

Cache Design

CS 1541

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Oracle Cache

- CPU Cycles = CPU Compute Cycles + Memory Stall Cycles
- **Oracle cache**: a cache that never misses
 - In effect, **Memory Stall Cycles == 0**
 - Impossible, since even with infinite capacity, there are still cold misses
 - But useful to set **bounds** on performance
- Real caches may approach performance of oracle caches but can't exceed
- What metric can we use to compare and evaluate real cache designs?
 - AMAT (Average Memory Access Time)

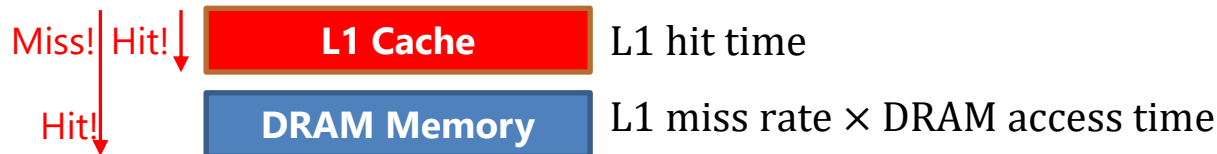
AMAT (Average Memory Access Time)

- **AMAT** (Average Memory Access Time) is defined as follows:
 - **AMAT = hit time + (miss rate × miss penalty)**
 - **Hit time:** time to get the data from cache when we hit
 - **Miss rate:** what percentage of cache accesses we miss
 - **Miss penalty:** time to get the data from lower memory when we miss
 - Shouldn't it be **hit rate × hit time**?
 - Hit time is incurred regardless of hit or miss
 - It is more aptly called access time (the time to search for the data)
- Hit time, miss rate, miss penalty are the 3 components of a cache design
 - When evaluating a cache design, we need to consider all 3
 - Cache designs trade-off one for the other
 - E.g. a large cache trade-offs longer hit time for smaller miss rate
 - Whether trade-off is beneficial depends on the resulting AMAT

Cache Design Parameter 1: Number of Levels

AMAT for Multi-level Caches

- For a single-level cache (L1 cache):
 - $AMAT(L1) = L1 \text{ hit time} + (L1 \text{ miss rate} \times \text{DRAM access time})$



- For a multi-level cache (L1, L2 caches):
 - $AMAT(L2) = L1 \text{ hit time} + (L1 \text{ miss rate} \times L1 \text{ miss penalty})$
 - $L1 \text{ miss penalty} = L2 \text{ hit time} + (L2 \text{ miss rate} \times \text{DRAM access time})$
 - $AMAT(L2) = L1 \text{ hit time} + L1 \text{ miss rate} \times L2 \text{ hit time} + L1 \text{ miss rate} \times L2 \text{ miss rate} \times \text{DRAM access time}$



AMAT for Multi-level Caches

- For L2 Cache to be worth it, $AMAT(L1) > AMAT(L2)$ needs to be true.

L1 Cache

L1 hit time

DRAM Memory

L1 miss rate \times DRAM access time

>?

L1 Cache

L1 hit time

L2 Cache

L1 miss rate \times L2 hit time

DRAM Memory

L1 miss rate \times L2 miss rate \times DRAM access time

- $AMAT(L1) - AMAT(L2)$
 $= (L1 \text{ miss rate} - L1 \text{ miss rate} \times L2 \text{ miss rate}) \times \text{DRAM access time}$
 $\quad - L1 \text{ miss rate} \times L2 \text{ hit time}$
 $= L1 \text{ miss rate} \times ((1 - L2 \text{ miss rate}) \times \text{DRAM access time} - L2 \text{ hit time}) > 0$
 $\rightarrow (1 - L2 \text{ miss rate}) \times \text{DRAM access time} > L2 \text{ hit time}$
 $\rightarrow \text{Benefit from reduced DRAM accesses} > \text{Penalty from L2 accesses}$

AMAT for Multi-level Caches

- $(1 - \text{L2 miss rate}) \times \text{DRAM access time} > \text{L2 hit time}$
 - Let's assume L2 miss rate = 0.9 and DRAM access time = 100 cycles:
 $(1 - 0.9) \times 100 > \text{L2 hit time}$
 $\text{L2 hit time} < 10$
 - **If L2 hit time can be kept below 10 cycles, worth it to install L2 cache**
- So, should we install the L2 cache, or not? That depends on the program!
 - Locality in program determines cache capacity required for 0.9 miss rate
 - If we can design a cache with hit time < 10 for that capacity, go for it
- Again, shows design decisions are heavily impacted by needs of software

