

# Cache Assignment: Understanding Cache Memories

COMP 222: Introduction to Computer Organization  
Assigned: 11/17/25, **Due: Friday, 12/5/25, 11:55PM**

**Important: This assignment must be done individually.** Be sure to carefully read the course policies for assignments (including the honor code policy) on the assignments page of the course web site:

<http://www.clear.rice.edu/comp222/html/assignments.html>

## 1 Overview

This assignment will help you understand the impact that cache memories can have on the performance of your C programs.

The assignment consists of two parts. In the first part you will write a small C program (about 200-300 lines) that simulates the behavior of a cache memory. In the second part, you will optimize a small matrix transpose function, with the goal of minimizing the number of cache misses.

## 2 Getting Started

Please visit the web page at <https://classroom.github.com/a/CoDley2B>. (If you are copying this URL, do not include the period at the end of the sentence, as it is not part of the URL.) This page should say “RICE-COMP222-F25-Classroom” and “Accept the assignment — Cache”. Moreover, it should have a green button labeled “Accept this assignment”<sup>1</sup>. Please accept the assignment.

Upon accepting the assignment, you will be redirected to another web page. This page will confirm that you have accepted the assignment, and it will eventually (after you click refresh) provide you with a link to your personal repository for the assignment. Click this link to go to your personal repository.

The web page for your personal repository has a green button labeled “Code”. Click this button. You should now see a text field with a URL. Copy or remember this URL.

Login to the CLEAR system if you have not already done so. Type the following:

```
git clone [Copy the URL for your repo here]
```

You will be prompted for your github username and password.

Once the clone operation is complete, you will have a directory named

```
cache-[YOUR github ID]
```

Please `cd` into this directory, and run the command `ls`. You should see the following files:

- `Makefile` – Builds the simulator and tools
- `README` – Describes these files

---

<sup>1</sup>You may have to login to GitHub to see this page. If so, you will be prompted for your GitHub username and password.

- `driver.py` – The driver program, runs `test-csim` and `test-trans`
- `cachelab.c` – Required helper functions
- `cachelab.h` – Required header file
- `csim.c` – Your cache simulator
- `csim-ref` – The executable reference cache simulator
- `test-csim` – Tests your cache simulator
- `test-trans.c` – Tests your transpose function
- `tracegen.c` – Helper program used by `test-trans`
- `traces` – Subdirectory containing trace files used by `test-csim.c`
- `trans.c` – Your transpose function

If you do **NOT** see these files, contact the course staff immediately!

You will be modifying two files: `csim.c` and `trans.c`. To compile these files, type:

```
CLEAR> make
```

### 3 Description

This assignment has two parts. In Part A you will implement a cache simulator. In Part B you will write a matrix transpose function that is optimized for cache performance.

#### 3.1 Reference Trace Files

The `traces` subdirectory of your repo contains a collection of *reference trace files* that we will use to evaluate the correctness of the cache simulator you write in Part A. The trace files are generated by a Linux program called `valgrind`. For example, typing

```
CLEAR> valgrind --log-fd=1 --tool=lackey -v --trace-mem=yes ls -l
```

on the command line runs the executable program “`ls -l`”, captures a trace of each of its memory accesses in the order they occur, and prints them on `stdout`.

Valgrind memory traces have the following form:

```
I 0400d7d4,8
M 0421c7f0,4
L 04f6b868,8
S 7ff0005c8,8
```

Each line denotes one or two memory accesses. The format of each line is

```
[space]operation address,size
```

The *operation* field denotes the type of memory access: “I” denotes an instruction load, “L” a data load, “S” a data store, and “M” a data modify (i.e., a data load followed by a data store). There is never a space before each “I”. There is always a space before each “M”, “L”, and “S”. The *address* field specifies a 64-bit hexadecimal memory address. The *size* field specifies the number of bytes accessed by the operation.

### 3.2 Part A: Writing a Cache Simulator

In Part A you will write a cache simulator in `csim.c` that takes a `valgrind` memory trace as input, simulates the hit/miss behavior of a cache memory on this trace, and outputs the total number of hits, misses, and evictions.

We have provided you with the binary executable of a *reference cache simulator*, called `csim-ref`, that simulates the behavior of a cache with arbitrary size and associativity on a `valgrind` trace file. It uses the LRU (least-recently used) replacement policy when choosing which cache line to evict.

