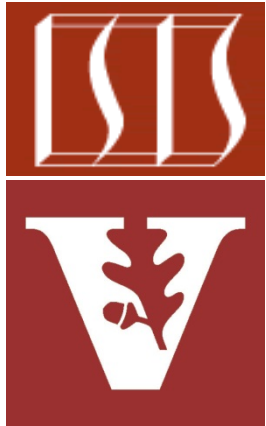


# Android Concurrency: The AsyncTask Framework



Douglas C. Schmidt

[d.schmidt@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:d.schmidt@vanderbilt.edu)

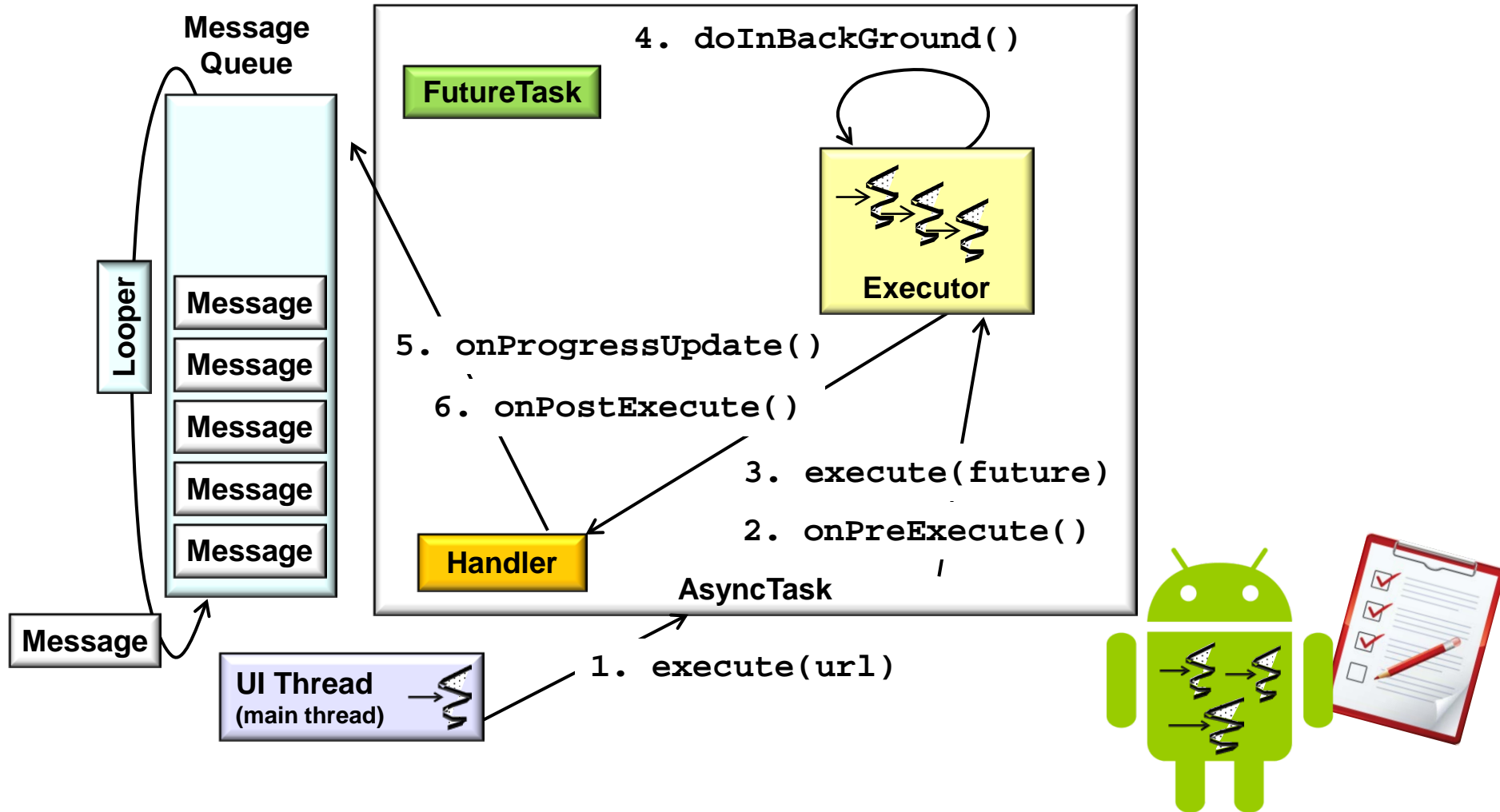
[www.dre.vanderbilt.edu/~schmidt](http://www.dre.vanderbilt.edu/~schmidt)

Institute for Software  
Integrated Systems  
Vanderbilt University  
Nashville, Tennessee, USA



# Learning Objectives in this Part of the Module

- Recognize the concurrency idioms & mechanisms associated with programming the Android AsyncTask framework



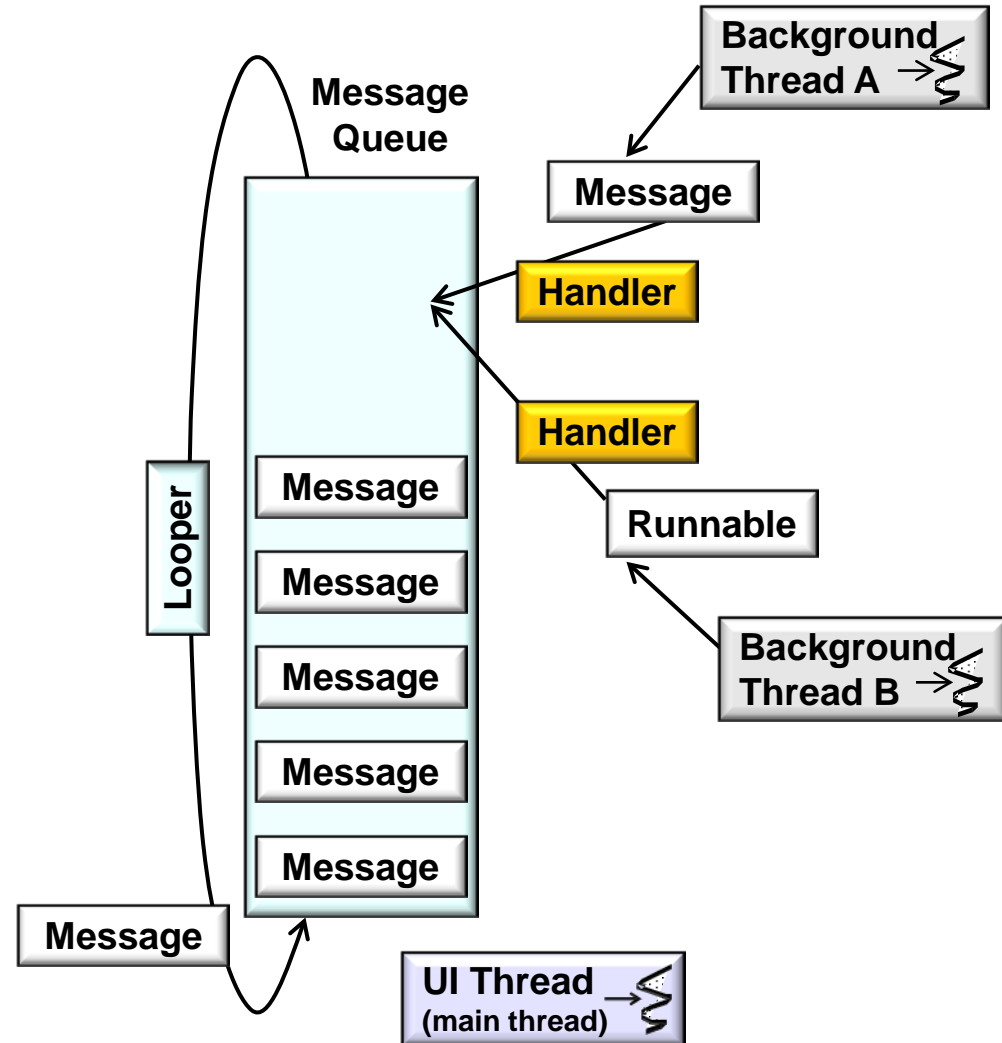
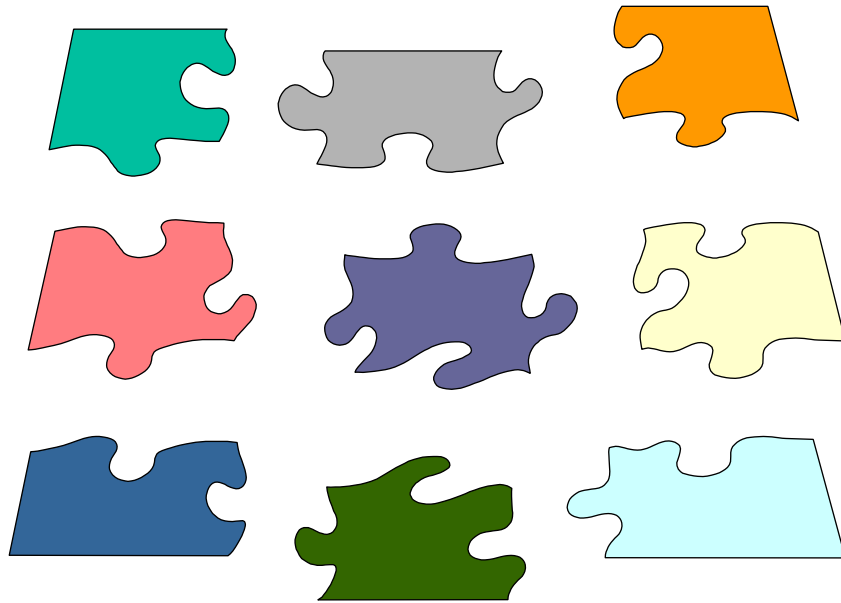
Allows apps to perform background operations & publish results on UI thread *without* manipulating threads, handlers, messages, or runnables

---

# Overview of the AsyncTask Framework

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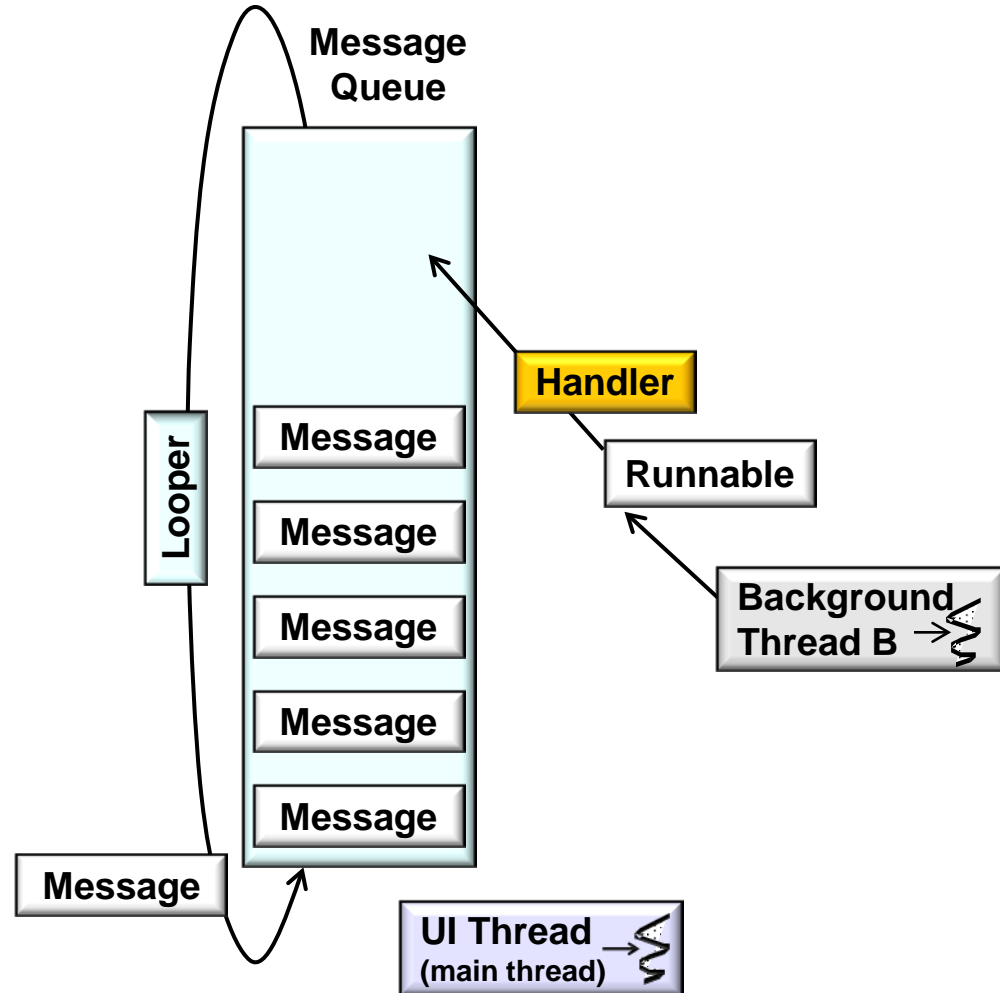
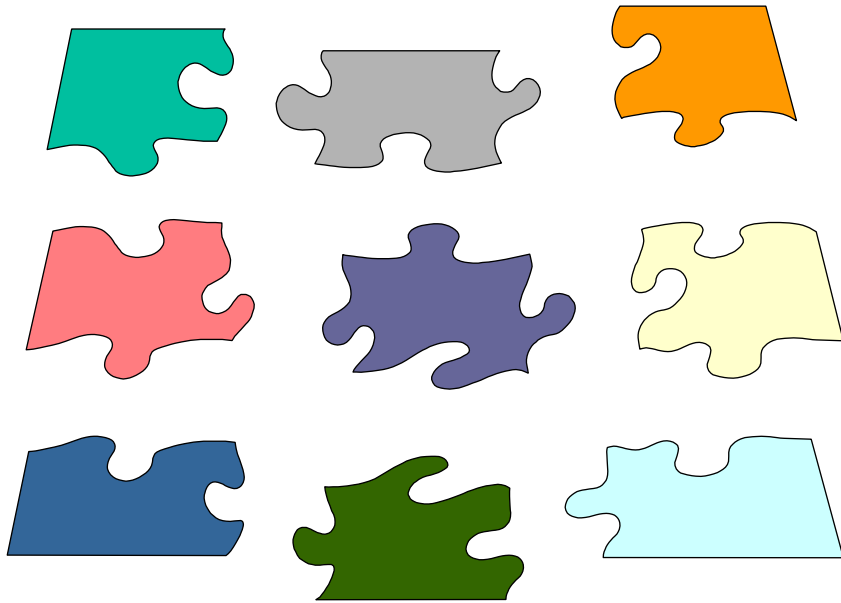
- Classes in HaMeR framework are loosely connected



See previous part on  
the HaMeR framework

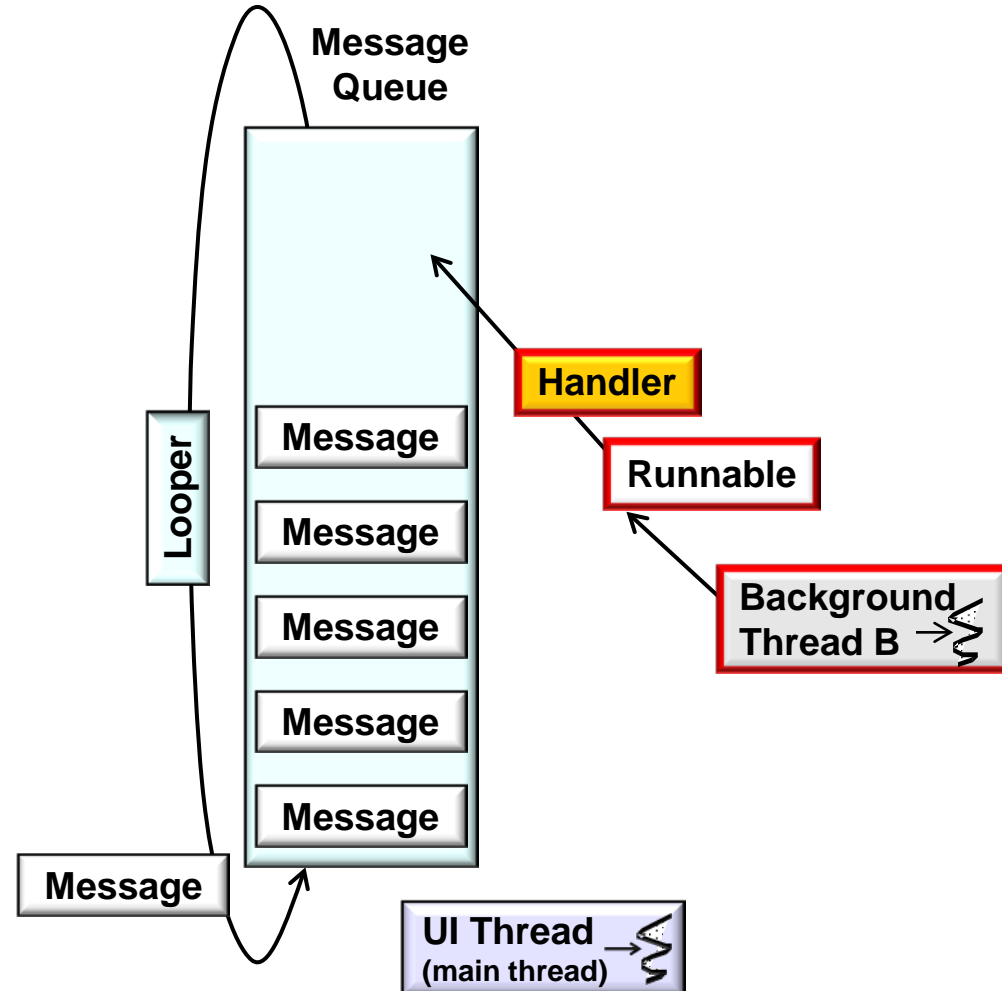
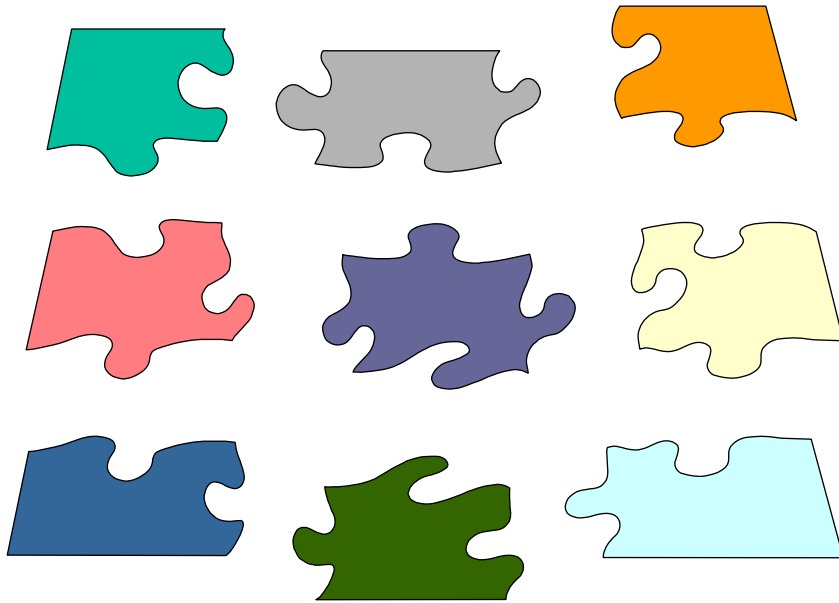
# Overview of the AsyncTask Framework

- Classes in HaMeR framework are loosely connected
  - This flexibility works well for simple concurrency use cases



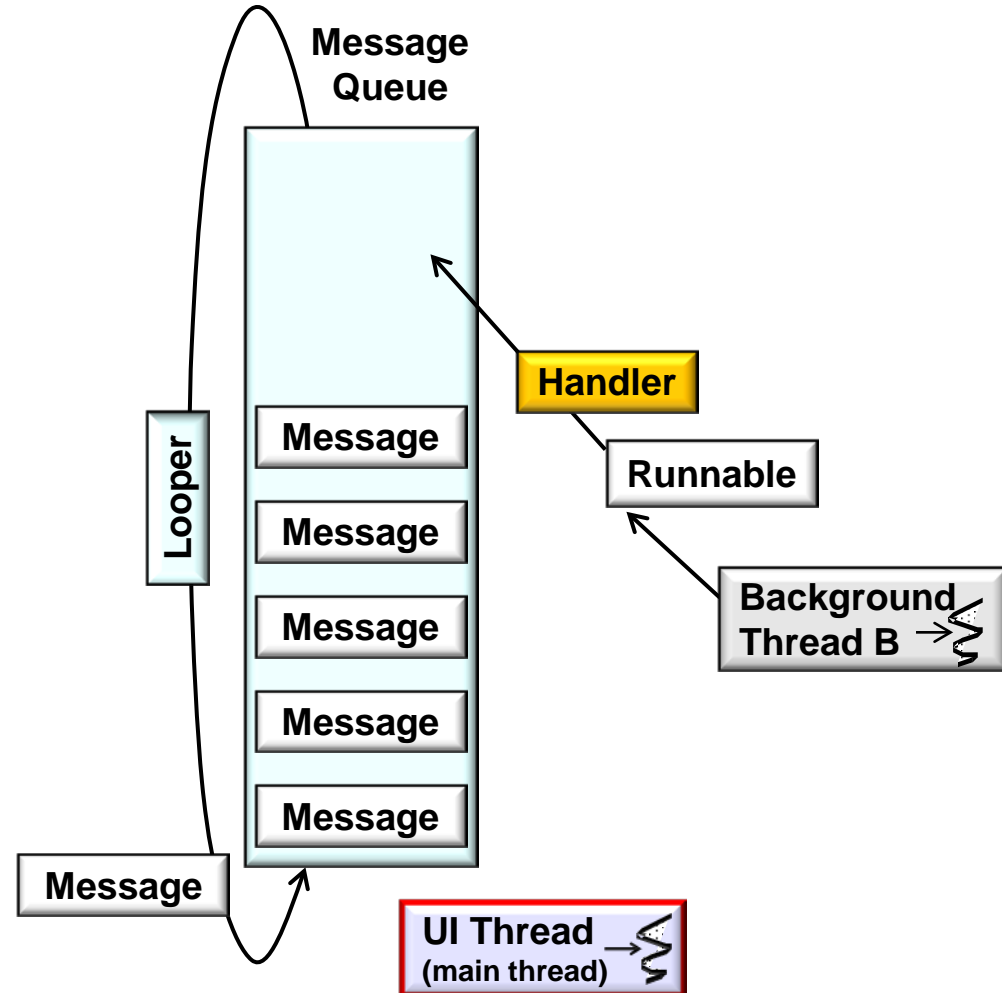
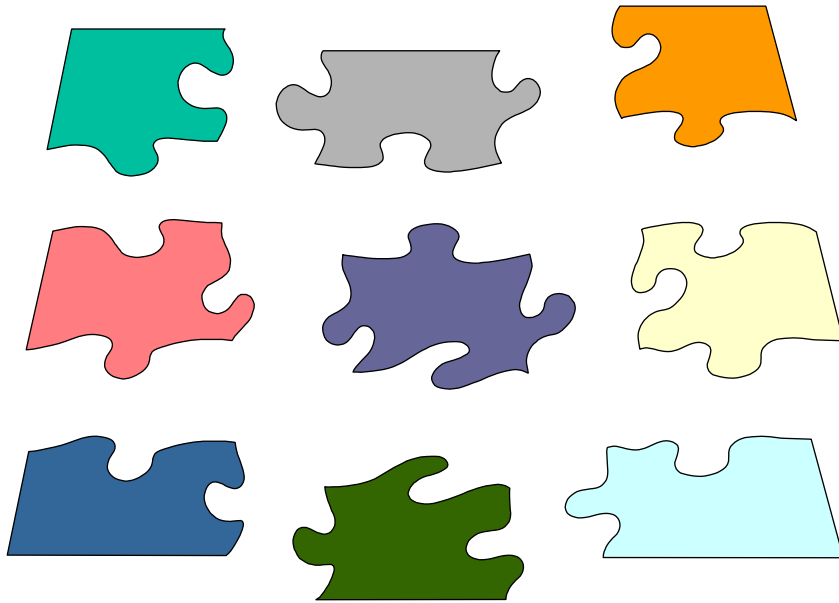
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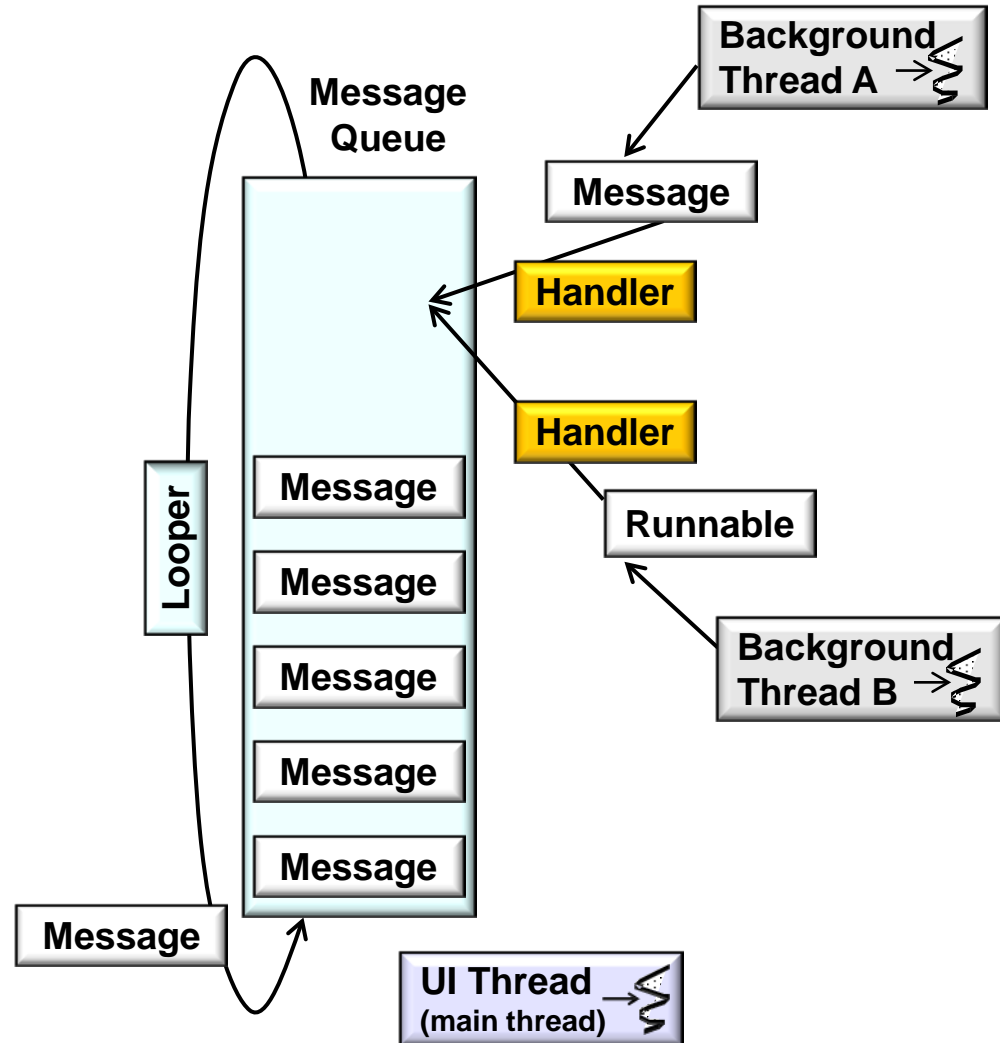
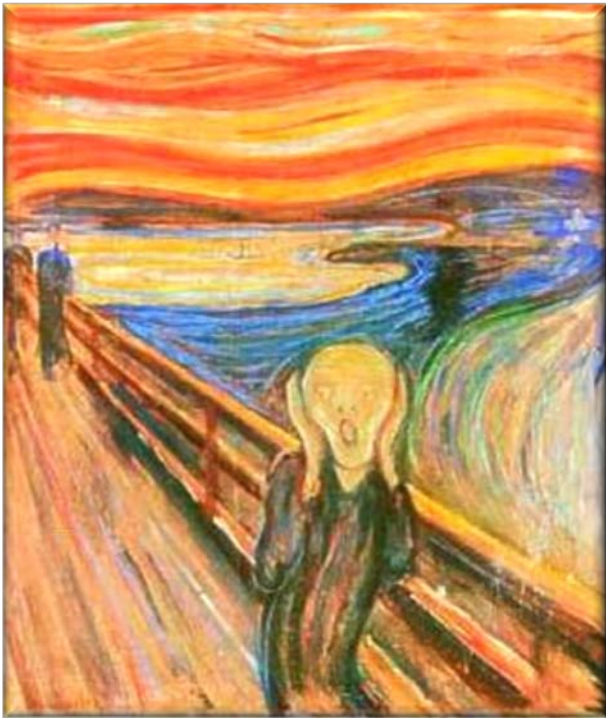
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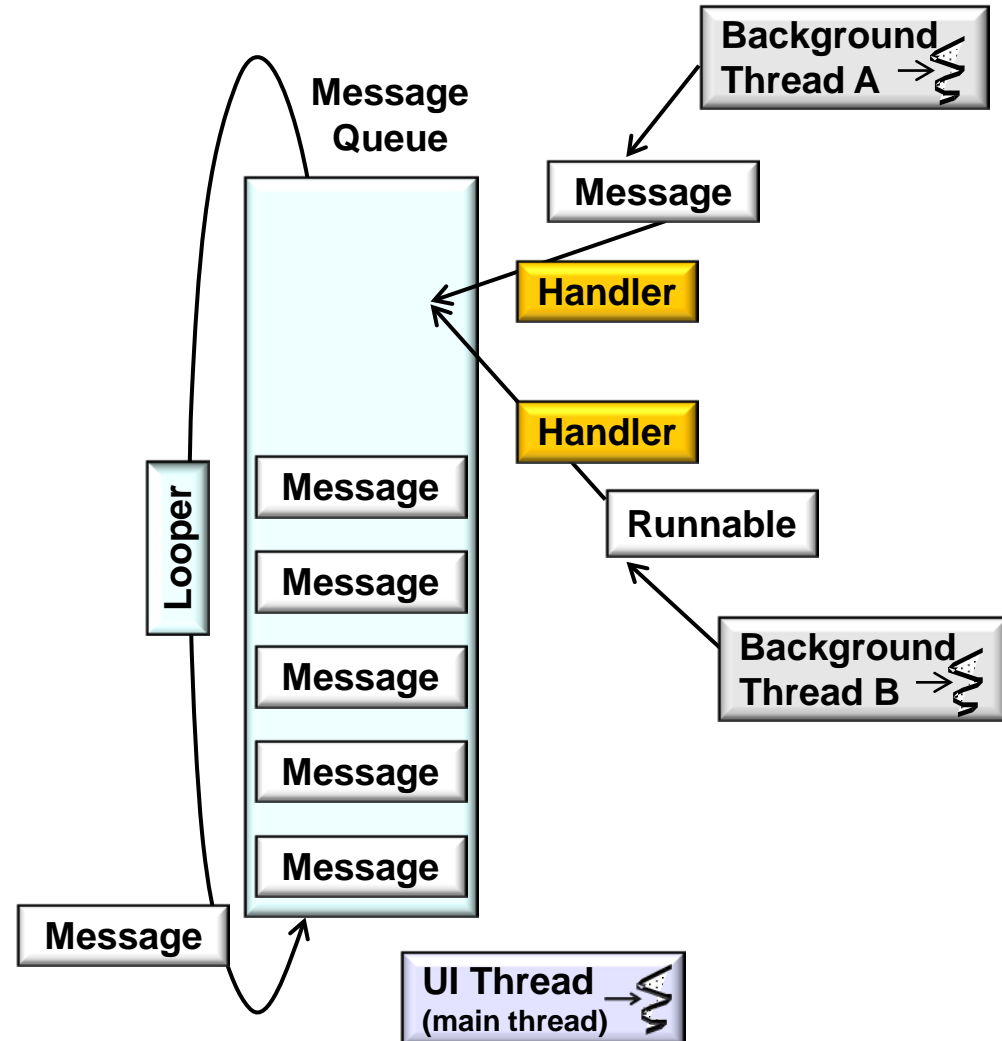
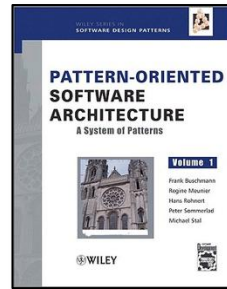
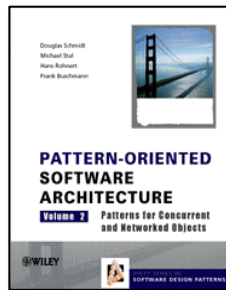
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  - However, there are drawbacks





