

Concurrent Programming

15-213: Introduction to Computer Systems
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Concurrent Programming is Hard!

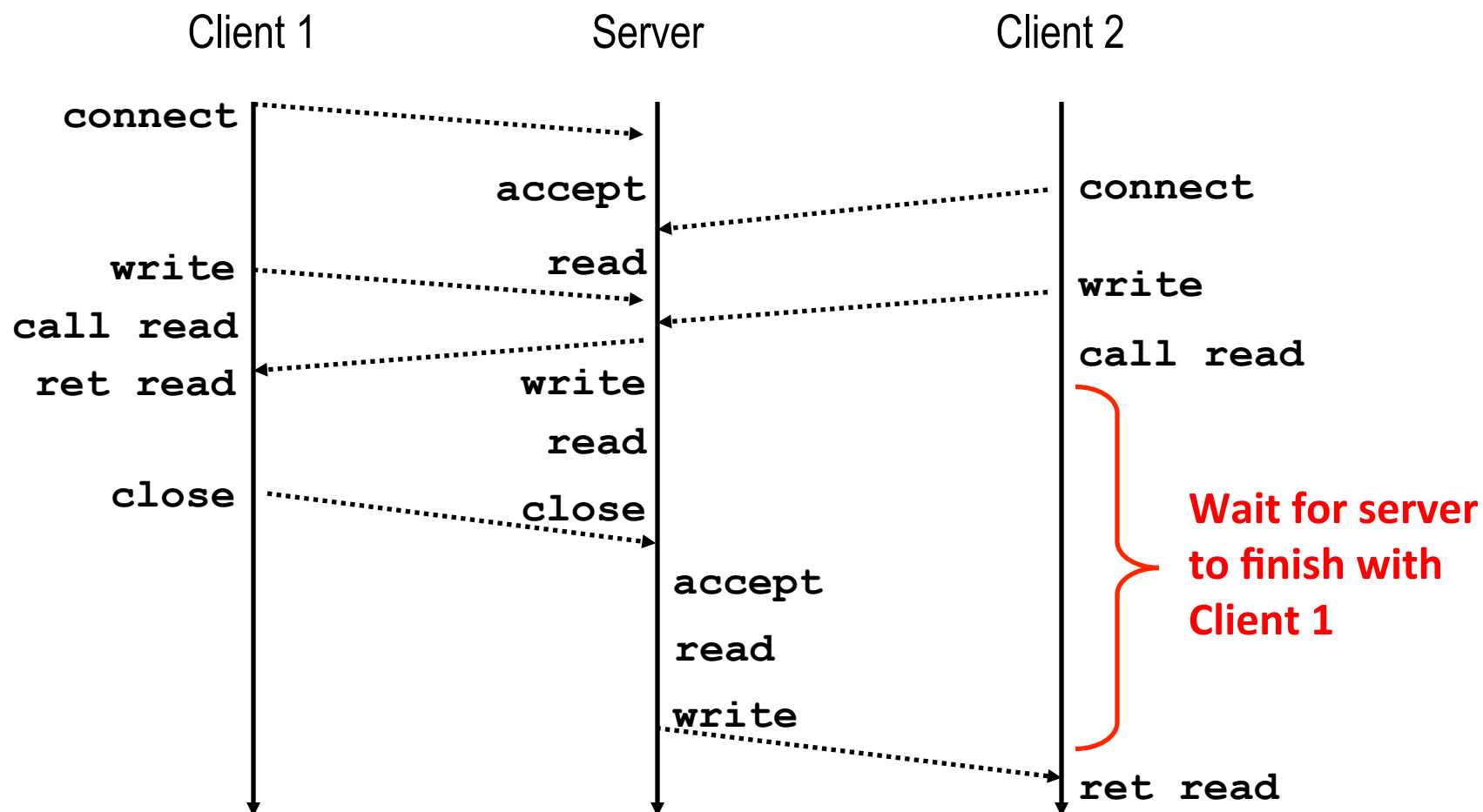
- The human mind tends to be sequential
- The notion of time is often misleading
- Thinking about all possible sequences of events in a computer system is at least error prone and frequently impossible

Concurrent Programming is Hard!

- **Classical problem classes of concurrent programs:**
 - ***Races***: outcome depends on arbitrary scheduling decisions elsewhere in the system
 - Example: who gets the last seat on the airplane?
 - ***Deadlock***: improper resource allocation prevents forward progress
 - Example: traffic gridlock
 - ***Livelock / Starvation / Fairness***: external events and/or system scheduling decisions can prevent sub-task progress
 - Example: people always jump in front of you in line
- **Many aspects of concurrent programming are beyond the scope of our course..**
 - but, not all 😊
 - We'll cover some of these aspects in the next few lectures.

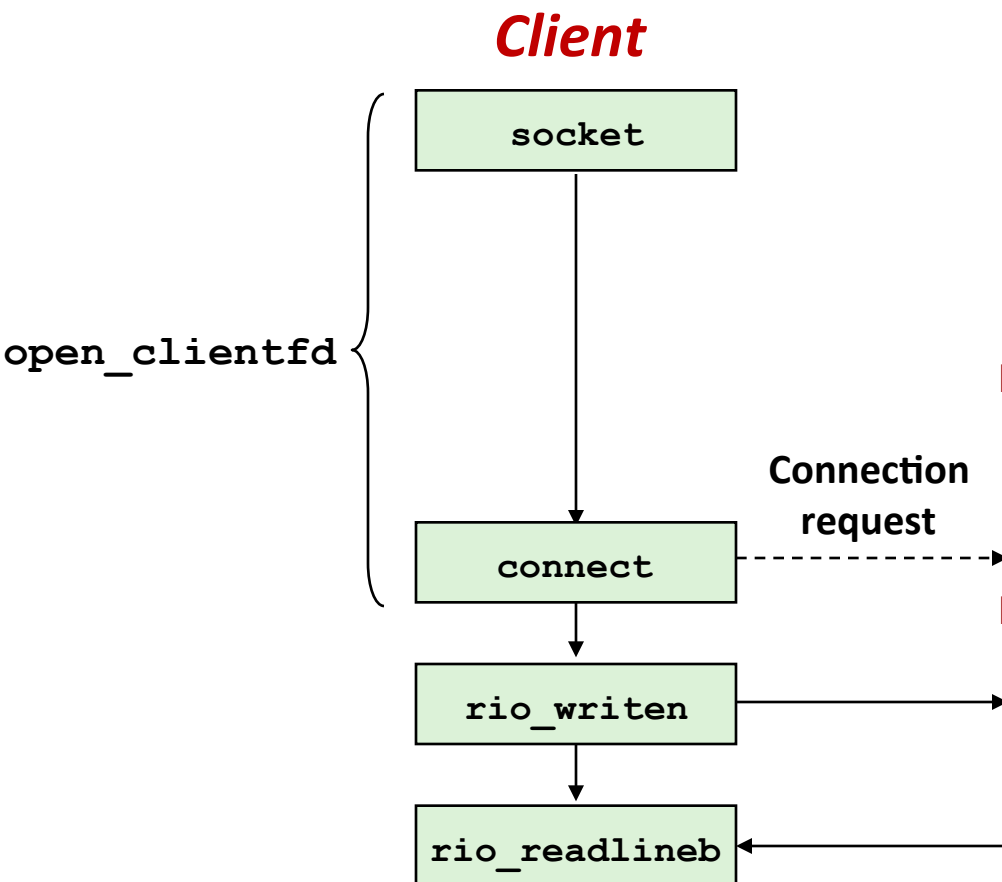
Iterative Servers

- Iterative servers process one request at a time



Where Does Second Client Block?

