



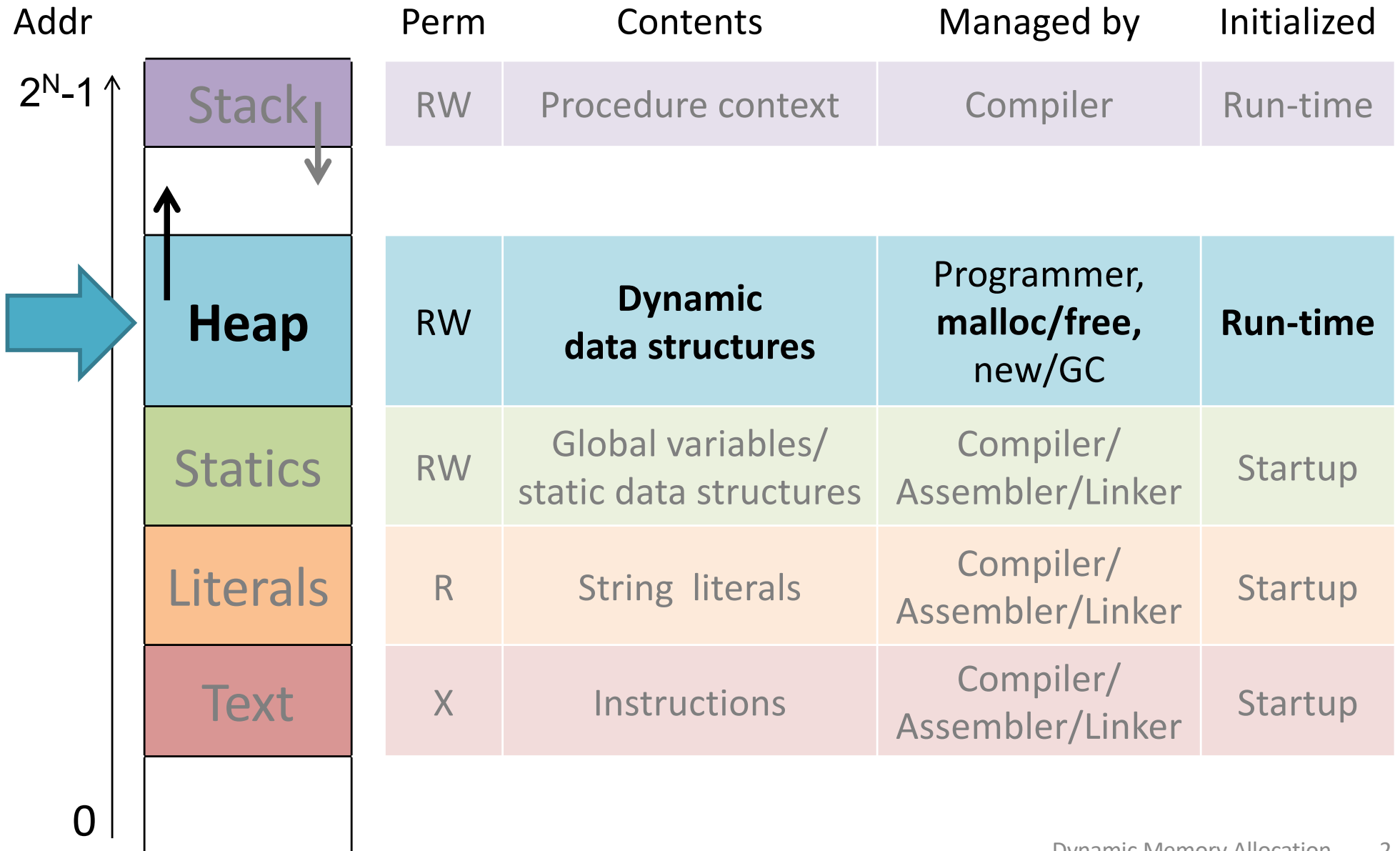
# Dynamic Memory Allocation in the Heap

Explicit allocators

Manual memory management

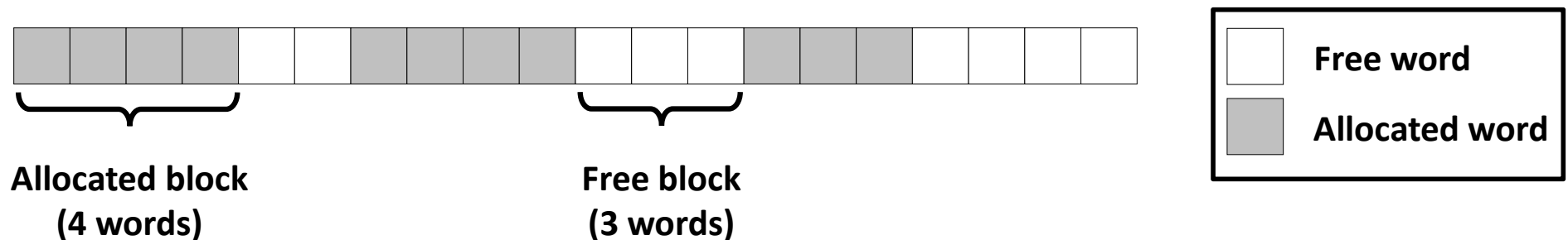
C: implementing malloc and free

# Heap Allocation



# Allocator basics

Pages too coarse-grained for allocating individual objects.  
Instead: flexible-sized, word-aligned blocks.



pointer to newly allocated block  
of at least that size

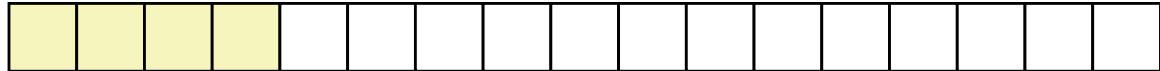
number of contiguous bytes required

```
void* malloc(size_t size);
```

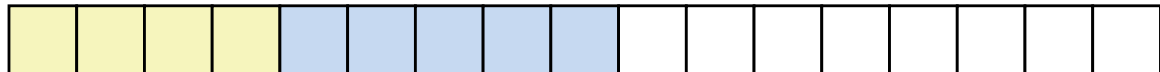
```
void free(void* ptr);
```

# Example (64-bit words)

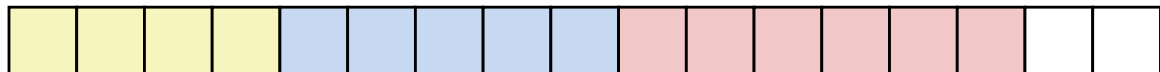
```
p1 = malloc(32);
```



```
p2 = malloc(40);
```



```
p3 = malloc(48);
```



```
free(p2);
```



```
p4 = malloc(16);
```



# Allocator goals: malloc/free

## 1. Programmer does not decide locations of distinct objects.

Programmer decides: what size, when needed, when no longer needed

## 2. Fast allocation.

mallocs/second or bytes malloc'd/second

## 3. High memory utilization.



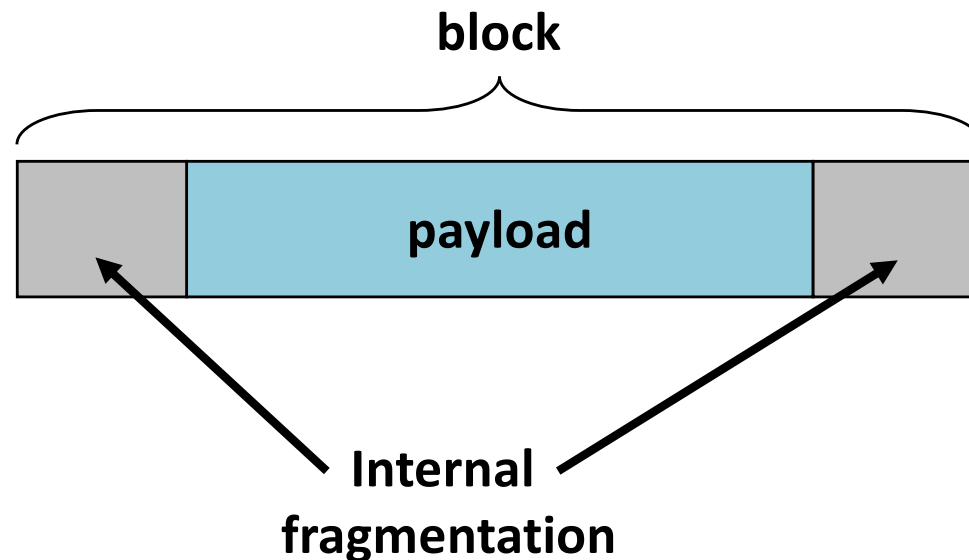
Most of heap contains necessary program data.

