Operating Systems

Interrupts and Syscalls

Giorgio Grisetti
grisetti@diag.uniroma1.it

Department of Computer Control and Management Engineering
Sapienza University of Rome

Interrupts in OS

Modern Operating Systems are interrupt based

- Each interaction with the OS is triggered by an interrupt

How can an interrupt arise?

- External events (e.g. I/O, timer)
- Internal Exceptions (e.g. illegal instruction...)
- Explicit call(e.g. syscall)

Interrupts Why

Polling Option

- continuously query the status

```
while(1){
   if(key_pressed)
      handleKey();
   if(disk_finished)
      handleDisk();
      ....
}
```

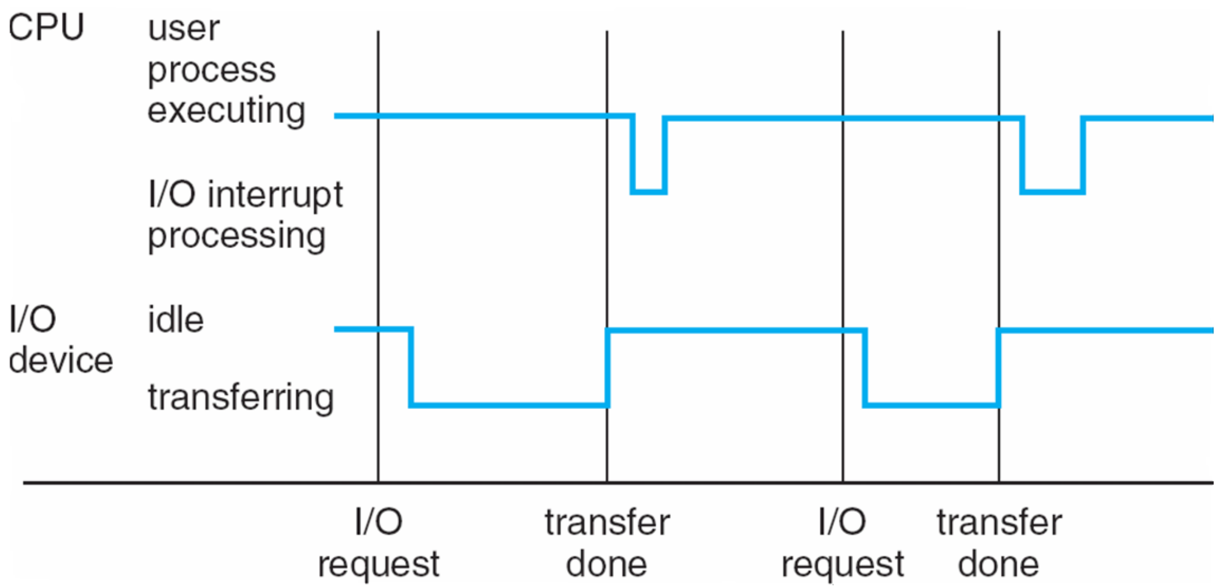
Interrupt option

- get woken up when something happens, but sleep most of the time

```
void keyISR();
void diskISR();
...
while(1){
   // Minimal Power
   halt();
}
```

Interrupt in OS

- When an interrupt occurs, the current context is saved, and the CPU start executing the interrupt identification routine
- Usually a single physical interrupt manages multiple devices (e.g. USB)
- Figuring out who was responsible requires little handshaking
- Usually while serving an interrupt, interrupts of the same type are disabled
- **The ISR is part of the OS**



Interrupt Vector

- Is an array of function pointers containing the addresses of the ISR
- Each location is associated to a specific event

Interrupt ID	ISR pointer
0 (es. reset)	ADR 0
1 (es. serial)	ADR 1
2 (es. TRAP)	ADR 2
3 (...)	ADR 3
……...	……...

Exceptions

The exceptions are software triggered interrupts.

On x86, they fall in these categories:

- Traps: ISR is invoked after triggering instruction.

  examples: INT instruction, Breakpoint

- Faults: ISR is invoked before triggering instruction

  examples: divide by 0, page fault, illegal instruction

- Aborts: state of the triggering process cannot be recovered

  example: double fault exception

The CPU deals with its circuits to the occurrence of these events.

For each event there is an entry in the interrupt vector.

Dealing with these events is a task of the OS.

