09. I/O Systems

9th ed: Ch. 13

10th ed: Ch. 12

Objectives

- To understand the general structure of the I/O subsystem
- To know different ways of performing I/O including polling, interrupts, and direct memory access
- To know of different types of device
- To be aware of other issues including caching, scheduling, and performance

Outline

- I/O subsystem
- I/O devices
- Kernel data structures

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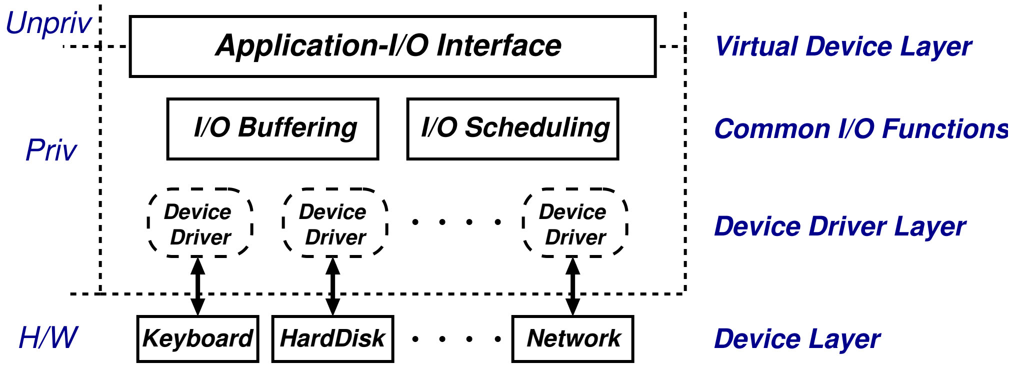
- I/O subsystem
  - Polling
  - Interrupts
  - Interrupt handling
  - Direct Memory Access (DMA)
- I/O devices
- Kernel data structures

Computers and computation rely on I/O

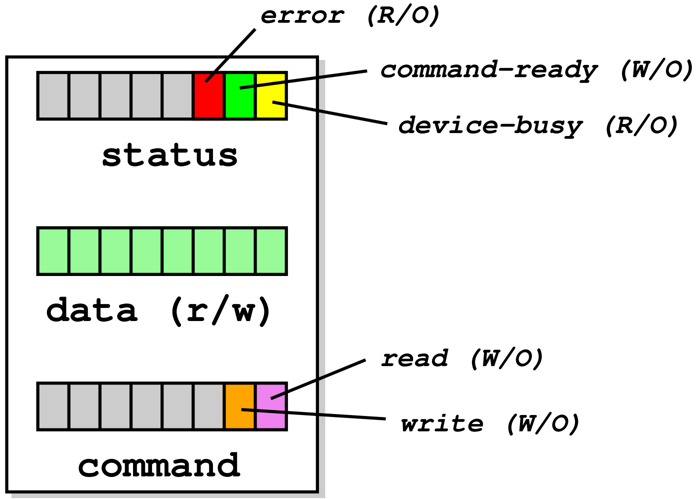
- Need input data to process, and means to output results
- There is a huge range of I/O devices
  - **Human readable**: graphical displays, keyboard, mouse, printers
  - **Machine readable**: disks, tapes, CD, sensors
  - **Communications**: modems, network interfaces, radios
- All differ significantly from one another in several ways:
  - **Data rate**: orders of magnitude different between keyboard and network
  - **Control complexity**: printers much simpler than disks
  - **Transfer unit and direction**: blocks vs characters vs frame stores
  - **Data representation**
  - **Error handling**
- I/O management is therefore a major component of an OS
  - New devices come along frequently
  - I/O performance is critical to system performance
  - Also wish to present a homogenous API

I/O subsystem

- Incredible variety of I/O devices but there are commonalities
  - Signals from I/O devices interface with computer
  - A device has at least one connection point, or **port**
  - Devices interconnect via a **bus**, either daisy-chained or shared direct access
  - Devices have integrated or separate controllers (host adapters) containing processor, microcode, private memory, etc that operate the device, handle bus connections, any ports
- Typically device will have registers to hold commands, addresses, data
  - E.g., Data-in register, data-out register, status register, control register
- Devices have addresses and are used by either
  - Direct I/O instructions, usually privileged, or
  - Memory-mapped I/O, where device registers are mapped into processor address space, especially when large (e.g., graphics cards)



