Lecture 6
Synchronization and Visibility
Atomicity

• Atomic operations are uninterruptible
  – They have either not started, or have finished: there is no “middle”
  – Procedural abstraction: permits method calls to be viewed as atomic, even though they consist of multiple operations
  – Concurrency breaks procedural abstraction!

• Thread-safety: use of locking to give illusion of atomicity to method calls *vis à vis* a class specification
Atomicity in Java

• What is guaranteed to be atomic in Java?
  – Reads, writes of non-64-bit primitive types (ints, chars, floats, etc.)
  – Reads, writes of references (32-bit and 64-bit)

• Guarantee: if you read a non-64-bit primitive-typed variable, or reference variable, you will see a value that some thread actually wrote to it

• This guarantee is sometimes called out-of-thin-air safety
64-bit Reads, Writes

- Not guaranteed to be atomic in case of primitive types!
  - \texttt{E.g. double }\texttt{x = 1.0;}
    - \texttt{x} is a 64-bit variable
    - Java spec says a JVM can implement this as two 32-bit writes
    - If a thread reads this variable during a write operation to it, it can get 32 “stale” bits and 32 “fresh” bits (a value that no thread ever wrote)!
  - Other data type like this: \texttt{long}

- For safe reads, writes of these variables, need synchronization
Synchronization and Visibility

• Two aspects to an operation
  – Atomicity: does it have a “middle” that other threads can see?
  – Visibility: when is its effect perceived by other threads?

• Visibility is tricky
What Can Following Code Do? (adapted from textbook)

public class NoVisibilityAlt {
    private static boolean ready;
    private static int number;

    private static class ReaderThread
        extends Thread {
        public void run () {
            while (!ready)
                Thread.yield ();
            System.out.println (number);
        }
    }

    public static void main(…) {
        new ReaderThread ().start ();
        number = 42;
        ready = true;
    }
}

• It can print 42
• It can print 0
• It could even never terminate!
• Why?
  – Assignments to number, ready are atomic
  – However, visibility is not guaranteed
    • Java language specification lets compilers reorder statements, use caches, etc.
    • So while number = 42 is atomic, the operation’s effect may not be visible until after thread executes println!
    • In this case, previous stale value of number is what thread sees
Reordering in Java

• Java permits effects of statements to be reordered
  – `number = 42` could update cache
  – `ready = true` could update actual
  – Other thread might only see main memory and not cache

• Reorderings often driven by memory hardware / firmware
  – Sequential behavior is preserved
  – Behavior of multi-threaded applications is problematic
Dealing with Visibility: \texttt{volatile}

- Some visibility problems can be fixed by declaring variables to be \texttt{volatile}
  - Declaring variables \texttt{volatile} indicates operations should not be reordered
  - \texttt{E.g.}
    
    \begin{verbatim}
    private static volatile int number;
    private static volatile boolean ready;
    \end{verbatim}
  - \texttt{Ensures that in previous program, assignment to number occurs before ready is made true, and that there is no delay in thread seeing truth of ready}

- Volatility does not make non-atomic reads, writes atomic, however! It just affects visibility of atomic operations
Visibility and Locking (1/3)

- Locking also fixes visibility problems!
- Consider following fragment from synchronized BoundedCounterThreadSafe class:

```java
public synchronized int current () { return value; }
...
public synchronized void inc () {
   if (!isMaxed()) ++value;
}
```

- Further suppose a class implementing threads that increment a counter:

```java
public class BoundedCounterIncThread implements Runnable {

   private BoundedCounterThreadSafe counter;

   BoundedCounterIncThread (BoundedCounter c){
      this.counter = c;
   }

   public void run () { counter.inc(); }
}
```
Visibility and Locking (2/3)

• What is output of following?

```java
public static void main(String[] args) throws InterruptedException {
    BoundedCounterThreadSafe c = new BoundedCounterThreadSafe(2);
    Thread t1 = new Thread(new BoundedCounterIncThread(c));
    Thread t2 = new Thread(new BoundedCounterIncThread(c));
    t1.start();
    t2.start();
    t1.join();
    t2.join();
    System.out.println(c.current());
}
```
Visibility and Locking (3/3)

• Answer: 2

• Why?
  The results of the inc operations performed first by t1/t2 are visible to the second

• A general principle of Java
  – When a lock is released, operations guarded by the lock become visible to operations following the reacquisition of the same lock
  – In the previous example, the intrinsic lock of object c plays this role!
Locking and Visibility (from textbook)

Thread A

y = 1

lock M

x = 1

unlock M

Everything before unlock M ...

Thread B

lock M

i = x

unlock M

j = y

... is visible to everything after lock M
Visibility in Detail

• The Java Memory Model (part of the Java Language Specification) defines precisely how visibility works.

• Key notions
  – Event sequences
  – “happens-before”

• Intuitively: if an event happens before another, the effect of the first event is visible to the second.

• We will study this more later in the semester.