CSE 506: Operating Systems

Disk Scheduling
Key to Disk Performance

• Don’t access the disk
  – Whenever possible

• Cache contents in memory
  – Most accesses hit in the block cache

• **Prefetch** blocks into block cache (a.k.a. read-ahead)
  – When OS accesses disk, get next few blocks too
    • Keep them in block cache
  – If access hits on prefetched block
    • Read the next few blocks in the background
  – Avoids *demand* access to the disk
Caching + Throughput

• Most reads and writes to disk are asynchronous
  – Dirty data can be buffered and written at OS’s leisure
  – Most reads hit in block cache – read-ahead works

• How to optimally order pending disk I/O requests?
  – Hint: it isn’t first-come, first-served
Another view of disk accesses

• Between block cache and disk, there is a queue
  – All disk requests wait in this queue
  – Requests are a tuple of (block #, read/write, buffer addr)

• Requests can be reordered
  – To achieve best performance across all requests

• What reordering heuristic to use? If any?
  – Heuristic is called the IO Scheduler
A simple disk model

• Disks are slow
  – Moving parts much slower than circuits
  – Flash storage is faster
    • Still multiple orders of magnitude slower than memory

• Programming interface: simple array of sectors (blocks)

• Physical disk layout:
  – Concentric “cylinders” of blocks on a platter
    • Two tracks, one on each side
  – Ex.: sectors 0-9 on innermost track, 10-19 on next track, etc.
  – Disk arm (with heads attached) moves between tracks
  – Platter rotates under disk head to align w/ requested sector
Each block on a sector

Disk spins at a constant speed. Tracks rotate underneath head.

Disk Head reads at granularity of entire sector
Disk Model

Concentric tracks

Gap between 7 and 8 accounts for seek time

Disk head seeks to different tracks
Many Tracks

Disk Arm
Several (~4) Platters

Platters spin together at same speed

Each platter has two heads; All heads seek together on arm
3 key latencies

• I/O delay: Time to read/write a sector
• Rotational delay: Time for track to rotate under head
  – Note: disk rotates continuously at constant speed
• Seek delay: Time to move disk arm to cylinder
Greedy IO Scheduler

- Op. latency is function of arm and cylinder position
- Each request changes these values
- Idea: build a model of the disk
  - Use delay values from measurement or manuals
  - Use math to evaluate latency of each pending request
  - Greedy algorithm: always select lowest latency
Problem with Greedy?

- “Far” requests will starve
- Disk head may just hover around the “middle” tracks
Elevator Algorithms (SCAN)

- Arm moves in continuous “sweeps” in and out
  - Reorder requests within a sweep
    - Closest block in direction of travel is next to be read
    - Request that was just passed has to wait for sweep to return
- Prevents starvation
  - Sectors “inside” or “outside” serviced after bounded time
- Reasonably good throughput
  - Sort requests to minimize seek latency
- Simple to code
  - Programming model hides low-level details
Elevator Algorithms (C-SCAN)

• SCAN is not fair
  – Cylinders in the middle get serviced ~twice as often
    • Likely to be handled when arm travels in either direction
• Only perform ops when moving in one direction
  – Once the end is reached, quickly go to the beginning
• More fair
  – But probably lower average performance
Pluggable Schedulers

- Linux allows the disk scheduler to be replaced
  - Just like the CPU scheduler
- Can choose a different heuristic that favors:
  - Fairness
  - Real-time constraints
  - Performance
Complete Fairness Queue (CFQ)

• Idea: Add a second layer of queues (one per process)
  – Round-robin promote them to the “real” queue

• Goal: Fairly distribute disk bandwidth among tasks

• Problems?
  – Overall throughput likely reduced
  – Ping-pong disk head around
Deadline Scheduler

• Associate expiration times with requests
• Prioritize requests closer to expiration
  – Constrains reordering to ensure forward progress
• Good for real-time applications
Anticipatory Scheduler

• Idea: Try to anticipate locality of requests

• If process P issues bursts of requests for close blocks
  – If a request from P arrives
    • Hold request in queue for a while
    • Hope that more “nearby” requests come in
  – Eventually, schedule all pending requests at once
    • Coalesce adjacent requests
Optimizations at Cross-purposes

• The disk itself does some optimizations
  – Caching
    • Disks have their own caches
    • And do their own read-ahead
  – Reordering requests internally
    • Disk protocols (e.g., SAS) allow many outstanding commands
      – Can’t assume that requests are serviced in order
  – Bad sectors can be remapped to “spares”
    • Problem: disk arm flailing on an old disk