NAME

strace - trace system calls and signals

SYNOPSIS

DESCRIPTION

In the simplest case **strace** runs the specified *command* until it exits. It intercepts and records the system calls which are called by a process and the signals which are received by a process. The name of each system call, its arguments and its return value are printed on standard error or to the file specified with the $-\mathbf{0}$ option.

strace is a useful diagnostic, instructional, and debugging tool. System administrators, diagnosticians and trouble-shooters will find it invaluable for solving problems with programs for which the source is not readily available since they do not need to be recompiled in order to trace them. Students, hackers and the overly-curious will find that a great deal can be learned about a system and its system calls by tracing even ordinary programs. And programmers will find that since system calls and signals are events that happen at the user/kernel interface, a close examination of this boundary is very useful for bug isolation, sanity checking and attempting to capture race conditions.

Each line in the trace contains the system call name, followed by its arguments in parentheses and its return value. An example from stracing the command "cat /dev/null" is:

```
open("/dev/null", O_RDONLY) = 3
```

Errors (typically a return value of -1) have the error symbol and error string appended.

```
open("/foo/bar", O_RDONLY) = -1 ENOENT (No such file or directory)
```

Signals are printed as signal symbol and decoded siginfo structure. An excerpt from stracing and interrupting the command "sleep 666" is:

```
sigsuspend([] <unfinished ...>
--- SIGINT {si_signo=SIGINT, si_code=SI_USER, si_pid=...} ---
+++ killed by SIGINT +++
```

If a system call is being executed and meanwhile another one is being called from a different thread/process then **strace** will try to preserve the order of those events and mark the ongoing call as being *unfinished*. When the call returns it will be marked as *resumed*.

```
[pid 28772] select(4, [3], NULL, NULL, NULL <unfinished ...>
[pid 28779] clock_gettime(CLOCK_REALTIME, {1130322148, 939977000}) = 0
[pid 28772] <... select resumed> ) = 1 (in [3])
```

Interruption of a (restartable) system call by a signal delivery is processed differently as kernel terminates the system call and also arranges its immediate reexecution after the signal handler completes.

```
read(0, 0x7ffff72cf5cf, 1) = ? ERESTARTSYS (To be restarted)
--- SIGALRM ... ---
rt_sigreturn(0xe) = 0
read(0, "", 1) = 0
```

Arguments are printed in symbolic form with passion. This example shows the shell performing ">>xyzzy" output redirection:

```
open("xyzzy", O_WRONLY|O_APPEND|O_CREAT, 0666) = 3
```

Here, the third argument of **open**(2) is decoded by breaking down the flag argument into its three bitwise-OR constituents and printing the mode value in octal by tradition. Where the traditional or native usage differs from ANSI or POSIX, the latter forms are preferred. In some cases, **strace** output is proven to be more readable than the source.

Structure pointers are dereferenced and the members are displayed as appropriate. In most cases, arguments are formatted in the most C-like fashion possible. For example, the essence of the command "ls –l /dev/null" is captured as:

```
lstat("/dev/null", {st_mode=S_IFCHR | 0666, st_rdev=makedev(0x1, 0x3), ...}) = 0
```

Notice how the 'struct stat' argument is dereferenced and how each member is displayed symbolically. In particular, observe how the **st_mode** member is carefully decoded into a bitwise-OR of symbolic and numeric values. Also notice in this example that the first argument to **lstat**(2) is an input to the system call and the second argument is an output. Since output arguments are not modified if the system call fails, arguments may not always be dereferenced. For example, retrying the "ls -l" example with a non-existent file produces the following line:

```
lstat("/foo/bar", 0xb004) = -1 ENOENT (No such file or directory)
```

In this case the porch light is on but nobody is home.