INT and CALL

Difference between explicilty called ISR and calling a soubroutine:

INT <XX>

- behavior: jump to ISR whose address is stored in position <XX> of interrupt vector
- <XX> is an index of the ISR vector (limited number)
- there is a **limited** number of **controlled** entry points for the INT instruction
- the cpu flags are altered when jumping to the ISR. (Supervisor Mode is entered)

CALL <YY>

- behavior: call soubroutine whose address is YY>.
- <YY> can be **any valid address** mapped in the executable memory area of a process.
- the flags are NOT altered

Dual Mode

Program misbehaving:

- What happens if a user program alters the interrupt vector?
- What happens when a user program writes random stuff on a memory mapped device (e.g. the disk controller)?

  <your answers>

The OS needs to have control of int vector and I/O ports to do his job.

Solution:

- prevent the program to do this by defining two operation modes for the CPU: **privileged** and **user** mode.
- in user mode only a subset of the instructions can be executed
- the modes are toggled by a bit in the FLAG register
- altering this flag is a privileged instruction
- ISR are always executed in **privileged** mode

Dual Mode

OS is executed in privileged mode, user program not.

Issue:

Calling the OS from user program requires changing the flags, but this is a priviledged instruction.

Solution:

- hide the entire OS behind an entry of the interrupt vector.
- the specific OS function is invoked through an INT <OS_ISR> instruction (syscall).
- parameters of the syscall can be:
  - in the CPU registers
  - on the stack

Issue:

- what if the used program does "INT <DISK_ISR>"?

Solution:

- only a subset of the location in the interrupt vector can be called by the user program without generating a protection exception.

Syscall

One single controlled entry point to the OS nucleum (kernel)

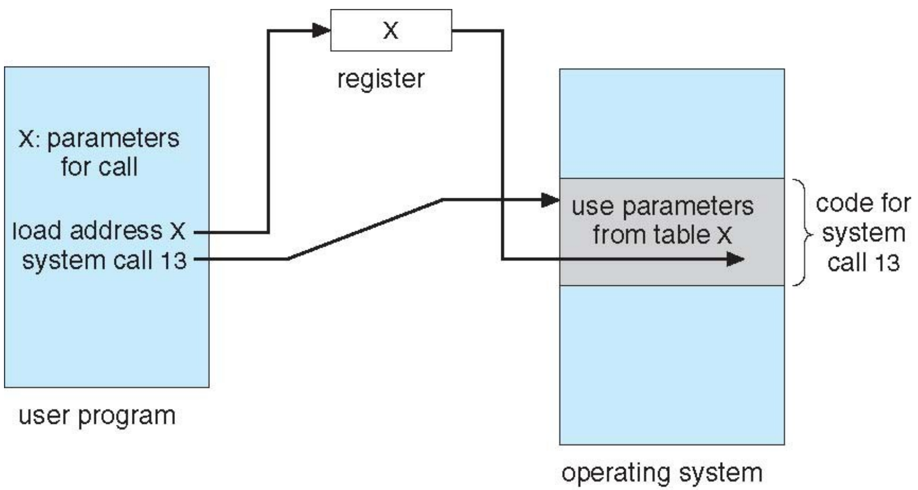
User programs are "caged" :)

Problem:

The kernel may offer several functionalities, but we have one single ISR to handle all of them

Solution:

- enumerate all possible functions (syscall number)
- use a register to select which function to invoke (EAX on Linux-x86)
- the specific syscall looks up the remaining parameters on the register/stack

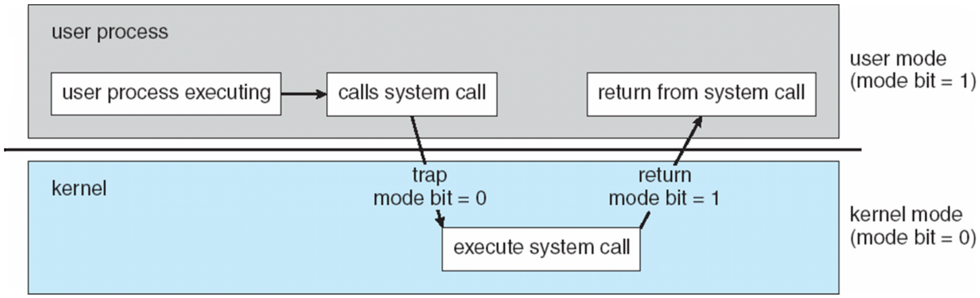


Problem:

How to restore the mode-bit after executing a syscall?