Cache Design Parameter 2: Cache Size

Impact of Cache Size (a.k.a. Capacity) on AMAT

- $AMAT = \text{hit time} + (\text{miss rate} \times \text{miss penalty})$
- Larger caches are **good** for **miss rates**
 - More capacity means you can keep around cache blocks for longer
 - Means you can leverage more of the pre-existing **temporal locality**
 - If entire working set can fit into the cache, no capacity misses!
- But larger caches are **bad** for **hit times**
 - Longer wires and larger decoders mean longer access time
- Exactly why there are multiple levels of caches
 - **Frequently** accessed data where hit time is important stays in **L1** cache
 - **Rarely** accessed data which is part of a larger working set stays in **L3**

What cache size(s) should I choose?

- How should each cache level be sized?
- That depends on the application
 - Working set sizes of the application at various levels. E.g.:
 - Small set of data accessed very frequently (typically stack variables)
 - Medium set of data accessed often (currently accessed data structure)
 - Large set of data accessed rarely (rest of program data)
 - **Ideally**, cache levels and sizes would **reflect working set sizes**.
- Simulate multiple cache levels and sizes and choose one with lowest AMAT
 - Simulate on the applications that you care about
 - In the end, it must be a **compromise** (giving best average AMAT)

Cache Design Parameter 3: Cache Block Size

Impact of Cache Block Size on AMAT

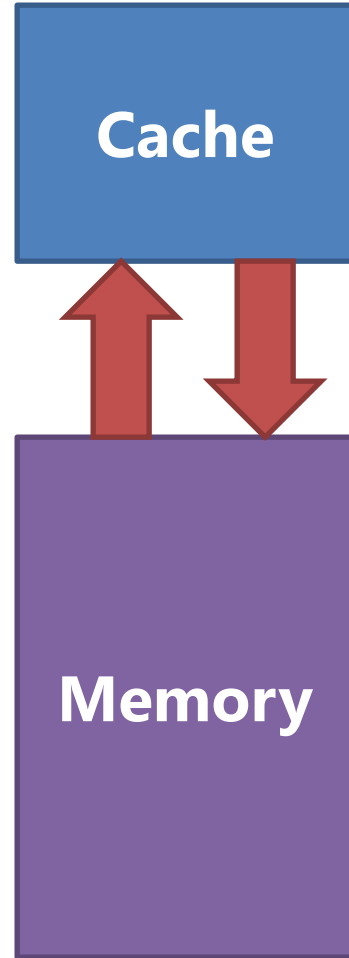
- $AMAT = \text{hit time} + (\text{miss rate} \times \text{miss penalty})$
- **Cache block** (a.k.a. **cache line**)
 - Unit of transfer for cache data (typically 32 or 64 bytes)
 - If program accesses any byte in cache block, entire block is brought in
 - Each level of a multi-level cache can have a different cache block size
- Impact of larger cache block size on **miss rate**
 - Maybe **smaller miss rate** due to **better** leveraging of **spatial locality**
 - Maybe **bigger miss rate** due to **worse** leveraging of **temporal locality**
(Bringing in more data at a time may push out other useful data)
- Impact of larger cache block size on **miss penalty**
 - With a limited bus width, may take multiple transfers for a large block
 - E.g. DDR 4 DRAM bus width is 8 bytes, so 8 transfers for 64-byte block
 - Could lead to **increase in miss penalty**

Cache Block Size and Miss Penalty

- On a miss, the data must come from lower memory
- Besides memory access time, there's transfer time
- **What things impact how long that takes?**
 - The size of the cache block (**words/block**)
 - The width of the memory bus (**words/cycle**)
 - The speed of the memory bus (**cycles/second**)
- So the transfer time will be:

$$\frac{\text{seconds}}{\text{block}} = \frac{1}{\frac{\text{cycles}}{\text{second}} \times \frac{\text{words}}{\text{cycle}}} \times \frac{\text{words}}{\text{block}}$$

bus speed bus width block size



What cache block size should I choose?

