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What has been your favorite topic group so far?

- A. **Memory Management: pointers, references, malloc/free, new/delete, memory bugs, smart pointers**
- B. **Data Structures: arrays, structs, containers**
- C. **Object-Oriented Programming: classes, inheritance**
- D. **Modularization: compilation, interfaces, templates**
- E. **I/O: files, buffering, network programming**
- F. **Concurrency**
- G. **I prefer not to say**

Concurrency: Processes

CSE 333 Autumn 2025

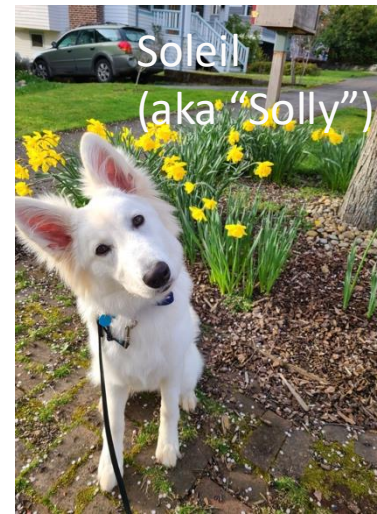
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Relevant Course Information

- ❖ Exercise 17 due Wednesday (11/26) by 10am
- ❖ Homework 4 due *next* Thursday (12/4) by 11:59pm
- ❖ Reduce O/Hs on Tuesday & Wednesday this week
 - Refer to course website schedule & Ed posts for details
- ❖ Next Monday's lecture *will be fun!*
 - Writing fast(er) code, dog pictures, attempts at humor



Next Monday's
Lecture
Assistant

Outline

- ❖ We'll look at different `searchserver` implementations
 - Sequential
 - Concurrent via forking threads – `pthread_create()`
 - **Concurrent via forking processes – `fork()`**
 - Concurrent via non-blocking, event-driven I/O – `select()`
 - We won't get to this ☹

- ❖ Reference: *Computer Systems: A Programmer's Perspective*, Chapter 12 (CSE 351 book)

Why Concurrent Processes?

❖ Advantages:

- Processes are isolated from one another
 - No shared memory between processes
 - If one crashes, the other processes keep going
- No need for language support (OS provides `fork`)

❖ Disadvantages:

- Processes are heavyweight
 - Relatively slow to fork
 - Context switching latency is high
- Communication between processes is complicated

Process Isolation

- ❖ **Process Isolation** is a set of mechanisms implemented to protect processes from each other and protect the kernel from user processes.
 - Processes have separate address spaces
 - Processes have privilege levels to restrict access to resources
 - If one process crashes, others will keep running

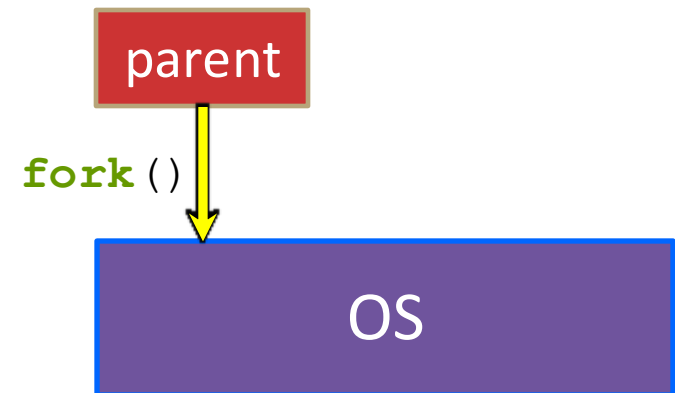
- ❖ Inter-Process Communication (IPC) is limited, but possible
 - Pipes via **pipe** ()
 - Sockets via **socketpair** ()
 - Shared Memory via **shm_open** ()

Creating New Processes (Review)



```
pid_t fork();
```

- Creates a child process that is an *exact clone* (except threads) of the current/parent process
 - Child process has a separate virtual address space from the parent
- ❖ **fork()** has peculiar semantics
- The parent invokes **fork()**



