

# CS162

## Operating Systems and Systems Programming

### Lecture 4

## Introduction to I/O, Sockets, Networking

September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Prof. John Kubiatowicz

<http://cs162.eecs.Berkeley.edu>

### Recall: Fork and Wait

```
...
cpid = fork();
if (cpid > 0) {                                /* Parent Process */
    mypid = getpid();
    printf("[%d] parent of [%d]\n", mypid, cpid);
    tcpid = wait(&status);
    printf("[%d] bye %d\n", mypid, tcpid);
} else if (cpid == 0) {                           /* Child Process */
    mypid = getpid();
    printf("[%d] child\n", mypid);
}
...
```

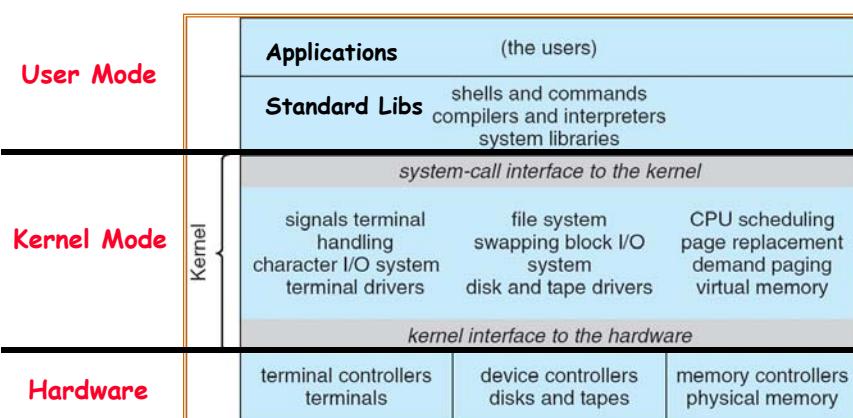
- Return value from Fork: integer
  - When > 0: return value is pid of new child (Running in **Parent**)
  - When = 0: Running in new **Child** process
  - When < 0: Error! Must handle somehow
- Wait() system call: wait for next child to exit
  - Return value is PID of terminating child
  - Argument is pointer to integer variable to hold exit status

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### Recall: UNIX System Structure



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### How does the kernel provide services?

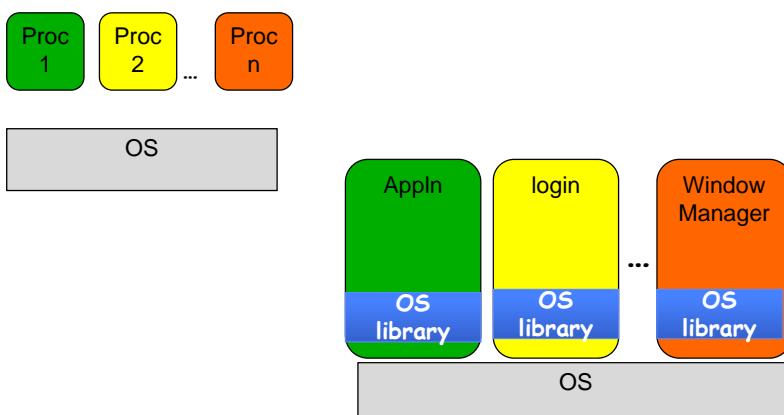
- You said that applications request services from the operating system via *syscall*, but ...
- I've been writing all sort of useful applications and I never ever saw a "syscall" !!!
- That's right.
- It was buried in the programming language runtime library (e.g., *libc.a*)
- ... Layering

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## OS run-time library

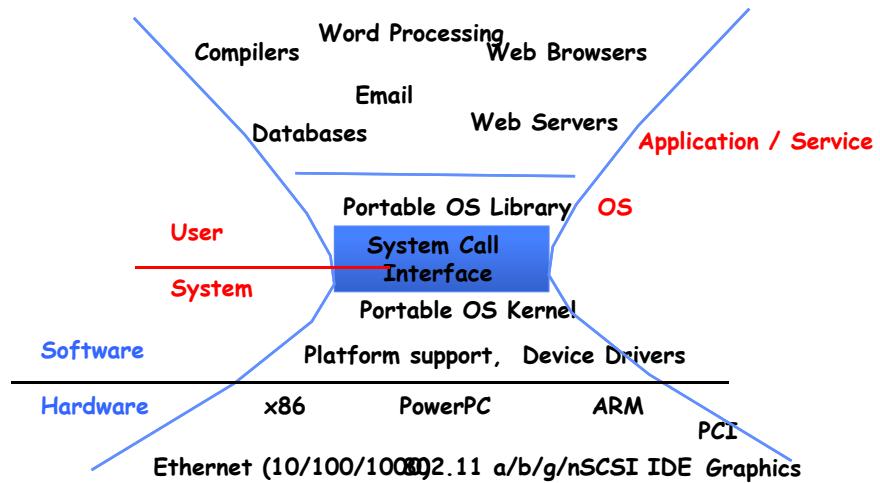


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## A Kind of Narrow Waist



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## Key Unix I/O Design Concepts