Little wasted space.

Enemy: **fragmentation** – unused memory that cannot be allocated.

# Internal fragmentation

payload smaller than block



## Causes

- metadata
- alignment
- policy decisions

# External fragmentation (64-bit words)

Total free space large enough,  
but no contiguous free block large enough

```
p1 = malloc(32);
```



```
p2 = malloc(40);
```



```
p3 = malloc(48);
```



```
free(p2);
```



```
p4 = malloc(48);
```

Depends on the pattern of future requests.

# Implementation issues

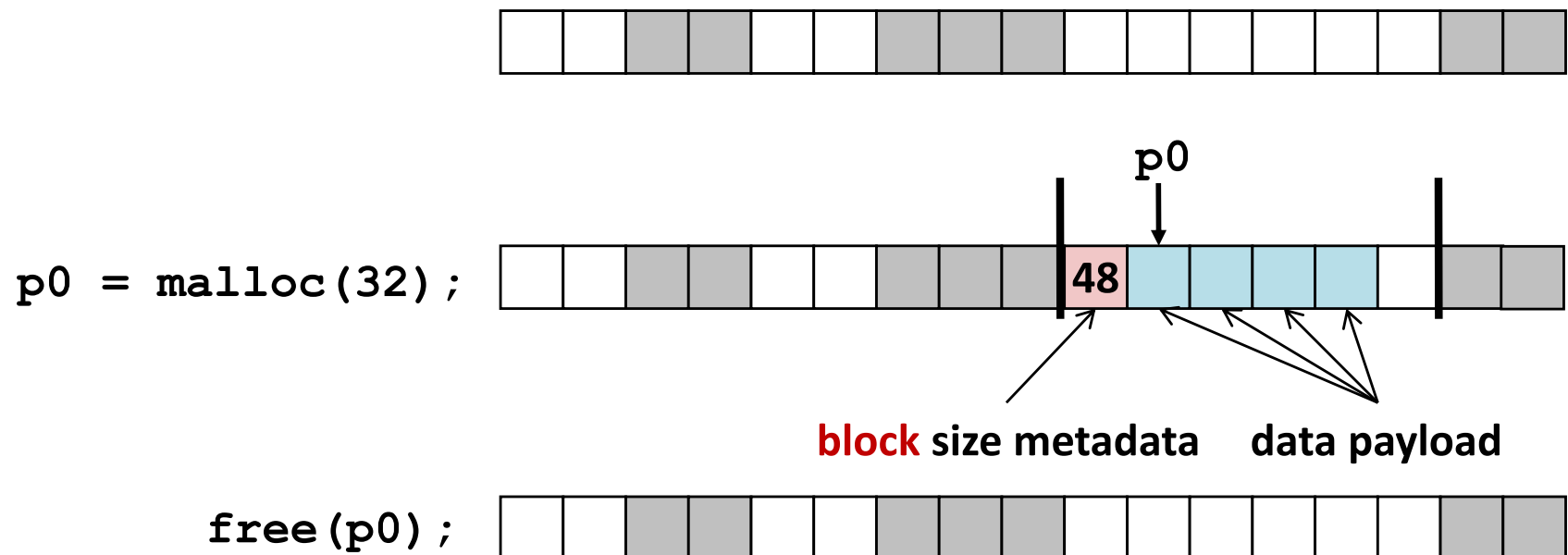
1. Determine how much to free given just a pointer.
2. Keep track of free blocks.
3. Pick a block to allocate.
4. Choose what do with extra space when allocating a structure that is smaller than the free block used.
5. Make a freed block available for future reuse.



# Knowing how much to free

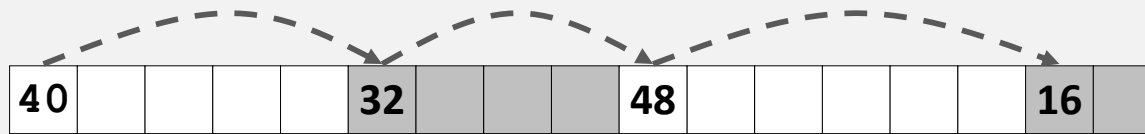
Keep length of block in *header* word preceding block

Takes extra space!

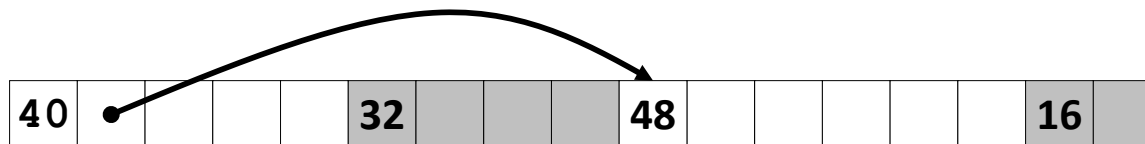


# Keeping track of free blocks

Method 1: *Implicit free list* of all blocks using length



Method 2: *Explicit free list* of free blocks using pointers



Method 3: *Seglist*

Different free lists for different size blocks

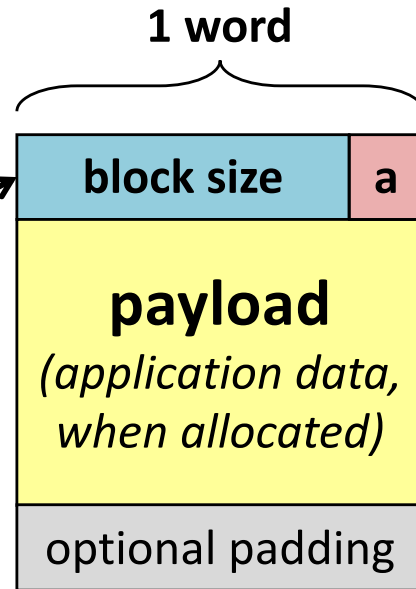
More methods that we will skip...

# Implicit free list: block format

## Block metadata:

1. Block size
2. Allocation status

Store in one header word.



Steal LSB for status flag.

LSB = 1: allocated

LSB = 0: free

16-byte aligned sizes have  
4 zeroes in low-order bits

00000000

00010000

00100000

00110000

...



# Implicit free list: **finding a free block**

## ***First fit:***

Search list from beginning, choose ***first*** free block that fits

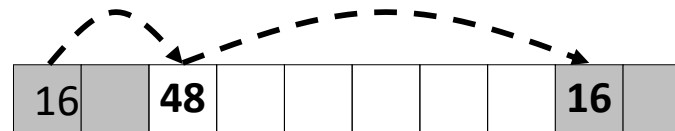
## ***Next fit:***

Do first-fit starting where previous search finished

## ***Best fit:***

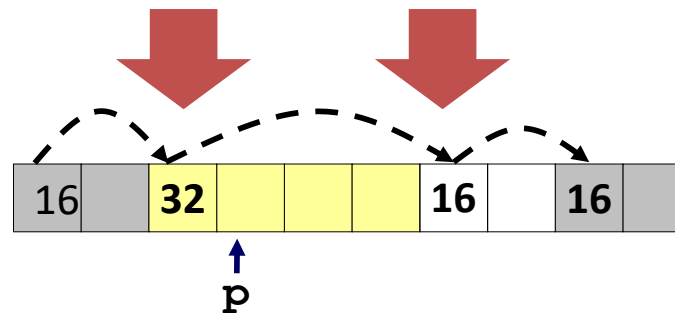
Search the list, choose the ***best*** free block: fits, with fewest bytes left over

# Implicit free list: allocating a free block



```
p = malloc(24);
```

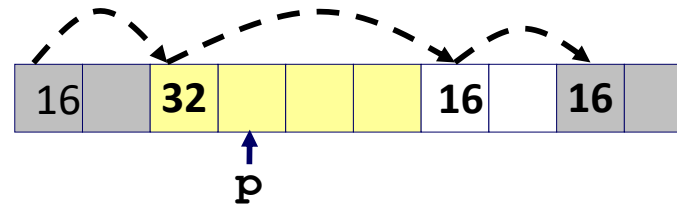
Allocated space  $\leq$  free space.  
Use it all? Split it up?



