

Cache Design 2

CS 1541

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Cache Design Parameter 6: Write-Through vs. Write-Back

Writes and Cache Consistency

- Assume **&x** is 111010_2 , and $x == 24$ initially

lw t0, &x

000

addi t0, t0, 1 # x++

001

sw t0, &x

010

- How will the **lw** change the cache?

011

- How will the **sw** change the cache?

100

- Uh oh, now the cache is **inconsistent**.

101

(Memory still has the old value 24.)

110

111

V	Tag	Data
0		
0		
1	111	25
0		
0		
0		
0		
0		

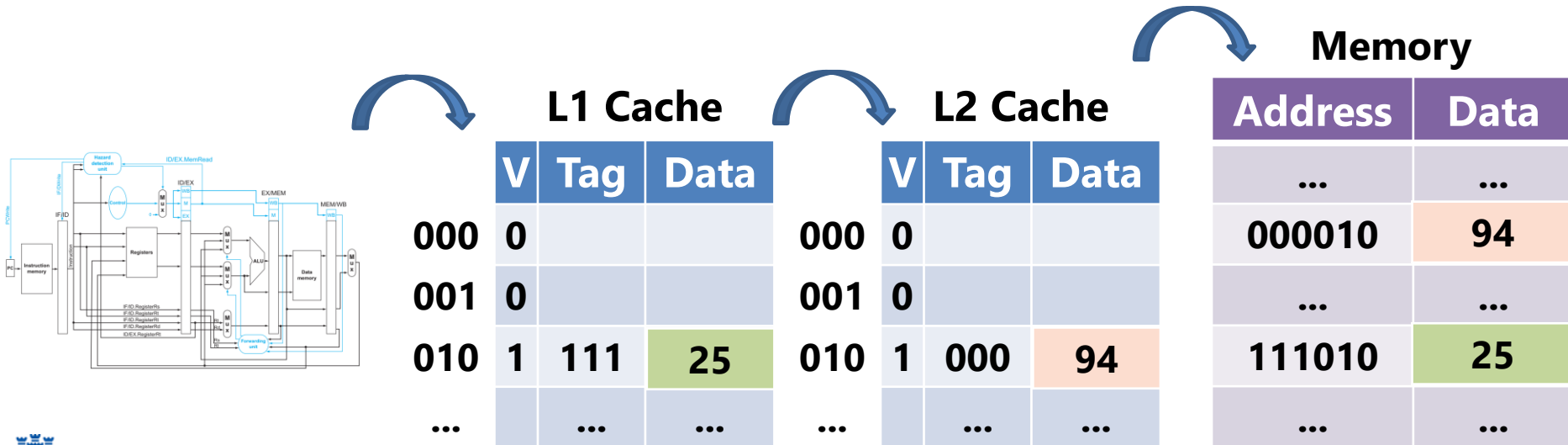
- How can we solve this? Two policies:

- Write-through:** Propagate write all the way through memory
- Write-back:** Write back cache block when it is evicted from cache

Write-Through Policy

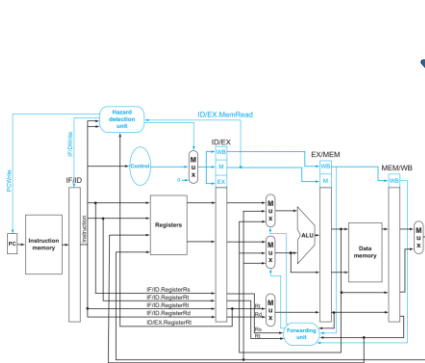
Policy 1: Write-through

- Write-through:
 - On hit, write to cache block and **propagate** write to lower memory
 - On miss, keep on propagating the write to lower memory
 - What happens if we write **25** to address **111010₂**?
 - What happens if we write **94** to address **000010₂**?
- Caches are kept consistent at all points in time!



Write-through: Reads

- What happens if we read from address **000010₂**?
 - We can just discard the conflicting cache block **111010₂**
 - It's just an extra copy of the same data
- Note how we allocate blocks only on read misses
 - Write misses don't allocate blocks because it doesn't help anyway
 - writes are propagated to lower memory even on write hits
 - This policy is called **no write allocate**



L1 Cache

	V	Tag	Data
000	0		
001	0		
010	1	000	94
...	



L2 Cache

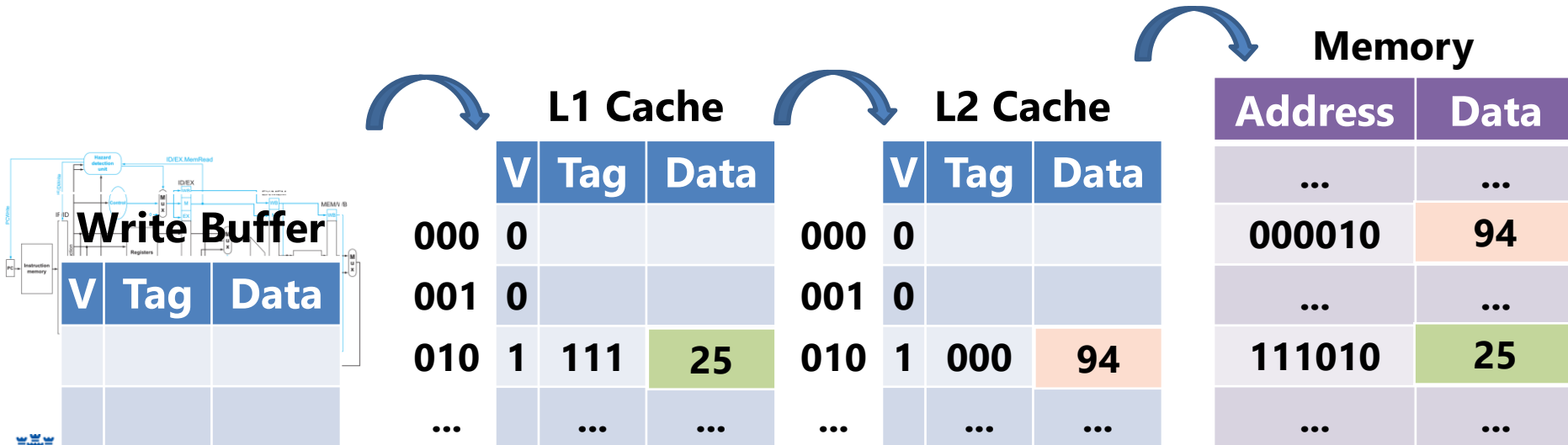
	V	Tag	Data
000	0		
001	0		
010	1	000	94
...	

Memory

Address	Data
...	...
000010	94
...	...
111010	25
...	...

Write-through: Drawbacks

- Drawback: **Long write delays** regardless of hit or miss
 - Must always propagate writes all the way to DRAM
- Solution: **Write buffer** maintaining pending writes
 - CPU gets on with work after moving pending write to write buffer
 - But does the write buffer solve all problems?



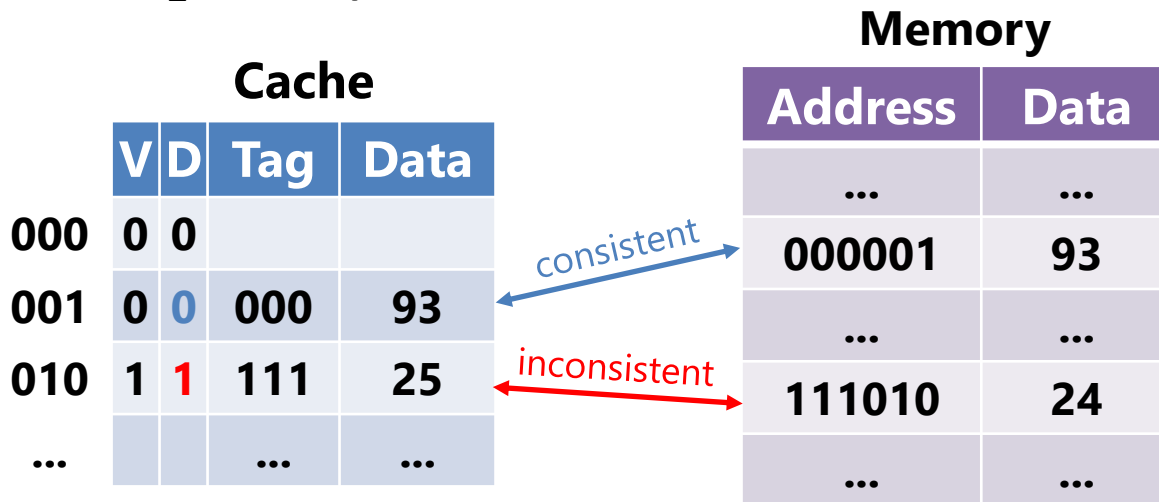
Write-through: Drawbacks

- The write buffer does not solve all problems.
 1. Write buffer must be **very big** to store all pending writes
 - May take more than 100 cycles for write to propagate to memory
 - Write buffer is always checked before L1\$ → adds to **hit time**
 2. Write buffer does not solve **bandwidth** problems
 - If memory bandwidth < rate of writes in program, write buffer will fill up quickly, no matter how big it is
- Impractical to write-through all the way to memory
 - Typically only L1 caches are write-through, if any
- We need another strategy that is not so bandwidth-intensive