Syscalls unknown to **strace** are printed raw, with the unknown system call number printed in hexadecimal form and prefixed with "syscall_":

```
syscall_0xbad(0x1, 0x2, 0x3, 0x4, 0x5, 0x6) = -1 ENOSYS (Function not implement
```

Character pointers are dereferenced and printed as C strings. Non-printing characters in strings are normally represented by ordinary C escape codes. Only the first *strsize* (32 by default) bytes of strings are printed; longer strings have an ellipsis appended following the closing quote. Here is a line from "ls –l" where the **getpwuid**(3) library routine is reading the password file:

```
read(3, "root::0:0:System Administrator:/"..., 1024) = 422
```

While structures are annotated using curly braces, simple pointers and arrays are printed using square brackets with commas separating elements. Here is an example from the command id(1) on a system with supplementary group ids:

```
getgroups(32, [100, 0]) = 2
```

On the other hand, bit-sets are also shown using square brackets but set elements are separated only by a space. Here is the shell, preparing to execute an external command:

```
sigprocmask(SIG_BLOCK, [CHLD TTOU], []) = 0
```

Here, the second argument is a bit-set of two signals, **SIGCHLD** and **SIGTTOU**. In some cases, the bit-set is so full that printing out the unset elements is more valuable. In that case, the bit-set is prefixed by a tilde like this:

```
sigprocmask(SIG_UNBLOCK, ~[], NULL) = 0
```

Here, the second argument represents the full set of all signals.

OPTIONS

-a column Align return values in a specific column (default column 40).

-i Print the instruction pointer at the time of the system call.

-k Print the execution stack trace of the traced processes after each system call.

-o filename Write the trace output to the file filename rather than to stderr. filename.pid form is used if

-ff option is supplied. If the argument begins with '|' or '!', the rest of the argument is treated as a command and all output is piped to it. This is convenient for piping the debugging output to a program without affecting the redirections of executed programs. The latter

is not compatible with **-ff** option currently.

−A Open the file provided in the **−o** option in append mode.

-q Suppress messages about attaching, detaching etc. This happens automatically when output

is redirected to a file and the command is run directly instead of attaching.

-qq If given twice, suppress messages about process exit status.

-r Print a relative timestamp upon entry to each system call. This records the time difference

between the beginning of successive system calls. Note that since $-\mathbf{r}$ option uses the monotonic clock time for measuring time difference and not the wall clock time, its measurements

can differ from the difference in time reported by the $-\mathbf{t}$ option.

-s strsize Specify the maximum string size to print (the default is 32). Note that filenames are not

considered strings and are always printed in full.

-t Prefix each line of the trace with the wall clock time.

-tt If given twice, the time printed will include the microseconds.

-ttt If given thrice, the time printed will include the microseconds and the leading portion will be

printed as the number of seconds since the epoch.

-T Show the time spent in system calls. This records the time difference between the beginning

and the end of each system call.

-x Print all non-ASCII strings in hexadecimal string format.

-xx Print all strings in hexadecimal string format.

-X format Set the format for printing of named constants and flags. Supported format values are:

raw Raw number output, without decoding.

abbrev Output a named constant or a set of flags instead of the raw number if they are

found. This is the default **strace** behaviour.

verbose Output both the raw value and the decoded string (as a comment).

-y Print paths associated with file descriptor arguments.

-yy Print protocol specific information associated with socket file descriptors, and block/charac-

ter device number associated with device file descriptors.

Statistics

-c Count time, calls, and errors for each system call and report a summary on program exit,

suppressing the regular output. This attempts to show system time (CPU time spent running in the kernel) independent of wall clock time. If $-\mathbf{c}$ is used with $-\mathbf{f}$, only aggregate totals for

all traced processes are kept.

-C Like -c but also print regular output while processes are running.

-O overhead Set the overhead for tracing system calls to overhead microseconds. This is useful for overriding the default heuristic for guessing how much time is spent in mere measuring when

timing system calls using the -c option. The accuracy of the heuristic can be gauged by timing a given program run without tracing (using time(1)) and comparing the accumulated system call time to the total produced using -c.

−S sortby

Sort the output of the histogram printed by the -c option by the specified criterion. Legal values are time, calls, name, and nothing (default is time).

Summarise the time difference between the beginning and end of each system call. The de- $-\mathbf{w}$ fault is to summarise the system time.

Filtering

-е *expr* A qualifying expression which modifies which events to trace or how to trace them. The format of the expression is:

[qualifier=][!][?]value1[,[?]value2]...

where qualifier is one of trace, abbrev, verbose, raw, signal, read, write, fault, inject, or **kvm** and *value* is a qualifier-dependent symbol or number. The default qualifier is **trace**. Using an exclamation mark negates the set of values. For example, **-e open** means literally -e trace=open which in turn means trace only the open system call. By contrast, -e trace=!open means to trace every system call except open. Question mark before the syscall qualification allows suppression of error in case no syscalls matched the qualification provided. Appending one of "@64", "@32", or "@x32" suffixes to the syscall qualification allows specifying syscalls only for the 64-bit, 32-bit, or 32-on-64-bit personality, respectively. In addition, the special values **all** and **none** have the obvious meanings.