- Again, that depends on the application
 - How much spatial and temporal locality the application has
- Simulate multiple cache block sizes and choose one with lowest AMAT
 - Simulate on benchmarks that you care about and choose best average
 - You may have to simulate different combinations for multi-level caches

Cache Design Parameter 4: Cache Associativity

Mapping blocks from memory to caches

- Cache size is much smaller compared to the entire memory space
 - Must map all the blocks in memory to limited CPU cache
- Does this sound familiar? Remember branch prediction?
 - Had similar problem of mapping PCs to a limited BHT
 - What did we do then?
 - We hashed PC to an entry in the BHT
 - On a hash conflict, we replaced old entry with more recent one
- We will use a similar idea with caches
 - **Hash memory addresses** to entries in cache
 - On a conflict:
 - **Replace** old cache block with more recent one
 - Or, **chain** multiple cache blocks on to same hash entry

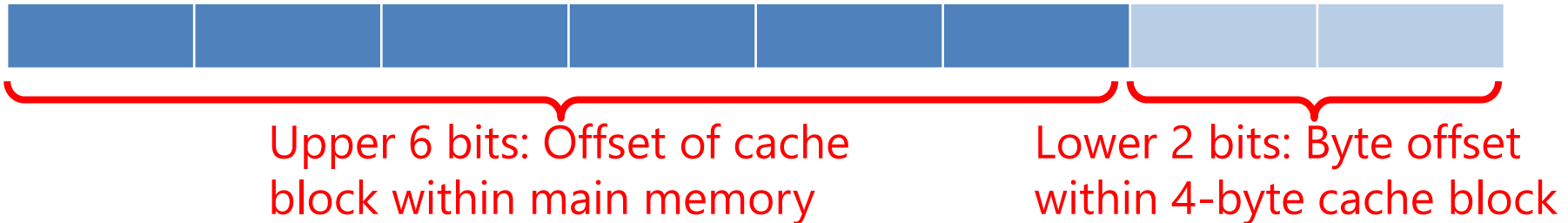
Impact of Cache Associativity on AMAT

- Depending on hash function and chaining, a cache is either:
 - **Direct-mapped** (**no chaining** allowed)
 - **Set-associative** (**some chaining** allowed)
 - **Fully-associative** (**limitless chaining** allowed)
- Impact of more associativity on **miss rate**
 - **Smaller miss rate** due to less misses due to hash conflicts
 - Misses due to hash conflicts are called **conflict misses**
 - A third category of misses besides cold and capacity misses
- Impact of more associativity on **hit time**
 - **Longer hit time** due to need to search through long chain

Direct-mapped Caches

Assumptions

- Let's assume for the sake of concise explanations
 - 8-bit memory addresses
 - 4-byte (one word) cache block sizes
- Of course these are not typical values. Typical values are:
 - 32-bit or 64-bit memory addresses (32-bit or 64-bit CPU)
 - 32-byte or 64-byte cache blocks sizes (for spatial locality)
 - But too many bits in addresses are going to give you a headache
- According to our assumption, here's a breakdown of address bits