- Second client attempts to connect to iterative server



- Call to `connect` returns

- Even though connection not yet accepted
- Server side TCP manager queues request
- Feature known as "TCP listen backlog"

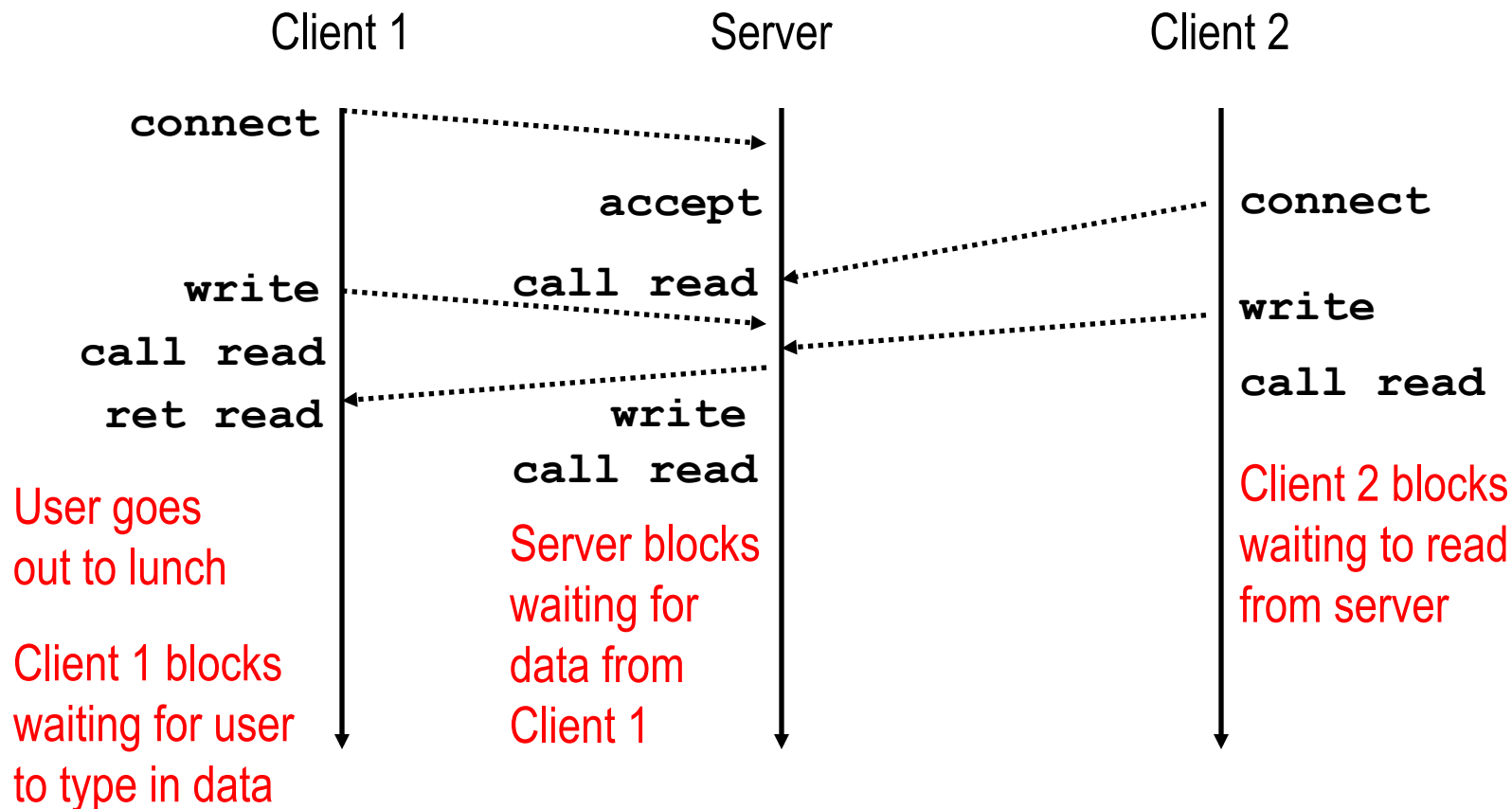
- Call to `rio_writen` returns

- Server side TCP manager buffers input data

- Call to `rio_readlineb` blocks

- Server hasn't written anything for it to read yet.

Fundamental Flaw of Iterative Servers



■ Solution: use *concurrent servers* instead

- Concurrent servers use multiple concurrent flows to serve multiple clients at the same time

Approaches for Writing Concurrent Servers

Allow server to handle multiple clients concurrently

1. Process-based

- Kernel automatically interleaves multiple logical flows
- Each flow has its own private address space