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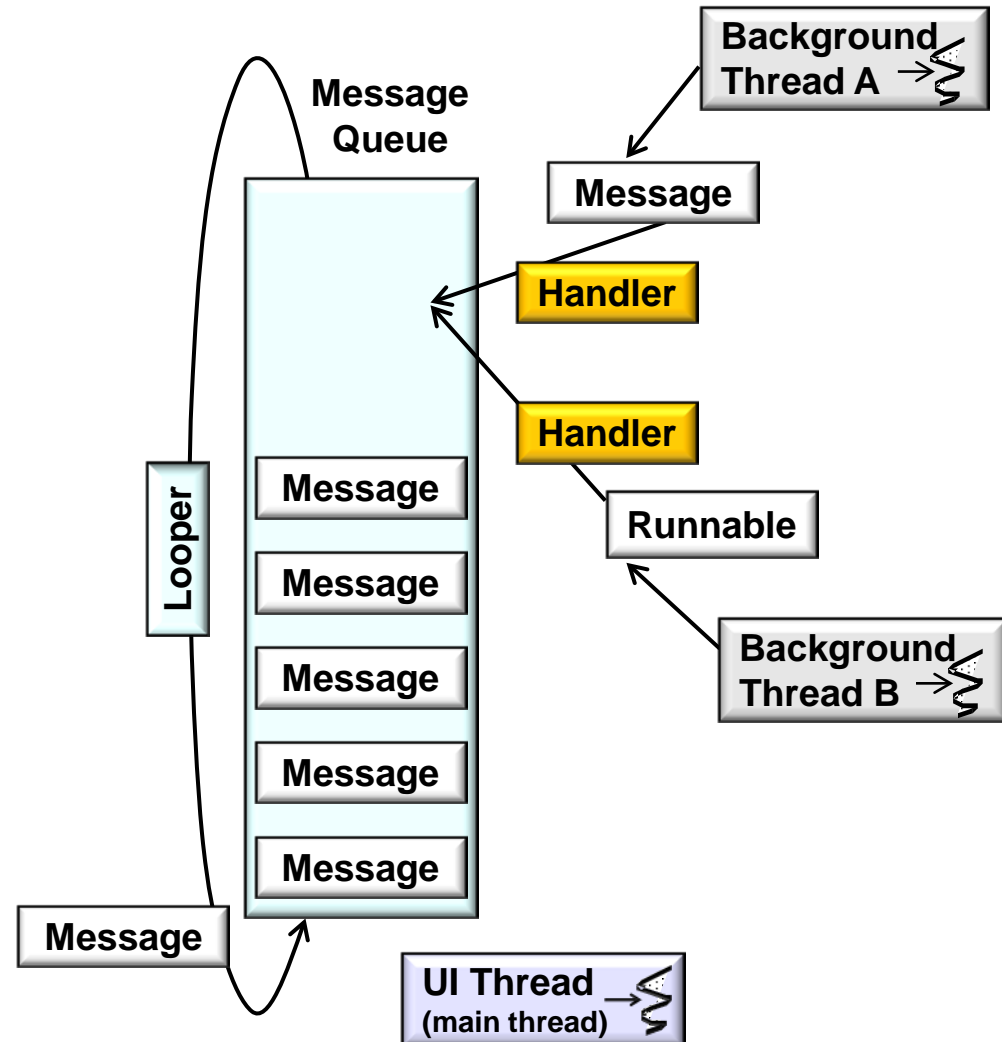
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- However, there are drawbacks
  - Must understand patterns



See [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active\\_object](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active_object) & [www.dre.vanderbilt.edu/~schmidt/CommandProcessor.pdf](http://www.dre.vanderbilt.edu/~schmidt/CommandProcessor.pdf)

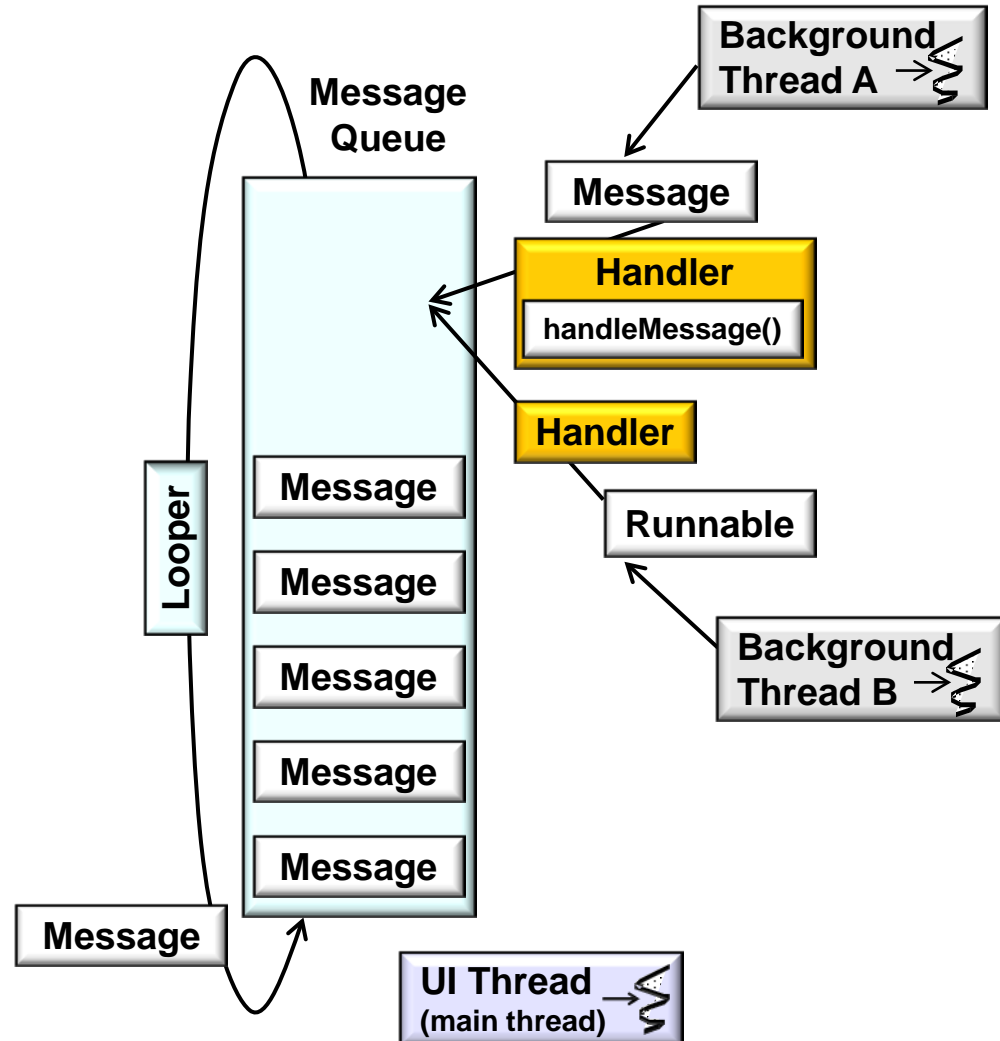
# Overview of the AsyncTask Framework

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- However, there are drawbacks
  - Must understand patterns
  - Tedious & error-prone



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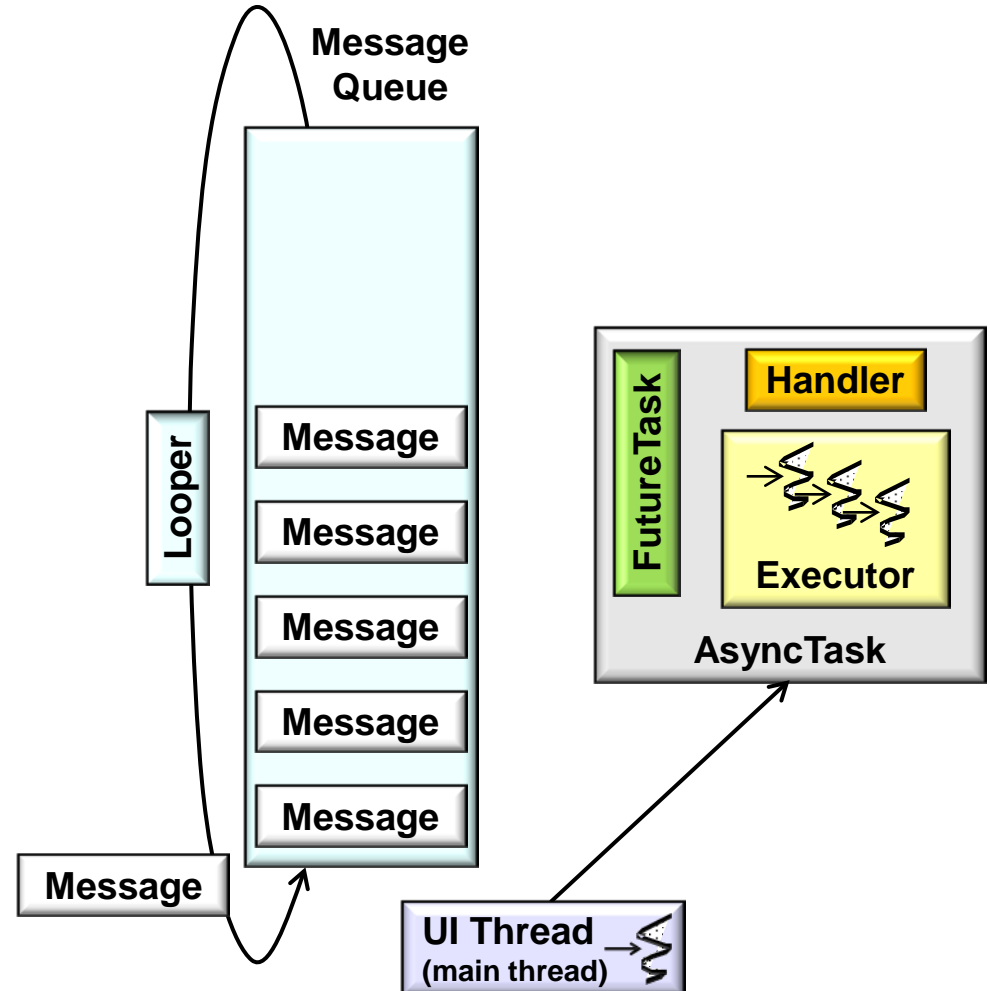
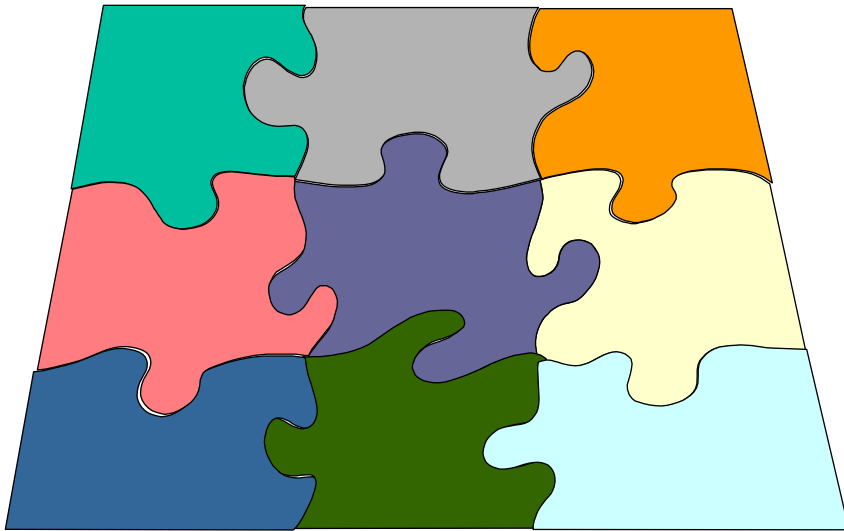
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  - This flexibility works well for simple concurrency use cases
- However, there are drawbacks
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  - Tedious & error-prone



e.g., apps must understand how to manage the lifecycle of Messages

# Overview of the AsyncTask Framework

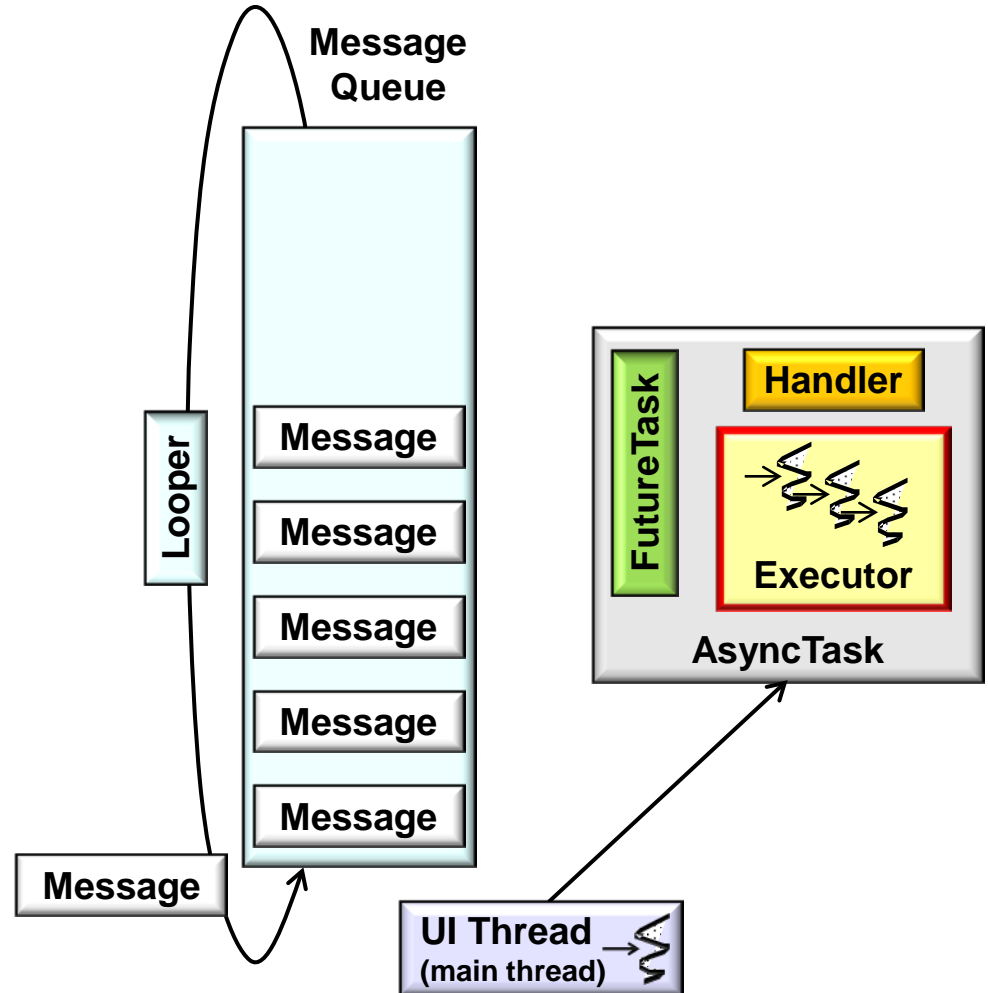
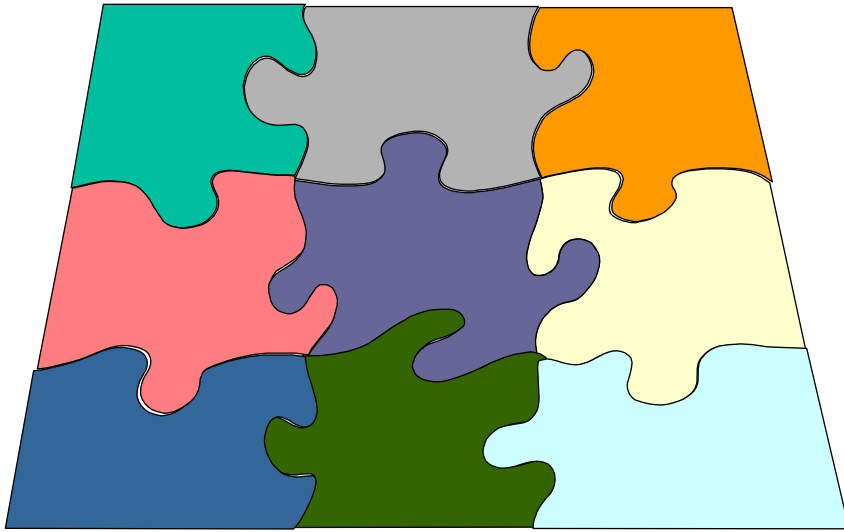
- Classes in HaMeR framework are loosely connected
- Classes in AsyncTask framework are strongly connected



See [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template\\_Method\\_pattern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template_Method_pattern)

