Malware

NIST 800-83 defines malware as:

"a program that is inserted into a system, usually covertly, with the intent of compromising the confidentiality, integrity, or availability of the victim's data, applications, or operating system or otherwise annoying or disrupting the victim."

Name	Description
Advanced persistent threat	Cybercrime directed at business and political targets, using a wide variety of intrusion technologies and malware, applied persistently and effectively to specific targets over an extended period, often attributed to state-sponsored organizations.
Adware	Advertising that is integrated into software. It can result in pop-up ads or redirection of a browser to a commercial site.
Attack Kit	Set of tools for generating new malware automatically using a variety of supplied propagation and payload mechanisms.
Auto-rooter	Malicious hacker tools used to break into new machines remotely.
Backdoor (trapdoor)	Any mechanisms that bypasses a normal security check; it may allow unauthorized access to functionality in a program, or onto a compromised system.
Downloaders	Code that installs other items on a machine that is under attack. It is normally included in the malware code first inserted on to a compromised system to then import a larger malware package.
Drive-by download	An attack using code in a compromised web site that exploits a browser vulnerability to attack a client system when the site is viewed.
Exploits	Code specific to a single vulnerability or set of vulnerabilities.
Flooders (DoS client)	Used to generate a large volume of data to attack networked computer systems, by carrying out some form of denial-of-service (DoS) attack.
Keyloggers	Captures keystrokes on a compromised system.
Logic bomb	Code inserted into malware by an intruder. A logic bomb lies dormant until a predefined condition is met; the code then triggers an unauthorized act.
Macro Virus	A type of virus that uses macro or scripting code, typically embedded in a document, and triggered when the document is viewed or edited, to run and replicate itself into other such documents.
Mobile Code	Software (e.g., script, macro, or other portable instruction) that can be shipped unchanged to a heterogeneous collection of platforms and execute with identical semantics.
Rootkit	Set of hacker tools used after attacker has broken into a computer system and gained root-level access.
Spammer Programs	Used to send large volumes of unwanted e-mail.
Spyware	Software that collects information from a computer and transmits it to another system by monitoring keystrokes, screen data and/or network traffic; or by scanning files on the system for sensitive information.
Trojan horse	A computer program that appears to have a useful function, but also has a hidden and potentially malicious function that evades security mechanisms, sometimes by exploiting legitimate authorizations of a system entity that invokes the Trojan horse program.
Virus	Malware that, when executed, tries to replicate itself into other executable machine or script code; when it succeeds the code is said to be infected. When the infected code is executed, the virus also executes.
Worm	A computer program that can run independently and can propagate a complete working version of itself onto other hosts on a network, usually by exploiting software vulnerabilities in the target system.
Zombie, bot	Program activated on an infected machine that is activated to launch attacks on other machines.

Table 6.1 Malware Terminology

(Table can be found on page 185 in the textbook.)

Classification of Malware

Classified into two broad categories:

- Based first on how it spreads or propagates to reach the desired targets
- Then on the actions or payloads it performs once a target is reached

Also classified by:

- Those that need a host program (parasitic code such as viruses)
- Those that are independent, self-contained programs (worms, trojans, and bots)
- Malware that does not replicate (trojans and spam e-mail)
- Malware that does replicate (viruses and worms)

Types of Malicious Software (Malware)

Propagation mechanisms include:

- Infection of existing content by viruses that is subsequently spread to other systems
- Exploit of software vulnerabilities by worms or drive-by-downloads to allow the malware to replicate
- Social engineering attacks that convince users to bypass security mechanisms to install Trojans or to respond to phishing attacks

Payload actions performed by malware once it reaches a target system can include:

- Corruption of system or data files
- Theft of service/make the system a zombie agent of attack as part of a botnet
- Theft of information from the system/keylogging
- Stealthing/hiding its presence on the system

Attack Sources

- Another significant malware development is the change from attackers being individuals often motivated to demonstrate their technical competence to their peers to more organized and dangerous attack sources such as:

- This has significantly changed the resources available and motivation behind the rise of malware and has led to development of a large underground economy involving the sale of attack kits, access to compromised hosts, and to stolen information

Advanced Persistent Threats (APTs)

- Well-resourced, persistent application of a wide variety of intrusion technologies and malware to selected targets (usually business or political)
- Typically attributed to state-sponsored organizations and criminal enterprises
- Differ from other types of attack by their careful target selection and stealthy intrusion efforts over extended periods
- High profile attacks include Aurora, RSA, APT1, and Stuxnet