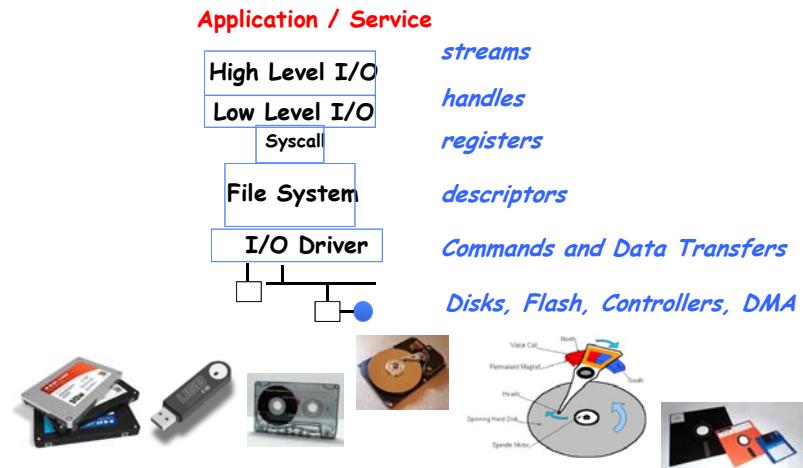
- **Uniformity**
  - file operations, device I/O, and interprocess communication through open, read/write, close
  - Allows simple composition of programs
    - » find | grep | wc ...
- **Open before use**
  - Provides opportunity for access control and arbitration
  - Sets up the underlying machinery, i.e., data structures
- **Byte-oriented**
  - Even if blocks are transferred, addressing is in bytes
- **Kernel buffered reads**
  - Streaming and block devices looks the same
  - read blocks process, yielding processor to other task
- **Kernel buffered writes**
  - Completion of out-going transfer decoupled from the application, allowing it to continue
- **Explicit close**

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## I/O & Storage Layers



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## The file system abstraction

- **High-level idea**
  - Files live in hierarchical namespace of filenames
- **File**
  - Named collection of data in a file system
  - File data
    - » Text, binary, linearized objects
  - File Metadata: information about the file
    - » Size, Modification Time, Owner, Security info
    - » Basis for access control
- **Directory**
  - "Folder" containing files & Directories
  - Hierarchical (graphical) naming
    - » Path through the directory graph
    - » Uniquely identifies a file or directory
      - /home/ff/cs162/public\_html/fa14/index.html
  - Links and Volumes (later)

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## Connecting Processes, Filesystem, and Users

- Process has a 'current working directory'
- Absolute Paths
  - /home/ff/cs152
- Relative paths
  - index.html, ./index.html - current WD
  - ../index.html - parent of current WD
  - ~, ~cs152 - home directory

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## C high level File API - streams (review)

- Operate on "streams" - sequence of bytes, whether text or data, with a position



```
#include <stdio.h>
FILE *fopen( const char *filename, const char *mode );
int fclose( FILE *fp );
```

Mode	Text	Binary	Descriptions
r	rb		Open existing file for reading
w		wb	Open for writing; created if does not exist
a		ab	Open for appending; created if does not exist
r+		rb+	Open existing file for reading & writing.
w+		wb+	Open for reading & writing; truncated to zero if exists, create otherwise
a+		ab+	Open for reading & writing. Created if does not exist. Read from beginning, write as append

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Don't forget to flush

## C API Standard Streams

- Three predefined streams are opened implicitly when the program is executed.
  - FILE \*stdin - normal source of input, can be redirected
  - FILE \*stdout - normal source of output, can be redirected
  - FILE \*stderr - diagnostics and errors, can be redirected
- STDIN / STDOUT enable composition in Unix
  - Recall: Use of pipe symbols connects STDOUT and STDIN
    - » find | grep | wc ...

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## C high level File API - stream ops

```
#include <stdio.h>
// character oriented
int fputc( int c, FILE *fp );           // rtn c or EOF on err
int fputs( const char *s, FILE *fp );    // rtn >0 or EOF

int fgetc( FILE * fp );
char *fgets( char *buf, int n, FILE *fp );

// block oriented
size_t fread(void *ptr, size_t size_of_elements,
            size_t number_of_elements, FILE *a_file);

size_t fwrite(const void *ptr, size_t size_of_elements,
            size_t number_of_elements, FILE *a_file);

// formatted
int fprintf(FILE *restrict stream, const char *restrict format,
            ...);
int fscanf(FILE *restrict stream, const char *restrict format,
            ...);
```

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## Example code

```
#include <stdio.h>

#define BUFSIZE 256
FILE *outfile;
char mybuf[BUFSIZE];

int storetofile() {
    char *instring;

    outfile = fopen("/usr/homes/testing/tokens", "w+");
    if (!outfile)
        return (-1);      // Error!
    while (1) {
        instring = fgets(*mybuf, BUFSIZE, stdin); // catches overrun!

        // Check for error or end of file (^D)
        if (!instring || strlen(instring)==0) break;

        // Write string to output file, exit on error
        if (fputs(instring, outfile)< 0) break;
    }
    fclose(outfile); // Flushes from userspace
}
```

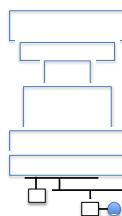
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## C Stream API positioning

```
int fseek(FILE *stream, long int offset, int whence);
long int ftell (FILE *stream)
void rewind (FILE *stream)
```



- Preserves high level abstraction of uniform stream of objects
- Adds buffering for performance

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## Administrivia: Getting started

- Final class enrollment: ~321
  - Waitlist was emptied
- Homework 1 Due Monday, 9/21
  - Get moving on it!
- Participation: Get to know your TA!
  - We have some seriously under-subscribed sections - consider going to one of them!
  - Under subscribed:
    - » Friday 1-2, 87 Evans
    - » Friday 2-3, 6 Evans
    - » Friday 11-12, B51 Hildebrand
  - OverSubscribed:
    - » Friday 10-11, 385 LeConte
- Group sign up form out this week
  - Get finding groups ASAP
  - 4 people in a group! Same TA! (better - same section)