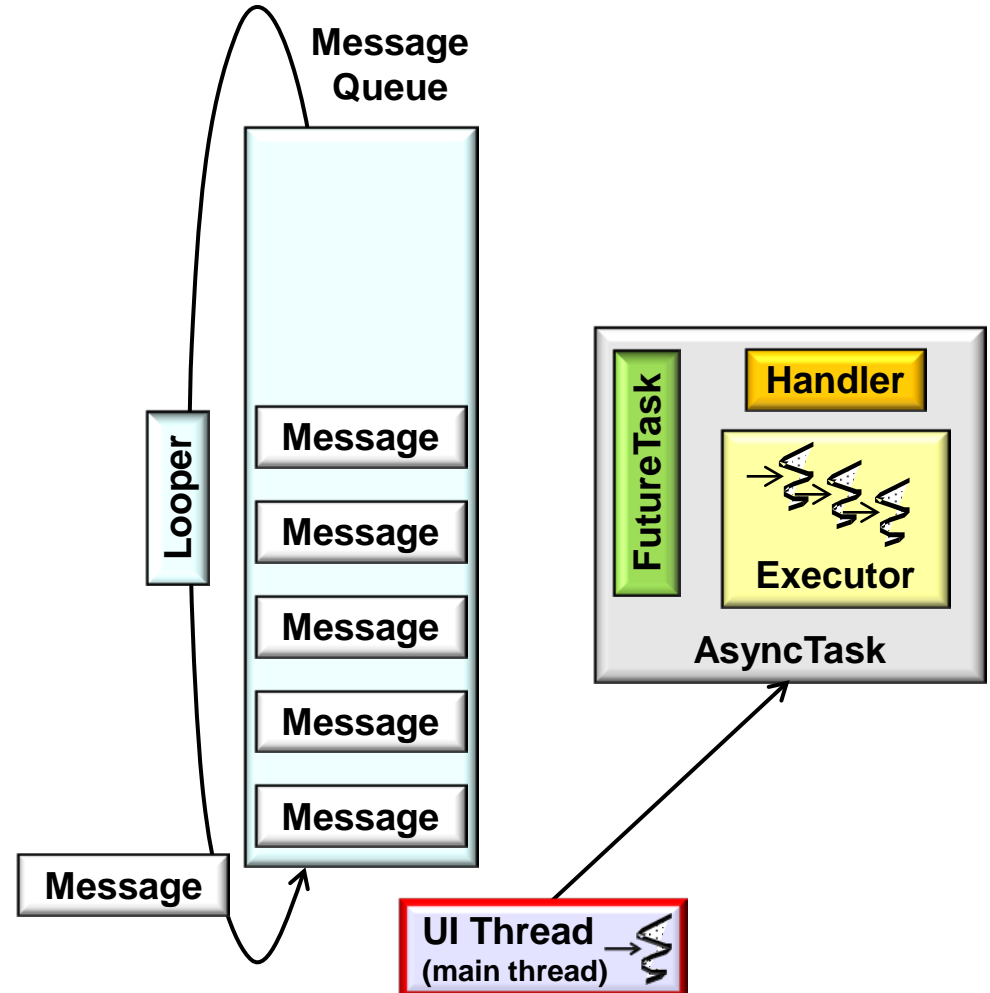
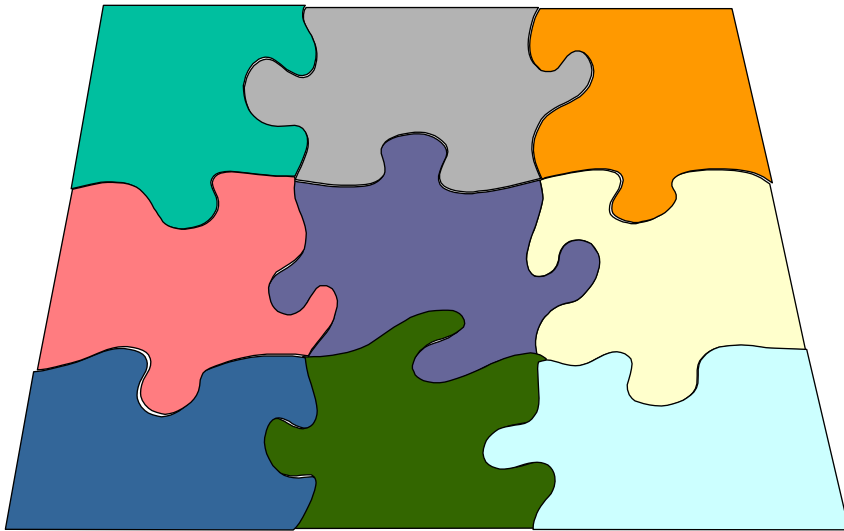
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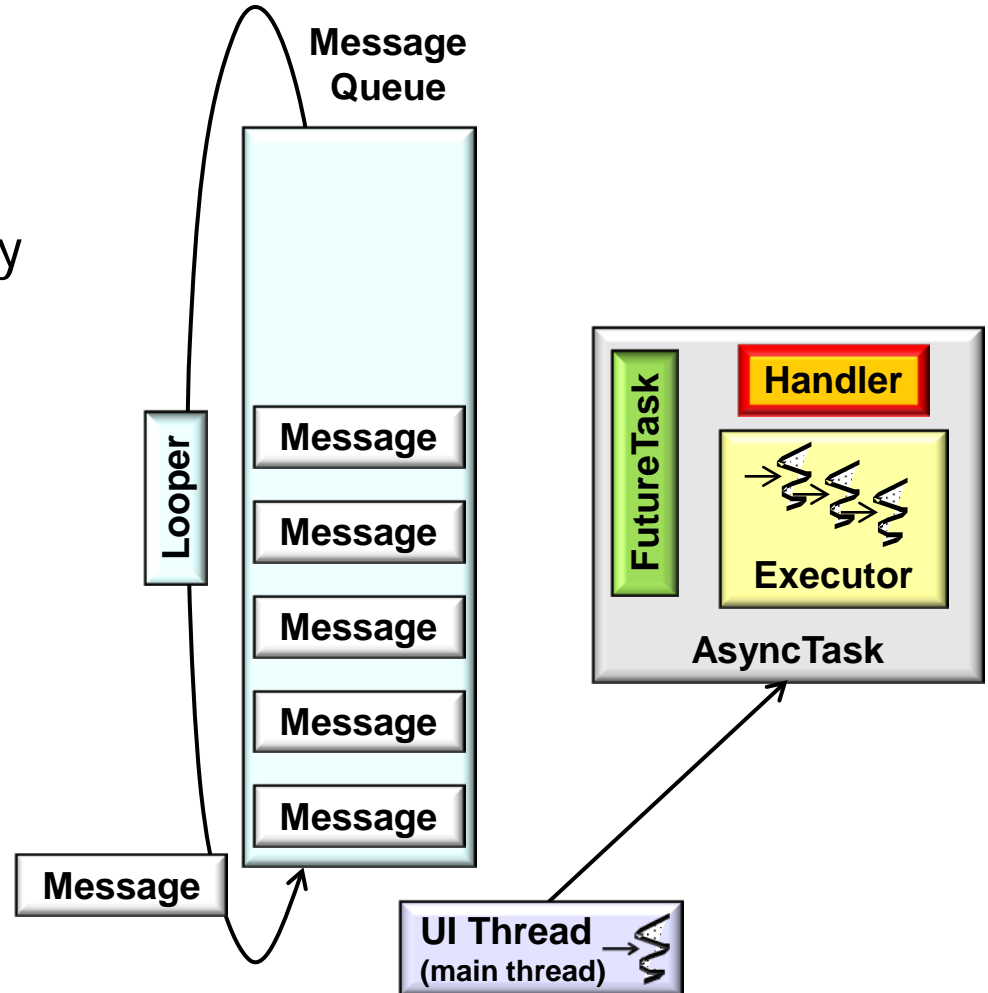
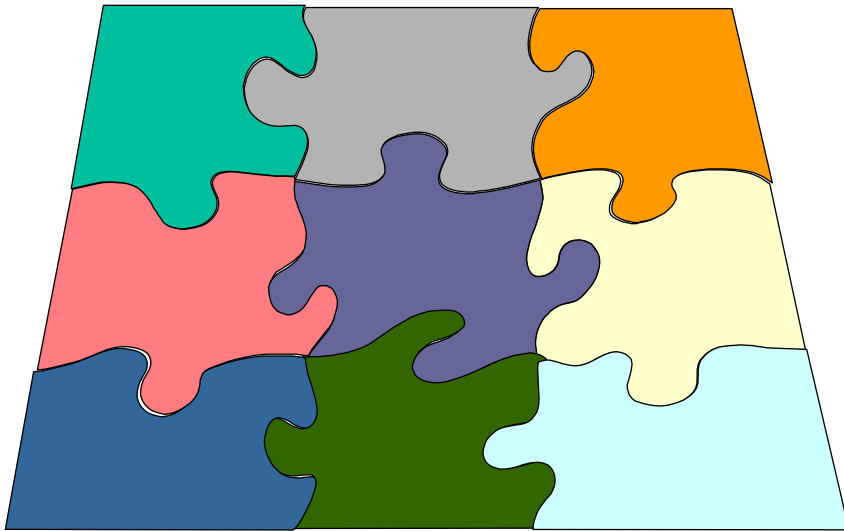
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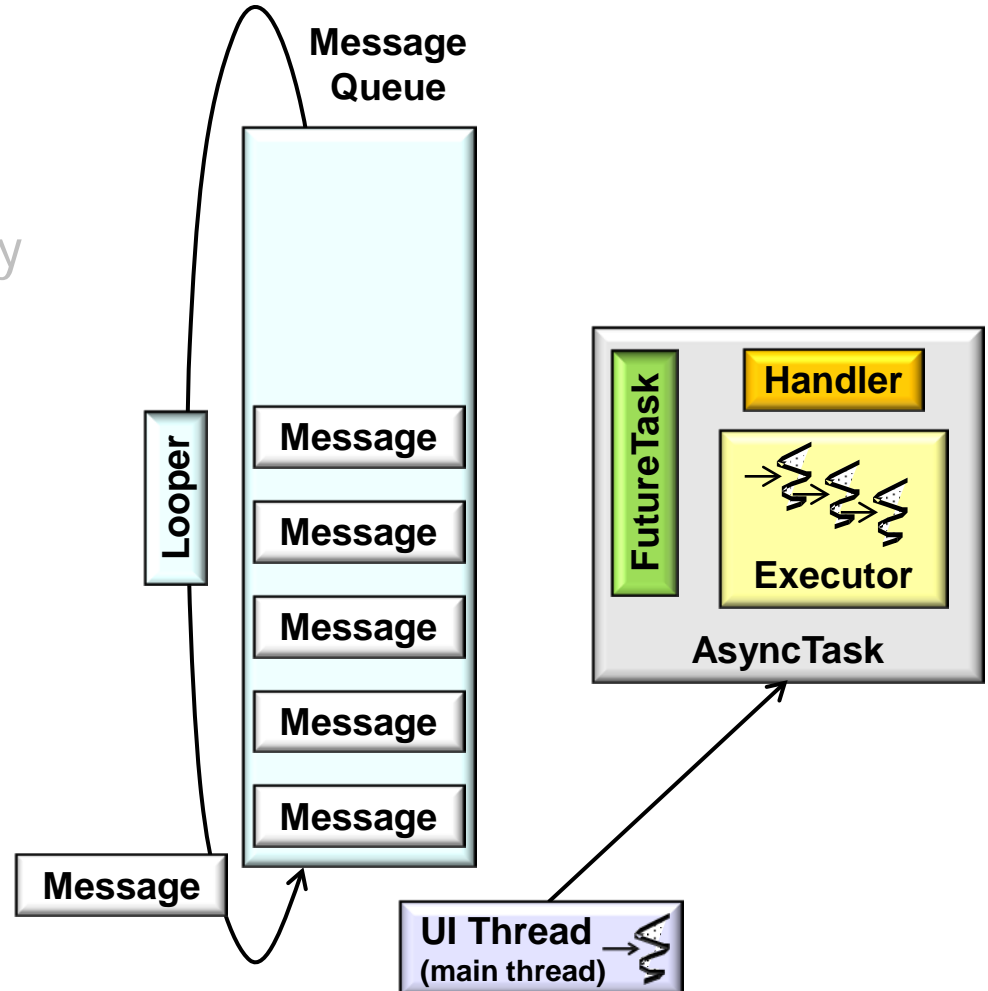
# Overview of the AsyncTask Framework

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- Smaller “surface area”





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- Classes in HaMeR framework are loosely connected
- Classes in AsyncTask framework are strongly connected
  - Run concurrently, *without* directly manipulating Threads, Handlers, Messages, or Runnables
  - Smaller “surface area”
  - Complex framework details accessed via *Façade* pattern



**AsyncTask**

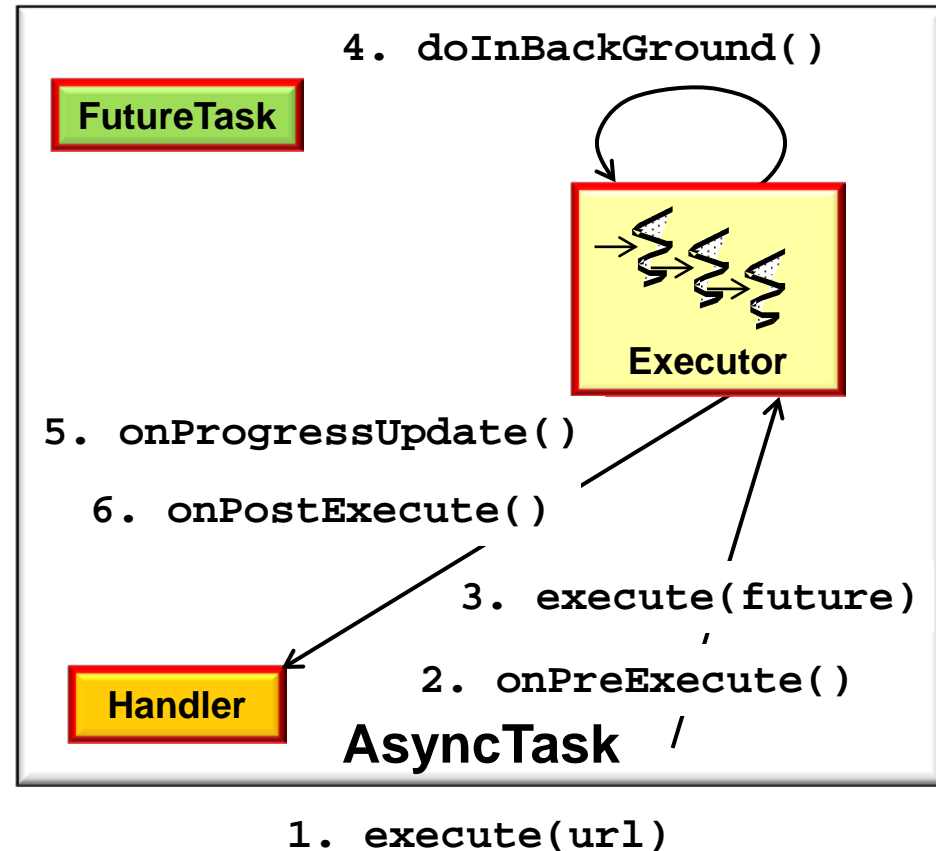
1. `execute(url)`

---

See [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facade\\_pattern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facade_pattern)

# Overview of the AsyncTask Framework

- Classes in HaMeR framework are loosely connected
- Classes in AsyncTask framework are strongly connected
  - Run concurrently, *without* directly manipulating Threads, Handlers, Messages, or Runnables
  - Smaller “surface area”
  - Complex framework details accessed via *Façade* pattern
    - Wraps complicated subsystem or framework with simpler interface



---

# Categories of Methods in `AsyncTask`

# Categories of Methods in the AsyncTask Class

- The AsyncTask class has two types of methods



## AsyncTask

Added in API level 3

extends `Object`

`java.lang.Object`

↳ `android.os.AsyncTask<Params, Progress, Result>`

## Class Overview

AsyncTask enables proper and easy use of the UI thread. This class allows to perform background operations and publish results on the UI thread without having to manipulate threads and/or handlers.

AsyncTask is designed to be a helper class around `Thread` and `Handler` and does not constitute a generic threading framework. AsyncTasks should ideally be used for short operations (a few seconds at the most.) If you need to keep threads running for long periods of time, it is highly recommended you use the various APIs provided by the `java.util.concurrent` package such as `Executor`, `ThreadPoolExecutor` and `FutureTask`.

An asynchronous task is defined by a computation that runs on a background thread and whose result is published on the UI thread. An asynchronous task is defined by 3 generic types, called `Params`, `Progress` and `Result`, and 4 steps, called `onPreExecute`, `doInBackground`, `onProgressUpdate` and `onPostExecute`.

See [developer.android.com/  
reference/android/os/AsyncTask.html](http://developer.android.com/reference/android/os/AsyncTask.html)

# Categories of Methods in the AsyncTask Class

---

- The AsyncTask class has two types of methods
  - Public methods
    - Invoked by apps

```
AsyncTask<Params, Progress, Result>  
    execute(Params... params)
```

- Executes the task with the specified parameters

```
AsyncTask<Params, Progress, Result>  
    executeOnExecutor(Executor exec,  
                      Params... params)
```

- Executes the task with the specified parameters on the specified Executor

```
static void execute(Runnable  
                    runnable)
```

- Convenience version of execute(Object) for use with a simple Runnable object

```
boolean cancel  
    (boolean mayInterruptIfRunning)
```