## Block Splitting

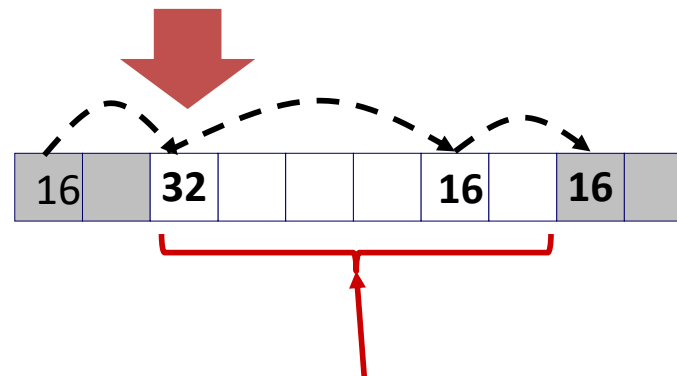
Now showing allocation status flag implicitly with shading.

# Implicit free list: freeing an allocated block



`free(p);`

**Clear *allocated* flag.**

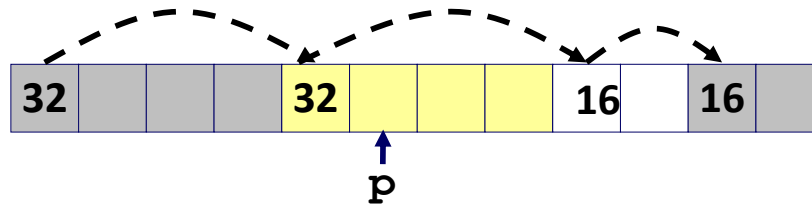


`malloc(40);`



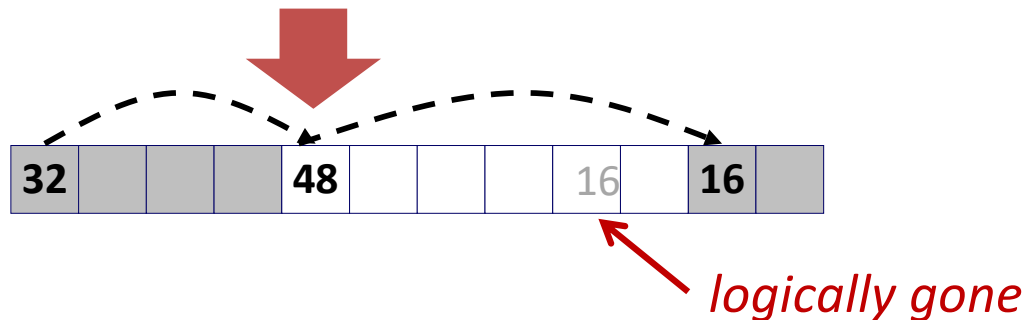
**External fragmentation!**  
Enough space, not one block.

# Coalescing free blocks



`free(p)`

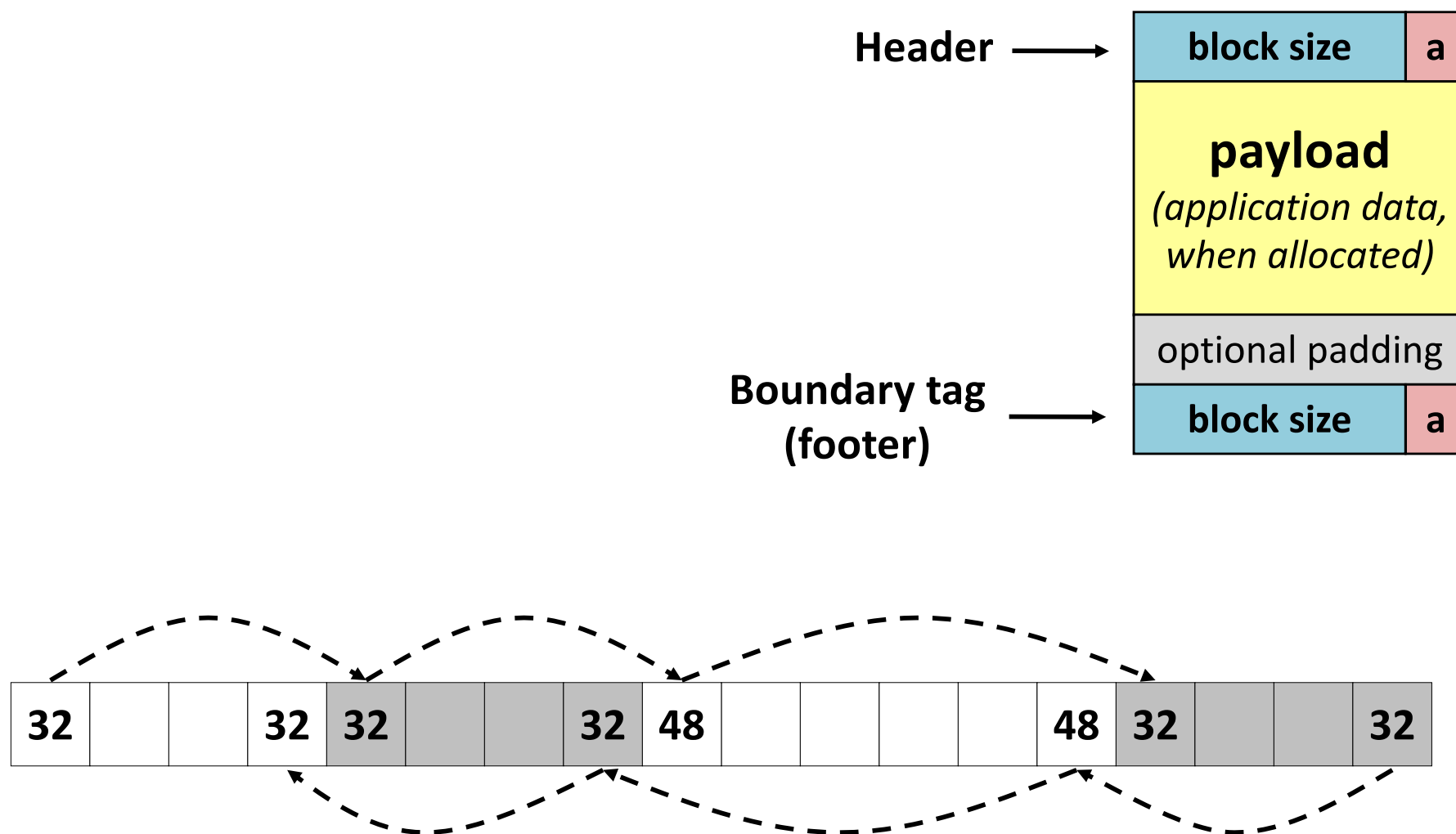
Coalesce with following *free* block.