Write-Back Policy

Policy 2: Write-back

- **Dirty** block: a block that is temporarily inconsistent with memory
 - On a hit, write to cache block, marking it dirty. **No propagation.**
 - **Write back** dirty block to lower memory only when it is **evicted**
→ Saves bandwidth since write hits no longer access memory
- A **dirty bit** is added to the cache block metadata (marked "D")
 - Block **000001**₂ is clean → can be discarded on eviction
 - Block **111010**₂ is dirty → needs to be written back on eviction



Write-back: Write allocate

- What happens on a write miss?
 - If no write allocate like write-through, will miss again on next write
 - And on the next write, and on the next write, ...
 - No bandwidth savings from hitting in cache
- Unlike write-through, write-back has a **write allocate** policy
 - On write miss, block is allocated in cache to stop further misses
 - On **allocation**, the block is **read** in from **lower memory**
- Q: Why the wasted effort?
 - Aren't we going to overwrite the block anyway with new data?
 - Why read in data that is going to be overwritten?

Write-back: Write allocate

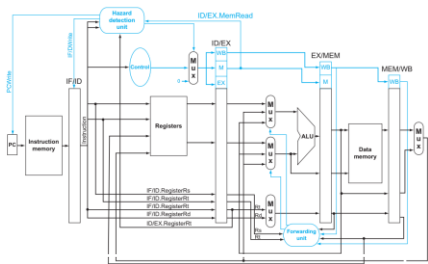
- Because a block is multiple bytes, and you are updating just a few
 - Suppose a cache block is 8 bytes (2 words)
 - Suppose you are writing to only the **first word**

V	D	Tag	Data	
1	1		first word (written)	second word (not written)

- After allocate, the entire cache block is marked **valid**
 - That means **second word** as well as **first word** must be valid
 - That means **second word** must be fetched from lower memory
 - Otherwise if later **second word** is read, it will contain junk data
 - Unavoidable, unless you have a valid bit for each byte
 - That means spending 1 bit for every 8 bits of data
 - That's just too much metadata overhead

Policy 2: Write-back

- What happens if we write **25** to address **111010₂**?



Write Buffer

V	Tag	Data

000

V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
0	0		
1	0	111	24
...	

000

V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
0	0		
1	0	000	93
...	

001

010

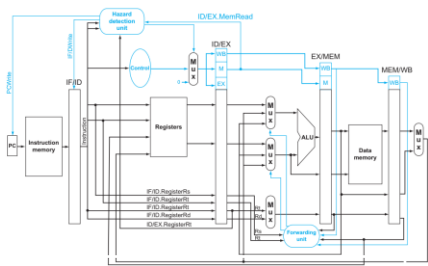
...

Memory

Address	Data
...	...
000010	93
...	...
111010	24
...	...

Policy 2: Write-back

- What happens if we write **25** to address **111010₂**?
 - L1 Cache **hit!** Update cache block and mark it dirty.
 - That's it! How quick is that compared to write-through?



Write Buffer

V	Tag	Data
000		
001		
010		
...		

000
001
010
...

V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
0	0		
1	1	111	25
...	

L1 Cache

000
001
010
...

V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
0	0		
1	0	000	93
...	

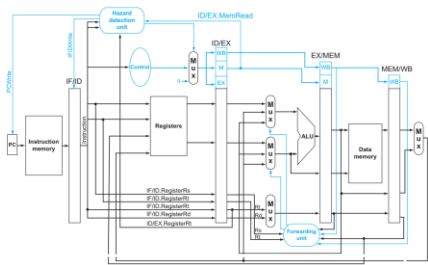
L2 Cache

Memory

Address	Data
...	...
000010	93
...	...
111010	24
...	...

Policy 2: Write-back

- What happens if we write **94** to address **000010₂**?
 - L1 Cache **miss**! First thing we will do is add store to **Write Buffer**.
(So that the CPU can continue executing past the store)



Write Buffer

V	Tag	Data
1		94

000

V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
001	0	0	
010	1	1	111
...			...

000

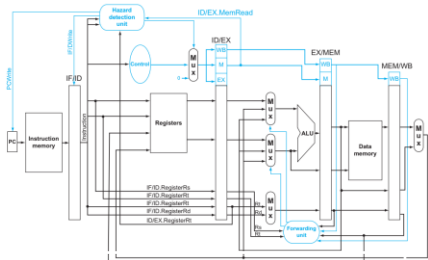
V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
001	0	0	
010	1	0	000
...			...

Memory

Address	Data
...	...
000010	93
...	...
111010	24
...	...

Policy 2: Write-back

- What happens if we write **94** to address **000010₂**? (cont'd)
 - Next the L2 Cache is searched and it's a **hit**!
 - To bring in block to L1 Cache, we first need to evict block **25**.
 - It's a dirty block, so we can't just discard it. Need to **write** it **back**!
 - Since block **25** misses in L2, it will take the **long** trip to Memory
 - Is there a way to put it aside and get to it later?



Write Buffer

V	Tag	Data
1		94

000

001

010

...

L1 Cache

V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
0	0		
1	1	111	25
	



L2 Cache

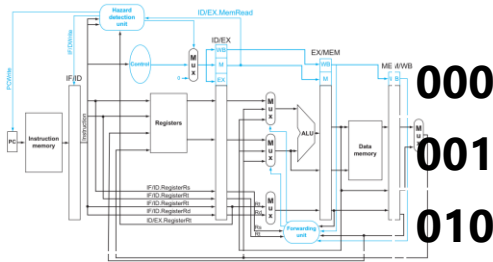
V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
0	0		
1	0	000	93
	

Memory

Address	Data
...	...
000010	93
...	...
111010	24
...	...

Policy 2: Write-back

- What happens if we write **94** to address **000010₂**? (cont'd)
 - Yes! Add Write Buffers to caches, just like we did for the pipeline!
 - Move block to L1 Write Buffer so L1 Cache can continue working
 - Pending block will get written back to Memory eventually



Write Buffer

V	Tag	Data
1		94

L1 Cache

V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
0	0		
1	1	111	25

Write Buffer

V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
0	0		

L2 Cache

V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
0	0		
1	0	000	93

Write Buffer

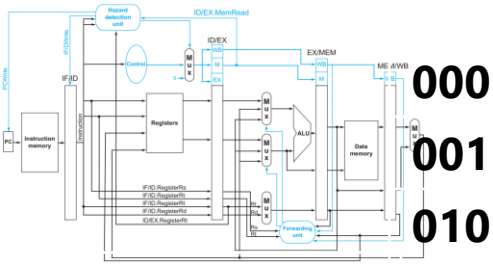
V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
0	0		

Memory

Address	Data
...	...
000010	93
...	...
111010	24
...	...

Policy 2: Write-back

- What happens if we write **94** to address **000010₂**? (cont'd)
 - Now we can finally read in block **93** to the L1 Cache



Write Buffer

V	Tag	Data
1		94

L1 Cache

V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
0	0		
0	0		

Write Buffer

V	D	Tag	Data
1	1	111	25
0	0		

L2 Cache

	V	D	Tag	Data
000	0	0		
001	0	0		
010	1	0	000	93

Write Buffer

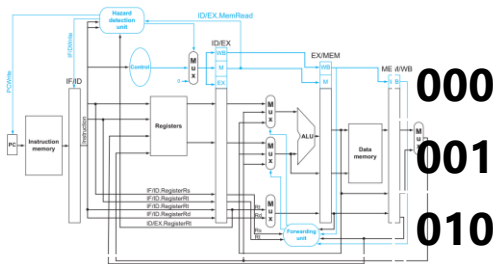
V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
0	0		

Memory

Address	Data
...	...
000010	93
...	...
111010	24
...	...

