

System-Level Input/Output

CS 485G-006: Systems Programming

Lectures 20 and 21: 21–23 Mar 2016

Today

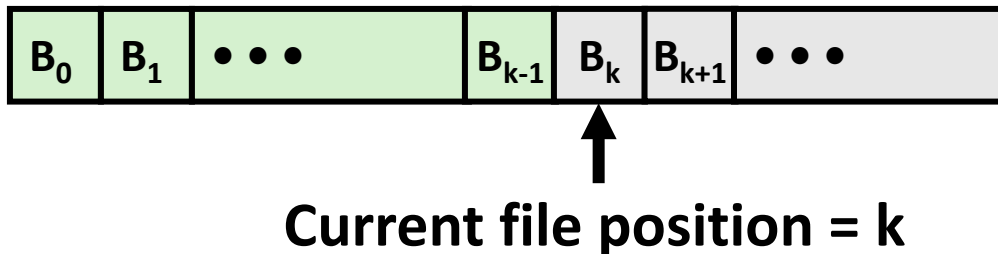
- **Unix I/O**
- Metadata, sharing, and redirection
- Standard I/O
- Closing remarks

Unix I/O Overview

- A Linux *file* is a sequence of m bytes:
 - $B_0, B_1, \dots, B_k, \dots, B_{m-1}$
- Cool fact: All I/O devices are represented as files:
 - `/dev/sda2` (`/usr` disk partition)
 - `/dev/tty2` (terminal)
- Even the kernel is represented as a file:
 - `/boot/vmlinuz-3.13.0-55-generic` (kernel image)
 - `/proc` (kernel data structures)

Unix I/O Overview

- Elegant mapping of files to devices allows kernel to export simple interface called *Unix I/O*:
 - Opening and closing files
 - `open()` and `close()`
 - Reading and writing a file
 - `read()` and `write()`
 - Changing the *current file position* (seek)
 - indicates next offset into file to read or write
 - `lseek()`



Current file position = k

File Types

- Each file has a *type* indicating its role in the system
 - *Regular file*: Contains arbitrary data
 - *Directory*: Index for a related group of files
 - *Socket*: For communicating with a process on another machine
- Other file types beyond our scope
 - *Named pipes (FIFOs)*
 - *Symbolic links*
 - *Character and block devices*

Regular Files

- A regular file contains arbitrary data
- Applications often distinguish between *text files* and *binary files*
 - Text files are regular files with only ASCII or Unicode characters
 - Binary files are everything else
 - e.g., object files, JPEG images
 - Kernel doesn't know the difference!
- Text file is sequence of *text lines*
 - Text line is sequence of chars terminated by *newline char* ('\n')
 - Newline is 0xa, same as ASCII line feed character (LF)
- End of line (EOL) indicators in other systems
 - Linux and Mac OS: '\n' (0xa)
 - line feed (LF)
 - Windows and Internet protocols: '\r\n' (0xd 0xa)
 - Carriage return (CR) followed by line feed (LF)

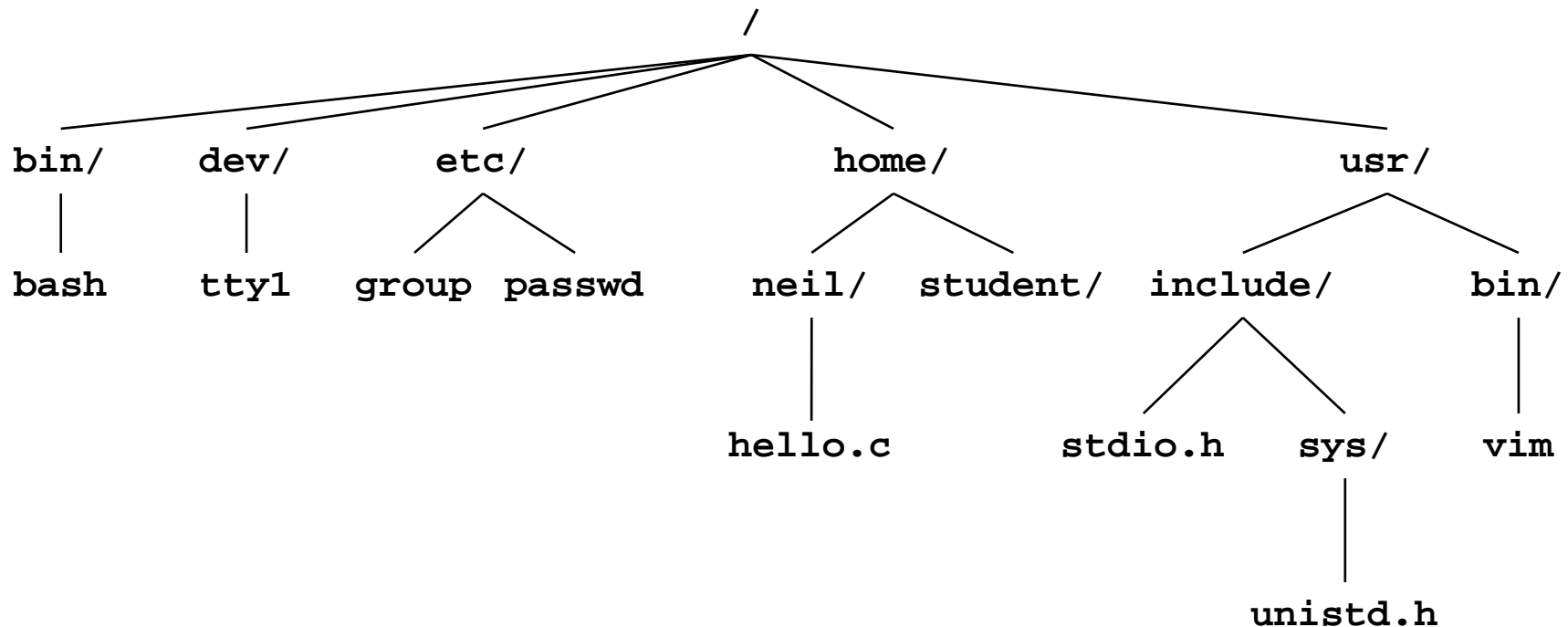


Directories

- **Directory consists of an array of *links***
 - Each link maps a *filename* to a file
- **Each directory contains at least two entries**
 - `.` (dot) is a link to itself
 - `..` (dot dot) is a link to *the parent directory* in the *directory hierarchy* (next slide)
- **Commands for manipulating directories**
 - `mkdir`: create empty directory
 - `ls`: view directory contents
 - `rmdir`: delete empty directory

