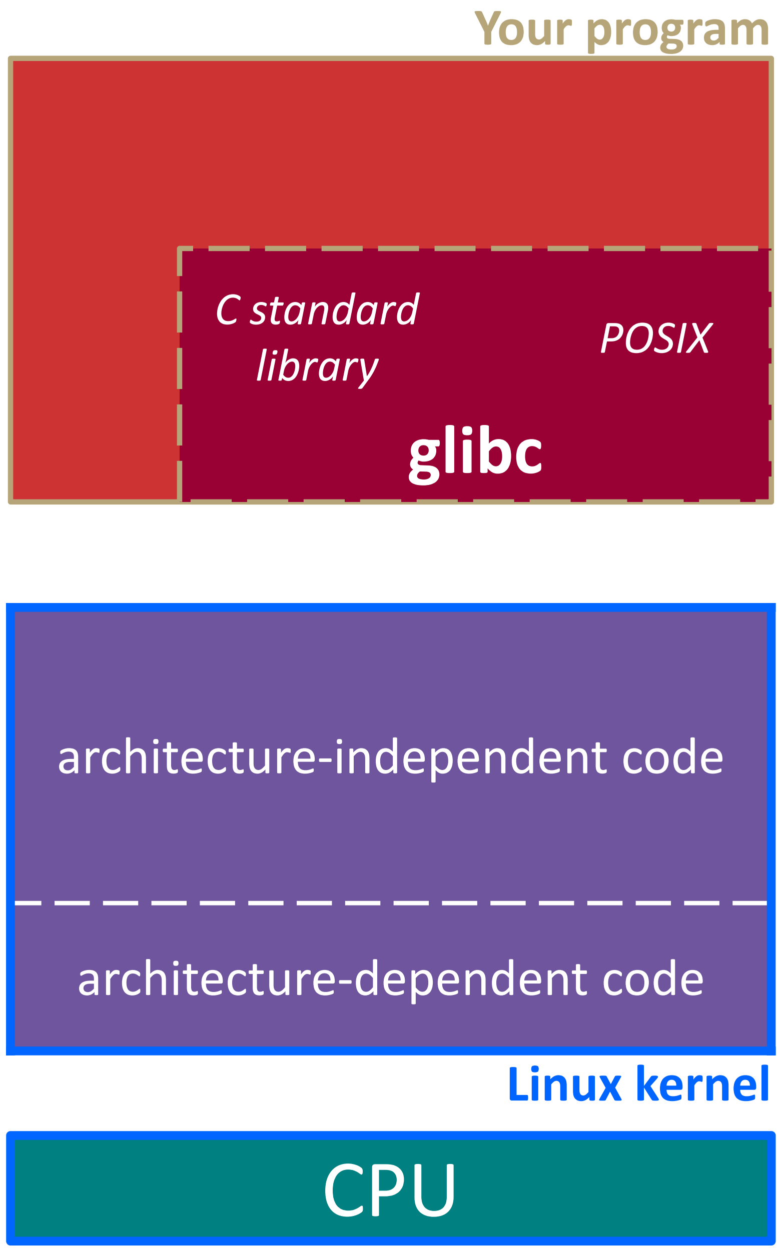


System Calls on x86/Linux

Remember our process address space picture?

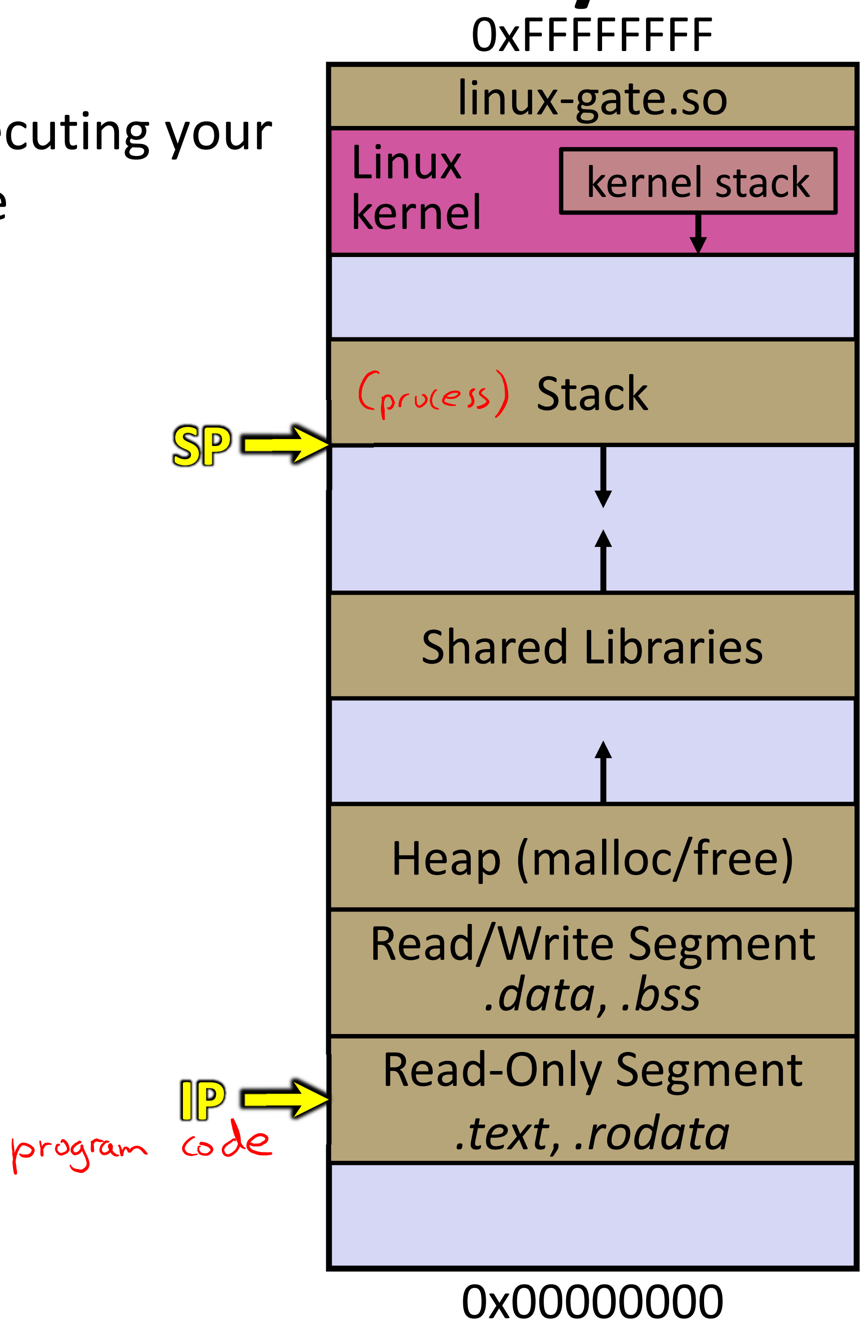
- Let's add some details:

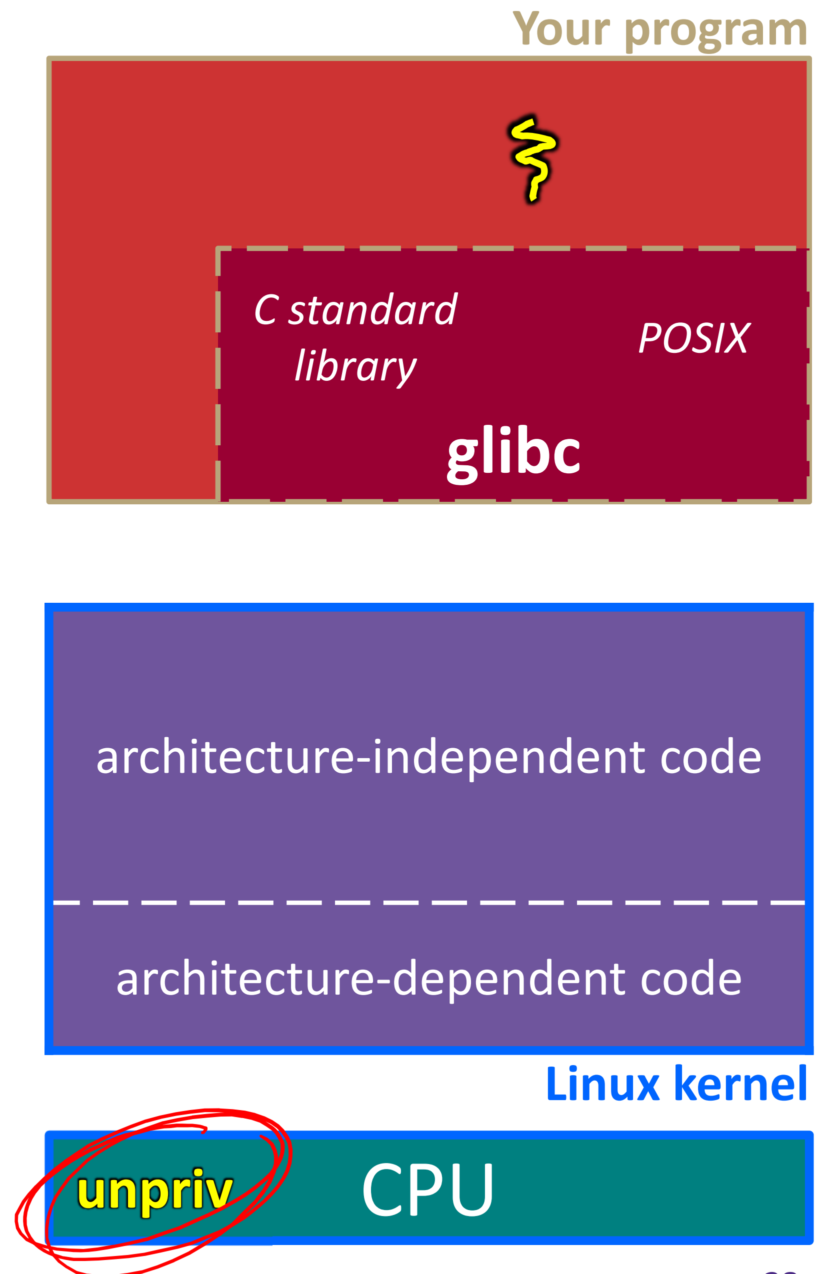




System Calls on x86/Linux

Process is executing your program code

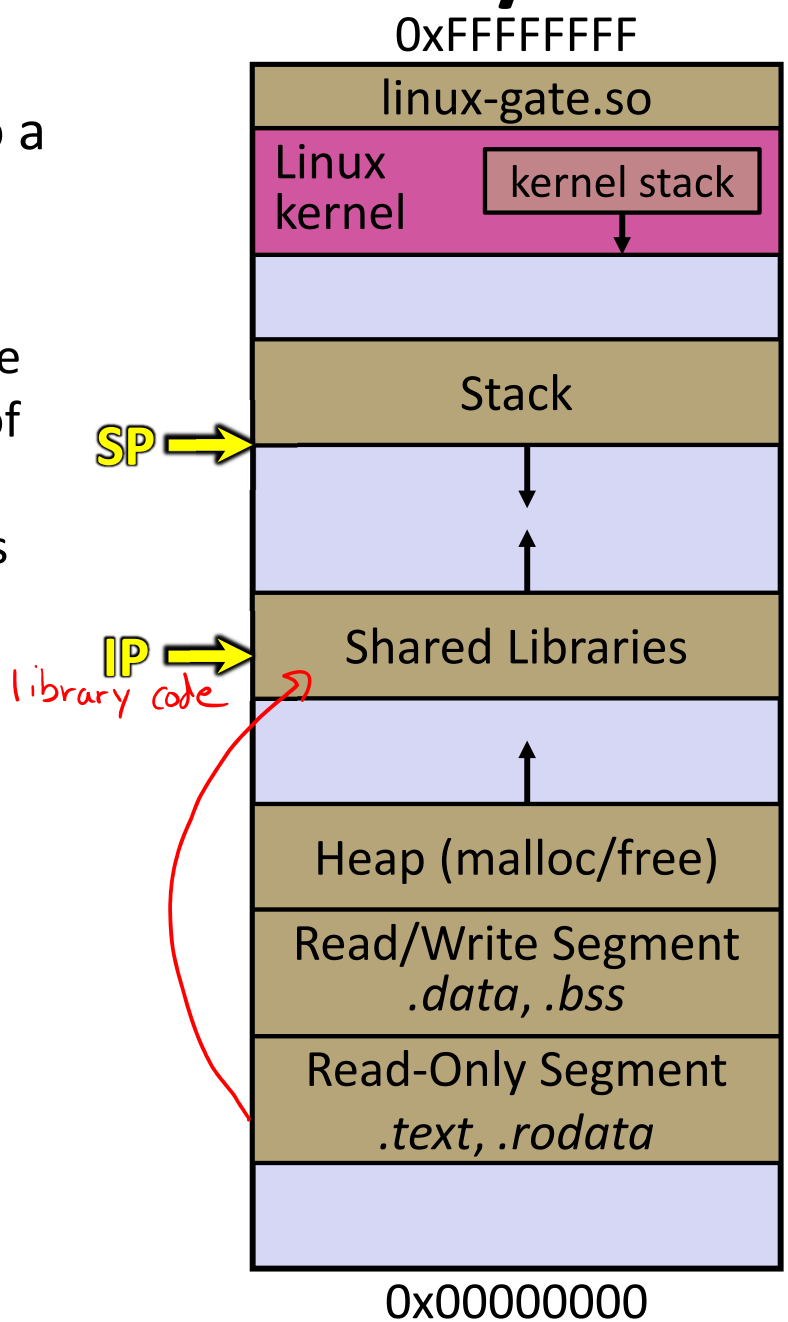


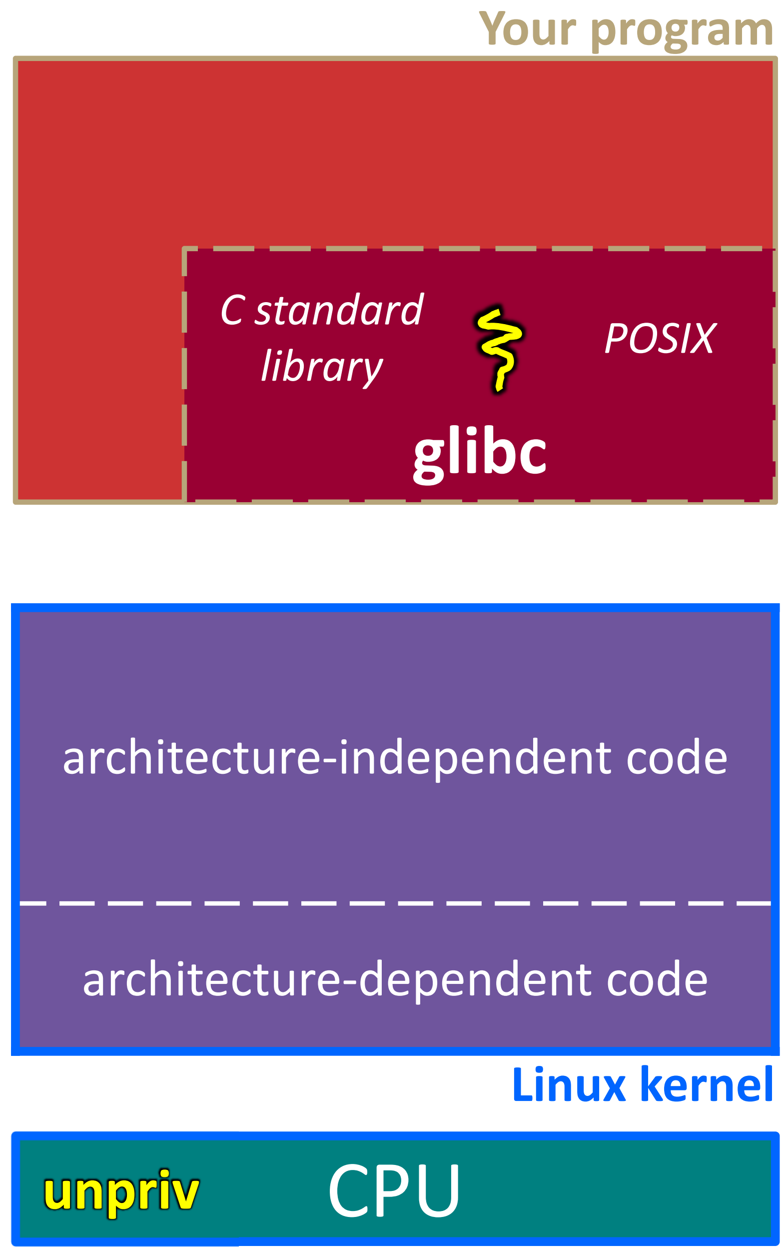


System Calls on x86/Linux

Process calls into a `glibc` function

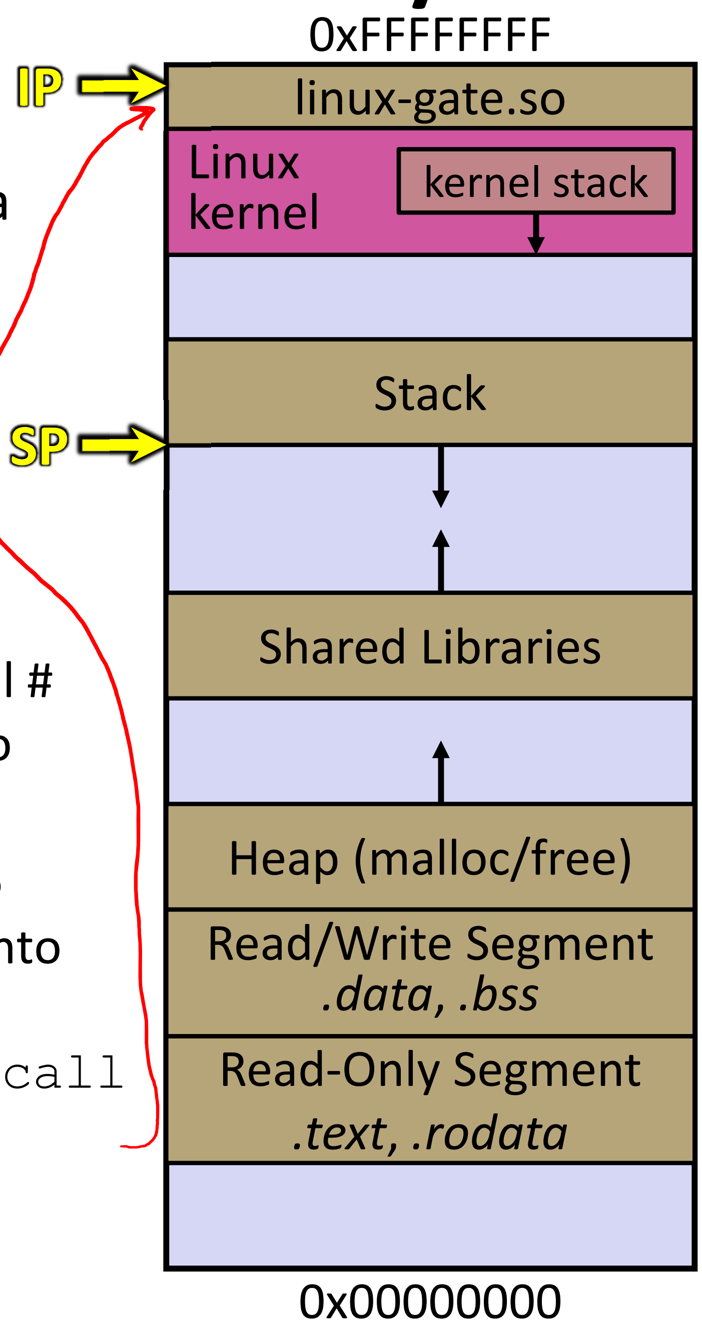
- *e.g.* **`fopen`**()
- We'll ignore the messy details of loading/linking shared libraries

