Concurrent systems

Lecture 6: Isolation vs. Strict Isolation,
2-Phase Locking (2PL), Time Stamp Ordering (TSO), and
Optimistic Concurrency Control (OCC)

Dr Robert N. M. Watson

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Reminder from last time

- Concurrency without shared data
  - Active objects
- **Message passing**; the actor model
  - Linda, occam, Erlang
- **Composite operations**
  - **Transactions**, **ACID properties**
  - **Isolation** and **serialisability**
- **History graphs**; **good** (and **bad**) **schedules**

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Last time: isolation – serialisability

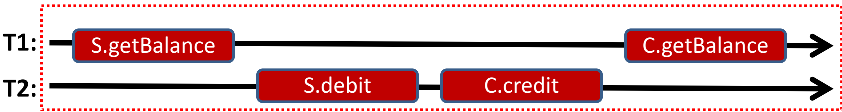
- The idea of executing transactions **serially** (one after the other) is a useful model
  - We want to run transactions concurrently
  - But the result should be **as if** they ran serially
- Consider two transactions, T1 and T2

Isolation allow **transaction programmers** to reason about the interactions between **transactions** trivially: they appear to execute in **serial**.

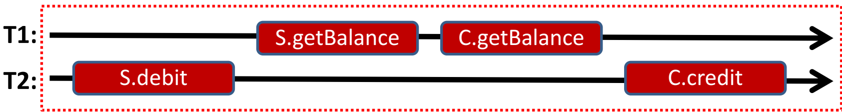
Transaction systems execute transactions concurrently for performance and rely on the definition of **serialisability** to decide if an actual execution schedule is allowable.

From last lecture

Isolation – serialisability



- This execution is neither **serial** nor **serialisable**
  - **T1** sees inconsistent values: old **S** and new **C**



The **transaction system** must ensure that, regardless of actual concurrent execution used to improve performance, only **serialisable orderings** are visible to the **transaction programmer**.

This time

- Effects of bad schedules
- Isolation vs. strict isolation; enforcing isolation
- Two-phase locking; rollback
- Timestamp ordering (TSO)
- Optimistic concurrency control (OCC)
- Isolation and concurrency summary

This lecture considers how the transaction implementation itself can provide transactional (**ACID**) guarantees

Effects of bad schedules

- **Lost Updates**
  - **T1** updates (writes) an object, but this is then overwritten by concurrently executing **T2**
  - (also called a write-write conflict)
- **Dirty Reads**
  - **T1** reads an object which has been updated an uncommitted transaction **T2**
  - (also called a read-after-write conflict)
- **Unrepeatable Reads**
  - **T1** reads an object which is then updated by **T2**
  - Not possible for **T1** to read the same value again
  - (also called a write-after-read conflict)

Lack of **atomicity**: operation results "lost"

Lack of **isolation**: partial result seen

Lack of **isolation**: read value unstable

Atomicity: all or none of operations performed
Isolation: transactions execute as if isolated from concurrent effects

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Isolation and strict isolation

- Ideally want to avoid all three problems
- Two ways: Strict Isolation and Non-Strict Isolation
  - **Strict Isolation**: guarantee we never experience lost updates, dirty reads, or unrepeatable reads
  - **Non-Strict Isolation**: let transaction continue to execute despite potential problems
- Non-strict isolation usually allows more concurrency but can lead to complications
  - E.g. if **T2** reads something written by **T1** (a "dirty read") then **T2** cannot commit until **T1** commits
  - And **T2** must abort if **T1** aborts: **cascading aborts**
- Both approaches ensure that only serialisable schedules are visible to the transaction programmer

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Enforcing isolation

- In practice there are a number of techniques we can use to enforce isolation (of either kind)
- We will look at:
  - **Two-Phase Locking (2PL)**;
  - **Timestamp Ordering (TSO)**; and
  - **Optimistic Concurrency Control (OCC)**
- More complete descriptions and examples of these approaches can be found in:

  Operating Systems, Concurrent and Distributed Software Design, Jean Bacon and Tim Harris, Addison-Wesley 2003.