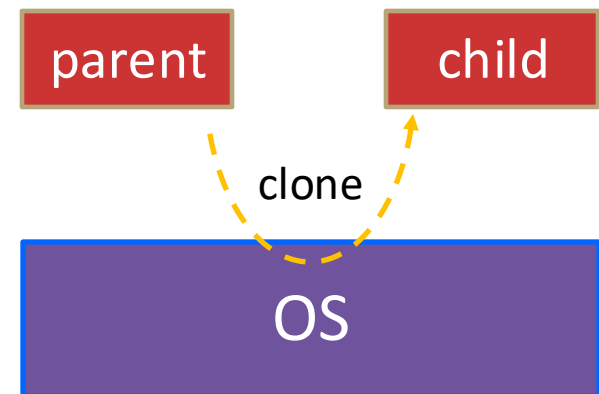
Creating New Processes (Review)

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❖ `fork()` has peculiar semantics

- The parent invokes `fork()`
- The OS clones the parent



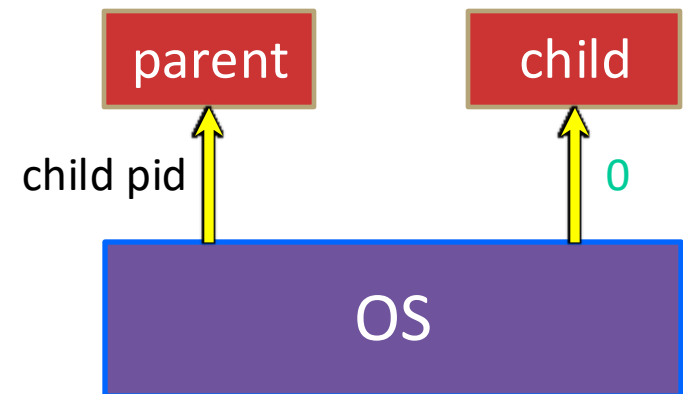
Creating New Processes (Review)

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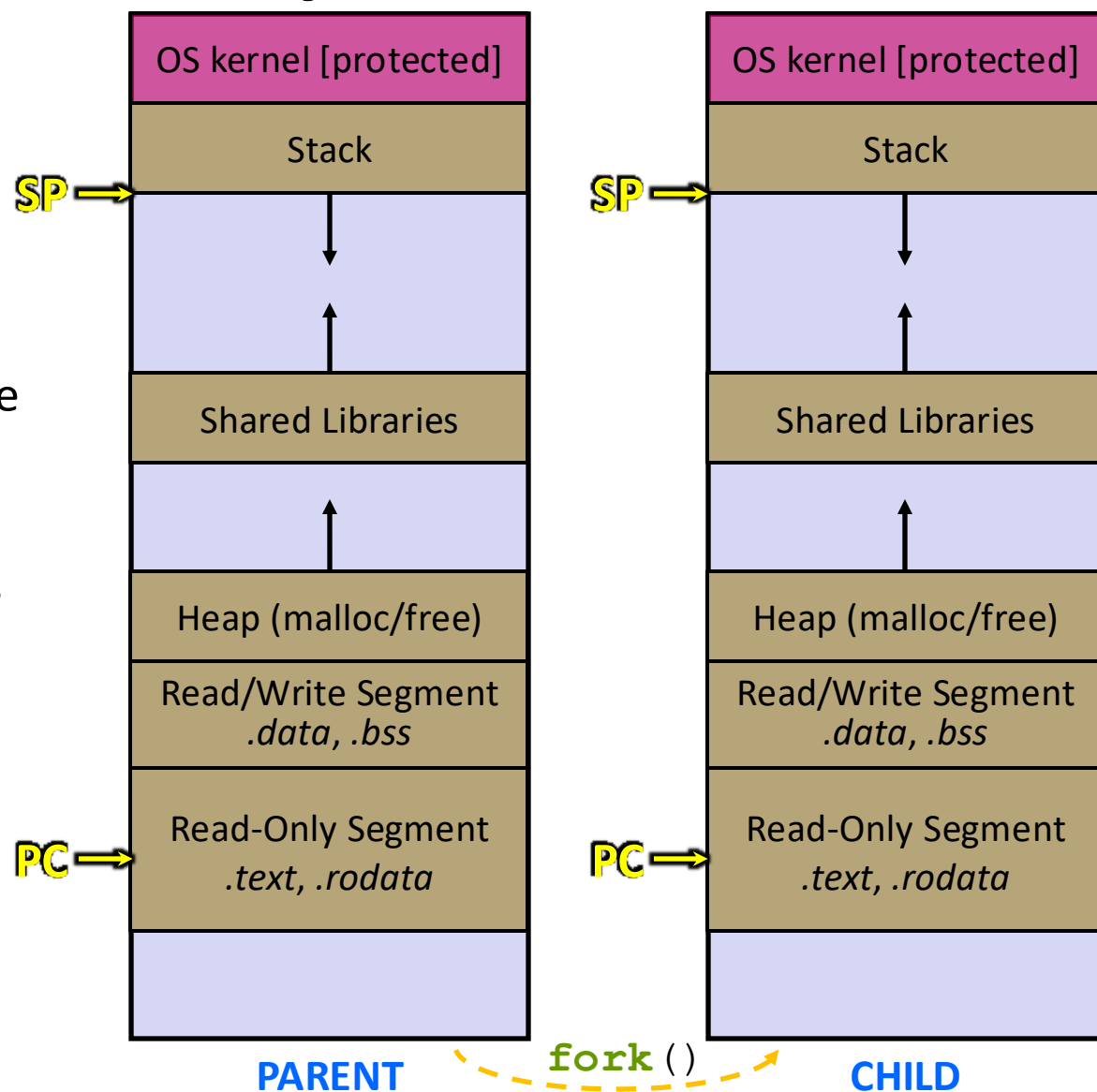
❖ `fork()` has peculiar semantics

