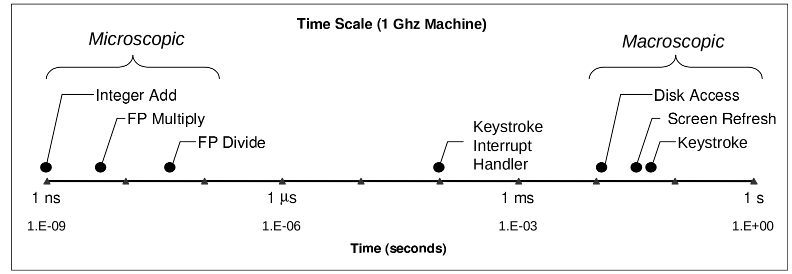
15-213

Time Measurement
October 25, 2001

Topics

- Time scales
- Interval counting
- Cycle counters
- K-best measurement scheme

Computer Time Scales



Two Fundamental Time Scales

- **Processor:** **$\sim 10^{-9}$ seconds**
- **External events:** **$\sim 10^{-2}$ seconds**
  - Keyboard input
  - Disk seek
  - Screen refresh

Implication

- **Can execute many instructions while waiting for external event to occur**
- **Can alternate among processes without anyone noticing**

Measurement Challenge

How Much Time Does Program X Require?

- **CPU time**
  - How many total seconds are used when executing X?
  - Measure used for most applications
  - Small dependence on other system activities
- **Actual ("Wall") Time**
  - How many seconds elapse between the start and the completion of X?
  - Depends on system load, I/O times, etc.

Confounding Factors

- **How does time get measured?**
- **Many processes share computing resources**
  - Transient effects when switching from one process to another
  - Suddenly, the effects of alternating among processes become noticeable

"Time" on a Computer System

real (wall clock) time

= **user time** *(time executing instructing instructions in the user process)*

= **system time** *(time executing instructing instructions in kernel on behalf of user process)*

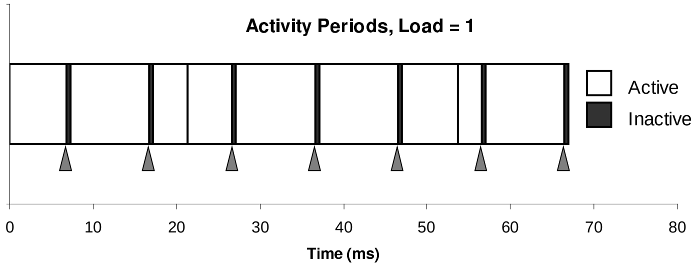
= **some other user's time** *(time executing instructing instructions in different user's process)*

\+ \+ = **real (wall clock) time**

We will use the word "time" to refer to user time.

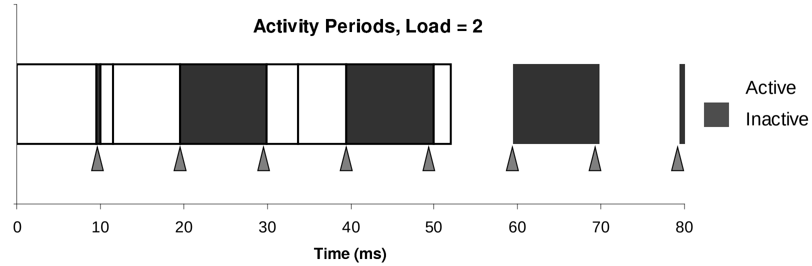
cummulative user time

Activity Periods: Light Load



- **Most of the time spent executing one process**
- **Periodic interrupts every 10ms**
  - Interval timer
  - Keep system from executing one process to exclusion of others
- **Other interrupts**
  - Due to I/O activity
- **Inactivity periods**
  - System time spent processing interrupts
  - ~250,000 clock cycles

Activity Periods: Heavy Load



- **Sharing processor with one other active process**
- **Periodic interrupts every 10ms**
  - Interval timer
  - Keep system from executing one process to exclusion of others
- **Other interrupts**
  - Due to I/O activity
- **Inactivity periods**
  - System time spent processing interrupts
  - Periods when other process executes