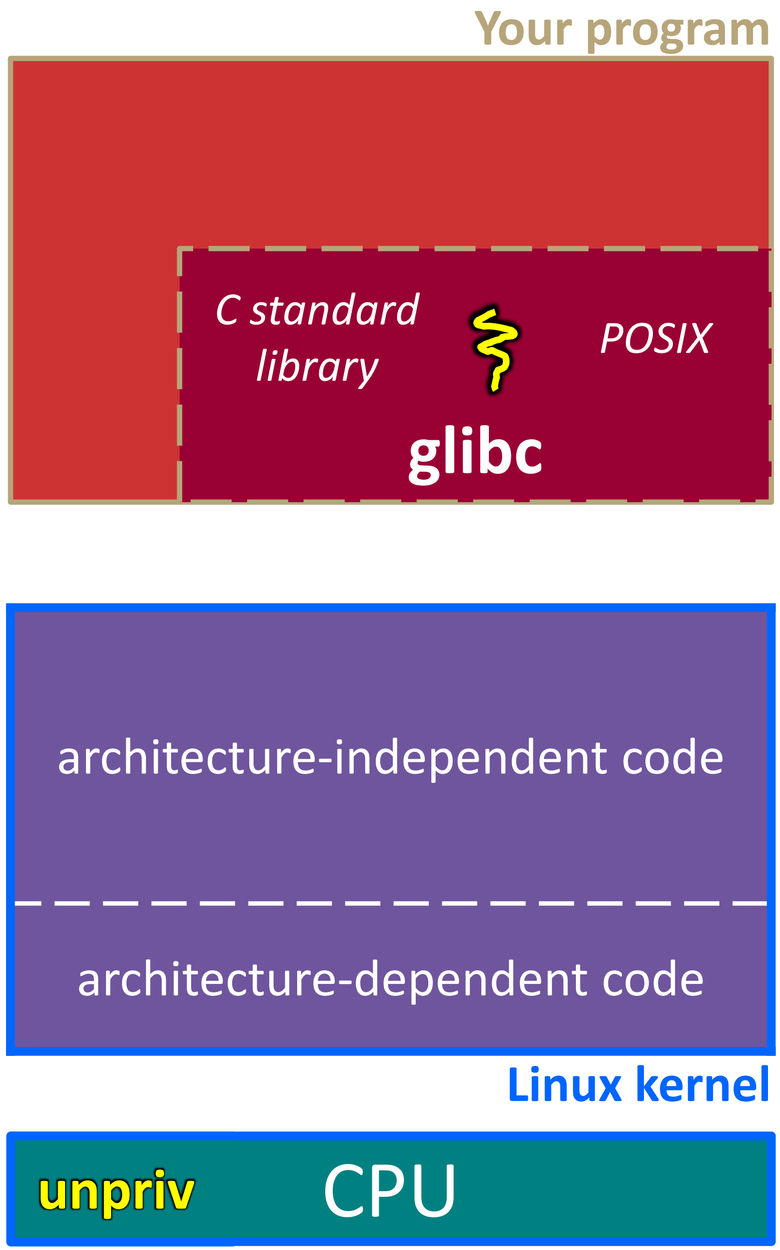




System Calls on x86/Linux

- `glibc` begins the process of invoking a Linux system call
  - `glibc`'s `fopen()` likely invokes Linux's `open()` system call
  - Puts the system call # and arguments into registers
  - Uses the **`call`** x86 instruction to call into the routine `__kernel_vsyscall` located in `linux-gate.so`



