

CS 230, Fall 2016  
Malloc Lab: Writing a Dynamic Storage Allocator  
Assigned: Tuesday Nov. 22, Due: Tuesday Dec. 6, 11:59PM

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## 1 Introduction

In this lab you will be writing a dynamic storage allocator for C programs, i.e., your own version of the `malloc`, `free` and `realloc` routines. You are encouraged to explore the design space creatively and implement an allocator that is correct, efficient and fast.

## 2 Hand Out Instructions

Start by copying `malloclab-handout.tar` to a protected directory in which you plan to do your work. The following command copies the compressed tar file that contains required for this lab, to your home directory.

```
linux> cp /home/lab/malloclab-handout.tar ~
```

Then decompress the tarfile by typing the following command.

```
linux> tar xvf malloclab-handout.tar
```

This will cause a number of files to be unpacked into the directory. The only file you will be modifying and handing in is `mm.c`. The `mdriver.c` program is a driver program that allows you to evaluate the performance of your solution. Use the command `make` to generate the driver code and run it with the command `./mdriver -V`. (The `-V` flag displays helpful summary information.)

When you have completed the lab, you will hand in only one file (`mm.c`), which contains your solution.

### 3 How to Work on the Lab

Your dynamic storage allocator will consist of the following four functions, which are declared in `mm.h` and defined in `mm.c`.

```
int    mm_init(void);
void *mm_malloc(size_t size);
void   mm_free(void *ptr);
void *mm_realloc(void *ptr, size_t size);
```

The `mm.c` file we have given you implements the simplest but still functionally correct malloc package that we could think of. Using this as a starting place, modify these functions (and possibly define other private static functions), so that they obey the following semantics:

- **mm\_init:** Before calling `mm_malloc`, `mm_realloc` or `mm_free`, the application program (i.e., the trace-driven driver program that you will use to evaluate your implementation) calls `mm_init` to perform any necessary initializations, such as allocating the initial heap area. The return value should be -1 if there was a problem in performing the initialization, 0 otherwise.
- **mm\_malloc:** The `mm_malloc` routine returns a pointer to an allocated block payload of at least `size` bytes. The entire allocated block should lie within the heap region and should not overlap with any other allocated chunk.

We will compare your implementation to the version of `malloc` supplied in the standard C library (`libc`). Since the `libc` `malloc` always returns payload pointers that are aligned to 8 bytes, your `malloc` implementation should do likewise and always return 8-byte aligned pointers.

- **mm\_free:** The `mm_free` routine frees the block pointed to by `ptr`. It returns nothing. This routine is only guaranteed to work when the passed pointer (`ptr`) was returned by an earlier call to `mm_malloc` or `mm_realloc` and has not yet been freed.
- **mm\_realloc:** The `mm_realloc` routine returns a pointer to an allocated region of at least `size` bytes with the following constraints.
  - if `ptr` is `NULL`, the call is equivalent to `mm_malloc(size)`;
  - if `size` is equal to zero, the call is equivalent to `mm_free(ptr)`;
  - if `ptr` is not `NULL`, it must have been returned by an earlier call to `mm_malloc` or `mm_realloc`. The call to `mm_realloc` changes the size of the memory block pointed to by `ptr` (the *old block*) to `size` bytes and returns the address of the new block. Notice that the address of the new block might be the same as the old block, or it might be different, depending on your implementation, the amount of internal fragmentation in the old block, and the size of the `realloc` request.

The contents of the new block are the same as those of the old `ptr` block, up to the minimum of the old and new sizes. Everything else is uninitialized. For example, if the old block is 8 bytes and the new block is 12 bytes, then the first 8 bytes of the new block are identical to the first 8

bytes of the old block and the last 4 bytes are uninitialized. Similarly, if the old block is 8 bytes and the new block is 4 bytes, then the contents of the new block are identical to the first 4 bytes of the old block.

These semantics match the semantics of the corresponding `libc malloc`, `realloc`, and `free` routines. Type `man malloc` to the shell for complete documentation.

## 4 Support Routines

The `memlib.c` package simulates the memory system for your dynamic memory allocator. You can invoke the following functions in `memlib.c`:

- `void *mem_sbrk(int incr)`: Expands the heap by `incr` bytes, where `incr` is a positive non-zero integer and returns a generic pointer to the first byte of the newly allocated heap area. The semantics are identical to the Unix `sbrk` function, except that `mem_sbrk` accepts only a positive non-zero integer argument.
- `void *mem_heap_lo(void)`: Returns a generic pointer to the first byte in the heap.
- `void *mem_heap_hi(void)`: Returns a generic pointer to the last byte in the heap.
- `size_t mem_heapsize(void)`: Returns the current size of the heap in bytes.
- `size_t mem_pagesize(void)`: Returns the system's page size in bytes (4K on Linux systems).

## 5 The Trace-driven Driver Program

The driver program `mdriver.c` in the `malloclab-handout.tar` distribution tests your `mm.c` package for correctness, space utilization, and throughput. The driver program is controlled by a set of *trace files* that are included in the `malloclab-handout.tar` distribution. Each trace file contains a sequence of allocate, reallocate, and free directions that instruct the driver to call your `mm_malloc`, `mm_realloc`, and `mm_free` routines in some sequence. The driver and the trace files are the same ones we will use when we grade your handin `mm.c` file.