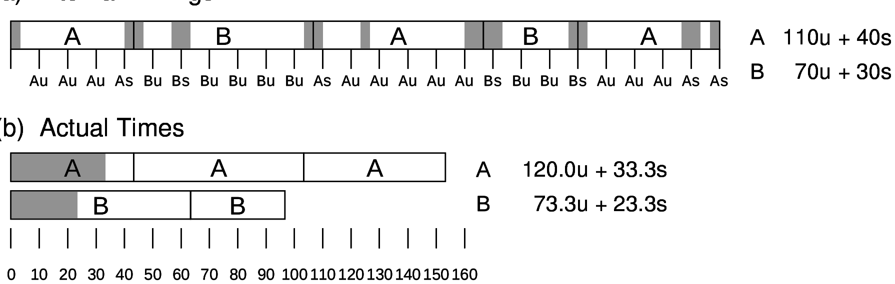
Interval Counting

OS Measures Runtimes Using Interval Timer

- **Each time get timer interrupt, increment timer for executing process**
  - User time if running in user mode
  - System time if running in kernel mode

(a) Interval Timings

(b) Actual Times

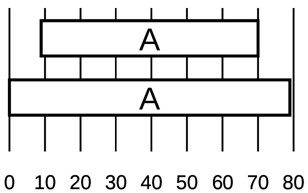


Unix `time` Command

```
time make osevent
gcc -O2 -Wall -g  -march=i486 -c clock.c
gcc -O2 -Wall -g  -march=i486 -c options.c
gcc -O2 -Wall -g  -march=i486 -c load.c
gcc -O2 -Wall -g  -march=i486 -O osevent osevent.c . . .
0.820u 0.300s 0:01.32 84.8%     0+0k 0+0io 4049pf+0w
```

- **0.82 seconds user time**
  - 82 timer intervals
- **0.30 seconds system time**
  - 30 timer intervals
- **1.32 seconds wall time**
- **84.8% of total was used running these processes**
  - (.82+0.3)/1.32 = .848

Accuracy of Interval Counting



Minimum

Maximum

- Computed time = 70ms
- Min Actual = 60 + ε
- Max Actual = 80 – ε

Worst Case Analysis

- Timer Interval = δ
- Single process segment measurement can be off by ±δ
- No bound on error for multiple segments
  – Could consistently underestimate, or consistently overestimate

Average Case Analysis

- Over/underestimates tend to balance out
- As long as total run time is sufficiently large
  > 1 second
- Consistently miss 4% overhead due to timer interrupts

Cycle Counters

- Most modern systems have built in registers that are incremented every clock cycle
  – Very fine grained
  – Maintained as part of process state
    » In Linux, counts elapsed global time
- Special assembly code instruction to access
- On (recent model) Intel machines:
  – 64 bit counter.
  – RDTSC instruction sets **%edx** to high order 32-bits, **%eax** to low order 32-bits

Wrap Around Times for 550 MHz machine

- Low order 32-bits wrap around every 2^{32} / (550 * 10^6) = 7.8 seconds
- High order 64-bits wrap around every 2^{64} / (550 * 10^6) = 33539534679 seconds
  – 1065.3 years

Measuring with Cycle Counter

Idea

- Get current value of cycle counter
  – store as pair of unsigned's `cyc_hi` and `cyc_lo`
- Compute something
- Get new value of cycle counter
- Perform double precision subtraction to get elapsed cycles

```
/* Keep track of most recent reading of cycle counter */
static unsigned cyc_hi = 0;
static unsigned cyc_lo = 0;

void start_counter()
{
  /* Get current value of cycle counter */
  access_counter(&cyc_hi, &cyc_lo);
}
```


Accessing the Cycle Counter (cont.)

- GCC allows inline assembly code with mechanism for matching registers with program variables
- Code only works on x86 machine compiling with GCC

```
void access_counter(unsigned *hi, unsigned *lo)
{
  /* Get cycle counter */
  asm("rdtsc; movl %%edx,%0; movl %%eax,%1"
      : "=r" (*hi), "=r" (*lo)
      : /* No input */
      : "%edx", "%eax");
}
```

- Emit assembly with `rdtsc` and two `movl` instructions
- Code generates two outputs:
  – Symbolic register `%0` should be used for `*hi`
  – Symbolic register `%1` should be used for `*lo`
- Code has no inputs
- Registers `%eax` and `%edx` will be overwritten

Completing Measurement

- Get new value of cycle counter
- Perform double precision subtraction to get elapsed cycles
- Express as `double` to avoid overflow problems

```
double get_counter()
{
  unsigned ncyc_hi, ncyc_lo
  unsigned hi, lo, borrow;
  /* Get cycle counter */
  access_counter(&ncyc_hi, &ncyc_lo);
  /* Do double precision subtraction */
  lo = ncyc_lo - cyc_lo;
  borrow = lo > ncyc_lo;
  hi = ncyc_hi - cyc_hi - borrow;
  return (double) hi * (1 << 30) * 4 + lo;
}
```