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Two-phase locking (2PL)

- Associate a lock with every object
  - Could be mutual exclusion, or MRSW
- Transactions proceed in two phases:
  - **Expanding Phase**: during which locks are acquired but none are released
  - **Shrinking Phase**: during which locks are released, and no more are acquired
- Operations on objects occur in either phase, providing appropriate locks are held
  - Should ensure serializable execution

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2PL example

Expanding Phase

Shrinking Phase

```
// transfer amt from A -> B
transaction {
 readLock(A);
 if (getBalance(A) > amt) {
    writeLock(A);
    debit(A, amt);
    writeLock(B);
    credit(B, amt);
    writeUnlock(B);
    addInterest(A);
    writeUnlock(A);
    tryCommit(return=true);
  } else {
    readUnlock(A);
    tryCommit(return=false);
}
```

Acquire a read lock (shared) before 'read' A

Upgrade to a write lock (exclusive) before write A

Acquire a write lock (exclusive) before write B

Release locks when done to allow concurrency

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Problems with 2PL

- Requires knowledge of which locks required
  - Can be automated in many systems
  - Easy if a transaction **statically declares** its affected objects
  - But some transactions **look up objects dynamically**
- Risk of deadlock
  - Can attempt to impose a partial order
  - Or can detect deadlock and abort, releasing locks
  - (this is safe for transactions, which is nice)
- Non-Strict Isolation: releasing locks during execution means others can access those objects
  - e.g. **T1** updates **A**, then releases write lock; now **T2** can read or overwrite the uncommitted value
  - Hence **T2**'s fate is tied to **T1** (whether commit or abort)
  - Can fix with **strict 2PL**: hold all locks until transaction end

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Strict 2PL example

Expanding Phase

Unlock All Phase

```
// transfer amt from A -> B
transaction {
 readLock(A);
 if (getBalance(A) > amt) {
    writeLock(A);
    debit(A, amt);
    writeLock(B);
    credit(B, amt);
    addInterest(A);
    tryCommit(return=true);
  } else {
    readUnlock(A);
    tryCommit(return=false);
} on commit, abort {
    unlock(A);
    unlock(B);
}
```

Retain lock on B here to ensure **strict isolation**

By holding locks longer, Strict 2PL risks greater **contention**

2PL: rollback

- Recall that transactions can **abort**
  - Could be due to run-time conflicts (non-strict 2PL), or could be programmed (e.g. on an exception)
- Using locking for isolation works, but means that updates are made 'in place'
  - i.e. once acquire write lock, can directly update
  - If transaction aborts, need to ensure no visible effects
- **Rollback** is the process of returning the world to the state it in was before the transaction started

Why might a transaction abort?

- Some failures are internal to transaction systems:
  - Transaction **T2** depends on **T1**, and **T1** aborts
  - Deadlock is detected between two transactions
  - Memory is exhausted or a system error occurs
- Some are programmer-triggered:
  - Transaction self-aborted – e.g., `debit()` failed due to inadequate balance
- Some failures will be programmer visible
- Others will simply trigger retry of the transaction

Implementing rollback: undo

- One strategy is to **undo** operations, e.g.
  - Keep a log of all operations, in order: $\mathbf{O_1}$, $\mathbf{O_2}$, .. $\mathbf{O_n}$
  - On abort, undo changes of $\mathbf{O_n}$, $\mathbf{O_{(n-1)}}$, .. $\mathbf{O_1}$
- Must know how to undo an operation:
  - Assume we log both operations and parameters
  - Programmer can provide an explicit counter action
    - UNDO(credit(A, x)) ⇔ debit(A, x);
- May not be sufficient (e.g. setBalance(A, x))
  - Would need to record previous balance, which we may not have explicitly read within transaction…

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Implementing rollback: copy

- A more brute-force approach is to take a **copy** of an object before [first] modification
  - On abort, just revert to original copy
- Has some advantages:
  - Doesn't require programmer effort
  - Undo is simple, and can be efficient (e.g. if there are many operations, and/or they are complex)
- However can lead to high overhead if objects are large … and may not be needed if don't abort!
  - Can reduce overhead with **partial copying**