- Attempts to cancel execution of this task

```
...
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execute() runs each AsyncTask one-at-a-time (serially) in a background thread within a process

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executeOnExecutor() can run multiple AsyncTasks concurrently in a pool of threads within a process

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cancel() requires cooperation by the AsyncTask, i.e., it's voluntary

# Categories of Methods in the AsyncTask Class

---

- The AsyncTask class has two types of methods

- Public methods

- Protected hook methods

**void onPreExecute()**

- Runs on UI thread before doInBackground()

**abstract Result doInBackground**

**(Params... params)**

- Override this method to perform a computation on a background thread

**void onPostExecute(Result result)**

- Runs on UI thread after doInBackground()

**void onProgressUpdate(Progress... values)**

- Runs on UI thread after publishProgress() called

**void onCancelled()**

- Runs on UI thread after cancel() is invoked & doInBackground() has finished

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    - Overridden by apps
  - Invoked by framework
    - At different points of time &
    - In different threading contexts

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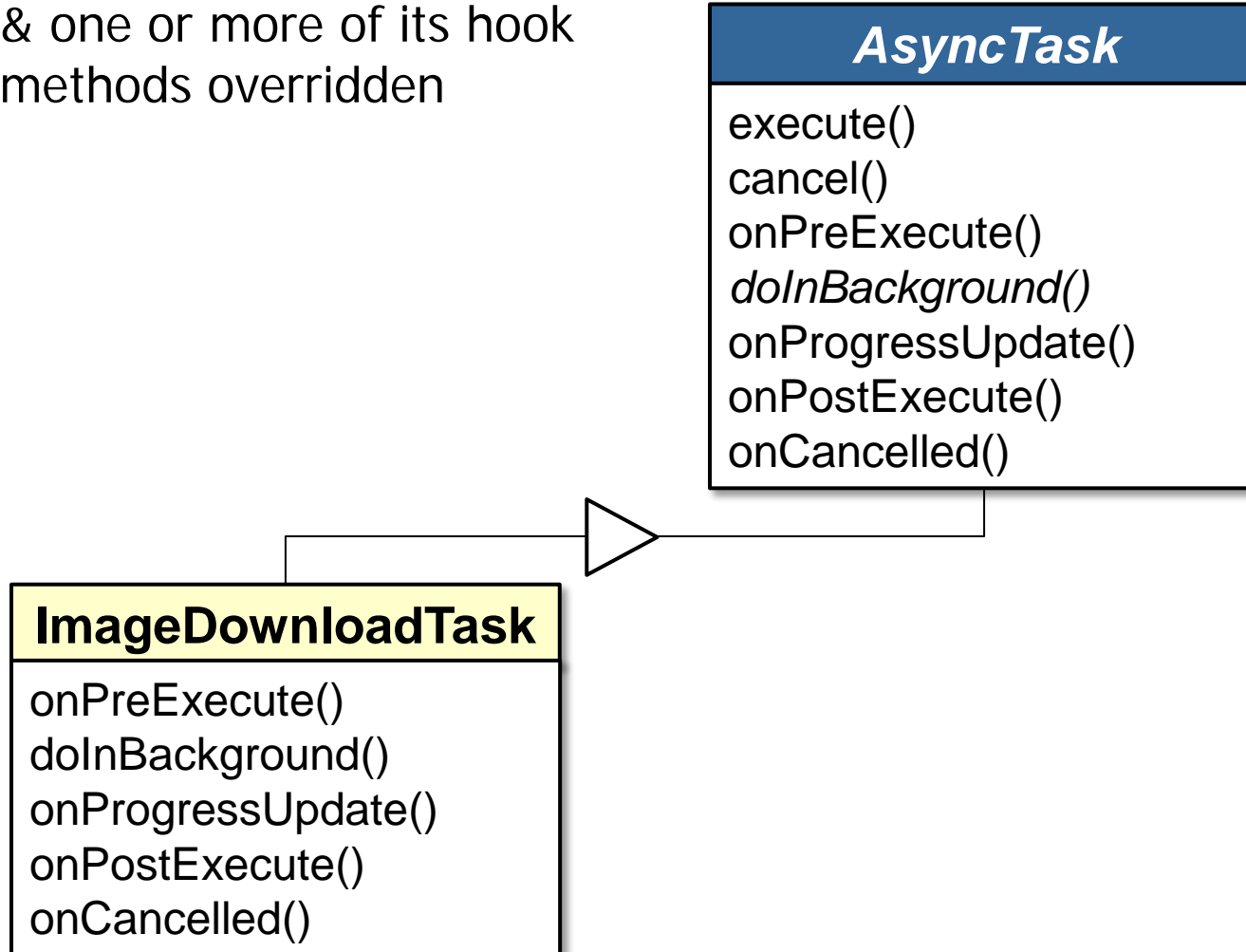
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...

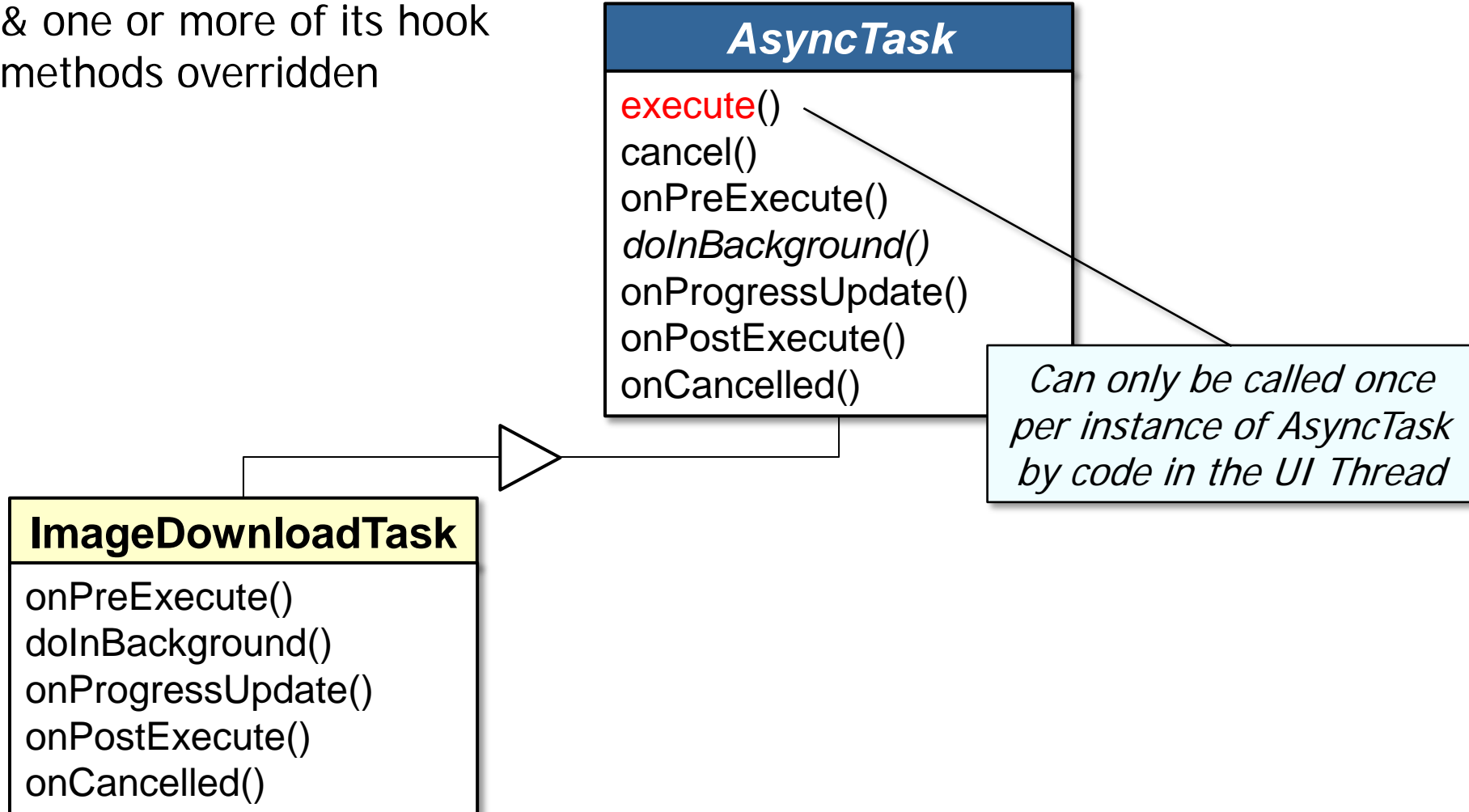
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- AsyncTask must be extended & one or more of its hook methods overridden



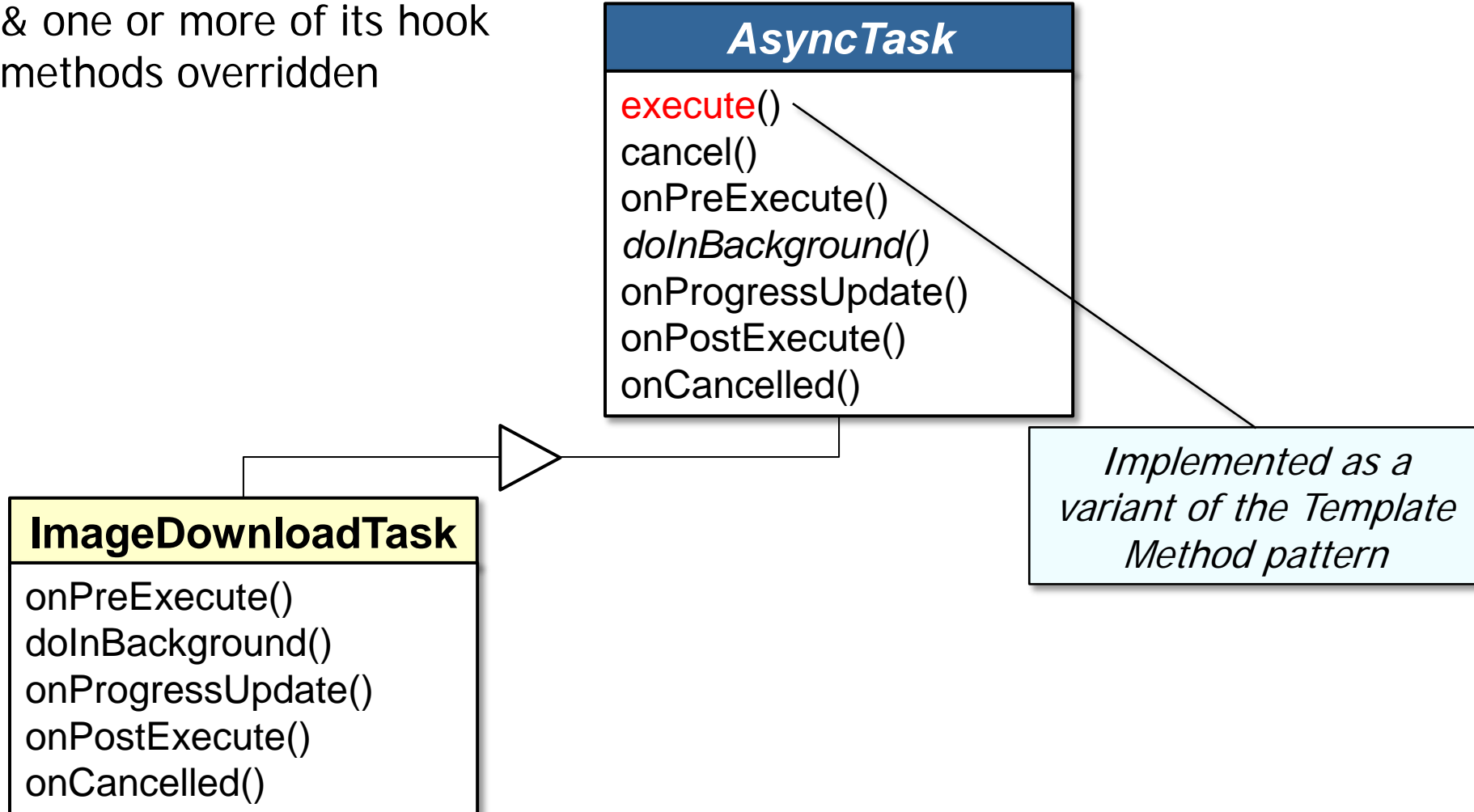
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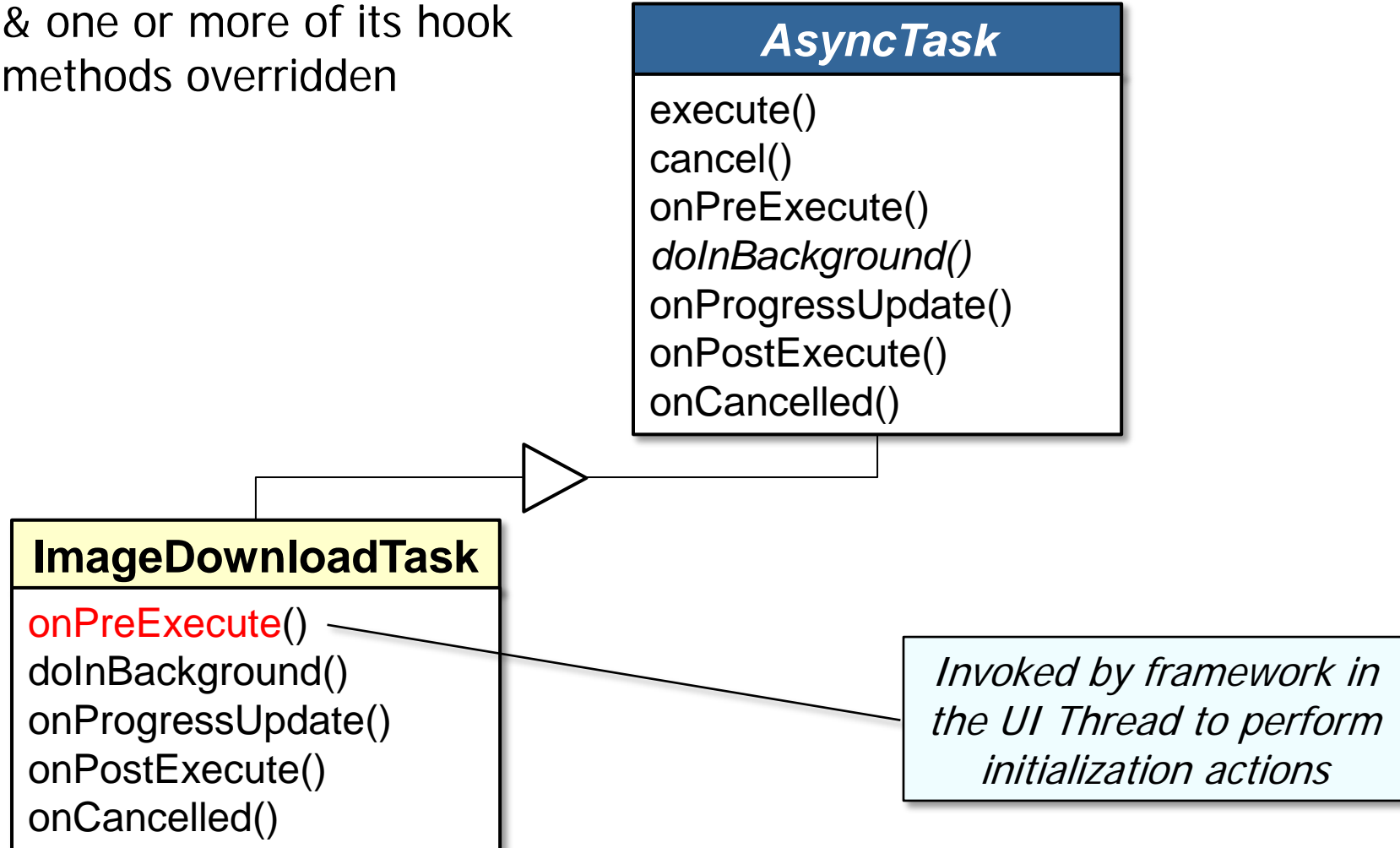
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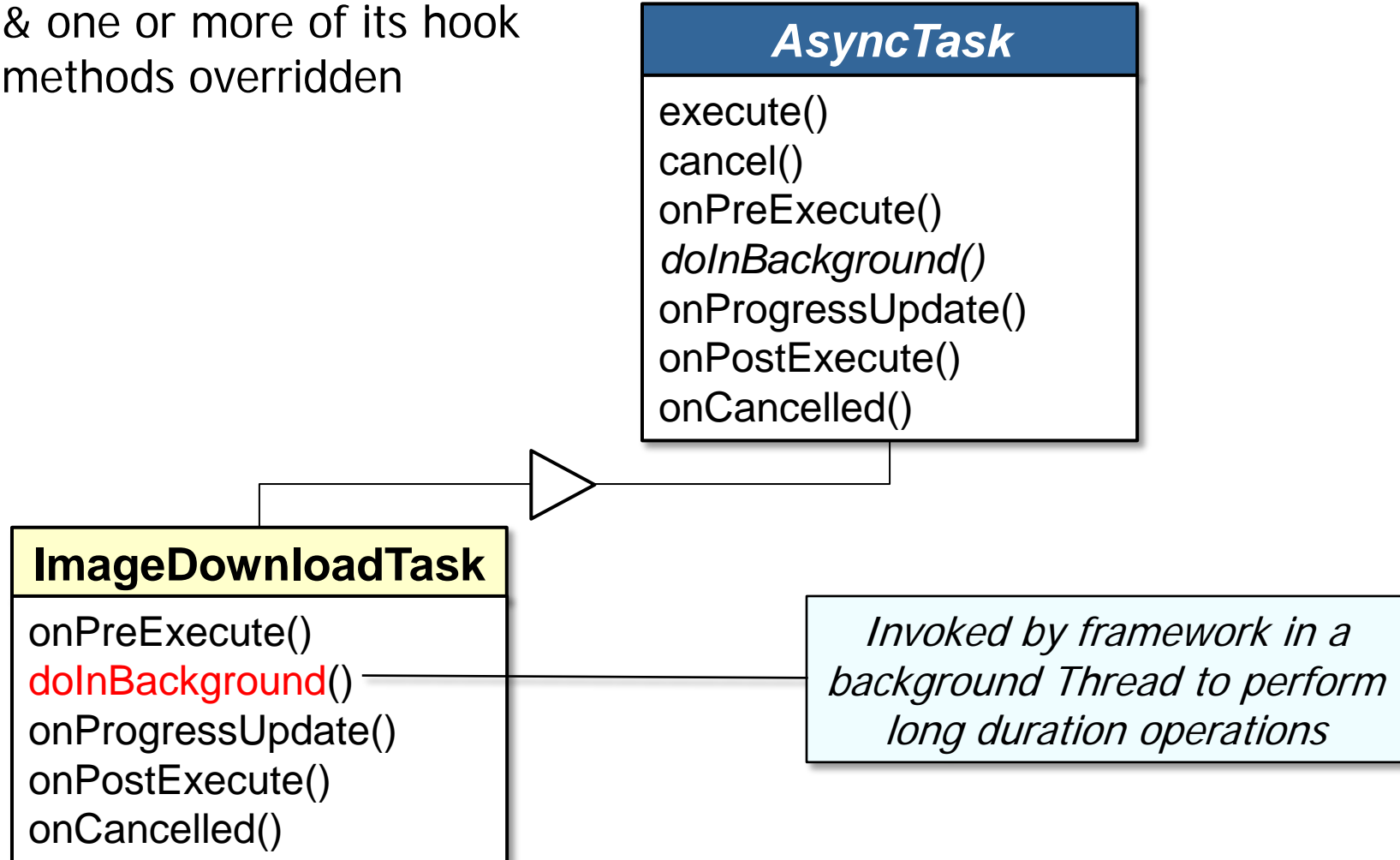
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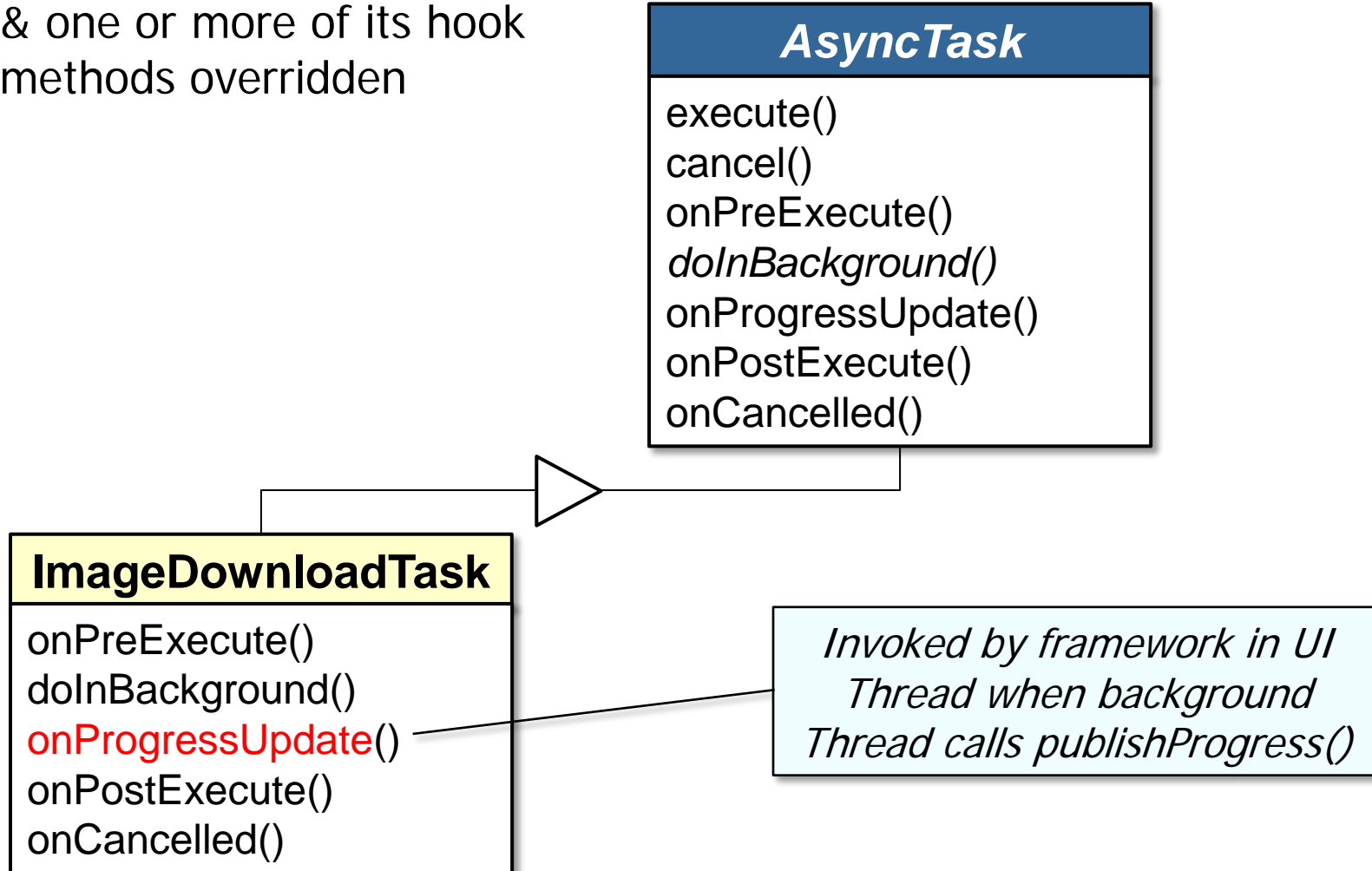
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See [www.androiddesignpatterns.com/2014/01/thread-scheduling-in-android.html](http://www.androiddesignpatterns.com/2014/01/thread-scheduling-in-android.html)

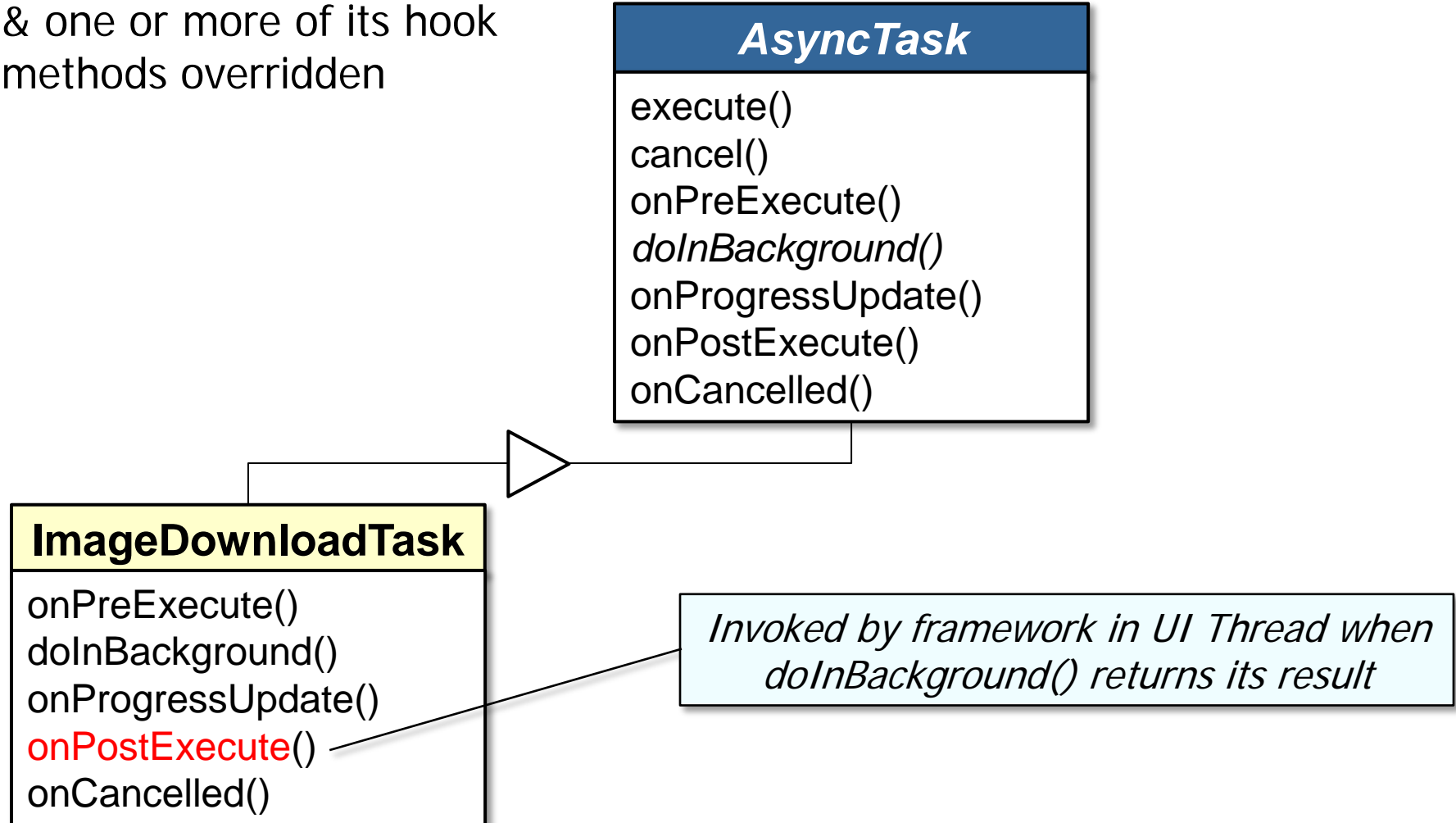
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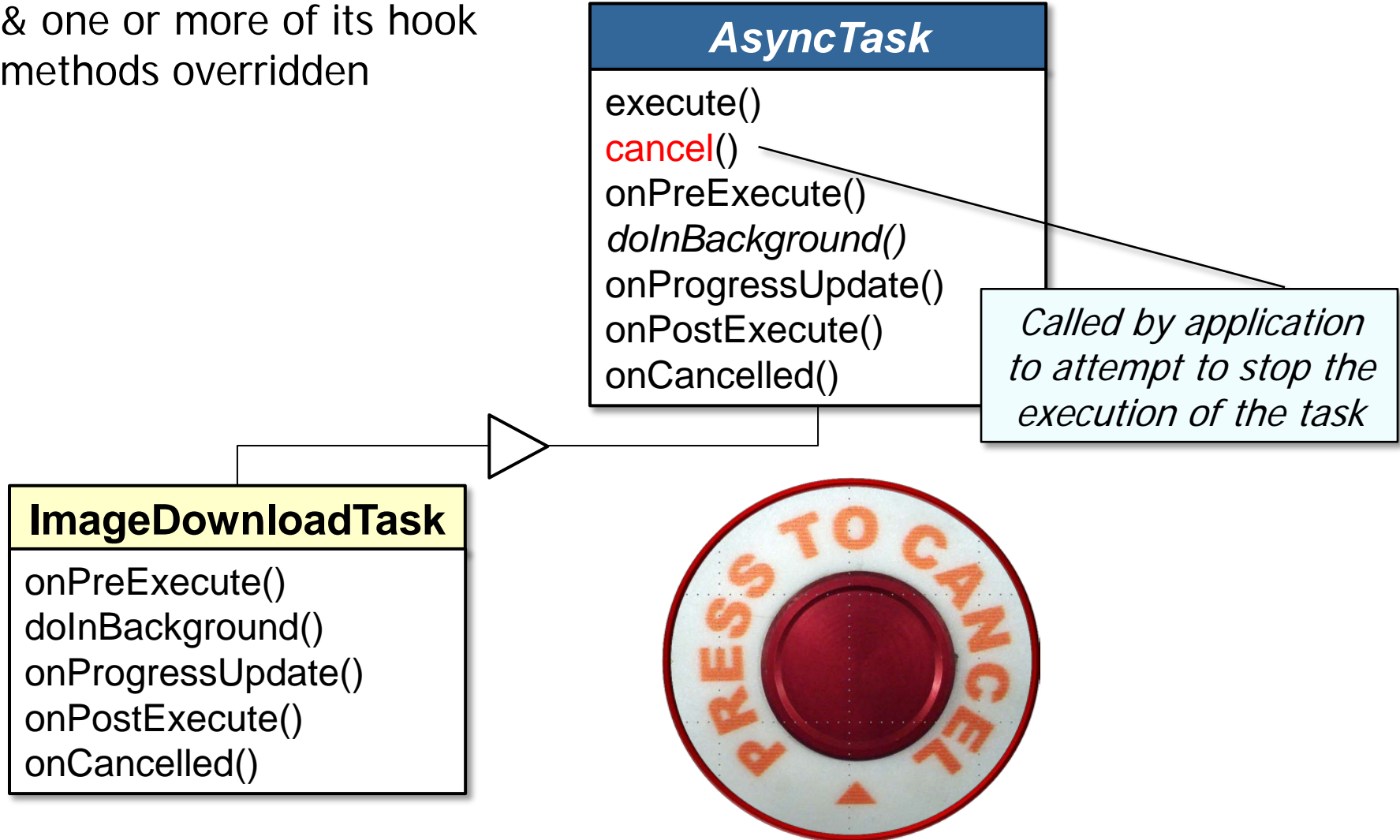
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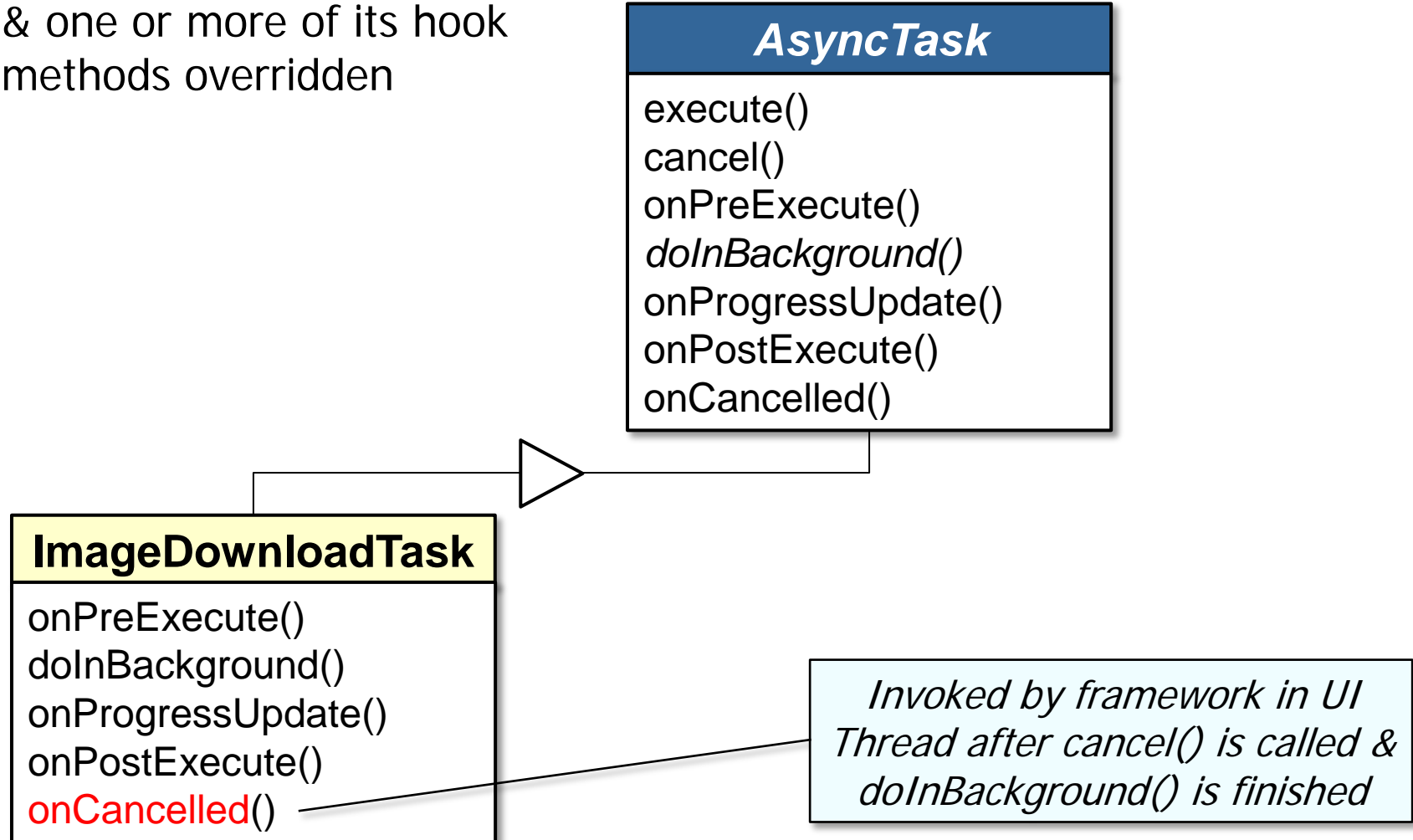
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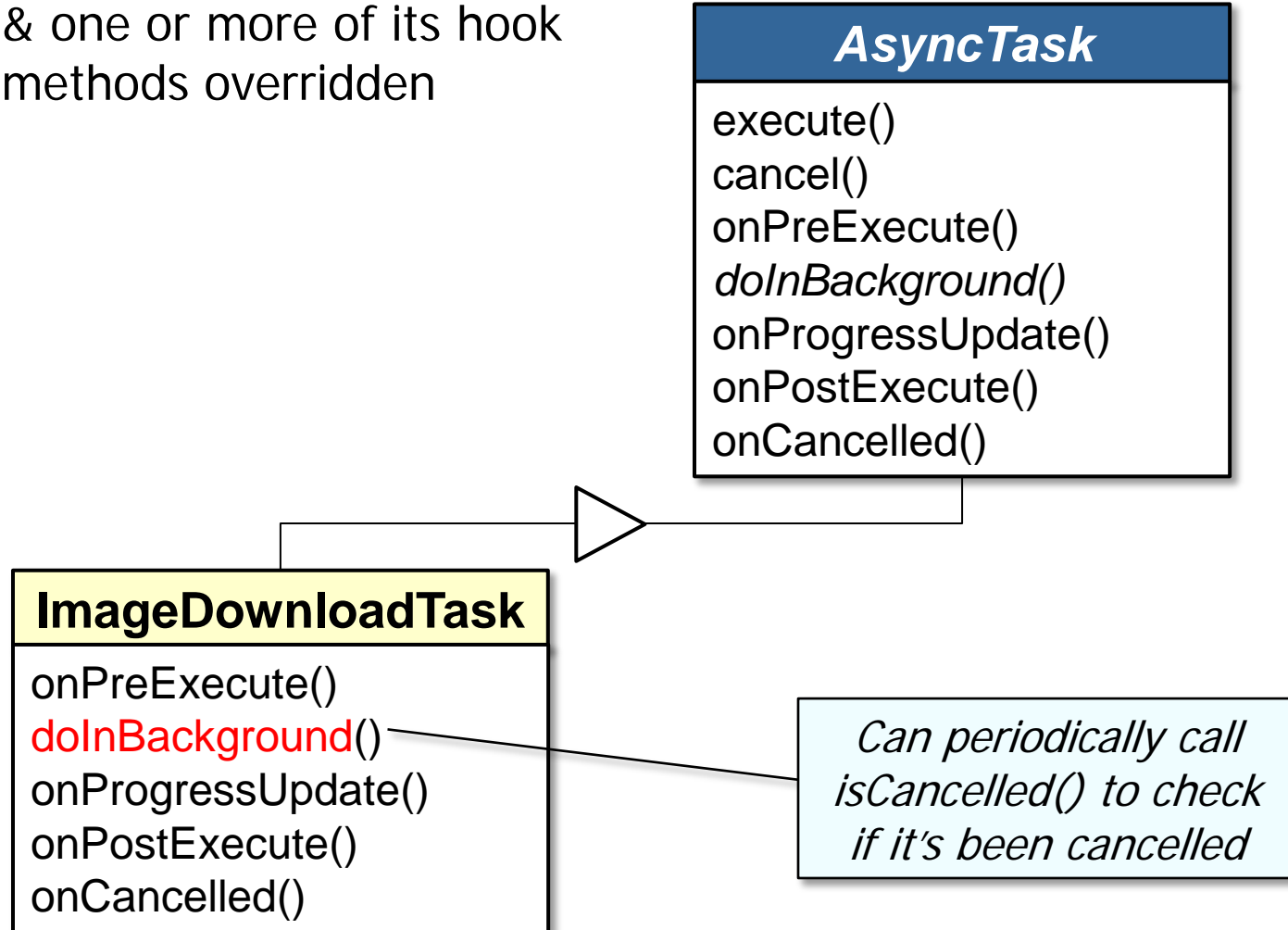
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If onCancelled() is called then onPostExecute() is *not* called

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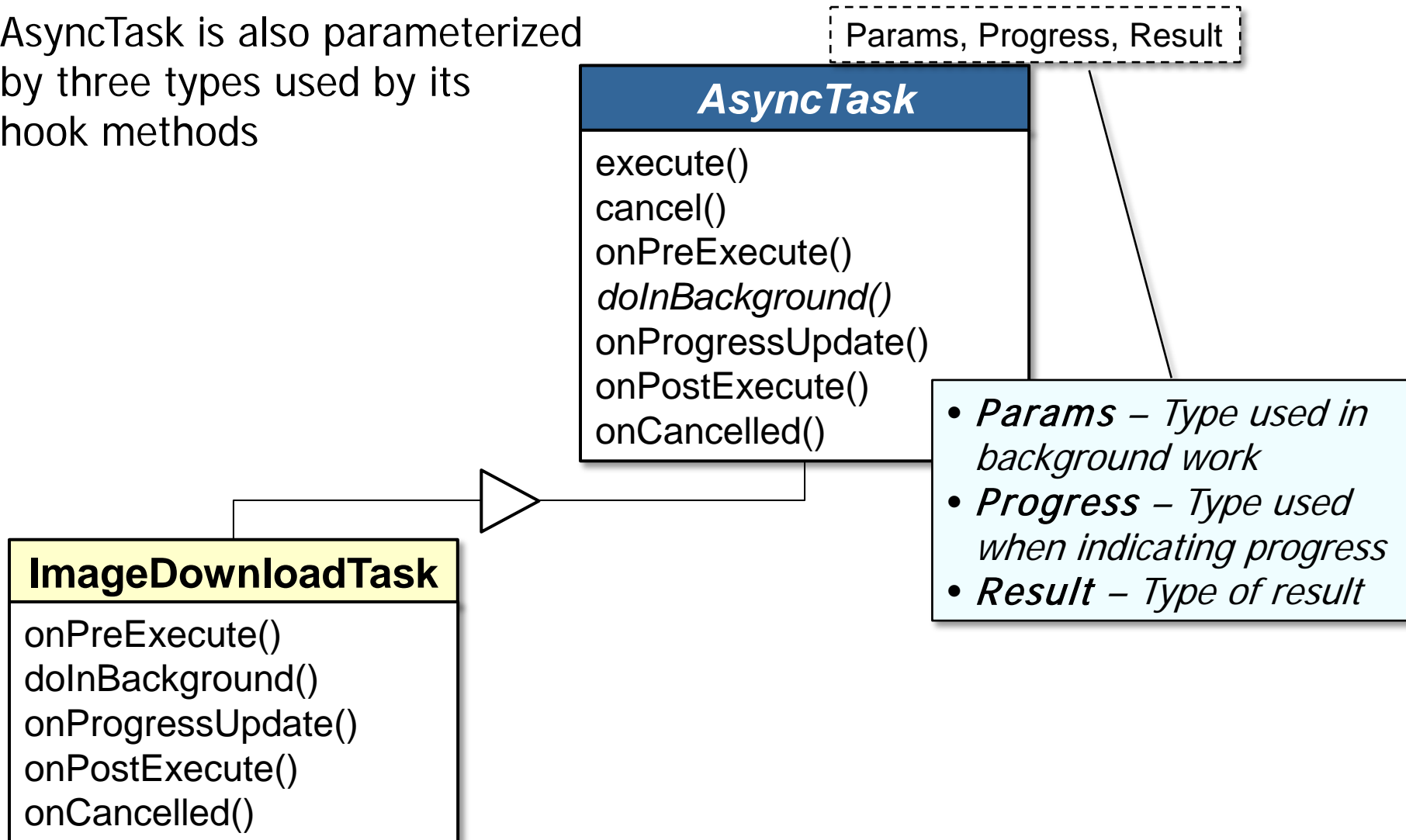
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Similar to using Java Thread interrupt requests to voluntarily shutdown Threads

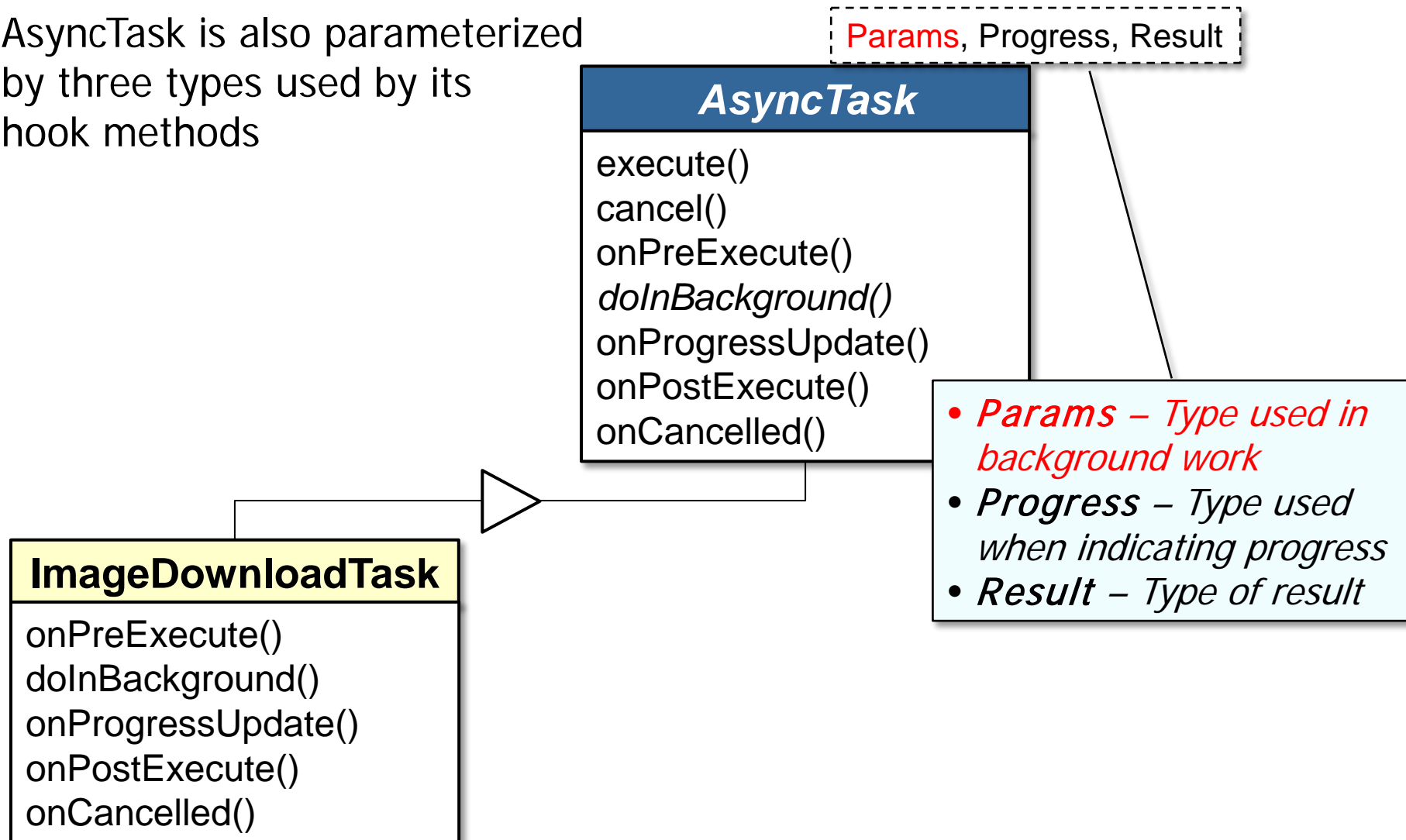
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- AsyncTask is also parameterized by three types used by its hook methods



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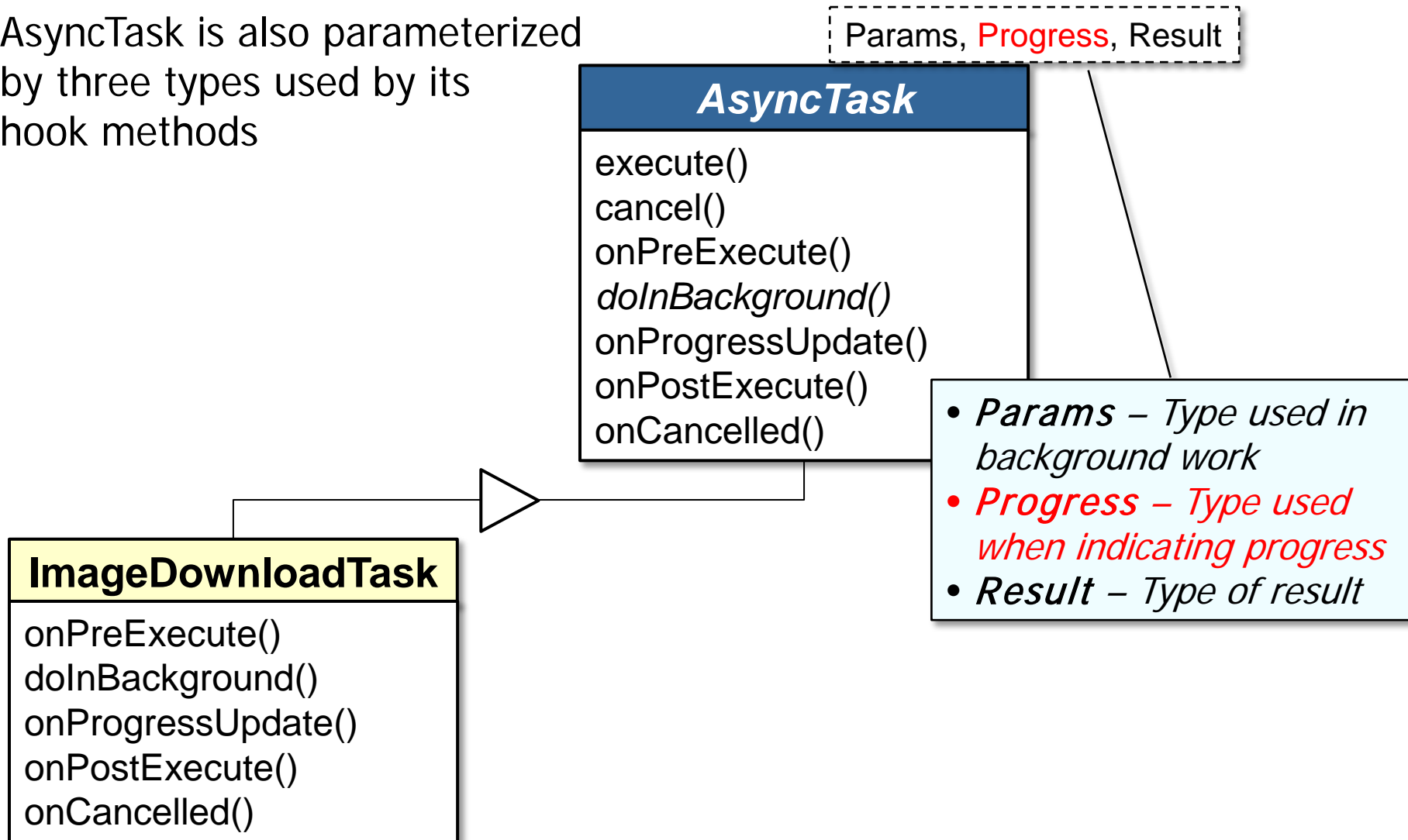
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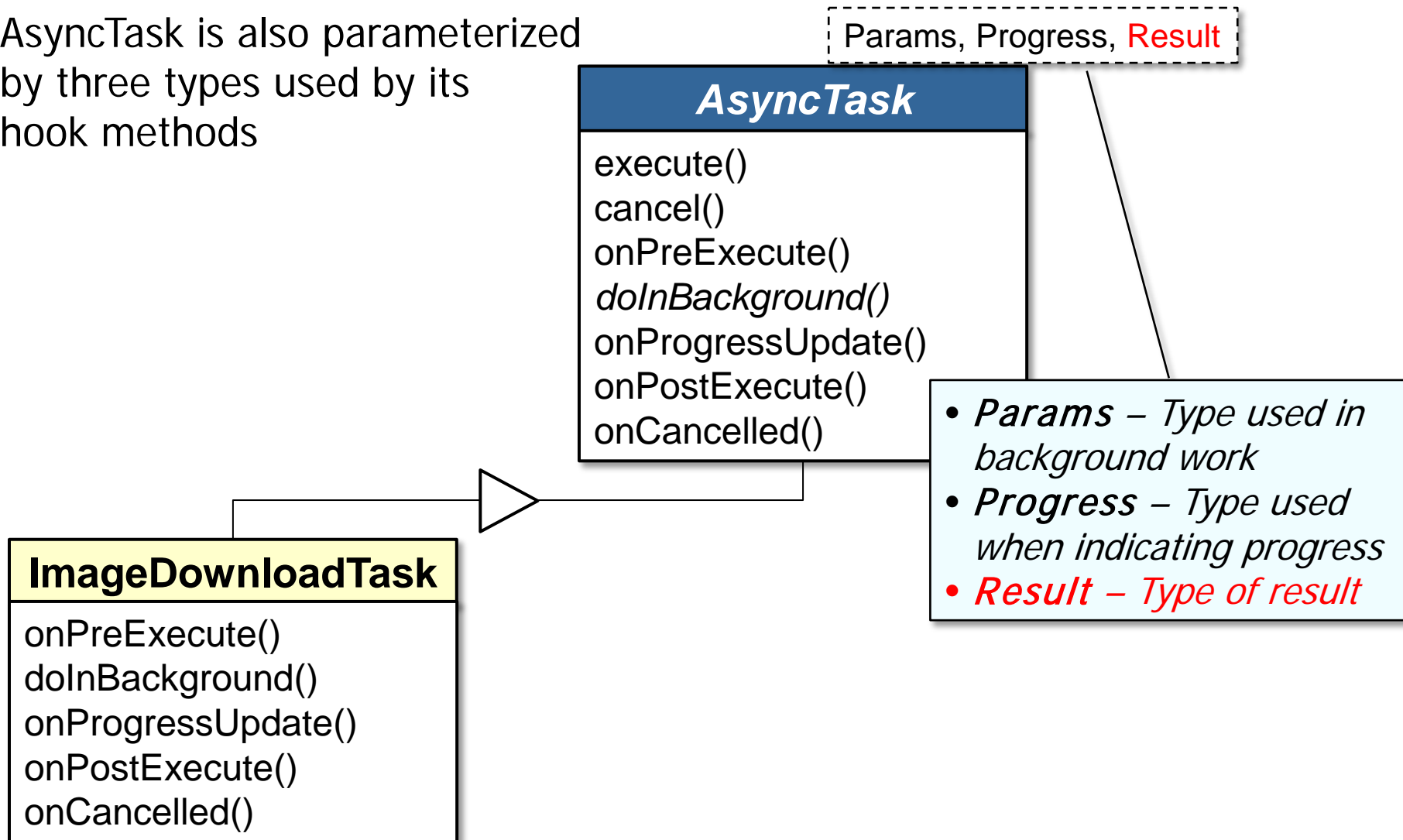
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# Categories of Methods in the AsyncTask Class

---

- Apps must customize the AsyncTask class to meet their concurrency needs