APT Characteristics

Advanced

- Used by the attackers of a wide variety of intrusion technologies and malware including the development of custom malware if required
- The individual components may not necessarily be technically advanced but are carefully selected to suit the chosen target

Persistent

- Determined application of the attacks over an extended period against the chosen target in order to maximize the chance of success
- A variety of attacks may be progressively applied until the target is compromised

Threats

- Threats to the selected targets as a result of the organized, capable, and well-funded attackers intent to compromise the specifically chosen targets
- The active involvement of people in the process greatly raises the threat level from that due to automated attacks tools, and also the likelihood of successful attacks

APT Attacks

- Aim:
  - Varies from theft of intellectual property or security and infrastructure related data to the physical disruption of infrastructure
- Techniques used:
  - Social engineering
  - Spear-phishing email
  - Drive-by-downloads from selected compromised websites likely to be visited by personnel in the target organization
- Intent:
  - To infect the target with sophisticated malware with multiple propagation mechanisms and payloads
  - Once they have gained initial access to systems in the target organization a further range of attack tools are used to maintain and extend their access

Viruses

- Piece of software that infects programs
  - Modifies them to include a copy of the virus
  - Replicates and goes on to infect other content
  - Easily spread through network environments
- When attached to an executable program a virus can do anything that the program is permitted to do
  - Executes secretly when the host program is run
- Specific to operating system and hardware
  - Takes advantage of their details and weaknesses

Virus Components

Infection mechanism

- Means by which a virus spreads or propagates
- Also referred to as the *infection vector*