Policy 2: Write-back

- What happens if we write **94** to address **000010₂**? (cont'd)
 - Now we can finally read in block **93** to the L1 Cache
 - And write **94** into the cache block, also marking it dirty
 - Store is finished, so now remove it from pipeline Write Buffer!



Write Buffer

V	Tag	Data
1	000	94

L1 Cache

V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
0	0		
1	1	000	94

Write Buffer

V	D	Tag	Data
1	1	111	25
0	0		

L2 Cache

V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
0	0		
1	0	000	93

Write Buffer

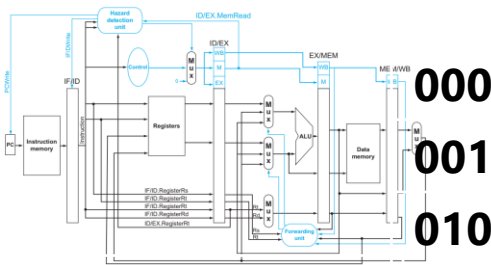
V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
0	0		

Memory

Address	Data
...	...
000010	93
...	...
111010	24
...	...

Policy 2: Write-back

- What happens if we write **94** to address **000010₂**? (cont'd)
 - Eventually, the pending block in L1 Write Buffer will write back
 - But this didn't affect the original store latency



Write Buffer

V	Tag	Data

L1 Cache

V	D	Tag	Data
000	0	0	
001	0	0	
010	1	1	000

Write Buffer

V	D	Tag	Data
1	1	111	25
0	0		

L2 Cache

V	D	Tag	Data
000	0	0	
001	0	0	
010	1	0	000

Write Buffer

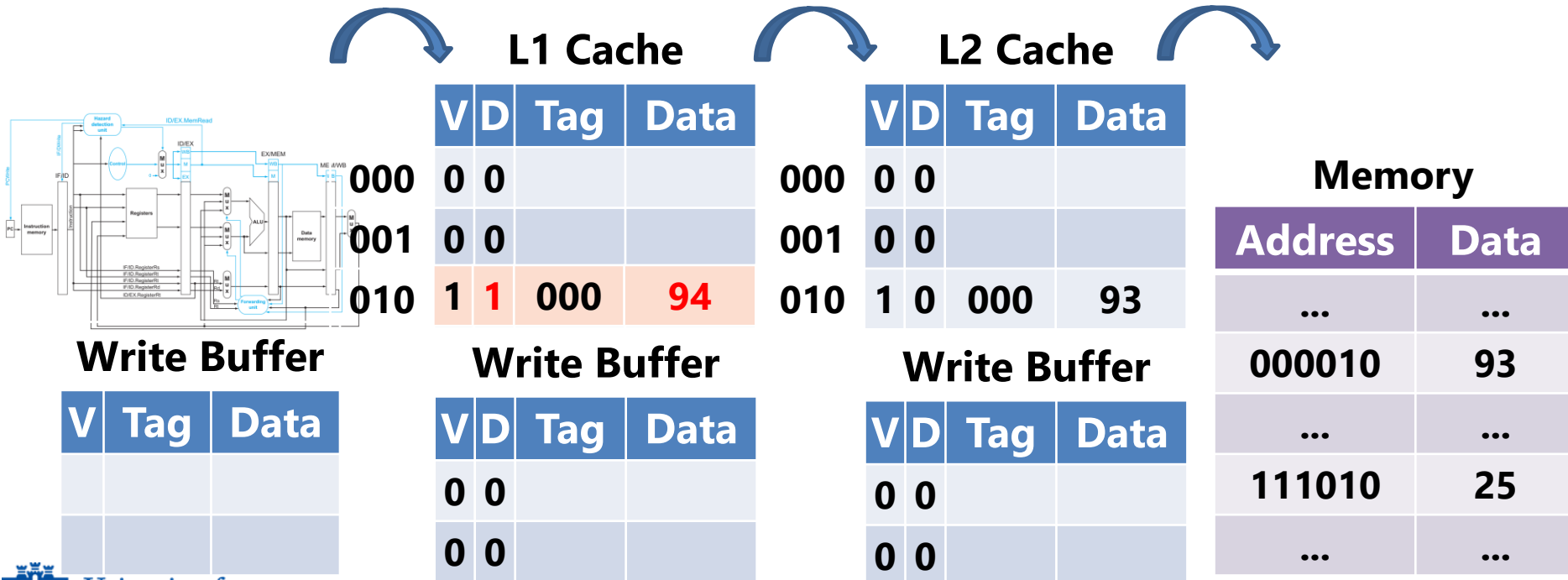
V	D	Tag	Data
0	0		
0	0		

Memory

Address	Data
...	...
000010	93
...	...
111010	24
...	...

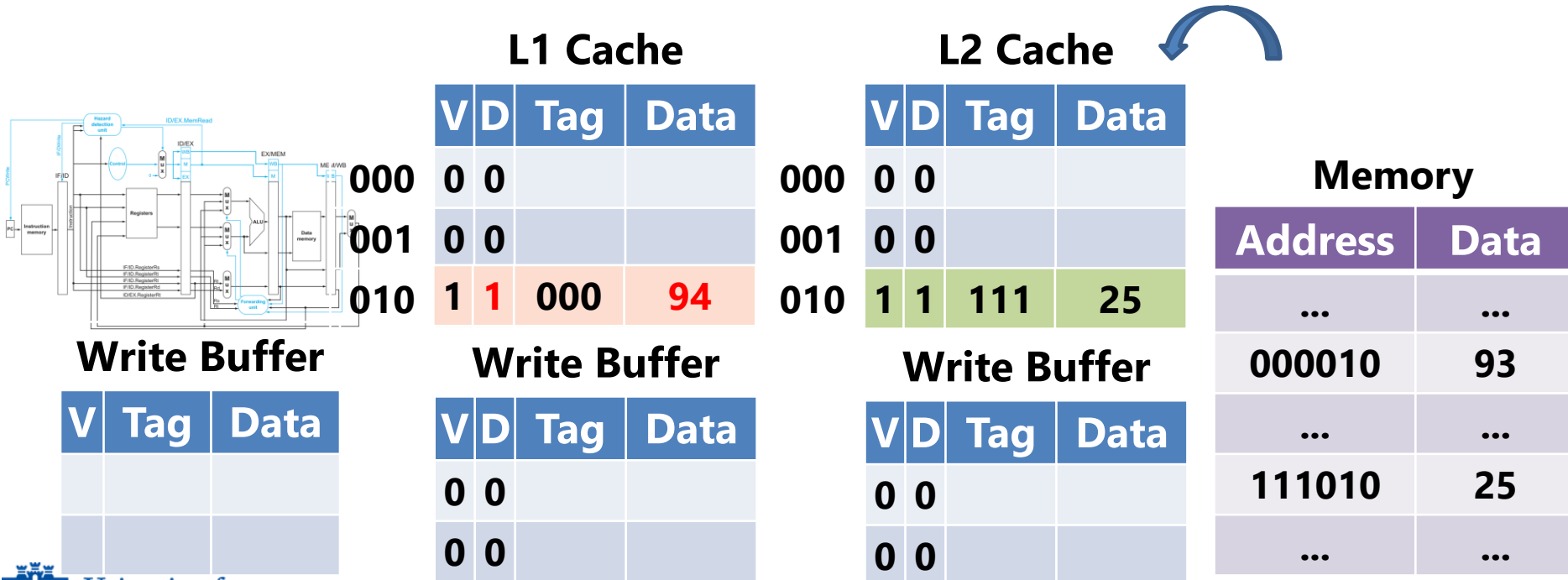
Write-back: Reads

- What happens if we read **25** from address **111010₂**?
 - Misses in L1 and L2 caches and must go all the way to Memory



