CS 455: Introduction To Distributed Systems

[Thread Safety]

Retrospective on making a thread-safe class better!

You may extend, but not always
Depends, it does, on the code maze
Is the fear of making things worse
Making you scamper from that source?
Composition is the wind in your sails
Use it, when all else fails

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Frequently asked questions from the previous class survey

- Where are ThreadLocal objects stored?
- Is passing a reference of `this` to another class always a race condition?
  - Do inner private classes maintain the thread-safety of the outer class
- Preferable to use private locks instead of synchronized?
- Make objects immutable whenever possible?

Topics covered in this lecture

- Adding functionality to a thread-safe class
- Synchronized & Concurrent Collections
- Locking strategies
  - Lock striping
- Synchronizers

Vehicle Tracker Application

A Vehicle Tracker application

- Each vehicle
  - Identified by a `String`
  - Location represented by `(x,y)` coordinates
- `VehicleTracker` class
  - Tracks identity and location of all known vehicles

Viewer thread and Updater Thread

Viewer

```
Map<String, Point> locations = vehicles.getLocations();

for (String key: locations.keySet())
    renderVehicle(key, locations.get(key) );
```

Updater

```
public void vehicleMoved(VehicleMovedEvent evt) {
   Point loc = evt.getNewLocation();
   vehicles.setLocation(evt.getVehicleId(), loc.x, loc.y);
}
```

The `MonitorVehicleTracker`

```
public class MonitorVehicleTracker {
   private final Map<String, MutablePoint> locations;

   public synchronized Map<String, MutablePoint> getLocations() {
      return deepCopy(locations);
   }

   public synchronized MutablePoint getLocation(String id) {
      MutablePoint loc = locations.get(id);
      return loc == null? null: new MutablePoint(loc);
   }

   public synchronized void setLocation(String id, int x, int y){
      MutablePoint loc = locations.get(id);
      if (loc == null) {throw IllegalArgumentException(...)}
      loc.x = x;
      loc.y = y;
   }
      private deepCopy() { ... }
}
```


The tracker class is thread-safe, even though `MutablePoint` may not be

```
public class MutablePoint {
   public int x, y;

   public MutablePoint() {x=0; y=0;}

   public MutablePoint(MutablePoint p) {
     this.x = p.x;
     this.y = p.y;
   }
}
```


What the `deepCopy()` looks like

```
public class MonitorVehicleTracker {

   ...

   private Map<String, MutablePoint>
     deepCopy(Map<String, MutablePoint> m) {
       Map<String, MutablePoint>  result =
          new HashMap<String, MutablePoint>();

       for (String id: m.keySet())
          result.put(id, new MutablePoint(m.get(id)) );
       return Collections.unmodifiableMap(result);
   }
}
```


The `Collections` utility class

- `List<String> readOnlyList = Collections.unmodifiableList(myList);`
- Note:
  - Nothing to *differentiate* this as a read-only list
  - You have access to the mutator methods
    - But calling them results in an `UnsupportedException`

Delegating thread-safety

```
public class DelegatingVehicleTracker {
   private final ConcurrentMap<String, Point> locations;
   private final Map<String, Point> unmodifiableMap;

   public DelegatingVehicleTracker(Map<String, Point>points {
      locations = new ConcurrentHashMap<String, Point>(points);
      unmodifiableMap = Collections.unmodifiableMap(locations);
   }

   public Map<String, Point> getLocations() {
      return unmodifiableMap;
   }

  public Point getLocation(String id) {return locations.get(id);}

   public void setLocation(String id, int x, int y) {
     if (locations.replace(id, new ImmutablePoint(x, y)) == null)
         throw new IllegalArgumentException("Invalid Vehicle ID);
   }
}
```


Immutable `Point`

```
public class ImmutablePoint {
   public final int x, y;

   public ImmutablePoint(int x, int y) {
     this.x = x;
     this.y = y;
   }
}
```