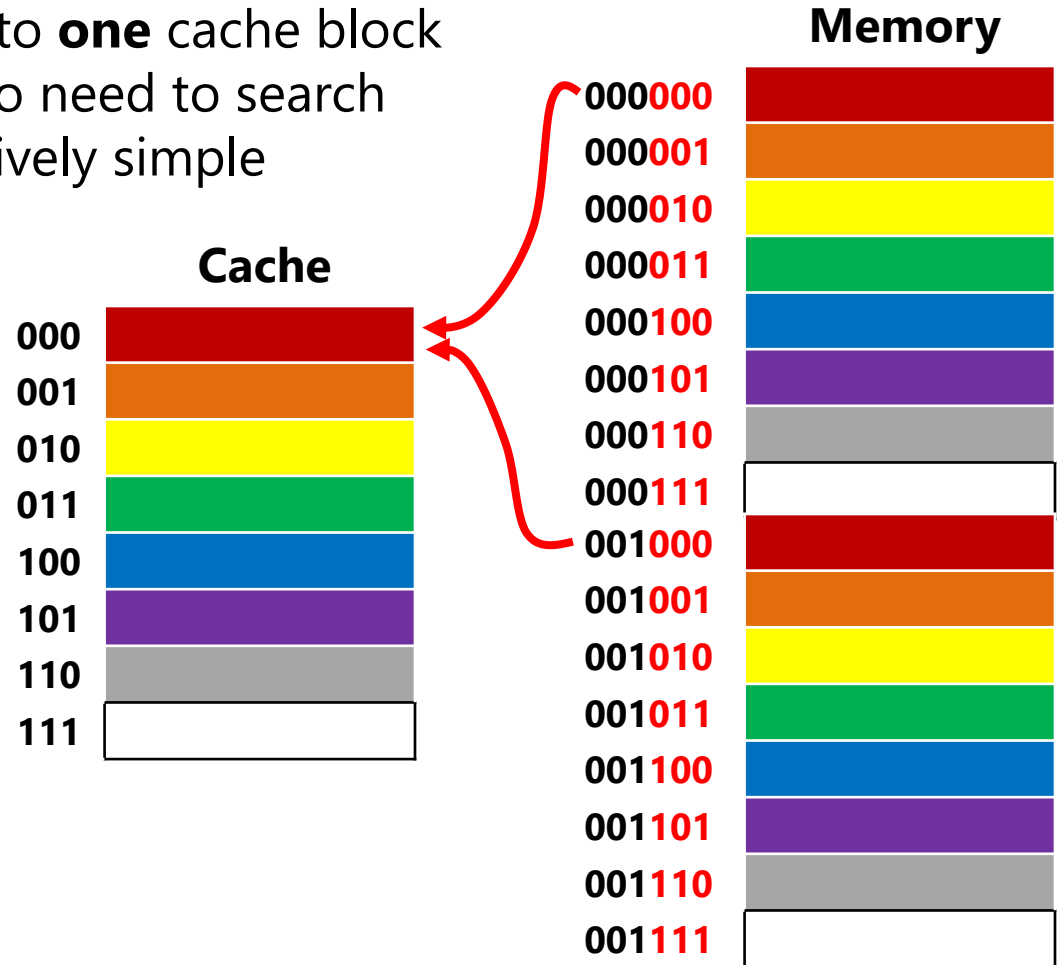
- When I refer to addresses, I will sometimes omit the lower 2 bits
(When we talk about cache block transfer, that part is irrelevant)

Direct-mapped Cache Hash Function

- Each memory address maps to **one** cache block
 - No chaining allowed so no need to search
 - Implementing this is relatively simple

For this 8-entry cache, to find **cache block index**, take the lowest 3 cache block offset bits in address.

But if our program accesses **001000**, then **000000**, how do we tell them apart? Tags!

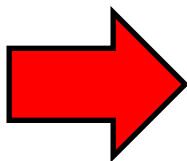


Tags

- Each cache block has a **tag** that indicates the original memory location

This seems redundant...

	Tag	Data
000	001000	DEADBEEF
001		
010		
011	110011	CAFEFACE
100	101100	B0DECA7
101		
110		
111		



For address **110011**, **011** is the **block index**, and **110** is the **tag**.

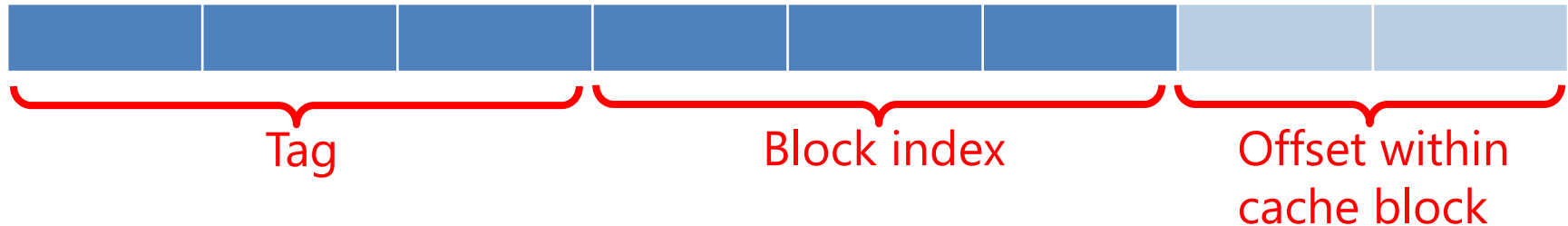
	Tag	Data
000	001	DEADBEEF
001		
010		
011	110	CAFEFACE
100	101	B0DECA7
101		
110		
111		

How do we tell what entries are empty/full?

Just add another bit (a **valid** bit)!

Address Bits Breakdown

- Now with the following parameters:
 - 8-bit memory addresses
 - 4-byte cache block sizes
 - 8-block cache
- How would we breakdown the memory address bits?