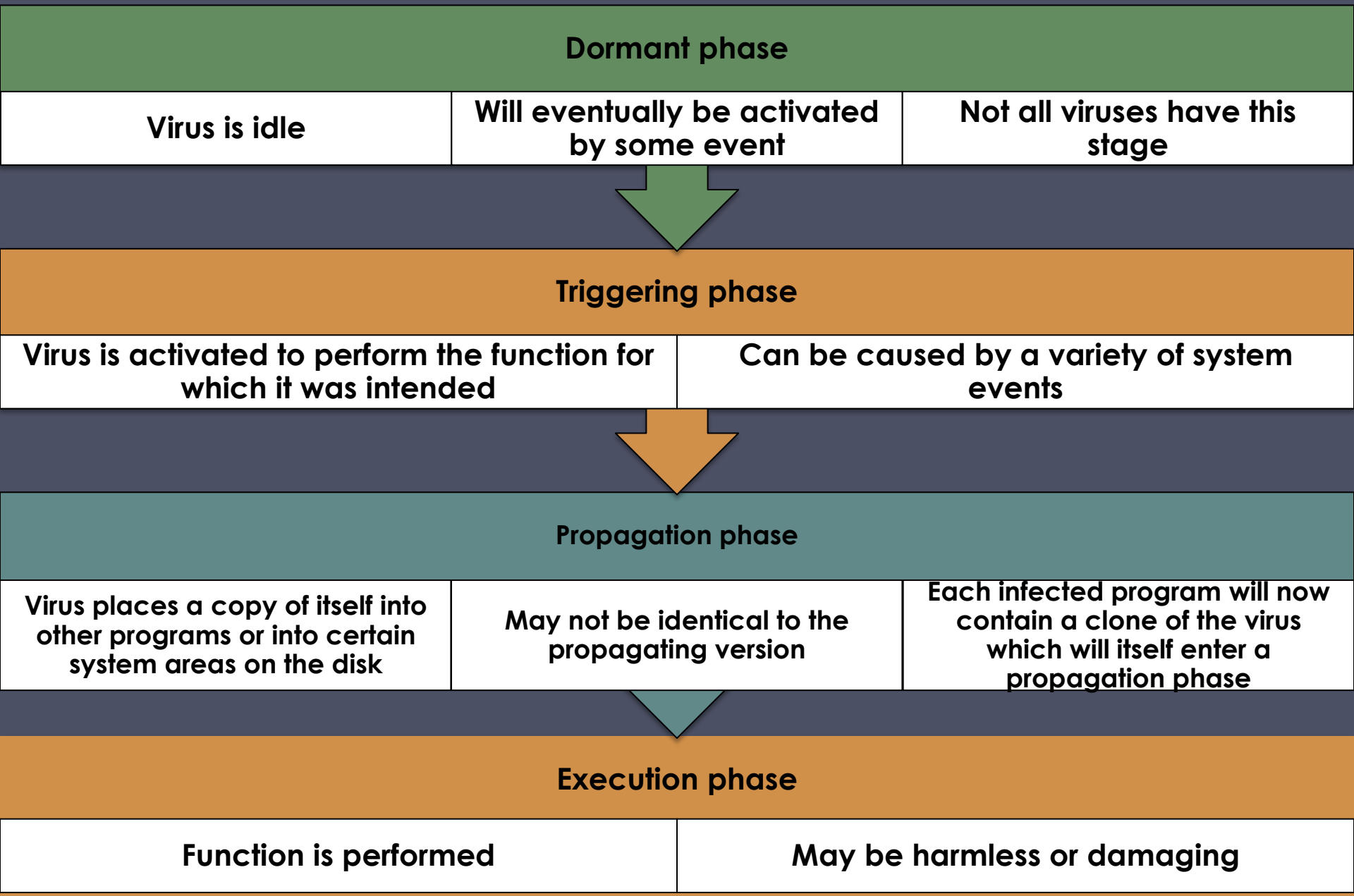
Trigger

- Event or condition that determines when the payload is activated or delivered
- Sometimes known as a *logic bomb*

Payload

- What the virus does (besides spreading)
- May involve damage or benign but noticeable activity

Virus Phases



Virus Classifications

Classification by target

- Boot sector infector
  - Infects a master boot record or boot record and spreads when a system is booted from the disk containing the virus
- File infector
  - Infects files that the operating system or shell considers to be executable
- Macro virus
  - Infects files with macro or scripting code that is interpreted by an application
- Multipartite virus
  - Infects files in multiple ways

Classification by concealment strategy

- Encrypted virus
  - A portion of the virus creates a random encryption key and encrypts the remainder of the virus
- Stealth virus
  - A form of virus explicitly designed to hide itself from detection by anti-virus software
- Polymorphic virus
  - A virus that mutates with every infection
- Metamorphic virus
  - A virus that mutates and rewrites itself completely at each iteration and may change behavior as well as appearance

Worms

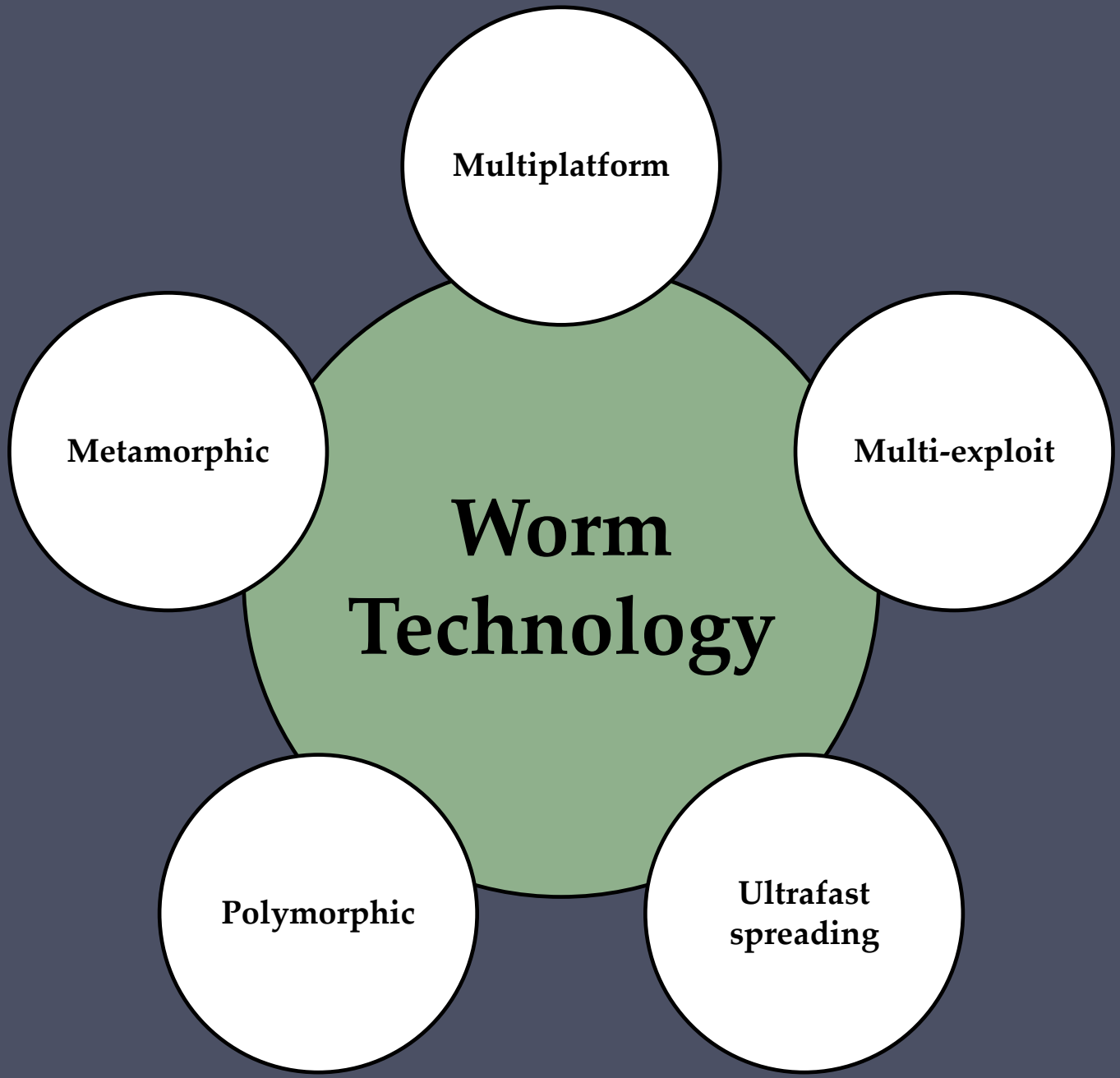
- Program that actively seeks out more machines to infect and each infected machine serves as an automated launching pad for attacks on other machines
- Exploits software vulnerabilities in client or server programs
- Can use network connections to spread from system to system
- Spreads through shared media (USB drives, CD, DVD data disks)
- E-mail worms spread in macro or script code included in attachments and instant messenger file transfers
- Upon activation the worm may replicate and propagate again
- Usually carries some form of payload
- First known implementation was done in Xerox Palo Alto Labs in the early 1980s