When delegation fails

```
public class NumberRange {
   private final AtomicInteger lower = new AtomicInteger(0);
   private final AtomicInteger upper = new AtomicInteger(0);

   public void setLower(int i) {
      if (i > upper.get() ) {
         throw IllegalArgumentException("lower > upper!");
      }
   }

   public void setUpper(int i) {
      if (i < lower.get() ) {
         throw IllegalArgumentException("upper < lower!");
      }
   }
   public boolean isInRange(int i){
      return (i >= lower.get() && i <= upper.get());
   }
}
```

Adding functionality to existing thread-safe classes

Adding functionality to existing thread-safe classes

- Sometimes we have a thread-safe class that supports ***almost all*** the operations we need
- We should be able to add a new operation to it *without undermining its thread safety*

Adding a put-if-absent function to a List

- The operation *put-if-absent* must be atomic
- If `List` does not have **X** and we add **X** twice?
  - It's a problem because the collection should only have one **X**
- But if *put-if-absent* is not atomic?
  - Two threads could see that **X** is absent and the list then has 2 copies of **X**

Adding additional operations

1. Safest way is to **modify** the original class
2. **Extend** the class
   - Often base classes do not expose enough of their state to allow this approach
3. Place the extension code in a "**helper class**"
4. **Composition**

Extending `Vector` to have a put-if-absent method

```
public class BetterVector<E> extends Vector<E> {

   public synchronized boolean putIfAbsent(E x) {
     boolean absent = !contains(x);

     if (absent) {
        add(x);
     }
     return absent;
   }
}
```

Client side locking

- Sometimes extending a class or adding a method is not possible
- For e.g., if `ArrayList` is wrapped with a `Collections.SynchronizedList` wrapper
  - Client code does not even know the class of the `List` object
- In such situations, the 3rd strategy of using a helper class comes in

Client-side locking

```
public class ListHelper<E> {

   public List<E> list =
     Collections.synchronizedList(new ArrayList<E>());

   ...

   public synchronized boolean putIfAbsent(E x) {
     boolean absent = !list.contains(x);

     if (absent) {
        list.add(x);
     }
     return absent;
   }
}
```

Using the intrinsic lock of ListHelper to synchronize access to List

Client-side locking: Let's try again …

```
public class ListHelper<E> {

   private List<E> list =
     Collections.synchronizedList(new ArrayList<E>());

   ...

   public boolean putIfAbsent(E x) {
     synchronized(list) {
        boolean absent = !list.contains(x);

        if (absent) {
          list.add(x);
        }
        return absent;
     }
   }
}
```

Contrasting extending a class AND client side locking

- Extending a class to add an atomic operation?
  - **Distributes locking code** over multiple classes in the *object hierarchy*
- Client side locking is **even more fragile**
  - We put locking code for a `Class C` in classes that are *completely unrelated* to it

Composition: A less fragile alternative to adding an atomic operation

```
public class ImprovedList<T> implements List<T> {
   private final List<T> list = new ArrayList<T>();
   ...
   public synchronized boolean putIfAbsent(T x) {
      boolean absent = !list.contains(x);

      if (absent) {
          list.add(x);
        }
      return absent;
     }
   }
   public synchronized void clear() {list.clear();}
   // delegate other list methods ...
}
```


More about the `ImprovedList`

- No worries *even if* the underlying `List` is not thread-safe
- `ImprovedList` uses its intrinsic lock
- Extra layer of synchronization may add small performance penalty
  - But it is much better than attempting to mimick the locking strategy of another object

SYNCHRONIZED COLLECTIONS

Synchronized collections

- These include classes such as `Vector` and `Hashtable`
- There is also the **synchronized wrapper** classes
  - Created by `Collections.synchronizedX` factory methods
    - E.g., `Collections.synchronizedList(List list)`, `Collections.synchronizedMap(Map m)`, `Collections.synchronizedSet(Set s)`

Problems with synchronized collections

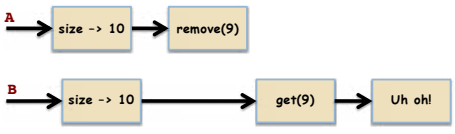
- Thread-safe but *additional client-side locking needed* to guard **compound actions**
  - Iteration
  - Navigation
    - Find the next element
  - Conditional operations
    - Put-if-absent