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## Administrivia (Con't)

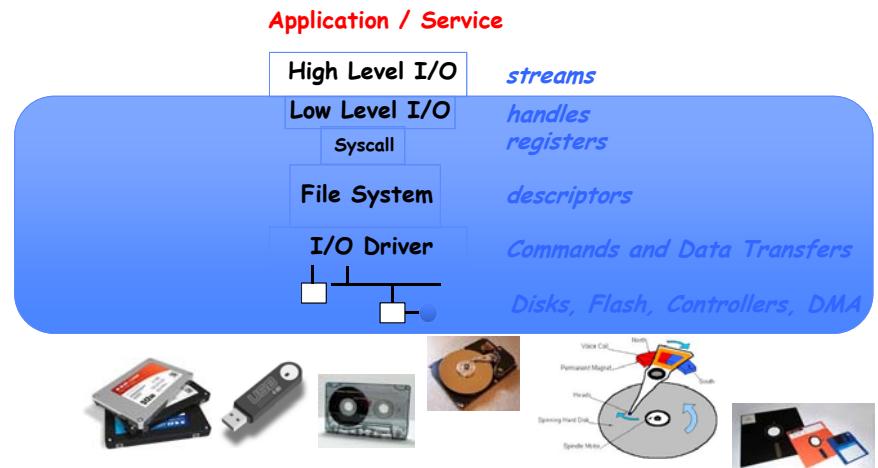
- Kubiatowicz Office Hours (really!)
  - 1pm-2pm, Monday/Wednesday
- Midterm 2 conflict: See Piazza poll!
  - Wednesday 11/18: Conflict with EE16A - evening
  - Monday 11/23: 7-10 pm? Slightly hard on DataScience folks, but all done in one day! (Drown sorrows in turkey?).

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## What's below the surface ??



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## C Low level I/O

- Operations on File Descriptors - as OS object representing the state of a file
  - User has a "handle" on the descriptor

```
#include <fcntl.h>
#include <unistd.h>
#include <sys/types.h>

int open (const char *filename, int flags [, mode_t mode])
int creat (const char *filename, mode_t mode)
int close (int filedes)
```

Bit vector of:  
• Access modes (Rd, Wr, ...)  
• Open Flags (Create, ...)  
• Operating modes (Appends, ...)

Bit vector of Permission Bits:  
• User|Group|Other X R|W|X

[http://www.gnu.org/software/libc/manual/html\\_node/Opening-and-Closing-Files.html](http://www.gnu.org/software/libc/manual/html_node/Opening-and-Closing-Files.html)

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## C Low Level: standard descriptors

```
#include <unistd.h>

STDIN_FILENO - macro has value 0
STDOUT_FILENO - macro has value 1
STDERR_FILENO - macro has value 2

int fileno (FILE *stream)

FILE * fdopen (int filedes, const char *opentype)
```

- Crossing levels: File descriptors vs. streams
- Don't mix them!

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## C Low Level Operations

```
ssize_t read (int filedes, void *buffer, size_t maxsize)
- returns bytes read, 0 => EOF, -1 => error
ssize_t write (int filedes, const void *buffer, size_t size)
- returns bytes written

off_t lseek (int filedes, off_t offset, int whence)

int fsync (int fildes) - wait for i/o to finish
void sync (void) - wait for ALL to finish
```

- When write returns, data is on its way to disk and can be read, but it may not actually be permanent!

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## Another example: lowio-std.c

```
#include <stdlib.h>
#include <stdio.h>
#include <string.h>
#include <unistd.h>
#include <sys/types.h>

#define BUFSIZE 1024

int main(int argc, char *argv[])
{
    char buf[BUFSIZE];
    ssize_t writelen = write(STDOUT_FILENO, "I am a process.\n", 16);

    ssize_t readlen = read(STDIN_FILENO, buf, BUFSIZE);

    ssize_t strlen = snprintf(buf, BUFSIZE, "Got %zd chars\n", readlen);

    writelen = strlen < BUFSIZE ? strlen : BUFSIZE;
    write(STDOUT_FILENO, buf, writelen);

    exit(0);
}
```

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## And lots more !

- TTYS versus files
- Memory mapped files
- File Locking
- Asynchronous I/O
- Generic I/O Control Operations
- Duplicating descriptors

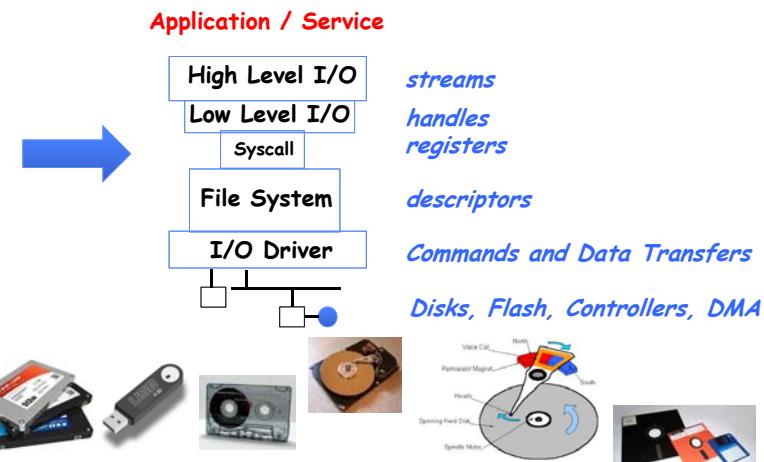
```
int dup2 (int old, int new)
int dup (int old)
```

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## What's below the surface ??



