

CSE 333

Lecture 8 - low-level I/O

Hal Perkins

Department of Computer Science & Engineering

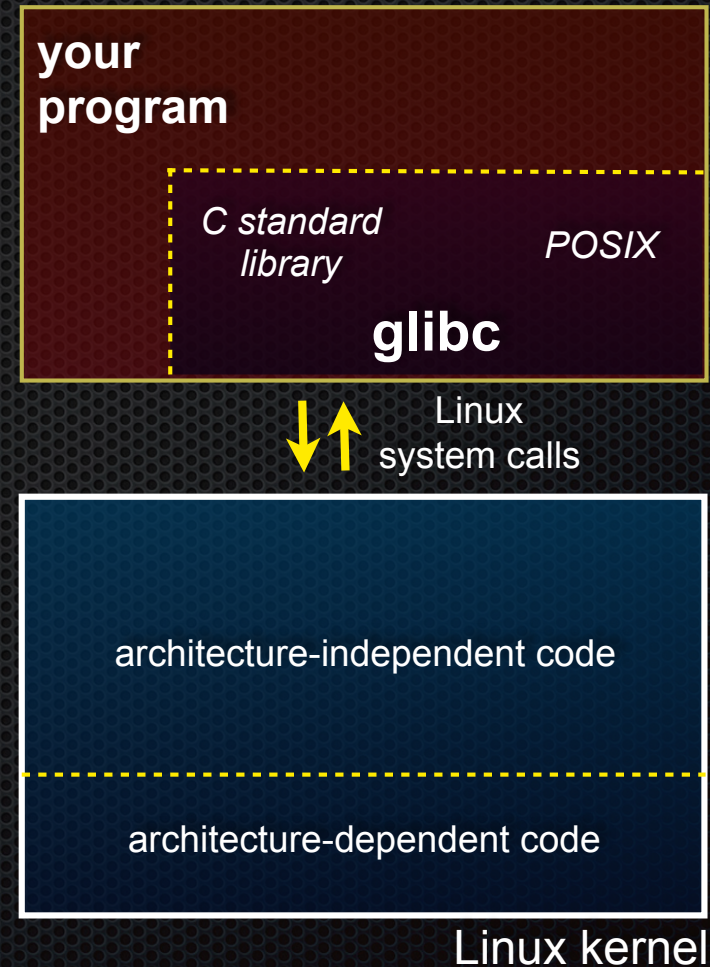
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Lower-level file access

Remember this picture?

- your program can access many layers of APIs
 - ▶ C standard library
 - ▶ POSIX compatibility API
 - ▶ underlying OS system calls



So far...

You've used the C standard library to access files

- specifically, `fopen`, `fread`, `fwrite`, `fclose`, `fseek`
 - ▶ these provide a (`FILE *`) stream abstraction

These are convenient and portable...

- but, they are *buffered*
- and, they are implemented by using lower-level OS calls

Lower-level file access

Most UNIX-en support a common set of lower-level file access APIs

- open, read, write, close, lseek
 - ▶ similar in spirit to their fopen (etc.) counterparts
 - ▶ but, lower-level and unbuffered
 - (well, unbuffered from user's perspective; OS does its own buffering at least for disk blocks)
 - ▶ and, less convenient
- you will have to use these for network I/O, so we might as well learn them now

open / close

To open a file...

- pass in the filename and access mode, similar to fopen
- get back a “file descriptor”
 - ▶ similar to a (FILE *) from fopen, but is just an int

```
#include <fcntl.h>

...

int fd = open("foo.txt",
              O_RDONLY);
if (fd == -1) {
    perror("open failed");
    exit(EXIT_FAILURE);
}

...

close(fd);
```


Reading from a file

```
ssize_t read(int fd, void *buf, size_t count);
```

- returns the # of bytes read
 - ▶ might be fewer bytes than you requested (!!!)
 - ▶ returns 0 if you're at end-of-file
 - ▶ return -1 on error
- warning: read has some very surprising error modes!

read() error modes

On error, the “errno” global variable is set

- you need to check it to see what kind of error happened

What errors might read() encounter?

- EBADF -- bad file descriptor
- EFAULT -- output buffer is not a valid address
- EINTR -- read was interrupted, please try again
 - ▶ argh!!!
- and many others

How to read() n bytes

```
#include <errno.h>
#include <unistd.h>

...

char *buf = ...;
int bytes_left = n;
int result = 0;

while (bytes_left > 0) {
    result = read(fd, buf + (n-bytes_left), bytes_left);
    if (result == -1) {
        if (errno != EINTR) {
            // a real error happened, return an error result
        }
        // EINTR happened, do nothing and loop back around
        continue;
    }
    bytes_left -= result;
}
```


Other low-level functions

Read the man pages to learn about:

- **write()** -- write data
- **fsync()** -- flush data to the underlying device
- **opendir()**, **readdir()**, **closedir()** -- get a directory listing
 - ▶ make sure you read the section 3 version, e.g.:
 - man 3 opendir
 - ▶ kind of painful to use

A useful cheat-sheet

From a CMU systems programming course:

<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~guna/15-123S11/Lectures/Lecture24.pdf>

See you on Friday!