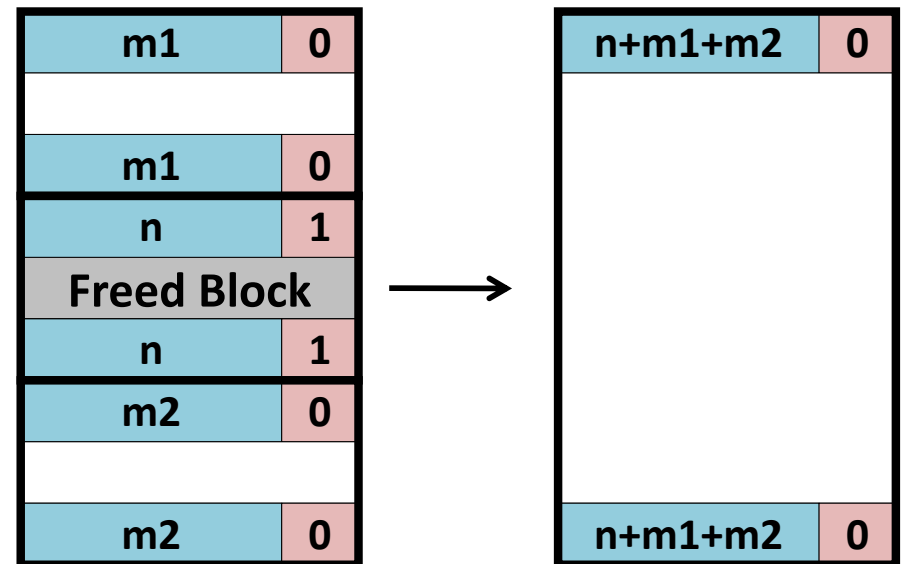
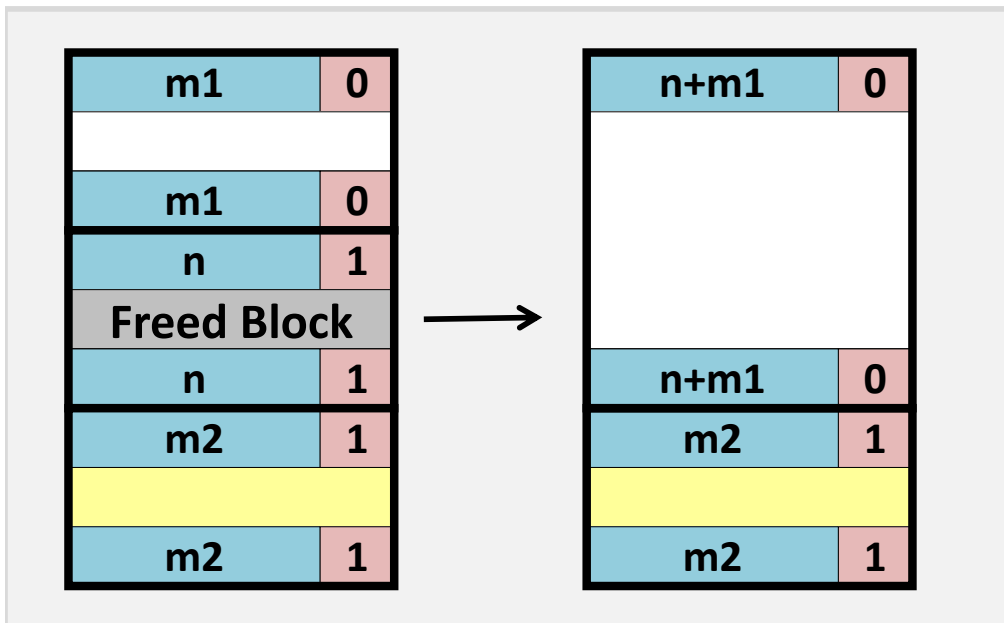
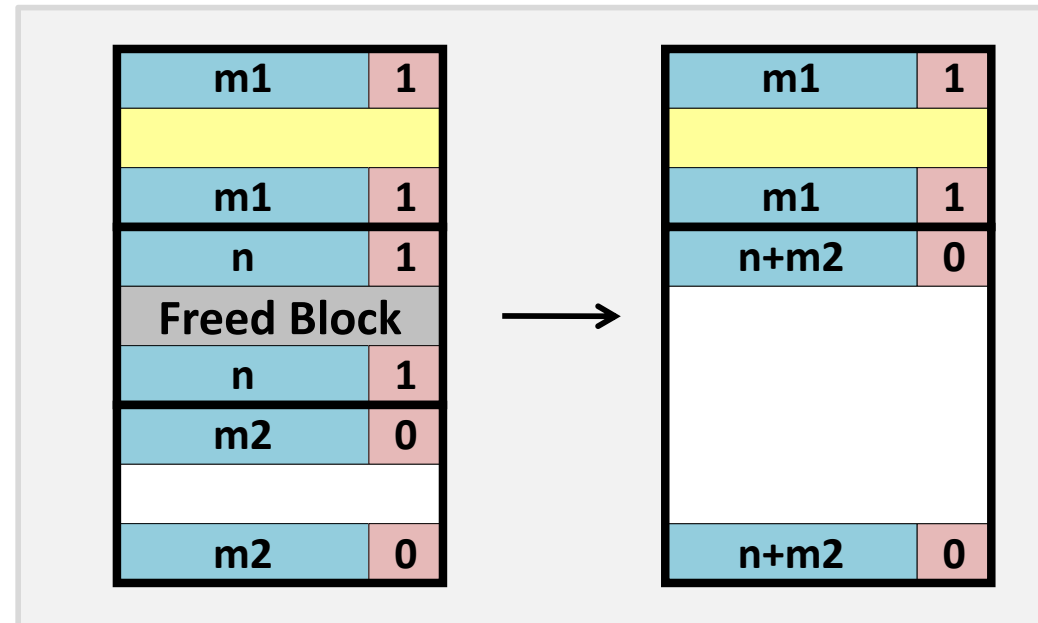
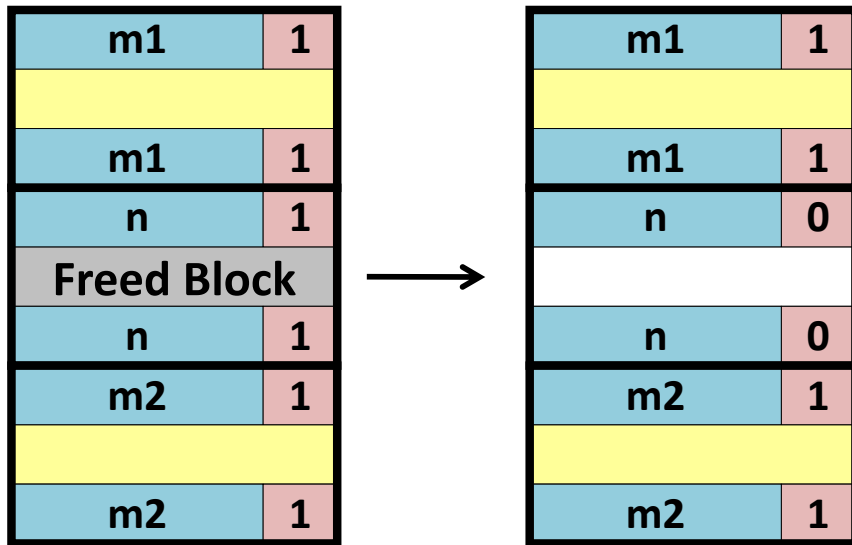
Coalesce with **preceding** *free* block?



# Bidirectional coalescing: boundary tags



# Constant-time $O(1)$ coalescing: 4 cases



# Summary: **implicit free lists**

**Implementation:** simple

**Allocate:**  $O(\text{blocks in heap})$

**Free:**  $O(1)$

**Memory utilization:** depends on placement policy

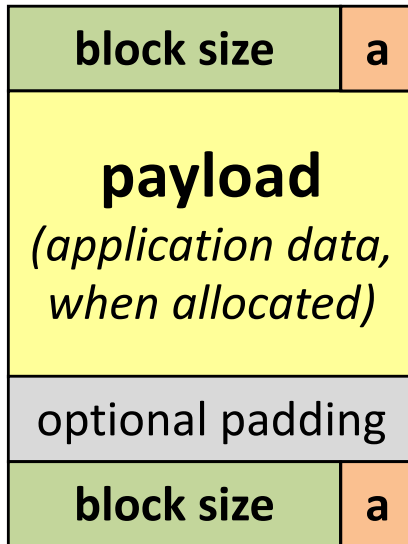
**Not widely used in practice**

some special purpose applications

Splitting, boundary tags, coalescing are **general** to *all* allocators.