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## Recall: SYSCALL

syscalls.kernelgrok.com

Linux Syscall Reference

#	Name	Registers	Definition
0	sys_restart_syscall	eax	kernel/signal.c:2058
1	sys_exit	ebx	kernel/exit.c:1046
2	sys_fork	ecx	arch/alpha/kernel/entry.S:716
3	sys_read	edx	fs/read_write.c:391
4	sys_write	esi	fs/read_write.c:408
5	sys_open	edi	fs/open.c:900
6	sys_close	eax	fs/open.c:969
7	sys_waitpid	ebx	kernel/ext.c:1771
8	sys_creat	ecx	fs/open.c:933
9	sys_link	edx	fs/namei.c:2520

Showing 1 to 10 of 338 entries

Generated from Linux kernel 2.6.35.4 using Exuberant Ctags, Python, and DataTables. Project on GitHub. Hosted on GitHub Pages.

- Low level lib parameters are set up in registers and syscall instruction is issued
  - A type of synchronous exception that enters well-defined entry points into kernel

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## Internal OS File Descriptor

- Internal Data Structure describing everything about the file
  - Where it resides
  - Its status
  - How to access it
- Pointer to

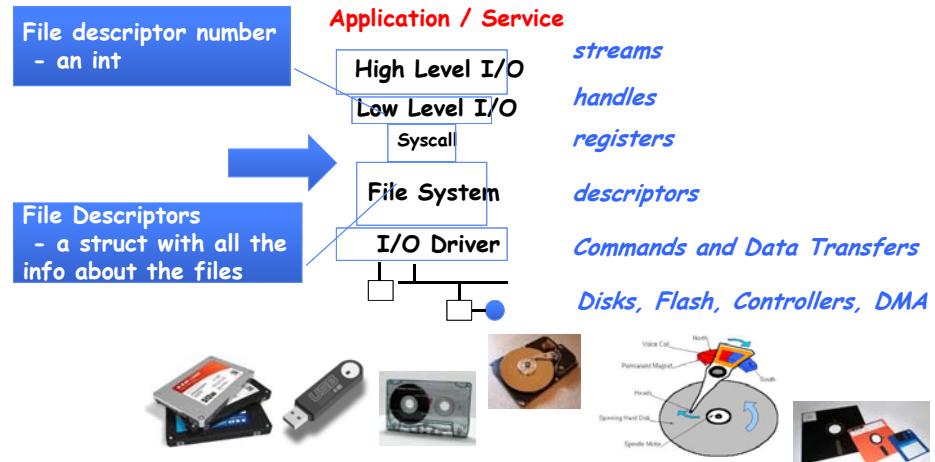
```
lxr.free-electrons.com/source/include/linux/fs.h#L747
747 struct file {
748     union {
749         struct list_head        fulllist;
750         struct rcu_head          rcuhead;
751     } f_u;
752     struct path               f_path;
753     #define f_dentry           f_path.dentry
754     struct inode              *f_inode; /* <-- const */
755     const struct file_operations *f_op;
756 
757     /*
758      * Protects F_ep_links, F_Flags.
759      * Must not be taken from IRQ context.
760     */
761     spinlock_t               f_lock;
762     atomic_long_t             f_count;
763     unsigned int              f_flops;
764     fmode_t                  f_mode;
765     struct mutex              f_pos_lock;
766     loff_t                   f_pos;
767     struct fown_struct        fowner;
768     const struct cred          *f_cred;
769     struct file_ra_state       f_ra;
770 
771     u64                      f_version;
772 #ifdef CONFIG_SECURITY
773     void                     *f_security;
774 #endif
775     /* needed for tty driver, and maybe others */
776     void                     *private_data;
777 
778 #ifdef CONFIG_EPOLL
779     /* Used by fs/eventpoll.c to link all the hooks */
780     struct list_head          f_ep_links;
781     struct file_llink         f_file_llink;
782 #endif
783     struct address_space       *f_mapping;
784 } __attribute__((aligned(4))); /* lest something weird
```

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## What's below the surface ??



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## File System: from syscall to driver

In fs/read\_write.c

```
ssize_t vfs_read(struct file *file, char __user *buf, size_t count, loff_t *pos)
{
    ssize_t ret;
    if (!(file->f_mode & FMODE_READ)) return -EBADF;
    if (!file->f_op || (!file->f_op->read && !file->f_op->aio_read))
        return -EINVAL;
    if (unlikely(!access_ok(VERIFY_WRITE, buf, count))) return -EFAULT;
    ret = rw_verify_area(READ, file, pos, count);
    if (ret >= 0) {
        count = ret;
        if (file->f_op->read)
            ret = file->f_op->read(file, buf, count, pos);
        else
            ret = do_sync_read(file, buf, count, pos);
        if (ret > 0) {
            fsnotify_access(file->f_path.dentry);
            add_rchar(current, ret);
        }
        inc_syscr(current);
    }
    return ret;
}
```