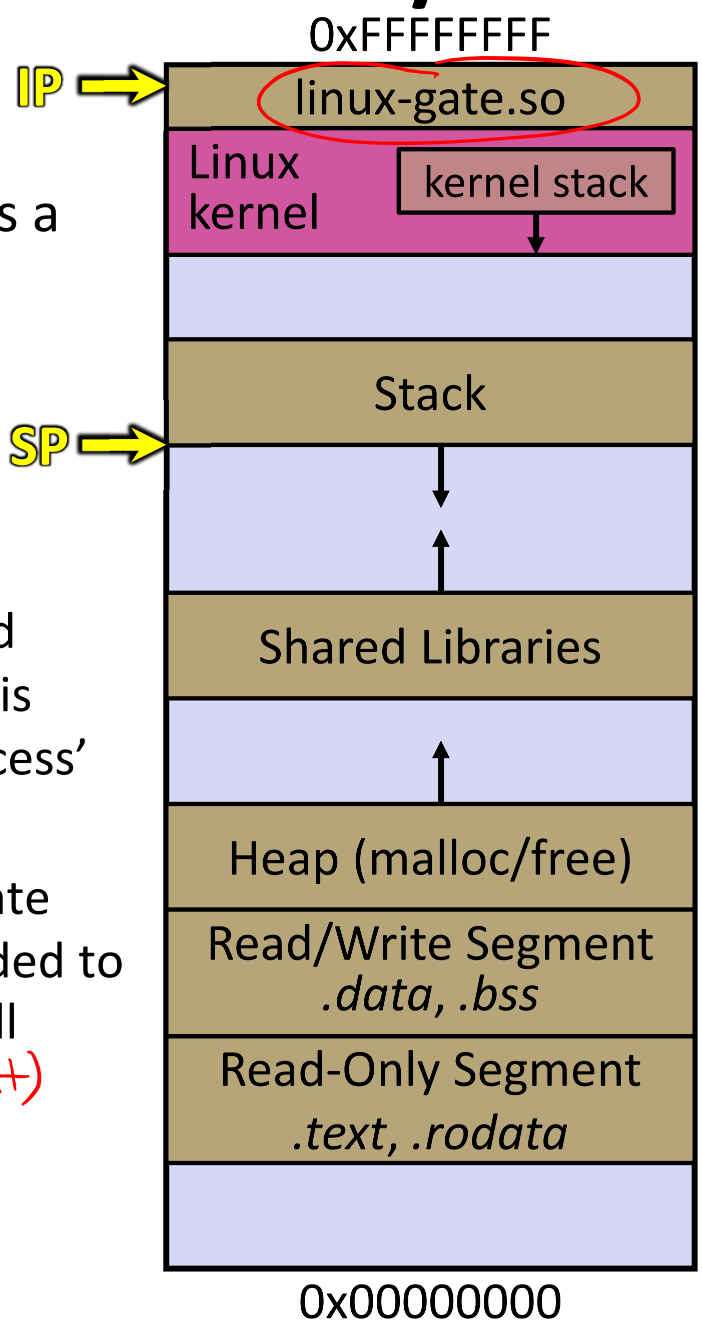


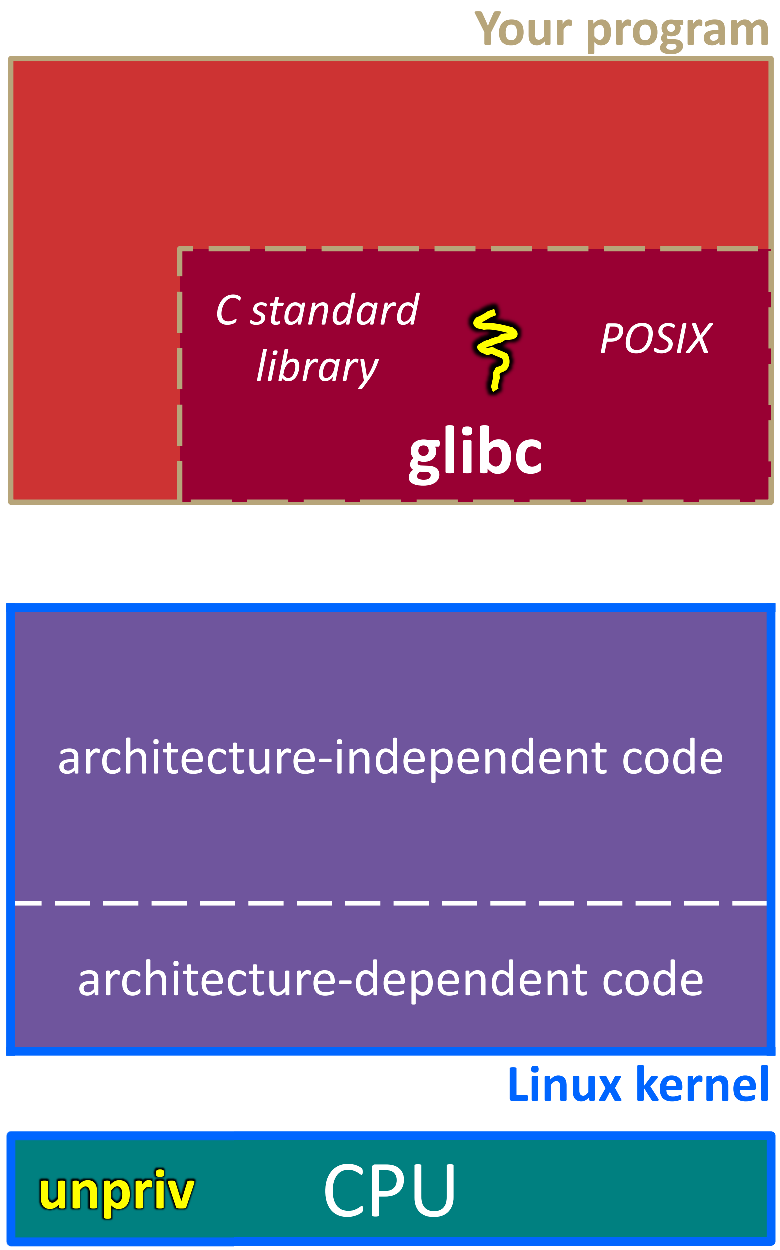
System Calls on x86/Linux

`linux-gate.so` is a **vdso**

- A virtual dynamically-linked shared object
- Is a kernel-provided shared library that is plunked into a process' address space
- Provides the intricate machine code needed to trigger a system call

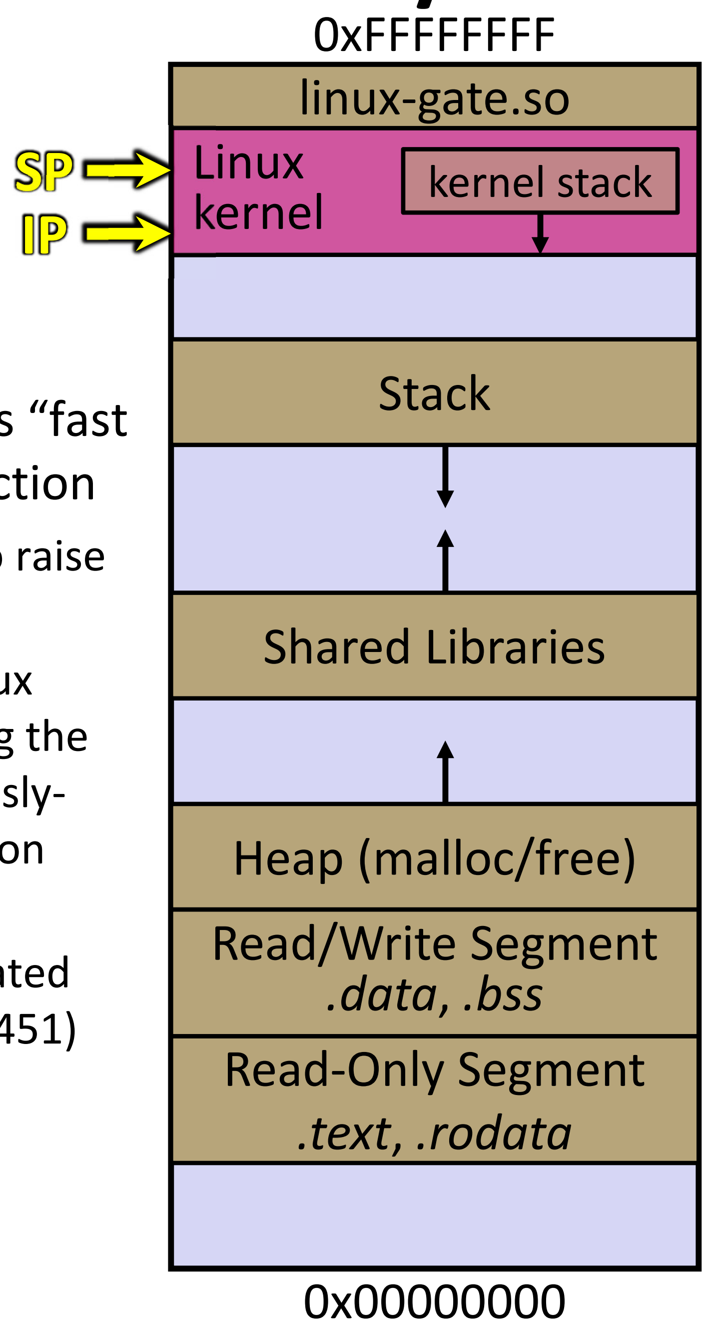
(details not important)

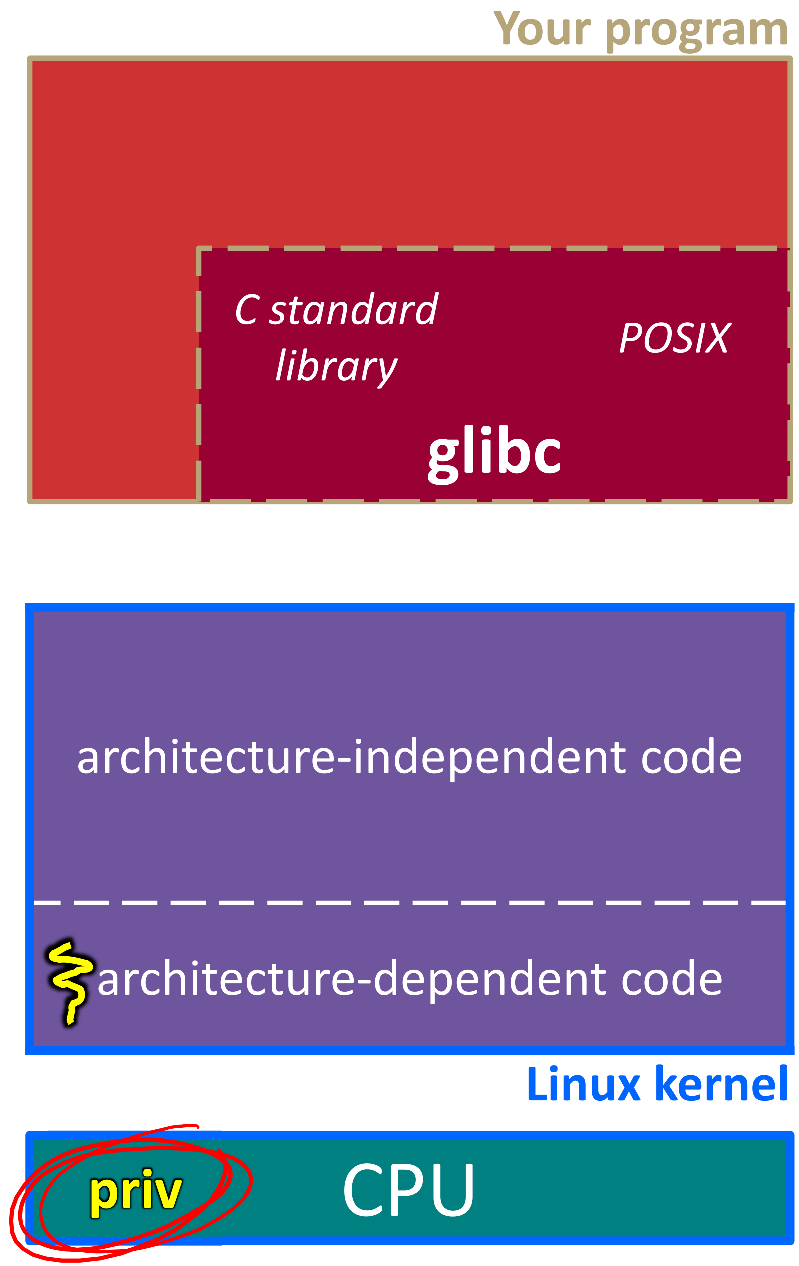




System Calls on x86/Linux

- `linux-gate.so` eventually invokes the `SYSENTER` x86 instruction
  - `SYSENTER` is x86's "fast system call" instruction
    - Causes the CPU to raise its privilege level
    - Traps into the Linux kernel by changing the SP, IP to a previously-determined location
    - Changes some segmentation-related registers (see CSE451)