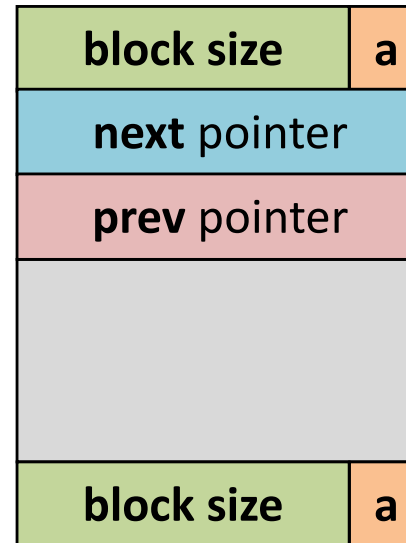
# Explicit free list: block format

Allocated block:



(same as implicit free list)

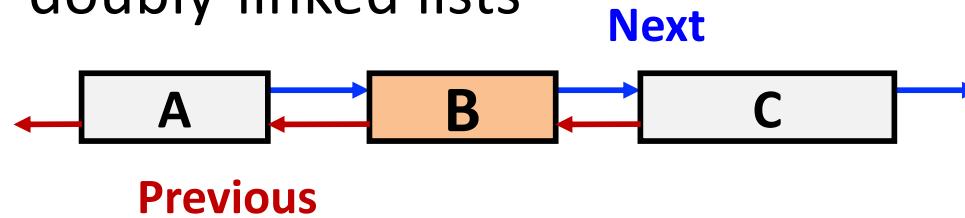
Free block:



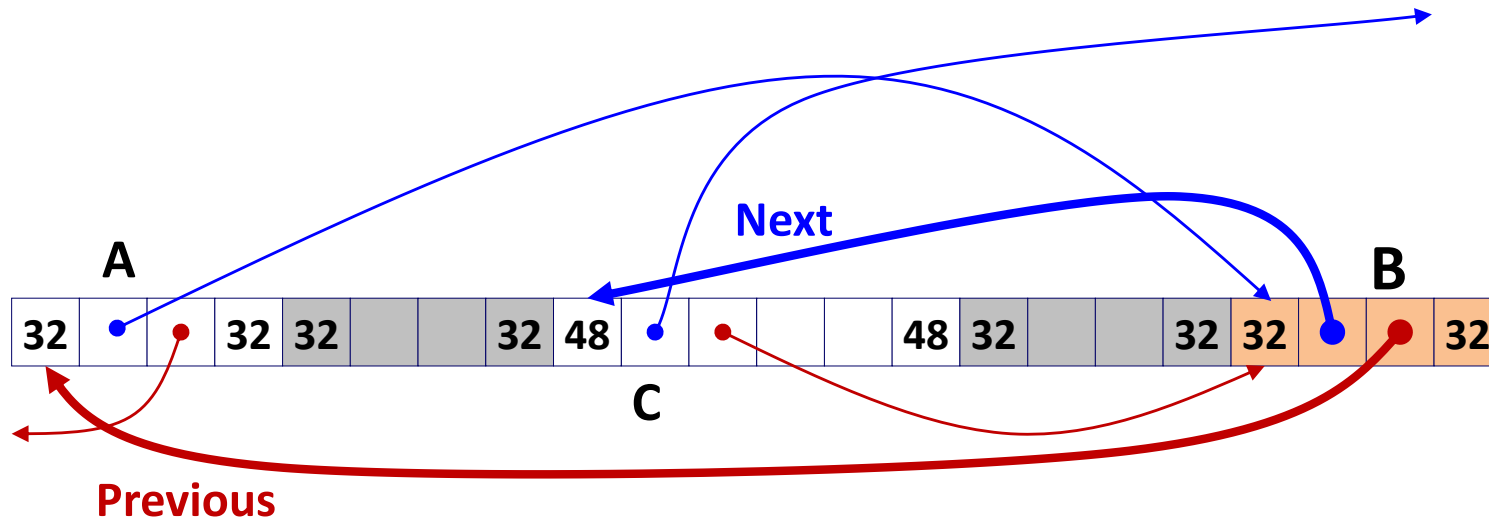
Explicit list of **free** blocks rather than implicit list of **all** blocks.