2. Event-based

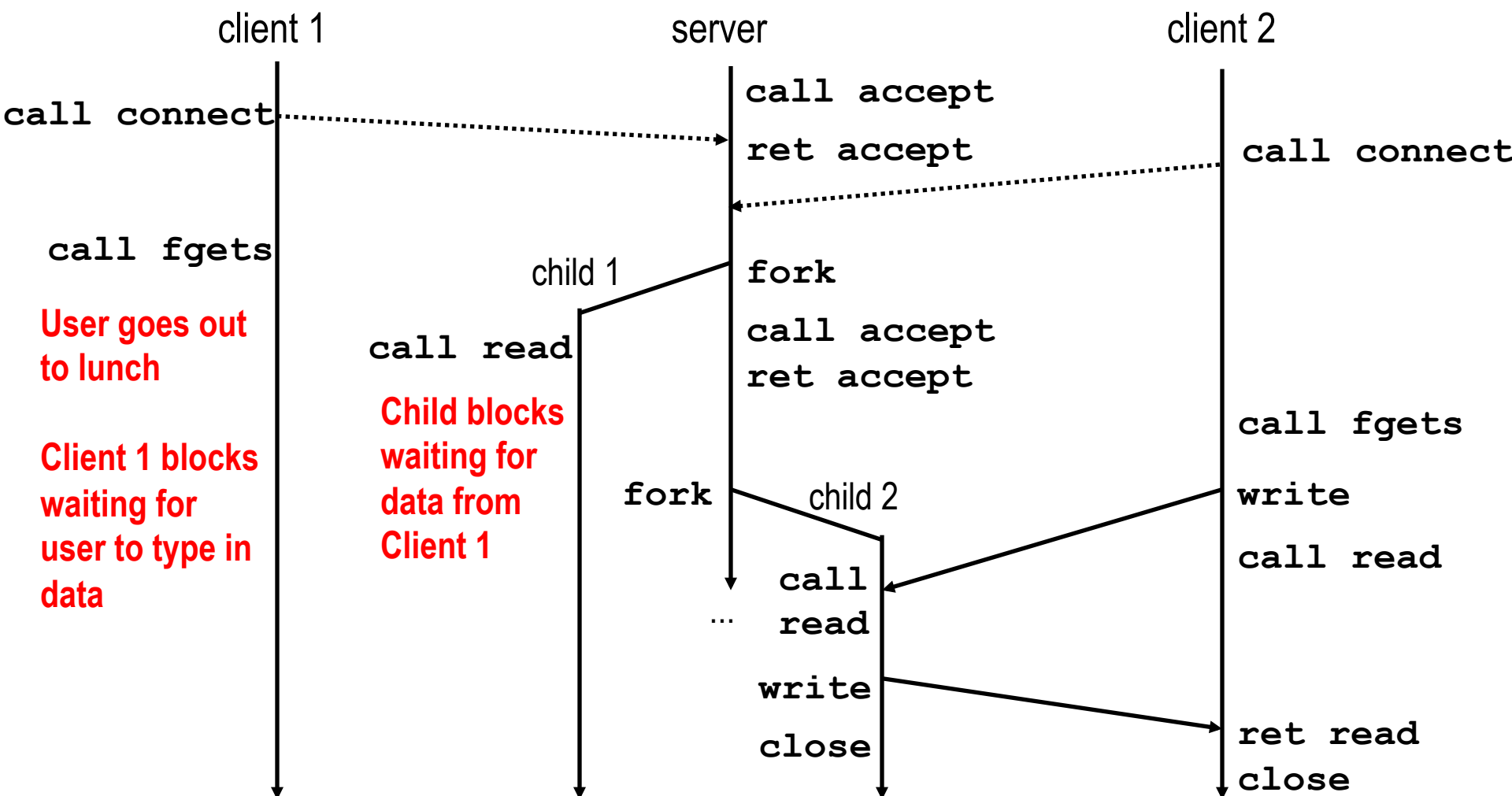
- Programmer manually interleaves multiple logical flows
- All flows share the same address space
- Uses technique called *I/O multiplexing*.

3. Thread-based

- Kernel automatically interleaves multiple logical flows
- Each flow shares the same address space
- Hybrid of of process-based and event-based.

Approach #1: Process-based Servers

- Spawn separate process for each client



Process-Based Concurrent Echo Server

```
int main(int argc, char **argv)
{
    int listenfd, connfd;
    socklen_t clientlen;
    struct sockaddr_storage clientaddr;

    Signal(SIGCHLD, sigchld_handler);
    listenfd = Open_listenfd(argv[1]);
    while (1) {
        clientlen = sizeof(struct sockaddr_storage);
        connfd = Accept(listenfd, (SA *) &clientaddr, &clientlen);
        if (Fork() == 0) {
            Close(listenfd); /* Child closes its listening socket */
            echo(connfd);    /* Child services client */
            Close(connfd);  /* Child closes connection with client */
            exit(0);        /* Child exits */
        }
        Close(connfd); /* Parent closes connected socket (important!) */
    }
}
```

echoserverp.c

Process-Based Concurrent Echo Server (cont)

```
void sigchld_handler(int sig)
{
    while (waitpid(-1, 0, WNOHANG) > 0)
        ;
    return;
}
```