- The parent invokes `fork()`
- The OS clones the parent
- *Both* the parent and the child return from `fork`
 - Parent receives child's pid
 - Child receives a 0



fork () and Address Spaces

- ❖ Fork causes the OS to clone the address space
 - The *copies* of the memory segments are (nearly) identical
 - The new process has *copies* of the parent's data, stack-allocated variables, open file descriptors, etc.



Zombies (Review)

- ❖ When a process terminates, its resources (*e.g.*, its address space) hang around as the process sits in a *zombie* state
 - Process terminates by `return` from `main` or calling `exit()`
- ❖ A zombie process needs to be *reaped*
 - Done automatically when its parent process terminates
 - Can be done explicitly by its parent process by calling `wait()` or `waitpid()`, which also returns the *status code*
 - If the parent process terminates before the child becomes a zombie, then `init/systemd` is responsible for reaping it
- ❖ See `fork_example.cc`
 - `ps -u` displays the user's currently running processes

Main Uses of `fork`

❖ Fork a child to handle some work

- *e.g.*, server forks to handle a new connection
- *e.g.*, web browser forks to render a new website (for security purposes)



❖ Fork a child that then starts a new program via `execv`

- *e.g.*, a shell forks and starts the program you want to run
- *e.g.*, the 333 grading scripts `fork` and `exec` your executable



❖ Fork a background (“daemon”) process that runs independently



How Fast is `fork()` ?

- ❖ See fork_latency.cc
- ❖ **~0.26 milliseconds per fork***
 - \therefore maximum of $(1000/0.26) = 3,800$ connections/sec/core
= ~332 million connections/day/core
 - This is fine for most servers
 - Too slow for super-high-traffic front-line web services
 - Facebook served ~750 billion page views per day in 2013!
Would need 2-3k cores just to handle `fork()`, i.e. without doing any work for each connection
- ❖ *Past measurements are not indicative of future performance – depends on hardware, OS, software versions, ...
- ❖ Tested on `attul` (11/24/2025)

How Fast is `pthread_create()` ?