# Explicit free list: list vs. memory order

Abstractly: doubly-linked lists

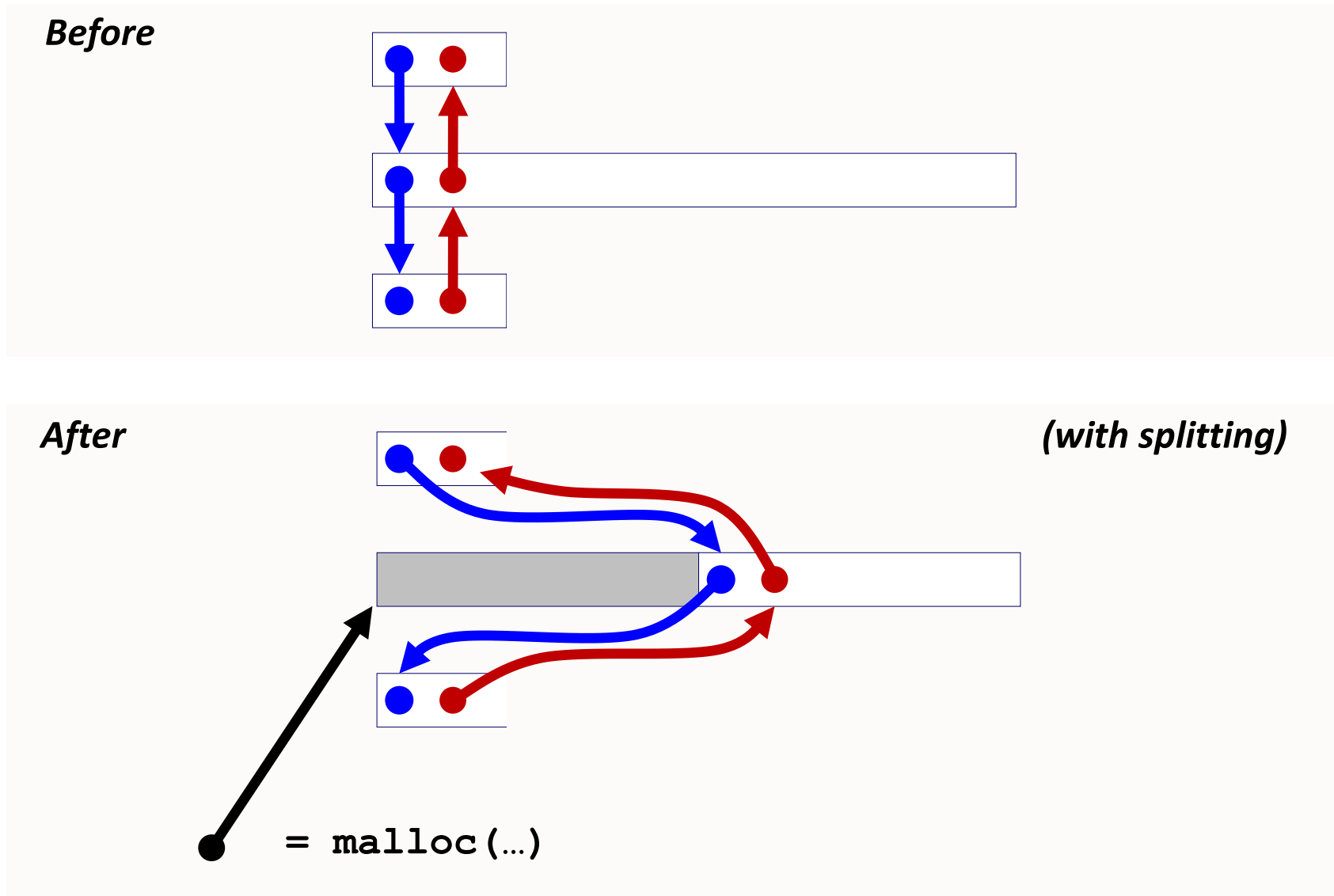


Concretely: free list blocks in any memory order



**List Order  $\neq$  Memory Order**

# Explicit free list: allocating a free block



# Explicit free list: **freeing a block**

***Insertion policy:*** Where in the free list do you add a freed block?

**LIFO (last-in-first-out) policy**

***Pro:*** simple and constant time

***Con:*** studies suggest fragmentation is worse than address ordered

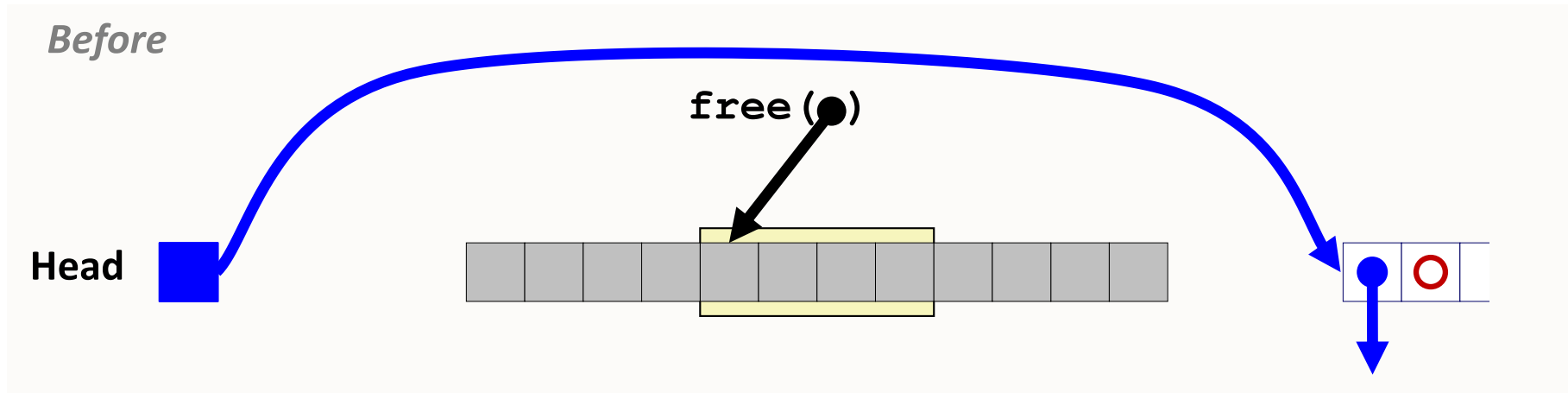
**Address-ordered policy**

***Con:*** linear-time search to insert freed blocks

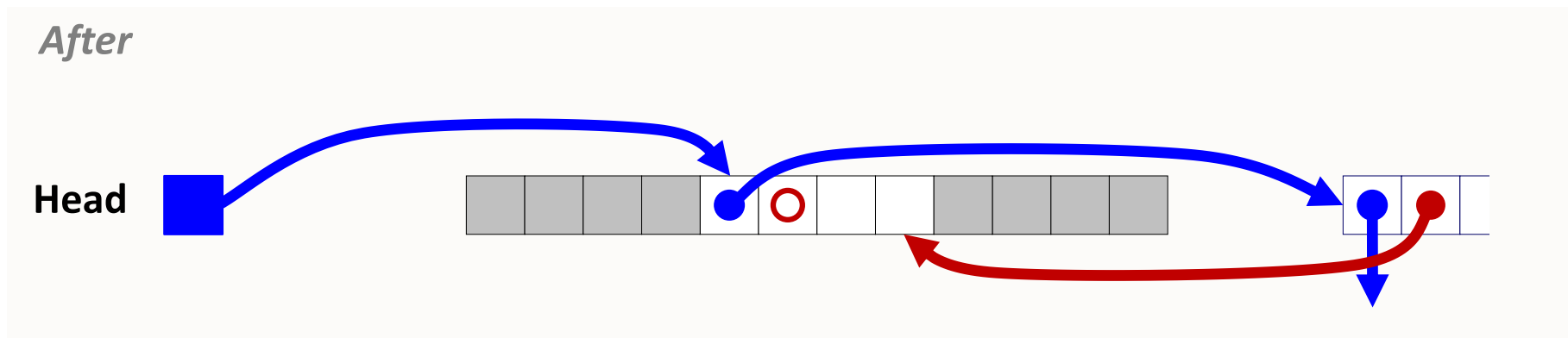
***Pro:*** studies suggest fragmentation is lower than LIFO

LIFO Example: 4 cases of freed block neighbor status.

# Freeing with LIFO policy: between allocated blocks

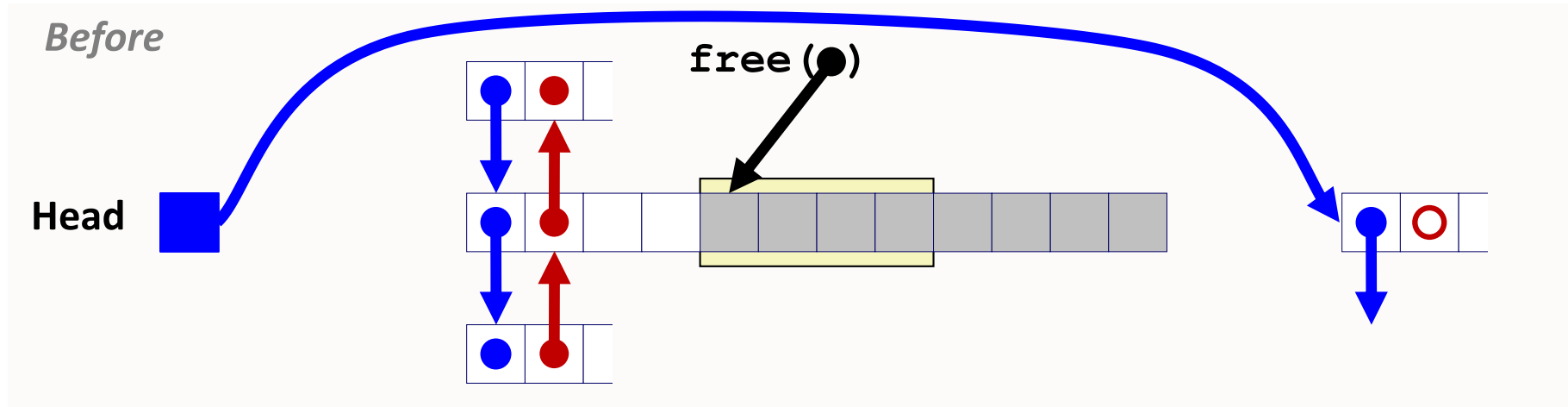


Insert the freed block at head of free list.