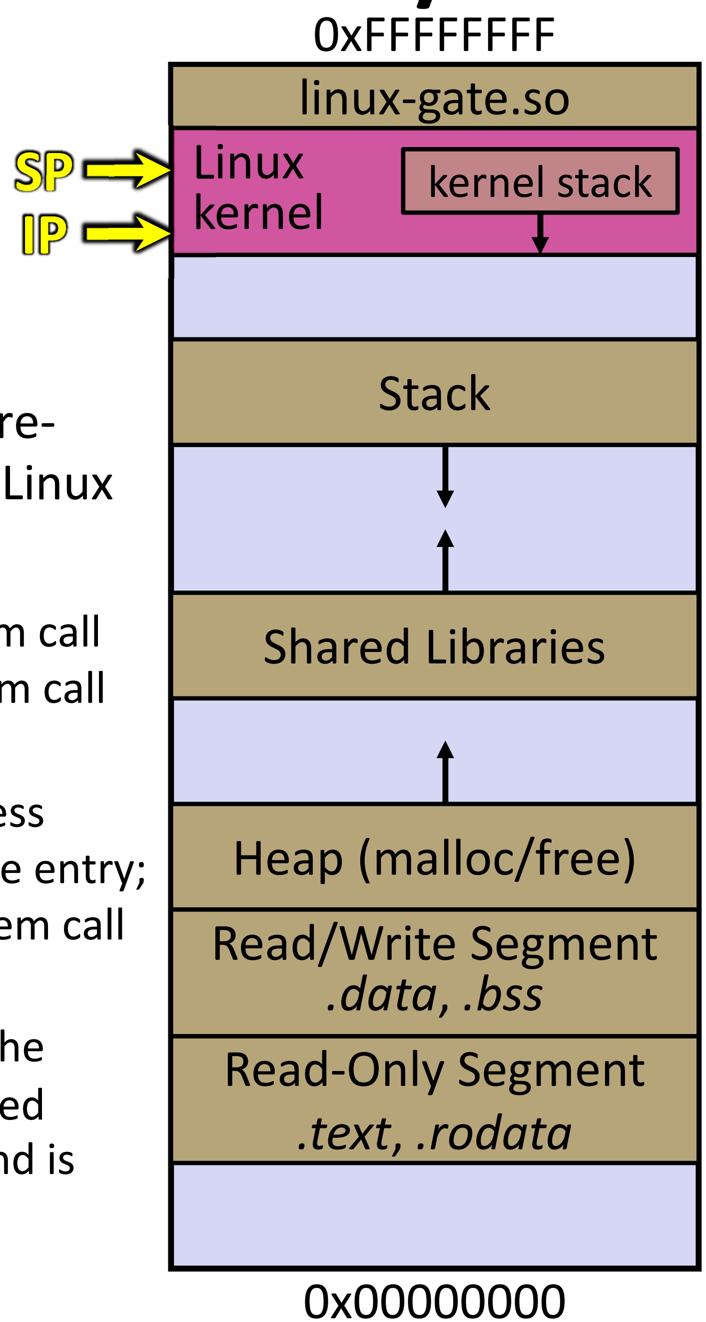


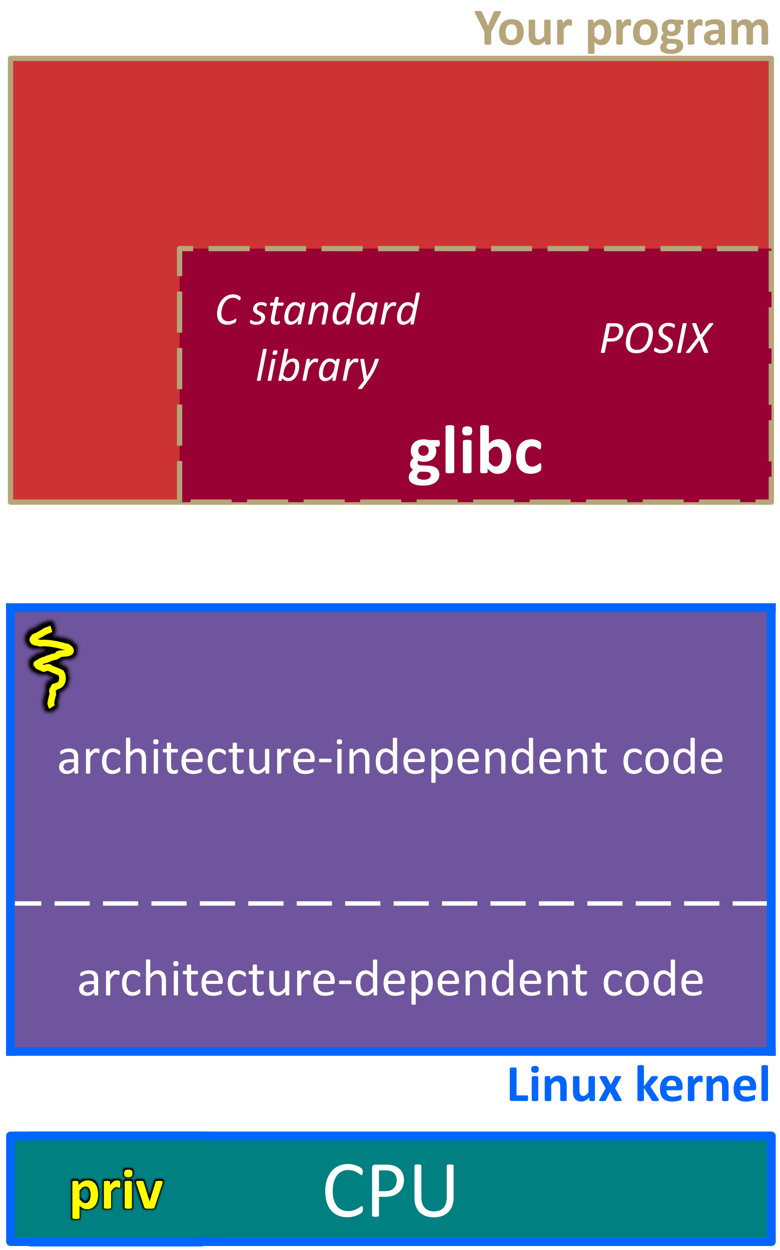


System Calls on x86/Linux

The kernel begins executing code at the `SYSENTER` entry point

- Is in the architecture-dependent part of Linux
- It's job is to:
  - Look up the system call number in a system call dispatch table
  - Call into the address stored in that table entry; this is Linux's system call handler
    - For `open()`, the handler is named `sys_open`, and is system call #5