Directory Hierarchy

- All files are organized as a hierarchy anchored by root directory named `/` (slash)

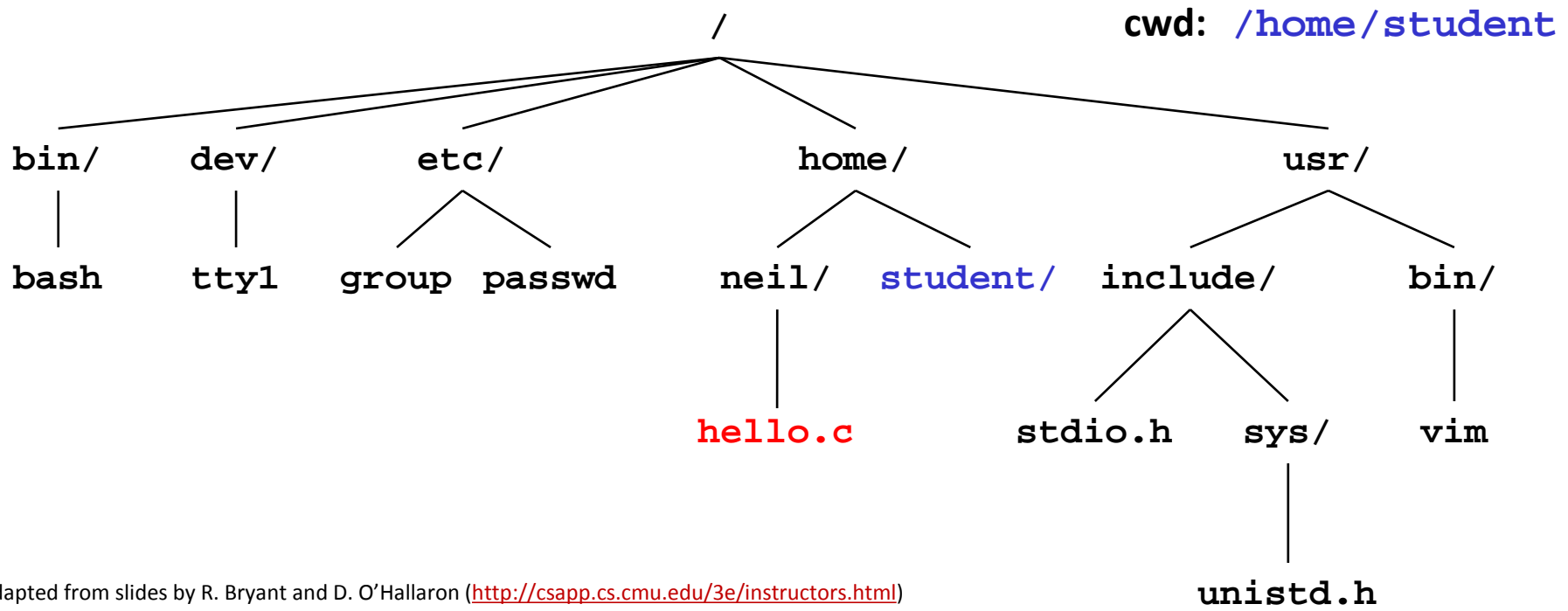


- Kernel maintains *current working directory (cwd)* for each process
 - Modified using the `cd` command

Pathnames

■ Locations of files in the hierarchy denoted by *pathnames*

- *Absolute pathname* starts with '/' and denotes path from root
 - `/home/neil/hello.c`
- *Relative pathname* denotes path from current working directory
 - `../neil/hello.c`



Opening Files

- Opening a file informs the kernel that you are getting ready to access that file

```
int fd;    /* file descriptor */  
  
if ((fd = open("/etc/hosts", O_RDONLY)) < 0) {  
    perror("open");  
    exit(1);  
}
```

- Returns a small identifying integer *file descriptor*
 - `fd == -1` indicates that an error occurred
- Each process created by a Linux shell begins life with three open files associated with a terminal:
 - 0: standard input (stdin)
 - 1: standard output (stdout)
 - 2: standard error (stderr)

Closing Files

- Closing a file informs the kernel that you are finished accessing that file

```
int fd;      /* file descriptor */
int retval; /* return value */

if ((retval = close(fd)) < 0) {
    perror("close");
    exit(1);
}
```

- Closing an already closed file is a recipe for disaster in threaded programs (more on this later)
- Moral: Always check return codes, even for seemingly benign functions such as `close()`

Reading Files

- Reading a file copies bytes from the current file position to memory, and then updates file position

```
char buf[512];
int fd;          /* file descriptor */
int nbytes;      /* number of bytes read */

/* Open file fd ... */
/* Then read up to 512 bytes from file fd */
if ((nbytes = read(fd, buf, sizeof(buf))) < 0) {
    perror("read");
    exit(1);
}
```

- Returns number of bytes read from file `fd` into `buf`
 - Return type `ssize_t` is signed integer
 - `nbytes < 0` indicates that an error occurred
 - **Short counts** (`nbytes < sizeof(buf)`) are possible and are not errors!

Writing Files

- Writing a file copies bytes from memory to the current file position, and then updates current file position

```
char buf[512];
int fd;          /* file descriptor */
int nbytes;      /* number of bytes read */

/* Open the file fd ... */
/* Then write up to 512 bytes from buf to file fd */
if ((nbytes = write(fd, buf, sizeof(buf))) < 0) {
    perror("write");
    exit(1);
}
```

- Returns number of bytes written from `buf` to file `fd`
 - `nbytes < 0` indicates that an error occurred
 - As with reads, short counts are possible and are not errors!

