The Need for Multiplexing

Suppose: Two file descriptors (FDs) to read from (e.g., terminals, pipes, sockets), their data arrive intermittently. E.g., a server that serves many clients concurrently, one FD per client.

(Could also be wanting to write, but may block. E.g., a chat server writes to multiple clients, some are not reading, your buffers are clogging up.)

If blocking I/O: Blocked indefinitely on one, missing out if the other is ready.

If non-blocking I/O: Busying-loop over trying both?! Are you programming or frying eggs?!

Unix provides a system call ‘select’ to help. Linux adds ‘epoll’.

select

```
int select(int n, fd_set *r, fd_set *w, fd_set *e,
           struct timeval *timeout);
```

Blocks until specified FDs are ready for read/write, or timeout, or signal. Returns 0 if timeout, positive count if some FDs are ready, -1 if error (e.g., invalid FD) or signal.

- `fd_set` type: Holds a set of FDs.
  (Next slide: How to insert, delete, query.)
- `n`: 1 + highest FD to check.
- `r`: Those you want to read from. NULL if not needed.
- `w`: Those you want to write to. NULL if not needed.
- `e`: Not used in this course. Use NULL.
- `timeout`: Max wait time. NULL if not needed.

'select' modifies your fd_sets to report readiness.

fd_set, struct timeval

```
void FD_ZERO(fd_set *s);            // make empty
void FD_SET(int fd, fd_set *s);     // add
void FD_CLR(int fd, fd_set *s);     // delete
int FD_ISSET(int fd, fd_set *s);    // query

struct timeval {
  time_t      tv_sec;
  suseconds_t tv_usec;  // microseconds
};
```

(Real hardware and OSes are unlikely to be accurate down to actual microseconds. Reasonable to expect milliseconds though.)

select Tips

- ‘select’ usually modifies your fd_sets. Always set them again before the next ‘select’ call.
- Ditto for the timeout struct.
- “Ready to read/write” does not mean there is data/room.
  Could mean the other end is closed,
  so EOF if read, broken pipe if write.
  “Ready” means won’t block if you try now.
  Except. . .
- May still block anyway if
  - Another process/thread beats you to it (if shared).
  - Large write, clogs buffer again.
  - Corner-case race condition.

  Pros set the FDs to non-blocking mode just in case.

Limitations of select

Cap on maximum fd_set size (1024 on most platforms—keep in mind typical servers want five times as many).

Slow when many FDs: You loop through them to `FD_SET`, then kernel loops through them, then you loop through them again to `FD_ISSET`.

Linux's 'epoll' supports more FDs and more efficiently. But only available on Linux. (Other OSes offer similar but incompatiable syscalls.)

epoll

API overview:

```
int epoll_create1(int flags);
```

Create epoll instance. Return its FD (epfd below).
(When you're done, use `close`.)

```
int epoll_ctl(int epfd, int op, int fd,
              struct epoll_event *ev);
```

Add/del/change what to monitor.

```
int epoll_wait(int epfd, struct epoll_event *evs,
               int n, int timeout);
```

Block until readiness or timeout or signal.

epoll_create1

`int epoll_create1(int flags);`
flags can be 0 or `FD_CLOEXEC`. Returns an FD referring to a new "epoll instance".

Like normal FDs in: has an entry in FD table, so everything about close, dup, fork, exec applies.

Unlike normal FDs in: not meaningful for read/write, only meaningful for other epoll functions.

epoll_ctl

Specify what to wait for.

```
int epoll_ctl(int epfd, int op, int fd,
              struct epoll_event *ev);
```

Returns 0 on success.

`epfd`: epoll instance.

`op`: `EPOLL_CTL_ADD` (monitor `fd`), `EPOLL_CTL_DEL` (don't monitor `fd`), `EPOLL_CTL_MOD` (change what to monitor for `fd`).

`fd` cannot be regular file or directory. But can be another epoll instance (can has hierarchy of epolling)!

`ev`: events to wait for. Unused for `EPOLL_CTL_DEL`.

struct epoll_event

```
struct epoll_event {
  uint32_t     events;
  epoll_data_t data;
};
```

Bits for `events` field (may bitwise-or together):
`EPOLLIN`: ready to read
`EPOLLOUT`: ready to write
`EPOLLONESHOT`: monitor only once, non-recurring
`EPOLLET`: Edge-triggered
Others.

Edge-triggered = notify when change from not-ready to ready.
Default = level-triggered = notify whenever ready (like select).
Difference: E.g., data arrives, you read some but not all, then wait again. Level: notify again. Edge: won't notify again.

epoll_data_t

```
typedef union epoll_data {
  void        *ptr;
  int          fd;
  uint32_t     u32;
  uint64_t     u64;
} epoll_data_t;
```

When `epoll_ctl`, you store anything you like.

When `epoll_wait` later, you get back what you stored.

What people usually store:

- the FD being monitored (`epoll_wait` doesn't tell you)
- pointer to your own book-keeping struct

epoll_wait

```
int epoll_wait(int epfd, struct epoll_event *evs,
               int n, int timeout);
```

`evs`: Array to receive events.
`n`: Array length.
`timeout`: milliseconds. (-1 if no timeout.)
Returns count of ready FDs, i.e., how many entries in `evs` used.

`events` field has bits set to tell you which events occurred. Two more possible bits even if you didn't ask:

`EPOLLHUP`: The other end (e.g., pipe, socket) closed.
`EPOLLERR`: Error condition (e.g., broken pipe).

`data` field has what you stored with `epoll_ctl` add/mod.