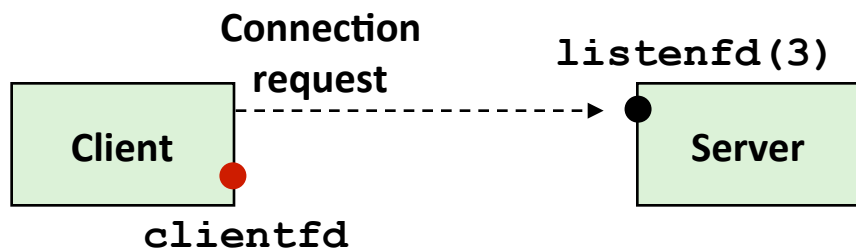
echoserverp.c

- Reap all zombie children

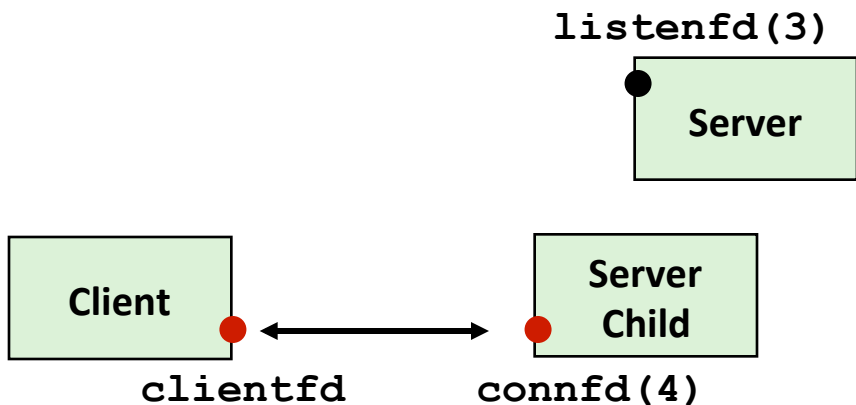
Concurrent Server: `accept` Illustrated



1. Server blocks in `accept`, waiting for connection request on listening descriptor `listenfd`

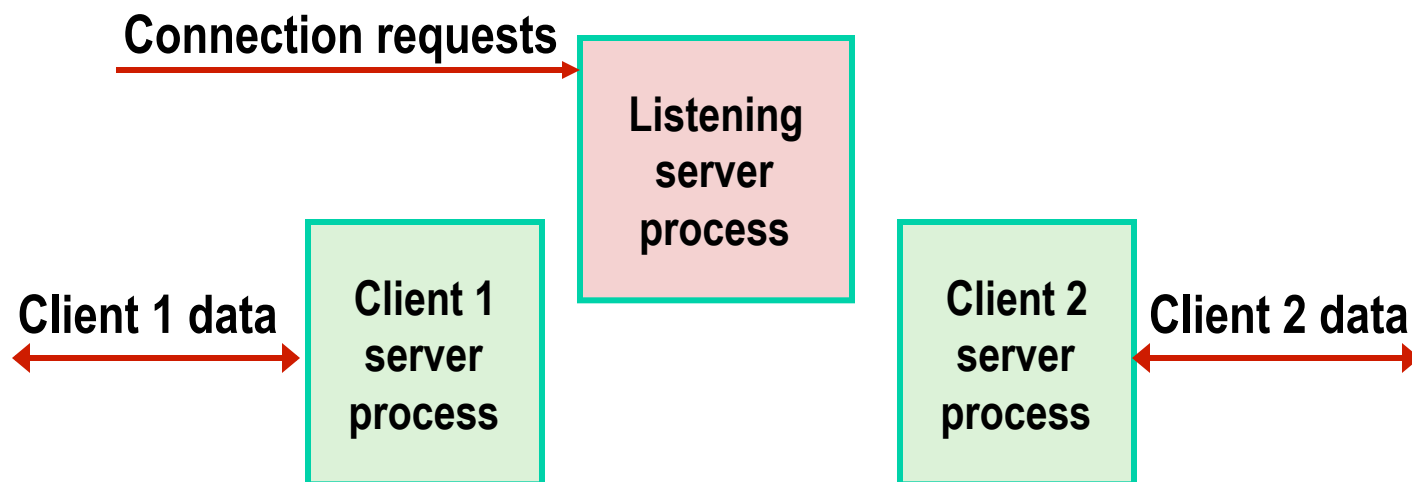


2. Client makes connection request by calling `connect`



3. Server returns `connfd` from `accept`. Forks child to handle client. Connection is now established between `clientfd` and `connfd`

Process-based Server Execution Model



- Each client handled by independent child process
- No shared state between them
- Both parent & child have copies of `listenfd` and `connfd`
 - Parent must close `connfd`
 - Child should close `listenfd`

Issues with Process-based Servers

- **Listening server process must reap zombie children**
 - to avoid fatal memory leak
- **Parent process must `close` its copy of `connfd`**
 - Kernel keeps reference count for each socket/open file
 - After fork, `refcnt(connfd) = 2`
 - Connection will not be closed until `refcnt(connfd) = 0`

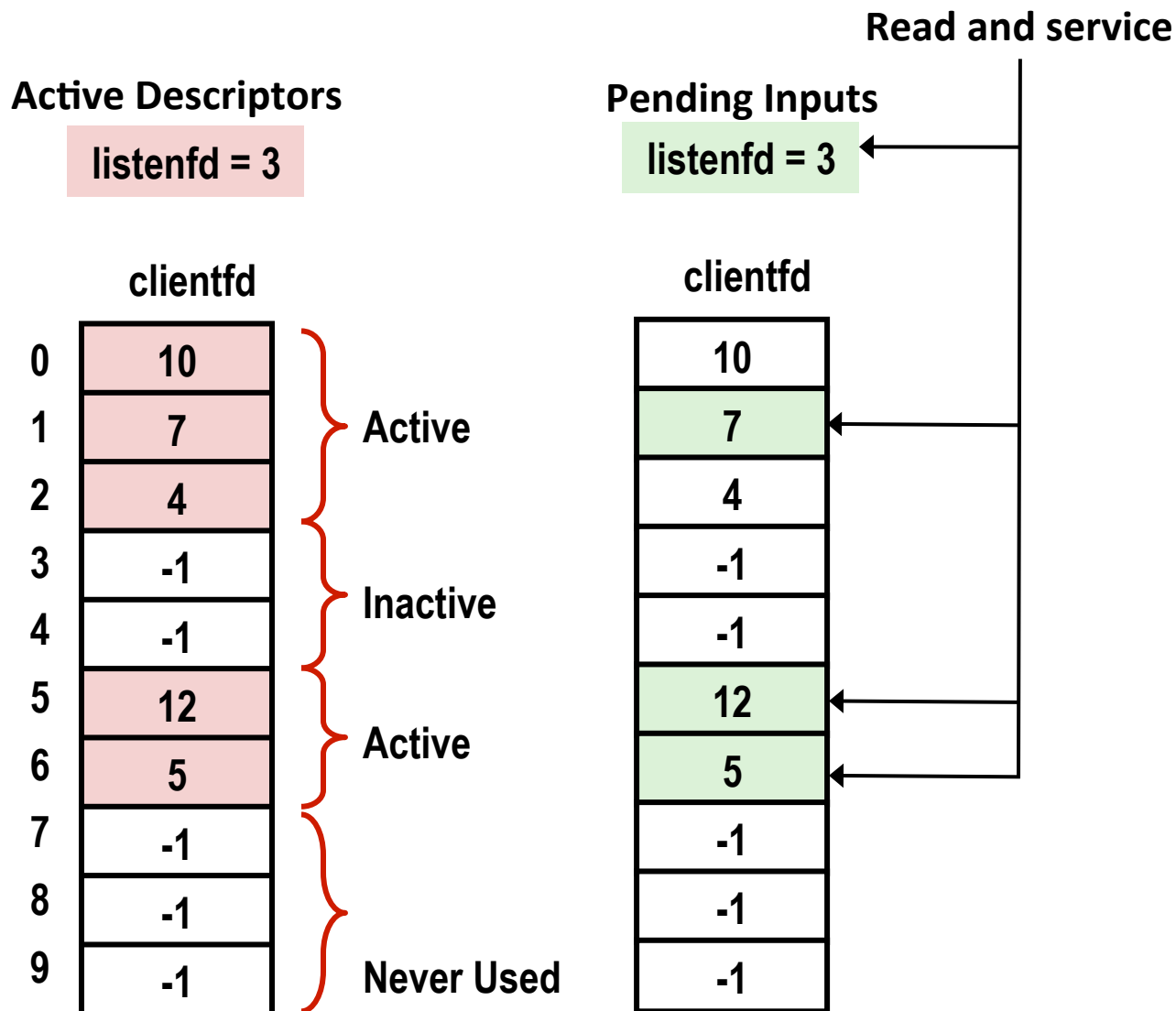
Pros and Cons of Process-based Servers

- **+ Handle multiple connections concurrently**
- **+ Clean sharing model**
 - descriptors (no)
 - file tables (yes)
 - global variables (no)
- **+ Simple and straightforward**
- **– Additional overhead for process control**
- **– Nontrivial to share data between processes**
 - Requires IPC (interprocess communication) mechanisms
 - FIFO's (named pipes), System V shared memory and semaphores

Approach #2: Event-based Servers

- **Server maintains set of active connections**
 - Array of `connfd`'s
- **Repeat:**
 - Determine which descriptors (`connfd`'s or `listenfd`) have pending inputs
 - e.g., using `select` or `epoll` functions
 - arrival of pending input is an *event*
 - If `listenfd` has input, then `accept` connection
 - and add new `connfd` to array
 - Service all `connfd`'s with pending inputs
- **Details for select-based server in book**

I/O Multiplexed Event Processing



Pros and Cons of Event-based Servers

- **+ One logical control flow and address space.**
- **+ Can single-step with a debugger.**
- **+ No process or thread control overhead.**
 - Design of choice for high-performance Web servers and search engines. e.g., Node.js, nginx, Tornado
- **– Significantly more complex to code than process- or thread-based designs.**
- **– Hard to provide fine-grained concurrency**
 - E.g., how to deal with partial HTTP request headers
- **– Cannot take advantage of multi-core**
 - Single thread of control