Compound actions producing confusing results

```
public Object getLast(Vector list) {
   int lastIndex = list.size() – 1;
   return list.get(lastIndex);
}

public void deleteLast(Vector list) {
   int lastIndex = list.size() -1;
   list.remove(lastIndex);
}
```

Interleaving of `getLast` and `deleteLast`



Are there problems with this code?

```
for (int i=0; i < vector.size(); i++) {
   doSomething(vector.get(i));
}
```

There is chance that other threads may modify vector between the calls to `size()` and `get()`

Compound actions using client-side locking

```
public Object getLast(Vector list) {
   synchronized(list) {
     int lastIndex = list.size() – 1;
     return list.get(lastIndex);
   }
}

public void deleteLast(Vector list) {
   synchronized(list) {
      int lastIndex = list.size() -1;
      list.remove(lastIndex);
   }
}
```


Iterators

- The standard way to *iterate* over a `Collection` is with an `Iterator`
- Using iterators does not mean that you don't need to lock the collection
- `Iterators` returned by synchronized collections are *not designed for concurrent modification*

Iterators in synchronized collections

- Iterators of synchronized collections are **fail-fast**
- If they detect that the collection has changed since iteration began?
  - Unchecked `ConcurrentModificationException` is thrown

Fail-fast iterators are not designed to be fool proof

- Designed to catch concurrency errors on a *good-faith* basis
- Associate a **modification count** with the collection
- If the modification count *changes* during iteration?
  - `hasNext()` or `next()` throws `ConcurrentModificationException`

Let's look at this code snippet

```
List<Widget> widgetList =
   Collections.synchronizedList(new ArrayList<Widget>());

...
for (Widget w: widgetList)
   doSomething(w);
```

//May throw ConcurrentModificationException

Internally **javac** generates code that uses `Iterator` and repeatedly calls `hasNext()` and `next()` to iterate the `List`

How to prevent the `ConcurrentModificationException`

- Hold the collection lock for the **duration** of the iteration
- Is this desirable?

Issues with locking a collection during iteration

- Other threads that need to access the collection **will block**
- If the collection is large or if the task performed on each element is lengthy?
  - The *wait could be really long*

Locking collection and scalability

- The longer a lock is held
  - The more likely it will be **contended**
- If many threads are waiting for a lock?
  - *Throughput* and *CPU utilization* **plummet**
- ALTERNATIVE:
  - Deep-copy the collection and iterate over the copy
  - The copy is thread-confined

Hidden Iterators

```
public class HiddenIterator {
   private final Set<Integer> set = new HashSet<Integer>();

   public synchronized void add(Integer i) {set.add(i);}

   public synchronized void remove(Integer i) {set.remove(i);}

   public void diagnostics() {
     System.out.println("DEBUG: Elements in set: " + set);
   }
}
```

- Lock should have been acquired for the System.out
- Iterators are also invoked for `hashCode` and `equals`

CONCURRENT COLLECTIONS

Locking strategies: `Hashtable` & `ConcurrentHashMap`

- `Hashtable`
  - Lock held for the *duration of each operation*
  - Restricting access to a *single thread at a time*
- `ConcurrentHashMap`
  - *Finer-grained locking* mechanism
  - **Lock striping**

Lock striping: How it works

- `ConcurrentHashMap` uses an **array of 16 locks**
  - Each lock guards $1/16^{th}$ of the hash buckets
  - Bucket N guarded by lock $N \bmod 16$
- Assuming hash functions provide reasonable spreading characteristics
  - Demand for a given lock should reduce by $1/16$
- Enables `ConcurrentHashMap` to support up to 16 (default) concurrent writers
  - A constructor that allows you to specify the concurrency level

Downsides of lock striping

- Locking the collection for exclusive access
  - More difficult and costly than a single lock
  - Done by acquiring locks in the **stripe set**
- When does `ConcurrentHashMap` need to do this?
  - If the map needs to be expanded, values need to be rehashed into a larger set of buckets

Concurrent collections and iterators

- Iterators are *weakly consistent* instead of fail-safe
  - Do not throw `ConcurrentModificationException`
- **Weakly consistent iterator**
  - Tolerates concurrent modification
  - Traverses elements as they existed when the iterator was created
  - May (no guarantees) reflect modifications after construction

But what are the trade-offs?