- ❖ See `thread_latency.cc`
- ❖ **~0.02 milliseconds** per thread creation*
 - ~13x faster than `fork()`
 - \therefore maximum of $(1000/0.02) = 50,000$ connections/sec/core
= ~4.3 billion connections/day/core
 - Much faster, but writing safe multithreaded code can be serious voodoo, as we've seen
- ❖ *Past measurements are not indicative of future performance – depends on hardware, OS, software versions, ..., but will typically be an order of magnitude faster than `fork()`
- ❖ Tested on `attul` (11/24/2025)

Concurrent Server with Processes

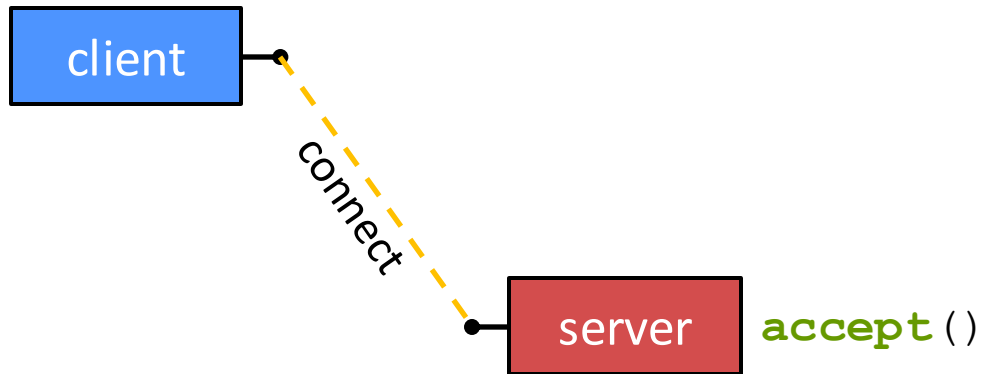
- ❖ The **parent** process blocks on **accept** () , waiting for a new client to connect
 - When a new connection arrives, the parent calls **fork** () to create a **child** process
 - The child process handles that new connection and **exit** () 's when the connection terminates

- ❖ How do we avoid zombie processes from consuming all of our memory?
 - Option A: Parent calls **wait** () to “reap” children
 - Option B: Use a **double-fork trick**