Note that some shells use the exclamation point for history expansion even inside quoted arguments. If so, you must escape the exclamation point with a backslash.

-e trace=set

Trace only the specified set of system calls. The -c option is useful for determining which system calls might be useful to trace. For example, trace=open,close,read,write means to only trace those four system calls. Be careful when making inferences about the user/kernel boundary if only a subset of system calls are being monitored. The default is trace=all.

-e trace=/regex

Trace only those system calls that match the regex. You can use POSIX Extended Regular Expression syntax (see regex(7)).

- -e trace=%file
- **-e trace=file** (deprecated)

Trace all system calls which take a file name as an argument. You can think of this as an abbreviation for -e trace=open,stat,chmod,unlink,... which is useful to seeing what files the process is referencing. Furthermore, using the abbreviation will ensure that you don't accidentally forget to include a call like **lstat**(2) in the list. Betchya woulda forgot that one.

- -e trace=% process
- **-e trace=process** (deprecated)

Trace all system calls which involve process management. This is useful for watching the fork, wait, and exec steps of a process.

- -e trace=%net
- -e trace=%network
- -e trace=network (deprecated)

Trace all the network related system calls.

- -e trace=%signal
- **-e trace=signal** (deprecated)

Trace all signal related system calls.

-e trace=%ipc

-e trace=ipc (deprecated)

Trace all IPC related system calls.

-e trace=%desc

-e trace=desc (deprecated)

Trace all file descriptor related system calls.

-e trace=%memory

-e trace=memory (deprecated)

Trace all memory mapping related system calls.

-e trace=%stat

Trace stat syscall variants.

-e trace=%lstat

Trace Istat syscall variants.

-e trace=%fstat

Trace fstat and fstatat syscall variants.

-e trace=%%stat

Trace syscalls used for requesting file status (stat, Istat, fstata, fstatat, statx, and their variants).

-e trace=%statfs

Trace statfs, statfs64, statvfs, osf_statfs, and osf_statfs64 system calls. The same effect can be achieved with **–e trace=/^(.*_)?statv?fs** regular expression.

-e trace=%fstatfs

Trace fstatfs, fstatfs64, fstatvfs, osf_fstatfs, and osf_fstatfs64 system calls. The same effect can be achieved with **–e trace=/fstatv?fs** regular expression.

-e trace=%%statfs

Trace syscalls related to file system statistics (statfs-like, fstatfs-like, and ustat). The same effect can be achieved with **–e trace=/staty?fs|fsstat|ustat** regular expression.

-e trace=%pure

Trace syscalls that always succeed and have no arguments. Currently, this list includes $arc_gettls(2)$, getdtablesize(2), getegid(2), getegid(2), getegid(2), getegid(2), getpid(2), getpid(2), getpid(2), getpid(2), getpid(2), $get_gid(2)$, get_gid

-e abbrev=set

Abbreviate the output from printing each member of large structures. The default is **abbrev=all**. The **-v** option has the effect of **abbrev=none**.

-e verbose=set

Dereference structures for the specified set of system calls. The default is **verbose=all**.

-e raw=*set* Print raw, undecoded arguments for the specified set of system calls. This option has the effect of causing all arguments to be printed in hexadecimal. This is mostly useful if you don't trust the decoding or you need to know the actual numeric value of an argument. See also **-X raw** option.

-e signal=*set* Trace only the specified subset of signals. The default is **signal**=**all**. For example, **signal**=!**SIGIO** (or **signal**=!**io**) causes **SIGIO** signals not to be traced.

-e read=*set* Perform a full hexadecimal and ASCII dump of all the data read from file descriptors listed in the specified set. For example, to see all input activity on file descriptors 3 and 5 use **-e read**=3,5. Note that this is independent from the normal tracing of the **read**(2) system call which is controlled by the option **-e trace=read**.

-e write=set Perform a full hexadecimal and ASCII dump of all the data written to file descriptors listed in the specified set. For example, to see all output activity on file descriptors 3 and 5 use -e write=3,5. Note that this is independent from the normal tracing of the write(2) system call which is controlled by the option **-e trace=write**.