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Timestamp ordering (TSO)

- 2PL and Strict 2PL are widely used in practice
  - But can limit concurrency (certainly the latter)
  - And must be able to deal with deadlock
- **Time Stamp Ordering (TSO)** is an alternative approach:
  - As a transaction begins, it is assigned a **timestamp**
  - Timestamps are comparable, and unique (can think of as e.g. current time – or a logical incrementing number)
  - Every object **O** records the timestamp of the last transaction to successfully access it: **V**(O)
  - **T** can access object O iff **V**(T) >= **V**(O), where **V**(T) is the timestamp of **T** (otherwise rejected as "***too late***")

Timestamps allow us to explicitly track new "happens-before" edges, detecting (and preventing) violations

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TSO example 1

```
T1 transaction {
  s = getBalance(S);
  c = getBalance(C);
  return = s + c;
}
```

```
T2 transaction {
  debit(S, 100);
  credit(C, 100);
  return true;
}
```

Imagine **S** and **C** start off with version **10**

1. **T1** and **T2** both start concurrently:
   - **T1** gets timestamp **27**, T2 gets timestamp **29**
2. **T1** reads **S** => ok! (27 >= 10); S gets timestamp **27**
3. **T2** does debit **S**, 100 => ok! (29 >= 27); **S** gets timestamp **29**
4. **T1** reads **C** => ok! (27 => 10); C gets timestamp **27**
5. **T2** does credit **C**, 100 => ok! (29 >= 27); **C** gets timestamp **29**
6. Both transactions commit.

Succeeded as all **conflicting operations** executed in **timestamp order**

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TSO example 2

```
T1 transaction {
  s = getBalance(S);
  c = getBalance(C);
  return = s + c;
}
```

```
T2 transaction {
  debit(S, 100);
  credit(C, 100);
  return true;
}
```

As before, **S** and **C** start off with version **10**

1. **T1** and **T2** both start concurrently:
   - **T1** gets timestamp **27**, **T2** gets timestamp **29**
2. **T1** reads **S** => **ok**! (27 >= 10); **S** gets timestamp **27**
3. **T2** does debit **S**, 100 => **ok**! (29 >= 27); **S** gets timestamp **29**
4. **T2** does credit **C**, 100 => **ok**! (29 >= 10); **C** gets timestamp **29**
5. **T1** reads **C** => **FAIL**! (27 < 29); **T1** aborts
6. **T2** commits; **T1** restarts, gets timestamp **30**…

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Advantages of TSO

- Deadlock free
- Can allow more concurrency than 2PL
- Can be implemented in a decentralized fashion
- Can be augmented to distinguish reads & writes
  - objects have read timestamp **R** & write timestamp **W**

```
READ(O, T) {
  if(V(T) < W(O)) abort;
  // do actual read
  R(O): = MAX(V(T), R(O));
}
```

Only safe to read if no-one wrote "after" us

R(O) holds timestamp of *latest* transaction to read

```
WRITE(O, T) {
  if(V(T) < R(O)) abort;
  if(V(T) < W(O)) return;
  // do actual write
  W(O) := V(T);
}
```

Unsafe to write if later txaction has read value

But if later txaction *wrote* it, just skip write (he won!). Or?

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However…

- TSO needs a rollback mechanism (like 2PL)
- TSO does not provide strict isolation:
  - hence subject to cascading aborts
  - (can provide strict TSO by locking objects when access is granted – still remains deadlock free)
- TSO decides *a priori* on one serialisation
  - even if others might have been possible
- And TSO does not perform well under contention
  - will repeatedly have transactions aborting & retrying & …
- In general TSO is a good choice for **distributed systems** [decentralized management] where conflicts are rare

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Optimistic concurrency control

- **OCC** is an alternative to 2PL or TSO
- Optimistic since assume conflicts are rare
  - Execute transaction on a **shadow** [copy] of the data
  - On commit, check if all "OK"; if so, apply updates; otherwise discard shadows & retry
- "OK" means:
  - All shadows read were **mutually consistent**, and
  - No-one else has committed "later" changes to any object that we are hoping to update
- Advantages: no deadlock, no cascading aborts
  - And "rollback" comes pretty much for free!

