APIT: Concurrency

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Overview

- Concurrency
- Threading
- Solving threading problems
- Threads in Swing

What is concurrency?

- Multiple parts of the program running simultaneously
- Why?
  - Make use of multiple processors
  - Efficient integration with slow devices (e.g. disks)
  - User-friendly-ness (responsive OS)
- Useful (but oldish) paper
- In Java, we can use `threads` to build concurrent programs

Mental models

- Previously you might have had the model in your head of the computer **being** somewhere in your programme.
  - single *point of execution*
- With multiple *threads*, each thread is (potentially) in a different place *at the same time*!
  - multiple *points of execution*

Threads in Java are objects

- Our previous objects have all been passive
- `Thread` objects are active:
  - They have attributes and methods
  - But they also run by themselves!

Creating threads in Java

There are two ways of creating threads in Java:

- You must create a class that either:
  - Implements the `Runnable` interface
  - Extends the `Thread` class

Implementing the `Runnable` interface

The `Runnable` interface is very simple:

```
public interface Runnable {
    public void run();
}
```

To use it:

- create a new class implementing this interface
- create a `Thread` object passing an instance of your class
- call `Thread.start()` (**Note: we never call `run()`**)
- our new class *must* have a `run()` method.

For example, the following class implements Runnable and prints a particular String n times:

```java
public class PointlessPrint implements Runnable {
    private String message;
    private int n;
    public PointlessPrint(String message,int n) {
        this.message = message;
        this.n = n;
    }
    public void run() {
        for(int i=0;i<n;i++) {
            System.out.println(i + "/" +
                n + " " + message);
        }
    }
}
```

To use this class, we must create an instance and then place this instance within an instance of the `Thread` object:

```
public class RunnableTest {
    public static void main(String[] args) {
        PointlessPrint p = new PointLessPrint("Hello",100);
        Thread t = new Thread(p);
        t.start();
    }
}
```

`t.start()` starts the thread by invoking the `run()` method of `PointlessPrint`

The whole point of threads is that we can simultaneously create many of them. This is straightforward via an array of `Thread` objects:

```java
public static void main(String[] args) {
    int nThreads = 2;
    Thread[] threads = new Thread[nThreads];
    for(int i=0;i<nThreads;i++)
    {
        PointlessPrint p = new PointlessPrint(
            "I am thread " + i,10);
        threads[i] = new Thread(p);
        threads[i].start();
    }
}
```

Producing the following output:

```
0/10 I am thread 0
1/10 I am thread 0
0/10 I am thread 1
1/10 I am thread 1
2/10 I am thread 0
2/10 I am thread 1
.
.
6/10 I am thread 1
7/10 I am thread 0
7/10 I am thread 1
8/10 I am thread 0
8/10 I am thread 1
9/10 I am thread 0
9/10 I am thread 1
```

We can see from the order of the `println` statements that both threads are running at the same time.

- The order might change every time we run it
- The program stops once all threads are complete
- It's impossible for us to know when Java switches from one thread to another
- Note: They're not necessarily on different processors / cores, but might be

Extending the `Thread` class

- The alternative to implementing the `Runnable` interface
- Create a new class that extends `Thread`
- The new class has to have a method that overrides `run()`
- The equivalent to our previous example can be found in `SimpleThreadTest`

You've been using threads all along

Can you predict the output of this?

```
public class MainThread extends Thread{
    public void run() {
        try {
            Thread.sleep(1000);
        }catch(InterruptedException e) {}
        System.out.println("Thread finished");
    }
    public static void main(String[] args) {
        for(int i=0;i<10;i++) { new MainThread().start(); }
        System.out.println("THE END");
    }
}
```

What's the implication?

