

# Basic IPC

2025 Winter ECE353: Systems Software  
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Lecture 4  
2.0.1

## **IPC is Transferring Bytes Between Two or More Processes**

Reading and writing files is a form of IPC

The read and write system calls allow any bytes

## A Simple Process Could Write Everything It Reads

See: `06-basic-ipc/read-write-example.c`

We read from standard in, and write to standard out

Does this remind you of any program you've seen before?

If we run it in our terminal without arguments, it'll wait for input

Press Ctrl+D when you're done to send end-of-file (EOF)

## read **Just Reads Data from a File Descriptor**

See: man 2 read

There's no EOF character, read just returns 0 bytes read  
The kernel returns 0 on a closed file descriptor

We need to check for errors!  
Save errno if you're using another function that may set it

## **write Just Writes Data to a File Descriptor**

See: `man 2 write`

It returns the number of bytes written, you can't assume it's always successful

- Save `errno` if you're using another function that may set it

Both ends of the read and write have a corresponding write and read

- This makes two communication channels with command line programs

## The Standard File Descriptors Are Powerful

We could close standard input (freeing file descriptor 0) and open a file instead

Linux uses the lowest available file descriptor for new ones

See: `lecture-06/open-example.c` and `man 2 open`

Without changing the core code, it now works with multiple input types  
You could type, or use a file

## Your Shell Will Let You Redirect Standard File Descriptors

Instead of running `./open-example open-example.c` we could run:

```
./open-example < open-example.c
```

Your shell will do the `open` for you and replace the standard input

We didn't actually have to write that!

You could also redirect across multiple processes

```
cat open-example.c | ./open-example
```

## Signals are a Form of IPC that Interrupts

You could also press Ctrl+C to stop `./open-example`

This interrupts your programs execution and exits early

Kernel sends a number to your program indicating the type of signal

Kernel default handlers either ignore the signal or terminate your process

Ctrl+C sends SIGINT (interrupt from keyboard)

If the default handler occurs the exit code will be  $128 + \text{signal number}$

## You Can Set Your Own Signal Handlers with sigaction

See: `06-basic-ipc/signal-example.c` and `man 2 sigaction`

You just declare a function that doesn't return a value, and has an `int` argument

The integer is the signal number

Some numbers are non-standard, below are a few from Linux x86-64:

- 2: SIGINT (interrupt from keyboard)
- 9: SIGKILL (terminate immediately)
- 11: SIGSEGV (memory access violation)
- 15: SIGTERM (terminate)

## **A Signal Pauses Your Process and Runs the Signal Handler**

Your process can be interrupted at any point in execution

Your process resumes after the signal handler finishes

This is an example of concurrency, your process switches execution

You have to be careful what you write here

Run `./signal-example` and press `Ctrl+C`

## You Need to Account for Interrupted System Calls

You should see:

```
Ignoring signal 2  
read: Interrupted system call
```

We can rewrite it to retry interrupted system calls

See: [06-basic-ipc/signal-example-2.c](#)

Now the program continues when we press Ctrl+C

## You Can Send Signals to Processes with Their PID

You can use the command: `kill`

It is also a system call, taking a `pid` and signal number

Find a processes' ID with `pidof`, e.g. `pidof ./signal-example-2`

After use `kill <pid>`, which by default sends `SIGTERM`

Use `kill -9 <pid>` to tell the kernel to terminate the process

Process won't terminate if it's in uninterruptible sleep

## Most Operations Are Non-Blocking

A non-blocking call returns immediately, and you check if something occurs

To turn `wait` into a non-blocking call, use `waitpid` with `WNOHANG` in options

To react to changes to a non-blocking call, we can either use a *poll* or *interrupt*

## Polling Continuously Calls the Function and Checks for Changes

See: `06-basic-ipc/wait-poll-example.c`

We call `waitpid` over and over until the child exits

Note: some hardware behaves like this,  
the kernel may have to check for changes

What's the drawback of this approach?

## **An Interrupt Instead Occurs Right After the Change**

See: `06-basic-ipc/wait-interrupt-example.c`

Instead of calling `wait` or `waitpid` from `main`, we can do it in the interrupt handler

The kernel sends the `SIGCHLD` whenever one of its children exit

This idea also applies to the kernel, hardware can generate interrupts

## Interrupt Handlers Run to Completion

See: `06-basic-ipc/signal-close-example.c`

An interrupt may occur while an interrupt handler is already running

All interrupt handler code must be reentrant

- You need to be able to pause execution,
- execute another call (to the same function),
- and resume execution

## On a RISC-V CPU, There's 3 Terms for "Interrupts"

### *Interrupt*

Triggered by external hardware,  
handled by the kernel (needs to respond quickly)

### *Exception*

Triggered by an instruction (divide by zero, illegal memory access),  
default handler is the kernel (calling process suspended),  
the process can optionally handle some of these themselves

### *Trap*

Transfer of control to a trap handler caused by either  
an exception or an interrupt (code that runs)

A system call would be a *requested trap*

## We Explored Basic IPC in an Operating System

Some basic IPC includes:

- read and write through file descriptors (could be a regular file)
- Redirecting file descriptors for communication
- Signals

Signals are like interrupts for user processes

The kernel has to handle all 3 kinds of "interrupts"