What is Readers Writer Problem?

Readers writer problem is another example of a classic synchronization problem. There are many variants of this problem, one of which is examined below.

The Problem Statement

There is a shared resource which should be accessed by multiple processes. There are two types of processes in this context. They are **reader** and **writer**. Any number of **readers** can read from the shared resource simultaneously, but only one **writer** can write to the shared resource. When a **writer** is writing data to the resource, no other process can access the resource. A **writer** cannot write to the resource if there are non zero number of readers accessing the resource at that time.

The Solution

From the above problem statement, it is evident that readers have higher priority than writer. If a writer wants to write to the resource, it must wait until there are no readers currently accessing that resource.

Here, we use one **mutex** `m` and a **semaphore** `w`. An integer variable `read_count` is used to maintain the number of readers currently accessing the resource. The variable `read_count` is initialized to `0`. A value of `1` is given initially to `m` and `w`.

Instead of having the process to acquire lock on the shared resource, we use the mutex `m` to make the process to acquire and release lock whenever it is updating the `read_count` variable.

The code for the **writer** process looks like this:

```
while(TRUE)
{
    wait(w);

   /* perform the write operation */

   signal(w);
}
```

And, the code for the **reader** process looks like this:

```
    //acquire lock
    wait(m);
    read_count++;
    if(read_count == 1)
        wait(w);

    //release lock
    signal(m);

    /* perform the reading operation */

    // acquire lock
    wait(m);
    read_count--;
    if(read_count == 0)
        signal(w);

    // release lock
    signal(m);
}
```

Here is the Code uncoded(explained)

- As seen above in the code for the writer, the writer just waits on the **w** semaphore until it gets a chance to write to the resource.
- After performing the write operation, it increments **w** so that the next writer can access the resource.
- On the other hand, in the code for the reader, the lock is acquired whenever the **read_count** is updated by a process.
- When a reader wants to access the resource, first it increments the **read_count** value, then accesses the resource and then decrements the **read_count** value.
- The semaphore **w** is used by the first reader which enters the critical section and the last reader which exits the critical section.
- The reason for this is, when the first readers enters the critical section, the writer is blocked from the resource. Only new readers can access the resource now.

- Similarly, when the last reader exits the critical section, it signals the writer using the **w** semaphore because there are zero readers now and a writer can have the chance to access the resource.

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