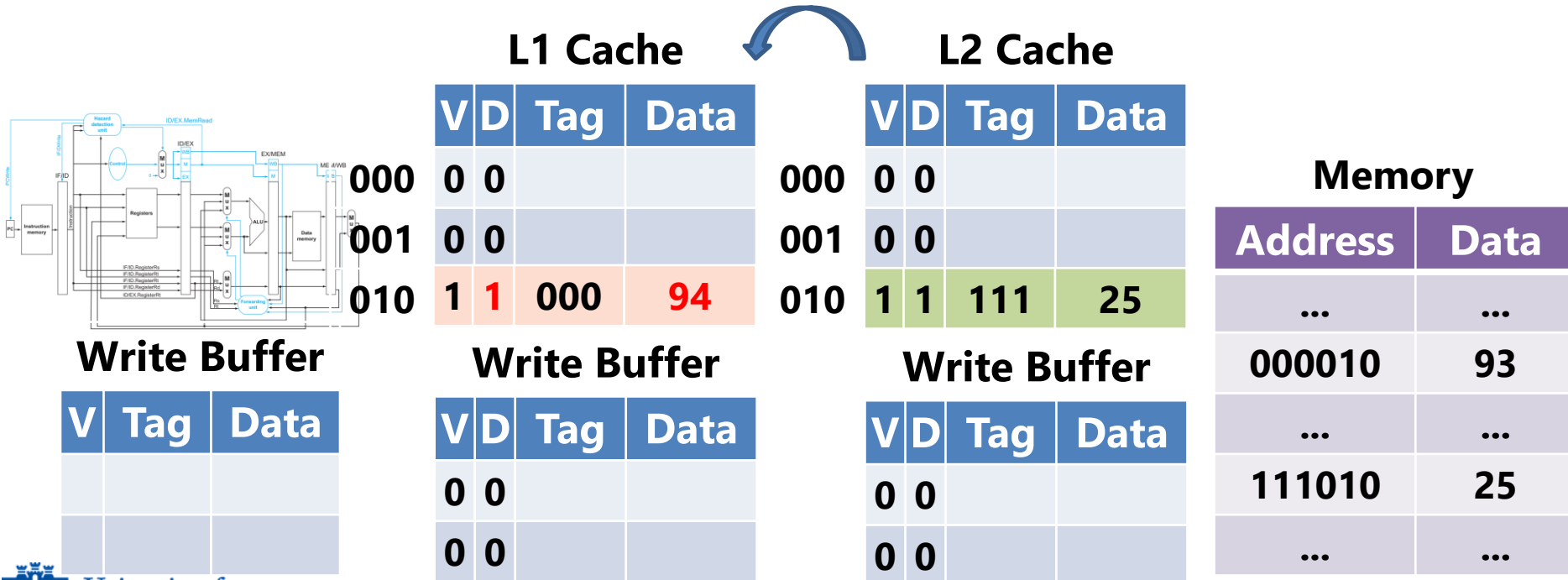
Write-back: Reads

- What happens if we read **25** from address **111010₂**?
 - Misses in L1 and L2 caches and must go all the way to Memory
 - Fills the L2 Cache with **25** on the way back after evicting block **93**
(Note that block **93** can simply be discarded since it's clean)



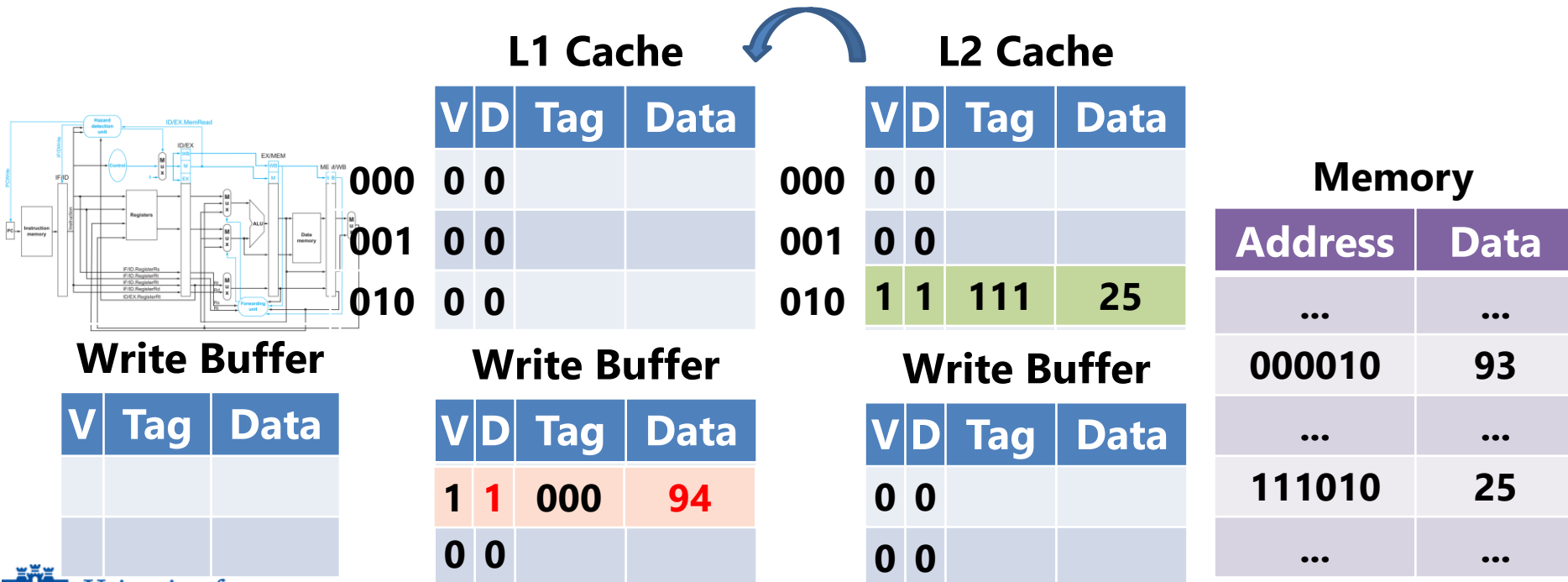
Write-back: Reads

- What happens if we read **25** from address **111010₂**? (cont'd)
 - Now it needs to evict block **94** in L1 Cache before filling with **25**
 - But block **94** needs to be written back since it's dirty!
 - So move to Write Buffer temporarily to make space.



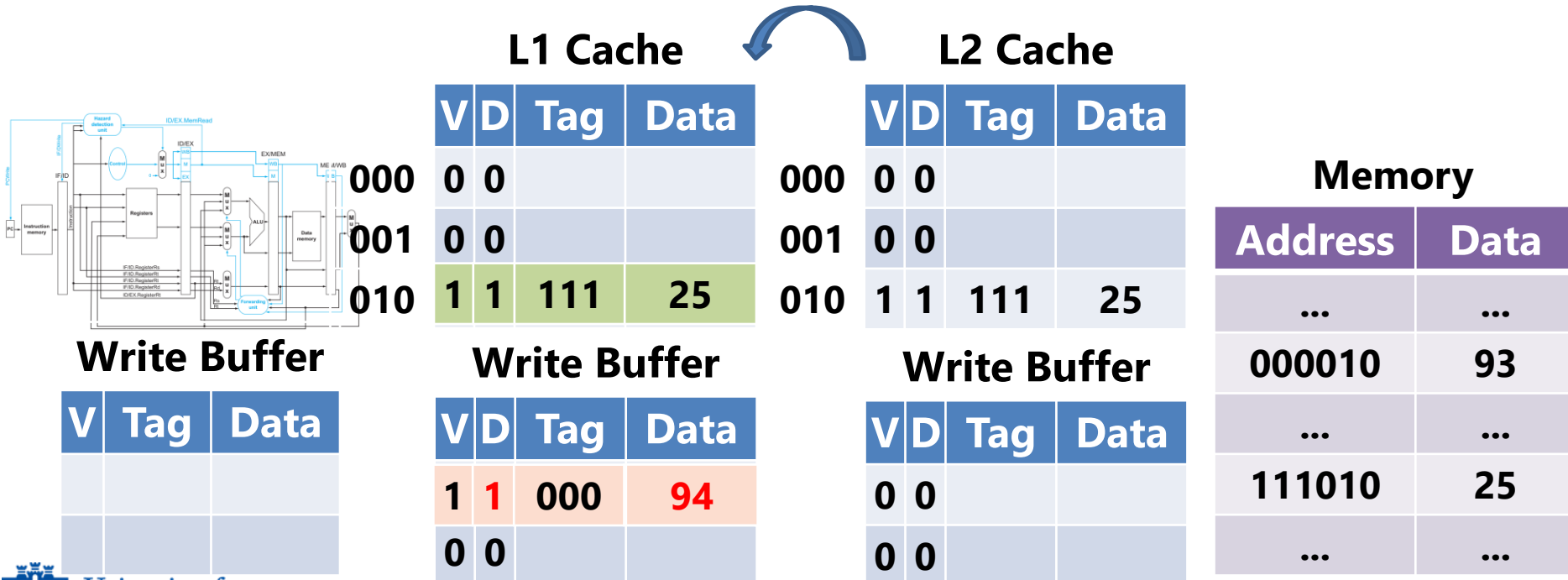
Write-back: Reads

- What happens if we read **25** from address **111010₂**? (cont'd)
 - Now L1 Cache can be filled with block 25