Timing With Cycle Counter

Determine Clock Rate of Processor

- Count number of cycles required for some fixed number of seconds

```
double MHZ;
int sleep_time = 10;
start_counter();
sleep(sleep_time);
MHZ = get_counter()/(sleep_time * 1e6);
```

Time Function P

- First attempt: Simply count cycles for one execution of P

```
double tsecs;
start_counter();
P();
tsecs = get_counter() / (MHZ * 1e6);
```


Timing with Cycle Counter

```
double MHZ;
int sleep_time = 10;
start_counter();
sleep(sleep_time);
MHZ = get_counter()/(sleep_time * 1e6);
```

```
double tsecs;
start_counter();
P();
tsecs = get_counter() / (MHZ * 1e6);
```


Measurement Pitfalls

Overhead

- Calling `get_counter()` incurs small amount of overhead
- Want to measure long enough code sequence to compensate

Unexpected Cache Effects

- artificial hits or misses
- e.g., these measurements were taken with the Alpha cycle counter:

```
foo1(array1, array2, array3);      /* 68,829 cycles */
foo2(array1, array2, array3);      /* 23,337 cycles */
  vs.
foo2(array1, array2, array3);      /* 70,513 cycles */
foo1(array1, array2, array3);      /* 23,203 cycles */
```

Dealing with Overhead & Cache Effects

- Always execute function once to "warm up" cache
- Keep doubling number of times execute P() until reach some threshold
  - Used CMIN = 50000

```
int cnt = 1;
double cmeas = 0;
double cycles;
do  {
  int c = cnt;
  P();                  /* Warm up cache */
  get_counter();
  while (c-- > 0)
    P();
  cmeas = get_counter();
  cycles = cmeas / cnt;
  cnt += cnt;
} while (cmeas < CMIN);  /* Make sure have enough */
return cycles / (1e6 * MHZ);
```


Multitasking Effects

Cycle Counter Measures Elapsed Time

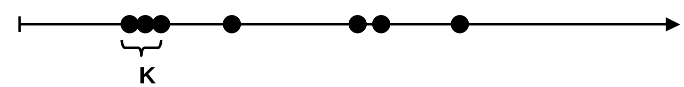
- Keeps accumulating during periods of inactivity
  - System activity
  - Running other processes

Key Observation

- Cycle counter never underestimates program run time
- Possibly overestimates by large amount

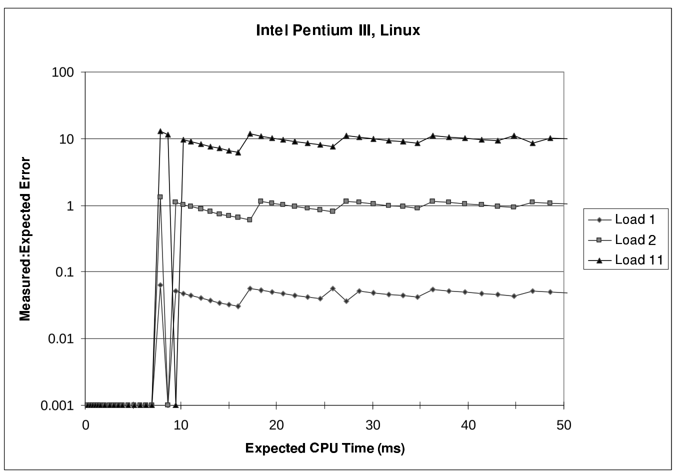
K-Best Measurement Scheme

- Perform up to N (e.g., 20) measurements of function
- See if fastest K (e.g., 3) within some relative factor ε (e.g., 0.001)



K-Best Validation

K = 3, ε = 0.001



Very good accuracy for < 8ms

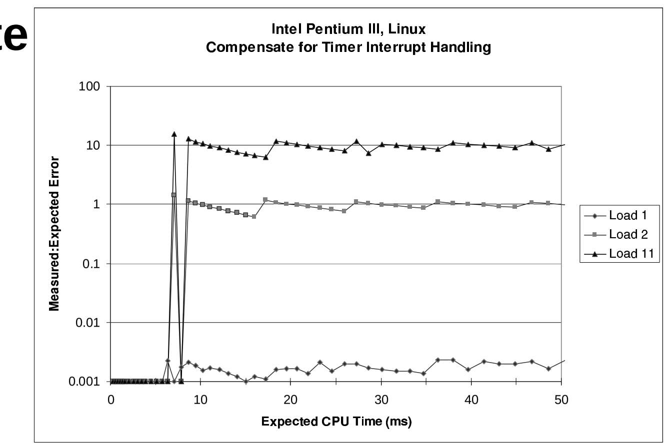
- Within one timer interval
- Even when heavily loaded