```
class DownloadTask extends
    AsyncTask<Uri, Integer, Long> {
    protected Long doInBackground
        (Uri... urls)
    { /* Download files */ }

    protected void onProgressUpdate
        (Integer... progress)
    { setProgressPercent(progress[0]); }

    protected void onPostExecute
        (Long result)
    { showDialog("Downloaded "
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}

new DownloadTask().execute(downloadURL);
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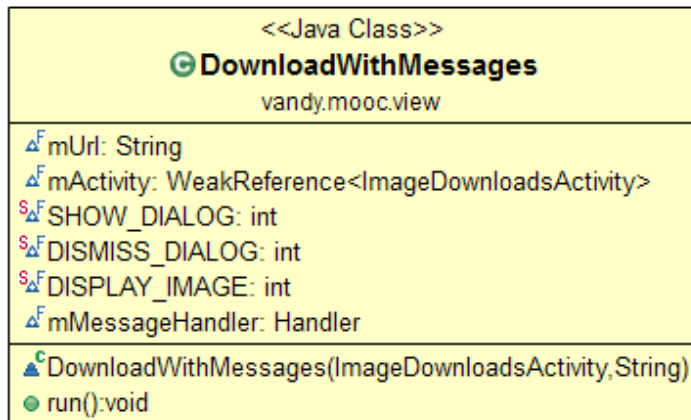
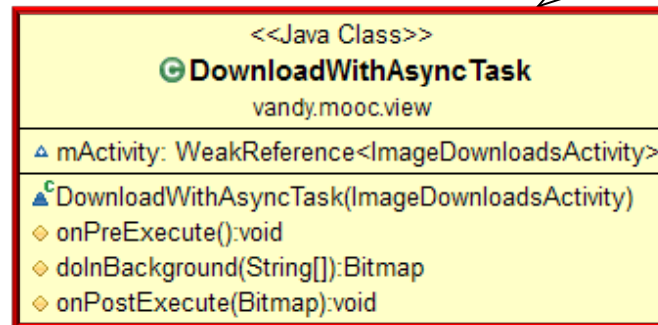
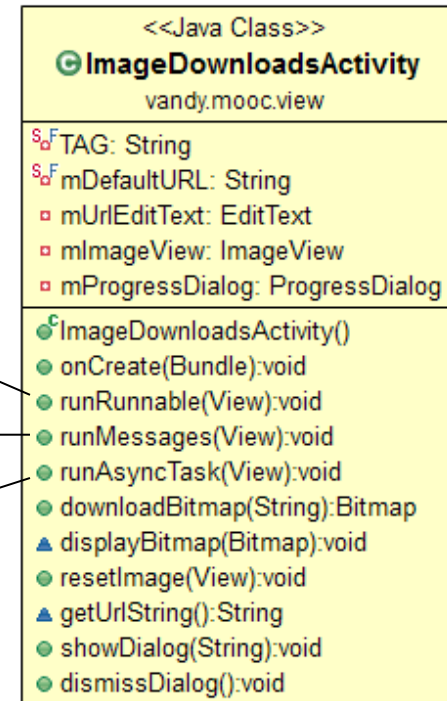
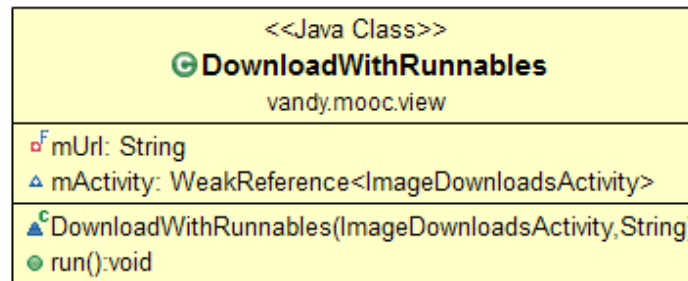
See [developer.android.com/  
reference/android/os/AsyncTask.html](http://developer.android.com/reference/android/os/AsyncTask.html)

---

# Programming with `AsyncTask`

# "Run Async" Behavior for SimpleImageDownloads

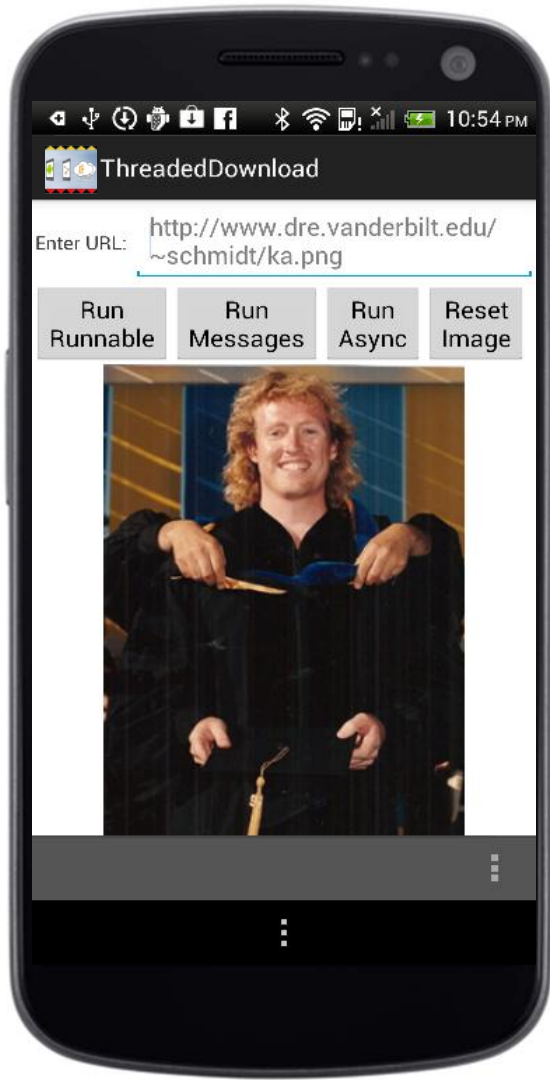
- Downloads & Displays image via AsyncTask



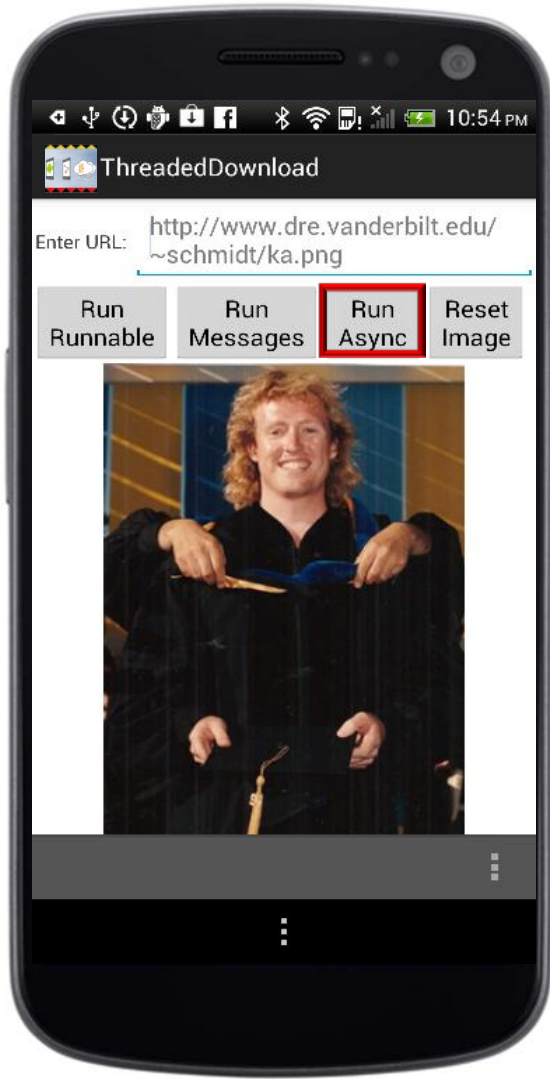
See [github.com/douglasraigschmidt/POSA-15/tree/master/ex/SimpleImageDownloads](https://github.com/douglasraigschmidt/POSA-15/tree/master/ex/SimpleImageDownloads)



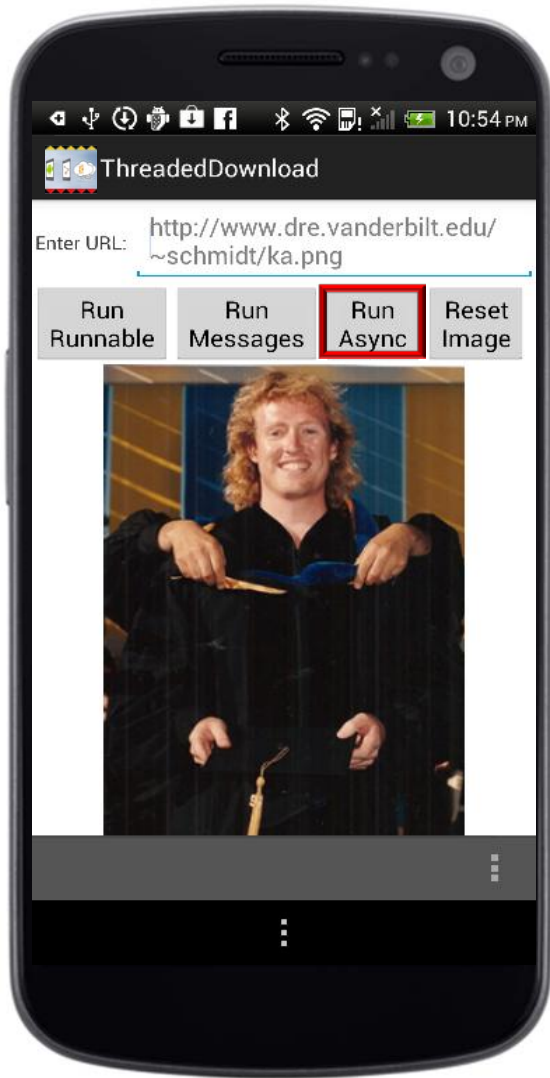
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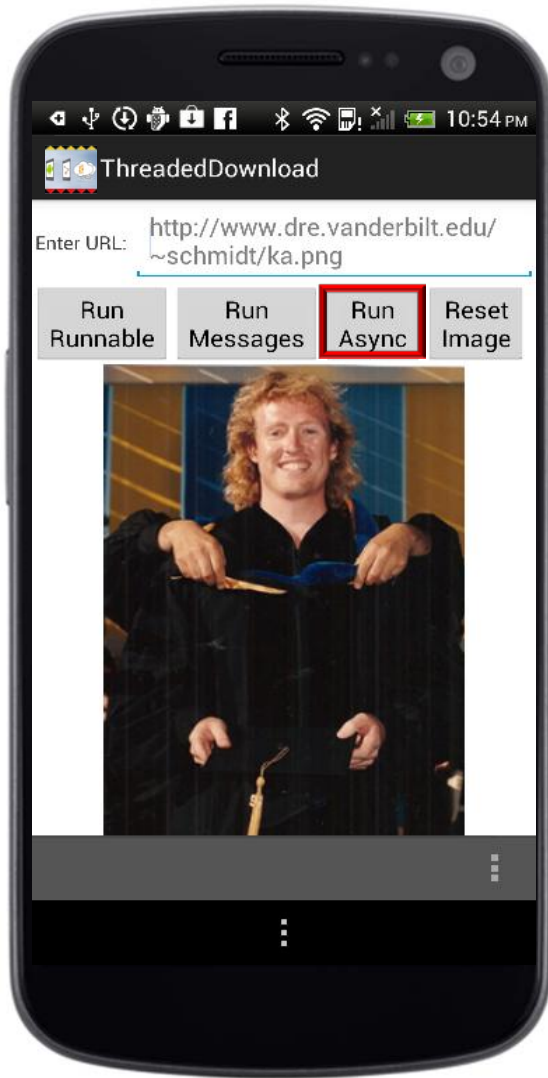
<Button

...

**android:onClick="runAsyncTask"**

**android:text="@string/runAsync" />**

# "Run Async" Behavior for SimpleImageDownloads



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<Button
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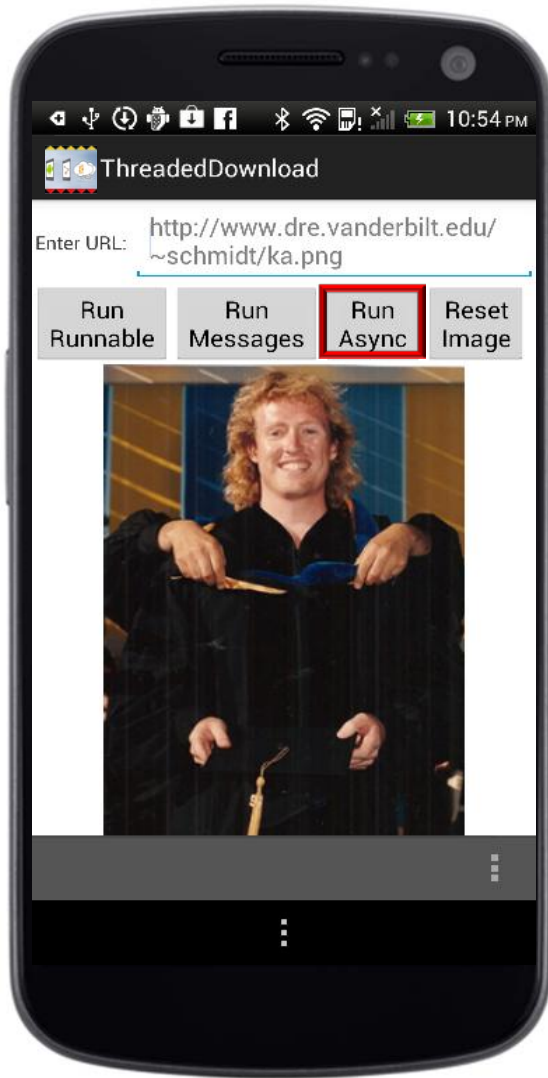
```
public class ImageDownloadsActivity  
    extends Activity {
```

```
...
```

```
public void runAsyncTask(View view) {  
    /* all magic happens here! */  
}
```

See [ThreadedDownloads/src/edu/vuum/mocca/ImageDownloadsActivity.java](http://ThreadedDownloads/src/edu/vuum/mocca/ImageDownloadsActivity.java)

