

CMSC 330: Organization of Programming Languages

Function Calls, Tail Recursion, Short Circuiting

Overview

- ▶ Function calls
- ▶ Tail recursion
- ▶ Short circuiting

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How Function Calls Really Work

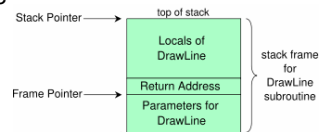
- ▶ Function calls are important
 - Usually have direct instruction support in hardware
 - Detail important for assembly language programming
 - > See CMSC 212, 311, 412, or 430
- ▶ Will just provide quick overview here
- ▶ Key point to remember
 - Function calls generally require allocating stack frames

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Stack Frame / Activation Record

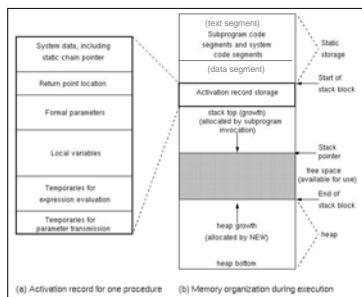
- ▶ Machine-dependent data structure containing state information for each function invocation
 - Allocated on stack at function invocation
 - Freed upon function return (by popping stack)
- ▶ Contents may include
 - Local variables
 - Return address
 - Actual parameters
 - Return value
 - Address of frame of calling function
 - Address of frame of lexically enclosing function



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Machine Model (Generic UNIX)



- ▶ The **text segment** contains the program's source code
- ▶ The **data segment** contains global variables, static data (data that exists for the entire execution and whose size is known), and the heap
- ▶ The **stack segment** contains the activation records for functions

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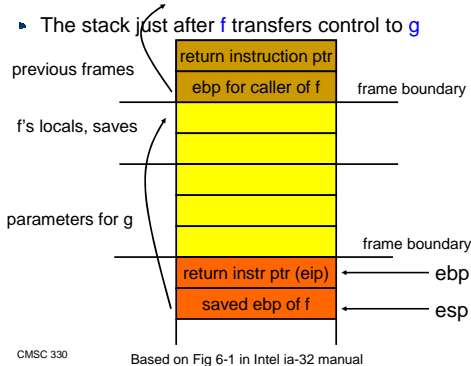
Machine Model (x86)

- ▶ The CPU has a fixed number of **registers**
 - Think of these as memory that's really fast to access
 - For a 32-bit machine, each can hold a 32-bit word
- ▶ Important x86 registers
 - **eax** generic register for computing values
 - **esp** pointer to the top of the stack
 - **ebp** pointer to start of current stack frame
 - **eip** the program counter (points to next instruction in text segment to execute)

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The x86 Stack Frame/Activation Record



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x86 Calling Convention

- ▶ To call a function
 - Push parameters for function onto stack
 - Invoke CALL instruction to
 - > Push current value of eip onto stack
 - I.e., save the program counter
 - > Start executing code for called function
 - Callee pushes ebp onto stack to save it

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x86 Calling Convention (cont.)

- ▶ When a function returns
 - Put return value in *eax*
 - Invoke LEAVE to pop stack frame
 - > Set esp to ebp
 - > Restore ebp that was saved on stack and pop it off the stack
 - Invoke RET instruction to load return address into eip
 - > I.e., start executing code where we left off at call

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Example

```
int f(int a, int b) {
    return a + b;
}

int main(void) {
    int x;

    x = f(3, 4);
}
```

gcc -S a.c

```
f:
    pushl   %ebp
    movl    %esp, %ebp
    movl    12(%ebp), %eax
    addl    8(%ebp), %eax
    leave
    ret

main:
    ...
    subl    $8, %esp
    pushl   $4
    pushl   $3
    call    f
1:  addl    $16, %esp
    movl    %eax, -4(%ebp)
    leave
    ret
```

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Lots More Details

- ▶ A whole lot more to say about calling functions
 - Local variables are allocated on stack by the callee as needed
 - > This is usually the first thing a called function does
 - Saving registers
 - > If the callee is going to use *eax* itself, you'd better save it to the stack before you call
 - Passing parameters in registers
 - > More efficient than pushing/popping from the stack
 - Etc...
- ▶ Details covered in other courses

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Tail Calls

- ▶ A **tail call** is a function call that is the last thing a function does before it returns
 - Not just function call in last line of code in function

```
let add x y = x + y
let f z = add z z (* tail call *)
```

```
let rec len = function
[] -> 0
| (_::t) -> 1 + (len t) (* not tail call, performs +1 *)
```

```
let rec len a = function
[] -> a
| (_::t) -> len (a + 1) t (* tail call *)
```

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Tail Recursion

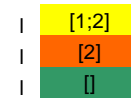
- ▶ Recall that in OCaml, all looping is via recursion
 - Seems very inefficient
 - Needs one stack frame for each recursive call
- ▶ A function is **tail recursive**
 - If it is recursive
 - And recursive call is a tail call
- ▶ If function is tail recursive
 - Can reuse stack frame for each recursive call

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Tail Recursion (cont.)

```
let rec len l = match l with
  [] -> 0
  | (_::t) -> 1 + (len t)
len [1; 2]
```



eax: 2

- ▶ Function is not tail recursive
 - Use stack frame store return value
 - Add 1 to return value, use as new return value

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Tail Recursion (cont.)

```
let rec len a l = match l with
  [] -> a
  | (_::t) -> (len (a + 1) t)
len 0 [1; 2]
```



eax: 2

- ▶ Function is tail recursive
 - Same stack frame can be reused for the next call
 - Since we'd just pop it off and return anyway

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Short Circuiting

- ▶ Will OCaml raise a **Division_by_zero** exception?

```
let x = 0
if x != 0 && (y / x) > 100 then
  print_string "OCaml sure is fun"
if x == 0 || (y / x) > 100 then
  print_string "OCaml sure is fun"
```

- No: **&&** and **||** are short circuiting in OCaml
 - > **e1 && e2** evaluates e1. If false, it returns false. Otherwise, it returns the result of evaluating e2
 - > **e1 || e2** evaluates e1. If true, it returns true. Otherwise, it returns the result of evaluating e2

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Short Circuiting (cont.)

- ▶ C, C++, Java, and Ruby all short-circuit **&&**, **||**
- ▶ But some languages don't, like Pascal (although Turbo Pascal has an option for this):

```
x := 0;
...
if (x <> 0) and (y / x > 100) then
  writeln('Sure OCaml is fun');
```

- So this would need to be written as

```
x := 0;
...
if x <> 0 then
  if y / x > 100 then
    writeln('Sure OCaml is fun');
```

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