The driver `mdriver.c` accepts the following command line arguments:

- `-f <tracefile>`: Use one particular `tracefile` for testing instead of the default set of tracefiles.
- `-h`: Print a summary of the command line arguments.
- `-l`: Run and measure `libc malloc` in addition to the student's `malloc` package.
- `-v`: Verbose output. Print a performance breakdown for each tracefile in a compact table.
- `-V`: More verbose output. Prints additional diagnostic information as each trace file is processed. Useful during debugging for determining which trace file is causing your `malloc` package to fail.

## 6 Programming Rules

- You should not change any of the interfaces in `mm.c`.
- You should not invoke any memory-management related library calls or system calls. This excludes the use of `malloc`, `calloc`, `free`, `realloc`, `sbrk`, `brk` or any variants of these calls in your code.
- You are not allowed to define any global or `static` compound data structures such as arrays, structs, trees, or lists in your `mm.c` program. However, you *are* allowed to declare global scalar variables such as integers, floats, and pointers in `mm.c`.
- For consistency with the `libc malloc` package, which returns blocks aligned on 8-byte boundaries, your allocator must always return pointers that are aligned to 8-byte boundaries. The driver will enforce this requirement for you.

## 7 Evaluation

You will receive **zero points** if you break any of the rules or your code is buggy and crashes the driver. Otherwise, your grade will be calculated as follows:

- *Correctness (20 points)*. You will receive full points if your solution passes the correctness tests performed by the driver program. You will receive partial credit for each correct trace.
- *Performance (35 points)*. Two performance metrics will be used to evaluate your solution:
  - *Space utilization*: The peak ratio between the aggregate amount of memory used by the driver (i.e., allocated via `mm_malloc` or `mm_realloc` but not yet freed via `mm_free`) and the size of the heap used by your allocator. The optimal ratio equals to 1. You should find good policies to minimize fragmentation in order to make this ratio as close as possible to the optimal.
  - *Throughput*: The average number of operations completed per second.

The driver program summarizes the performance of your allocator by computing a *performance index*,  $P$ , which is a weighted sum of the space utilization and throughput

$$P = wU + (1 - w) \min \left( 1, \frac{T}{T_{libc}} \right)$$

where  $U$  is your space utilization,  $T$  is your throughput, and  $T_{libc}$  is the estimated throughput of `libc malloc` on your system on the default traces.<sup>1</sup> The performance index favors space utilization over throughput, with a default of  $w = 0.6$ .

Observing that both memory and CPU cycles are expensive system resources, we adopt this formula to encourage balanced optimization of both memory utilization and throughput. Ideally, the performance

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<sup>1</sup>The value for  $T_{libc}$  is a constant in the driver (600 Kops/s) that your instructor established when they configured the program.

index will reach  $P = w + (1 - w) = 1$  or 100%. Since each metric will contribute at most  $w$  and  $1 - w$  to the performance index, respectively, you should not go to extremes to optimize either the memory utilization or the throughput only. To receive a good score, you must achieve a balance between utilization and throughput.

## 8 Handin Instructions

- To hand in your `mm.c` file, type: `linux> submit Lab6 mm.c`  
in the directory where `mm.c` file exists.
- You should verify your handin by typing  
`linux> submit check Lab6`

You may submit your solution for testing as many times as you wish up until the due date. Only the last version you submit will be graded.

## 9 Hints

- *Use the `mdriver -f` option.* During initial development, using tiny trace files will simplify debugging and testing. We have included two such trace files (`short1, 2-bal.rep`) that you can use for initial debugging.
- *Use the `mdriver -v` and `-V` options.* The `-v` option will give you a detailed summary for each trace file. The `-V` will also indicate when each trace file is read, which will help you isolate errors.
- *Compile with `gcc -g` and use a debugger.* A debugger will help you isolate and identify out of bounds memory references.
- *Understand every line of the `malloc` implementation in the textbook.* The textbook has a detailed example of a simple allocator based on an implicit free list. Use this as a point of departure. Don't start working on your allocator until you understand everything about the simple implicit list allocator.
- *Encapsulate your pointer arithmetic in C preprocessor macros.* Pointer arithmetic in memory managers is confusing and error-prone because of all the casting that is necessary. You can reduce the complexity significantly by writing macros for your pointer operations. See the text for examples.
- *Do your implementation in stages.* The first 9 traces contain requests to `malloc` and `free`. The last 2 traces contain requests for `realloc`, `malloc`, and `free`. We recommend that you start by getting your `malloc` and `free` routines working correctly and efficiently on the first 9 traces. Only then should you turn your attention to the `realloc` implementation. For starters, build `realloc` on top of your existing `malloc` and `free` implementations. But to get really good performance, you will need to build a stand-alone `realloc`.
- *Use a profiler.* You may find the `gprof` tool helpful for optimizing performance.

Good luck!