Write-back: Reads

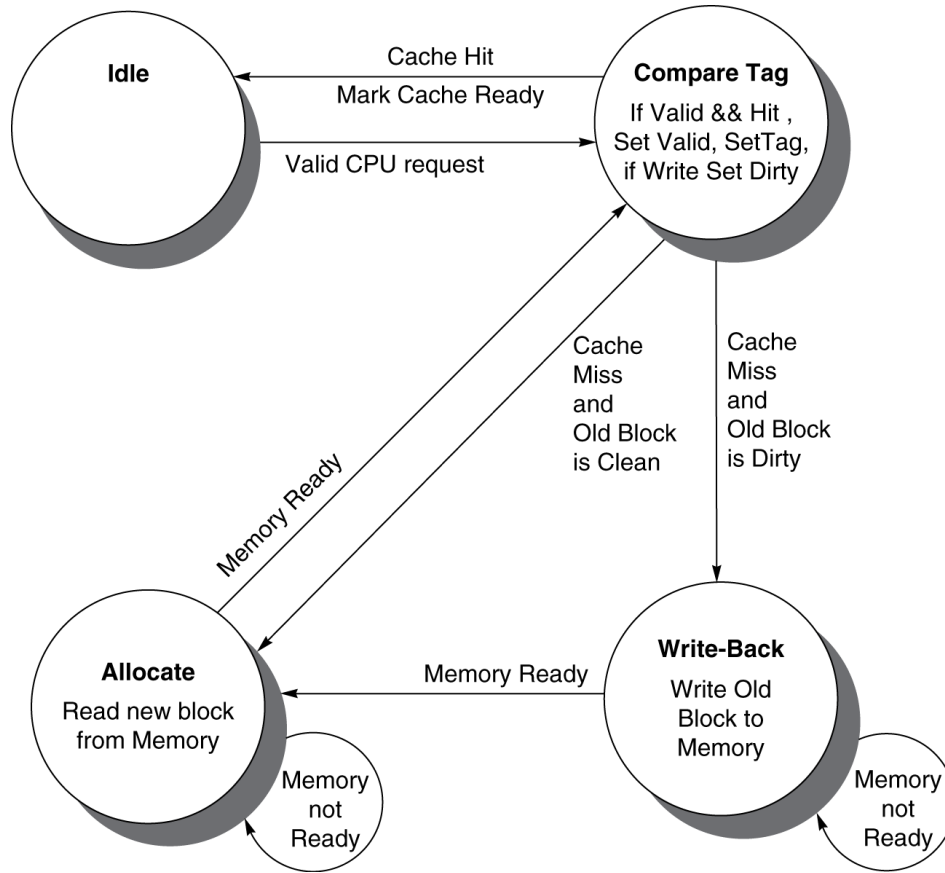
- What happens if we read **25** from address **111010₂**? (cont'd)
 - Now L1 Cache can be filled with block **25**
 - Block **94** will eventually be written back to Memory
 - Write buffers in this context are also called **victim caches**



Impact of Write Policy on AMAT

- $AMAT = \text{hit time} + (\text{miss rate} \times \text{miss penalty})$
- **Write-through** caches can have a **larger write hit time**
 - With write-back, a read hit and write hit take the same amount of time
 - With write-through, a write hit takes the same time as a write miss
- **Write-back** caches can have a **larger miss penalty**
 - Due to write allocate policy on write misses
 - Due to write-backs of dirty blocks when making space for new block
- Both issues can be mitigated using **write buffers** to varying degrees
- All in all, write-back caches usually outperform write-through caches
 - Because write hits are much more frequent compared to misses
 - But write-through sometimes used in L1 cache due to simplicity
 - Plenty of L1 \rightarrow L2 (intra-chip) bandwidth to handle write propagation
 - For L3, L3 \rightarrow DRAM bandwidth cannot support write propagation

Cache Controller FSM for Write Back Caches



- FSM must be in **Idle** state for cache to receive new requests
- Note: WB cache **allocates** a new block on **write misses** as well
 - WT cache goes back to idle after propagating write down
- **Write buffer** allows cache to defer **write-back** until later
 - Allows requests to return quickly back to CPU
 - Write buffer can work on write-back while idle

Cache Design Parameter 7: Unified vs. Split

Problem with Split Caches

- If cache is split into two (i-cache and d-cache)
 - Space cannot be flexibly allocated between data and code



If our working set looks like this – say, in a small loop that's accessing a large array – then we run out of data space.



If our working set looks like this – say, in a large function that's only using stack variables – then we run out of code space.

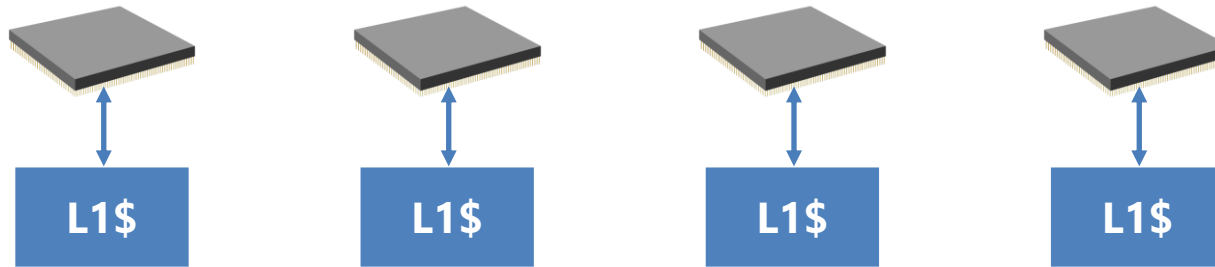
Impact of Unifying Cache

- The answer to the problem is to simply **unify** the cache into one
- $AMAT = \text{hit time} + (\text{miss rate} \times \text{miss penalty})$
- Impact of unifying cache on miss rate:
 - **Smaller miss rate** due to more flexible use of space
- Impact of unifying cache on hit time:
 - Potentially **longer hit time** due to structural hazard
 - With split caches, i-cache and d-cache can be accessed simultaneously
 - With unified cache, access request must wait until port is available
- **L1** cache is almost always **split**
 - Frequent accesses directly from pipeline trigger structural hazard often
- **Lower level** caches are almost always **unified**
 - Accesses are infrequent (filtered by L1), so structural hazards are rare

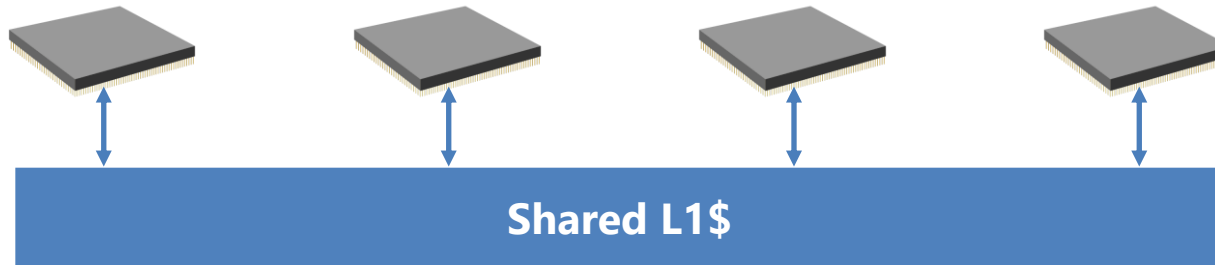
Cache Design Parameter 8: Private vs. Shared

Private vs. Shared Cache

- On a multi-core system, there are two ways to organize the cache
- **Private** caches: each core (processor) uses its own cache

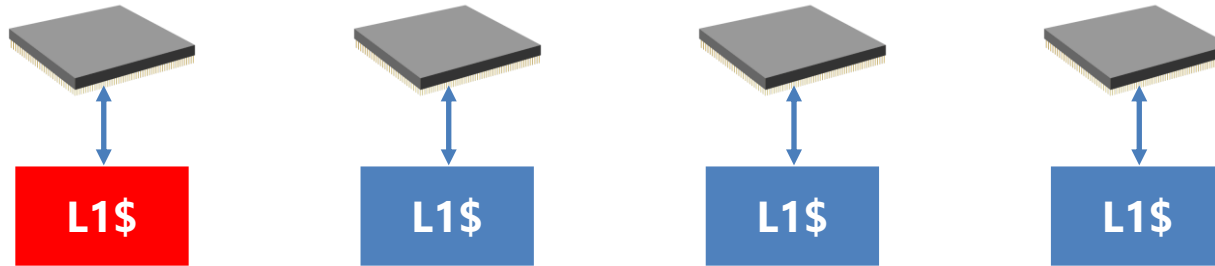


- **Shared** cache: all the cores share one big cache



Shared Cache can Use Space More Flexibly

- Suppose only 1st core is active and other cores are idle
 - How much cache space is available to 1st core? (Shown in **red**)
- **Private** caches: 1st core can only use its own private cache