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## Lower Level Driver

- Associated with particular hardware device
- Registers / Unregisters itself with the kernel
- Handler functions for each of the file operations

```
struct file_operations {
    struct module *owner;
    loff_t (*lseek) (struct file *, loff_t, int);
    ssize_t (*read) (struct file *, char __user *, size_t, loff_t *);
    ssize_t (*write) (struct file *, const char __user *, size_t, loff_t *);
    ssize_t (*aio_read) (struct kiocb *, const struct iovec *, unsigned long, loff_t);
    ssize_t (*aio_write) (struct kiocb *, const struct iovec *, unsigned long, loff_t);
    int (*readdir) (struct file *, void *, filidir_t);
    unsigned int (*poll) (struct file *, struct poll_table_struct *);
    int (*ioctl) (struct inode *, struct file *, unsigned int, unsigned long);
    int (* mmap) (struct file *, struct vm_area_struct *);
    int (*open) (struct inode *, struct file *);
    int (*flush) (struct file *, fl_owner_t id);
    int (*release) (struct inode *, struct file *);
    int (*sync) (struct file *, struct dentry *, int datasync);
    int (*async) (int, struct file *, int);
    int (*flock) (struct file *, int, struct file_lock *);
    [...]
};
```

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## Recall: Device Drivers

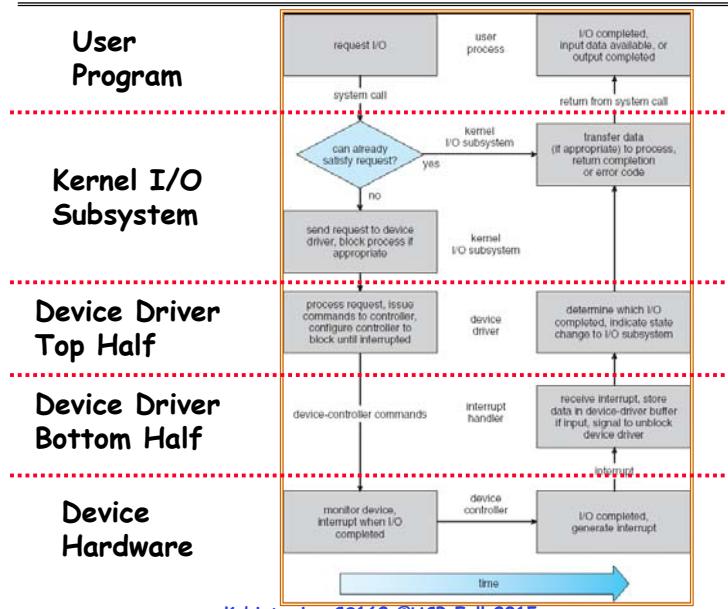
- Device Driver:** Device-specific code in the kernel that interacts directly with the device hardware
  - Supports a standard, internal interface
  - Same kernel I/O system can interact easily with different device drivers
  - Special device-specific configuration supported with the `ioctl()` system call
- Device Drivers typically divided into two pieces:
  - Top half:** accessed in call path from system calls
    - implements a set of **standard, cross-device calls** like `open()`, `close()`, `read()`, `write()`, `ioctl()`, `strategy()`
    - This is the kernel's interface to the device driver
    - Top half will *start I/O to device*, may put thread to sleep until finished
  - Bottom half:** run as interrupt routine
    - Gets input or transfers next block of output
    - May wake sleeping threads if I/O now complete

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## Life Cycle of An I/O Request

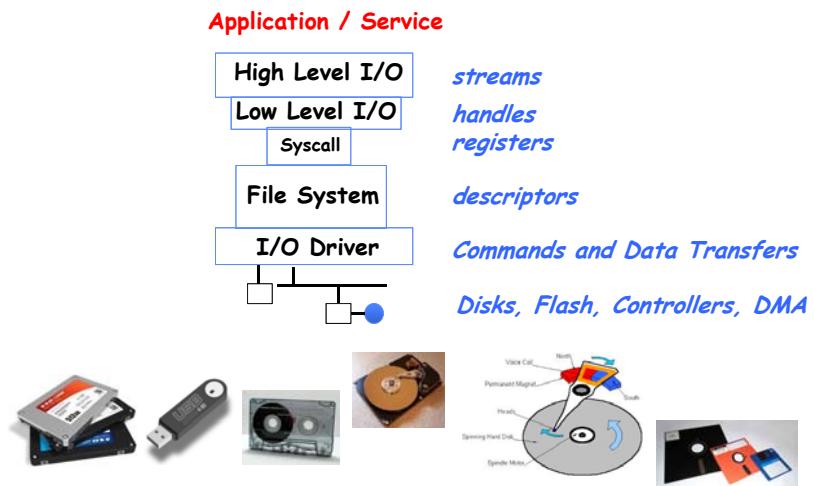


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## So what happens when you fgetc?



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## Communication between processes

- Can we view files as communication channels?

```
write(wfd, wbuf, wlen);
```



```
n = read(rfd, rbuf, rmax);
```

- Producer and Consumer of a file may be distinct processes
  - May be separated in time (or not)
- However, what if data written once and consumed once?
  - Don't we want something more like a queue?
  - Can still look like File I/O!

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## Communication Across the world looks like file IO

```
write(wfd, wbuf, wlen);
```



```
n = read(rfd, rbuf, rmax);
```

- Connected queues over the Internet
  - But what's the analog of open?
  - What is the namespace?
  - How are they connected in time?
- Answer these questions in a moment...