- **Semantics** of methods that operate on the entire `Map` have been *weakened* to reflect nature of collection
  - `size()` is allowed to return an approximation
  - `size()` and `isEmpty()`: These are far less useful in concurrent environments
- This allows *performance improvements* for the most important operations
  - `get`, `put`, `containsKey`, and `remove`

One feature offered by synchronized Map implementations?

- Lock the map for exclusive access
  - With `Hashtable` and `synchronizedMap`, acquiring the Map lock prevents other threads from accessing it
- In most cases replacing `Hashtable` and `synchronizedMap` with `ConcurrentHashMap`?
  - Gives you getter scalability
- If you need to lock `Map` for exclusive access?
  - Don't use the `ConcurrentHashMap`!

Support for additional atomic `Map` operations

- Put-if-absent
- Remove-if-equal
- Replace-if-equal

`ConcurrentMap` interface

```
public interface ConcurrentMap<K,V> extends Map<K,V> {

   //Insert if no value is mapped from K
   V putIfAbsent(K key, V value);

   //Remove only if K is mapped to V
   boolean remove(K key, V value);

   //Replace value only if K is mapped to oldValue
   boolean replace(K key, V oldValue, V newValue);

   //Replace value only if K is mapped to some value
   V replace(K key, V newValue)

}
```

SYNCHRONIZERS

Synchronizers

- Are objects that **coordinate control flow** of threads based on its state
- Examples
  - Latches
  - Semaphores
    - Counting and binary
  - Barriers
    - Cyclic and Exchangers

Synchronizer: Structural properties

- **Encapsulate state** that determines whether threads arriving at the synchronizer should:
  - Be allowed to *pass* or wait
- Provide methods to **manipulate** state
- Provide methods to *wait* for the synchronizer *to enter desired state*

Latches

- Latch acts as a **gate**
  - Until latch reaches terminal state; *gate is closed* and no threads can pass
  - In the **terminal state**: gate *opens* and allows all threads to pass
- Once the latch reaches terminal state?
  - *Cannot change state* again
  - Remains *open forever*

When to use latches

- Ensure that a computation does not proceed until all resources that it needs are initialized
- Service does not start until other services *that it depends on* have started
- Waiting until all parties in an activity are ready to proceed
  - Multiplayer gaming

`CountDownLatch`

- Allows one or more threads to **wait for a set of events to occur**
- Latch state has a counter initialized to positive number
  - This is the number of events to wait for
- `countDown()` decrements the counter indicating that an event has occurred
  - `await()` method waits for the counter to reach 0

Using CountDownLatch

```
public class TestHarness {
   public long timeTasks(int nThreads, final Runnable task)
     throws InterruptedException {
     final CountDownLatch startGate = new CountDownLatch(1);
     final CountDownLatch endGate=new CountDownLatch(nThreads);

     for (int i=0; i < nThreads; i++) {
       Thread t = new Thread() {
         public void run() {
           try {
            startGate.await();
            task.run();
           } finally {
              endGate.countDown();
           }
         }
       };
      t.start();
     }
   long start = System.nanoTime();
   startGate.countDown();
   endGate.await();
   long end = System.nanoTime();
   return end-start;
```


The contents of this slide set are based on the following references

- *Java Concurrency in Practice. Brian Goetz, Tim Peierls, Joshua Bloch, Joseph Bowbeer, David Holmes, and Doug Lea. Addison-Wesley Professional. ISBN: 0321349601/978-0321349606. [Chapters 4, 5 and 11]*