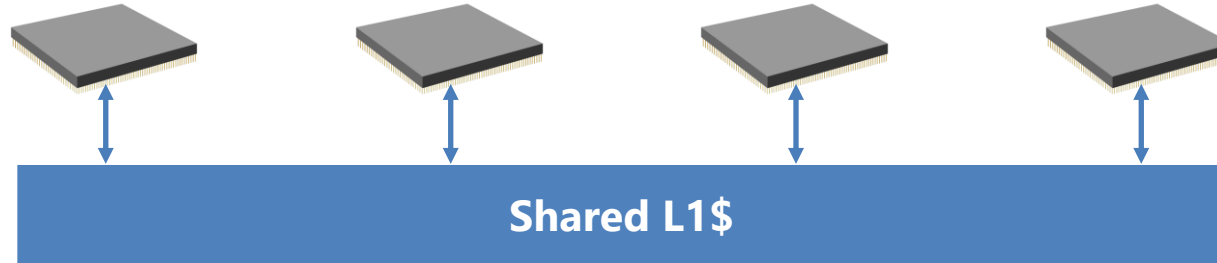


- **Shared** cache: 1st core can use entire shared cache!

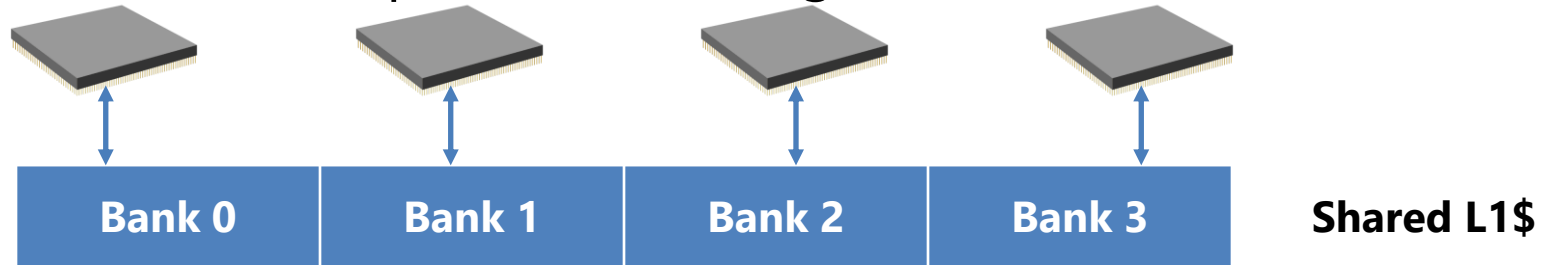


Banking: Solution to Structural Hazards

- Now what if all the cores are active at the same time?
 - Won't that cause **structural hazards** due to simultaneous access?



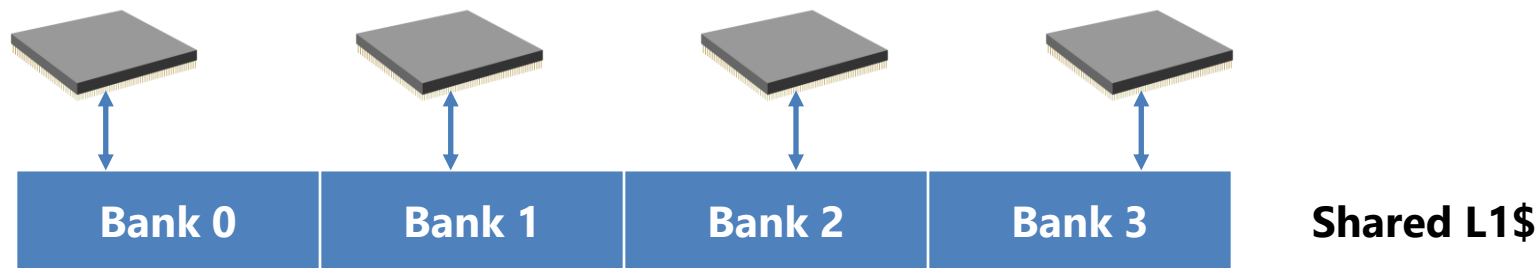
- Could add more ports, but adding **banks** is more cost effective



- Each bank has its own read / write port
- As long as two cores do not access same bank, no hazard!

Banking: Solution to Structural Hazards

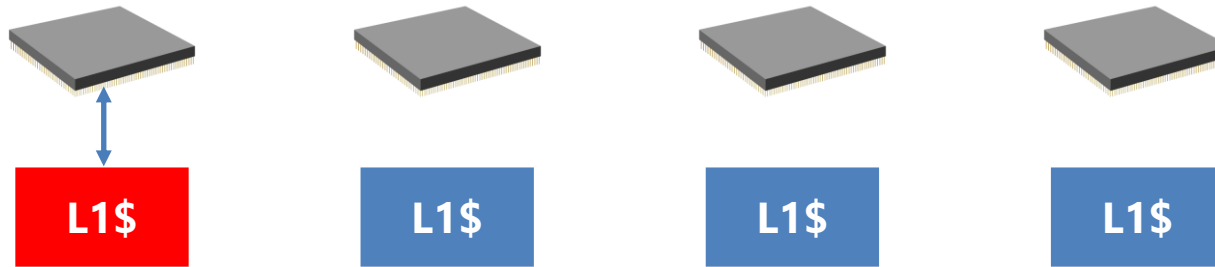
- Cache blocks are **interleaved** between banks



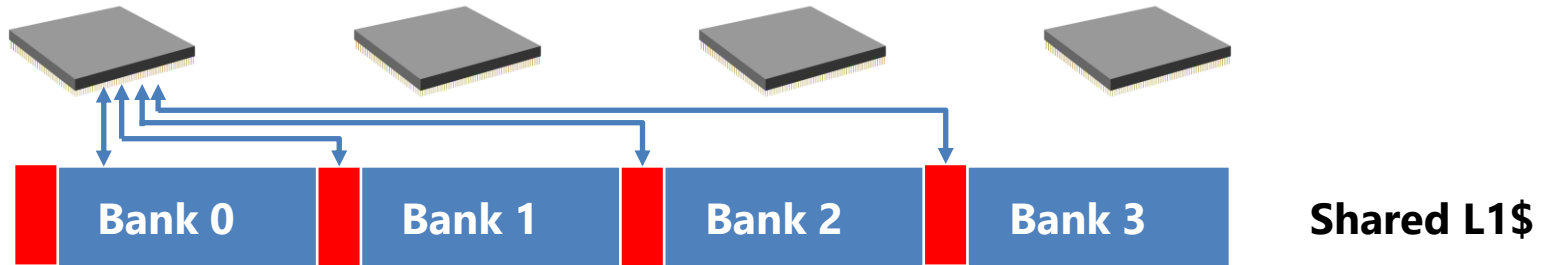
- Blocks 0, 4, 8 ... → Bank 0
- Blocks 1, 5, 9 ... → Bank 1
- Blocks 2, 6, 10 ... → Bank 2
- Blocks 3, 7, 11 ... → Bank 3
- That way, blocks are evenly distributed across banks
 - Causes cache accesses to also be distributed → less hazards

Shared Cache have Longer Access Times

- Again, suppose only 1st core is active and other cores are idle
 - The working set data is shown in **red**
- **Private** caches: entire working set data in nearby private cache