- First, the correct cache block is accessed using the **block index**
- Then, the **tag** is compared to the cache block tag
- If matched, **offset** is used to access specific byte within block

Example: A Direct-mapped Cache

- When the program first starts, we **set all the valid bits to 0**.
 - Signals all cache lines are empty
- Now let's try a sequence of reads...
do these **hit** or **miss**? How do the cache contents change?

000000 **miss**
100101 **miss**
100100 **miss**
100101 **hit**
010000 **miss** ← Cold miss
000000 **miss** ← Capacity miss?

} Cold misses

	V	Tag	Data
000	1	010	something
001	0		
010	0		
011	0		
100	1	100	something
101	1	100	something
110	0		
111	0		

Conflict Misses

- What should we call 2nd miss on **000000**?
 - Awkward to call it a capacity miss (It's not like capacity was lacking)
 - Let's call it a **conflict miss**

000000	miss	} Cold misses
100101	miss	
100100	miss	
100101	hit	
010000	miss	← Cold miss
000000	miss	← Capacity miss?

	V	Tag	Data
000	1	010	something
001	0		
010	0		
011	0		
100	1	100	something
101	1	100	something
110	0		
111	0		

Types of Cache Misses (Revised)

- Besides cold misses and capacity misses, there are conflict misses
- **Cold miss** (a.k.a. **compulsory miss**)
 - Miss suffered when data is accessed for the **first time** by program
- **Capacity miss**
 - Miss on a **repeat access** suffered due to a lack of **capacity**
 - When the program's **working set is larger than can fit in the cache**
- **Conflict miss**
 - Miss on a **repeat access** suffered due to a lack of **associativity**
 - **Associativity**: degree of freedom in associating cache block with an index
 - Direct mapped caches have no associativity
 - Since cache blocks are directly mapped to a particular block index

Associative caches

Flexible block placement

- Direct-mapped caches can have lots of **conflicts**
 - Multiple memory locations "fight" for the same cache line
- Suppose we had a 4-block direct-mapped cache
 - As before, 4-byte per cache block
 - Memory addresses are 8 bits.
- The following locations are accessed in a loop:
 - 0, 16, 32, 48, 0, 16, 32, 48...
 - or 000000, 000100, 001000, 001100, ...
- **What would happen?**
 - They will all land on the same block index, and all conflict miss!
 - Those other 3 blocks are not even getting used!
 - What if we used the space to chain conflicting blocks?

	V	Tag	Data
00	1	0011	
01	0		
10	0		
11	0		

Full associativity

- Let's make our 4-block cache **4-way set-associative**.

V	Tag	D
1	000000	*0

V	Tag	D
1	001100	*48

V	Tag	D
1	000100	*16

V	Tag	D
1	001000	*32

- What's the difference?
 - Now a hashed location can be associated with **any** of the 4 blocks
 - Analogous to having a hash conflict chain 4-entries long
 - The 4 cache blocks are said to be part of a cache **set**
 - When set size == cache size, it is said to be **fully associative**
- Let's do that sequence of reads again: 0, 16, 32, 48, 0, 16, 32, 48...
- Notice tag is now bigger, since there are no block index bits
 - Or **set index** bits in this context (just one set, so none needed)
- Now cache holds the entire **working set**: no more misses!

Example: A 2-way Set-Associative Cache

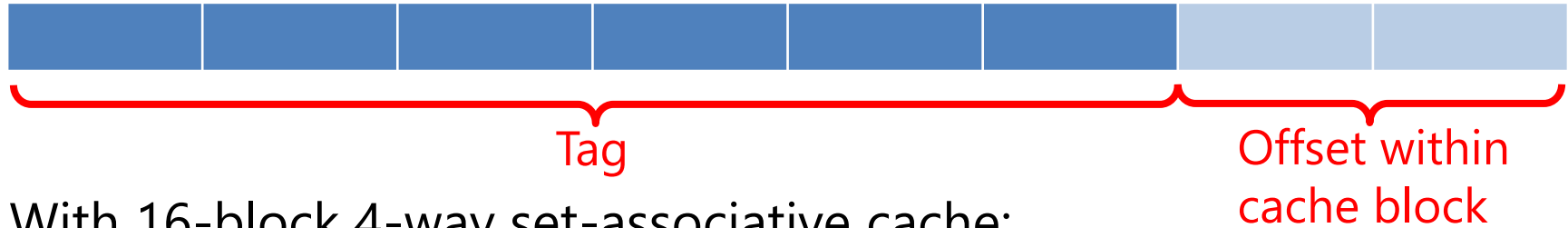
- 16-block 2-way set-associative cache
- Let's try the same stream of accesses as direct-mapped cache
- Yay! 2nd access to **000000** is no longer a conflict miss!