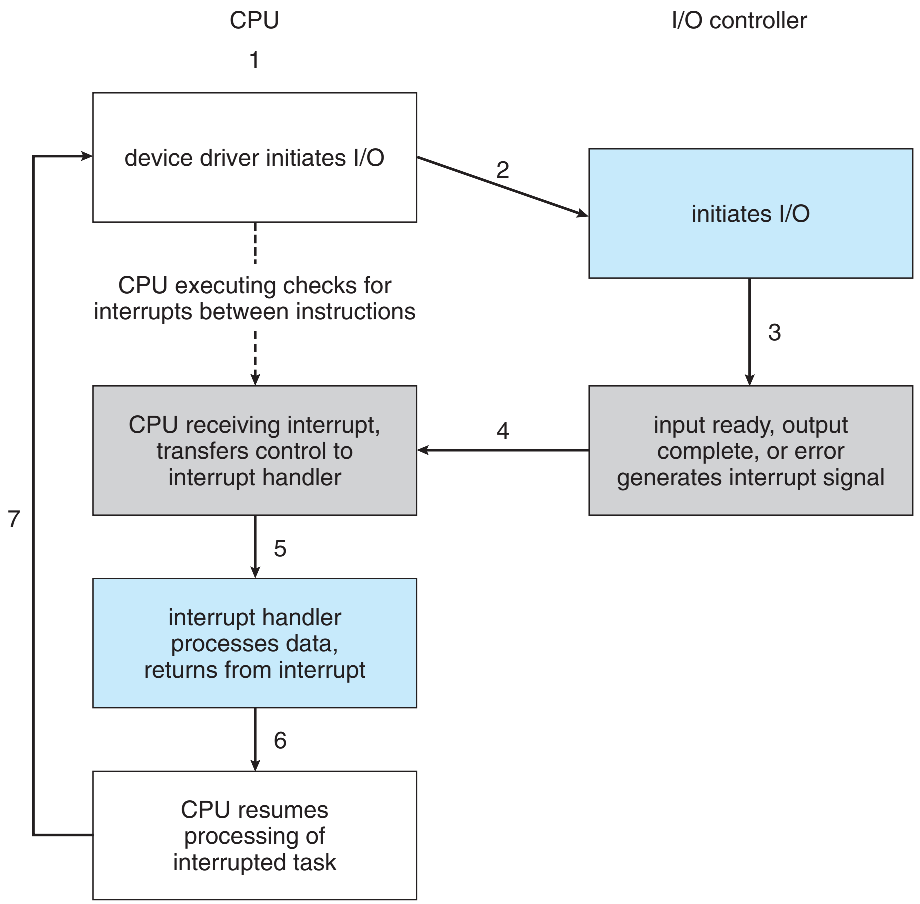
Polling



- Consider a simple device
  - Three registers: status, data and command
  - Host can read and write registers via the bus
- Polled mode operation is as follows, for every byte:
  - Host repeatedly reads *device-busy* until clear
  - Host sets *read* or *write* bit in command register, and puts data into data register
  - Host sets *command-ready* bit in status register
  - Device sees *command-ready* and sets *device-busy*
  - Device performs requested operation, executing transfer
  - Device clears *command-ready* and any *error* bit, and then clears *device-busy*
- Step 1 is polling – a **busy-wait** cycle, waiting for some I/O from device
  - This is ok if the device is fast but very inefficient if not
  - If the CPU switches to another task it risks missing a cycle leading to data being overwritten or lost

Interrupts

- More efficient than polling when device is relatively infrequently accessed
- Device triggers **interrupt-request line**
  - Checked by the CPU after each instruction
  - Aligns interrupts with instruction boundaries
- **Interrupt handler** receives the interrupt unless masked
- **Interrupt vector** dispatches interrupt to correct handler
  - Context switch required before and after
  - Priorities applied, and some interrupts may be **non-maskable**



Intel Pentium interrupt vectors

vector number	description
0	divide error
1	debug exception
2	null interrupt
3	breakpoint
4	INTO-detected overflow
5	bound range exception
6	invalid opcode
7	device not available
8	double fault
9	coprocessor segment overrun (reserved)
10	invalid task state segment
11	segment not present
12	stack fault
13	general protection
14	page fault
15	(Intel reserved, do not use)
16	floating-point error
17	alignment check
18	machine check
19–31	(Intel reserved, do not use)
32–255	maskable interrupts