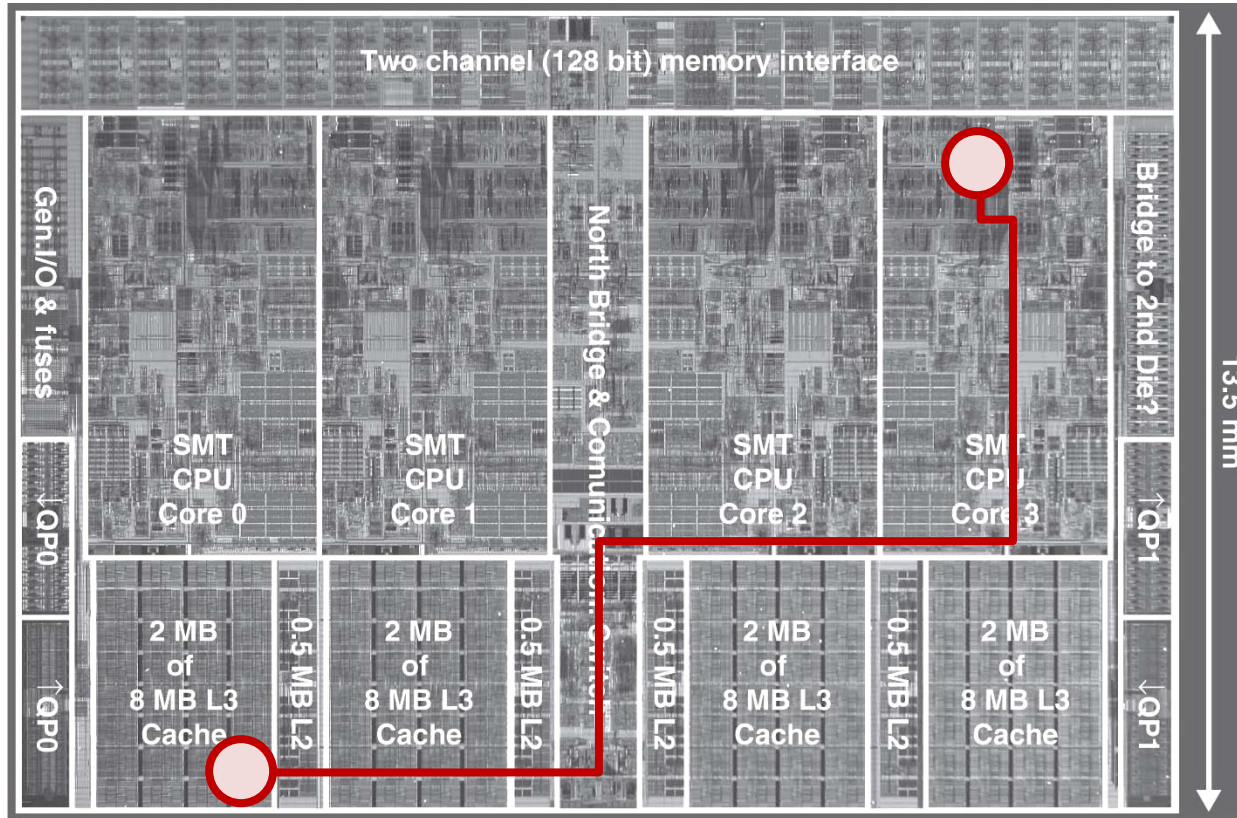


- **Shared** cache: data sometimes distributed to remote banks



Shared Cache have Longer Access Times

- Remember this picture?

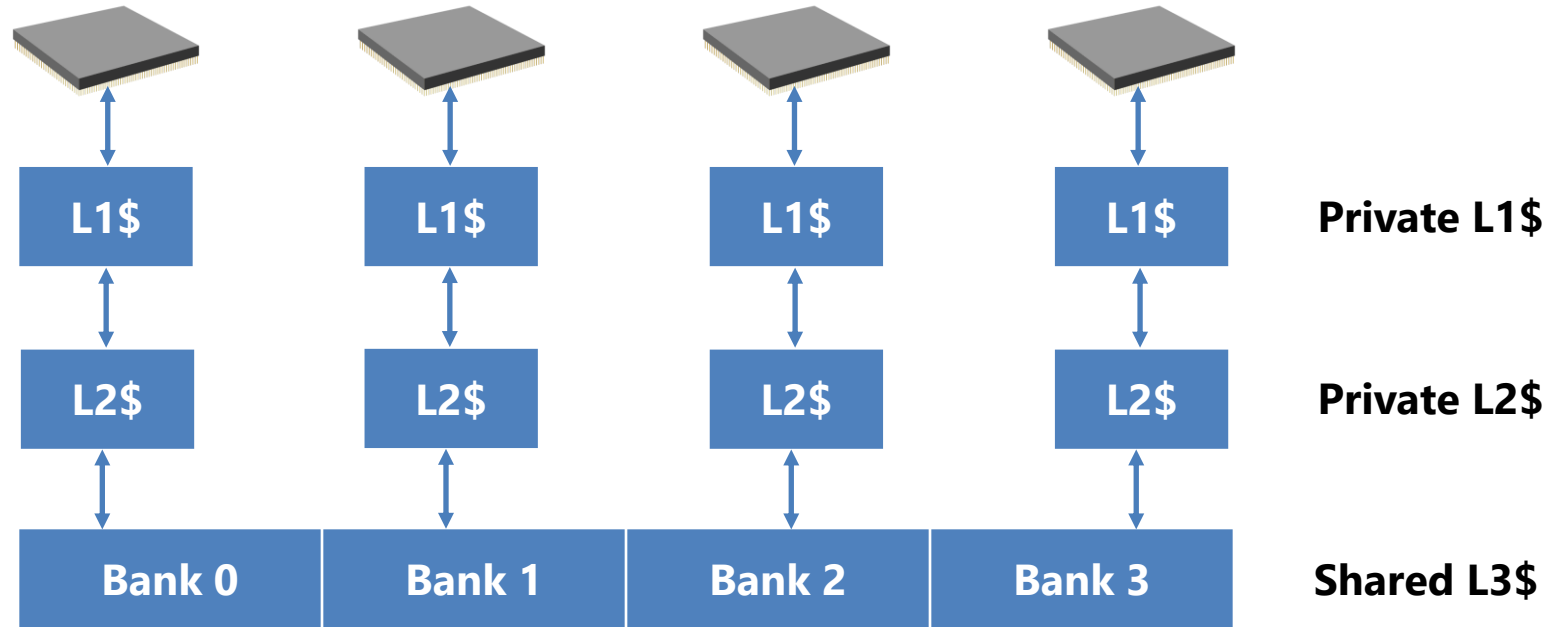


Impact of Shared Cache

- $AMAT = \text{hit time} + (\text{miss rate} \times \text{miss penalty})$
- Impact of shared cache on miss rate:
 - **Smaller miss rate** due to more flexible use of space
- Impact of shared cache on hit time:
 - **Longer hit time** due to sometimes having to access remote banks
- **L1** caches are almost always **private**
 - Hit time is important for L1. Cannot afford access to remote banks.
- **L3 (last level)** caches are almost always **shared**
 - Reducing miss rate is top priority to avoid DRAM access.

Cache Organization of Broadwell CPU

- This is the cache organization of Broadwell used in our Linux server



- Intel rebrands the shared cache as the "Smart Cache"

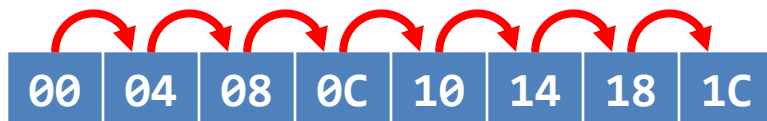
Cache Design Parameter 9: Prefetching

Prefetching

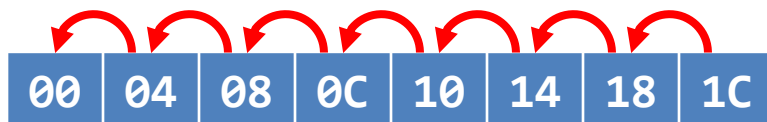
- **Prefetching**: fetching data that is expected to be needed soon
 - Allows you to hide the latency of fetching that data
 - E.g. Web browsers prefetch resources from not-yet-clicked links
 - when user later clicks on link, response is almost instantaneous
 - Caches also prefetch data that is expected to be used soon
 - Can be used to avoid even **cold misses**
- Two ways prefetching can happen:
 - Compiler-driven: compiler emits **prefetch instructions**
 - Can manually insert one in C program: `__builtin_prefetch(addr)`
 - Or rely on compiler to insert them using heuristics
 - Hardware-driven: CPU **prefetcher** emits prefetches dynamically
 - Relies on prefetcher to detect a pattern in memory accesses

Hardware Prefetching

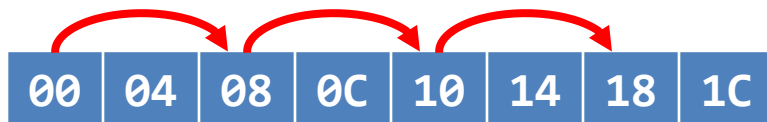
- What do you notice about both these snippets of code?
- They both access memory **sequentially**. **for**(i = 0 .. 100000)
 ○ The first one data, the next instructions. **A[i]++;**
- These kinds of access patterns are very common.