Simple Unix I/O example

- Copying stdin to stdout, one byte at a time
- Note the use of error-handling wrappers (Appendix A)

```
#include "csapp.h"

int main(void)
{
    char c;

    while(Read(STDIN_FILENO, &c, 1) != 0)
        Write(STDOUT_FILENO, &c, 1);
    exit(0);
}
```

On Short Counts

- **Short counts can occur in these situations:**
 - Encountering (end-of-file) EOF on reads
 - Reading text lines from a terminal
 - Reading and writing network sockets

- **Short counts never occur in these situations:**
 - Reading from disk files (except for EOF)
 - Writing to disk files

- **Best practice is to always allow for short counts.**

Today

- Unix I/O
- **Metadata, sharing, and redirection**
- Standard I/O
- Closing remarks

File Metadata

- **Metadata** is data about data, in this case file data
- **Per-file metadata maintained by kernel**
 - accessed by users with the `stat` and `fstat` functions

```
/* Metadata returned by the stat and fstat functions */
struct stat {
    dev_t      st_dev;      /* Device */
    ino_t      st_ino;      /* inode */
    mode_t     st_mode;     /* Protection and file type */
    nlink_t    st_nlink;    /* Number of hard links */
    uid_t      st_uid;      /* User ID of owner */
    gid_t      st_gid;      /* Group ID of owner */
    dev_t      st_rdev;     /* Device type (if inode device) */
    off_t      st_size;     /* Total size, in bytes */
    unsigned long st_blksize; /* Blocksize for filesystem I/O */
    unsigned long st_blocks; /* Number of blocks allocated */
    time_t     st_atime;    /* Time of last access */
    time_t     st_mtime;    /* Time of last modification */
    time_t     st_ctime;    /* Time of last metadata change */
};
```

Example of Accessing File Metadata

```

int main (int argc, char **argv)
{
    struct stat stat;
    char *type, *readok;

    Stat(argv[1], &stat);
    if (S_ISREG(stat.st_mode))          /* Determine file type */
        type = "regular";
    else if (S_ISDIR(stat.st_mode))
        type = "directory";
    else
        type = "other";
    if ((stat.st_mode & S_IRUSR)) /* Check read access */
        readok = "yes";
    else
        readok = "no";

    printf("type: %s, read: %s\n", type, readok);
    exit(0);
}

```

statcheck.c

```

linux> ./statcheck statcheck.c
type: regular, read: yes
linux> chmod 000 statcheck.c
linux> ./statcheck statcheck.c
type: regular, read: no
linux> ./statcheck ..
type: directory, read: yes

```

Accessing Directories

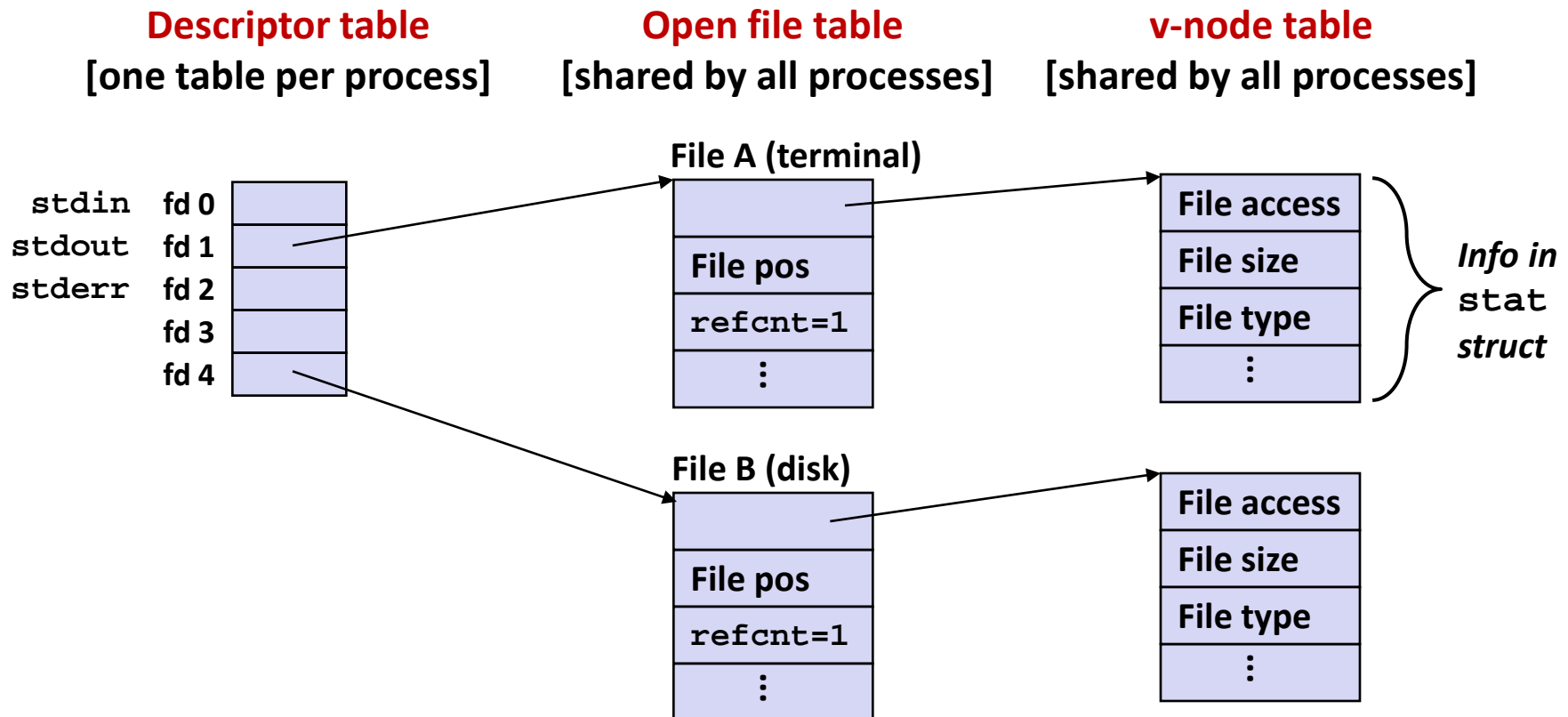
- **Only recommended operation on a directory: read its entries**
 - `dirent` structure contains information about a directory entry
 - `DIR` structure contains information about directory while stepping through its entries

```
#include <sys/types.h>
#include <dirent.h>

{
    DIR *directory;
    struct dirent *de;
    ...
    if (!(directory = opendir(dir_name)))
        error("Failed to open directory");
    ...
    while (0 != (de = readdir(directory))) {
        printf("Found file: %s\n", de->d_name);
    }
    ...
    closedir(directory);
}
```