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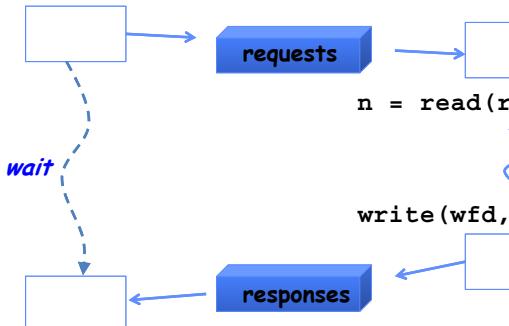
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## Request Response Protocol

### Client (issues requests)

### Server (performs operations)

```
write(rqfd, rqbuf, buflen);
```



```
n = read(rfd, rbuf, rmax);
```

```
service request
```

```
write(wfd, respbuf, len);
```

```
n = read(resfd, resbuf, resmax);
```

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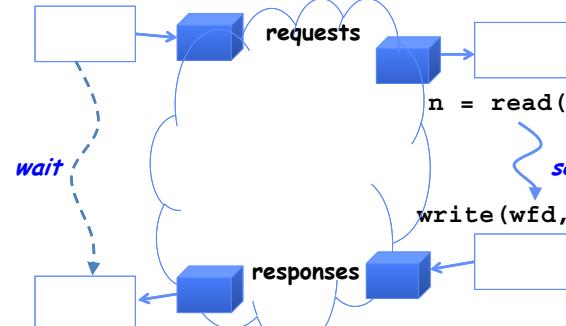
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## Request Response Protocol

### Client (issues requests)

### Server (performs operations)

```
write(rqfd, rqbuf, buflen);
```



```
n = read(resfd, resbuf, resmax);
```

```
n = read(rfd, rbuf, rmax);
```

```
service request
```

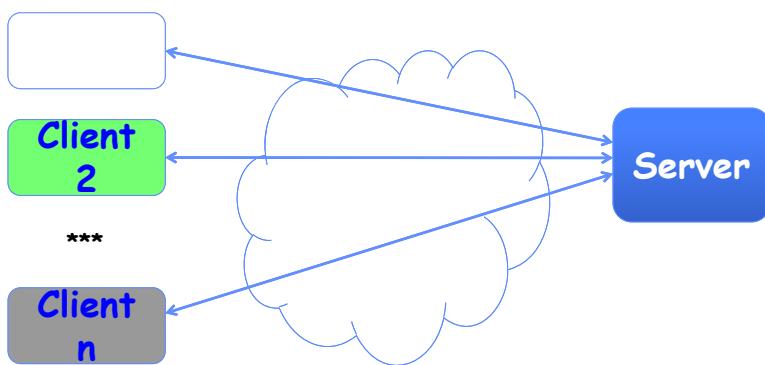
```
write(wfd, respbuf, len);
```

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## Client-Server Models



- File servers, web, FTP, Databases, ...
- Many clients accessing a common server

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## Sockets

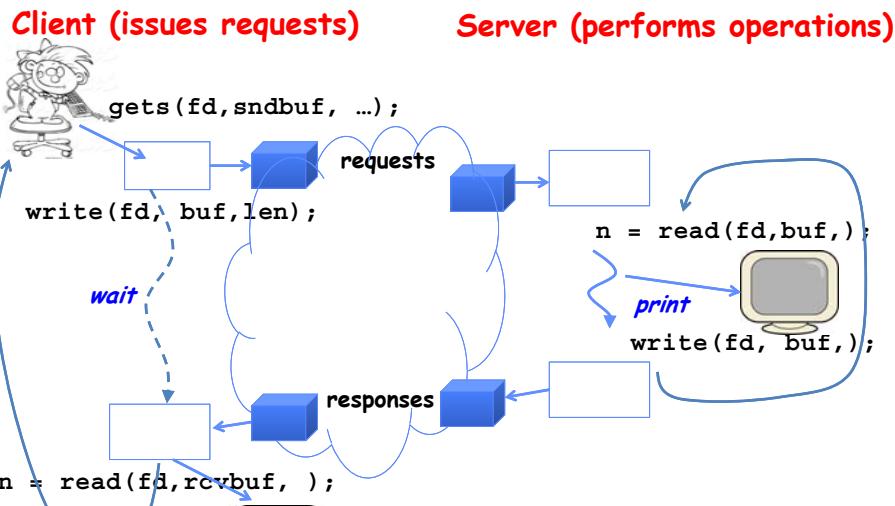
- **Socket:** an abstraction of a network I/O queue
  - Mechanism for inter-process communication
  - Embodies one side of a communication channel
    - » Same interface regardless of location of other end
    - » Could be local machine (called "UNIX socket") or remote machine (called "network socket")
  - First introduced in 4.2 BSD UNIX: big innovation at time
    - » Now most operating systems provide some notion of socket
- Data transfer like files
  - Read / Write against a descriptor
- Over ANY kind of network
  - Local to a machine
  - Over the internet (TCP/IP, UDP/IP)
  - OSI, Appletalk, SNA, IPX, SIP, NS, ...

