

Chapter 9: Threads

A Programmer's Guide to Java Certification (Second Edition)

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9.1 Multitasking

- Multitasking allows several activities to occur concurrently on the computer.
- *Process-based multitasking*
 - allows processes (i.e., programs) to run concurrently on the computer.
- *Thread-based multitasking*
 - allows parts of the *same* program to run concurrently.
 - The sequence of code executed for each task defines an *independent* path of execution, called a *thread (of execution)*.
- Some advantages of thread-based multitasking:
 - threads share the same address space
 - context switching between threads is usually less expensive than between processes
 - cost of communication between threads is relatively low
- Java supports thread-based multitasking and provides high-level facilities for multithreaded programming.
- *Thread safety:* design of classes to ensure that the state of their objects is always consistent, even when the objects are used concurrently by multiple threads.

9.2 Overview of Threads

- *A thread is an independent sequential path of execution within a program.*
- Threads exist in a common memory space, i.e share both data and code, and the process running the program (*lightweight threads*).
- Every thread in Java is created and controlled by a unique object of the `java.lang.Thread` class.
- Important aspects of multithreaded programming:
 - creating threads and providing the code that gets executed by a thread.
 - accessing common data and code through synchronization.
 - transitioning between thread states.

The Main Thread

- The runtime environment distinguishes between *user threads* and *daemon threads*.
 - As long as a *user thread* is alive, the JVM does not terminate.
 - A *daemon thread* is stopped if there are no more user threads running, thus terminating the program.
 - The status of the thread as either daemon or user can be set before the thread is *started*.
- The *main thread* is a user thread which is automatically created to execute the `main()` method.
 - *Child* threads are spawned from the main thread, inheriting its user-thread status.
 - The `main()` method can finish, but the program will keep running until all the user threads have finished.
 - Marking all spawned threads as daemon threads ensures that the application terminates when the main thread dies.
- When a GUI application is started, a special user thread is automatically created to monitor the user-GUI interaction.
 - allows interaction between the user and the GUI, even though the main thread might have died after the `main()` method finished executing.

9.3 Thread Creation

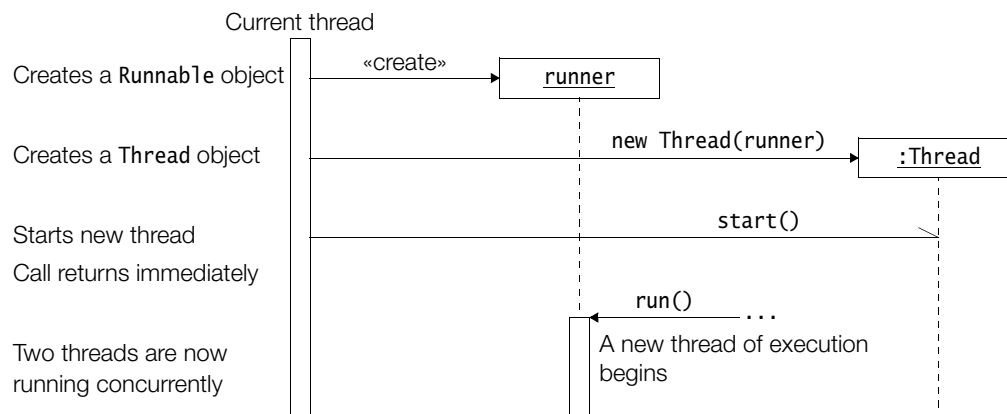
- A thread in Java is represented by an object of the Thread class.
- Implementing threads is achieved in one of two ways:
 - implementing the `java.lang.Runnable` interface
 - extending the `java.lang.Thread` class

Implementing the Runnable Interface

```
public interface Runnable {  
    void run();  
}
```

- A thread, which is created based on an object that implements the Runnable interface, will execute the code defined in the public method `run()` of this object.
- The `run()` method defines the entry and the exits for the thread.
- The thread ends when the `run()` method ends, either by normal completion or by throwing an uncaught exception.

Figure 9.1 *Spawning Threads Using a Runnable Object*



Constructors and methods of the `java.lang.Thread` class:

```
Thread(Runnable threadTarget)
```

```
Thread(Runnable threadTarget, String threadName)
```

The argument `threadTarget` is the object whose `run()` method will be executed when the thread is started.

```
static Thread currentThread()
```

This method returns a reference to the `Thread` object of the currently executing thread.

```
final String getName()
```

```
final void setName(String name)
```

The first method returns the name of the thread. The second one sets the thread's name.

```
void run()
```

Subclasses of the `Thread` class should override this method. If the current thread is created using a separate `Runnable` object, then the `Runnable` object's `run()` method is called.

```
final void setDaemon(boolean flag)
```

```
final boolean isDaemon()
```

Allow the status (user or daemon) to be set and read, respectively

```
void start()
```

This method *spawns* a new thread, that is, the new thread will begin execution as a child thread of the current thread. The call is asynchronous, i.e. returns immediately. It throws an `IllegalThreadStateException` if the thread was already started.