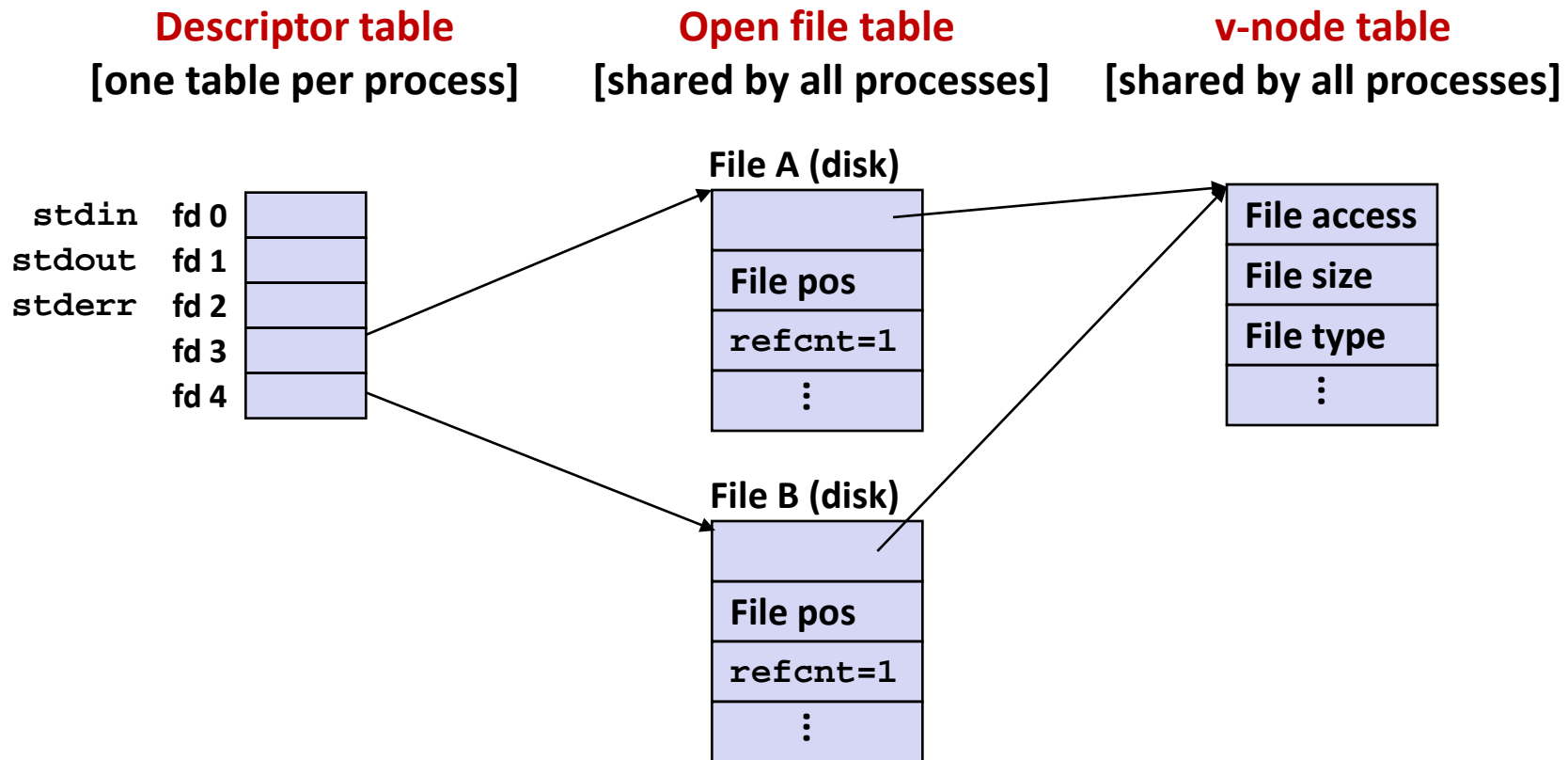
How the Unix Kernel Represents Open Files

- Two descriptors referencing two distinct open files.
Descriptor 1 (stdout) points to terminal, and descriptor 4 points to open disk file