000000 miss
100101 miss
100100 miss
100101 hit
010000 miss
000000 hit

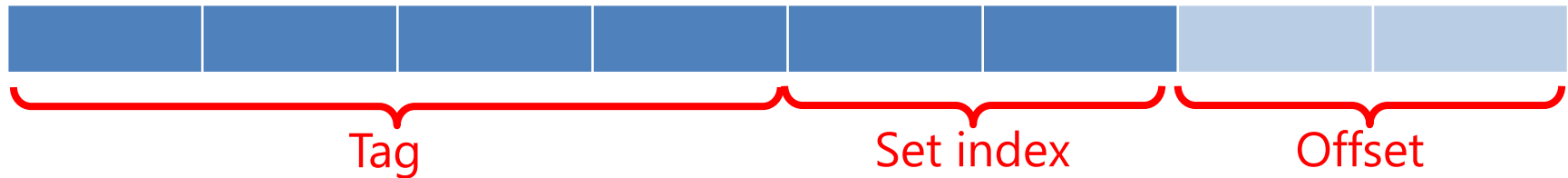
Set	V	Tag	Data	V	Tag	Data
000	1	000	something	1	010	something
001	0			0		
010	0			0		
011	0			0		
100	1	100	something	0		
101	1	100	something	0		
110	0			0		
111	0			0		

Address Bits Breakdown

- A fully associative cache (doesn't matter how many blocks):

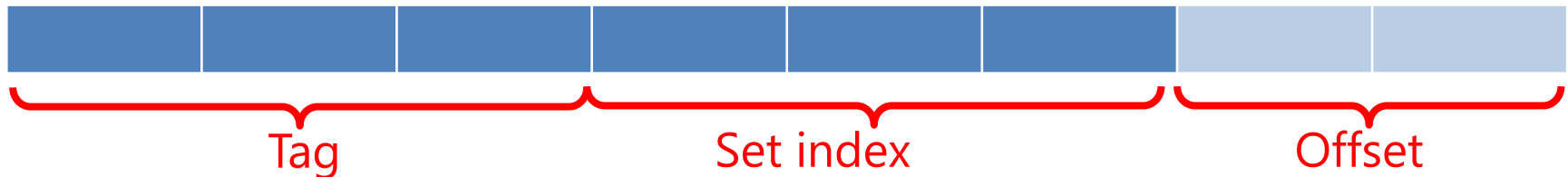


- With 16-block 4-way set-associative cache:



- $16 / 4 = 4$ sets in cache. So, 2 bits required for set index.

- With 64-block 8-way set-associative cache:



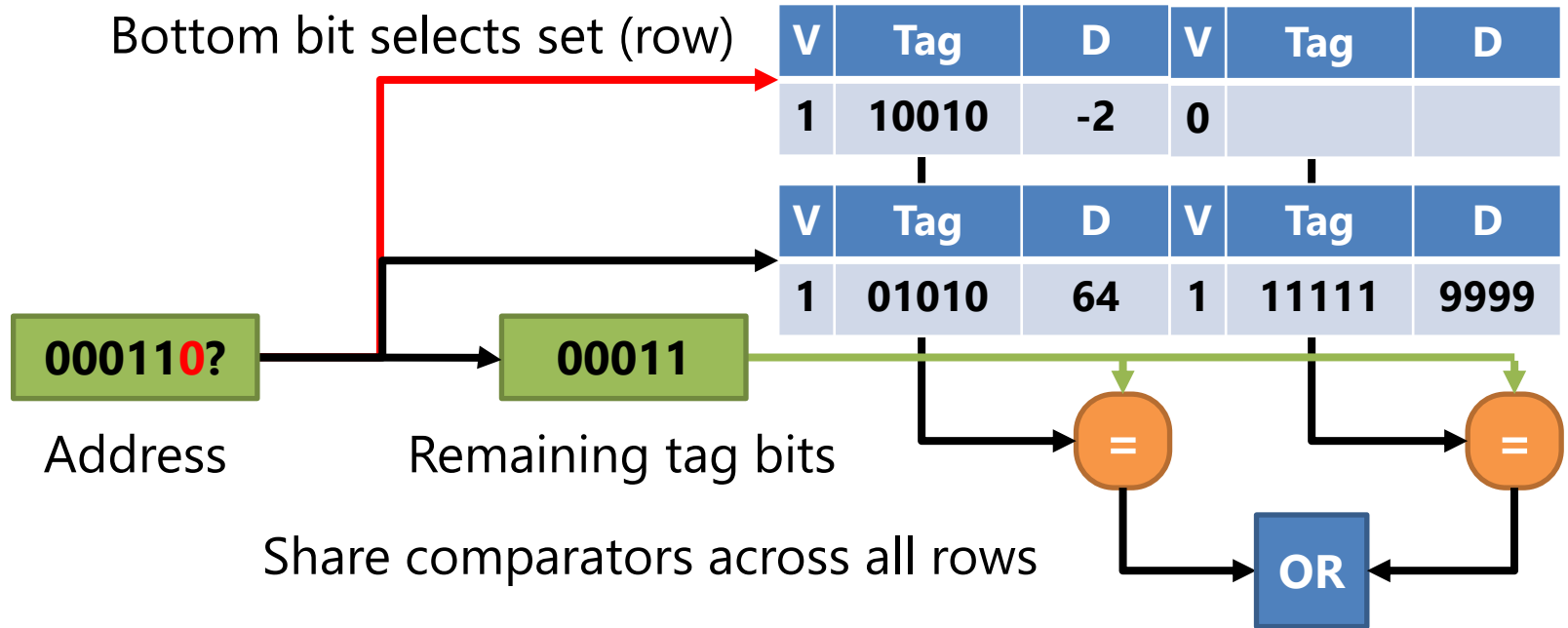
- $64 / 8 = 8$ sets in cache. So, 3 bits required for set index.

Want More Examples?

- Try out the Cache Visualizer on the course github:
 - https://github.com/wonsunahn/CS1541_Spring2022/tree/main/repositories/cache_demo
 - Courtesy of Jarrett Billingsley
- Visualizes cache organization for various parameters
 - Cache block size
 - Number of blocks in cache (capacity)
 - Cache associativity

Associativity is Costly

- Associativity requires complex circuitry and may **increase hit time**
- Full associativity is only used for very small caches
 - And where a cache miss is extremely costly
- Usually caches are 2-, 4-, or maybe 8- way set-associative



Cache Design Parameter 5: Cache Replacement Policy

Cache Replacement

- If we have a cache miss and no empty blocks, what then?

V	Tag	D
1	000000	*0

V	Tag	D
1	001100	*48

V	Tag	D
1	000001	*4

V	Tag	D
1	001000	*32

- Let's read memory address 4 (**00000100**).
 - Uh oh. That's a miss. Where do we put it?
- With associative caches, you must have a **replacement scheme**.
 - Which block to evict (kick out) when you're out of empty slots?
- The simplest replacement scheme is **random**.
 - Just pick one. Doesn't matter which.
- What would make more sense?
 - How about taking **temporal locality** into account?

LRU (Least-Recently-Used) Replacement

- When you need to evict a block, kick out the oldest one.

V	Tag	D
1	000001	*4

4 reads old

V	Tag	D
1	001100	*48

1 read old

V	Tag	D
1	000100	*16

3 reads old

V	Tag	D
1	001000	*32

2 reads old

- Our read history looked like 0, 16, 32, 48. How old are the blocks?
- Now we want to read address 4. Which block should we replace?
- But now we must maintain the age of the blocks
 - Easy to say. How do we keep track of this in hardware?
- Have a saturating counter for each cache block indicating age
 - When accessing a set, increment counter for each block in set
 - On a cache hit, reset counter to 0 (most recently used)

Impact of LRU on AMAT

- $AMAT = \text{hit time} + (\text{miss rate} \times \text{miss penalty})$
- Impact of LRU on **miss rate**
 - **Smaller miss rate** due to **better** leveraging of **temporal locality**
(Recently used cache lines more likely to be used again)
- Saturating counter for LRU uses bits and **adds to amount of metadata**
 - Cache **tag**, the **valid bit**, the **saturating counter** are all metadata
 - Every bit you spend on metadata is a bit you don't spend on real data
 - Spending many bits on counter may reduce capacity for real data
 - This may lead to a **larger miss rate**, if LRU is not very effective