The reference simulator takes the following command-line arguments:

```
Usage: ./csim-ref [-hv] -s <s> -E <E> -b <b> -t <tracefile>
```

- `-h`: Optional help flag that prints usage info
- `-v`: Optional verbose flag that displays trace info
- `-s <s>`: Number of set index bits ( $S = 2^s$  is the number of sets)
- `-E <E>`: Associativity (number of lines per set)
- `-b <b>`: Number of block bits ( $B = 2^b$  is the block size)
- `-t <tracefile>`: Name of the `valgrind` trace to replay

The command-line arguments are based on the notation ( $s$ ,  $E$ , and  $b$ ) from page 617 of the CS:APP3e textbook. For example:

```
CLEAR> ./csim-ref -s 4 -E 1 -b 4 -t traces/yi.trace
hits:4 misses:5 evictions:3
```

The same example in verbose mode:

```
CLEAR> ./csim-ref -v -s 4 -E 1 -b 4 -t traces/yi.trace
L 10,1 miss
M 20,1 miss hit
L 22,1 hit
S 18,1 hit
L 110,1 miss eviction
L 210,1 miss eviction
M 12,1 miss eviction hit
hits:4 misses:5 evictions:3
```

Your job for Part A is to fill in the `csim.c` file so that it takes the same command line arguments and produces the identical output as the reference simulator. Notice that this file is almost completely empty. You'll need to write it from scratch.

#### Programming Rules for Part A

- Include your name and NetID in the header comment for `csim.c`.
- Your `csim.c` file must compile without warnings in order to receive credit.

- Your simulator must work correctly for arbitrary  $s$ ,  $E$ , and  $b$ . This means that you will need to dynamically allocate storage for your simulator's data structures using the `malloc` function. Specifically, to receive credit, your simulator must dynamically allocate a data structure that is similar to the word usage count structure of Section 2.1 of Lab 9, "Advanced Pointers in C". This data structure should consist of an array of  $2^s$  "dummy" list headers, similar to the word count array of Lab 9. However, in contrast to Lab 9, no list should be empty. Every header should be the head of a circular doubly linked list of exactly  $E$  entries, where each entry represents a different cache line within the same set.
- To receive credit, your simulator must implement LRU replacement within a set as follows. On a cache hit, remove the matching entry from the circular doubly linked list, and reinsert it as the first entry. (Optionally, as an optimization, if the matching entry is already the first within the circular doubly linked list, then you can skip the removal and reinsertion.) When a cache line eviction within a set must occur, the last entry within the circular doubly linked list is the least recently used cache line. On a cache miss, remove the last entry from the circular doubly linked list, performing an eviction if it contained a valid cache line, then update the entry to reflect the new cache line that it represents, and reinsert it as the first entry.
- For this assignment, we are interested only in data cache performance, so your simulator should ignore all instruction cache accesses (lines starting with "I"). Recall that `valgrind` always puts "I" in the first column (with no preceding space), and "M", "L", and "S" in the second column (with a preceding space). This may help you parse the trace.
- To receive credit for Part A, you must call the function `printSummary`, with the total number of hits, misses, and evictions, at the end of your main function:

```
printSummary(hit_count, miss_count, eviction_count);
```

- For this assignment, you should assume that memory accesses are aligned properly, such that a single memory access never crosses block boundaries. By making this assumption, you can ignore the request sizes in the `valgrind` traces.

### 3.3 Part B: Optimizing Matrix Transpose

In Part B you will write a transpose function in `trans.c` that causes as few cache misses as possible.

Let  $A$  denote a matrix, and  $A_{ij}$  denote the component on the  $i$ th row and  $j$ th column. The *transpose* of  $A$ , denoted  $A^T$ , is a matrix such that  $A_{ij} = A_{ji}^T$ .

To help you get started, we have given you an example transpose function in `trans.c` that computes the transpose of  $N \times M$  matrix  $A$  and stores the results in  $M \times N$  matrix  $B$ :

```
char trans_desc[] = "Simple row-wise scan transpose";
void trans(int M, int N, int A[N][M], int B[M][N])
```

The example transpose function is correct, but it is inefficient because the access pattern results in relatively many cache misses.

Your job in Part B is to write a similar function, called `transpose_submit`, that minimizes the number of cache misses across different sized matrices:

```
char transpose_submit_desc[] = "Transpose submission";
void transpose_submit(int M, int N, int A[N][M], int B[M][N]);
```

Do *not* change the description string ("Transpose submission") for your `transpose_submit` function. The autograder searches for this string to determine which transpose function to evaluate for credit.

## Programming Rules for Part B

- Include your name and NetID in the header comment for `trans.c`.
- Your code in `trans.c` must compile without warnings to receive credit.
- You are allowed to define at most 12 local variables of type `int` per transpose function.<sup>2</sup>
- You are not allowed to side-step the previous rule by using any variables of type `long` or by using any bit tricks to store more than one value to a single variable.
- Your transpose function may not use recursion.
- If you choose to use helper functions, you may not have more than 12 local variables on the stack at a time between your helper functions and your top level transpose function. For example, if your transpose declares 8 variables, and then you call a function which uses 4 variables, which calls another function which uses 2, you will have 14 variables on the stack, and you will be in violation of the rule.
- Your transpose function may not modify array A. You may, however, do whatever you want with the contents of array B.
- You are NOT allowed to define any arrays in your code or to use any variant of `malloc`.