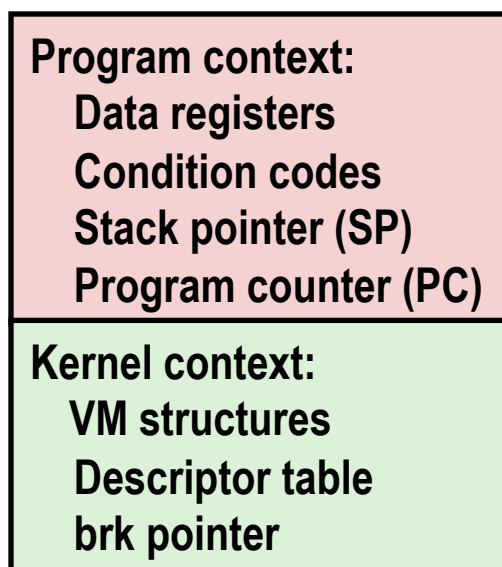
Approach #3: Thread-based Servers

- **Very similar to approach #1 (process-based)**
 - ...but using threads instead of processes

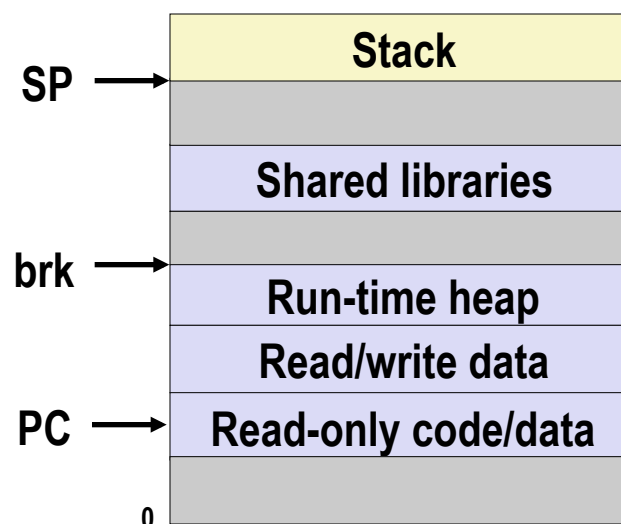
Traditional View of a Process

- **Process = process context + code, data, and stack**

Process context

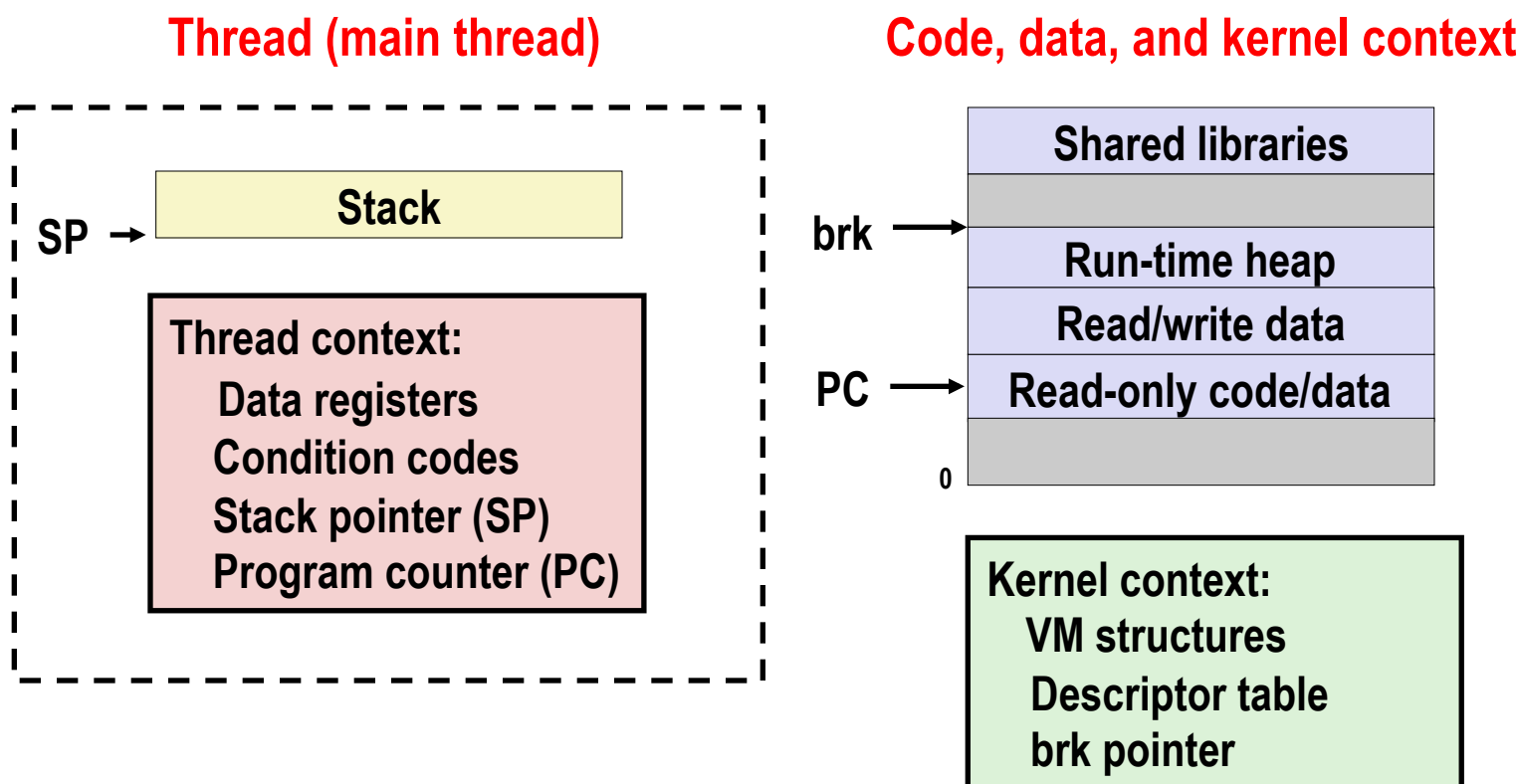


Code, data, and stack



Alternate View of a Process

- Process = thread + code, data, and kernel context



A Process With Multiple Threads

- **Multiple threads can be associated with a process**
 - Each thread has its own logical control flow
 - Each thread shares the same code, data, and kernel context
 - Each thread has its own stack for local variables
 - but not protected from other threads
 - Each thread has its own thread id (TID)

Thread 1 (main thread)

Thread 2 (peer thread)