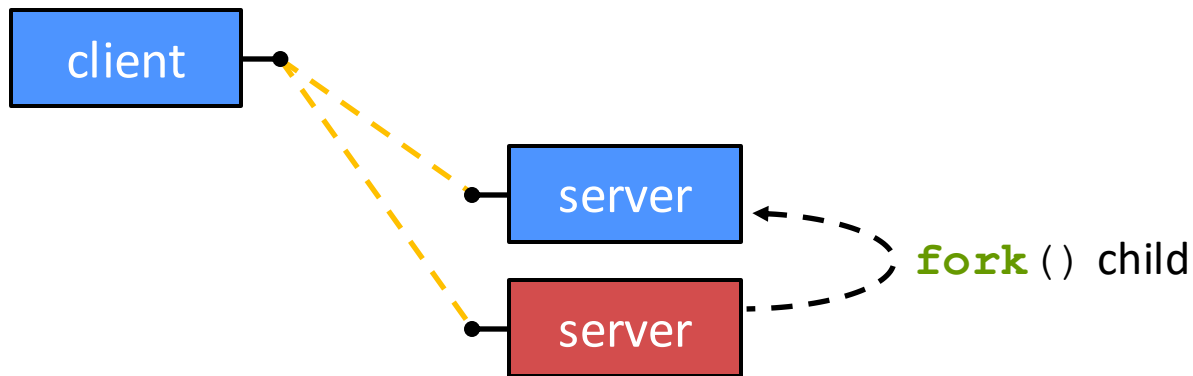
Double-fork Trick



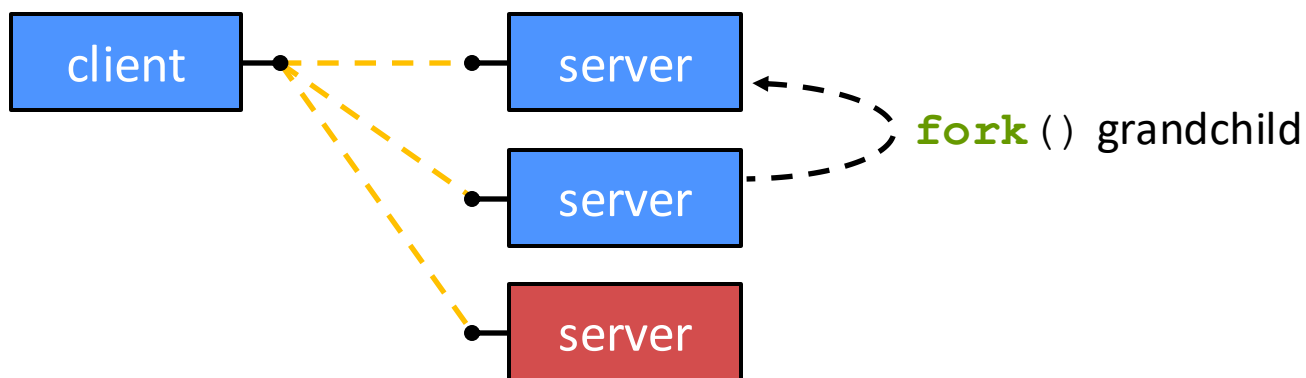
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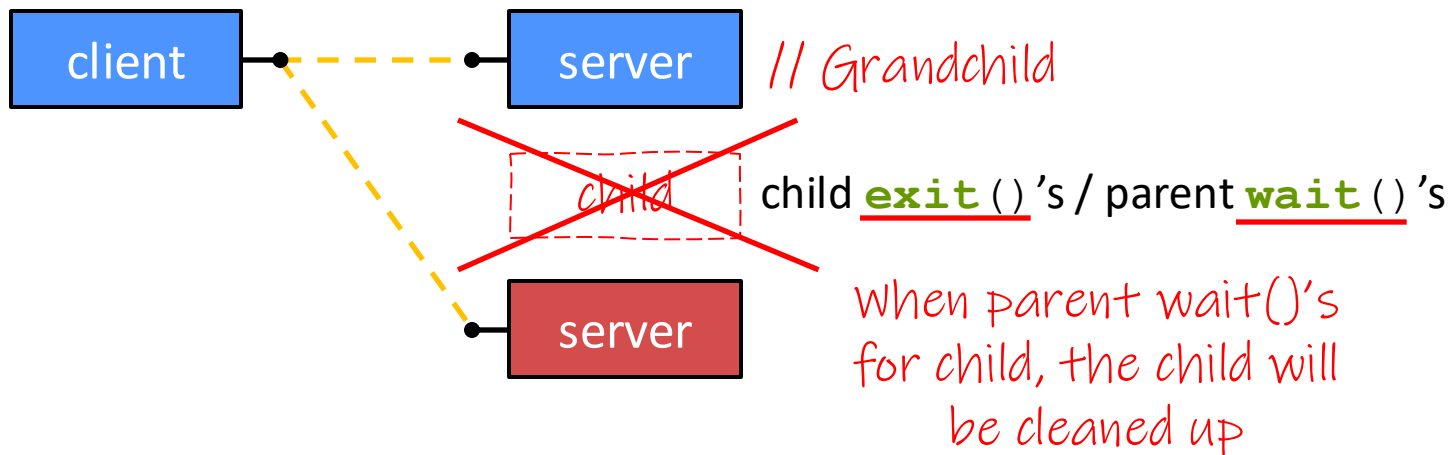
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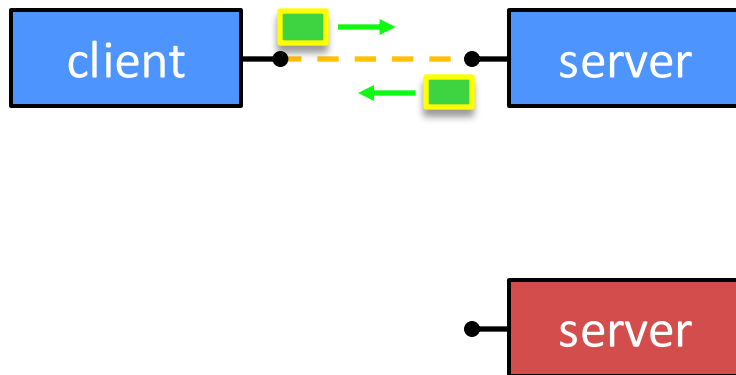
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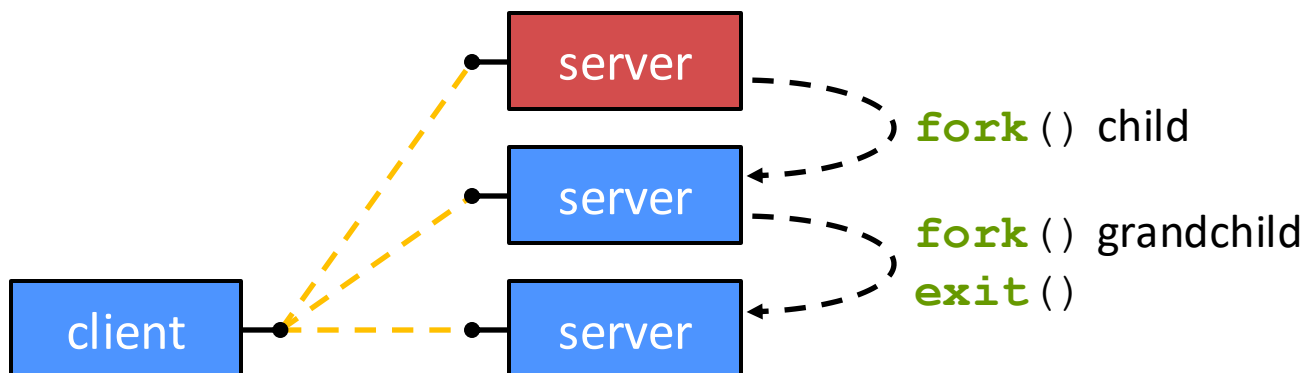
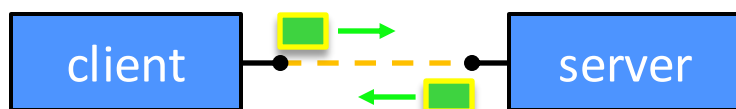
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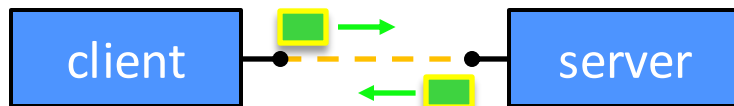