## 4 Evaluation

This section describes how your work will be evaluated. The full score for this assignment is 53 points:

- Part A: 27 Points
- Part B: 26 Points

### 4.1 Evaluation for Part A

For Part A, we will run your cache simulator using different cache parameters and traces. There are eight test cases, each worth 3 points, except for the last case, which is worth 6 points:

```
linux> ./csim -s 1 -E 1 -b 1 -t traces/yi2.trace
linux> ./csim -s 4 -E 2 -b 4 -t traces/yi.trace
linux> ./csim -s 2 -E 1 -b 4 -t traces/dave.trace
linux> ./csim -s 2 -E 1 -b 3 -t traces/trans.trace
linux> ./csim -s 2 -E 2 -b 3 -t traces/trans.trace
linux> ./csim -s 2 -E 4 -b 3 -t traces/trans.trace
linux> ./csim -s 5 -E 1 -b 5 -t traces/trans.trace
linux> ./csim -s 5 -E 1 -b 5 -t traces/long.trace
```

You can use the reference simulator `csim-ref` to obtain the correct answer for each of these test cases. During debugging, use the `-v` option for a detailed record of each hit and miss.

For each test case, outputting the correct number of cache hits, misses and evictions will give you full credit for that test case. Each of your reported number of hits, misses and evictions is worth 1/3 of the credit for that test case. That is, if a particular test case is worth 3 points, and your simulator outputs the correct number of hits and misses, but reports the wrong number of evictions, then you will earn 2 points.

---

<sup>2</sup>The reason for this restriction is that our testing code is not able to count references to the stack. We want you to limit your references to the stack and focus on the access patterns of the source and destination arrays.

## 4.2 Evaluation for Part B

For Part B, we will evaluate the correctness and performance of your `transpose_submit` function on three different-sized output matrices:

- $32 \times 32$  ( $M = 32, N = 32$ )
- $64 \times 64$  ( $M = 64, N = 64$ )
- $61 \times 67$  ( $M = 61, N = 67$ )

### 4.2.1 Performance (26 pts)

For each matrix size, the performance of your `transpose_submit` function is evaluated by using `valgrind` to extract the address trace for your function, and then using the reference simulator to replay this trace on a cache with parameters ( $s = 5, E = 1, b = 5$ ).

Your performance score for each matrix size scales linearly with the number of misses,  $m$ , up to some threshold:

- $32 \times 32$ : 8 points if  $m < 300$ , 0 points if  $m > 600$
- $64 \times 64$ : 8 points if  $m < 1,300$ , 0 points if  $m > 2,000$
- $61 \times 67$ : 10 points if  $m < 2,000$ , 0 points if  $m > 3,000$

Your code must be correct to receive any performance points for a particular size. Your code only needs to be correct for these three cases and you can optimize it specifically for these three cases. In particular, it is perfectly OK for your function to explicitly check for the input sizes and implement separate code optimized for each case.

## 5 Working on the Assignment

### 5.1 Working on Part A

We have provided you with an autograding program, called `test-csim`, that tests the correctness of your cache simulator on the reference traces. Be sure to compile your simulator before running the test:

```
CLEAR> make
CLEAR> ./test-csim
```

Points	(s,E,b)	Your simulator			Reference simulator			
		Hits	Misses	Evicts	Hits	Misses	Evicts	
3	(1,1,1)	9	8	6	9	8	6	traces/yi2.trace
3	(4,2,4)	4	5	2	4	5	2	traces/yi.trace
3	(2,1,4)	2	3	1	2	3	1	traces/dave.trace
3	(2,1,3)	167	71	67	167	71	67	traces/trans.trace
3	(2,2,3)	201	37	29	201	37	29	traces/trans.trace
3	(2,4,3)	212	26	10	212	26	10	traces/trans.trace
3	(5,1,5)	231	7	0	231	7	0	traces/trans.trace
6	(5,1,5)	265189	21775	21743	265189	21775	21743	traces/long.trace
27								

For each test, it shows the number of points you earned, the cache parameters, the input trace file, and a comparison of the results from your simulator and the reference simulator.

Here are some hints and suggestions for working on Part A:

- Do your initial debugging on the small traces, such as `traces/dave.trace`.
- The reference simulator takes an optional `-v` argument that enables verbose output, displaying the hits, misses, and evictions that occur as a result of each memory access. You are not required to implement this feature in your `csim.c` code, but we strongly recommend that you do so. It will help you debug by allowing you to directly compare the behavior of your simulator with the reference simulator on the reference trace files.
- We recommend that you use the `getopt` function to parse your command line arguments. You'll need the following header file:

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

See “`man 3 getopt`” for details.