Handling interrupts

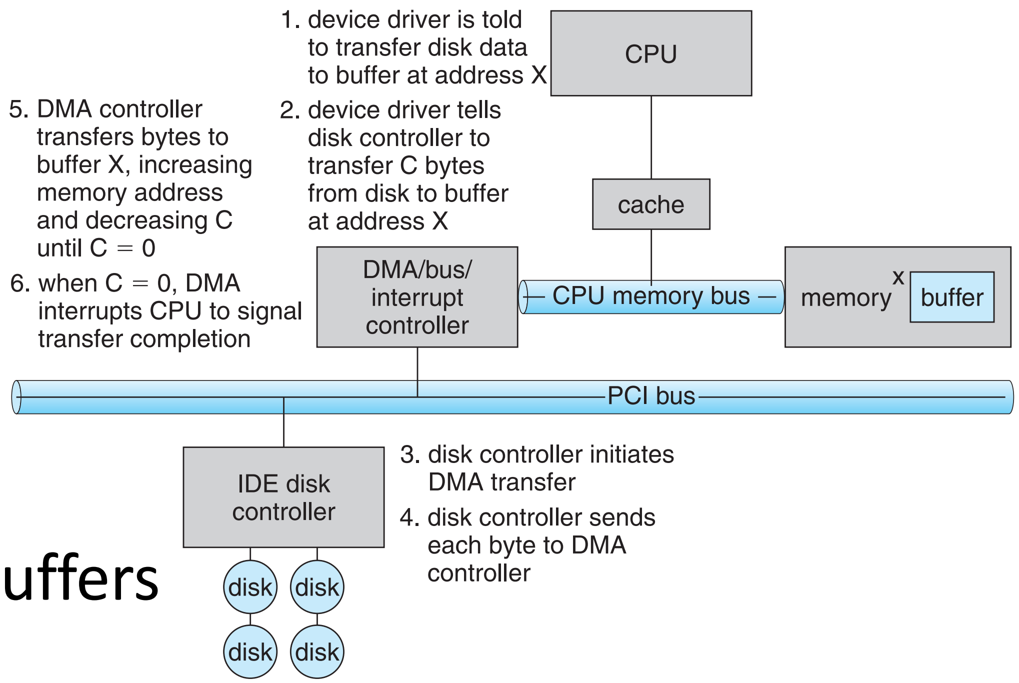
- Split the implementation into two parts:
  - Bottom half, the **interrupt handler**
  - Top half, **interrupt service routines** (ISR; per-device)
- Processor-dependent interrupt handler may:
  - Save more registers and establish a language environment
  - Demultiplex interrupt in software and invoke relevant ISR
- Device- (not processor-) dependent interrupt service routine will:
  - For programmed IO device: transfer data and clear interrupt
  - For DMA devices: acknowledge transfer; request any more pending; signal any waiting processes; and finally enter the scheduler or return
- But who is scheduling whom? Consider, e.g., network **livelock**

Direct Memory Access (DMA)

- Used for high-speed I/O devices able to transmit information at close to memory speeds
  - Interrupts good but (e.g.) **livelock** a problem
  - Better if devices can read and write processor memory **directly** – Direct Memory Access (DMA)
- Device controller transfers blocks of data from buffer storage directly to main memory without CPU intervention with generic DMA "command" include, e.g.,
  - Source address plus increment / decrement / do nothing
  - Sink address plus increment / decrement / do nothing
  - Transfer size

Direct Memory Access (DMA)

- Only generate one interrupt per block rather than one per byte
- DMA channels may be provided by dedicated DMA controller, or by devices themselves
  - E.g. disk controller passes disk address, memory address and size, and read/write
- All that's required is that a device can become a bus master
  - Requires ability for arbitration as not just CPU driving the bus
  - Involves **cycle stealing** as taking the bus away from the CPU
- Scatter/Gather DMA chains multiple requests, e.g., of disk reads into set of buffers



Outline

- I/O subsystem
- I/O devices
  - Device characteristics
  - Blocking, non-blocking, asynchronous I/O
  - I/O structure
- Kernel data structures