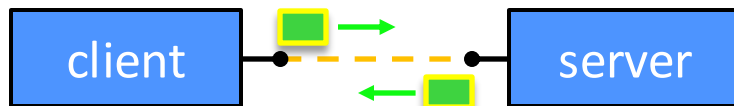
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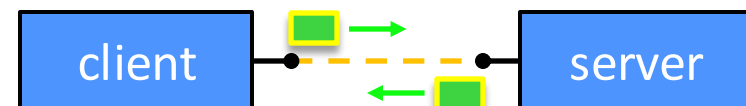
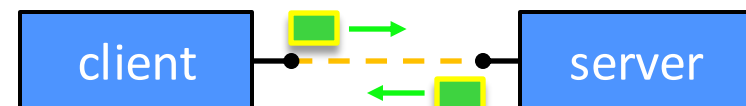
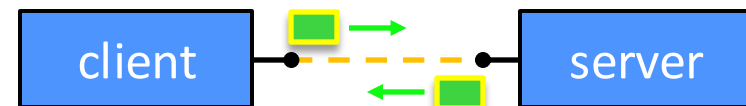
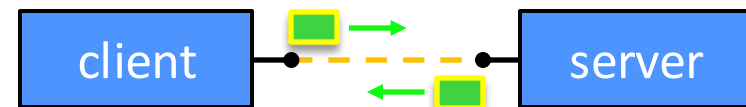
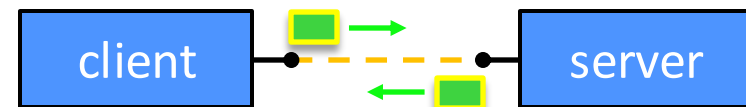
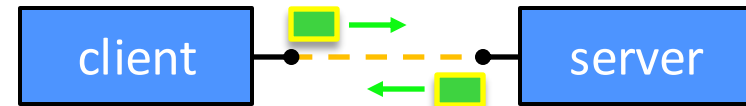
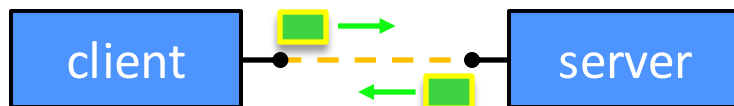
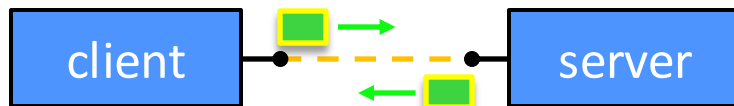
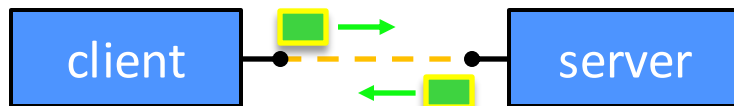
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Double-fork Trick