Thread names

- In our examples, we passed a message to a thread to help identify it
- Threads can also be given names through their constructor:

```
Thread t = new Thread(aRunnableThing,"my name");
Thread t = new Thread("my name");
```

- which can be accessed via:

```
thread.getName()
```

- See notes for examples

Blocking methods

- Blocking methods are methods that rely on something else within the system for termination
  - Waiting for a timer to elapse
  - Waiting for another thread to end
- Because these methods rely on something external, they might be waiting forever.
- To ensure smooth running, they should be *cancelable*

Interrupted Exception

- Threads can be interrupted by other threads
- When a thread is interrupted, one of two things happen:
  - If it is running an interruptable method (e.g. `Thread.sleep()`), the method unblocks and throws the `InterruptedException`
  - Otherwise, its (boolean) interrupted status is set
- Interrupted status can be read with `Thread.isInterrupted()`
- Interrupted status can be read and reset (0) with `Thread.interrupted()`

Sleeping threads

- `Thread.sleep(long time)` is a blocking method which can be stopped by interrupting. If this happens, it throws `InterruptedException` so we must catch it somewhere:

```
public void run() {
    try {
        Thread.sleep(1000);
    }catch (InterruptedException e) {
        System.out.println("You woke me up");
    }
}
```

Join

- In many applications it will be useful to know if a Thread has finished.
- `someThread.join()` pauses the current thread until `someThread` has finished.
- `join()` throws an `InterruptedException`
- Syntax: `aThread.join()` pauses the thread **that calls the method** until `aThread` has finished.
  - This can be a bit confusing!

The following code starts 5 threads and then waits for each in turn to stop:

```
MyThread[] m = new MyThread[5];
for(int i=0;i<5;i++) {
    m[i] = new MyThread();
    m[i].start();
}
for(int i=0;i<5;i++) {
    m[i].join();
}
```

`main` doesn't finish until after the last thread

Note: the following is not good:

```
MyThread[] m = new MyThread[5];
for(int i=0;i<5;i++) {
    m[i] = new MyThread();
    m[i].start();
    m[i].join();
}
```

Why?

The benefits of parallel processing

- Many machines have multiple cores / processors
- Threads can be placed on different cores / processors
  - Java does this for us - we have no control
- Running things in parallel should give us speed improvements
  - Although it increases system book-keeping
- Class example: merge sort

Merge sort

- We'd like to sort the values in a large array.
- Can be made parallel:
  - Split the array into N smaller arrays
  - Sort the smaller arrays
  - Merge the results together
- How much speed-up will this give?

Shared variables

- A benefit of threads is the shared address space
  - Multiple threads can access the same shared resources
- For example, suppose I would like to make a system where several threads can all increment the same counter
- See `CounterExample`
- Why can't we just pass an `Integer` around instead of a `MyCounter` object? (see Immutable objects and Immutable objects 2)

- If we have many threads accessing the same shared object we don't always see what we might expect.
- In this example, if we have 100 threads all incrementing the same counter 1000 times then we should see 100000 at the end.
- But we don't....any ideas why not?

```java
public void run() {
    for(int i=0;i<n;i++) {
        int temp = count.getCount();
        temp++;
        count.setCount(temp);
    }
}
```

The problem is found in the `run()` method:

- Remember that we have no idea when Java will move from one Thread to another.
- If it moves between the `getCount()` and `setCount()` methods. . .