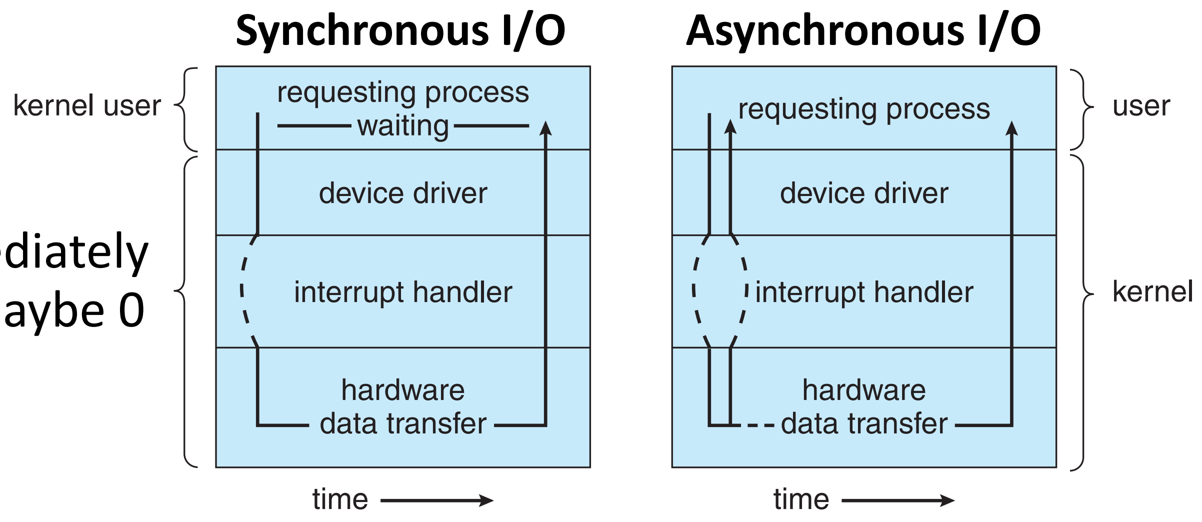
I/O device characteristics

- **Block devices**, e.g. disk drives, CD
  - Commands include *read*, *write*, *seek*
  - Can have *raw* access or via (e.g.) filesystem ("cooked") or *memory-mapped*
- **Character devices**, e.g. keyboards, mice, serial
  - Commands include *get*, *put*
  - Layer libraries on top for line editing, etc
- **Network Devices**
  - Vary enough from block and character devices to get their own interface
  - Unix and Windows NT use the Berkeley Socket interface
- **Miscellaneous**
  - Current time, elapsed time, timers, clocks
  - On Unix, *ioctl* covers other odd aspects of I/O

aspect	variation	example
data-transfer mode	character block	terminal disk
access method	sequential random	modem CD-ROM
transfer schedule	synchronous asynchronous	tape keyboard
sharing	dedicated sharable	tape keyboard
device speed	latency seek time transfer rate delay between operations	
I/O direction	read only write only read–write	CD-ROM graphics controller disk

Blocking, non-blocking, asynchronous I/O

- From programmer perspective, I/O system calls exhibit one of three behaviours
- **Blocking**
  - Process suspended until I/O completed
  - Easy to use and understand but insufficient for some needs
- **Nonblocking**
  - I/O call returns all available data, immediately
  - Returns count of bytes read/written, maybe 0
  - *select* following *read*/*write*
  - Relies on multi-threading



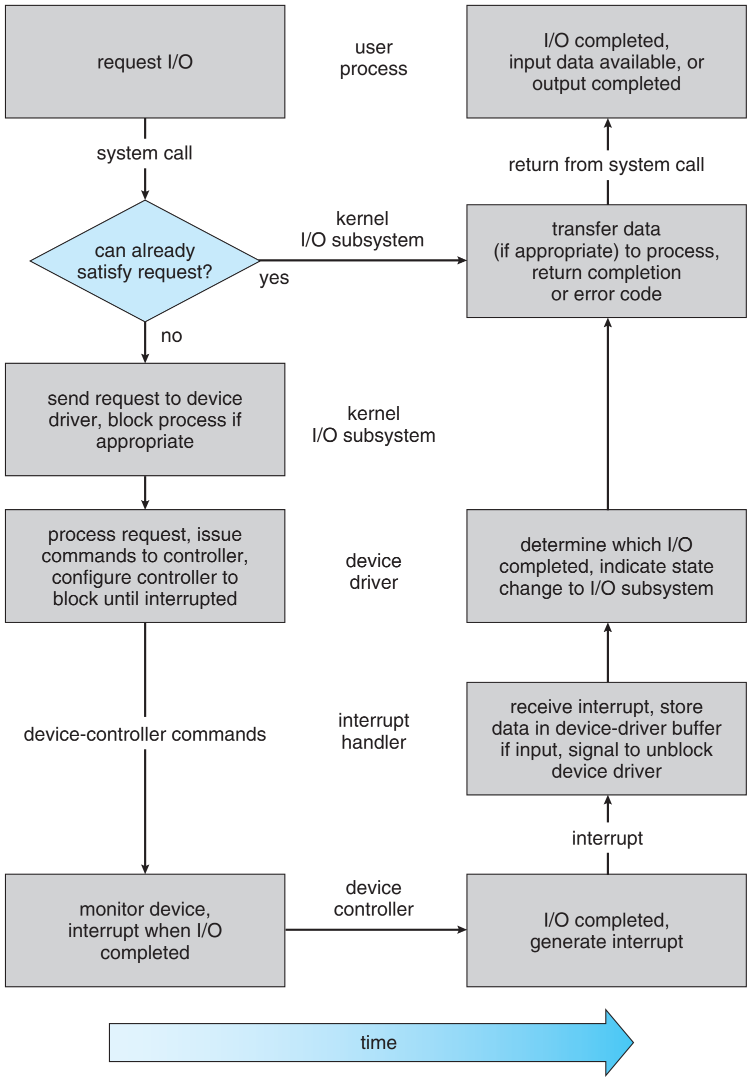
- **Asynchronous**
  - Process continues running while I/O executes with I/O subsystem explicitly signalling I/O completion
  - Most flexible and potentially most efficient, but also most complex to use

