

The Java™ Tutorials

Trail: Essential Classes

Lesson: Concurrency

Section: Synchronization

Intrinsic Locks and Synchronization

Synchronization is built around an internal entity known as the *intrinsic lock* or *monitor lock*. (The API specification often refers to this entity simply as a "monitor.") Intrinsic locks play a role in both aspects of synchronization: enforcing exclusive access to an object's state and establishing happens-before relationships that are essential to visibility.

Every object has an intrinsic lock associated with it. By convention, a thread that needs exclusive and consistent access to an object's fields has to *acquire* the object's intrinsic lock before accessing them, and then *release* the intrinsic lock when it's done with them. A thread is said to *own* the intrinsic lock between the time it has acquired the lock and released the lock. As long as a thread owns an intrinsic lock, no other thread can acquire the same lock. The other thread will block when it attempts to acquire the lock.

When a thread releases an intrinsic lock, a happens-before relationship is established between that action and any subsequent acquisition of the same lock.

Locks In Synchronized Methods

When a thread invokes a synchronized method, it automatically acquires the intrinsic lock for that method's object and releases it when the method returns. The lock release occurs even if the return was caused by an uncaught exception.

You might wonder what happens when a static synchronized method is invoked, since a static method is associated with a class, not an object. In this case, the thread acquires the intrinsic lock for the `Class` object associated with the class. Thus access to class's static fields is controlled by a lock that's distinct from the lock for any instance of the class.

Synchronized Statements

Another way to create synchronized code is with *synchronized statements*. Unlike synchronized methods, synchronized statements must specify the object that provides the intrinsic lock:

```
public void addName(String name) {
    synchronized(this) {
        lastName = name;
        nameCount++;
    }
    nameList.add(name);
}
```

In this example, the `addName` method needs to synchronize changes to `lastName` and `nameCount`, but also needs to avoid synchronizing invocations of other objects' methods. (Invoking other objects' methods from synchronized code can create problems that are described in the section on [Liveness](#).) Without synchronized statements, there would have to be a separate, unsynchronized method for the sole purpose of invoking `nameList.add`.

Synchronized statements are also useful for improving concurrency with fine-grained synchronization. Suppose, for example, class `MsLunch` has two instance fields, `c1` and `c2`, that are never used together. All updates of these fields must be synchronized, but there's no reason to prevent an update of `c1` from being interleaved with an update of `c2` — and doing so reduces concurrency by creating unnecessary blocking. Instead of using synchronized methods or otherwise using the lock associated with `this`, we create two objects solely to provide locks.

```
public class MsLunch {
    private long c1 = 0;
    private long c2 = 0;
    private Object lock1 = new Object();
    private Object lock2 = new Object();

    public void incl() {
```

```
        synchronized(lock1) {  
            c1++;  
        }  
    }  
  
    public void inc2() {  
        synchronized(lock2) {  
            c2++;  
        }  
    }  
}
```

Use this idiom with extreme care. You must be absolutely sure that it really is safe to interleave access of the affected fields.

Reentrant Synchronization

Recall that a thread cannot acquire a lock owned by another thread. But a thread *can* acquire a lock that it already owns. Allowing a thread to acquire the same lock more than once enables *reentrant synchronization*. This describes a situation where synchronized code, directly or indirectly, invokes a method that also contains synchronized code, and both sets of code use the same lock. Without reentrant synchronization, synchronized code would have to take many additional precautions to avoid having a thread cause itself to block.

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Previous page: Synchronized Methods

Next page: Atomic Access