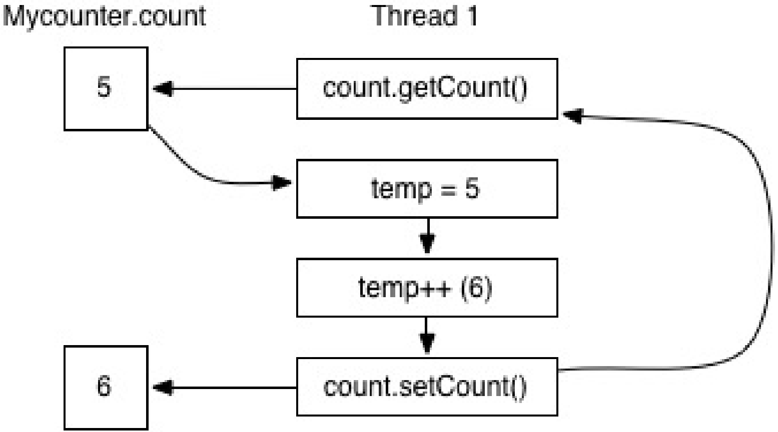

Figure 1: Single thread operation

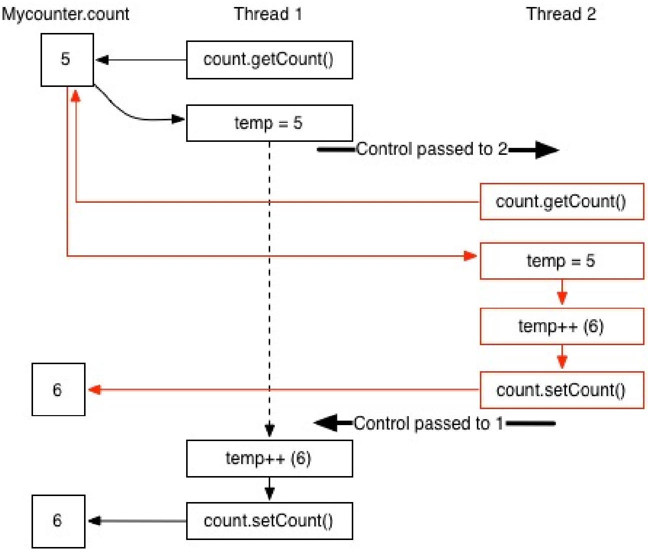

Figure 2: Multi-thread operation

- If control is passed between `get` and `set` the new thread sees an out of date value.
    - Remember: `temp` is local to each thread.
- In reality, thread 1 might be sitting dormant with `temp=5` for a long time
- When it finally updates it, it will effectively delete lots of updates performed by other threads
- It is known as a *race condition*
- This is a *big* problem in multi-threaded programs
- We'll now look at ways of overcoming it

Synchronized

- To overcome race conditions, we must *lock* objects.
- All objects have an associated monitor that can be locked or unlocked (we don't see the monitor, but it is there in the background)
- A thread can lock a monitor, ensuring no other threads can modify it
- Other threads trying are blocked until the lock is released
- The easiest way is with `synchonized` blocks and methods.

- `CounterExample3` gives a new version of our Counter program
- Note that the incrementation is now done inside the class
- It still has the same problem, although perhaps not as extreme (try it and see. Why? Think about how `count++` is done and the chances of being interrupted at a bad point)
- We can solve our race condition by making the `increment()` a synchronised method
  - when any thread is invoking a synchronized method, all other threads trying to are paused until it has finished
- See `CounterExample4` ... problem solved

- Alternatively, we can just synchronize a block of code.
- E.g. instead of declaring `increment()` as `synchronized` we can:

```
public void run() {
    for(int i=0;i<n;i++) {
        synchronized(count) {
            count.increment()
        }
    }
}
```

- This causes the thread to lock the `count` object
- No other threads can modify `count` when the thread is in this block.
- This will also fix the problen - try it
- There are other blocks that could be synchronized - try some

Locks

- An alternative approach involves creating `Lock` objects
- For example, `ReentrantLock()` (`CounterExample5`):

```
public static class MyCounter {
    private int count = 0;
    private ReentrantLock counterLock =
        new ReentrantLock();
    public void increment() {
        counterLock.lock();
        count ++;
        counterLock.unlock();
    }
    ...
}
```

- When `counterLock` is locked, no other thread can lock it until it has been unlocked (Phonebooth analogy in BigJava)

- There's a problem: if the code between `lock` and `unlock` throws an exception the `unlock` never happens
  - Phonebooth user collapsing??
- Always do the following to ensure the lock is released:

```
someLock.lock();
try {
    // Some code
}
finally {
    someLock.unlock();
}
```

Deadlocks

- What if two threads are both waiting for one another to release a lock?
- The program will hang indefinitely
- This is a *deadlock*
- For example, suppose adding another object to our `CounterExample` that decrements `MyCounter`
  - If we set the system up so that in total the same amount is incremented and decremented then `count` will sometimes become negative (depending on ordering of events)
  - See `CounterDecounter`