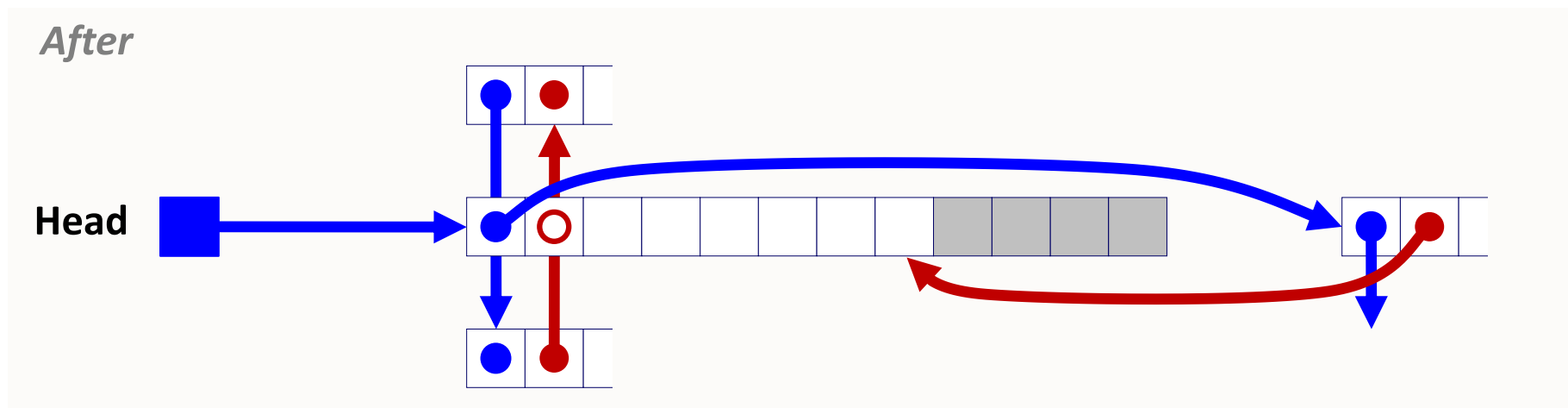




# Freeing with LIFO policy: between free and allocated

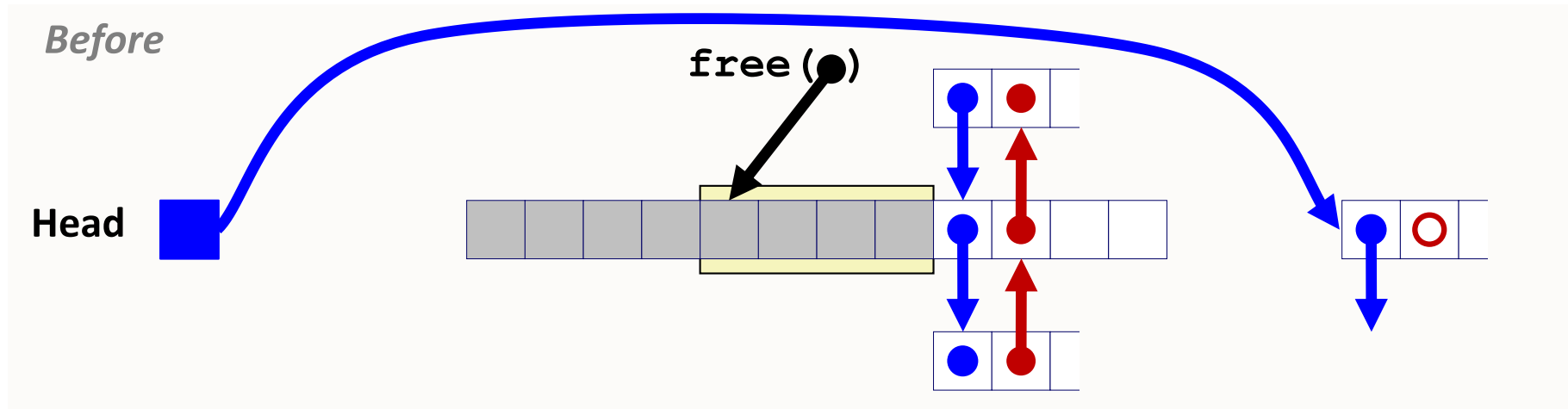


Splice out predecessor block, coalesce both memory blocks, and insert the new block at the head of the free list.

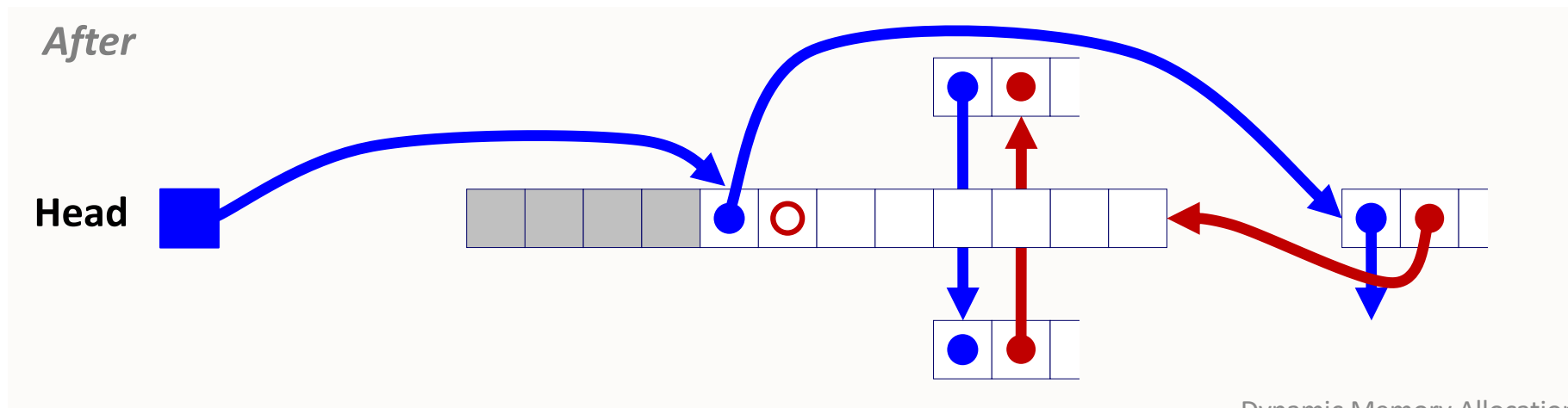


Could be on either or both sides...

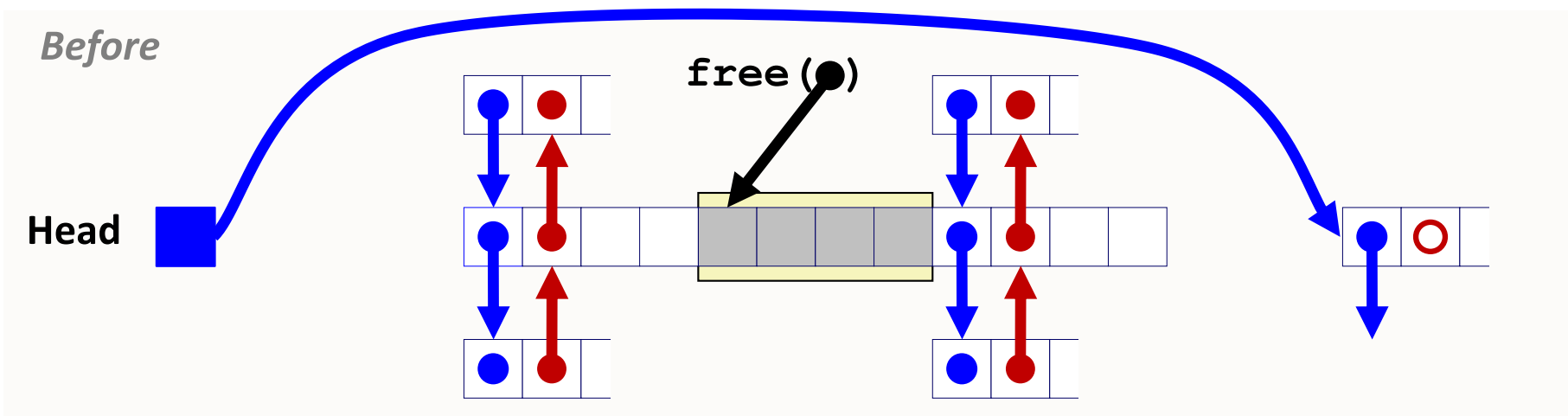
# Freeing with LIFO policy: between allocated and free



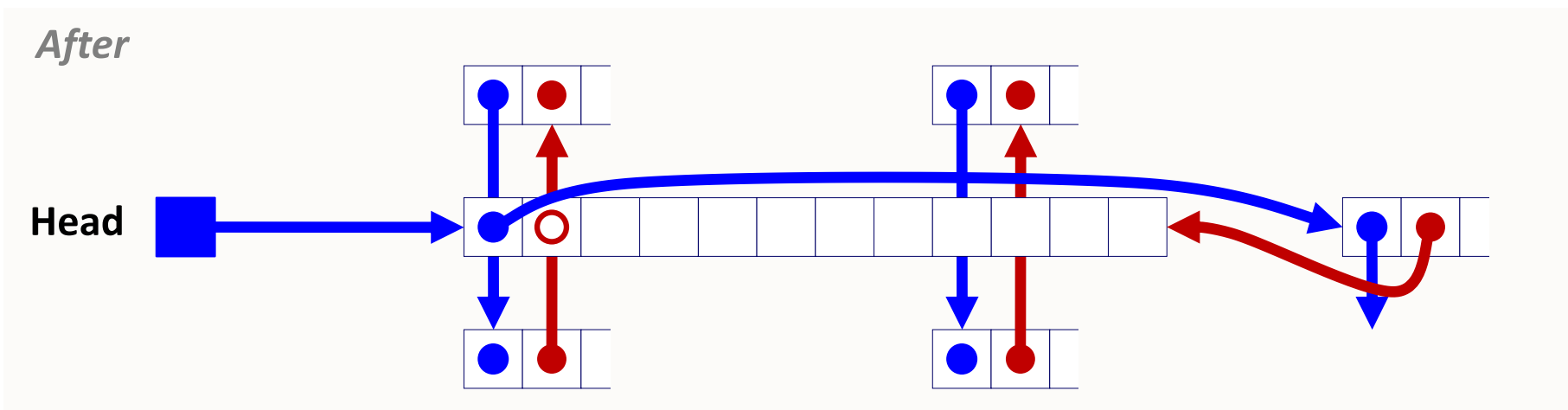
Splice out successor block, coalesce both memory blocks and insert the new block at the head of the free list.