I/O structure

- **Synchronous**
  - After I/O starts, control returns to user program only upon I/O completion
  - Wait instruction idles the CPU until the next interrupt
  - Wait loop (contention for memory access)
  - At most one I/O request is outstanding at a time, no simultaneous I/O processing
- **Asynchronous**
  - After I/O starts, control returns to user program without waiting for I/O completion
  - **System call** allows application to request to the OS to allow user to wait for I/O completion
  - **Device-status table** contains entry for each I/O device indicating its type, address, and state
  - OS indexes into I/O device table to determine device status and to modify table entry to include interrupt

I/O request lifecycle

- Consider process reading a file from disk:
  - Determine device holding file
  - Translate name to device representation
  - Physically read data from disk into buffer
  - Make data available to requesting process
  - Return control to process



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- Kernel data structures
    - Vectored I/O
    - Buffering
    - Other issues

Kernel data structures

- To manage all this, the OS kernel must maintain state for IO components:
  - Open file tables
  - Network connections
  - Character device states
- Results in many complex and performance critical data structures to track buffers, memory allocation, “dirty” blocks
- Consider reading a file from disk for a process:
  - Determine device holding file
  - Translate name to device representation
  - Physically read data from disk into buffer
  - Make data available to requesting process
  - Return control to process

Vectored I/O

- Enable one system call to perform multiple I/O operations
  - E.g., Unix *readve* accepts a vector of multiple buffers to read into or write from
- This **scatter-gather** method better than multiple individual I/O calls
  - Decreases context switching and system call overhead
- Some versions provide atomicity
  - Avoids, e.g., worry about multiple threads changing data while I/O occurring

Buffering

- So OS can deal with mismatches between devices, e.g., speed, transfer size), different buffering strategies can be used
  - **Single buffering**: OS assigns a system buffer to the user request
  - **Double buffering**: process consumes from one buffer while system fills the next
  - **Circular buffering**: most useful for bursty IO
  - Details often dictated by device type: character devices buffer by line; network devices are very bursty; block devices often the major user of IO buffer memory
- Can smooth peaks/troughs in data rate but can't help if on average:
  - Process demand > data rate – the process will spend time waiting, or
  - Data rate > capability of the system – the buffers will all fill and data will spill
- However, buffering can introduce jitter which is bad for real-time or multimedia applications

Other issues

- **Caching**: fast memory holding copy of data for both reads and writes; critical to IO performance
- **Scheduling**: order IO requests in per-device queues; some OSs may even attempt to be fair
- **Spooling**: queue output for a device, useful if device is "single user" (e.g., printer), i.e. can serve only one request at a time
- **Device reservation**: system calls for acquiring or releasing exclusive access to a device (care required)
- **Error handling**: generally get some form of error number or code when request fails, logged into system error log (e.g., transient write failed, disk full, device unavailable, ...)
- **Protection**: process might attempt to disrupt normal operation via illegal I/O operations so all such instructions must be privileged and memory-mapped and I/O port memory locations protected, with I/O performed via system calls
- **Performance**: I/O really affects performance through demands on CPU to execute device driver, kernel I/O code, context switches due to interrupts, data copying

Summary

- I/O subsystem
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  - Interrupts
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  - Direct Memory Access (DMA)
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