Example 9.1: Implementing the Runnable interface

- The constructor for the Counter class ensures:
 - that each object of the Counter class will create a new thread by passing the Counter instance to the Thread constructor.
 - that the thread is enabled for execution by the call to its start() method.
 - that the class defines the run() method that constitutes the code executed by the thread.
- The Client class creates an object of class Counter at (5) and retrieves its value in a loop at (6).
- Note that the main thread executing in the Client class sleeps for a longer time between iterations than the Counter thread.
 - The Counter thread is a *child* thread of the main thread.
 - It inherits the user-thread status from the main thread.
- If the code after statement at (5) in the main() method was removed, the main thread would finish executing before the child thread.
 - The program would continue running until the child thread completed.

Example 9.1 Implementing the Runnable Interface

```
class Counter implements Runnable {
    private int currentValue;
    private Thread worker;

    public Counter(String threadName) {
        currentValue = 0;
        worker = new Thread(this, threadName); // (1) Create a new thread.
        System.out.println(worker);
        worker.start(); // (2) Start the thread.
    }
    public int getValue() { return currentValue; }

    public void run() { // (3) Thread entry point
        try {
            while (currentValue < 5) {
                System.out.println(worker.getName() + ": " + (currentValue++));
                Thread.sleep(250); // (4) Current thread sleeps.
            }
        } catch (InterruptedException e) {
            System.out.println(worker.getName() + " interrupted.");
        }
        System.out.println("Exit from thread: " + worker.getName());
    }
}
```

```

public class Client {
    public static void main(String[] args) {
        Counter counterA = new Counter("Counter A"); // (5) Create a thread.
        try {
            int val;
            do {
                val = counterA.getValue(); // (6) Access the counter value.
                System.out.println("Counter value read by main thread: " + val);
                Thread.sleep(1000); // (7) Current thread sleeps.
            } while (val < 5);
        } catch (InterruptedException e) {
            System.out.println("main thread interrupted.");
        }
        System.out.println("Exit from main() method.");
    }
}

```

Possible output from the program:

```

Thread[Counter A,5,main] ← Thread's name (Counter A), its priority (5), and
Counter value read by main thread: 0 its parent thread (main).
Counter A: 0
Counter A: 1
Counter A: 2
Counter A: 3
Counter value read by main thread: 4
Counter A: 4
Exit from thread: Counter A
Counter value read by main thread: 5
Exit from main() method.

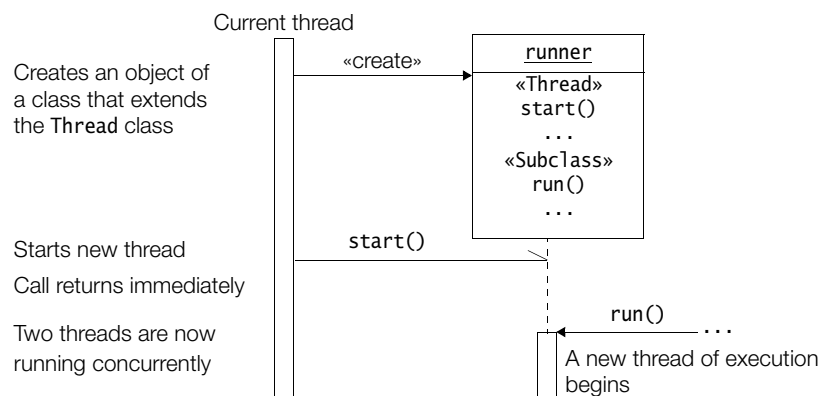
```

The output from the main thread and the Counter A thread is interleaved.

Extending the Thread Class

- A class can also extend the Thread class to create a thread:
 1. A class extending the Thread class overrides the run() method from the Thread class to define the code executed by the thread.
 2. This subclass may call a Thread constructor explicitly in its constructors to initialize the thread, using the super() constructor call.
 3. The start() method inherited from the Thread class is invoked on the object of the class to make the thread eligible for running.

Figure 9.2 *Spawning Threads—Extending the Thread Class*



Example 9.2: Extending the Thread class

- Note the call to the constructor of the superclass `Thread` at (1) and the invocation of the inherited `start()` method at (2) in the constructor of the `Counter` class.
- The program output shows that the program continues running until the child threads have completed.
 - The two child threads are independent, each having its own counter and executing its own `run()` method.
- Note that the `Thread` class implements the `Runnable` interface: the roles of the `Runnable` object and the `Thread` object are combined in a single object of the subclass.
- The name of the current thread can be obtained as follows:

```
Thread.currentThread().getName(); // (5) Current thread
```
- Inserting the following code before (2) in Example 9.2:

```
setDaemon(true);
```

illustrates the daemon nature of threads.