Key idea: when ready to commit, search for a **serialisable order** that accepts the transaction

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Implementing OCC

- Various efficient schemes for shadowing
  - e.g. write buffering, page-based copy-on-write.
- Complexity arises in performing **validation** when a transaction **T** finishes & tries to commit
- **Read validation**:
  - Must ensure that all versions of data read by **T** (all shadows) were valid at some particular time *t*
  - This becomes the tentative **start time** for **T**
- **Serialisability validation**:
  - Must ensure that there are **no conflicts** with any transactions which have an later start time

OCC example (1)

- All objects are tagged with a version
  - **Validation timestamp** of the transaction which most recently wrote its updates to that object
- Many threads execute transactions
  - When wish to read an object, take a shadow copy, and take note of the version number
  - If wish to write: first take copy, then update that
- When a thread finishes a transaction, it submits the versions to a single threaded **validator**

OCC example (2)

- Validator keeps track of last *k* validated transactions, their timestamps, and the objects they updated

Transaction	Validation Timestamp	Objects Updated	Writeback Done?
T5	10	A, B, C	Yes
T6	11	D	Yes
T7	12	A, E	No

- The versions of the objects are as follows:
  - **T7** has started, but not finished, writeback
  - (A has been updated, but not E)

Object	Version
A	12
B	10
C	10
D	11
E	9

What will happen if we now start a new transaction **T8** on {B, E} before **T7** writes back E?

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OCC example (3)

- Consider **T8**: { write(B), write(E) };
- **T8** executes and makes shadows of B & E
  – Records timestamps: B@10, E@9
  – When done, **T8** submits for validation
- Phase 1: read validation
  – Check shadows are part of a consistent snapshot
  – Latest committed start time is 11 = OK (10, 9 < 11)
- Phase 2: serializability validation
  – Check **T8** against all later transactions (here, T7)
  – Conflict detected! (**T7** updates E, but **T8** read old E)

Looking at log: have other transactions interfered with **T8**'s inputs?

Looking at log: would committing **T8** invalidate other now-committed transactions?

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Issues with OCC

- Preceding example uses a simple validator
  - Possible will abort even when don't need to
  - (e.g. can search for a 'better' start time)
- In general OCC can find more serializable schedules than TSO
  - Timestamps assigned after the fact, and taking the actual data read and written into account
- However OCC is not suitable when high conflict
  - Can perform lots of work with 'stale' data => wasteful!
  - Starvation possible if conflicting set continually retries
  - Will the transaction system always make progress?

Something think about: what happens when *k*-transaction log is exhausted?

Isolation & concurrency: summary

- **2PL** explicitly locks items as required, then releases
  - Guarantees a serializable schedule
  - Strict 2PL avoids cascading aborts
  - Can limit concurrency; & prone to deadlock
- **TSO** assigns timestamps when transactions start
  - Cannot deadlock, but may miss serializable schedules
  - Suitable for distributed/decentralized systems
- **OCC** executes with shadow copies, then validates
  - Validation assigns timestamps when transactions end
  - Lots of concurrency, & admits many serializable schedules
  - No deadlock but potential livelock when contention is high
- Differing tradeoffs between **optimism**, **concurrency**, but also potential for **starvation**, **livelock**, and **deadlock**
- Ideas like TSO and OCC will recur in Distributed Systems

Summary + next time

- History graphs; good (and bad) schedules
- Isolation vs. strict isolation; enforcing isolation
- Two-phase locking; rollback
- Timestamp ordering (TSO)
- Optimistic concurrency control (OCC)
- Isolation and concurrency summary

- Next time:
  - Transactional durability: crash recovery and logging
  - Lock-free programming; transactional memory

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