Solution:

Done by the IRET (return from interrupt), instruction that restores the flags



Typical Syscalls

- Process control
  - end, abort
  - load, execute
  - create process, terminate process
  - get process attributes, set process attributes
  - wait for time
  - wait event, signal event
  - allocate and free memory
- File management
  - create file, delete file
  - open, close file
  - read, write, reposition
  - get and set file attributes
- Device management
  - request device, release device
  - read, write, reposition
  - get device attributes, set device attributes
  - logically attach or detach devices
- Information maintenance
  - get time or date, set time or date
  - get system data, set system data
  - get and set process, file, or device attributes
- Communications
  - create, delete communication connection
  - send, receive messages
  - transfer status information

Portability

The syscalls usually offer rather low level functionalities

- write/read n bytes on a device
- map a certain amount of RAM in the memory space of a process
- open/close a device
- wait for some data to become available
- ....

Albeit these functionalities typically enable the development of complex applications, operating at system call level would result in a tight dependancy on the OS

The software should be rewritten for each OS

Standards

Language Standards

- Some languages come with a standard library, that offer I/O functionalities through high level functions
  - (f)printf, fopen, fclose

  Writing programs using only functions in the standard library ensures portability
- The implementation of these functions rolls back to specific syscalls

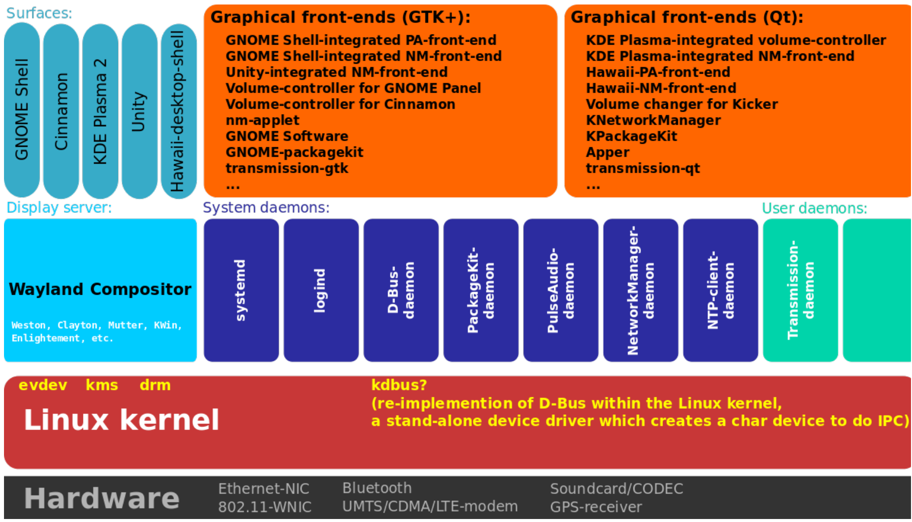
System Standards

- More powerful functionalities of the os are usually not covered by the standard library of the language.
- To ease portability among different OSes, some committee has defined standard libraries that provide these functionalities
  - threads, network, synchronization
- Examples: POSIX (Linux, Solaris, Darwin) vs WinAPI (Windows)

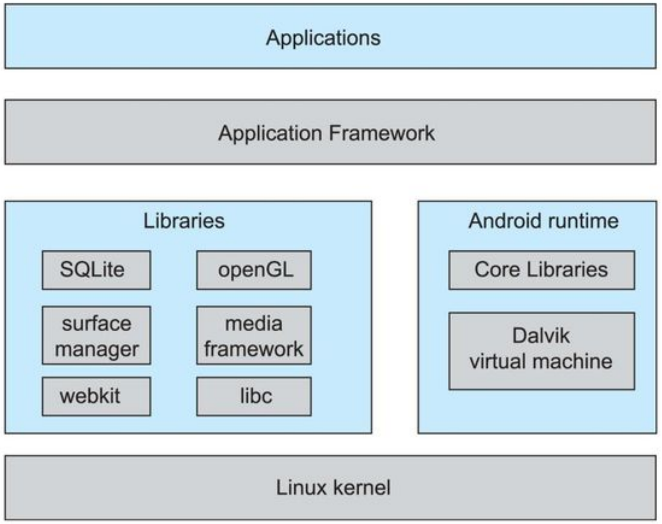
Layers

- A core rule in the design of the sistem is to define a layered architecture.
- The functionalities at higher layer are built exclusively on top of functionalities at the lower layer.
- When desiging an application, always use the highest possible layer to ensure broader portability.

linux desktop



android



Example: printf