Caches, TLBs, and Addressing
— Stuff you should know —

This lecture contains a lot of important vocabulary.

This lecture talks about hardware, not compilers.

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Where Do These Data Areas Go?

The compiler lays out data areas
- Where are they located at runtime?
- How does the code find the data areas?

The executable assumes that it has its own `virtual address space`
- Large, isolated, uninitialized tract of memory
- Compiled code manages the layout of that virtual address space
  - In collaboration with the operating system, which creates & maintains it

**Virtual Address Space**

```
0 1 2 3  . . .  n-2 n-1 n
```
Address Space Layout

Most language runtimes layout the address space in a similar way:

- Pieces (stack, heap, code, & globals) may move, but all will be there.
- Stack and heap grow toward each other (if heap grows).
- Arrays live on one of the stacks, in the global area, or in the heap.

The picture shows one virtual address space.

- The hardware supports one virtual address space per process.
- How does a virtual address space map into physical memory?
Multiple Virtual Address Spaces?

The Big Picture

Compiler’s view

OS’ view

1980 Hardware view

virtual address spaces (one per process)

Physical address space (big vector of memory)

TLB is an address cache used by the OS to speed virtual-to-physical address translation. A processor may have > 1 level of TLB.
Add some high-end bits so we can treat the process address spaces as one large address space for mapping purposes.

Unified virtual address space

TLB is an address cache used by the OS to speed virtual-to-physical address translation. A processor may have > 1 level of TLB.
Of course, the “Hardware view” is no longer that simple

- Multiple levels of cache
- Caches shared among cores
- Caches exclusive to one core
- Multiple levels of (shared) TLB

All of the addresses must map in a way that works for the code generated to run in a single virtual address space

Most processors have > 1 core
Modern hardware features multiple levels of cache & of TLB

- **L1** is typically private to one core
  - Separate **L1** code & data caches
- **L2** (and beyond) is typically shared between cores and between instructions (I) and data (D)
- Most chips use **inclusive** caches
  - Item in **L1** ⇒ in **L2** ⇒ in **L3** ...
  - Some chips use **exclusive** caches
- Most caches are **set associative**
  - 2, 4 or 8 way
- **TLBs** are also **associative**
  - Little documentation
- Caches can be designed to use **either physical or virtual addr’s**
Cache Memory

The primary function of a cache is to provide fast memory “near” the core

- **L1** is “a couple of cycles” and small
- **L2** is slower than **L1** and larger; **L3** is slower, again, and larger
- **RAM** is even slower and going to disk is glacial

My Laptop:
- 4 cycles
- 12 cycles
- 21 cycles
Cache Memory

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The other function of a cache is to map addresses

• Cache is organized into blocks, or lines
• Each line consists of a tag and a set of words
Cache Memory

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• Cache is organized into **blocks**, or **lines**
• Each line consists of a **tag** and a set of words

A full cache is a set of lines

• Address maps into tag, index, and offset

To make good use of cache memory, the running code must reuse values. **Spatial reuse** refers to the use of more than one item in a line. **Temporal reuse** refers to reuse of the same word over time.
Cache Memory

Caches differ in how they apportion the tag and index bits

- A **direct-mapped** cache has one line per **index**
- Cache lookup is simple
  - *The index bits are an ordinal index into the set of lines*

Direct-mapped cache

A direct mapped cache has $2^s$ lines.

*Capacity* is the sum of the sizes of the lines.
Caches differ in how they apportion the tag and index bits

- A **set-associative** cache has multiple lines per **index**
  - *index* maps to a set, lookup matches tags within the set
  - Small associative tag memory for each set (*parallel search*)

2-way Set-Associative Cache

A set-associative cache has $2^s$ sets. For a given total size, $s$ is smaller than in direct mapped. The **tag** is longer; the **index** is shorter.
Caches differ in how they apportion the tag and index bits

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4-way Set-Associative Cache
Cache Memory

Caches differ in how they apportion the tag and index bits

• A **set-associative** cache has multiple lines per index.

4-way Set-Associative Cache

Why not go to 8-way, or 16-way, or 32-way, or fully associative

• Each set has a small associative memory to allow parallel search on the tag bits

• The logic to do that lookup in parallel grows as the \( \log_2 \) of the number of ways
  ♦ Each doubling of the number of ways adds another layer to the network of gates
  ♦ Larger associativity means longer access times (*more cost, no gain*)

• Direct, 2-way, & 4-way are common
The Role of the Translation Lookaside Buffer (TLB)

- **TLB** is a small **cache** that maps virtual addresses to physical addresses
  - Holds a subset of the (active) virtual pages that are in memory
  - Each line contains a physical page address, tag is the full virtual address†

- **In a load**, the lookup in a **physically addressed** cache uses the **TLB** to translate the virtual address to a physical address
  - A **TLB** hit allows the load to proceed
  - A **TLB** miss invokes a search to bring the desired page into the **TLB**, followed by a continuation or a re-issue of the **load**
    \[ \text{TTLB holds only recently accessed pages} \hspace{1cm} \text{(locality matters, a lot)} \]

- **Lookup in a direct-mapped L1 cache**
  - Must translate virtual to physical, then lookup line by the index bits
  - If tags match, return the line; if not, fetch the line and replace old contents

- **Lookup in an associative L1 cache**
  - Must translate virtual to physical, then lookup index, then match tags

† Remember the high-order bits we added to unify the multiple virtual address spaces? They keep the **TLB** entries for different processes distinct.
The Role of the Translation Lookaside Buffer (TLB)

What happens on a TLB miss?