# "Run Async" Behavior for SimpleImageDownloads



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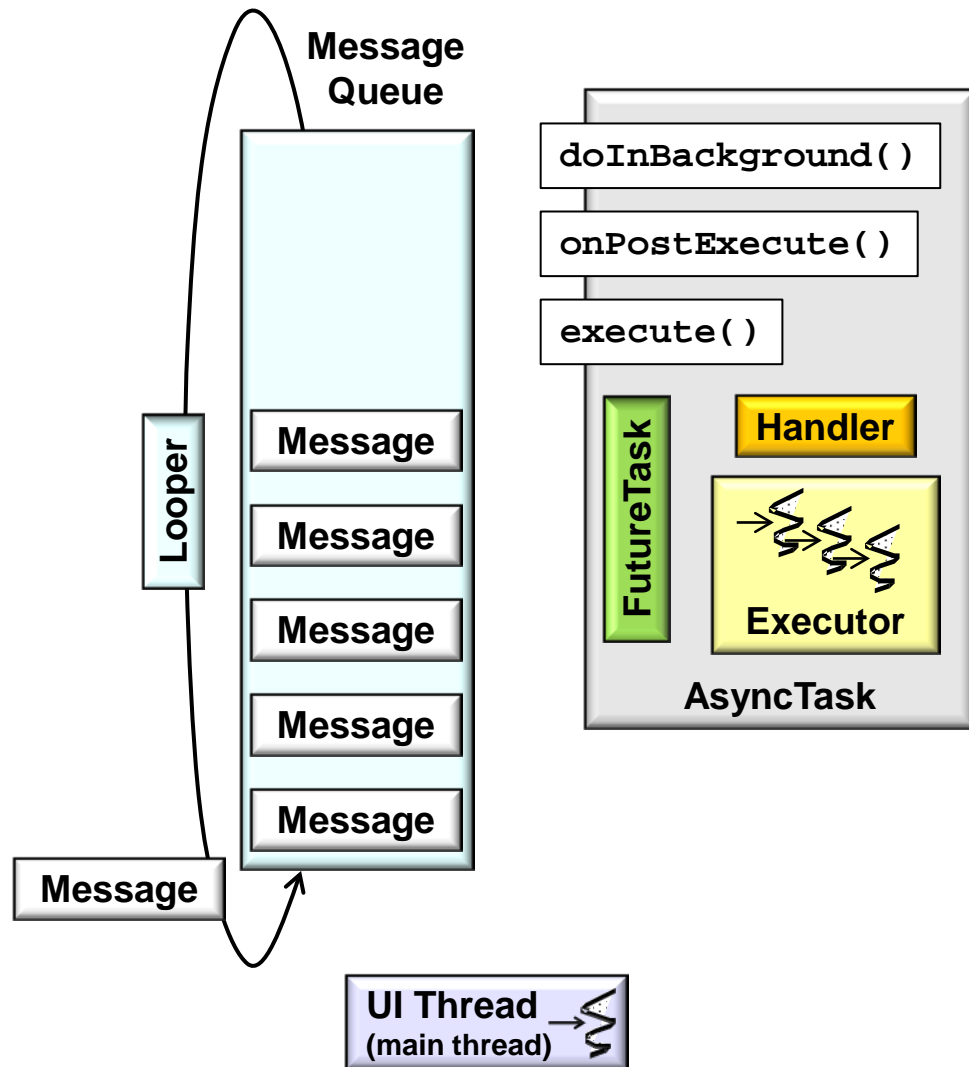
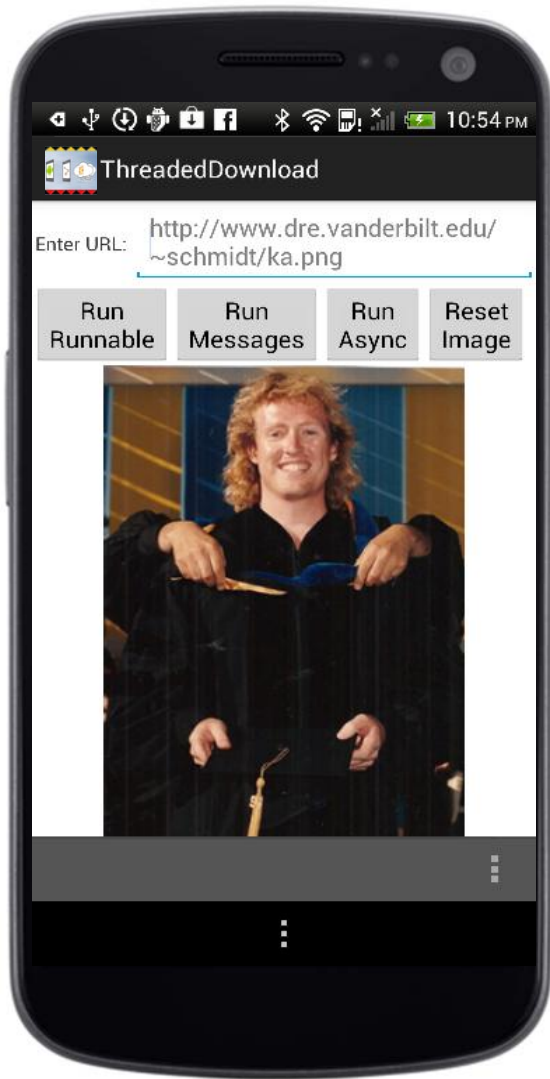
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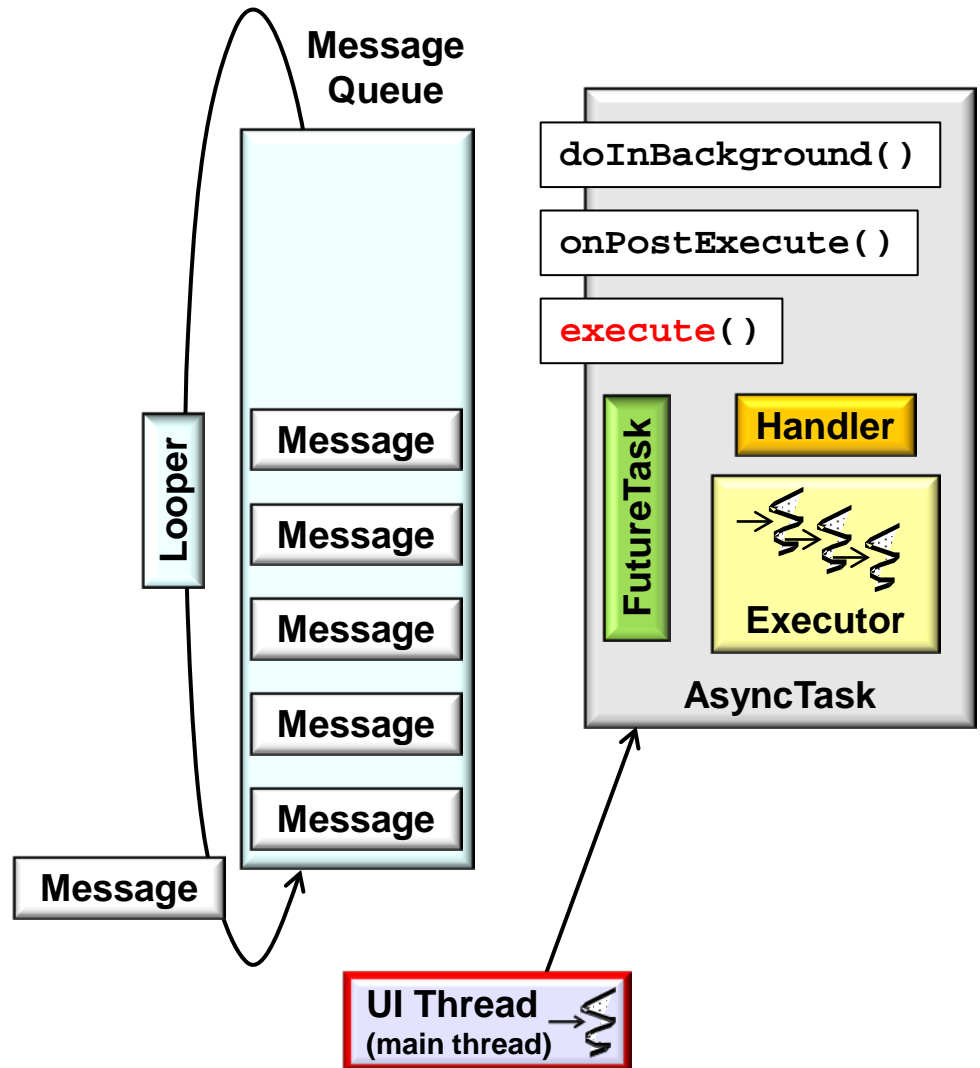
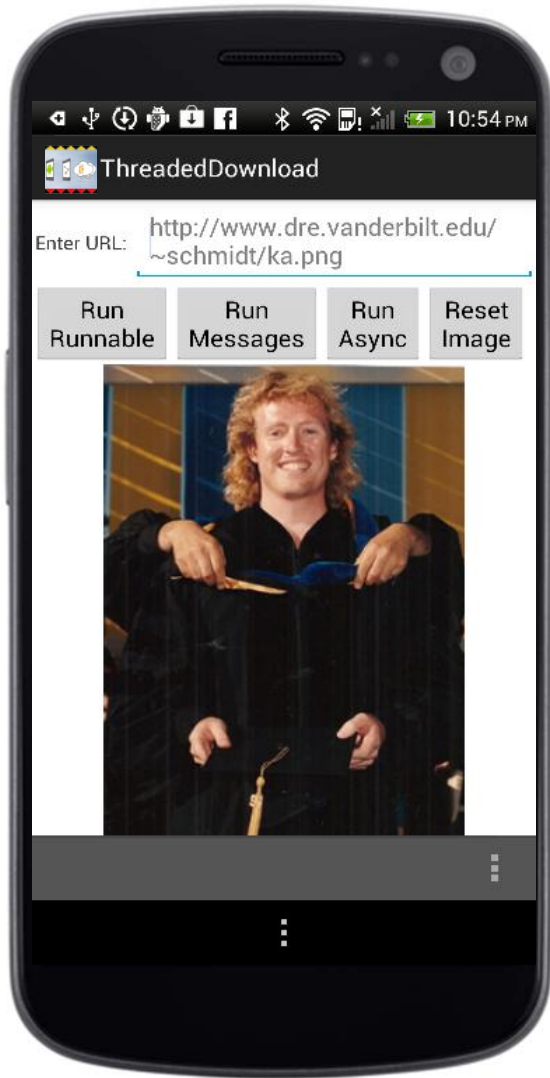
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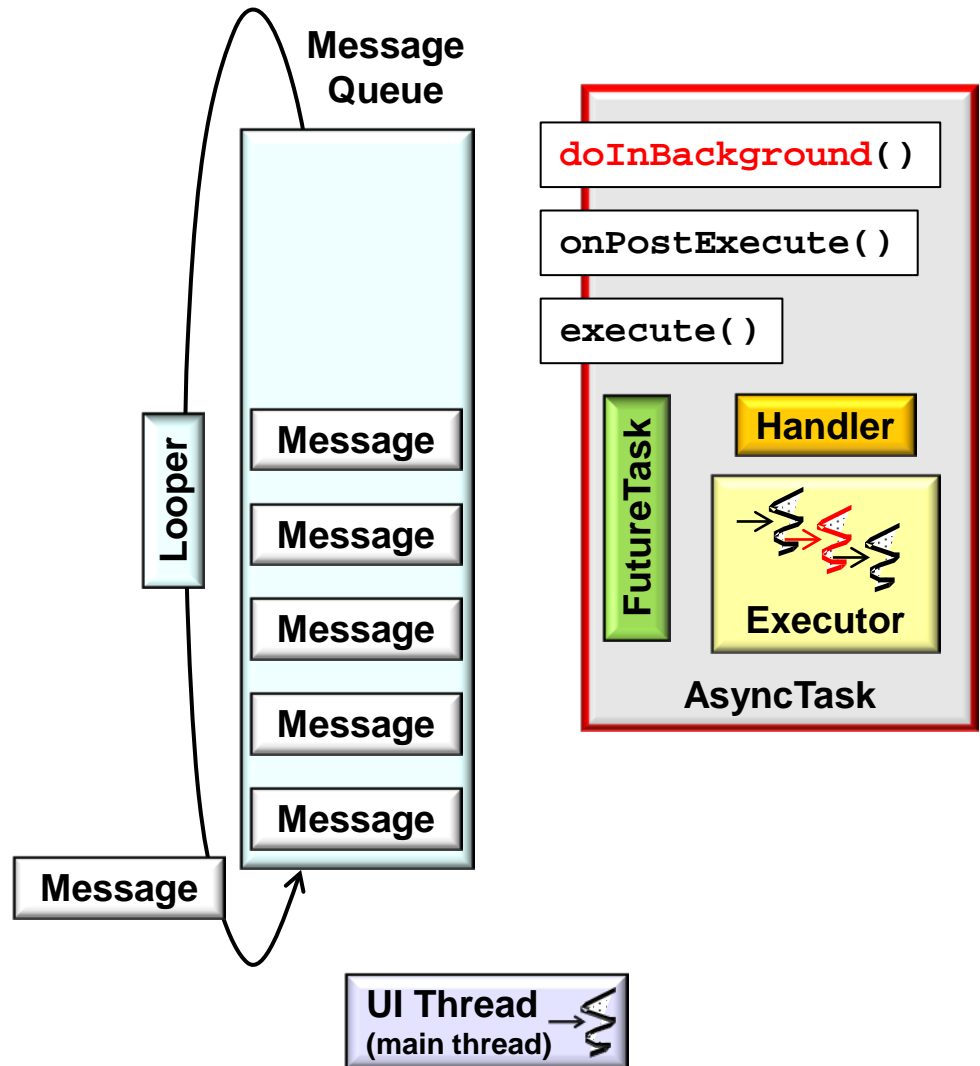
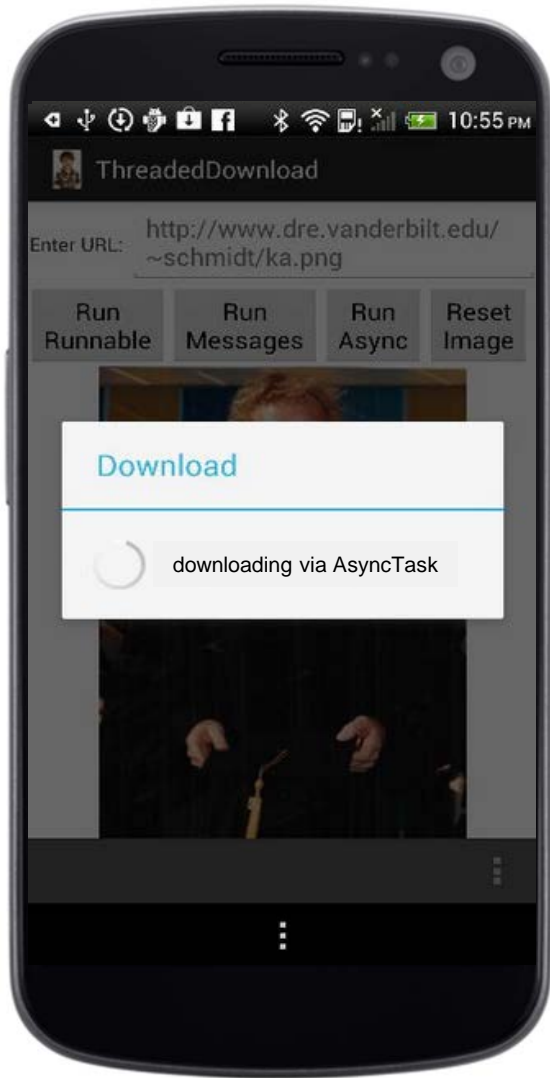
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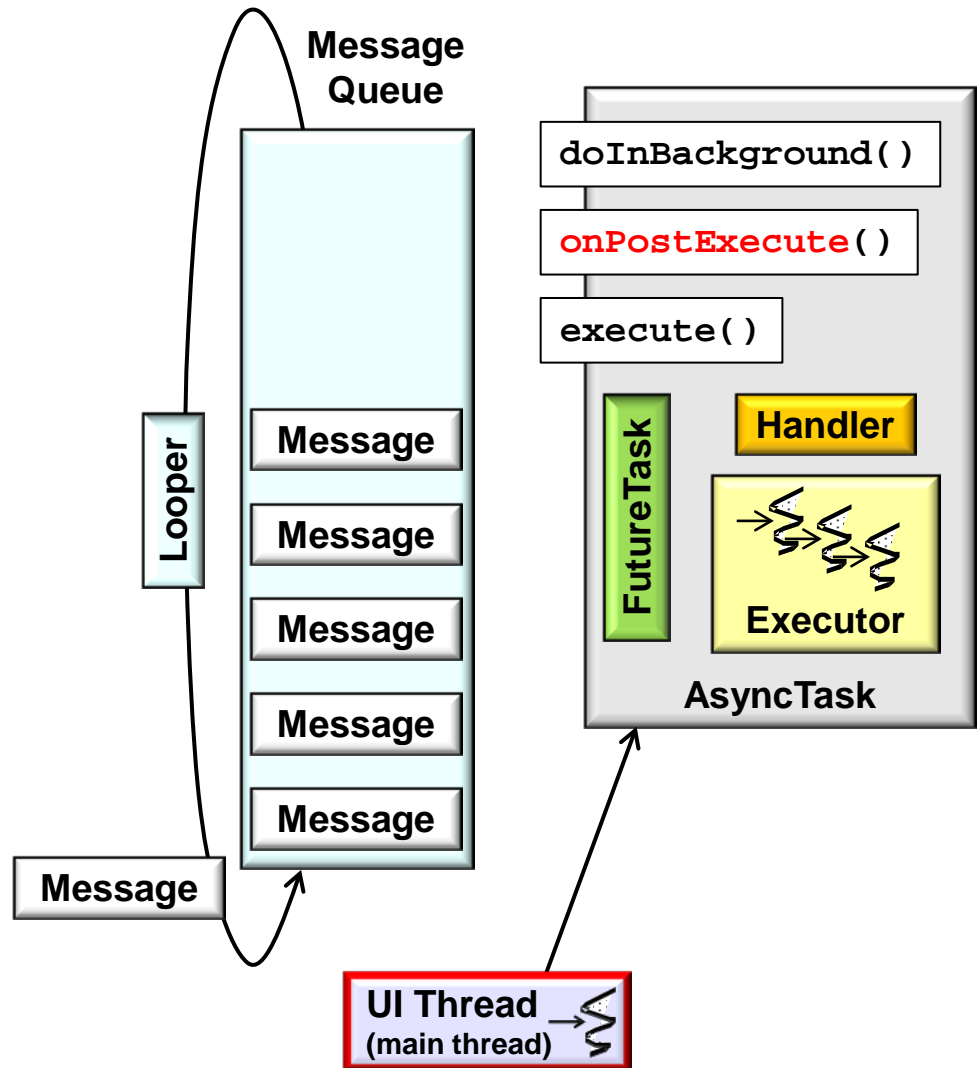


# "Run Async" Behavior for SimpleImageDownloads

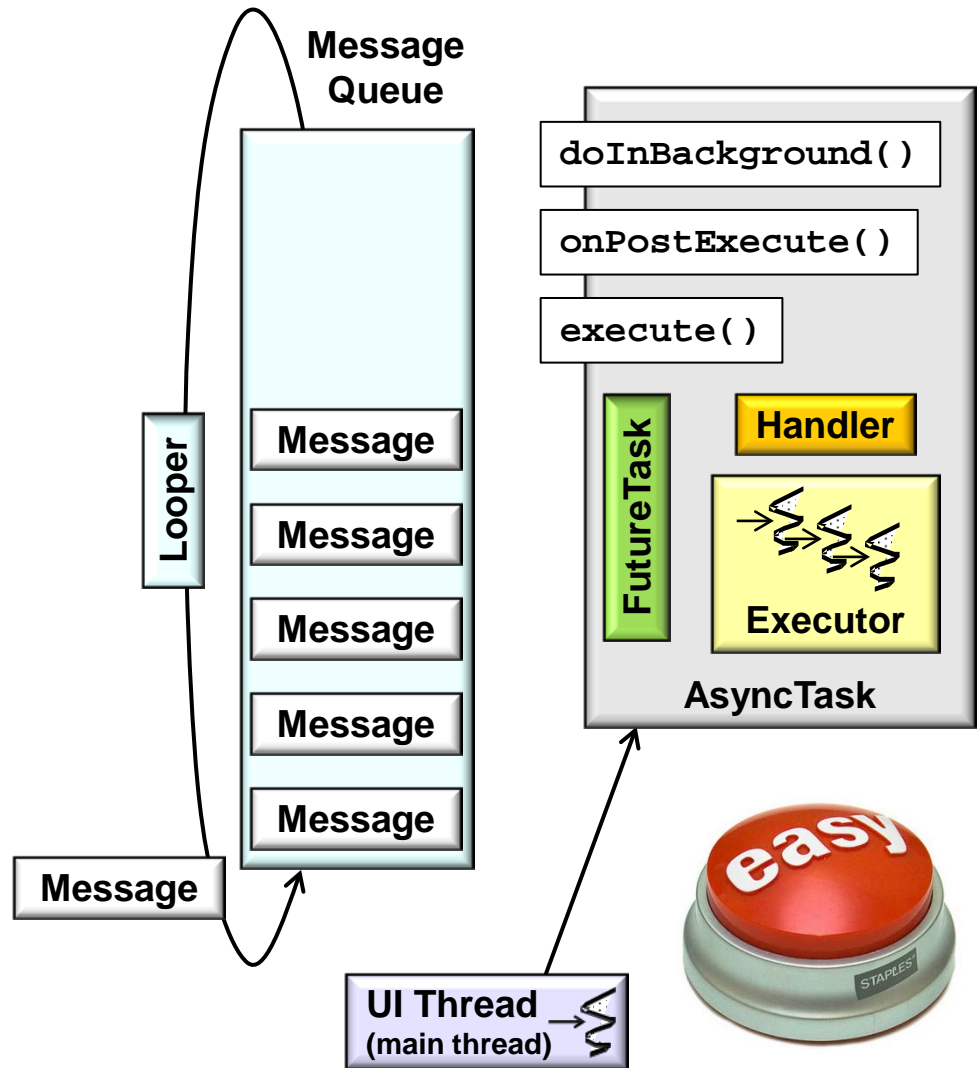




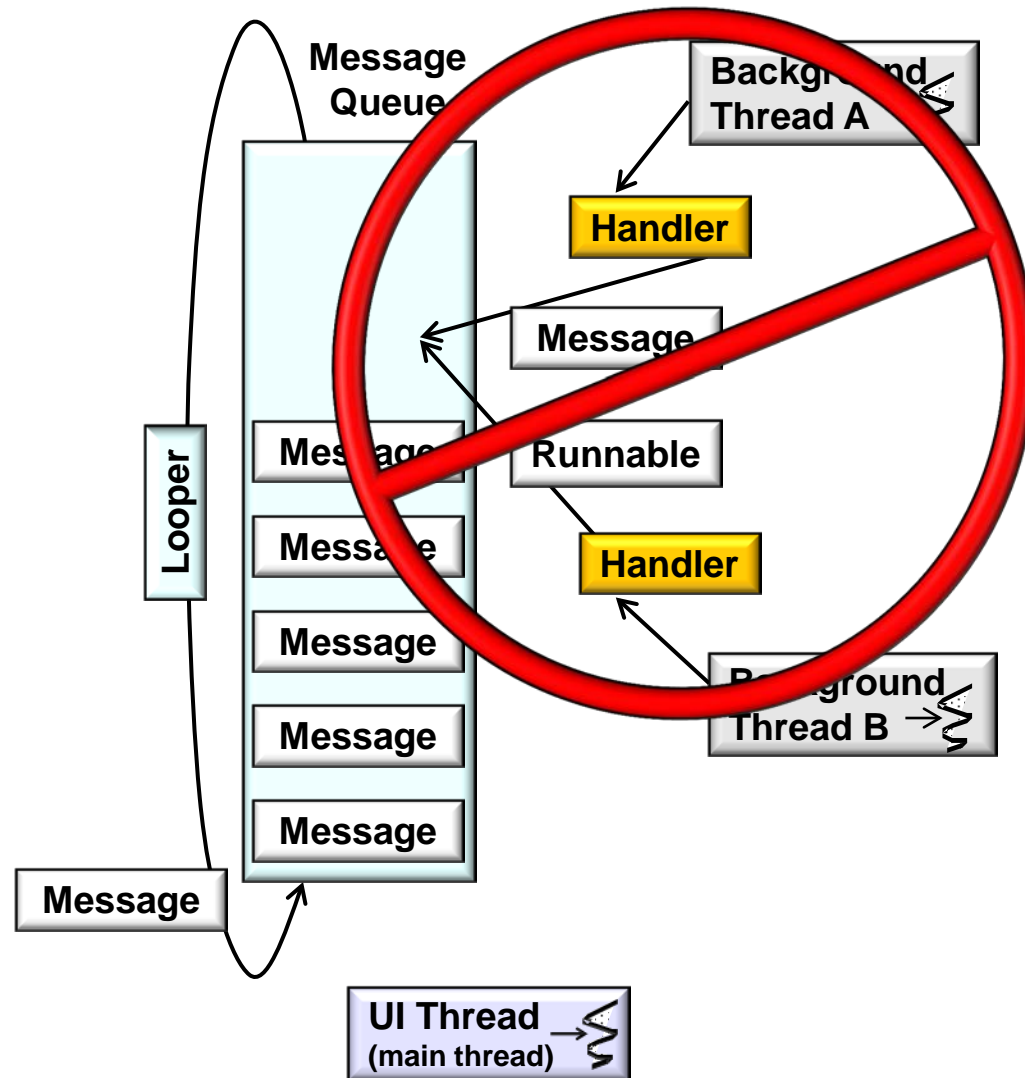
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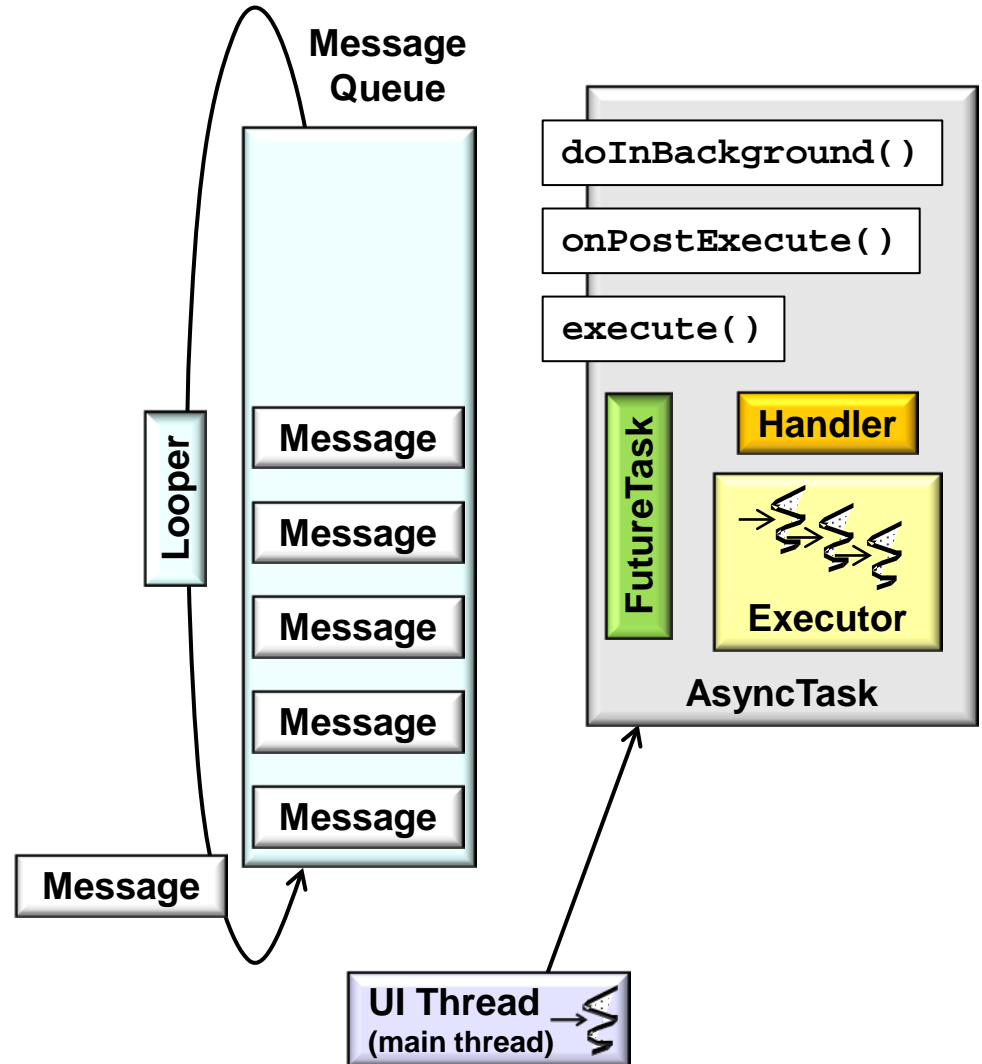
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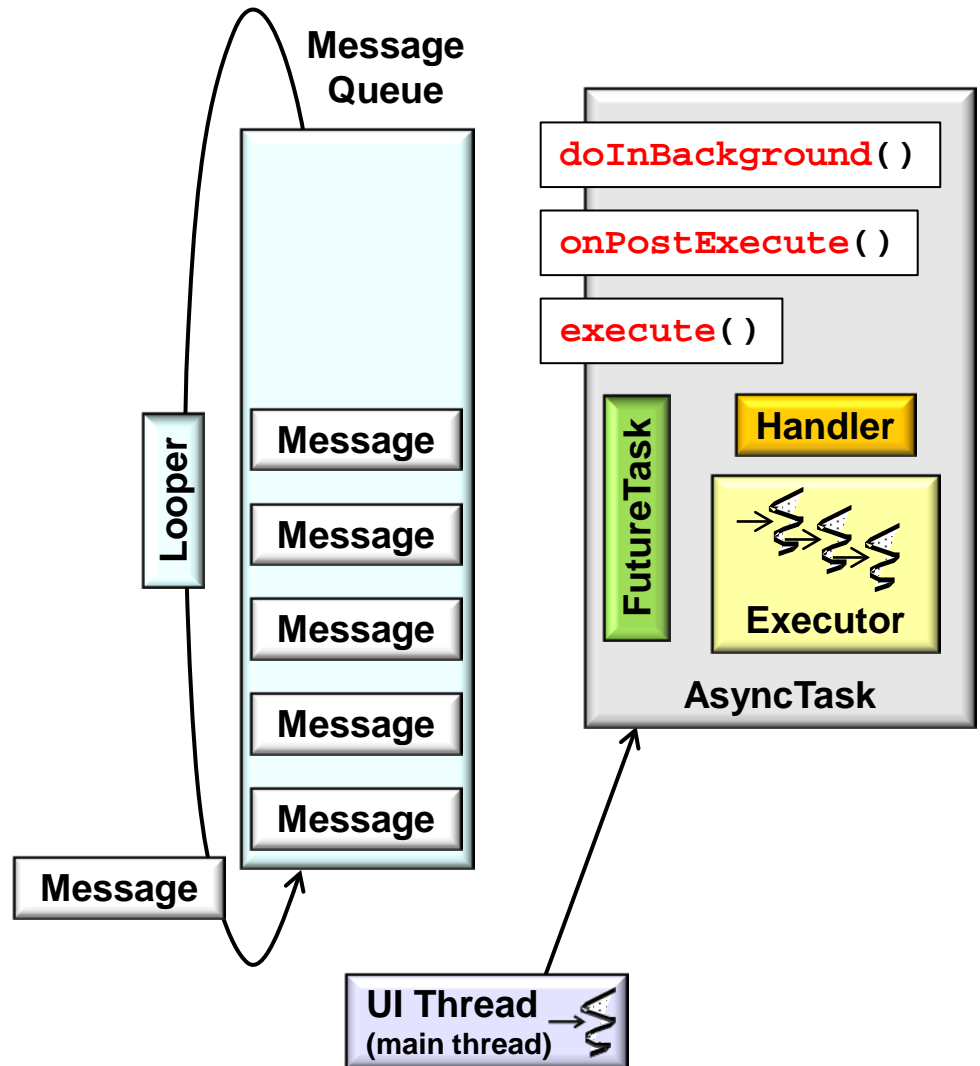