Worm Replication

Electronic mail or instant messenger facility	• Worm e-mails a copy of itself to other systems • Sends itself as an attachment via an instant message service
File sharing	• Creates a copy of itself or infects a file as a virus on removable media
Remote execution capability	• Worm executes a copy of itself on another system
Remote file access or transfer capability	• Worm uses a remote file access or transfer service to copy itself from one system to the other
Remote login capability	• Worm logs onto a remote system as a user and then uses commands to copy itself from one system to the other

Target Discovery

- Scanning (or fingerprinting)
  - First function in the propagation phase for a network worm
  - Searches for other systems to infect
- Random
  - Each compromised host probes random addresses in the IP address space using a different seed
  - This produces a high volume of Internet traffic which may cause generalized disruption even before the actual attack is launched
- Hit-list
  - The attacker first compiles a long list of potential vulnerable machines
  - Once the list is compiled the attacker begins infecting machines on the list
  - Each infected machine is provided with a portion of the list to scan
  - This results in a very short scanning period which may make it difficult to detect that infection is taking place
- Topological
  - This method uses information contained on an infected victim machine to find more hosts to scan
- Local subnet
  - If a host can be infected behind a firewall that host then looks for targets in its own local network
  - The host uses the subnet address structure to find other hosts that would otherwise be protected by the firewall


Multiplatform
Metamorphic
Multi-exploit
Worm Technology
Polymorphic
Ultrafast spreading

- **Multiplatform**: Newer worms are not limited to Windows machines but can attack a variety of platforms, especially the popular varieties of UNIX; or exploit macro or scripting languages supported in popular document types.
- **Multi-exploit**: New worms penetrate systems in a variety of ways, using exploits against Web servers, browsers, e-mail, file sharing, and other network-based applications; or via shared media.

- **Ultrafast spreading**: Exploit various techniques to optimize the rate of spread of a worm to maximize its likelihood of locating as many vulnerable machines as possible in a short time period.

- **Polymorphic**: To evade detection, skip past filters, and foil real-time analysis, worms adopt the virus polymorphic technique. Each copy of the worm has new code generated on the fly using functionally equivalent instructions and encryption techniques.

- **Metamorphic**: In addition to changing their appearance, metamorphic worms have a repertoire of behavior patterns that are unleashed at different stages ofpropagation.

