

# Kernel Messaging

Advanced Operating Systems and Virtualization

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# Linux Kernel Messaging System

- Kernel-level software can produce output messages related to events occurring during the execution (debugging by printing)
- The messages can be produced both during initialization and steady state operations, hence:
  - Software modules forming the messaging system cannot rely on I/O standard services (such as `sys_write()`)
  - No standard library function can be used for output production
- Management of kernel-level messages occurs via specific modules that take care of the following tasks:
  - Message print on the “console” device
  - Message logging into a circular buffer kept within kernel level virtual addresses



# `printk()`

- The kernel level function to produce output messages is `printk()` defined in `kernel/printk/printk.c`
- It accepts a format string, similar to that used for the `printf()` standard library function
  - Floating point values are not allowed
- A message priority can be specified by relying on macros (expanded to strings) which tell how critical is a message



# Message Priorities

- Priority levels are defined in `include/linux/kernel.h`

```
#define KERN_EMERG "<0>"    /* system is unusable */
#define KERN_ALERT "<1>"    /* action must be taken immediately */
#define KERN_CRIT  "<2>"    /* critical conditions */
#define KERN_ERR   "<3>"    /* error conditions */
#define KERN_WARNING "<4>" /* warning conditions */
#define KERN_NOTICE "<5>"  /* normal but significant condition */
#define KERN_INFO  "<6>"    /* informational */
#define KERN_DEBUG "<7>"    /* debug-level messages */

printk(KERN_WARNING "message to print")
printk(KERN_INFO "%s: Module message\n", KBUILD_MODNAME);
```



# Message Priority Management

- There are 4 configurable parameters which determine how output messages are managed
- They are associated with the following variables:
  - `console_loglevel`: level under which the messages are logged on the console device
  - `default_message_loglevel`: priority level that is associated by default with messages for which no priority value is specified
  - `minimum_console_loglevel`: minimum level to allow a message to be logged on the console device
  - `default_console_loglevel`: the default level for messages destined to the console device



# Interacting with Log Level Settings

- `cat /proc/sys/kernel/printk`

7            4            1            7

(current default minimum boot-time-default)

- Write to this file to change the parameters (if supported by the specific kernel version/configuration)
- This is not a real stable storage file



# syslog()

```
int syslog(int type, char *bufp, int len);
```

- This is the system call to perform management operation on the kernel-level circular buffer hosting output messages
- the `bufp` parameter points to the memory area where the bytes read from the circular buffer will be copied
- `len` specifies how many bytes we are interested in, or a flag (depending on the value of `type`)



# syslog()'s type

```
/*  
* Commands to sys_syslog:  
*  
*      0 -- Close the log.  Currently a NOP.  
*      1 -- Open the log.  Currently a NOP.  
*      2 -- Read from the log.  
*      3 -- Read up to the last 4k  
*             of messages in the ring buffer.  
*      4 -- Read and clear last 4k  
*             of messages in the ring buffer  
*      5 -- Clear ring buffer.  
*      6 -- Disable printk's to console  
*      7 -- Enable printk's to console  
*      8 -- Set level of messages printed to console  
*/
```

console\_loglevel can be set (to a value in the range 1-8) by calling:  
syslog(8, dontcare, value)





# Messaging Management Daemon

## **klogd - Kernel Log Daemon**

### SYNOPSIS

```
klogd [ -c n ] [ -d ] [ -f fname ] [ -il ] [ -n ] [ -o ] [ -  
p ] [ -s ] [ -k fname ] [ -v ] [ -x ] [ -2 ]
```

### DESCRIPTION

klogd is a system daemon which intercepts and logs Linux kernel messages



# Circular buffer features

- The circular buffer keeping the kernel output messages has size `LOG_BUF_LEN` and is stored in the array `__log_buf`, both in `kernel/printk/printk.c`
  - originally 4096 bytes
  - Since 1.3.54 moved to 8192 bytes
  - Since 2.1.113 moved to 16384 bytes
  - Today, it can be defined at compile time
- A unique buffer is used for any message, independently of the priority level
- The buffer content can be accessed by also relying on `dmesg`



# Management of Messages

- To enable the delivery of messages with the exactly-once semantic, printing on console is synchronous (recall that standard library functions only enable at-most-once semantic, due to asynchronous management)
- Hence the `printk()` function does not return control until the message is delivered to any active console-device driver
- The driver, in its turn, does not return control until the message is sent to the (physical) console device
- This may impact performance
  - As an example, the delivery of a message on a serial console device working at 9600 bit/sec, slows down the system by 1 millisecond per char



# panic()

- `panic()` is defined in `kernel/panic.c`
- This function prints the specified message on the console device (by relying on `printk()`)
- The string “Kernel panic:” is prepended to the message
- Further, this function halts the machine, hence leading to stopping the execution of the kernel
  - Indeed, threads enter an infinite loop