-e inject=set[:error=errno|:retval=value][:signal=sig][:syscall=syscall][:delay_enter=usecs][:delay_exit=usecs][:when=expr]

Perform syscall tampering for the specified set of syscalls.

At least one of error, retval, signal, delay_enter, or delay_exit options has to be specified. error and retval are mutually exclusive.

If :error=errno option is specified, a fault is injected into a syscall invocation: the syscall number is replaced by -1 which corresponds to an invalid syscall (unless a syscall is specified with :syscall= option), and the error code is specified using a symbolic errno value like **ENOSYS** or a numeric value within 1..4095 range.

If :retval=value option is specified, success injection is performed: the syscall number is replaced by -1, but a bogus success value is returned to the callee.

If :signal=sig option is specified with either a symbolic value like SIGSEGV or a numeric value within 1..SIGRTMAX range, that signal is delivered on entering every syscall specified by the set.

If :delay_enter=usecs or :delay_exit=usecs options are specified, delay injection is performed: the tracee is delayed by at least usecs microseconds on entering or exiting the syscall.

If :signal=sig option is specified without :error=errno, :retval=value or :delay_{enter,exit}=usecs options, then only a signal sig is delivered without a syscall fault or delay injection. Conversely, :error=errno or :retval=value option without :delay_enter=usecs, :delay_exit=usecs or :signal=sig options injects a fault without delivering a signal or injecting a delay, etc.

If both :error=errno or :retval=value and :signal=sig options are specified, then both a fault or success is injected and a signal is delivered.

if :syscall=syscall option is specified, the corresponding syscall with no side effects is injected instead of -1. Currently, only "pure" (see -e trace=%pure description) syscalls can be specified there.

Unless a :when=expr subexpression is specified, an injection is being made into every invocation of each syscall from the set.

The format of the subexpression is one of the following:

For every syscall from the set, perform an injection for the syscall invocation number first only.

first+

For every syscall from the set, perform injections for the syscall invocation number first and all subsequent invocations.

first+step

For every syscall from the set, perform injections for syscall invocations number first, first+step, first+step+step, and so on.

For example, to fail each third and subsequent chdir syscalls with **ENOENT**, use **-e inject**=*chdir*:**error**=*ENOENT*:**when**=3+.

The valid range for numbers *first* and *step* is 1..65535.

An injection expression can contain only one **error**= or **retval**= specification, and only one **signal**= specification. If an injection expression contains multiple **when**= specifications, the last one takes precedence.

Accounting of syscalls that are subject to injection is done per syscall and per tracee.

Specification of syscall injection can be combined with other syscall filtering options, for example, **-P**/dev/urandom **-e inject**= file:**error**=ENOENT.

-e fault=set[:error=errno][:when=expr]

Perform syscall fault injection for the specified set of syscalls.

This is equivalent to more generic **–e inject**= expression with default value of *errno* option set to **ENOSYS**.

-e kvm=vcpu

Print the exit reason of kvm vcpu. Requires Linux kernel version 4.16.0 or higher.

- **-P** *path* Trace only system calls accessing *path*. Multiple **-P** options can be used to specify several paths.
- -v Print unabbreviated versions of environment, stat, termios, etc. calls. These structures are very common in calls and so the default behavior displays a reasonable subset of structure members. Use this option to get all of the gory details.

Tracing

- **-b** *syscall* If specified syscall is reached, detach from traced process. Currently, only **execve**(2) syscall is supported. This option is useful if you want to trace multi-threaded process and therefore require **-f**, but don't want to trace its (potentially very complex) children.
- **-D** Run tracer process as a detached grandchild, not as parent of the tracee. This reduces the visible effect of **strace** by keeping the tracee a direct child of the calling process.
- **-f** Trace child processes as they are created by currently traced processes as a result of the **fork**(2), **vfork**(2) and **clone**(2) system calls. Note that **-p** *PID* **-f** will attach all threads of process *PID* if it is multi-threaded, not only thread with *thread_id* = *PID*.
- **-ff** If the **-o** *filename* option is in effect, each processes trace is written to *filename.pid* where *pid* is the numeric process id of each process. This is incompatible with **-c**, since no perprocess counts are kept.