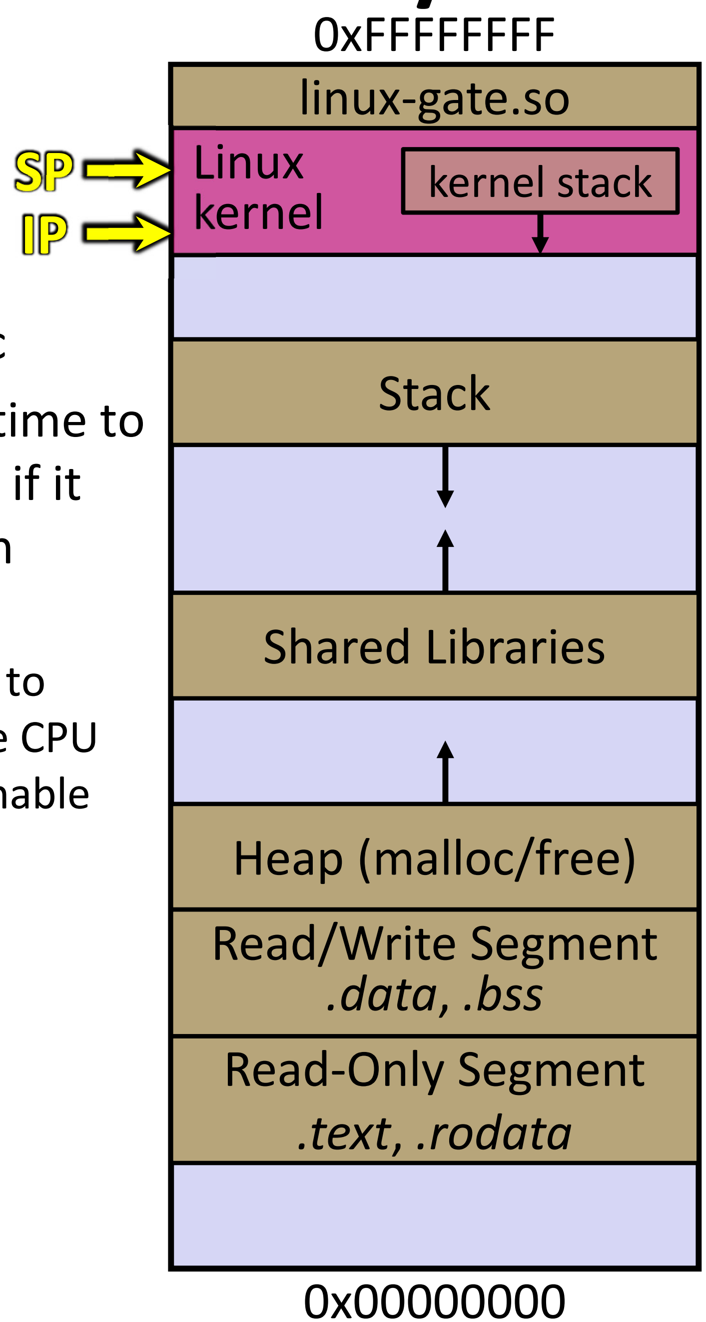


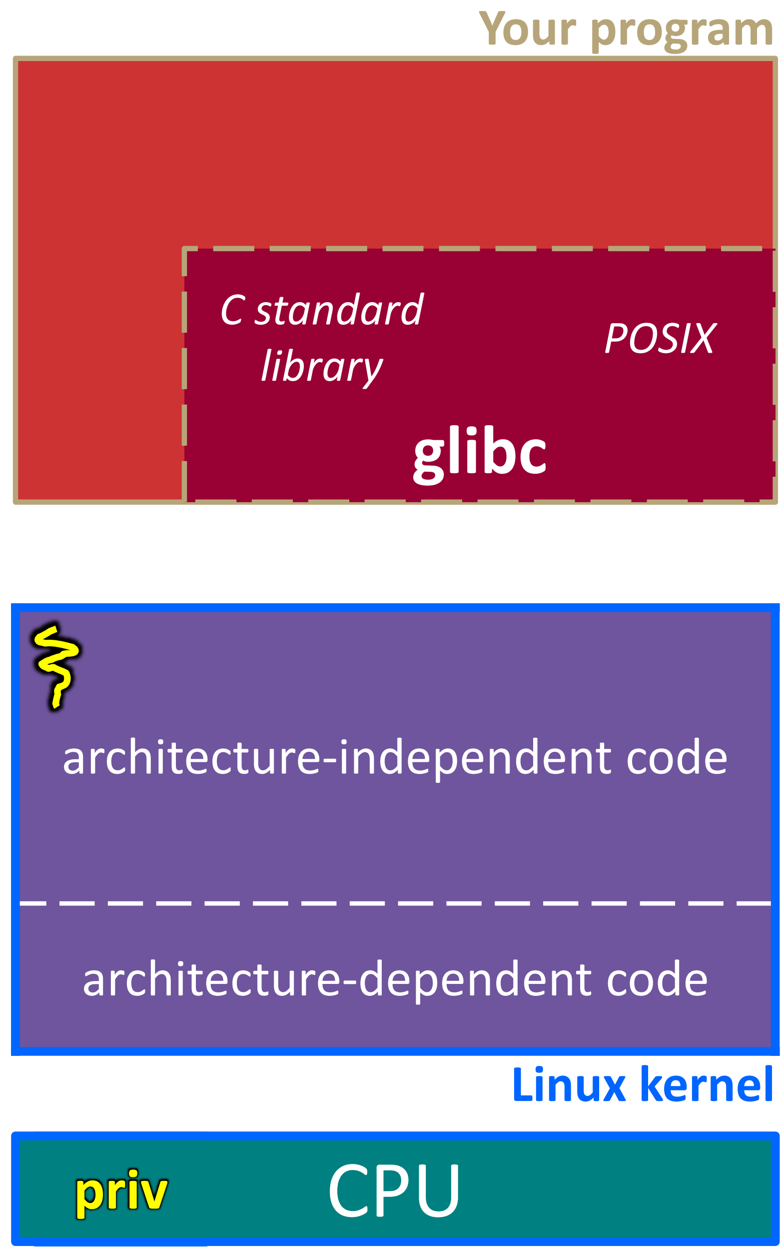


System Calls on x86/Linux

The system call handler executes

- What it does is system-call specific
- It may take a long time to execute, especially if it has to interact with hardware
  - Linux may choose to context switch the CPU to a different runnable process