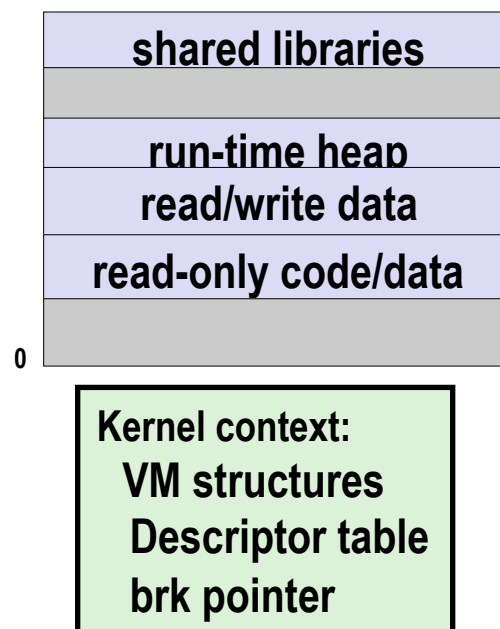
Shared code and data

stack 1

stack 2

Thread 1 context:
Data registers
Condition codes
SP1
PC1

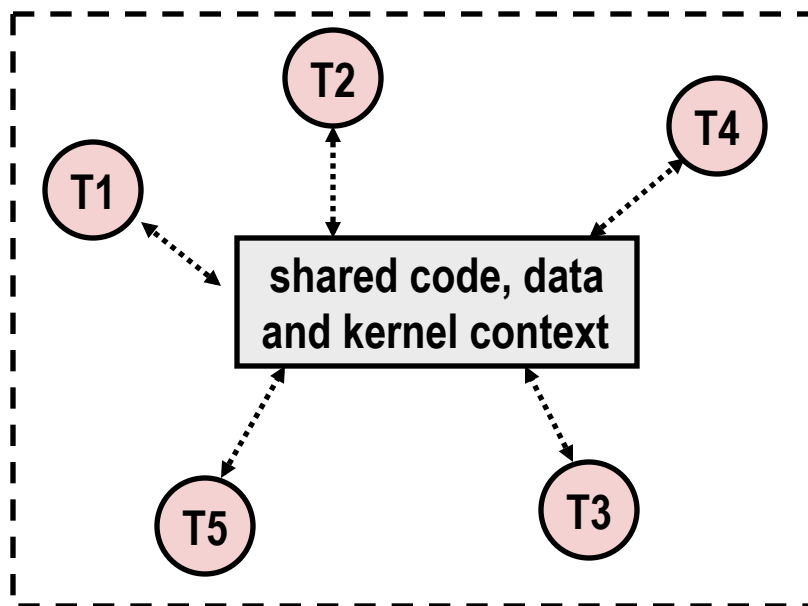
Thread 2 context:
Data registers
Condition codes
SP2
PC2



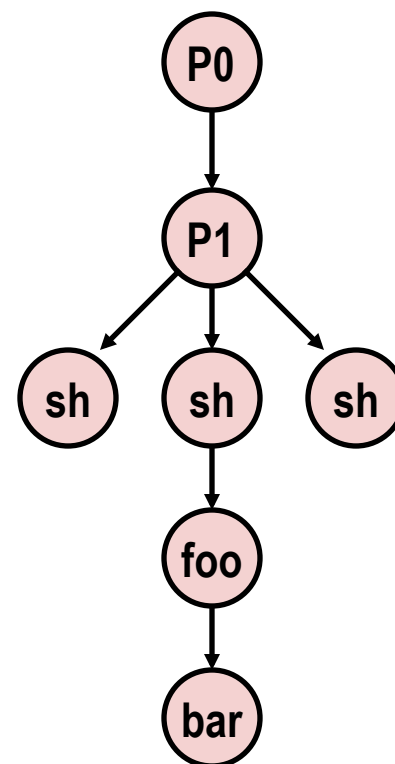
Logical View of Threads

- **Threads associated with process form a pool of peers**
 - Unlike processes which form a tree hierarchy

Threads associated with process foo



Process hierarchy

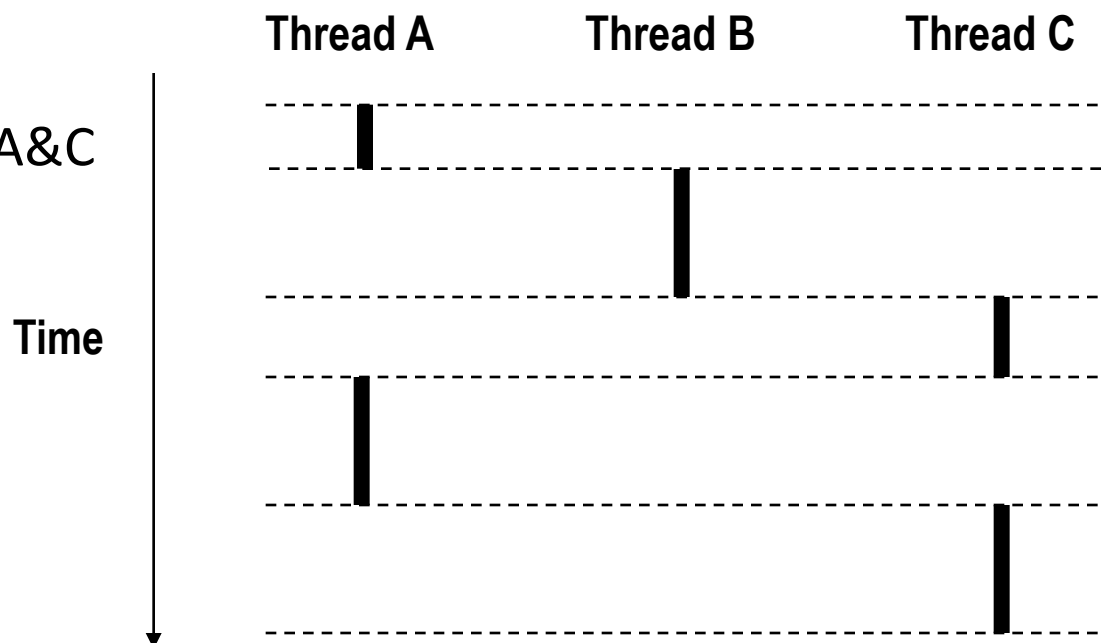


Concurrent Threads

- Two threads are *concurrent* if their flows overlap in time
- Otherwise, they are sequential

- **Examples:**

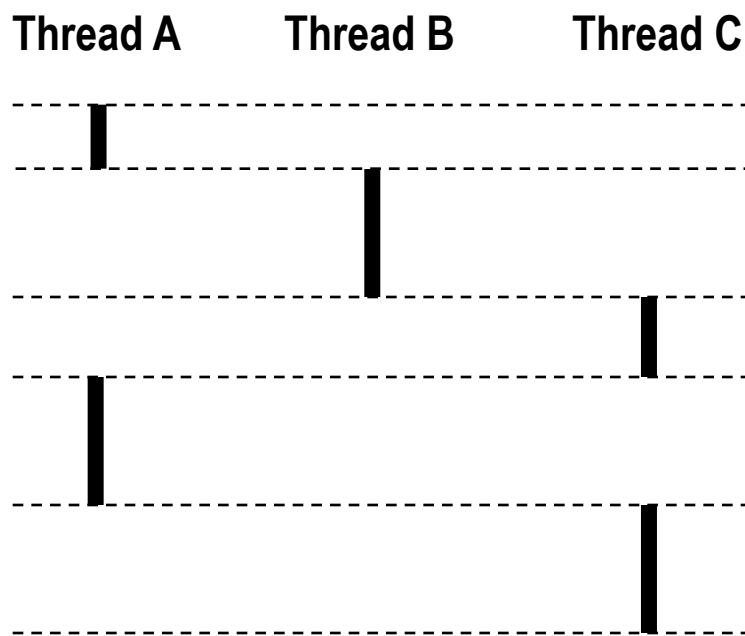
- Concurrent: A & B, A&C
- Sequential: B & C