One might want to consider using **strace-log-merge**(1) to obtain a combined strace log view.

-I interruptible

When **strace** can be interrupted by signals (such as pressing **CTRL-C**).

- 1 no signals are blocked;
- 2 fatal signals are blocked while decoding syscall (default);
- **3** fatal signals are always blocked (default if **-o** *FILE PROG*);
- 4 fatal signals and **SIGTSTP** (**CTRL-Z**) are always blocked (useful to make **strace -o** *FILE PROG* not stop on **CTRL-Z**).

Startup

-E *var=val* Run command with *var=val* in its list of environment variables.

-E var Remove var from the inherited list of environment variables before passing it on to the com-

mand.

-p pid Attach to the process with the process ID pid and begin tracing. The trace may be termi-

nated at any time by a keyboard interrupt signal (CTRL-C). **strace** will respond by detaching itself from the traced process(es) leaving it (them) to continue running. Multiple $-\mathbf{p}$ options can be used to attach to many processes in addition to *command* (which is optional if

at least one **-p** option is given). **-p** "'pidof PROG'" syntax is supported.

-u username Run command with the user ID, group ID, and supplementary groups of username. This op-

tion is only useful when running as root and enables the correct execution of setuid and/or setgid binaries. Unless this option is used setuid and setgid programs are executed without

effective privileges.

Miscellaneous

-d Show some debugging output of **strace** itself on the standard error.

-F This option is deprecated. It is retained for backward compatibility only and may be re-

moved in future releases. Usage of multiple instances of $-\mathbf{F}$ option is still equivalent to a single $-\mathbf{f}$, and it is ignored at all if used along with one or more instances of $-\mathbf{f}$ option.

-h Print the help summary.

-V Print the version number of **strace**.

DIAGNOSTICS

When *command* exits, **strace** exits with the same exit status. If *command* is terminated by a signal, **strace** terminates itself with the same signal, so that **strace** can be used as a wrapper process transparent to the invoking parent process. Note that parent-child relationship (signal stop notifications, **getppid**(2) value, etc) between traced process and its parent are not preserved unless **–D** is used.

When using **-p** without a *command*, the exit status of **strace** is zero unless no processes has been attached or there was an unexpected error in doing the tracing.

SETUID INSTALLATION

If **strace** is installed setuid to root then the invoking user will be able to attach to and trace processes owned by any user. In addition setuid and setgid programs will be executed and traced with the correct effective privileges. Since only users trusted with full root privileges should be allowed to do these things, it only makes sense to install **strace** as setuid to root when the users who can execute it are restricted to those users who have this trust. For example, it makes sense to install a special version of **strace** with mode 'rwsr-xr--', user **root** and group **trace**, where members of the **trace** group are trusted users. If you do use this feature, please remember to install a regular non-setuid version of **strace** for ordinary users to use.

MULTIPLE PERSONALITY SUPPORT

On some architectures, **strace** supports decoding of syscalls for processes that use different ABI rather than the one **strace** uses. Specifically, in addition to decoding native ABI, **strace** can decode the following ABIs on the following architectures:

Architecture	ABIs supported
x86_64	i386, x32 (when built as an x86_64 application); i386 (when built as an x32 application)
AArch64	ARM 32-bit EABI
PowerPC 64-bit	PowerPC 32-bit
RISC-V 64-bit	RISC-V 32-bit
s390x	s390
SPARC 64-bit	SPARC 32-bit
TILE 64-bit	TILE 32-bit

This support is optional and relies on ability to generate and parse structure definitions during the build

time. Please refer to the output of the **strace** –**V** command in order to figure out what support is available in your **strace** build ("non-native" refers to an ABI that differs from the ABI **strace** has):

m32-mpers strace can trace and properly decode non-native 32-bit binaries.

no-m32-mpers strace can trace, but cannot properly decode non-native 32-bit binaries.

mx32-mpers strace can trace and properly decode non-native 32-on-64-bit binaries.

no-mx32-mpers strace can trace, but cannot properly decode non-native 32-on-64-bit binaries.

If the output contains neither **m32-mpers** nor **no-m32-mpers**, then decoding of non-native 32-bit binaries is not implemented at all or not applicable.

Likewise, if the output contains neither **mx32-mpers** nor **no-mx32-mpers**, then decoding of non-native 32-on-64-bit binaries is not implemented at all or not applicable.