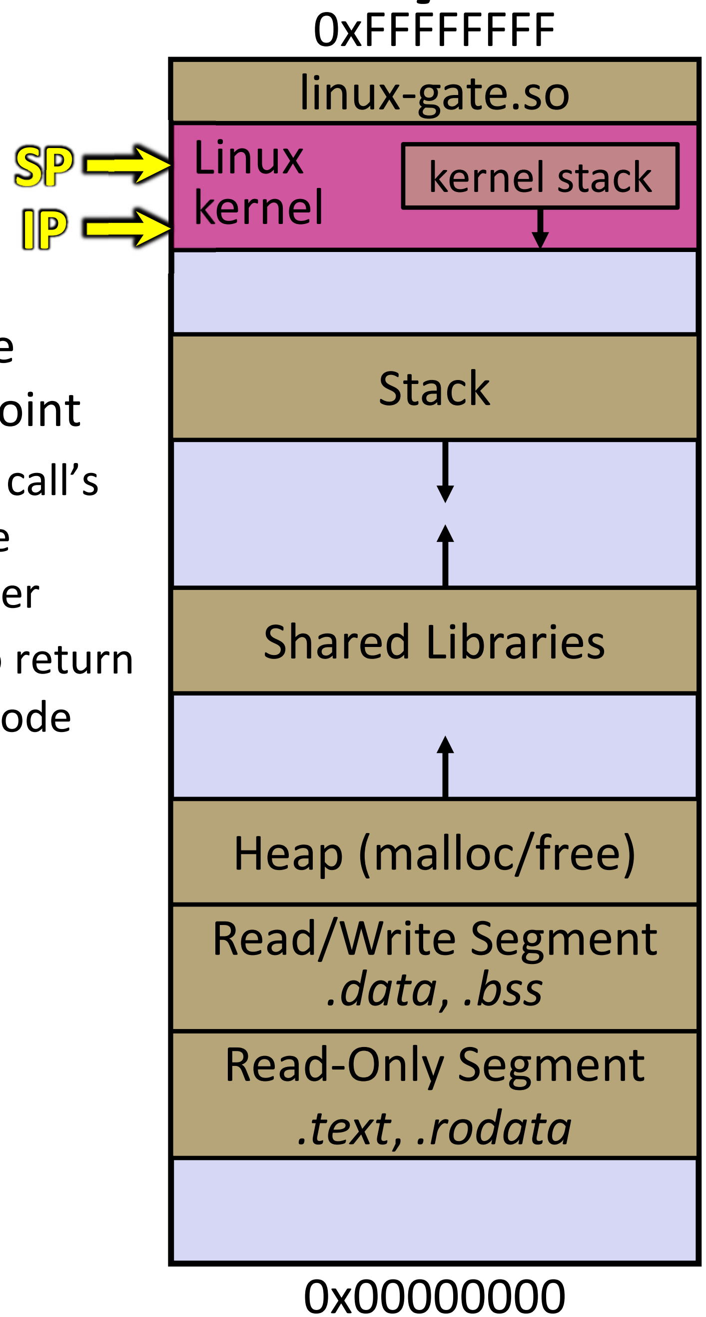


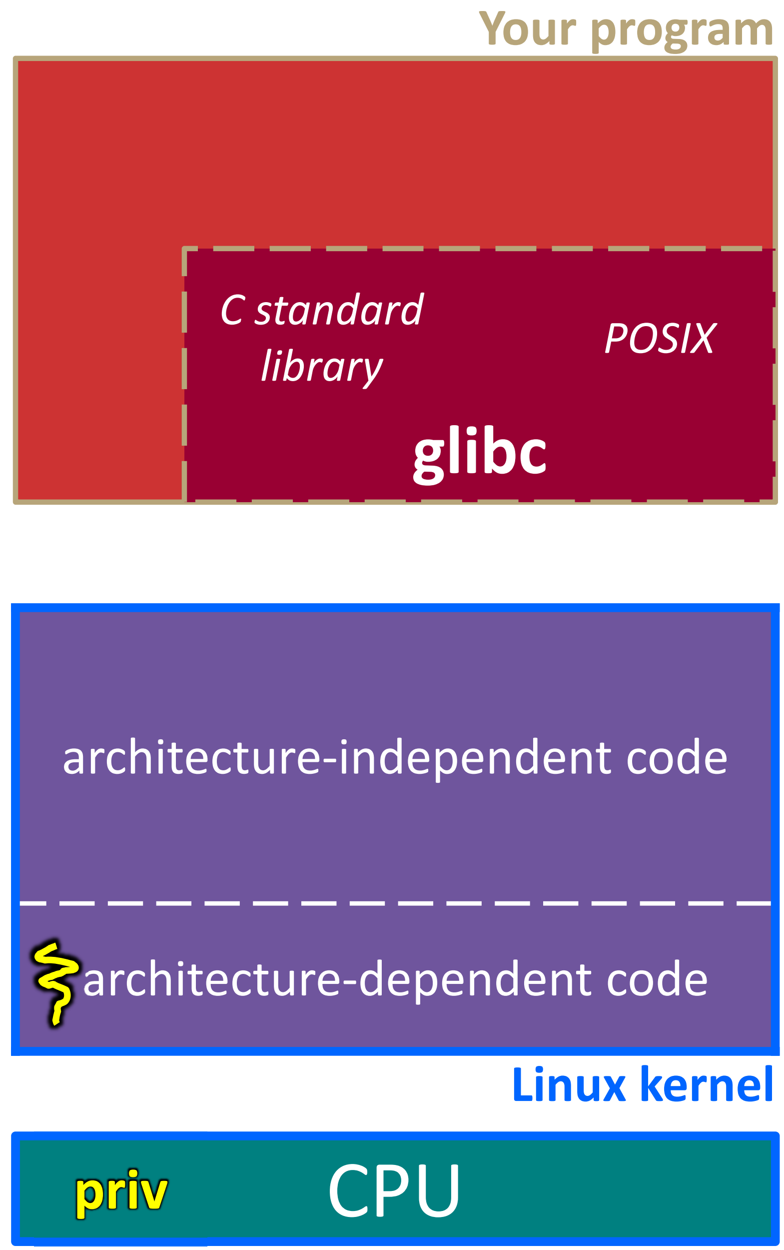


System Calls on x86/Linux

Eventually, the system call handler finishes

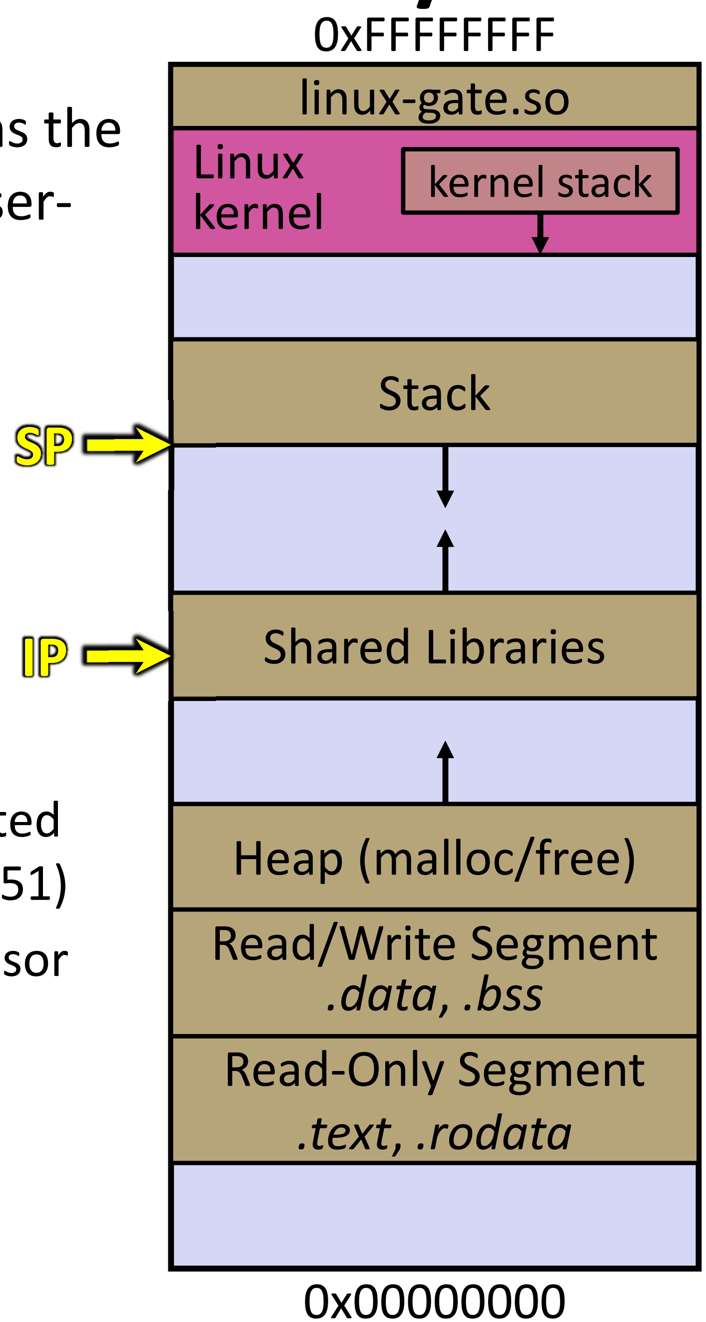
- Returns back to the system call entry point
  - Places the system call's return value in the appropriate register
  - Calls `SYSEXIT` to return to the user-level code

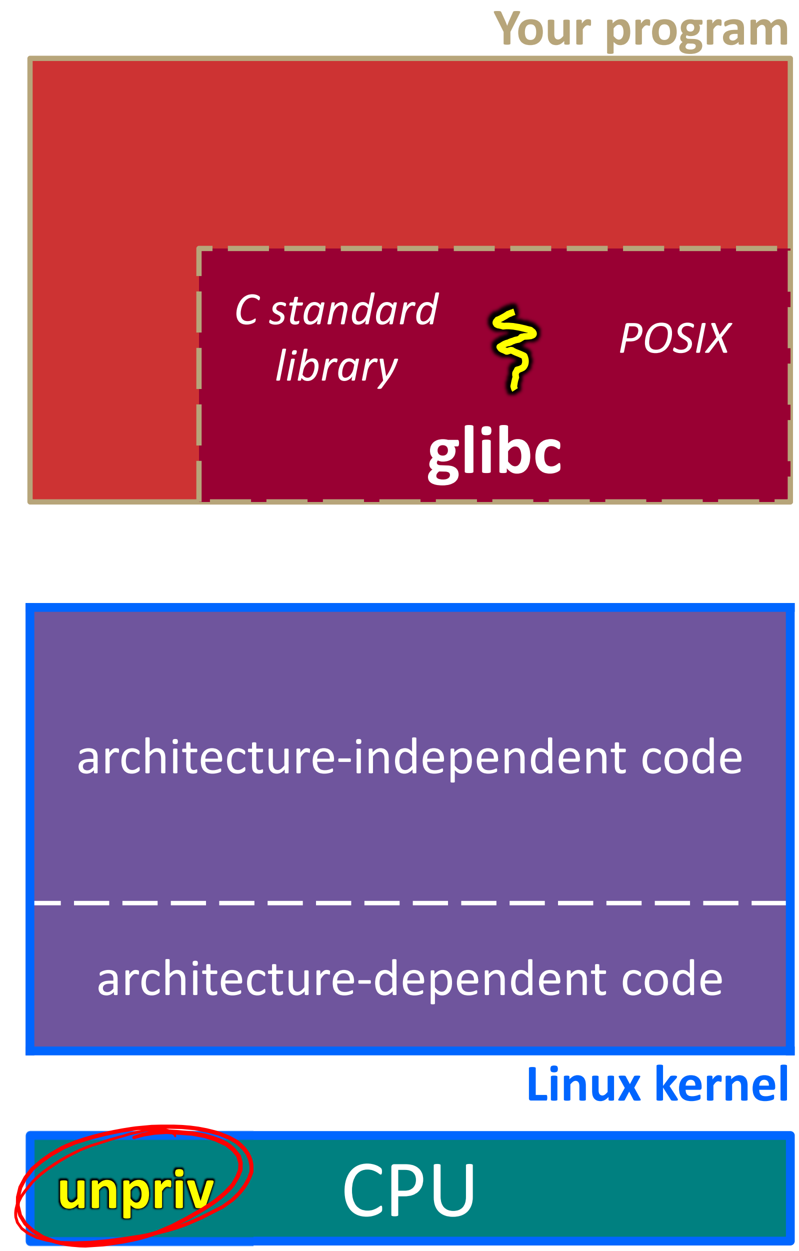




System Calls on x86/Linux

- `SYSEXIT` transitions the processor back to user-mode code
  - Restores the IP, SP to user-land values
  - Sets the CPU back to unprivileged mode
  - Changes some segmentation-related registers (see CSE451)
  - Returns the processor back to `glibc`