Concurrent Thread Execution

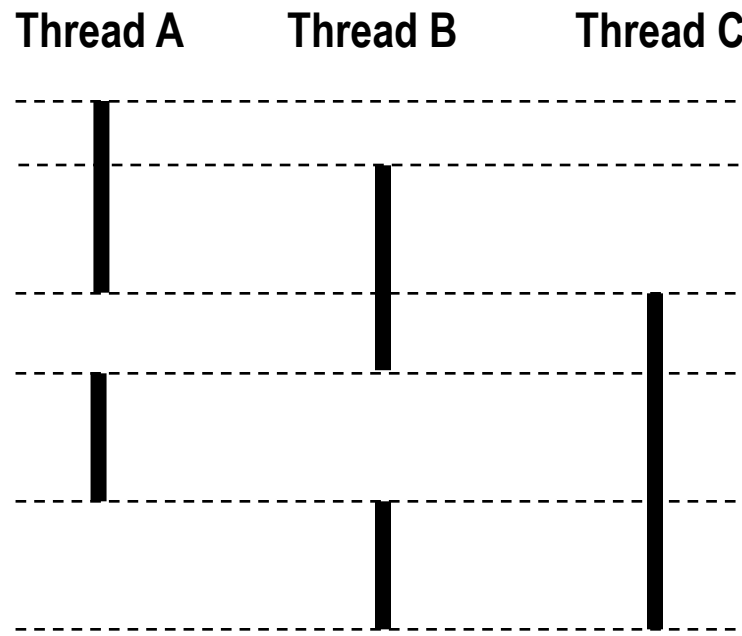
■ Single Core Processor

- Simulate parallelism by time slicing



■ Multi-Core Processor

- Can have true parallelism



Run 3 threads on 2 cores

Threads vs. Processes

■ How threads and processes are similar

- Each has its own logical control flow
- Each can run concurrently with others (possibly on different cores)
- Each is context switched

■ How threads and processes are different

- Threads share all code and data (except local stacks)
 - Processes (typically) do not
- Threads are somewhat less expensive than processes
 - Process control (creating and reaping) twice as expensive as thread control
 - Linux numbers:
 - ~20K cycles to create and reap a process
 - ~10K cycles (or less) to create and reap a thread

Posix Threads (Pthreads) Interface

- ***Pthreads***: Standard interface for ~60 functions that manipulate threads from C programs
 - Creating and reaping threads
 - `pthread_create()`
 - `pthread_join()`
 - Determining your thread ID
 - `pthread_self()`
 - Terminating threads
 - `pthread_cancel()`
 - `pthread_exit()`
 - `exit()` [terminates all threads] , `RET` [terminates current thread]
 - Synchronizing access to shared variables
 - `pthread_mutex_init`
 - `pthread_mutex_[un]lock`

The Pthreads "hello, world" Program

```
/*  
 * hello.c - Pthreads "hello, world" program  
 */  
#include "csapp.h"  
void *thread(void *vargp);  
  
int main()  
{  
    pthread_t tid;  
    Pthread_create(&tid, NULL, thread, NULL);  
    Pthread_join(tid, NULL);  
    exit(0);  
}
```

hello.c

Thread ID

Thread attributes
(usually NULL)

Thread routine

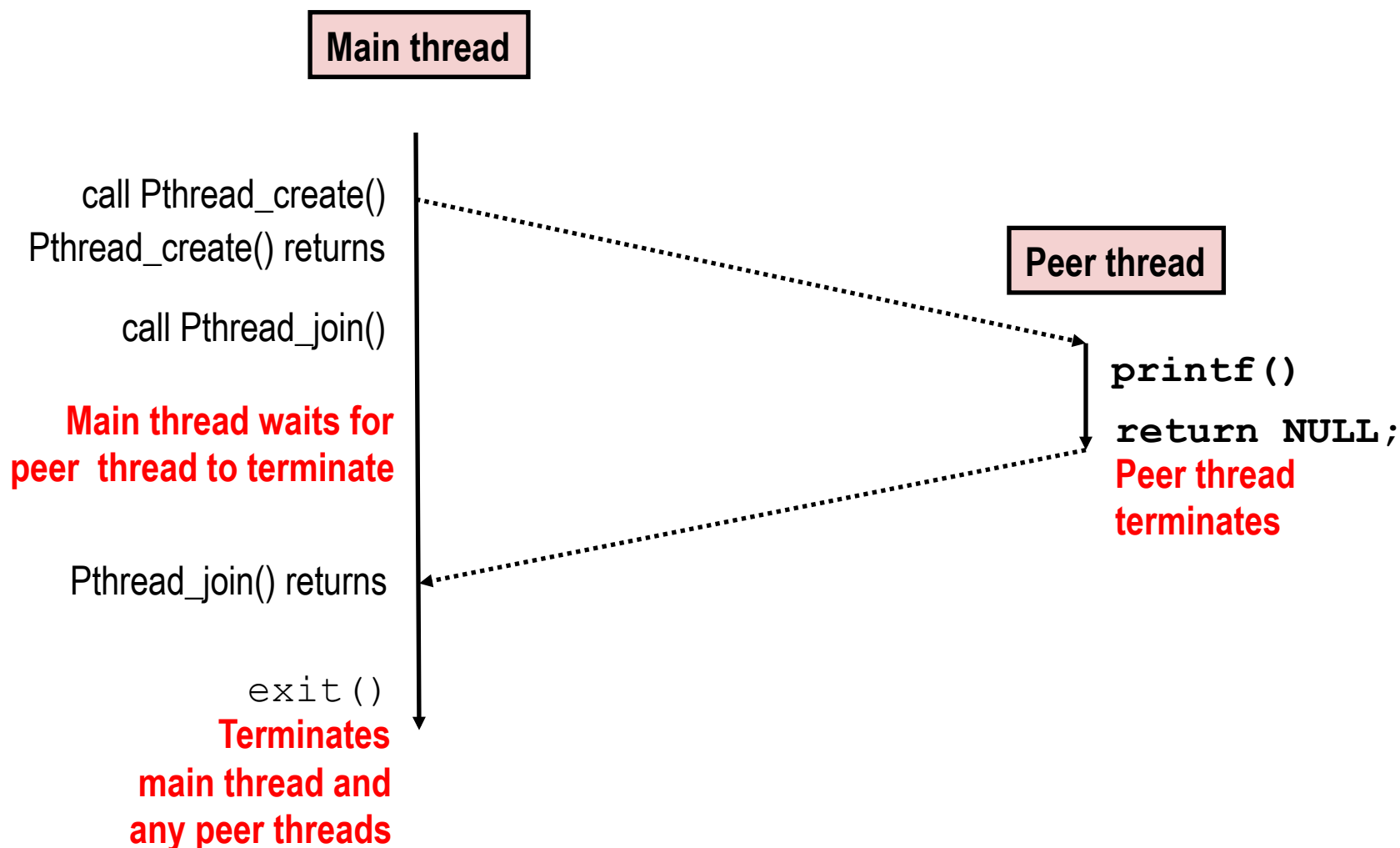
Thread arguments
(void *p)