- We would like to ensure this number never goes negative
- One way of doing this would be to put some kind of wait condition in the `decrement` method (`CounterDecounter2`):

```
counterLock.lock();
try {
    while(count<amount) {
        Thread.sleep(1);
}catch (InterruptedException e) {
    // fall through
}finally {
    counterLock.unlock();
}
```

- This causes the program to hang whenever it tries to decrement by an `amount` that is greater than `count`
  - Because the thread has locked `counterLock` no other thread can increase `amount`
  - This is a *deadlock*

Conditions

- Conditions allow threads to temporarily unlock locks whilst they await some condition to be fulfilled
- In this case, we'd like to temporarily unlock within a thread that is waiting to `decrement`
- Conditions are created from locks
- We can add a condition to `MyCounter` as follows:

```
private ReentrantLock counterLock = new ReentrantLock();
private Condition bigEnough = counterLock.newCondition();
```

- Threads can await the condition through the `Condition.await()` method
- We add this to our `decrement` method:

```
public void decrement(int amount) {
    counterLock.lock();
    try {
        while(count < amount) {
            bigEnough.await();
        }
        count -= amount;
        System.out.println("Subtracting " + amount + ", res
    }catch (InterruptedException e) {
        // Fall through
    }finally {
        counterLock.unlock();
    }
}
```

- A thread calling decrement when `count<amount` will wait until another thread invokes the `Condition.signalAll()` method.
- We put this method into the increment method:

```
public void increment(int amount) {
    counterLock.lock();
    try {
        count +=amount;
        System.out.println("Adding " + amount + ", result "
        bigEnough.signalAll();
    }finally {
        counterLock.unlock();
    }
}
```

- Whenever an increment is made, all threads waiting on this condition are restarted.
- Note that the `signalAll()` method doesn't mean that `amount` is big enough
  - The syntax in `decrement()` means that `signalAll()` will cause the thread to check again.
  - It might just end up invoking `await()` again.
- Run `CounterDecounter3` and verify that `count` never becomes negative

Threads in Swing

- In general Swing is not thread safe
  - You can't use normal threads
  - Ignore everything up until now!
- But, Swing does give you threading capabilities
- First, why do we need threads in Swing?
  - `SwingThread`

- System becomes unresponsive whilst counting
- Nothing updates until counting has finished
  - until we exit the actionPerformed method
- We need threads

The `event dispatch` thread

- Event handling code in Swing runs on the event dispatch thread
  - e.g. actionListeners
- Things on this thread should be *short tasks*
  - otherwise system becomes unresponsive
- Note: some swing component methods can be invoked from any thread (marked as *thread safe* in API)
  - Why isn't all of swing thread safe? read this

Longer jobs - the `SwingWorker` class

- Long tasks should not be run on the event dispatch thread
- Instead we use worker threads
- Created by extending `SwingWorker`
- The new class must extend:
  - `doInBackground()`
- And can also use:
  - `publish()` and `process()` to display interim results
  - done() to invoke a method on the event dispatch thread when the task is complete.
- `Counter.java`

- Note that `SwingWorker` takes two types:
  - `SwingWorker<A,B>`
  - A: the return value
  - B: the object passed by publish
- Note also that `process(List<B> b)` takes a list
  - There may be many calls to `publish` before `process` is called
- The various Swing layout things should be things you've seen before?

Other swing thread operations

- Initial threads (in `SwingUtilities`):
  - `invokeLater(Runnable go)` runs go on the event dispatch thread.
  - `invokeAndWait(Runnable go)` runs go on the event dispatch thread and then waits for it to finish.
  - Typically, these are used for starting the GUI (i.e. creating a `JFrame` object):

```java
public static void main(String[] args) {
    SwingUtilities.invokeLater(new Runnable() {
        new SwingThread();
    });
}
```

Swing example 2 - Game Of Life

- Class exercise: building a Game of Life simulator
- Details: Conway's Game of life
- We need a responsive application that animates a 'world' and allows users to start, stop, toggle cells, change speed, clear the world and randomise the world