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What will happen when one of the grandchildren processes finishes?

- A. **Zombie until grandparent exits**
- B. **Zombie until grandparent reaps**
- C. **Zombie until init reaps**
- D. **ZOMBIE FOREVER!!!**
- E. **We're lost...**

Concurrent with Processes Pseudocode

❖ See [searchserver_processes/](#)

```
... // Server set up
while (1) {
    sock_fd = accept();
    pid = fork();
    if (pid == 0) {
        // ??? process

    } else {
        // ??? process

    }
}
```

Concurrent with Processes Pseudocode

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```
... // Server set up
while (1) {
    sock_fd = accept();
    pid = fork();
    if (pid == 0) {
        // Child process

    } else {
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```

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        // Parent process

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```

Concurrent with Processes Pseudocode

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... // Server set up
while (1) {
    sock_fd = accept();
    pid = fork();
    if (pid == 0) {
        // Child process
        pid = fork();
        if (pid == 0) {
            // Grand-child process
            HandleClient(sock_fd, ...);
        }
    } else {
        // Parent process
    }
}
```

Concurrent with Processes Pseudocode

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        if (pid == 0) {
            // Grand-child process
            HandleClient(sock_fd, ...);
        }
        // Clean up resources...
        exit();
    } else {
        // Parent process

    }
}
```

Concurrent with Processes Pseudocode

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        pid = fork();
        if (pid == 0) {
            // Grand-child process
            HandleClient(sock_fd, ...);
        }
        // Clean up resources...
        exit();
    } else {
        // Parent process
        // Wait for child to immediately die
        wait();
        close(sock_fd);
    }
}
```


Outline (Revisited)

- ❖ We'll look at different `searchserver` implementations
 - Sequential
 - Concurrent via forking threads – `pthread_create()`
 - Concurrent via forking processes – `fork()`
 - Concurrent via non-blocking, event-driven I/O – `select()`
- ❖ Conclusions:
 - Concurrent execution leads to better CPU, network utilization
 - Writing concurrent software can be tricky and different concurrency methods have benefits and drawbacks
- ❖ In real servers, we'd like to avoid the overhead needed to create a new thread or process for every request... how?

Aside: Thread Pools

❖ Idea:

- Create a fixed set of worker threads when the server starts
- When a request arrives, add it to a queue of tasks (using locks)
- Each thread tries to remove a task from the queue (using locks)
- When a thread is finished with one task, it tries to get a new task from the queue (using locks)

❖ A thread pool is written for you in Homework 4!

- Feel free to take a look, if curious