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## Silly Echo Server - running example



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## Echo client-server example

```
void client(int sockfd) {
    int n;
    char sndbuf[MAXIN]; char rcvbuf[MAXOUT];
    getreq(sndbuf, MAXIN); /* prompt */
    while (strlen(sndbuf) > 0) {
        write(sockfd, sndbuf, strlen(sndbuf)); /* send */
        memset(rcvbuf, 0, MAXOUT); /* clear */
        n = read(sockfd, rcvbuf, MAXOUT-1); /* receive */
        write(STDOUT_FILENO, rcvbuf, n); /* echo */
        getreq(sndbuf, MAXIN); /* prompt */
    }
}

void server(int consockfd) {
    char reqbuf[MAXREQ];
    int n;
    while (1) {
        memset(reqbuf, 0, MAXREQ);
        n = read(consockfd, reqbuf, MAXREQ-1); /* Recv */
        if (n <= 0) return;
        n = write(STDOUT_FILENO, reqbuf, strlen(reqbuf));
        n = write(consockfd, reqbuf, strlen(reqbuf)); /* echo */
    }
}
```

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## Prompt for input

```
char *getreq(char *inbuf, int len) {  
    /* Get request char stream */  
    printf("REQ: ");           /* prompt */  
    memset(inbuf, 0, len);      /* clear for good measure */  
    return fgets(inbuf, len, stdin); /* read up to a EOL */  
}
```

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## Socket creation and connection

- File systems provide a collection of permanent objects in structured name space
  - Processes open, read/write/close them
  - Files exist independent of the processes
- Sockets provide a means for processes to communicate (transfer data) to other processes.
- Creation and connection is more complex
- Form 2-way pipes between processes
  - Possibly worlds away

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## Namespaces for communication over IP

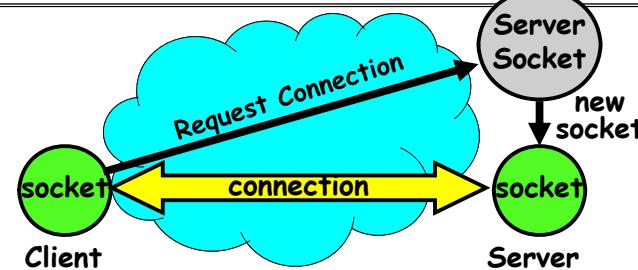
- Hostname
  - [www.eecs.berkeley.edu](http://www.eecs.berkeley.edu)
- IP address
  - 128.32.244.172 (ipv6?)
- Port Number
  - 0-1023 are "well known" or "system" ports
    - » Superuser privileges to bind to one
  - 1024 - 49151 are "registered" ports ([registry](#))
    - » Assigned by IANA for specific services
  - 49152-65535 ( $2^{15} + 2^{14}$  to  $2^{16}-1$ ) are "dynamic" or "private"
    - » Automatically allocated as "ephemeral Ports"

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## Socket Setup over TCP/IP



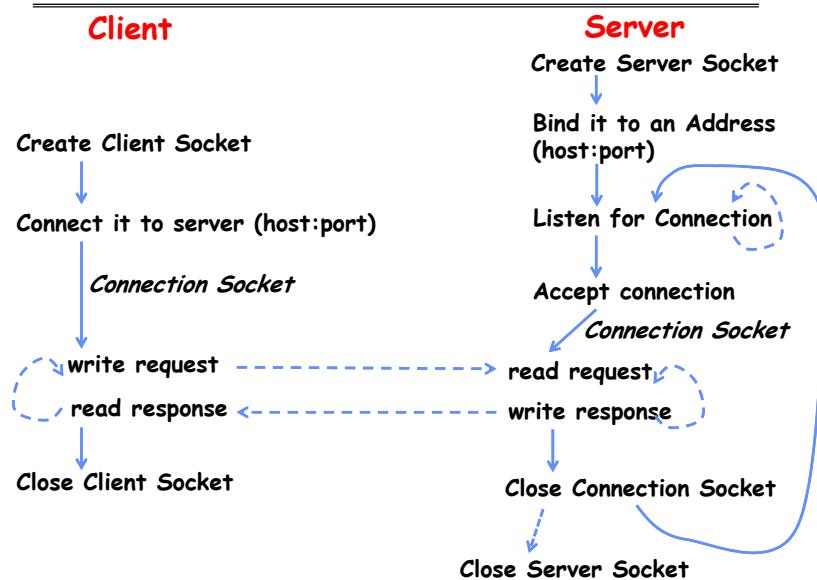
- Server Socket: Listens for new connections
  - Produces new sockets for each unique connection
- Things to remember:
  - Connection involves 5 values:  
[ Client Addr, Client Port, Server Addr, Server Port, Protocol ]
  - Often, Client Port "randomly" assigned
    - » Done by OS during client socket setup
  - Server Port often "well known"
    - » 80 (web), 443 (secure web), 25 (sendmail), etc
    - » Well-known ports from 0-1023

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## Sockets in concept



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## Client Protocol

```

char *hostname;
int sockfd, portno;
struct sockaddr_in serv_addr;
struct hostent *server;

server = buildServerAddr(&serv_addr, hostname, portno);

/* Create a TCP socket */
sockfd = socket(AF_INET, SOCK_STREAM, 0)

/* Connect to server on port */
connect(sockfd, (struct sockaddr *) &serv_addr, sizeof(serv_addr))
printf("Connected to %s:%d\n", server->h_name, portno);

/* Carry out Client-Server protocol */
client(sockfd);

/* Clean up on termination */
close(sockfd);

```

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## Server Protocol (v1)

```

/* Create Socket to receive requests*/
lstnsckfd = socket(AF_INET, SOCK_STREAM, 0);

/* Bind socket to port */
bind(lstnsckfd, (struct sockaddr *)&serv_addr,sizeof(serv_addr));
while (1) {
/* Listen for incoming connections */
listen(lstnsckfd, MAXQUEUE);

/* Accept incoming connection, obtaining a new socket for it */
consockfd = accept(lstnsckfd, (struct sockaddr *) &cli_addr,
&clilen);

server(consockfd);

close(consockfd);
}
close(lstnsckfd);

```

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## How does the server protect itself?