- Each data load (L) or store (S) operation can cause at most one cache miss. The data modify operation (M) is treated as a load followed by a store to the same address. Thus, an M operation can result in two cache hits, or a miss and a hit plus a possible eviction.

## 5.2 Working on Part B

We have provided you with an autograding program, called `test-trans.c`, that tests the correctness and performance of each of the transpose functions that you have registered with the autograder.

You can register up to 100 versions of the transpose function in your `trans.c` file. Each transpose version has the following form:

```
/* Header comment */
char trans_simple_desc[] = "A simple transpose";
void trans_simple(int M, int N, int A[N][M], int B[M][N])
{
    /* your transpose code here */
}
```

Register a particular transpose function with the autograder by making a call of the form:

```
registerTransFunction(trans_simple, trans_simple_desc);
```

in the `registerFunctions` routine in `trans.c`. At runtime, the autograder will evaluate each registered transpose function and print the results. Of course, one of the registered functions must be the `transpose_submit` function that you are submitting for credit:

```
registerTransFunction(transpose_submit, transpose_submit_desc);
```

See the default `trans.c` function for an example of how this works.

The autograder takes the matrix size as input. It uses `valgrind` to generate a trace of each registered transpose function. It then evaluates each trace by running the reference simulator on a cache with parameters ( $s = 5$ ,  $E = 1$ ,  $b = 5$ ).

For example, to test your registered transpose functions on a  $32 \times 32$  matrix, rebuild `test-trans`, and then run it with the appropriate values for  $M$  and  $N$ :

```
CLEAR> make
CLEAR> ./test-trans -M 32 -N 32
Step 1: Evaluating registered transpose funcs for correctness:
func 0 (Transpose submission): correctness: 1
func 1 (Simple row-wise scan transpose): correctness: 1
func 2 (column-wise scan transpose): correctness: 1
func 3 (using a zig-zag access pattern): correctness: 1

Step 2: Generating memory traces for registered transpose funcs.

Step 3: Evaluating performance of registered transpose funcs (s=5, E=1, b=5)
func 0 (Transpose submission): hits:1766, misses:287, evictions:255
func 1 (Simple row-wise scan transpose): hits:870, misses:1183, evictions:1151
func 2 (column-wise scan transpose): hits:870, misses:1183, evictions:1151
func 3 (using a zig-zag access pattern): hits:1076, misses:977, evictions:945

Summary for official submission (func 0): correctness=1 misses=287
```

In this example, we have registered four different transpose functions in `trans.c`. The `test-trans` program tests each of the registered functions, displays the results for each, and extracts the results for the official submission.

Here are some hints and suggestions for working on Part B.

- The `test-trans` program saves the trace for function  $i$  in file `trace.fi`.<sup>3</sup> These trace files are invaluable debugging tools that can help you understand exactly where the hits and misses for each transpose function are coming from. To debug a particular function, simply run its trace through the reference simulator with the verbose option:

```
CLEAR> ./csim-ref -v -s 5 -E 1 -b 5 -t trace.f0
S 68312c,1 miss
L 683140,8 miss
L 683124,4 hit
L 683120,4 hit
L 603124,4 miss eviction
S 6431a0,4 miss
...
```

- Since your transpose function is being evaluated on a direct-mapped cache, conflict misses are a potential problem. Think about the potential for conflict misses in your code, especially along the diagonal. Try to think of access patterns that will decrease the number of these conflict misses.
- Blocking is a useful technique for reducing cache misses. See

<http://csapp.cs.cmu.edu/public/waside/waside-blocking.pdf>

for more information.

---

<sup>3</sup>Because `valgrind` introduces many stack accesses that have nothing to do with your code, we have filtered out all stack accesses from the trace. This is why we have banned local arrays and placed limits on the number of local variables.



### 5.3 Putting it all Together

We have provided you with a *driver program*, called `./driver.py`, that performs a complete evaluation of your simulator and transpose code. This is the same program that we use to evaluate your submission. The driver uses `test-csim` to evaluate your simulator, and it uses `test-trans` to evaluate your submitted transpose function on the three matrix sizes. Then it prints a summary of your results and the points you have earned.

To run the driver, type:

```
CLEAR> ./driver.py
```

## 6 Submitting Your Work

To turn in your assignment, you *must* use `git push` to copy your work to the `github` remote repository. We will *only* look at the last version that you pushed before the deadline. As a precaution against accidental loss of your code, we encourage you to `push` periodically. Please note, the *only* files that you need to turn in are `csim.c` and `trans.c`. In other words, these are the only files on which you should ever perform `git add`.

For grading your submission, we will use the `Makefile` that was originally provided to compile your code. Therefore, your code should not rely on any modifications to the `Makefile` for correct compilation.

As a sanity check, you should use your web browser to visit your assignment repo. Make sure that what you see in the browser is consistent what you think you have pushed.