Malware Countermeasure Approaches

- Ideal solution to the threat of malware is prevention

Four main elements of prevention:

- Policy
- Awareness
- Vulnerability mitigation
- Threat mitigation

- If prevention fails, technical mechanisms can be used to support the following threat mitigation options:
  - Detection
  - Identification
  - Removal

Generations of Anti-Virus Software

First generation: simple scanners

- Requires a malware signature to identify the malware
- Limited to the detection of known malware

Second generation: heuristic scanners

- Uses heuristic rules to search for probable malware instances
- Another approach is integrity checking

Third generation: activity traps

- Memory-resident programs that identify malware by its actions rather than its structure in an infected program

Fourth generation: full-featured protection

- Packages consisting of a variety of anti-virus techniques used in conjunction
- Include scanning and activity trap components and access control capability

Sandbox Analysis

- Running potentially malicious code in an emulated sandbox or on a virtual machine
- Allows the code to execute in a controlled environment where its behavior can be closely monitored without threatening the security of a real system
- Running potentially malicious software in such environments enables the detection of complex encrypted, polymorphic, or metamorphic malware
- The most difficult design issue with sandbox analysis is to determine how long to run each interpretation

Host-Based Behavior-Blocking Software

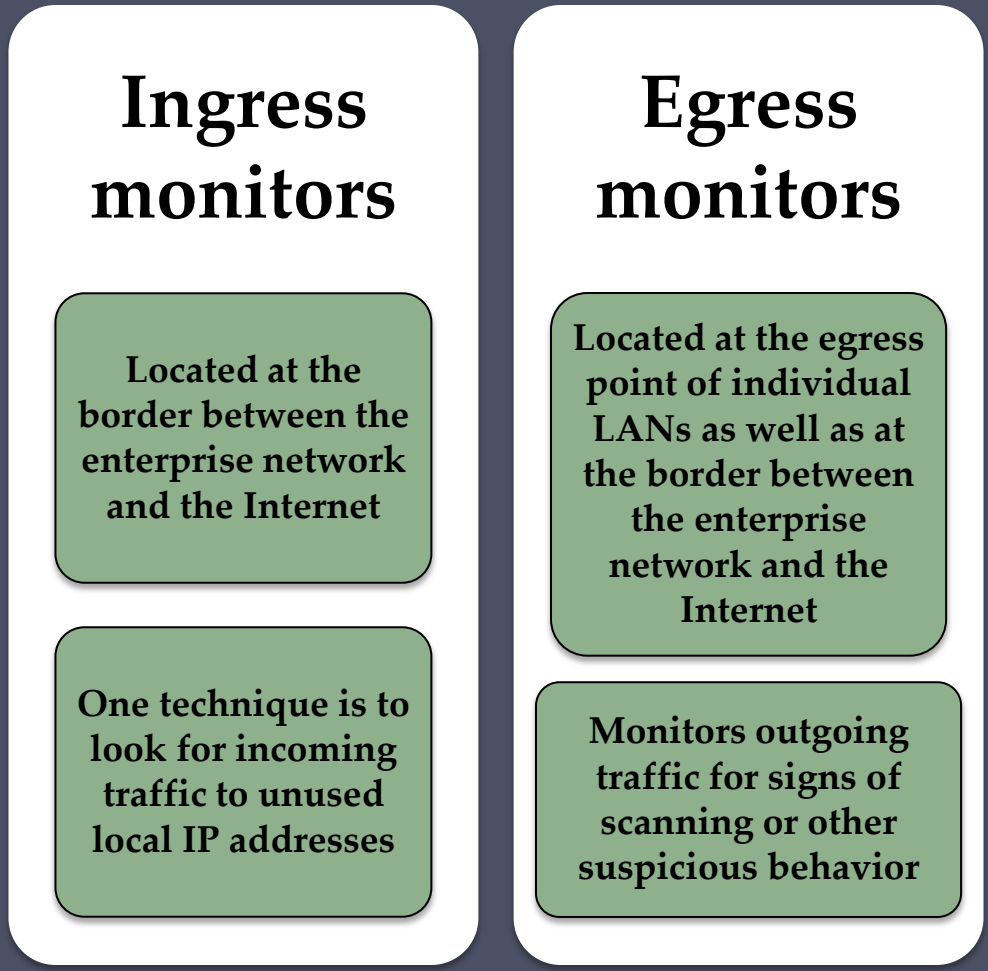
- Integrates with the operating system of a host computer and monitors program behavior in real time for malicious action
  - Blocks potentially malicious actions before they have a chance to affect the system
  - Blocks software in real time so it has an advantage over anti-virus detection techniques such as fingerprinting or heuristics

Limitations

- Because malicious code must run on the target machine before all its behaviors can be identified, it can cause harm before it has been detected and blocked

Perimeter Scanning Approaches

- Anti-virus software typically included in e-mail and Web proxy services running on an organization's firewall and IDS
- May also be included in the traffic analysis component of an IDS
- May include intrusion prevention measures, blocking the flow of any suspicious traffic
- Approach is limited to scanning malware



Two types of monitoring software