- Isolate the handling of each connection
- By forking it off as another process

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## Sockets With Protection

**Client**

Create Client Socket

Connect it to server (host:port)

write request  
read response  
Close Client Socket

**Server**

Create Server Socket

Bind it to an Address  
(host:port)

Listen for Connection

Accept connection

Connection Socket Parent

child

Close Listen Socket

read request  
write response

Close Connection  
Socket

Close Connection  
Socket

Wait for child

Close Server Socket

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## Server Protocol (v2)

```

while (1) {
    listen(lstnsockfd, MAXQUEUE);
    consockfd = accept(lstnsockfd, (struct sockaddr *) &cli_addr,
                      &clilen);
    cpid = fork();           /* new process for connection */
    if (cpid > 0) {          /* parent process */
        close(conssockfd);
        tcpid = wait(&cstatus);
    } else if (cpid == 0) {    /* child process */
        close(lstnsockfd);   /* let go of listen socket */

        server(conssockfd);

        close(conssockfd);
        exit(EXIT_SUCCESS); /* exit child normally */
    }
}
close(lstnsockfd);

```

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## Concurrent Server

- Listen will queue requests
- Buffering present elsewhere
- But server waits for each connection to terminate before initiating the next

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## Sockets With Protection and Parallelism

**Client**

Create Client Socket

Connect it to server (host:port)

Close Client Socket

**Server**

Create Server Socket

Bind it to an Address  
(host:port)

Listen for Connection

Accept connection

Connection Socket Parent

child

Close Listen Socket

read request  
write response

Close Connection  
Socket

Close Connection  
Socket

Close Server Socket

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## Server Protocol (v3)

```
while (1) {
    listen(lstnsockfd, MAXQUEUE);
    consockfd = accept(lstnsockfd, (struct sockaddr *) &cli_addr,
                      &clilen);
    cpid = fork();           /* new process for connection */
    if (cpid > 0) {         /* parent process */
        close(consockfd);
        //tcpid = wait(&cstatus);
    } else if (cpid == 0) {   /* child process */
        close(lstnsockfd);   /* let go of listen socket */

        server(consockfd);

        close(consockfd);
        exit(EXIT_SUCCESS); /* exit child normally */
    }
}
close(lstnsockfd);
```

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## Server Address - itself

```
memset((char *) &serv_addr, 0, sizeof(serv_addr));
serv_addr.sin_family      = AF_INET;
serv_addr.sin_addr.s_addr = INADDR_ANY;
serv_addr.sin_port        = htons(portno);
```

- Simple form
- Internet Protocol
- accepting any connections on the specified port
- In "network byte ordering"

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## Client: getting the server address

```
struct hostent *buildServerAddr(struct sockaddr_in *serv_addr,
                                char *hostname, int portno) {
    struct hostent *server;

    /* Get host entry associated with a hostname or IP address */
    server = gethostbyname(hostname);
    if (server == NULL) {
        fprintf(stderr, "ERROR, no such host\n");
        exit(1);
    }

    /* Construct an address for remote server */
    memset((char *) serv_addr, 0, sizeof(struct sockaddr_in));
    serv_addr->sin_family = AF_INET;
    bcopy((char *)server->h_addr,
          (char *)&(serv_addr->sin_addr.s_addr), server->h_length);
    serv_addr->sin_port = htons(portno);

    return server;
}
```

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## BIG OS Concepts so far

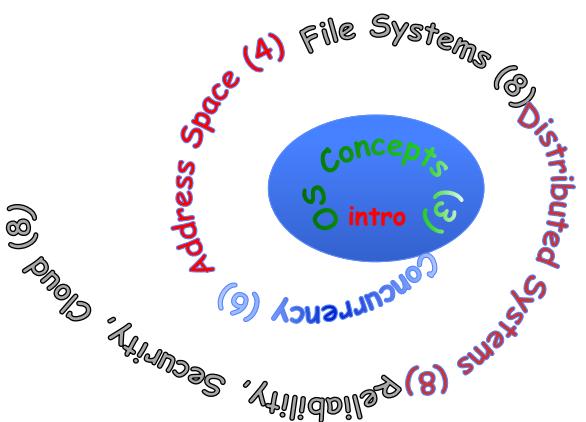
- Processes
- Address Space
- Protection
- Dual Mode
- Interrupt handlers (including syscall and trap)
- File System
  - Integrates processes, users, cwd, protection
- Key Layers: OS Lib, Syscall, Subsystem, Driver
  - User handler on OS descriptors
- Process control
  - fork, wait, signal, exec
- Communication through sockets
- Client-Server Protocol

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## Course Structure: Spiral



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## Conclusion

- System Call Interface provides a kind of "narrow waist" between user programs and kernel
- Streaming IO: modeled as a stream of bytes
  - Most streaming I/O functions start with "f" (like "fread")
  - Data buffered automatically by c-library functions
- Low-level I/O:
  - File descriptors are integers
  - Low-level I/O supported directly at system call level
- STDIN / STDOUT enable composition in Unix
  - Use of pipe symbols connects STDOUT and STDIN
    - » find | grep | wc ...
- Device Driver: Device-specific code in the kernel that interacts directly with the device hardware
  - Supports a standard, internal interface
  - Same kernel I/O system can interact easily with different device drivers
- File abstraction works for inter-processes communication
  - Can work across the Internet
- Socket: an abstraction of a network I/O queue
  - Mechanism for inter-process communication

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