

What is Fragmentation in Operating System?

The process of dividing a computer file, such as a data file or an executable program file, into fragments that are stored in different parts of a computer's storage medium, such as its hard disc or RAM, is known as fragmentation in computing. When a file is fragmented, it is stored on the storage medium in non-contiguous blocks, which means that the blocks are not stored next to each other.

Cause of Fragmentation

This can happen when a file is too large to fit into a single contiguous block of free space on the storage medium, or when the blocks of free space on the medium are insufficient to hold the file. Because the system must search for and retrieve individual fragments from different locations in order to open the file, fragmentation can cause problems when reading or accessing the file.

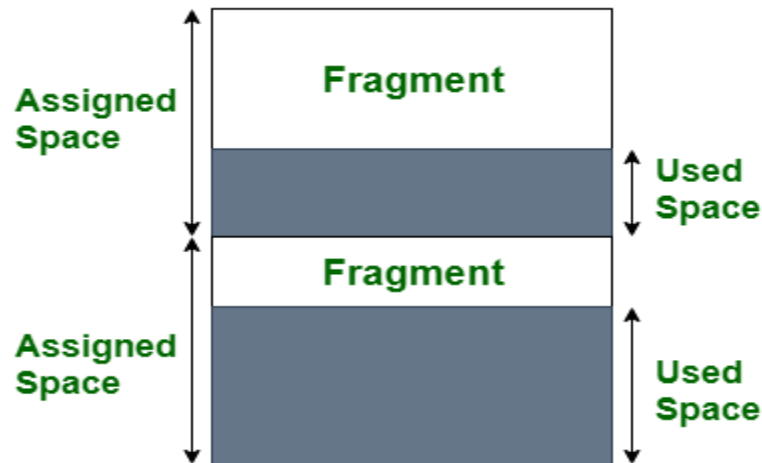
Effect of Fragmentation

This can reduce system performance and make it more difficult to access the file. It is generally best to defragment your hard disc on a regular basis to avoid fragmentation, which is a process that rearranges the blocks of data on the disc so that files are stored in contiguous blocks and can be accessed more quickly.

Types of Fragmentation

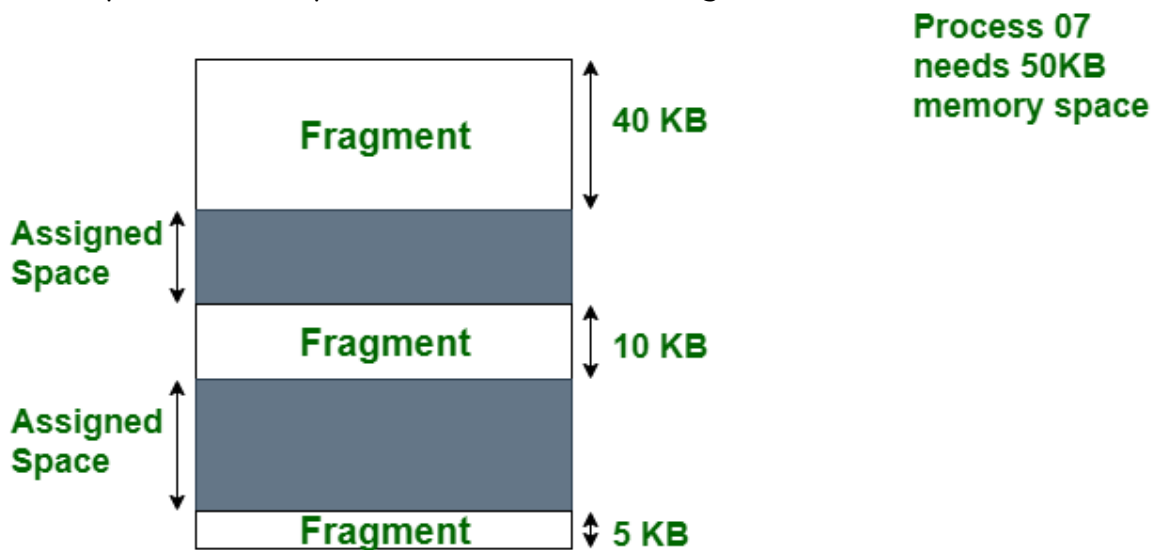
There are two main types of fragmentation:

- **Internal fragmentation:** Internal fragmentation occurs when there is unused space within a memory block. For example, if a system allocates a 64KB block of memory to store a file that is only 40KB in size, that block will contain 24KB of internal fragmentation. When the system employs a fixed-size block allocation method, such as a memory allocator with a fixed block size, this can occur.



Internal Fragmentation

- External fragmentation:** External fragmentation occurs when a storage medium, such as a hard disc or solid-state drive, has many small blocks of free space scattered throughout it. This can happen when a system creates and deletes files frequently, leaving many small blocks of free space on the medium. When a system needs to store a new file, it may be unable to find a single contiguous block of free space large enough to store the file and must instead store the file in multiple smaller blocks. This can cause external fragmentation and performance problems when accessing the file.



Fragmentation can also occur at various levels within a system. File fragmentation, for example, can occur at the file system level, in which a file is divided into multiple non-contiguous blocks and stored on a storage medium. Memory fragmentation can occur at the memory management level, where the system allocates and deallocated memory blocks dynamically. Network fragmentation occurs when a packet of data is divided into smaller fragments for transmission over a network.