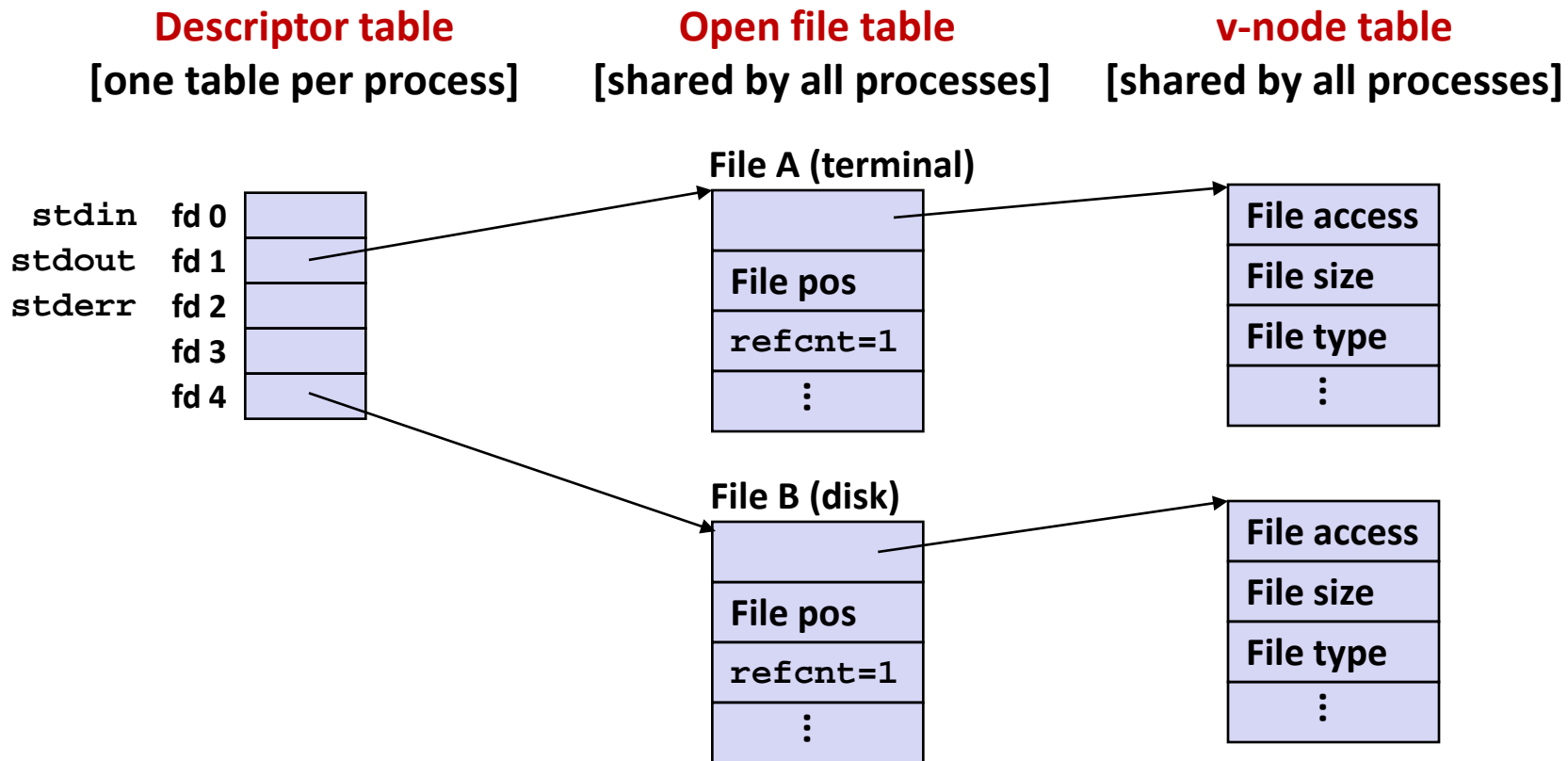
File Sharing

- Two distinct descriptors sharing the same disk file through two distinct open file table entries
 - E.g., Calling `open` twice with the same `filename` argument



How Processes Share Files: `fork`

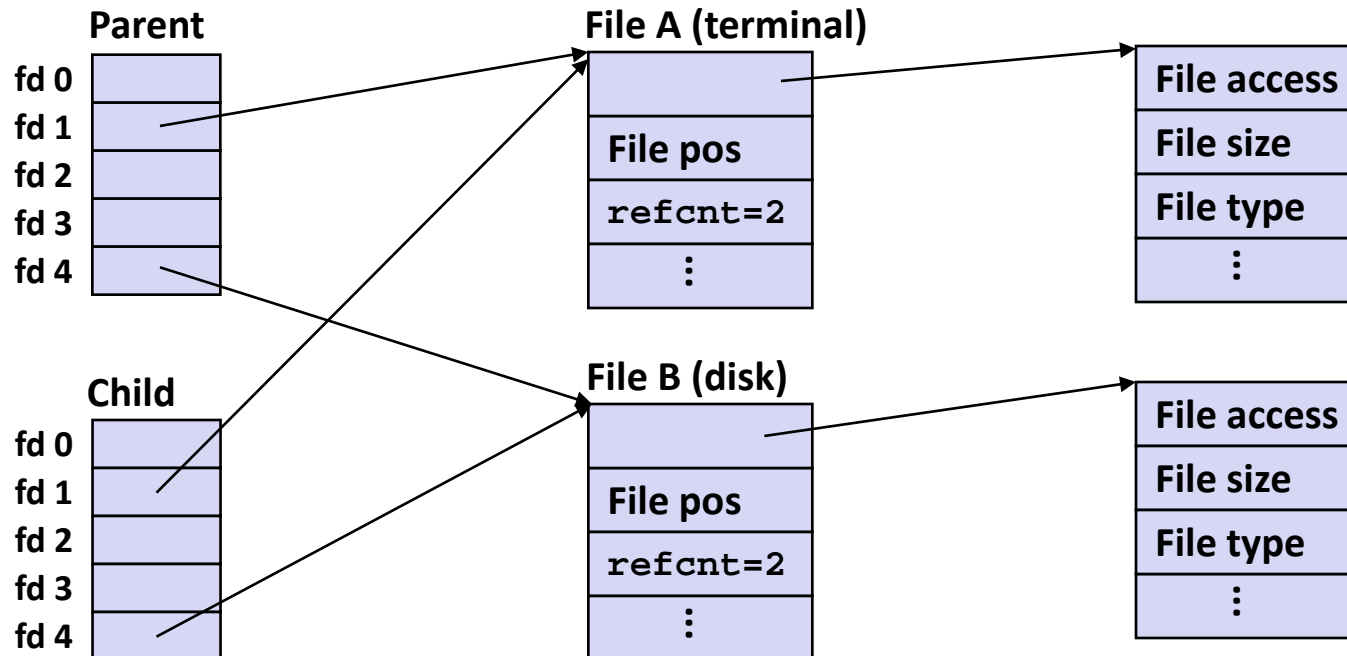
- `fork()` duplicates a process into a parent and child
 - Child process inherits its parent's open files
 - Note: situation unchanged by `exec` functions (use `fcntl` to change)
- **Before** `fork` call:



How Processes Share Files: `fork`

- A child process inherits its parent's open files
- *After* `fork`:
 - Child's table same as parent's, and +1 to each refcnt

Descriptor table [one table per process]
 Open file table [shared by all processes]
 v-node table [shared by all processes]



I/O Redirection

- Question: How does a shell implement I/O redirection?

```
linux> ls > foo.txt
```

- Answer: By calling the `dup2(oldfd, newfd)` function
 - Copies (per-process) descriptor table entry `oldfd` to entry `newfd`

