

Processes

Computer Science 240

Laboratory 12

Operating System

The set of software that controls the overall operation of a computer system, typically by performing such tasks as memory allocation, job scheduling, and input/output control.

Kernel

The part of the operating system that runs in *privileged* or *supervisory* mode (has access to all instructions and memory in the system). It does all sorts of things like interact with hardware, do file I/O, and spawn off processes. The kernel is the center of the operating system that manages everything.

Shell

A user interface for access to an operating system's services, which translates user commands to low-level calls to the kernel.

Process

Instance of a program in execution. A process provides the illusion that the program has exclusive use of the processor and exclusive use of the memory system. In Linux, when you run a program by typing the name of an executable object file to the shell, the shell creates a new process with the help of the kernel.

Context

A program runs in the context of some process, where the context is the *state* needed to run correctly. State consists of:

- Program's code and data stored in memory
- Stack
- Registers
- Program Counter
- Environment variables
- Set of open file descriptors

Context Switch

The kernel maintains a context for each process. When the kernel preempts the running process with a new process or a previously running process, it is called a context switch: the context of the current process must be saved, the context of the new process must be asserted, and then control is passed to the preempting process.

System Calls

The **execve()** function replaces the current process' code and context (registers, memory) with that of a different program.

The **fork()** function is called by a *parent* process to create a new running *child* process. The child process is almost identical to the parent (it inherits an identical (but separate) copy of the address space, and all open files). The main difference is that the child has a different PID (process ID).

Fork is called by the parent process, but returns twice: once to the parent process, returning the value of the child PID, and once to the child, with a return value of 0.

The parent and child processes run concurrently, and their instruction flows can be interleaved by the kernel in an arbitrary way.

The address space of the parent is duplicated for the child, but they will not overwrite one another.

Zombies

When a process terminates, it is not immediately removed from the system by the kernel. Instead, it is kept until the parent *reaps* the terminated child, at which point the kernel passes the child's exit status to the parent. Until it is reaped, it is called a zombie.

A zombie is not running, but does use memory resources to maintain some of its state.