Example 9.2 *Extending the Thread Class*

```
class Counter extends Thread {  
  
    private int currentValue;  
  
    public Counter(String threadName) {  
        super(threadName); // (1) Initialize thread.  
        currentValue = 0;  
        System.out.println(this);  
        start(); // (2) Start this thread.  
    }  
    public int getValue() { return currentValue; }  
  
    public void run() { // (3) Override from superclass.  
        try {  
            while (currentValue < 5) {  
                System.out.println(getName() + ": " + (currentValue++));  
                Thread.sleep(250); // (4) Current thread sleeps.  
            }  
        } catch (InterruptedException e) {  
            System.out.println(getName() + " interrupted.");  
        }  
        System.out.println("Exit from thread: " + getName());  
    }  
}
```

```

public class Client {
    public static void main(String[] args) {
        System.out.println("Method main() runs in thread " +
            Thread.currentThread().getName()); // (5) Current thread
        Counter counterA = new Counter("Counter A"); // (6) Create a thread.
        Counter counterB = new Counter("Counter B"); // (7) Create a thread.
        System.out.println("Exit from main() method.");
    }
}

```

Possible output from the program:

```

Method main() runs in thread main
Thread[Counter A,5,main]
Thread[Counter B,5,main]
Exit from main() method.
Counter A: 0
Counter B: 0
Counter A: 1
Counter B: 1
Counter A: 2
Counter B: 2
Counter A: 3
Counter B: 3
Counter A: 4
Counter B: 4
Exit from thread: Counter A
Exit from thread: Counter B

```

- Implementing the `Runnable` interface may be preferable to extending the `Thread` class:
 - The class implementing the `Runnable` interface is not prevented from extending another class.
 - The class implementing the `Runnable` interface can avoid the full overhead of the `Thread` class which can be excessive.
- Alternate ways of starting a thread:
 - The call to the `start()` method can be factored out of the constructor.
 - The `start()` method can be called later on the thread object.
- Inner classes are useful for implementing threads that do simple tasks:

```

( new Thread() {
    public void run() {
        for(;;) System.out.println("Stop the world!");
    }
}
).start();

```

9.4 Synchronization

- Threads share the same memory space, that is, they can share resources.
- Certain situations may require that only one thread at a time has access to a shared resource whose integrity must be maintained.
- Java provides high-level concepts for *synchronization* in order to control access to shared resources.

Locks

- A *lock* (a.k.a. *monitor*) is a mechanism to *synchronize* access to a shared resource.
- At any given time, at the most one thread can hold the lock (i.e., own the monitor) and thereby have access to the shared resource, implementing what is called *mutual exclusion* (a.k.a. *mutex*).
- In Java, *all* objects have a lock—including arrays.
- By associating a shared resource with a Java object and its lock, the object can act as a *guard*, ensuring synchronized access to the resource.
- The *object lock mechanism* enforces the following rules of synchronization:
 - A thread must *acquire* the object lock associated with a shared resource, before it can *enter* the shared resource.
 - No other thread can enter a shared resource if another thread already holds the object lock associated with the shared resource.
 - If a thread cannot immediately acquire the object lock, it is *blocked*, that is, it must wait for the lock to become available.
 - When a thread *exits* a shared resource, the object lock is also relinquished.
 - If another thread is waiting for this object lock, it can proceed to acquire the lock in order to gain access to the shared resource.

- Classes also have a class-specific lock that is analogous to the object lock.
- The keyword `synchronized` and the lock form the basis for implementing synchronized execution of code.
- There are two ways in which execution of code can be synchronized:
 - synchronized methods
 - synchronized blocks

Synchronized Methods

- If the methods of an object should only be executed by one thread at a time, then the declaration of all such methods should be specified with the keyword `synchronized`.
- A thread wishing to execute a synchronized method must first obtain the object's lock (i.e., hold the lock) before it can enter the object to execute the method.
 - A lock is achieved by calling the method.
 - If the lock is already held by another thread, the calling thread waits.
 - A thread relinquishes the lock simply by returning from the synchronized method.
- Synchronized methods are useful in situations where methods can manipulate the state of an object in ways that can corrupt the state if executed concurrently.
- While a thread is inside a synchronized method of an object, all other threads that wish to execute this synchronized method or any other synchronized method of the object will have to wait.
 - This restriction does not apply to the thread that already has the lock and is executing a synchronized method of the object.
 - Such a method can invoke other synchronized methods of the object without being blocked.

- The non-synchronized methods of the object can of course be called at any time by any thread.
- Static methods synchronize on the class lock.
 - Note that static, non-synchronized methods can be invoked at any time.
 - Synchronization of static methods in a class is independent from the synchronization of instance methods on objects of the class.
- Also note that a subclass decides whether the new definition of an inherited synchronized method will remain synchronized in the subclass.