Descriptor table

before `dup2(4, 1)`

fd 0	
fd 1	a
fd 2	
fd 3	
fd 4	b



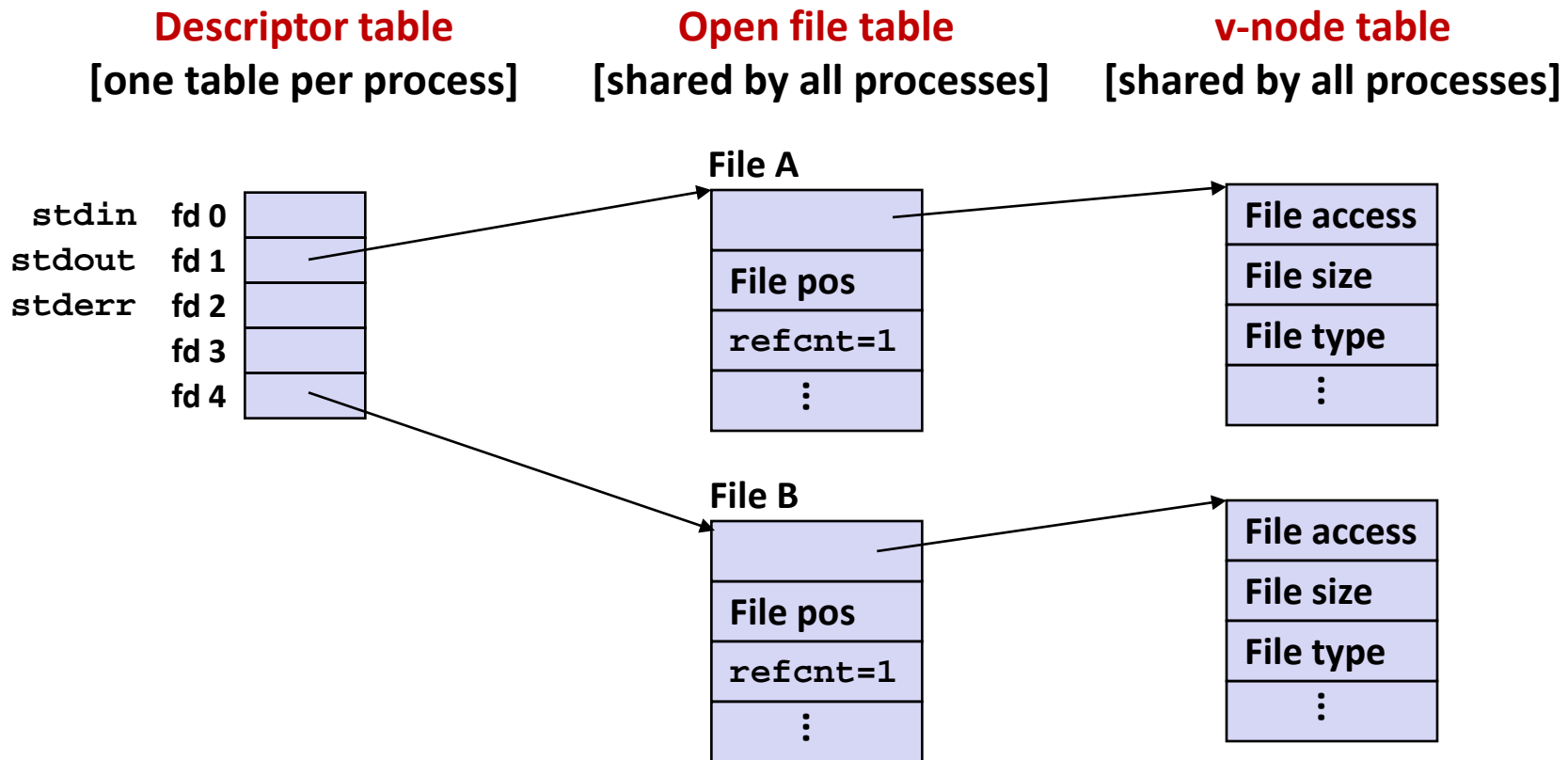
Descriptor table

after `dup2(4, 1)`

fd 0	
fd 1	b
fd 2	
fd 3	
fd 4	b

I/O Redirection Example

- **Step #1: open file to which stdout should be redirected**
 - Happens in child executing shell code, before `exec`



I/O Redirection Example (cont.)

■ Step #2: call `dup2(4, 1)`

- cause `fd=1` (stdout) to refer to disk file pointed at by `fd=4`

Descriptor table

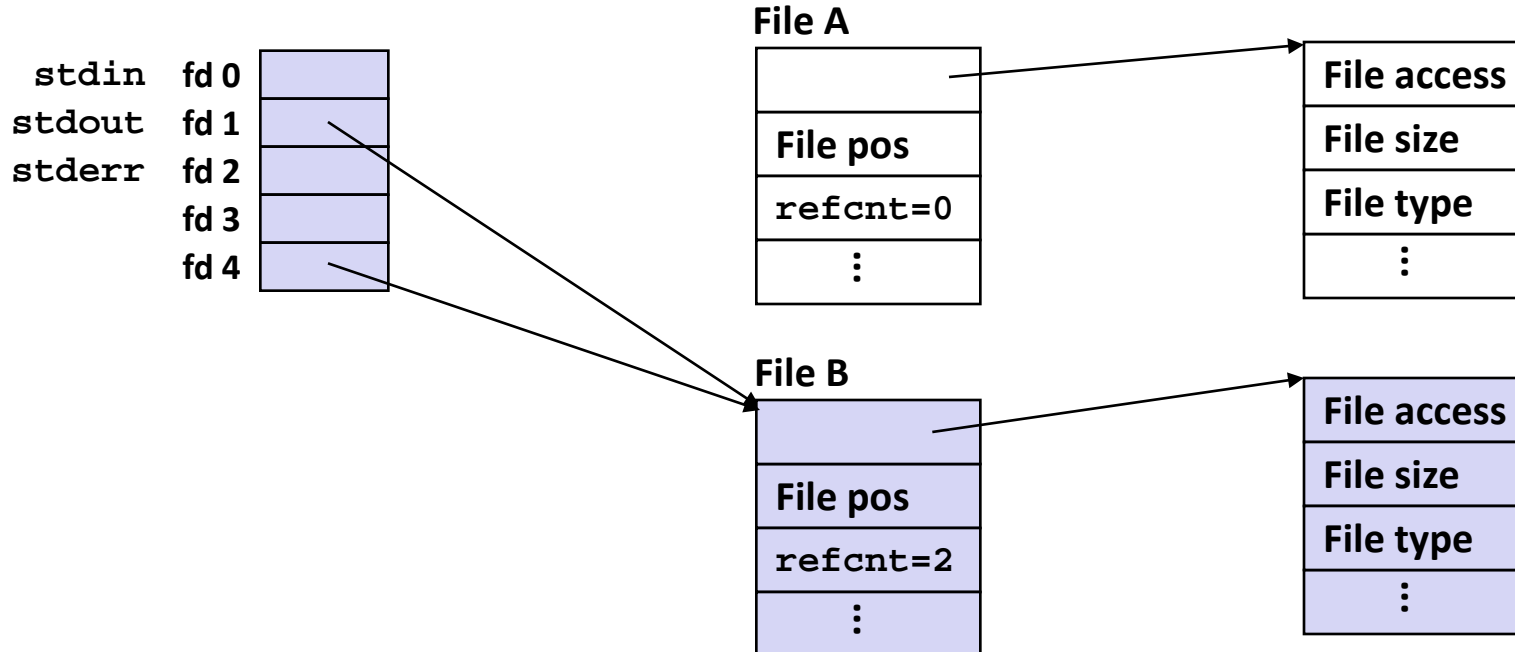
[one table per process]

Open file table

[shared by all processes]

v-node table

[shared by all processes]



Fun with File Descriptors (1)

```
#include "csapp.h"
int main(int argc, char *argv[])
{
    int fd1, fd2, fd3;
    char c1, c2, c3;
    char *fname = argv[1];
    fd1 = Open(fname, O_RDONLY, 0);
    fd2 = Open(fname, O_RDONLY, 0);
    fd3 = Open(fname, O_RDONLY, 0);
    Dup2(fd2, fd3);
    Read(fd1, &c1, 1);
    Read(fd2, &c2, 1);
    Read(fd3, &c3, 1);
    printf("c1 = %c, c2 = %c, c3 = %c\n", c1, c2, c3);
    return 0;
}
ffiles1.c
```

- What would this program print for file containing “abcde”?