# Freeing with LIFO policy: between free blocks



Splice out predecessor and successor blocks, coalesce all 3 memory blocks and insert the new block at the head of the list.



# Summary: **Explicit Free Lists**

**Implementation:** fairly simple

**Allocate:**  $O(\textit{free} \text{ blocks})$  vs.  $O(\textit{all} \text{ blocks})$

**Free:**  $O(1)$  vs.  $O(1)$

## **Memory utilization:**

depends on placement policy

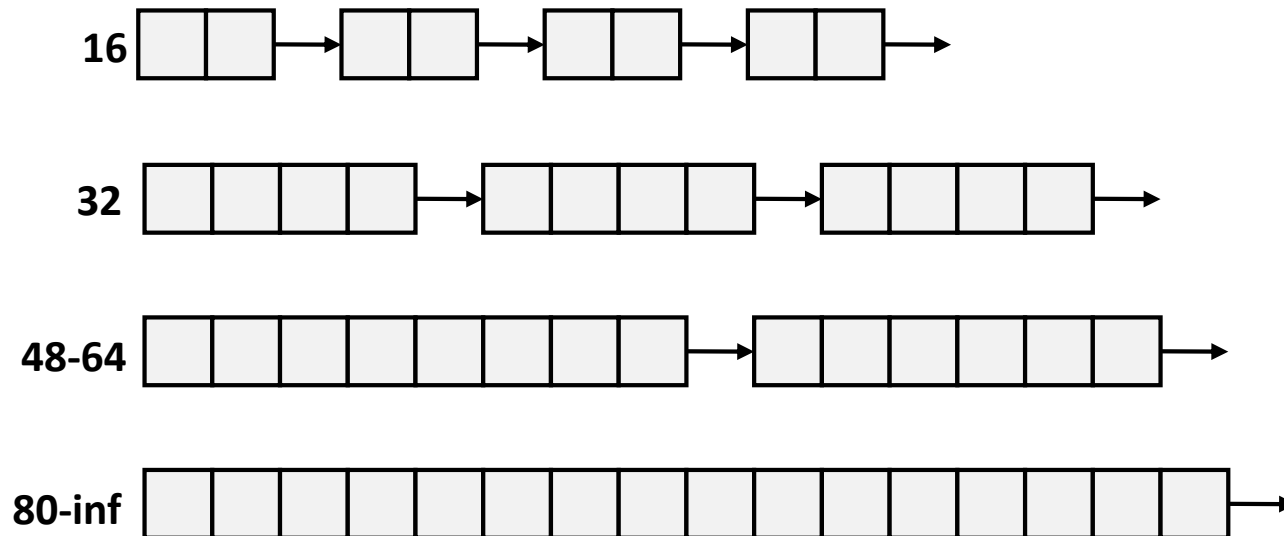
larger minimum block size (next/prev) vs. implicit list

**Used widely in practice, often with more optimizations.**

Splitting, boundary tags, coalescing are general to *all* allocators.

# Seglist allocators

Each *size bracket* has its own free list



Faster best-fit allocation...

# Summary: allocator policies

All policies offer **trade-offs** in fragmentation and throughput.

## Placement policy:

First-fit, next-fit, best-fit, etc.

*Seglists* approximate best-fit in low time

## Splitting policy:

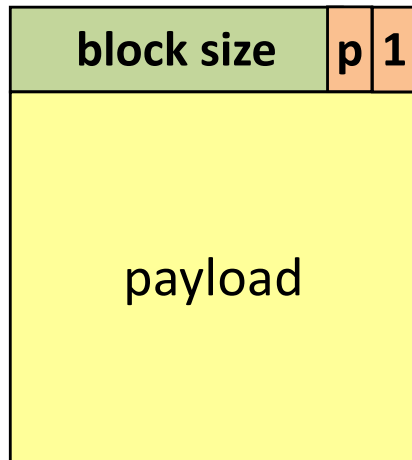
Always? Sometimes? Size bound?

## Coalescing policy:

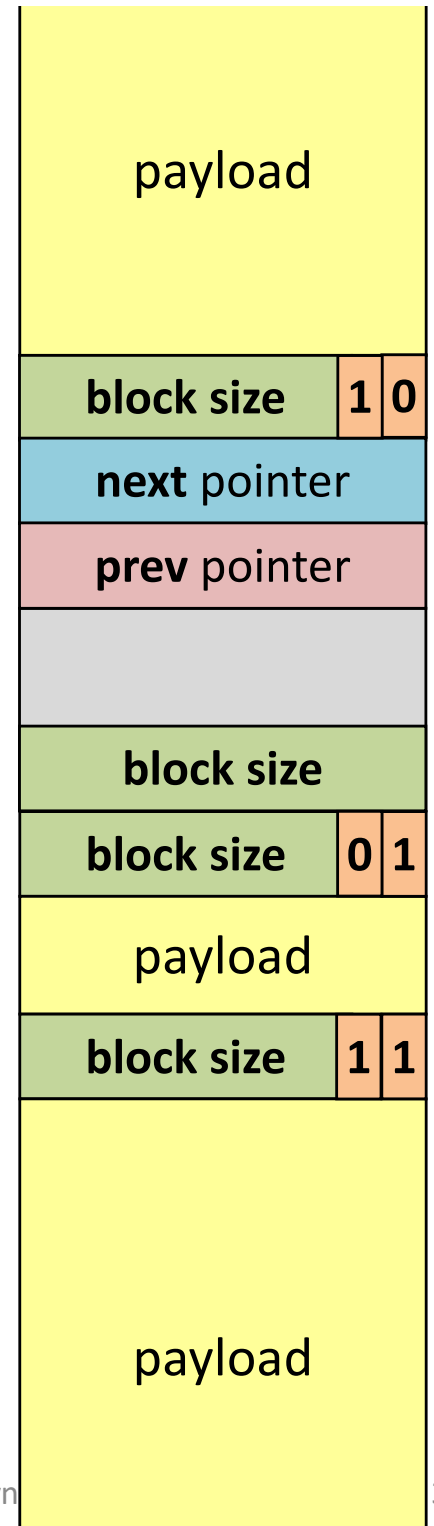
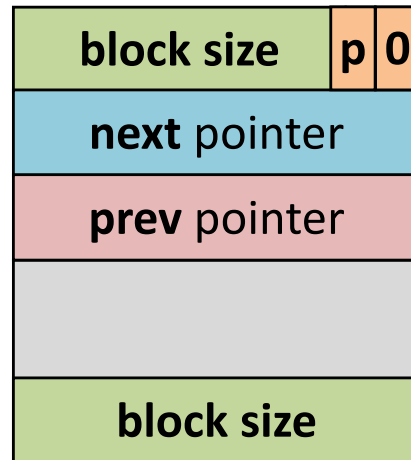
Immediate vs. deferred

# Remembrallocator block format

Allocated block:



Free block:



Minimum block size?

- Implicit free list
- Explicit free list

Update headers of 2 blocks on each malloc/free.