- If a load misses in the TLB, the next step is to consult the page table.
- Page table is a list of virtual address, physical address pairs.
  - Walk the list, looking for the virtual address, at page granularity.
  - If we find the page, we swap that mapping into the TLB & proceed as in a TLB hit.

To facilitate the page table lookup:

- The page table is usually "locked down" in L2 or L3 cache.
- Some processors provide hardware assist to search the page table.
  - Implies page table format is rigid and specified.
  - Page table can be quite large — how many 4KB pages in 8GB of RAM?
- Nonetheless, page table lookup is quite slow, compared to a hit in L1.

And, the processor may miss in the page table ...
⇒ Causing a virtual memory miss (VM miss) (more later)
What Happens on a Load?

The hardware must find the data in this complex hierarchy

• Assume that the address is in a register, e.g. \texttt{load r}_0 \Rightarrow r_1
• Assume the addresses are translated appropriately

Sequence of Events for a load

1. Processor looks in \textbf{L1} cache
   – \textit{Index maps to a set, then an associative search on the tags in the set}
   – \textit{If found (a cache hit), return the value; otherwise ...}

2. Processor looks in \textbf{L2} cache
   – \textit{Index maps to a set, then an associative search on the tags in the set}
   – \textit{If found (a cache hit), return the value; otherwise ...}

3. And so on ...
What Happens on a Load?

What if the page is not in cache?

• The **hardware** loads the cache line from **RAM**
  – Assumes that the virtual page resides in a physical page frame in **RAM**
  – If not, see “**VM miss**”

With inclusive caches:

• The cache line containing the data is loaded into all the levels of cache
• This act will trigger evictions through the replacement algorithm

With exclusive caches or “neither” caches:

• The cache line containing the data is loaded into the **L1** cache
• This act will trigger an eviction in **L1**, which may ripple up to **L2** & **L3**

If the page is not in **RAM**, ...

**Inclusive:** any line in \( L_i \) is always in \( L_{i+1} \)

**Exclusive:** a line is in only one cache at a time

**Neither:** the design does not guarantee either inclusivity or exclusivity

*These properties depend on the algebraic relationships between the cache parameters.*
What Happens on a Load? (VM Miss)

What if the page is not in memory (RAM)?

• The OS must bring the page into memory from its swap space
  – Swap space is an OS-managed file on disk
  
• When the OS created the address space, it allocated address space to it
  – Remember fork() and exec()?
  – As exec() fills the address space, those bytes populate the process’ swap space
  – The OS has a map of where all those pages are in swap space

• The OS initiates a transfer from swap space to RAM
  – Spinning disk must wait on rotational delay plus transfer time
  – Solid state disk avoids rotational delay; likely to be faster
  – When the data reaches RAM, the processor must pull it into cache

• The load must wait until the data hits the L1 cache

The takeaway: Locality matters (a lot)
What Happens on a Load?

**What about virtual to physical address translation?**

- The address in the **load** is a virtual address
- If the **load** misses in all caches, we need a physical address
- Caches can be designed to operate on either virtual or physical addresses
  - **L1** is typically indexed by virtual addresses
    → *Removes TLB lookup from the critical path on an L1 cache access*
  - **L2** and above are typically indexed by physical addresses
    → *Shorter addresses, shorter tags, less hardware, and, why not?*

**Physically-addressed cache ⇒ virtual address translation during lookup**

- Involves understanding the map from virtual pages to physical pages
- Involves cooperation between hardware and the operating system
  - Worst case behavior involves walking page tables (often locked in **L2** or **L3**)
  - Design of virtual memory systems is covered in a good **OS** course
What Happens on a Load?

Careful design can let the TLB lookup & index set lookup run in parallel

Because of paging in the virtual memory system, a physical address will have the same offset inside the page as does the corresponding virtual address (!)

• By playing with the size of \( t \), \( s \), and \( o \), the cache designer can separate index lookup from virtual-to-physical translation

• If \( s + o = \log_2(\text{pagesize}) \) then the index and offset bits are the same in physical & virtual addresses
  
  – If \( s + o = \log_2(\text{pagesize}) \), then the processor can start both the L1 lookup to find the set and the TLB lookup to translate the address at the same time
  
  – By the time it has found the set, it should have the tag data from the physical address (unless the lookup misses in the TLB)
  
  – In effect, associativity lets cache capacity grow without increasing the number of bits in the index field of the address

\[ \log_2(\text{pagesize}) \] is the number of bits required to address all the bytes in a page

A 4-way 32KB cache would need 2x sets or 2x line size (1 more bit in \( s \) or \( o \)) to keep \( s + o = 12 \).
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Why Is This Material in COMP 412?

Two key points:

1. As educated computer scientists, you should know this material
   - Background material for many decisions and discussions
   - Knowledge that might matter in a job interview

2. Memory hierarchy parameters play a critical role in performance
   - Transformations that improve locality are among the most profitable that a compiler can apply (look up “polyhedral transformations”)
   - Phenomena such as TLB locality and the intricacies of exclusive or neither caches are, in general, poorly understood by many software engineers

3. Locality can & should play a role in data-area layout
   - Entities that are small & referenced together can be in the same line
   - Entities that are large should be placed so as not to conflict with other items referenced at the same time