Fun with File Descriptors (2)

```
#include "csapp.h"
int main(int argc, char *argv[])
{
    int fd1;
    int s = getpid() & 0x1;
    char c1, c2;
    char *fname = argv[1];
    fd1 = Open(fname, O_RDONLY, 0);
    Read(fd1, &c1, 1);
    if (fork()) { /* Parent */
        sleep(s);
        Read(fd1, &c2, 1);
        printf("Parent: c1 = %c, c2 = %c\n", c1, c2);
    } else { /* Child */
        sleep(1-s);
        Read(fd1, &c2, 1);
        printf("Child: c1 = %c, c2 = %c\n", c1, c2);
    }
    return 0;
}
```

ffiles2.c

- What would this program print for file containing “abcde”?

Fun with File Descriptors (3)

```
#include "csapp.h"
int main(int argc, char *argv[])
{
    int fd1, fd2, fd3;
    char *fname = argv[1];
    fd1 = Open(fname, O_CREAT|O_TRUNC|O_RDWR, S_IRUSR|S_IWUSR);
    Write(fd1, "pqrs", 4);
    fd3 = Open(fname, O_APPEND|O_WRONLY, 0);
    Write(fd3, "jklmn", 5);
    fd2 = dup(fd1); /* Allocates descriptor */
    Write(fd2, "wxyz", 4);
    Write(fd3, "ef", 2);
    return 0;
}
```

ffiles3.c

- What would be the contents of the resulting file?

Today

- Unix I/O
- Metadata, sharing, and redirection
- **Standard I/O**
- Closing remarks

Standard I/O Functions

- The C standard library (`libc.so`) contains a collection of higher-level *standard I/O* functions
 - Documented in Appendix B of K&R
- Examples of standard I/O functions:
 - Opening and closing files (`fopen` and `fclose`)
 - Reading and writing bytes (`fread` and `fwrite`)
 - Reading and writing text lines (`fgets` and `fputs`)
 - Formatted reading and writing (`fscanf` and `fprintf`)

Standard I/O Streams

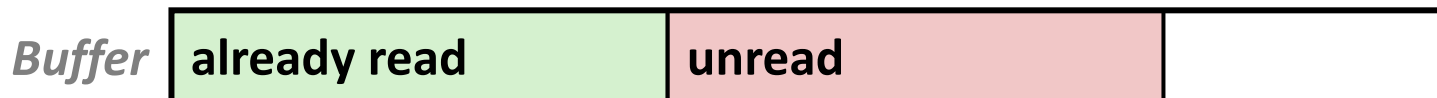
- Standard I/O models open files as *streams*
 - Abstraction for a file descriptor and a buffer in memory
- C programs begin life with three open streams (defined in `stdio.h`)
 - `stdin` (standard input)
 - `stdout` (standard output)
 - `stderr` (standard error)

```
#include <stdio.h>
extern FILE *stdin; /* standard input (descriptor 0) */
extern FILE *stdout; /* standard output (descriptor 1) */
extern FILE *stderr; /* standard error (descriptor 2) */

int main() {
    fprintf(stdout, "Hello, world\n");
}
```

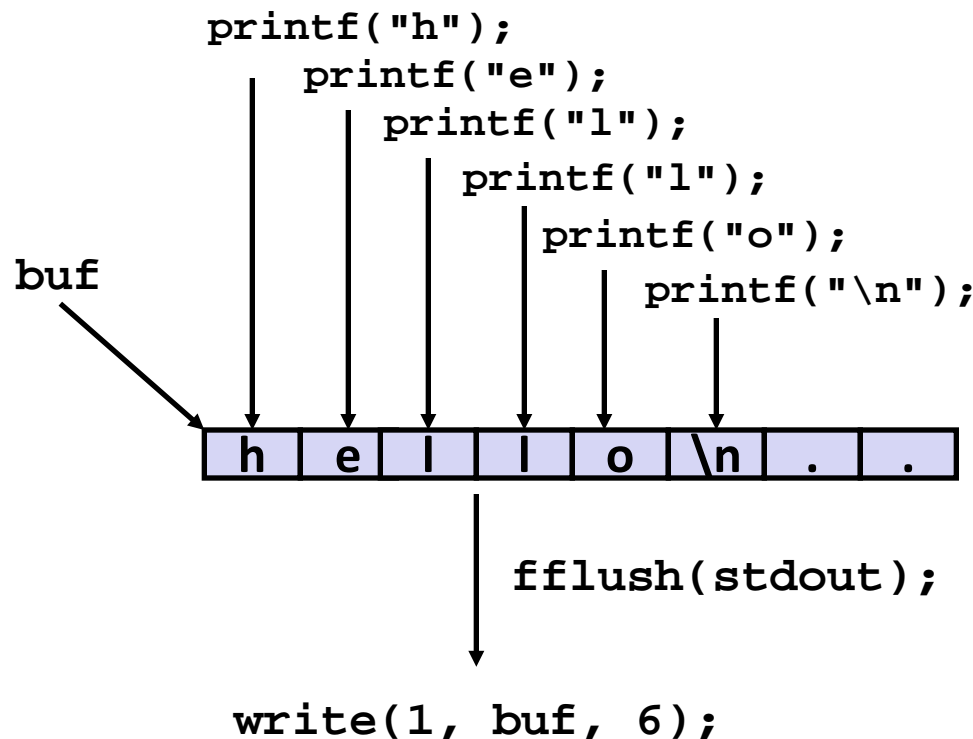

Buffered I/O: Motivation

- **Applications often read/write one character at a time**
 - `getc`, `putc`, `ungetc`
 - `gets`, `fgets`
 - Read line of text one character at a time, stopping at newline
- **Implementing as Unix I/O calls expensive**
 - `read` and `write` require Unix kernel calls
 - > 10,000 clock cycles
- **Solution: Buffered read**
 - Use Unix `read` to grab block of bytes
 - User input functions take one byte at a time from buffer
 - Refill buffer when empty



Buffering in Standard I/O

- Standard I/O functions use buffered I/O



- Buffer flushed to output fd on “\n”, call to `fflush` or `exit`, or return from `main`.