Example: Synchronized Methods

- Pushing and popping of stack elements should be mutually exclusive operations.
- A *race condition* occurs when two or more threads simultaneously update the same value, and as a consequence, leave the value in an undefined or inconsistent state.
- In Example 9.3, two threads continually push and pop the same stack.
- *Non-synchronized* scenario:
 - The non-synchronized `push()` and `pop()` methods at (2a) and (4a) intentionally sleep at (3) and (5), respectively, between an update and the use of the value in the field `topOfStack`.
 - A race condition occurs, resulting in an uncaught exception terminating the Pusher thread, but the Popper thread continues.
- *Synchronized* scenario:
 - The synchronized version of the `push()` and `pop()` methods at (2b) and (4b), respectively, avoids the race condition.
 - The method `sleep()` does not relinquish any lock that the thread might have on the current object.
 - The lock is only relinquished when the synchronized method exits, guaranteeing mutually exclusive push-and-pop operations on the stack.

Example 9.3 Mutual Exclusion

```
class StackImpl { // (1)
    private Object[] stackArray;
    private int topOfStack;
    public StackImpl(int capacity) {
        stackArray = new Object[capacity];
        topOfStack = -1;
    }
    public boolean push(Object element) { // (2a) non-synchronized
// public synchronized boolean push(Object element) { // (2b) synchronized
        if (isFull()) return false;
        ++topOfStack; // Note update before use.
        try { Thread.sleep(1000); } catch (Exception ex) { } // (3) Sleep a little.
        stackArray[topOfStack] = element;
        return true;
    }
    public Object pop() { // (4a) non-synchronized
// public synchronized Object pop() { // (4b) synchronized
        if (isEmpty()) return null;
        Object obj = stackArray[topOfStack];
        stackArray[topOfStack] = null;
        try { Thread.sleep(1000); } catch (Exception ex) { } // (5) Sleep a little.
        topOfStack--;
        return obj;
    }
}
```

```
    public boolean isEmpty() { return topOfStack < 0; }
    public boolean isFull() { return topOfStack >= stackArray.length - 1; }
}

public class Mutex {
    public static void main(String[] args) {
        final StackImpl stack = new StackImpl(20); // (6) Shared by the threads.

        (new Thread("Pusher") { // (7) Thread no. 1
            public void run() {
                for(;;) {
                    System.out.println("Pushed: " +
                        stack.push(new Integer(2003))); // Pushing
                }
            }
        }).start();

        (new Thread("Popper") { // (8) Thread no. 2
            public void run() {
                for(;;) {
                    System.out.println("Popped: " + stack.pop()); // Popping
                }
            }
        }).start();

        System.out.println("Exit from main().");
    }
}
```

Possible output from the program (non-synchronized scenario):

```
Exit from main().
...
Pushed: true
Popped: 2003
Popped: 2003
Popped: null
...
Popped: null
java.lang.ArrayIndexOutOfBoundsException: -1
    at StackImpl.push(Mutex.java:15)
    at Mutex$1.run(Mutex.java:41)
Popped: null
Popped: null
...
```

Synchronized Blocks

- A synchronized block allows execution of arbitrary code to be synchronized on the lock of an arbitrary object:

```
synchronized (<object reference expression>) { <code block> }
```

– The <object reference expression> and the braces of the block are mandatory.

- A synchronized method is equivalent to the following:

```
public Object pop() {
    synchronized (this) {           // Synchronized block on current object
        // ...
    }
}
```

- Mutual exclusion proceeds analogously to that in a synchronized method.

```
class SmartClient {
    BankAccount account;
    // ...
    public void updateTransaction() {
        synchronized (account) {    // (1) synchronized block
            account.update();       // (2)
        }
    }
}
```

Synchronized blocks in Inner Classes

- An inner object might need to synchronize on its associated outer object, in order to ensure integrity of data in the latter.

```
class Outer { // (1) Top-level Class
    private double myPi; // (2)
    protected class Inner { // (3) Non-static member Class
        public void setPi() { // (4)
            synchronized(Outer.this) { // (5) Synchronized block on outer object
                myPi = Math.PI; // (6)
            }
        }
    }
}
```

Synchronized blocks on a class lock

```
synchronized (<class name>.class) { <code block> }
```

- The block synchronizes on the lock of the object denoted by the reference *<class name>.class*.
- A static synchronized method `classAction()` in class A is equivalent to the following declaration:

```
static void classAction() {
    synchronized (A.class) { // Synchronized block on class A
        // ...
    }
}
```

- In summary, a thread can hold a lock on an object
 - by executing a synchronized instance method of the object
 - by executing the body of a synchronized block that synchronizes on the object
 - by executing a synchronized static method of a class
-