Less accurate of > 10ms

- Light load: ~4% error
  - Interval clock interrupt handling
- Heavy load: Very high error

Compensate For Timer Overhead

K = 3, ε = 0.001



Subtract Timer Overhead

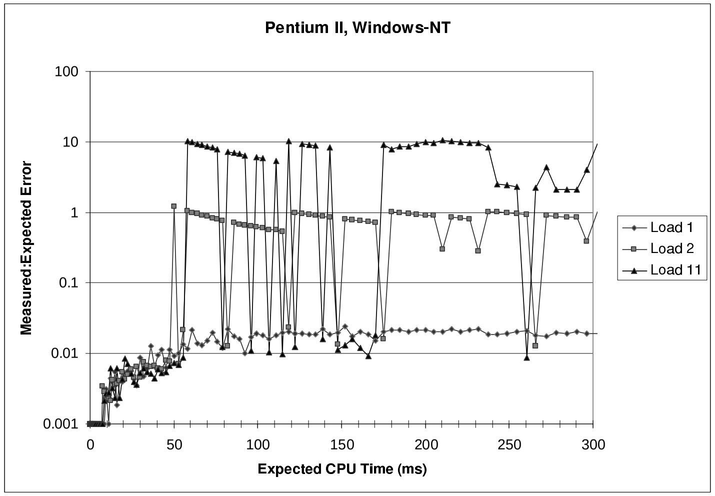
- Estimate overhead of single interrupt by measuring periods of inactivity
- Call interval timer to determine number of interrupts that have occurred

Better Accuracy for > 10ms

- Light load: 0.2% error
- Heavy load: Still very high error

K-Best on NT

K = 3, ε = 0.001



Acceptable accuracy for < 50ms

- **Scheduler allows process to run multiple intervals**

Less accurate of > 10ms

- **Light load: 2% error**
- **Heavy load: Generally very high error**

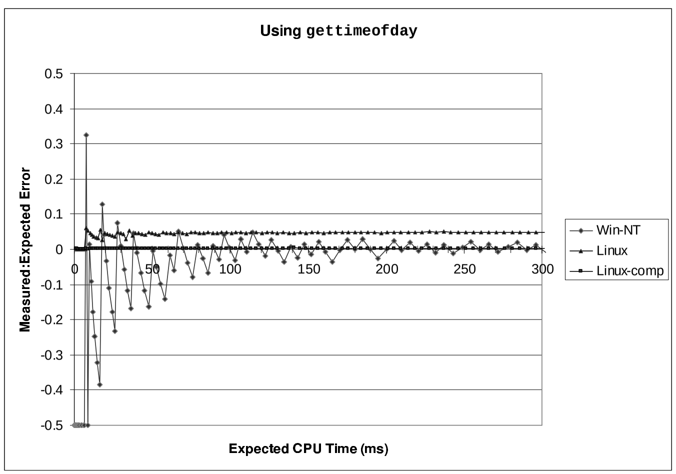
Time of Day Clock

- **Unix `gettimeofday()` function**
- **Return elapsed time since reference time (Jan 1, 1970)**
- **Implementation**
  - Uses interval counting on some machines
    - » Coarse grained
  - Uses cycle counter on others
    - » Fine grained, but significant overhead and only 1 microsecond resolution

```
#include <sys/time.h>
#include <unistd.h>

  struct timeval tstart, tfinish;
  double tsecs;
  gettimeofday(&tstart, NULL);
  P();
  gettimeofday(&tfinish, NULL);
  tsecs = (tfinish.tv_sec - tstart.tv_sec) +
      1e6 * (tfinish.tv_usec - tstart.tv_usec);
```


K-Best Using `gettimeofday`



Linux

- **As good as using cycle counter**
- **For times > 10 microseconds**

Windows

- **Implemented by interval counting**
- **Too coarse-grained**

Measurement Summary

Timing is highly case and system dependent

- **What is overall duration being measured?**
  - > 1 second: interval counting is OK
  - << 1 second: must use cycle counters
- **On what hardware / OS / OS version?**
  - Accessing counters
    - » How `gettimeofday` is implemented
  - Timer interrupt overhead
  - Scheduling policy

Devising a Measurement Method

- **Long durations: use Unix timing functions**
- **Short durations**
  - If possible, use gettimeofday
  - Otherwise must work with cycle counters
  - K-best scheme most successful