Standard I/O Buffering in Action

- You can see this buffering in action for yourself, using the always fascinating Linux `strace` program:

```
#include <stdio.h>

int main()
{
    printf("h");
    printf("e");
    printf("l");
    printf("l");
    printf("o");
    printf("\n");
    fflush(stdout);
    exit(0);
}
```

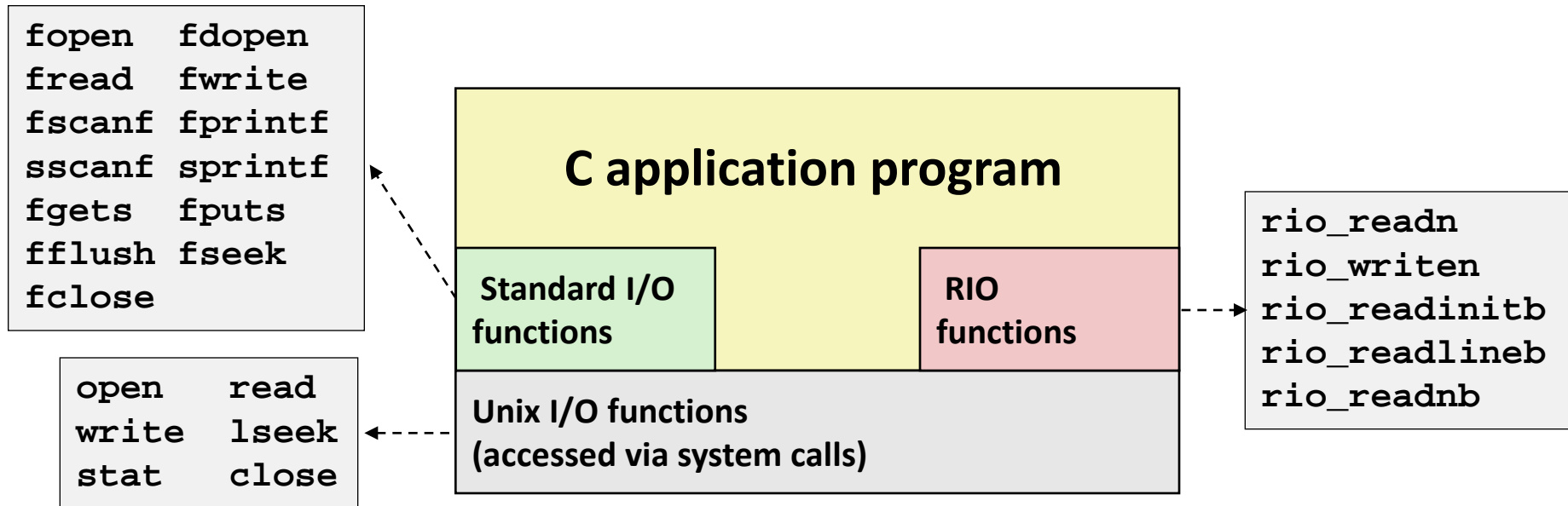
```
linux> strace ./hello
execve("./hello", ["hello"], [/* ... */]).
...
write(1, "hello\n", 6)                = 6
...
exit_group(0)                        = ?
```

Today

- Unix I/O
- RIO (robust I/O) package
- Metadata, sharing, and redirection
- Standard I/O
- **Closing remarks**

Unix I/O vs. Standard I/O vs. RIO

- **Standard I/O and RIO are implemented using low-level Unix I/O**
 - rio (robust I/O library) described in book section 10.4 (2E) or 10.5 (3E).



- **Which ones should you use in your programs?**

Pros and Cons of Unix I/O

■ Pros

- Unix I/O is the most general and lowest overhead form of I/O
 - All other I/O packages are implemented using Unix I/O functions
- Unix I/O provides functions for accessing file metadata
- Unix I/O functions are async-signal-safe and can be used safely in signal handlers

■ Cons

- Dealing with short counts is tricky and error prone
- Efficient reading of text lines requires some form of buffering, also tricky and error prone
- Both of these issues are addressed by the standard I/O and RIO packages

Pros and Cons of Standard I/O

■ Pros:

- Buffering increases efficiency by decreasing the number of **read** and **write** system calls
- Short counts are handled automatically

■ Cons:

- Provides no function for accessing file metadata
- Standard I/O functions are not async-signal-safe, and not appropriate for signal handlers
- Standard I/O is not appropriate for input and output on network sockets
 - There are poorly documented restrictions on streams that interact badly with restrictions on sockets (CS:APP3e, Sec 10.11)

Choosing I/O Functions

- **General rule: use the highest-level I/O functions you can**
 - Many C programmers are able to do all of their work using the standard I/O functions
 - But, be sure to understand the functions you use!
- **When to use standard I/O**
 - When working with disk or terminal files
- **When to use raw Unix I/O**
 - Inside signal handlers, because Unix I/O is async-signal-safe
 - In rare cases when you need absolute highest performance
- **When to use RIO**
 - When you are reading and writing network sockets
 - Avoid using standard I/O on sockets

Aside: Working with Binary Files

- **Functions you should never use on binary files**
 - Text-oriented I/O such as `fgets`, `scanf`, `rio_readlineb`
 - Interpret EOL characters.
 - Use functions like `rio_readn` or `rio_readnb` instead
 - String functions
 - `strlen`, `strcpy`, `strcat`
 - Interprets byte value 0 (end of string) as special

For Further Information

■ The Unix bible:

- W. Richard Stevens & Stephen A. Rago, ***Advanced Programming in the Unix Environment***, 2nd Edition, Addison Wesley, 2005
 - Updated from Stevens's 1993 classic text

■ The Linux bible:

- Michael Kerrisk, *The Linux Programming Interface*, No Starch Press, 2010
 - Encyclopedic and authoritative