NOTES

It is a pity that so much tracing clutter is produced by systems employing shared libraries.

It is instructive to think about system call inputs and outputs as data-flow across the user/kernel boundary. Because user-space and kernel-space are separate and address-protected, it is sometimes possible to make deductive inferences about process behavior using inputs and outputs as propositions.

In some cases, a system call will differ from the documented behavior or have a different name. For example, the **faccessat**(2) system call does not have *flags* argument, and the **setrlimit**(2) library function uses **prlimit64**(2) system call on modern (2.6.38+) kernels. These discrepancies are normal but idiosyncratic characteristics of the system call interface and are accounted for by C library wrapper functions.

Some system calls have different names in different architectures and personalities. In these cases, system call filtering and printing uses the names that match corresponding __NR_* kernel macros of the tracee's architecture and personality. There are two exceptions from this general rule: arm_fadvise64_64(2) ARM syscall and xtensa_fadvise64_64(2) Xtensa syscall are filtered and printed as fadvise64_64(2).

On x32, syscalls that are intended to be used by 64-bit processes and not x32 ones (for example, **readv**(2), that has syscall number 19 on x86_64, with its x32 counterpart has syscall number 515), but called with **_X32_SYSCALL_BIT** flag being set, are designated with #64 suffix.

On some platforms a process that is attached to with the $-\mathbf{p}$ option may observe a spurious **EINTR** return from the current system call that is not restartable. (Ideally, all system calls should be restarted on **strace** attach, making the attach invisible to the traced process, but a few system calls aren't. Arguably, every instance of such behavior is a kernel bug.) This may have an unpredictable effect on the process if the process takes no action to restart the system call.

As **strace** executes the specified *command* directly and does not employ a shell for that, scripts without shebang that usually run just fine when invoked by shell fail to execute with **ENOEXEC** error. It is advisable to manually supply a shell as a *command* with the script as its argument.

BUGS

Programs that use the *setuid* bit do not have effective user ID privileges while being traced.

A traced process runs slowly.

Traced processes which are descended from *command* may be left running after an interrupt signal (CTRL-C).

HISTORY

The original **strace** was written by Paul Kranenburg for SunOS and was inspired by its **trace** utility. The SunOS version of **strace** was ported to Linux and enhanced by Branko Lankester, who also wrote the Linux kernel support. Even though Paul released **strace** 2.5 in 1992, Branko's work was based on Paul's **strace** 1.5 release from 1991. In 1993, Rick Sladkey merged **strace** 2.5 for SunOS and the second release of **strace** for Linux, added many of the features of **truss**(1) from SVR4, and produced an **strace** that worked on both platforms. In 1994 Rick ported **strace** to SVR4 and Solaris and wrote the automatic configuration support. In 1995 he ported **strace** to Irix and tired of writing about himself in the third person.

Beginning with 1996, **strace** was maintained by Wichert Akkerman. During his tenure, **strace** development migrated to CVS; ports to FreeBSD and many architectures on Linux (including ARM, IA-64, MIPS, PA-RISC, PowerPC, s390, SPARC) were introduced. In 2002, the burden of **strace** maintainership was transferred to Roland McGrath. Since then, **strace** gained support for several new Linux architectures (AMD64, s390x, SuperH), bi-architecture support for some of them, and received numerous additions and improvements in syscalls decoders on Linux; **strace** development migrated to **git** during that period. Since 2009, **strace** is actively maintained by Dmitry Levin. **strace** gained support for AArch64, ARC, AVR32, Blackfin, Meta, Nios II, OpenSISC 1000, RISC-V, Tile/TileGx, Xtensa architectures since that time. In 2012, unmaintained and apparently broken support for non-Linux operating systems was removed. Also, in 2012 **strace** gained support for path tracing and file descriptor path decoding. In 2014, support for stack traces printing was added. In 2016, syscall fault injection was implemented.

For the additional information, please refer to the **NEWS** file and **strace** repository commit log.

REPORTING BUGS

Problems with **strace** should be reported to the **strace** mailing list at <strace-devel@lists.strace.io>.

SEE ALSO

strace-log-merge(1), ltrace(1), perf-trace(1), trace-cmd(1), time(1), ptrace(2), proc(5)