Sequential



Reverse sequential

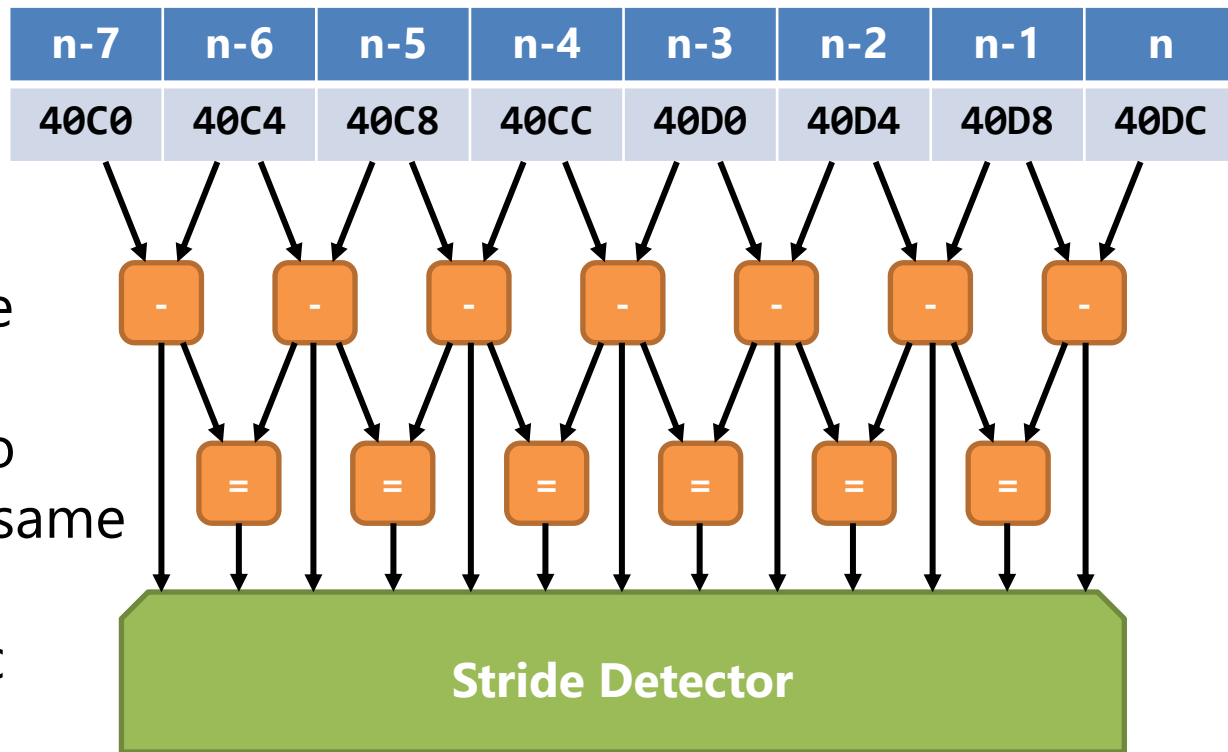


Strided sequential
(think "accessing one field
from each item in an array
of structs")

```
00 lw
04 lw
08 lw
0C addi
10 sub
14 mul
18 sw
1C sw
20 sw
```

Hardware Prefetching Stride Detection

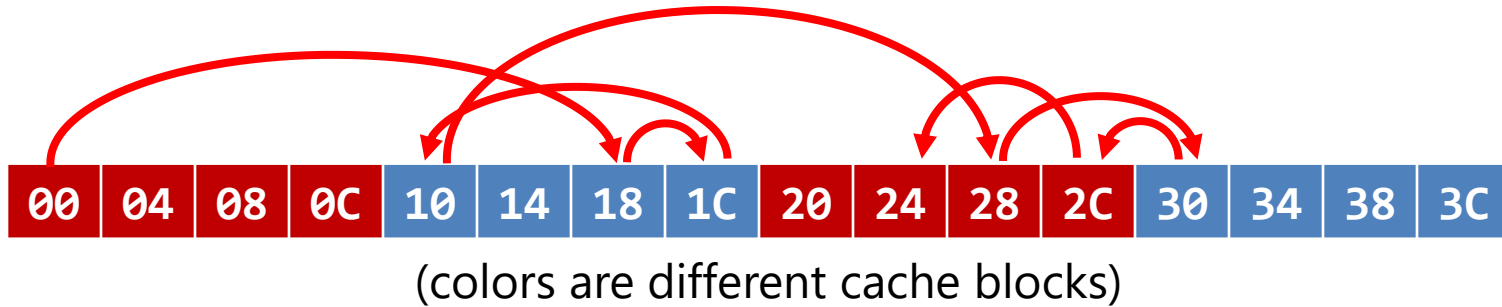
- What kinds of things would you need?
- A table of the last n memory accesses would be a good start.



- Some subtractors to calculate the stride
- Some comparators to see if strides are the same
- Some detection logic

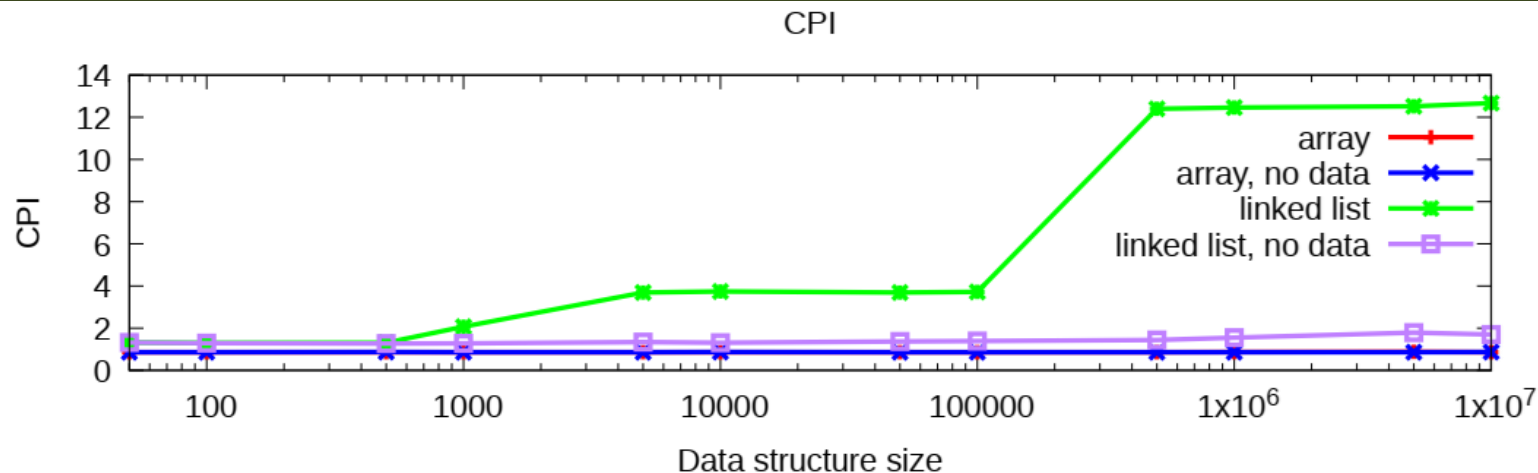
Where Hardware Prefetching Doesn't Work

- **Sequential** accesses are where prefetcher works best
 - E.g. Iterating over elements of an **array**
- Some accesses don't have a pattern or is too **complex** to detect
 - At below is how a typical **linked-list** traversal looks like



- Other pointer-chasing data structures (**graphs**, **trees**) look similar
- Can only rely on naturally occurring locality to avoid misses
- Or, have compiler insert prefetch instructions in middle of traversal

Mystery Solved



- How come **Array** performed well for even an array 1.28 GB large?
 - No spatial locality since each node takes up two 64-byte cache blocks
 - No temporal locality since working set of 1.28 GB exceeds any cache
- The answer is: **Array** had the benefit of a strided **prefetcher**!
 - Access pattern of **Linked List** was too complex for prefetcher to detect

Impact of Prefetching

- Prefetcher runs **in parallel** with the rest of the cache hardware
 - Does not slow down any on-demand reads or writes
- What if prefetcher is wrong? It can be wrong in two ways:
 - It fetched a block that was never going to be used
 - It fetched a useful block but fetched it too soon or too late
 - Too soon: the block gets evicted before it can be used
 - Too late: the prefetch doesn't happen in time for the access
- A bad prefetch results in **cache pollution**
 - Unused data is fetched, potentially pushing out other useful data
- On the other hand, good prefetches can reduce misses drastically!