# "Run Async" Behavior for SimpleImageDownloads



See [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template\\_method\\_pattern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template_method_pattern)

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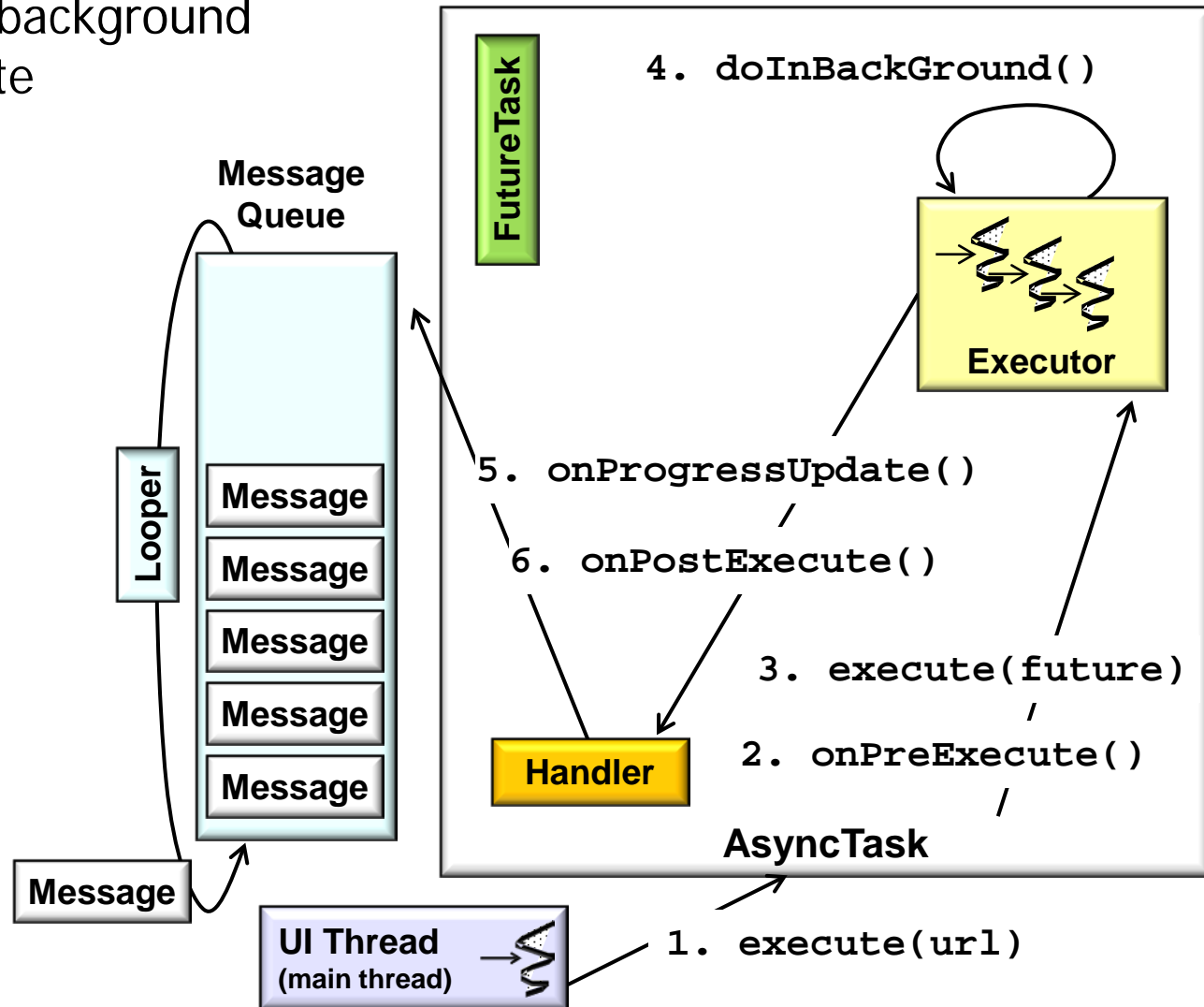


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# AsyncTask Usage Considerations

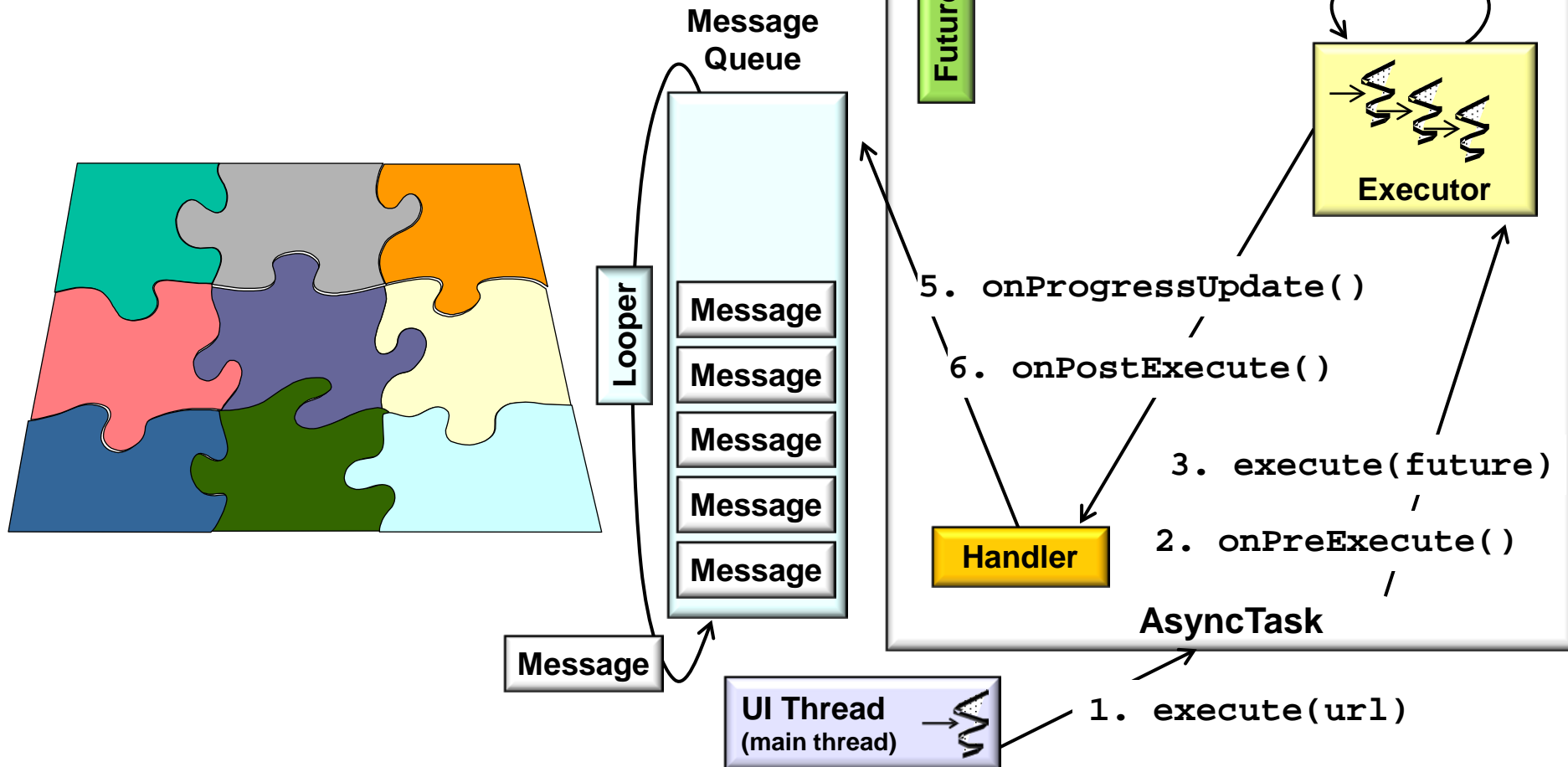
# AsyncTask Usage Considerations

- AsyncTask allows UI & background Threads to communicate



# AsyncTask Usage Considerations

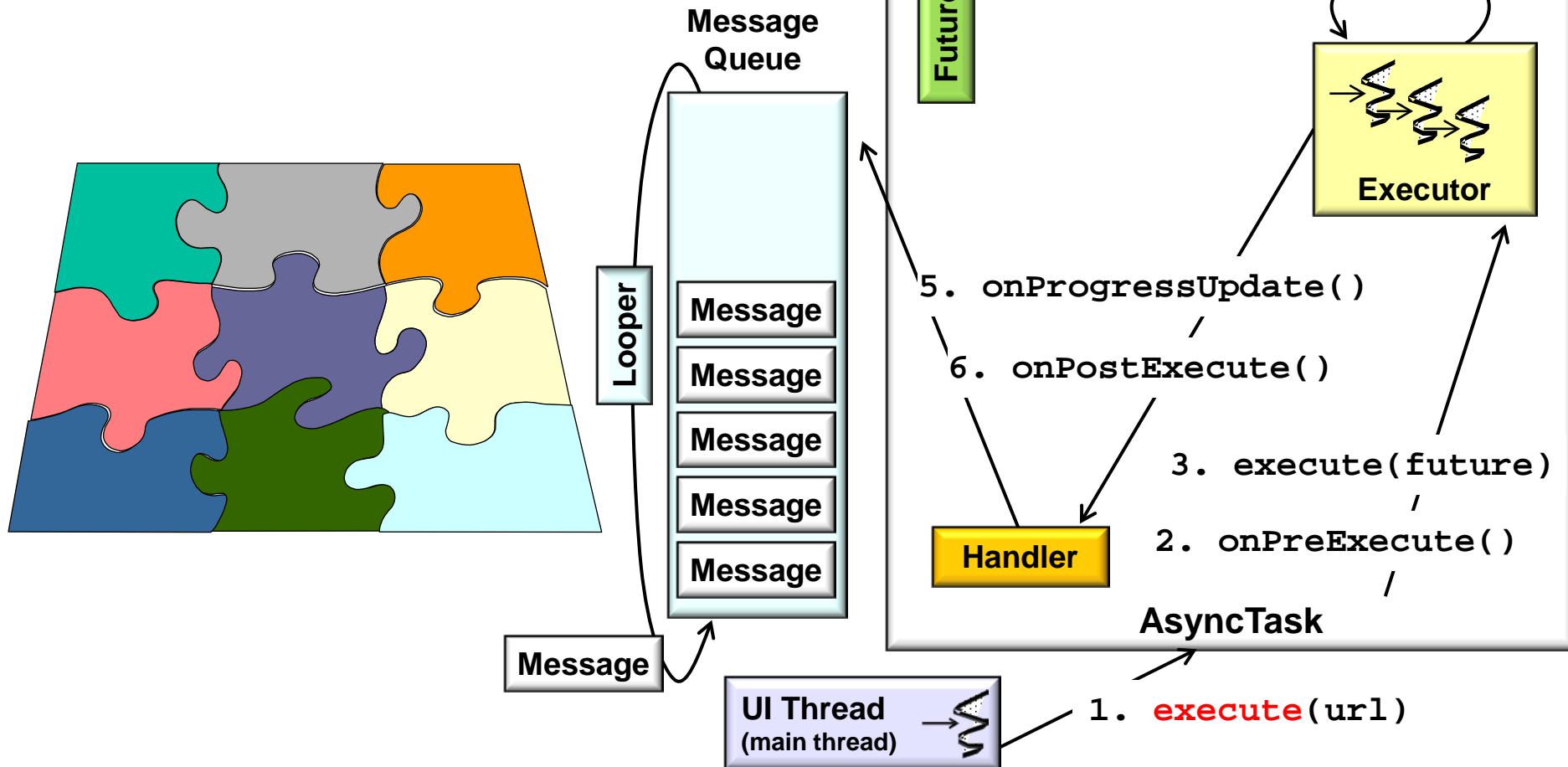
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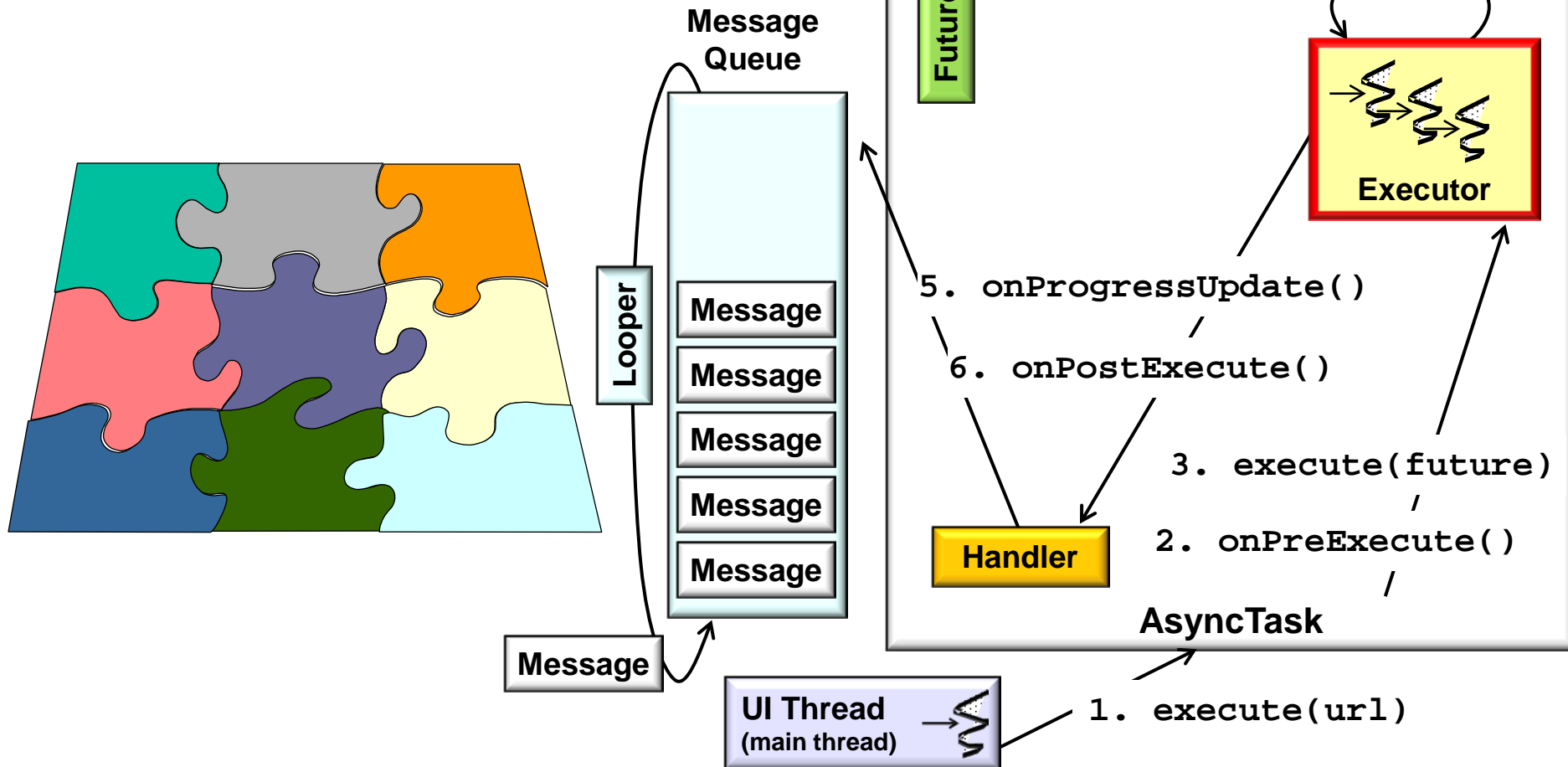
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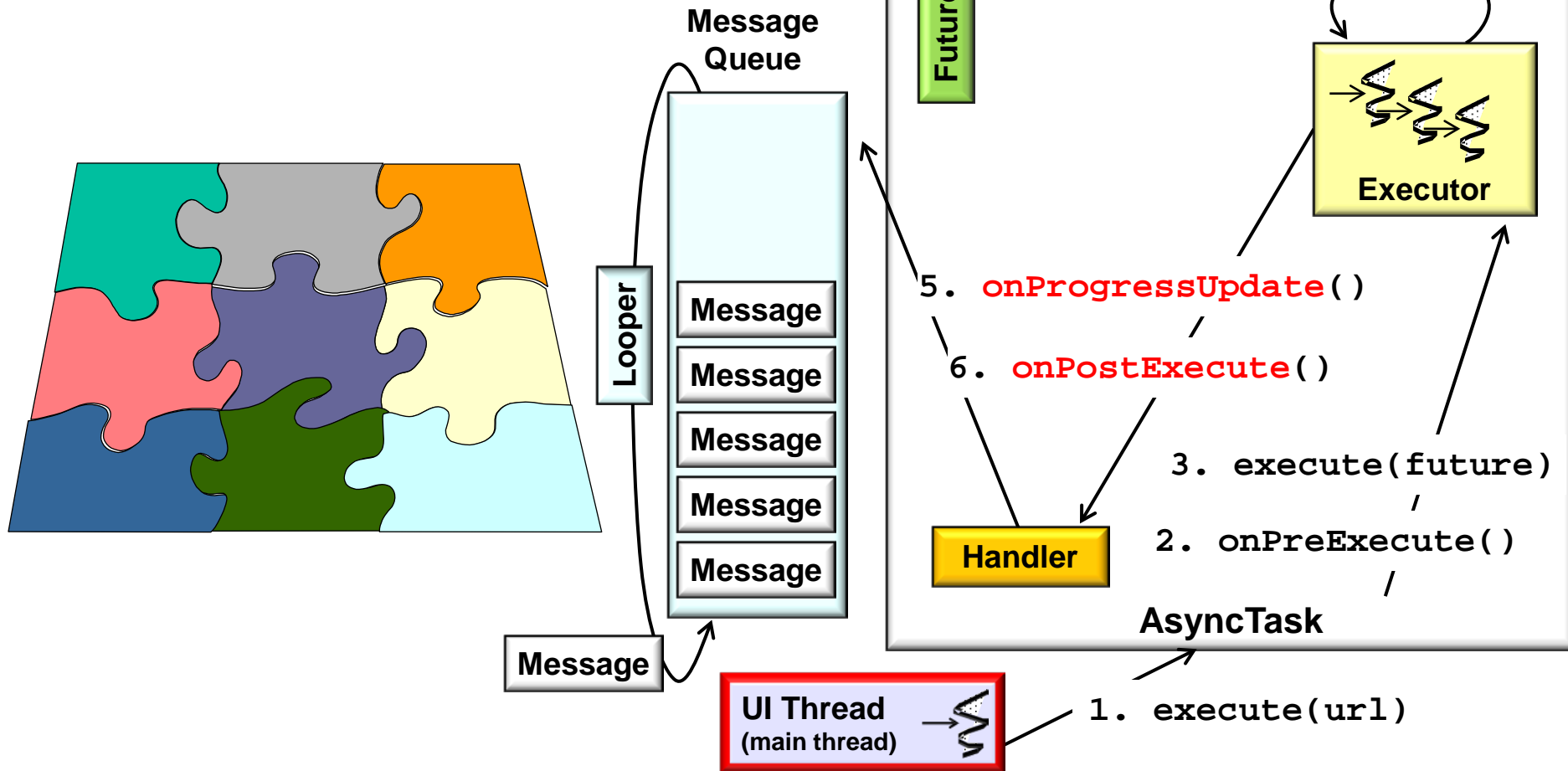
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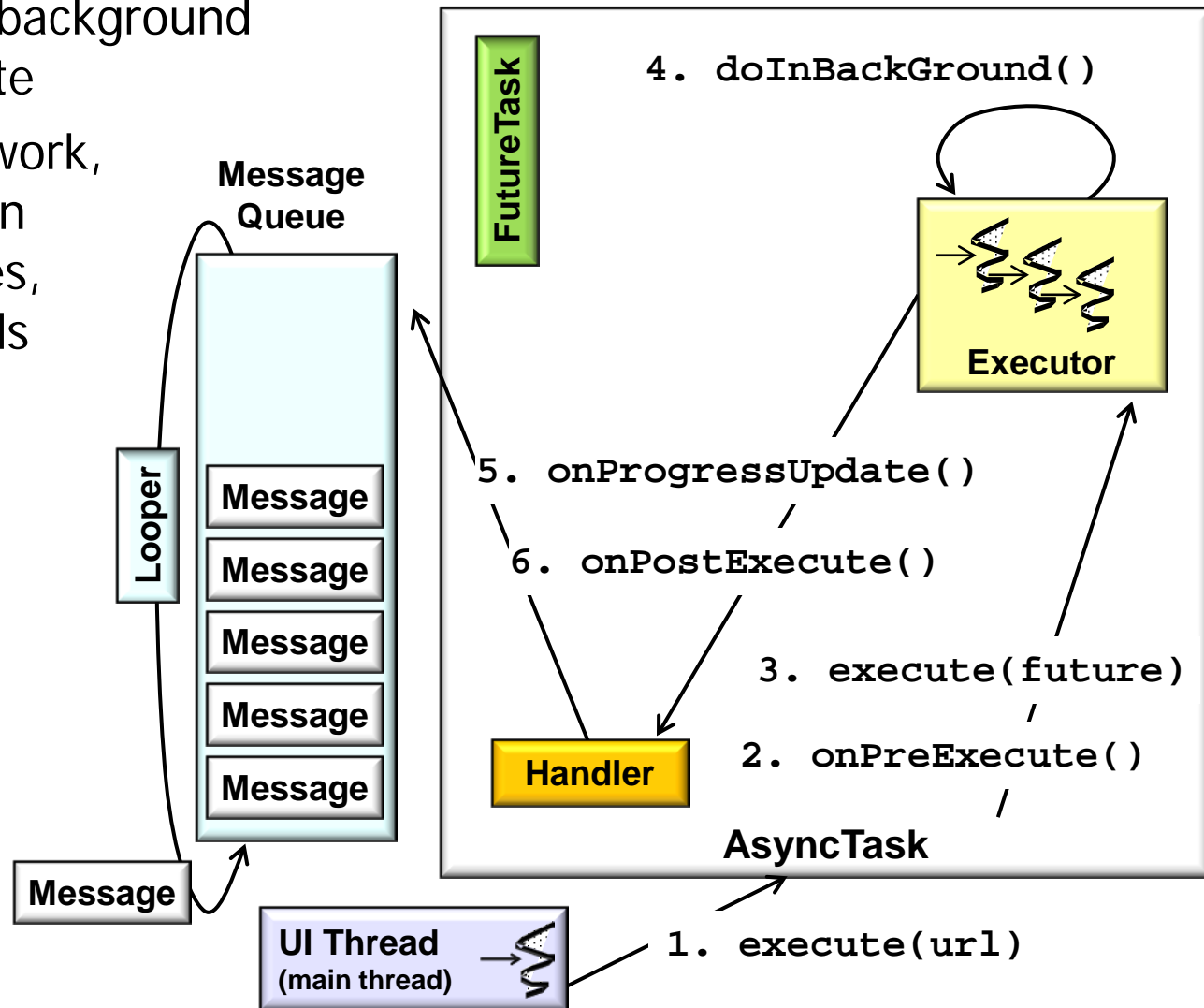
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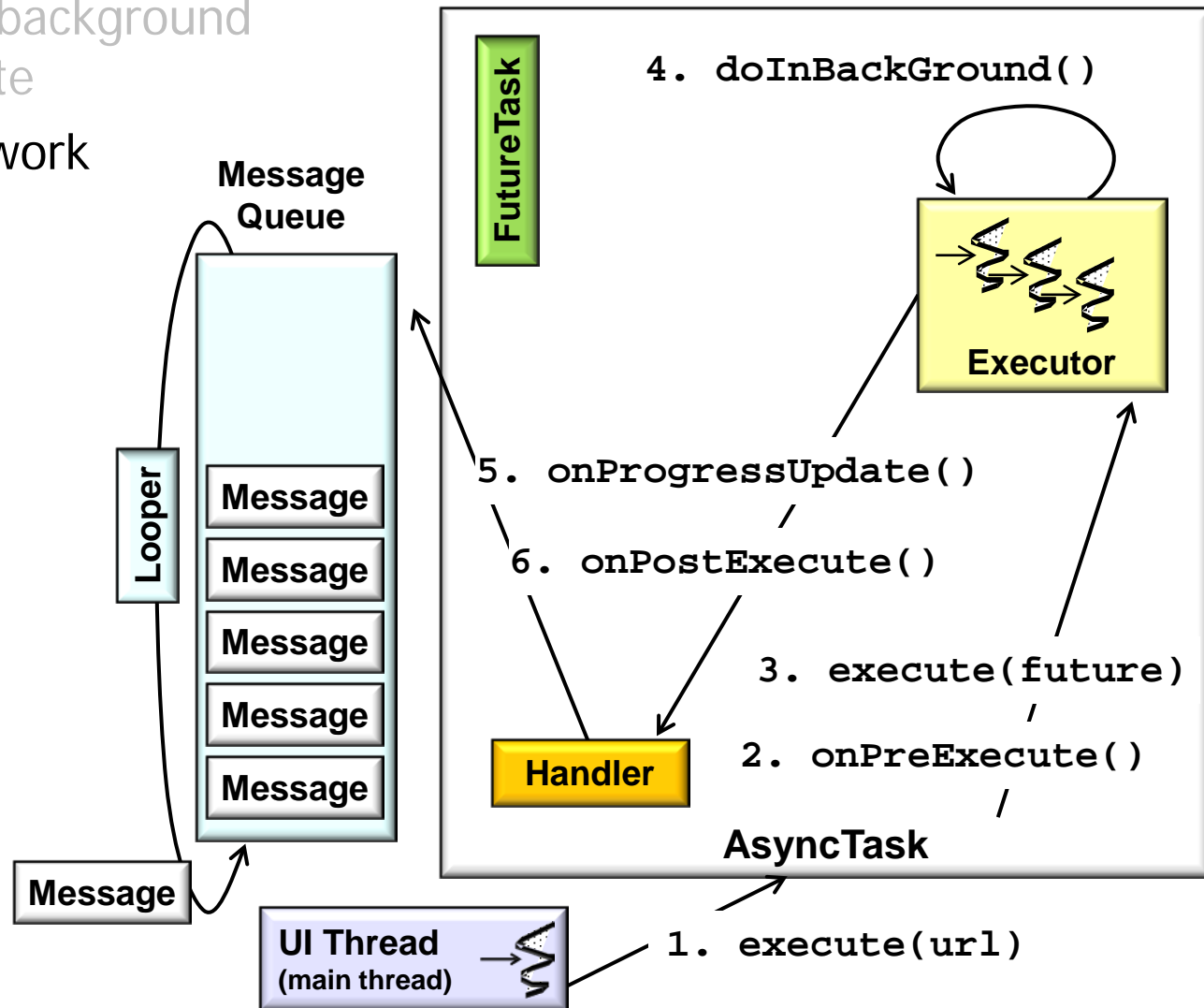
# AsyncTask Usage Considerations