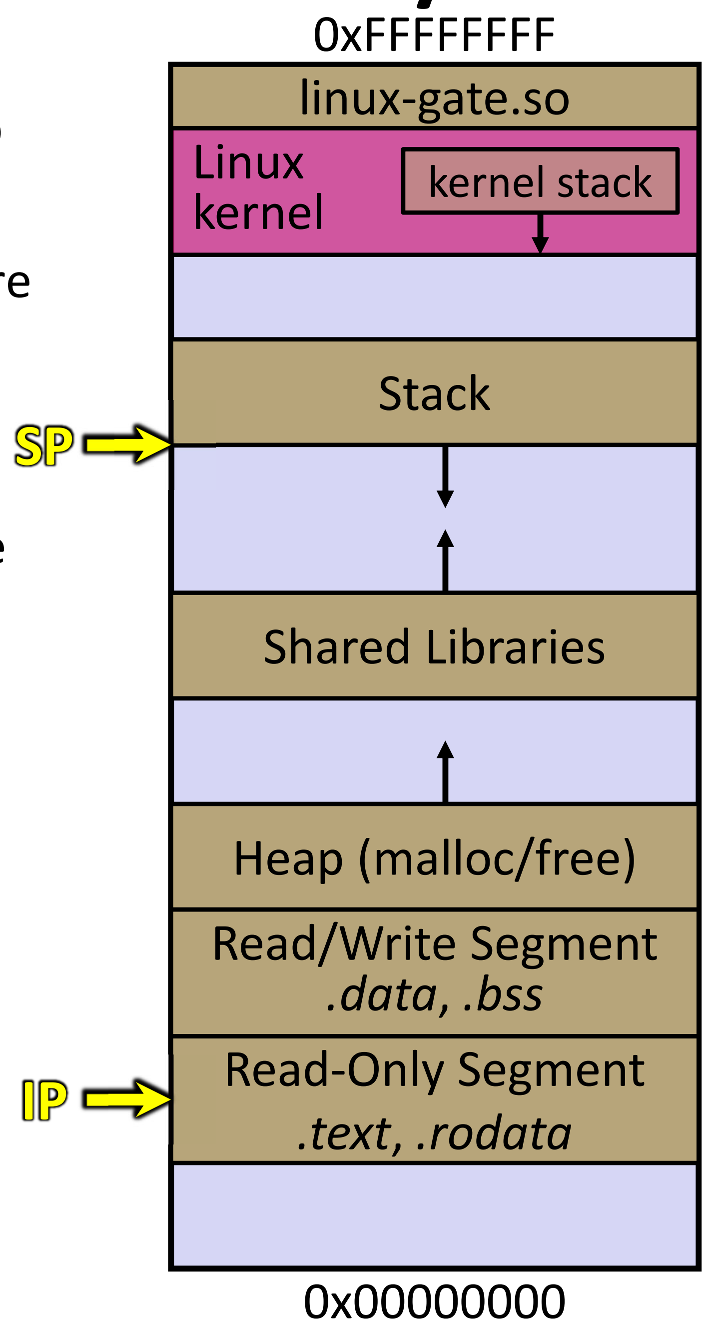


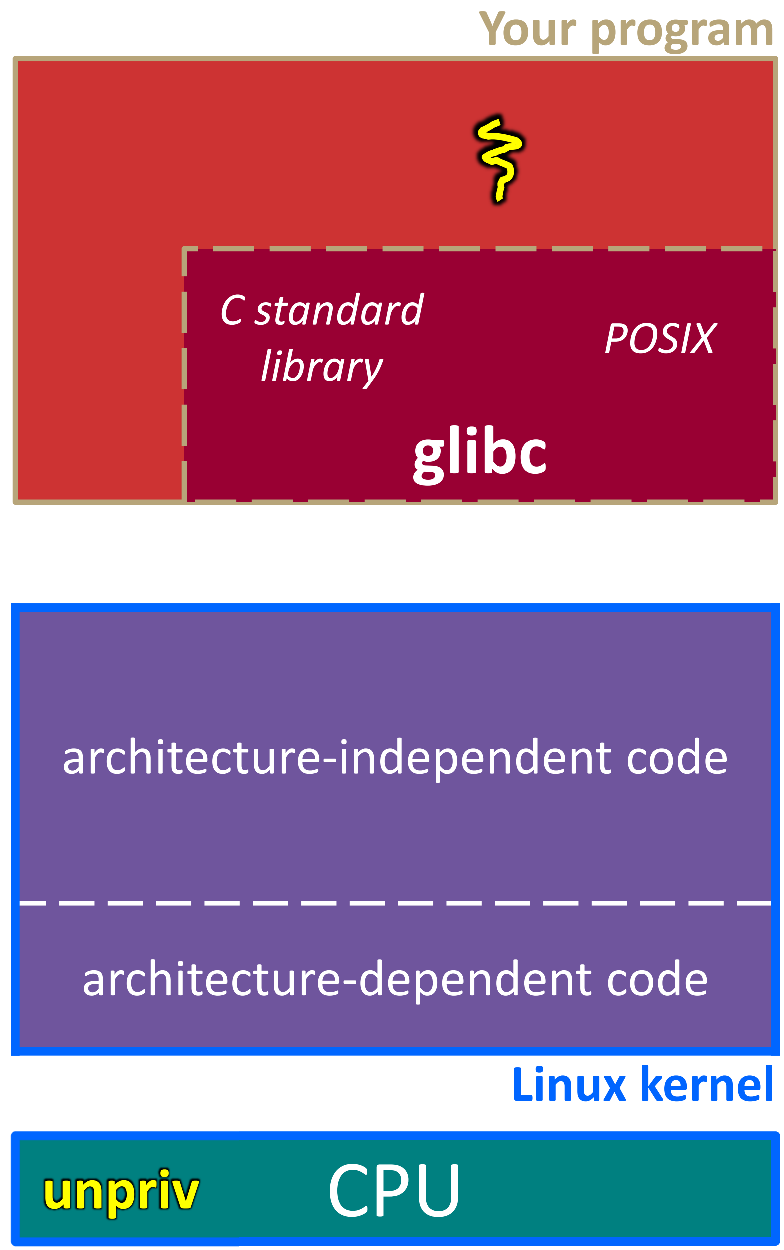


System Calls on x86/Linux

`glibc` continues to execute

- Might execute more system calls
- Eventually returns back to your program code





strace

- A useful Linux utility that shows the sequence of system calls that a process makes:

```
bash$ strace ls 2>&1 | less
execve("/usr/bin/ls", ["ls"], [/* 41 vars */]) = 0
brk(NULL)                                = 0x15aa000
mmap(NULL, 4096, PROT_READ|PROT_WRITE, MAP_PRIVATE|MAP_ANONYMOUS, -1, 0) =
  0x7f03bb741000
access("/etc/ld.so.preload", R_OK)       = -1 ENOENT (No such file or directory)
open("/etc/ld.so.cache", O_RDONLY|O_CLOEXEC) = 3
fstat(3, {st_mode=S_IFREG|0644, st_size=126570, ...}) = 0
mmap(NULL, 126570, PROT_READ, MAP_PRIVATE, 3, 0) = 0x7f03bb722000
close(3)                                 = 0
open("/lib64/libselinux.so.1", O_RDONLY|O_CLOEXEC) = 3
read(3, "\177ELF\2\1\1\0\0\0\0\0\0\0\0\0\3\0>\0\1\0\0\0\300j\0\0\0\0\0\0"...,
  832) = 832
fstat(3, {st_mode=S_IFREG|0755, st_size=155744, ...}) = 0
mmap(NULL, 2255216, PROT_READ|PROT_EXEC, MAP_PRIVATE|MAP_DENYWRITE, 3, 0) =
  0x7f03bb2fa000
mprotect(0x7f03bb31e000, 2093056, PROT_NONE) = 0
mmap(0x7f03bb51d000, 8192, PROT_READ|PROT_WRITE,
  MAP_PRIVATE|MAP_FIXED|MAP_DENYWRITE, 3, 0x23000) = 0x7f03bb51d000
... etc ...
```

If You're Curious

- Download the Linux kernel source code
  - Available from http://www.kernel.org/

man, section 1: user commands

- `man`, section 2: Linux system calls
  - `man 2 intro`
  - `man 2 syscalls`

- `man`, section 3: `glibc/libc` library functions
  - `man 3 intro`

- *The* book: *The Linux Programming Interface* by Michael Kerrisk (keeper of the Linux man pages)