

Stack Memory

I am sure a lot of you have used stackoverflow.com right? Stack overflows is one of the hardest problems to catch and diagnose, and thus no wonder someone invented this creative website URL.

Stack Memory consumers

Stack memory is required for the following:

1. Local Variables: Stored in the stack frame and automatically cleaned up when the function exits.
2. Function Calls: When a function is called, a stack frame is created and pushed onto the stack.
3. Function Returns: When a function completes, its stack frame is popped off the stack.

Fundamentally, a single core CPU contains a "Stack Pointer" which is a hardware register keeping track of memory. When a compiler generates code for a local variable, the stack pointer is typically decremented to make space for that variable.

```
void example_function() {
    int local_variable;
}

// Assembly:
example_function:
    push {lr}                // Save the link register (return address)
    sub sp, sp, #4           // Decrement the stack pointer by 4 bytes to allocate space for localV
    ...
    add sp, sp, #4           // Clean up the stack by incrementing the stack pointer
    pop {pc}                 // Restore the link register and return from the function
```

POSIX Thread

Let us experiment with a POSIX thread and visualize the stack usage.

```
#include <pthread.h>
#include <unistd.h> // sysconf()
```

```

#include <stdlib.h>
#include <stdio.h>
#include <stdint.h>

void* thread_entry(void *p) {
    //puts("Hello from thread");
    //uint8_t memory[280 * 1024] = { 0 };
    //uint8_t *memory = malloc(1 * 1024 * 1024);
    return NULL;
}

void *allocate_stack(const size_t stack_size_in_bytes) {
    const size_t align_to = sysconf(_SC_PAGESIZE);
    void *aligned_stack_ptr = aligned_alloc(align_to, stack_size_in_bytes);
    return aligned_stack_ptr;
}

void posix_thread_experiment() {
    void *thread_stack_mem_ptr = NULL;
    pthread_t posix_thread = {0};
    pthread_attr_t pthread_attributes = {0};
    const size_t stack_size = 256 * 1024;
    int status = pthread_attr_init(&pthread_attributes);
    if (0 == status) {
        //puts("Success: pthread_attr_init()");
        thread_stack_mem_ptr = allocate_stack(stack_size);
        status = pthread_attr_setstack(&pthread_attributes, thread_stack_mem_ptr, stack_size);
    }
    //////////////////////////////////////
    // TODO:
    //////////////////////////////////////
    // Write a pattern on all of the memory that will be used for thread stack
    // In other words, you are writing a "watermark pattern"
    if (0 == status) {
        //puts("Success: pthread_attr_setstack()");
        status = pthread_create(&posix_thread, &pthread_attributes, thread_entry, NULL);
    }
    if (0 != status) {
        puts("ERROR: Failed to create thread");
    }
}

```

```

}
// Wait for the thread to exit:
pthread_join(posix_thread, NULL);
// |----|    <- lower memory which is thread_stack_mem_ptr
// |----|
// |----|
////////////////////////////////////
// TODO:
////////////////////////////////////
// Count all the bytes with the watermark intact
uint32_t unused_stack_space = 0;
printf("Total bytes un-used: %u / %u\n", (unsigned)(unused_stack_space*sizeof(uint64_t)), (unsigned)
}
int main(int argc, char **argv) {
    //////////////////////////////////////
    // TODO
    // How much memory is the main() thread launched with?
    //uint8_t memory[8 * 1024 * 1024] = { 0 };
    //////////////////////////////////////
    posix_thread_experiment();
    return 0;
}

```

Exercises

Exercise 1:

1. Experiment and determine the maximum stack allocation size of the main() function
 - You can modify size of allocated memory inside main() and assess when the program crashes or experiences a segmentation fault
2. Complete the TODOs in the code to determine the stack usage of a thread
 - Paint the allocated stack memory with a watermark pattern
 - Count the number of stack memory bytes with un-altered pattern
 - Experiment with various stack memory usage of the thread to determine if your algorithm is working
 - Experiment with stack usage

- Note down how much stack space a `printf()` method takes

Exercise 2:

- Create two threads that perform some operations and sleep periodically
 - Use about 128k stack space for each thread
- Create a thread monitoring thread (third thread)
 - This thread should monitor the stack usage of each thread
 - If stack free reaches < 4000 bytes, print out a warning message
 - Periodically, every 5 seconds, print out stack usage of each thread

Revision #4

Created 9 months ago by [Preet Kang](#)

Updated 8 months ago by [Preet Kang](#)