- AsyncTask allows UI & background Threads to communicate
- Unlike HaMeR framework, no direct manipulation of Handlers, Messages, Runnables, or Threads



# AsyncTask Usage Considerations

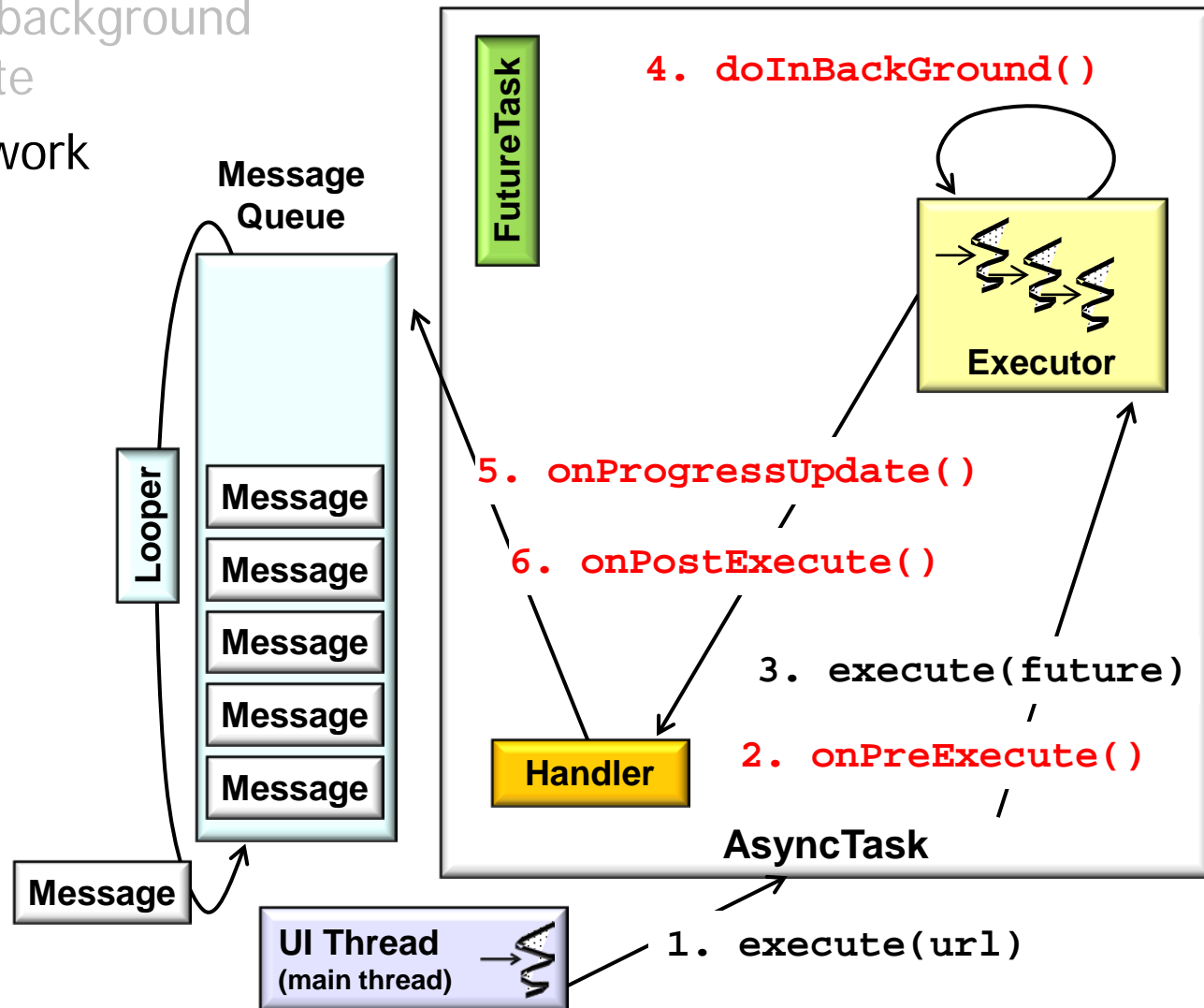
- AsyncTask allows UI & background Threads to communicate
- It embodies key framework characteristics



See earlier discussions on "Android of Concurrency Patterns & Frameworks"

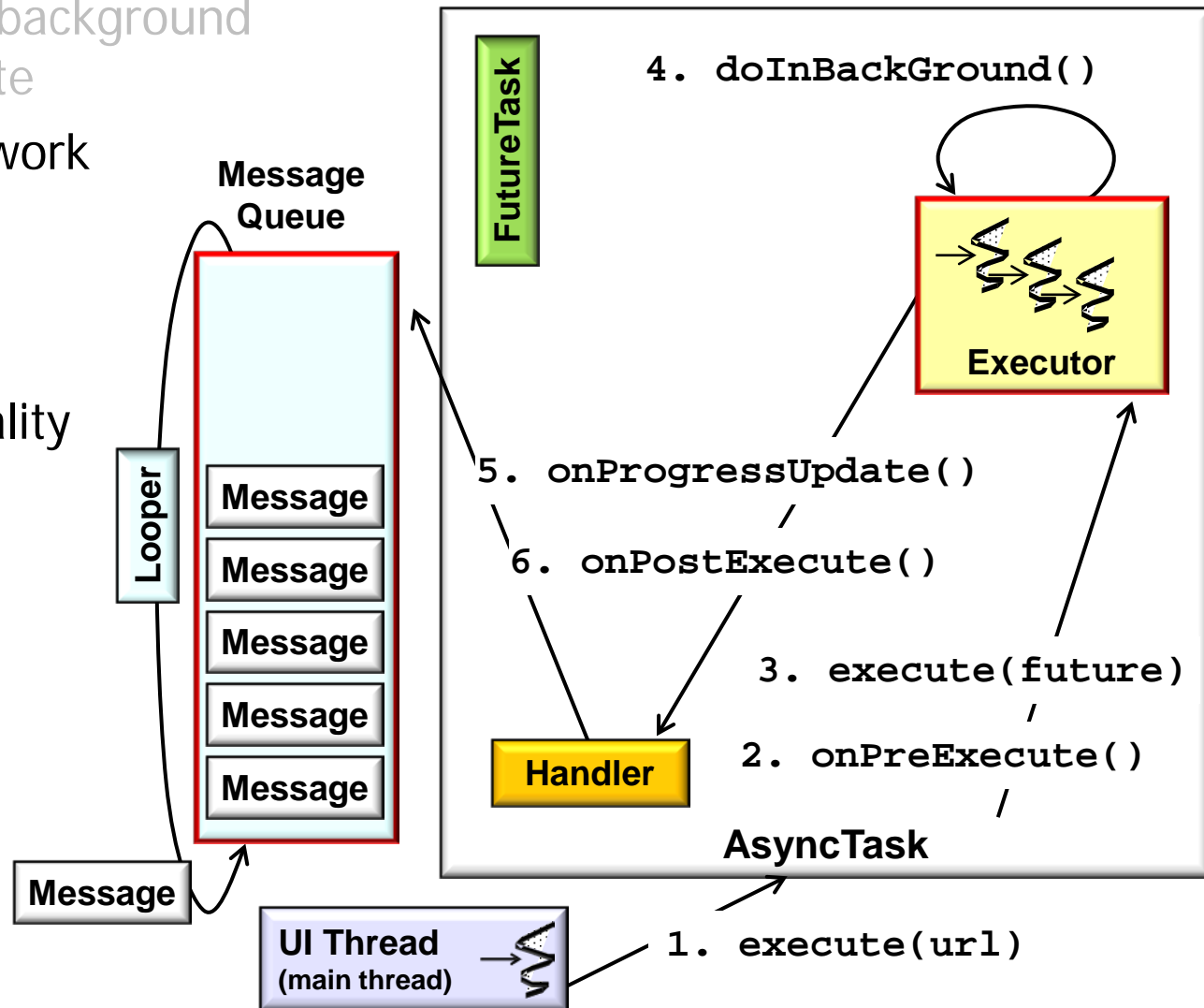
# AsyncTask Usage Considerations

- AsyncTask allows UI & background Threads to communicate
- It embodies key framework characteristics, e.g.
  - Inversion of control



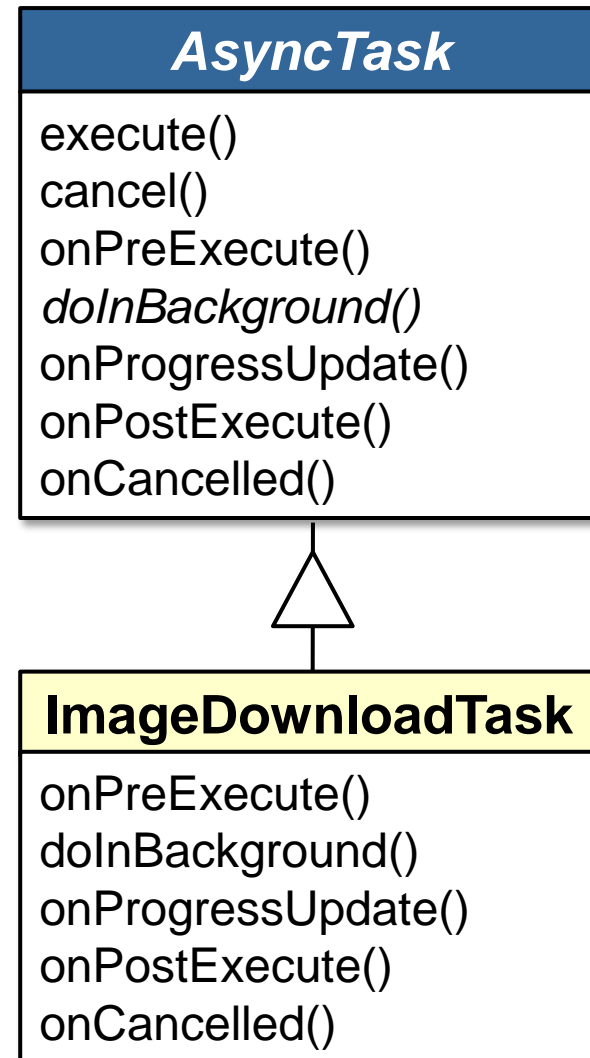
# AsyncTask Usage Considerations

- AsyncTask allows UI & background Threads to communicate
- It embodies key framework characteristics, e.g.
  - Inversion of control
  - Domain-specific structure & functionality



# AsyncTask Usage Considerations

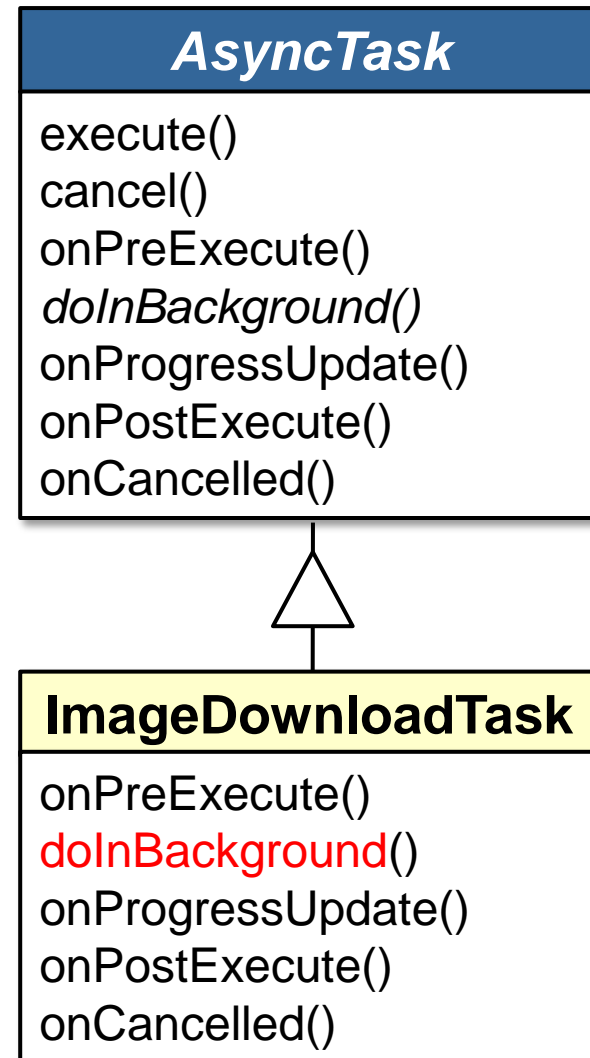
- AsyncTask allows UI & background Threads to communicate
- It embodies key framework characteristics, e.g.
  - Inversion of control
  - Domain-specific structure & functionality
  - Semi-complete portions of apps





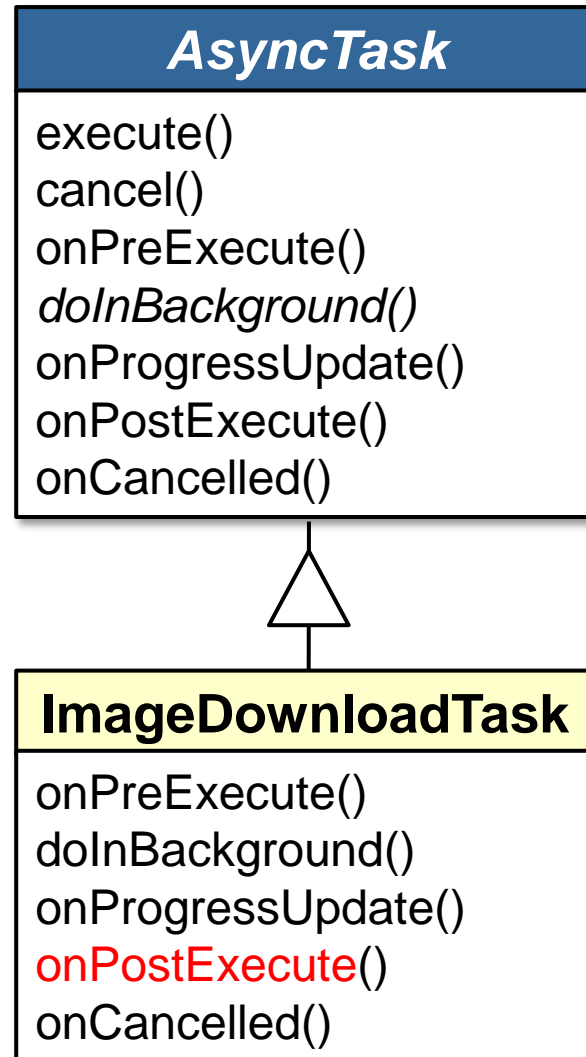
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# AsyncTask Usage Considerations

- AsyncTask allows UI & background Threads to communicate
- It embodies key framework characteristics
- AsyncTask has traps & pitfalls



See [bon-app-etit.blogspot.com/2013/04/the-dark-side-of-async-task.html](http://bon-app-etit.blogspot.com/2013/04/the-dark-side-of-async-task.html)

# AsyncTask Usage Considerations

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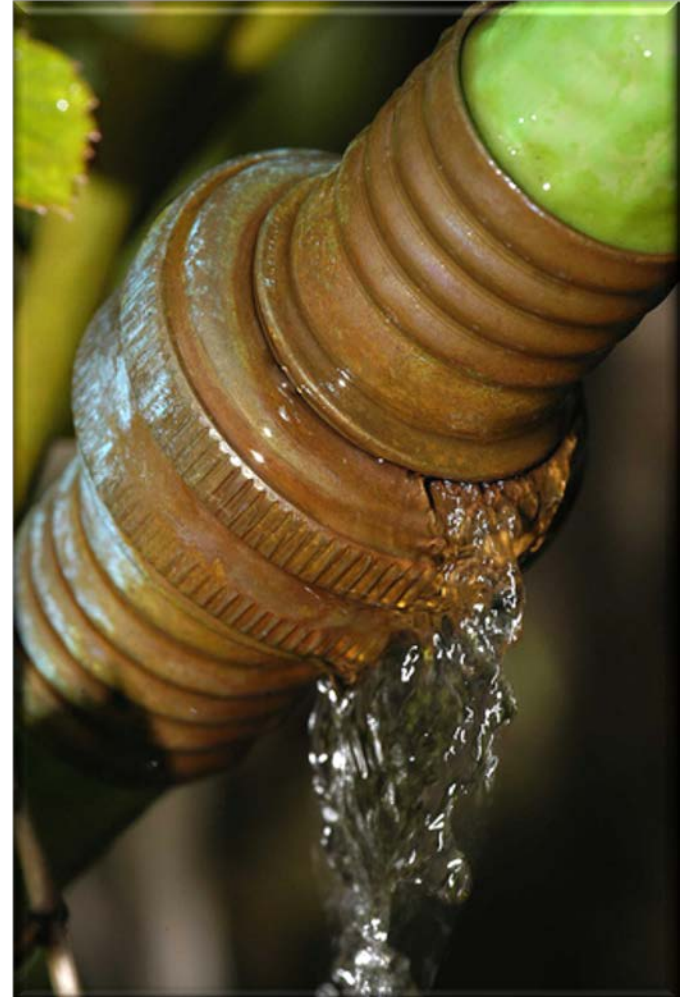
- AsyncTask allows UI & background Threads to communicate
- It embodies key framework characteristics
- AsyncTask has traps & pitfalls
  - Cancellation
    - Cancellation is voluntary, just like `Thread.interrupt()`



# AsyncTask Usage Considerations

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- AsyncTask allows UI & background Threads to communicate
- It embodies key framework characteristics
- AsyncTask has traps & pitfalls
  - Cancellation
  - Dependency on Activity
    - Memory leaks occur if there's a strong references to enclosing Activity



# AsyncTask Usage Considerations

- AsyncTask allows UI & background Threads to communicate
- It embodies key framework characteristics
- AsyncTask has traps & pitfalls
  - Cancellation
  - Dependency on Activity
  - Losing results if/when runtime configurations change
    - e.g., Activity associated with an AsyncTask may be destroyed

## Handling Runtime Changes

Some device configurations can change during runtime (such as screen orientation, keyboard availability, and language). When such a change occurs, Android restarts the running `Activity` ( `onDestroy()` is called, followed by `onCreate()` ). The restart behavior is designed to help your application adapt to new configurations by automatically reloading your application with alternative resources that match the new device configuration.

To properly handle a restart, it is important that your activity restores its previous state through the normal [Activity lifecycle](#), in which Android calls `onSaveInstanceState()` before it destroys your activity so that you can save data about the application state. You can then restore the state during `onCreate()` or `onRestoreInstanceState()` .

To test that your application restarts itself with the application state intact, you should invoke configuration changes (such as changing the screen orientation) while performing various tasks in your application. Your application should be able to restart at any time without loss of user data or state in order to handle events such as configuration changes or when the user receives an incoming phone call and then returns to your application much later after your application process may have been destroyed. To learn how you can restore your activity state, read about the [Activity lifecycle](#).

### In this document

- [Retaining an Object During a Configuration Change](#)
- [Handling the Configuration Change Yourself](#)

### See also

- [Providing Resources](#)
- [Accessing Resources](#)
- [Faster Screen Orientation Change](#)

# AsyncTask Usage Considerations

- AsyncTask allows UI & background Threads to communicate
- It embodies key framework characteristics
- AsyncTask has traps & pitfalls
  - Cancellation
  - Dependency on Activity
  - Losing results if/when runtime configurations change
  - Portability
    - Concurrency semantics of AsyncTask execute() have changed over time

## Before API 1.6 (Donut):

- In the first version of AsyncTask, the tasks were executed serially, so a task won't start before a previous task is finished. This caused quite some performance problems. One task had to wait on another one to finish.

## API 1.6 to API 2.3 (Gingerbread):

- The Android developers team decided to change this so that AsyncTasks could run parallel on a separate worker thread. There was one problem. Many developers relied on the sequential behavior and suddenly they were having a lot of concurrency issues.

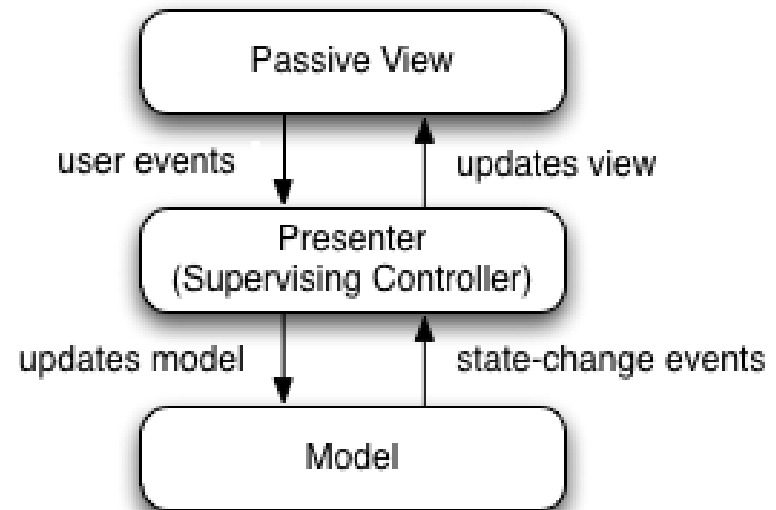
## API 3.0 (Honeycomb) until now

- "Hmmm, developers don't seem to get it? Let's just switch it back." The AsyncTasks were executed serially again. However, they can run parallel via [executeOnExecutor\(Executor\)](#).



# AsyncTask Usage Considerations

- AsyncTask allows UI & background Threads to communicate
- It embodies key framework characteristics
- AsyncTask has traps & pitfalls
  - Cancellation
  - Dependency on Activity
  - Losing results if/when runtime configurations change
  - Portability

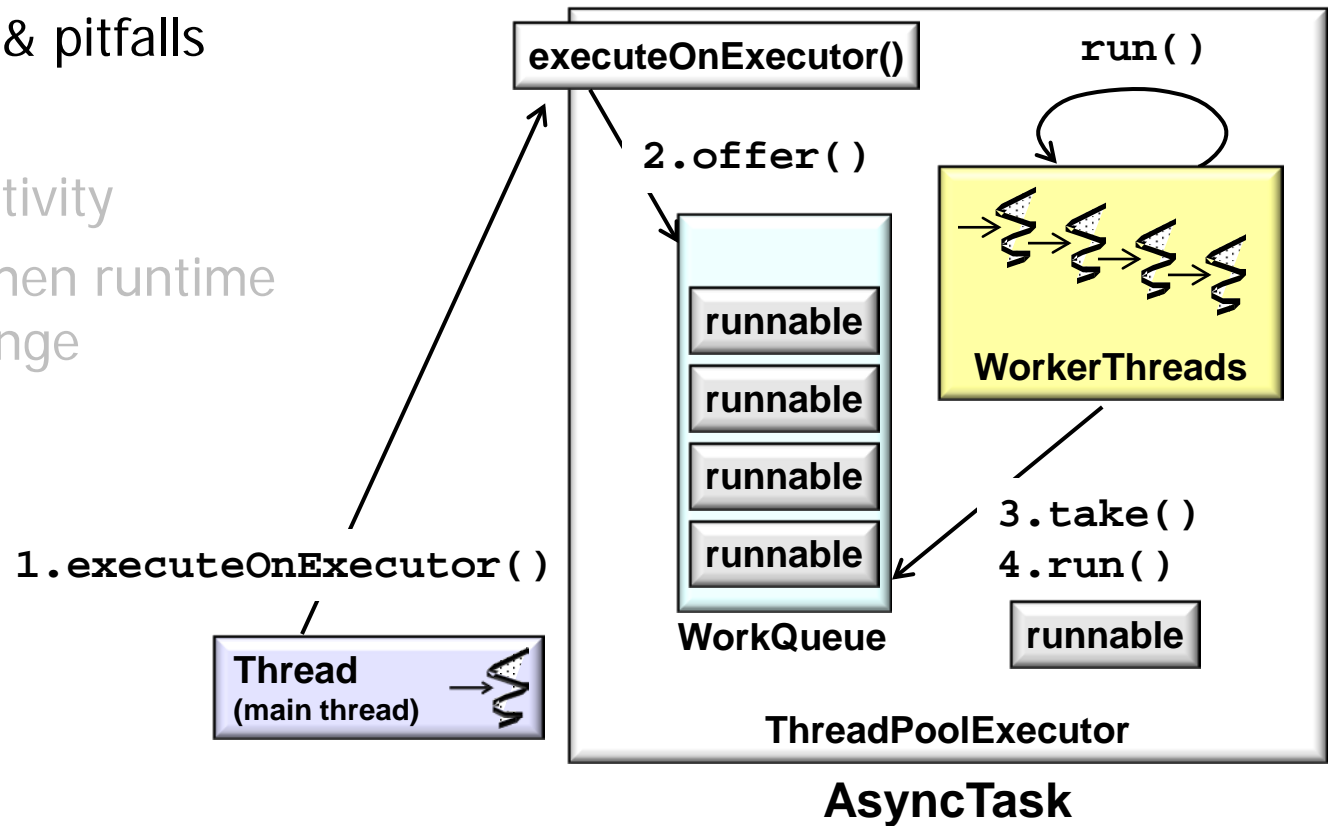


The *Model-View Presenter* (MVP) pattern addresses some of these issues



# AsyncTask Usage Considerations

- AsyncTask allows UI & background Threads to communicate
- It embodies key framework characteristics
- AsyncTask has traps & pitfalls
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Other issues can be addressed by understanding Android patterns & APIs

# AsyncTask Usage Considerations

---

- AsyncTask allows UI & background Threads to communicate
- It embodies key framework characteristics
- AsyncTask has traps & pitfalls
- AsyncTask used throughout Android



frameworks/base/core/java/android/content/AsyncTaskLoader.java

frameworks/base/core/java/android/content/CursorLoader.java

frameworks/base/core/java/android/os/AsyncTask.java

packages/apps/Browser/src/com/android/browser/UrlHandler.java

packages/apps/Calendar/src/com/android/calendar/CalendarController.java

packages/apps/Gallery/src/com/android/camera/ReverseGeocoderTask.java

packages/apps/Nfc/src/com/android/nfc/NfcService.java

packages/apps/Mms/src/com/android/mms/transaction/PushReceiver.java

packages/apps/Phone/src/com/android/phone/CallLogAsync.java

packages/apps/VideoEditor/src/com/android/videoeditor/BaseAdapterWithImages.java

...

# AsyncTask Usage Considerations

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- AsyncTask allows UI & background Threads to communicate
- It embodies key framework characteristics
- AsyncTask has traps & pitfalls
- AsyncTask used throughout Android
- `onProgressUpdate()` is not widely used



`frameworks/base/media/java/android/media/videoeditor/MediaArtistNativeHelper.java`  
`frameworks/base/packages/SystemUI/src/com/android/systemui/recent/RecentTasksLoader.java`  
`packages/apps/Email/emailcommon/src/com/android/emailcommon/utility/EmailAsyncTask.java`  
`packages/apps/Email/src/com/android/email/activity/setup/AccountCheckSettingsFragment.java`  
`packages/apps/Gallery2/src/com/android/gallery3d/app/ManageCachePage.java`  
`packages/apps/Gallery2/src/com/android/gallery3d/ui/ImportCompleteListener.java`  
`packages/apps/Gallery2/src/com/android/gallery3d/ui/MenuExecutor.java`  
`packages/apps/Settings/src/com/android/settings/TrustedCredentialsSettings.java`

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