Return value
(void **p)

```
void *thread(void *vargp) /* thread routine */  
{  
    printf("Hello, world!\n");  
    return NULL;  
}
```

hello.c

Execution of Threaded “hello, world”



Thread-Based Concurrent Echo Server

```
int main(int argc, char **argv)
{
    int listenfd, *connfdp;
    socklen_t clientlen;
    struct sockaddr_storage clientaddr;
    pthread_t tid;

    listenfd = Open_listenfd(argv[1]);
    while (1) {
        clientlen = sizeof(struct sockaddr_storage);
        connfdp = Malloc(sizeof(int));
        *connfdp = Accept(listenfd,
                          (SA *) &clientaddr, &clientlen);
        Pthread_create(&tid, NULL, thread, connfdp);
    }
}
```

echoserv.c

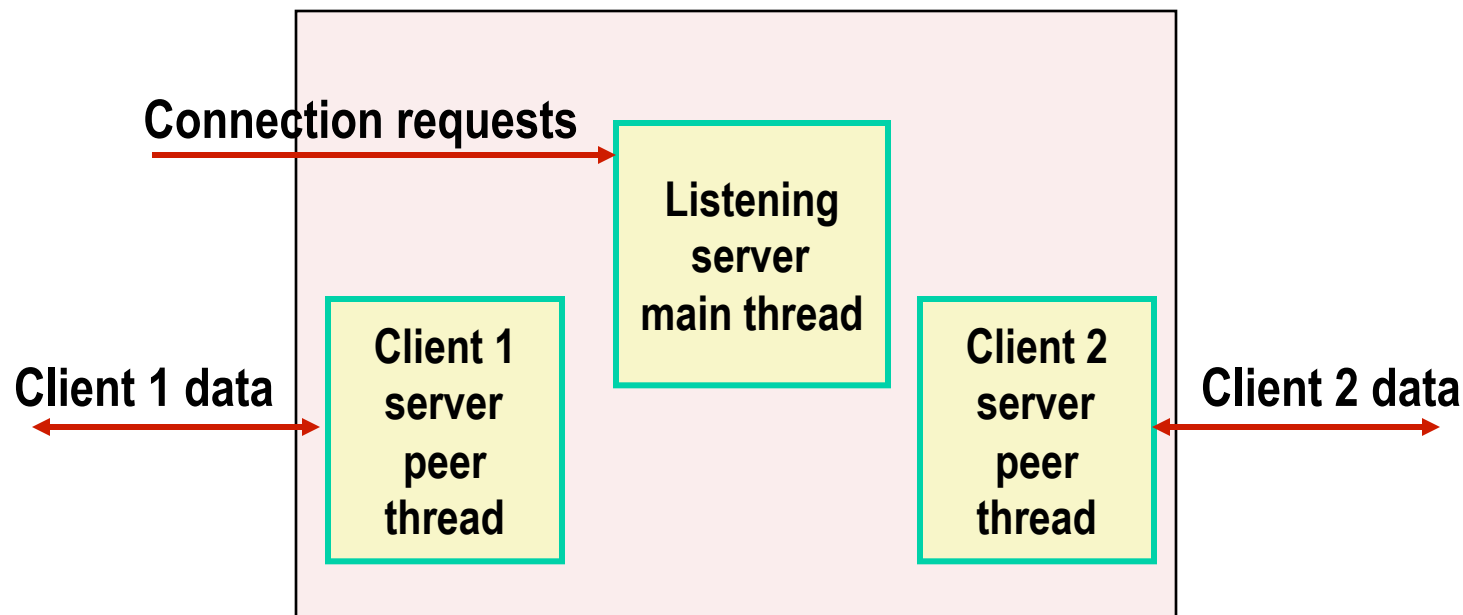
- `malloc` of connected descriptor necessary to avoid deadly race (later)

Thread-Based Concurrent Server (cont)

```
/* Thread routine */
void *thread(void *vargp)
{
    int connfd = *((int *)vargp);
    Pthread_detach(pthread_self());
    Free(vargp);
    echo(connfd);
    Close(connfd);
    return NULL;
}                                     echoserv.c
```

- Run thread in “detached” mode.
 - Runs independently of other threads
 - Reaped automatically (by kernel) when it terminates
- Free storage allocated to hold `connfd`.
- Close `connfd` (important!)

Thread-based Server Execution Model



- Each client handled by individual peer thread
- Threads share all process state except TID
- Each thread has a separate stack for local variables

Issues With Thread-Based Servers

■ Must run “detached” to avoid memory leak

- At any point in time, a thread is either *joinable* or *detached*
- *Joinable* thread can be reaped and killed by other threads
 - must be reaped (with `pthread_join`) to free memory resources
- *Detached* thread cannot be reaped or killed by other threads
 - resources are automatically reaped on termination
- Default state is joinable
 - use `pthread_detach(pthread_self())` to make detached

■ Must be careful to avoid unintended sharing

- For example, passing pointer to main thread's stack
 - `Pthread_create(&tid, NULL, thread, (void *)&connfd);`

■ All functions called by a thread must be *thread-safe*

- (next lecture)

Pros and Cons of Thread-Based Designs

- **+ Easy to share data structures between threads**
 - e.g., logging information, file cache
- **+ Threads are more efficient than processes**
- **– Unintentional sharing can introduce subtle and hard-to-reproduce errors!**
 - The ease with which data can be shared is both the greatest strength and the greatest weakness of threads
 - Hard to know which data shared & which private
 - Hard to detect by testing
 - Probability of bad race outcome very low
 - But nonzero!
 - Future lectures

Summary: Approaches to Concurrency

■ Process-based

- Hard to share resources: Easy to avoid unintended sharing
- High overhead in adding/removing clients

■ Event-based

- Tedious and low level
- Total control over scheduling
- Very low overhead
- Cannot create as fine grained a level of concurrency
- Does not make use of multi-core

■ Thread-based

- Easy to share resources: Perhaps too easy
- Medium overhead
- Not much control over scheduling policies
- Difficult to debug
 - Event orderings not repeatable