Synchronization in Java

Department of Computer Science
University of Maryland, College Park
Regarding Course Evaluations

- Course evaluations can be completed starting Tuesday April 24
- Visit [https://courseevalum.umd.edu/](https://courseevalum.umd.edu/)
- Help us make this course better, by completing the course evaluation this week. We will provide time in Wednesday’s lab (after the quiz) so you can complete them. Thanks 😊
Data Race

- **Definition**
  - Concurrent accesses to same shared variable, where *at least one* access is a write

- **Properties**
  - Order of accesses may change result of program
  - May cause intermittent errors, very hard to debug

- **Example**
  
  ```java
  public class DataRace extends Thread {
      static int x; // shared variable x causing data race
      public void run() { x = x + 1; } // access to x
  }
  ```
Synchronized Objects in Java

- Every Java object has a lock
- A lock can be held by only one thread at a time
- A thread acquires the lock by using `synchronized`
- Acquiring lock example
  ```java
  Object x = new Object(); // We can use any object as “locking object”
  synchronized(x) {
    // try to acquire lock on x on entry
    ...
    // hold lock on x in block
  }
  // release lock on x on exit
  ```

- When `synchronized` is executed
  - Thread will be able to acquire lock if no other thread has it
  - Thread will block if another thread has the lock (enforces mutual exclusion)
- Lock is released when block terminates
  - End of synchronized block is reached
  - Exit block due to return, continue, break
  - Exception thrown
Example (Account)

- We have a bank account **shared** by two kinds of buyers (Excessive and Normal)
- We can perform deposits, withdrawals and balance requests for an account
- **Critical section** → account access
- **Solution** (Example: lockObjInAccount)
  - We use using lockObj to protect access to the Account object
  - What would happen if we define lockObj as static? Can we have multiple accounts?
- **Solution** (Example: usingThisInAccount)
  - Notice we don’t need to define an object to protect the Account object as Account already has a lock
Synchronized Methods In Java

• If **the entire body of a method** is synchronized using the current object lock (e.g., synchronized(this)) then we can rewrite the code by using the synchronized keyword on the method prototype

Example

```java
synchronized foo() { ...code... }

// shorthand notation for
foo() {
    synchronized (this) { ...code... }
}
```

• Example: synchronizedMethods

• Mutual exclusion for entire body of method
Synchronization Issues

1. Use same lock to provide mutual exclusion
2. Ensure atomic transactions
3. Avoiding deadlock
Issue 1- Using Same Lock

• Potential problem
  • Mutual exclusion depends on threads acquiring same lock
  • No synchronization if threads have different locks

• Example
  foo() {
    Object o = new Object(); // different o per thread
    synchronized(o) {
      ... // potential data race
    }
  }
Locks in Java

- Single lock for all threads (mutual exclusion)

- Separate locks for each thread (no synchronization)
public class DataRace extends Thread {
    static int common = 0;
    public void run() {
        Object o = new Object(); // different o per thread
        synchronized(o) {
            int local = common; // data race
            local = local + 1;
            common = local; // data race
        }
    }
    public static void main(String[] args) {
        ...
    }
}
Issue 2- Atomic Transactions

- Potential problem
  - Sequence of actions must be performed as single atomic transaction to avoid data race
  - Ensure lock is held for duration of transaction

- Example
  ```java
  synchronized(o) {
    int local = common;
    local = local + 1;
    common = local;
  } // all 3 statements must be executed together by single thread
  ```
Lock Example – Incorrect Version

```java
public class DataRace extends Thread {
    static int common = 0;
    static Object o;  // all threads use o’s lock
    public void run() {
        int local;
        synchronized(o) {
            local = common;
        }
        synchronized(o) {  // data race may occur
            local = local + 1;
            common = local;
        }  // even using locks
    }
}
```
Issue 3- Avoiding Deadlock

• Potential problem
  • Threads holding lock may be unable to obtain lock held by other thread, and vice versa
  • Thread holding lock may be waiting for action performed by other thread waiting for lock
  • Program is unable to continue execution (deadlock)
Deadlock Example 1

Object \texttt{a} = \texttt{new Object()}
Object \texttt{b} = \texttt{new Object()}

Thread1() {
    synchronized(\texttt{a}) {
        synchronized(\texttt{b}) {
            ... 
        }
    }
}

Thread2() {
    synchronized(\texttt{b}) {
        synchronized(\texttt{a}) {
            ... 
        }
    }
}

// Thread1 holds lock for a, waits for b
// Thread2 holds lock for b, waits for a
Deadlock Example 2

void swap(Object a, Object b) {
    Object local;
    synchronized(a) {
        synchronized(b) {
            local = a; a = b; b = local;
        }
    }
}

Thread1() { swap(a, b); }  // holds lock for a, waits for b
Thread2() { swap(b, a); }  // holds lock for b, waits for a
Deadlock

• Avoiding deadlock
  • In general, avoid holding lock for a long time
  • Especially avoid trying to hold two locks
    • May wait a long time trying to get 2\textsuperscript{nd} lock
**Thread-safe**

- Thread-safe → Code is considered thread-safe if it works correctly when executed by multiple threads simultaneously.
- Example: ArrayList is not thread-safe

From Java API: “Note that this implementation is not synchronized. If multiple threads access an ArrayList instance concurrently, and at least one of the threads modifies the list structurally, it must be synchronized externally.”
Synchronization Summary

• Needed in multithreaded programs
• Can prevents data races
• Java objects support synchronization
• Many other tricky issues
  • To be discussed in future courses