

# **CSC 252/452: Computer Organization**

## **Fall 2025: Lecture 22**

Instructor: Yanan Guo

Department of Computer Science  
University of Rochester

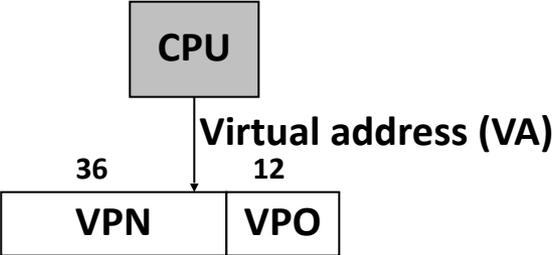
# Announcements

- Programming Assignment 5 will be released today.
  - Due Dec. 3th (Wednesday)
- Final Exam:
  - 12/13, Saturday, 8:30AM

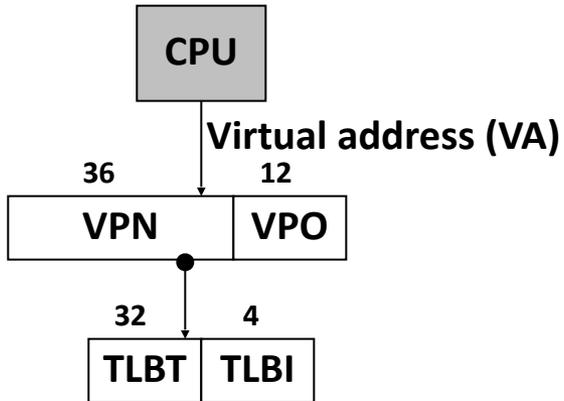
# Today

- Memory mapping
- Dynamic memory allocation

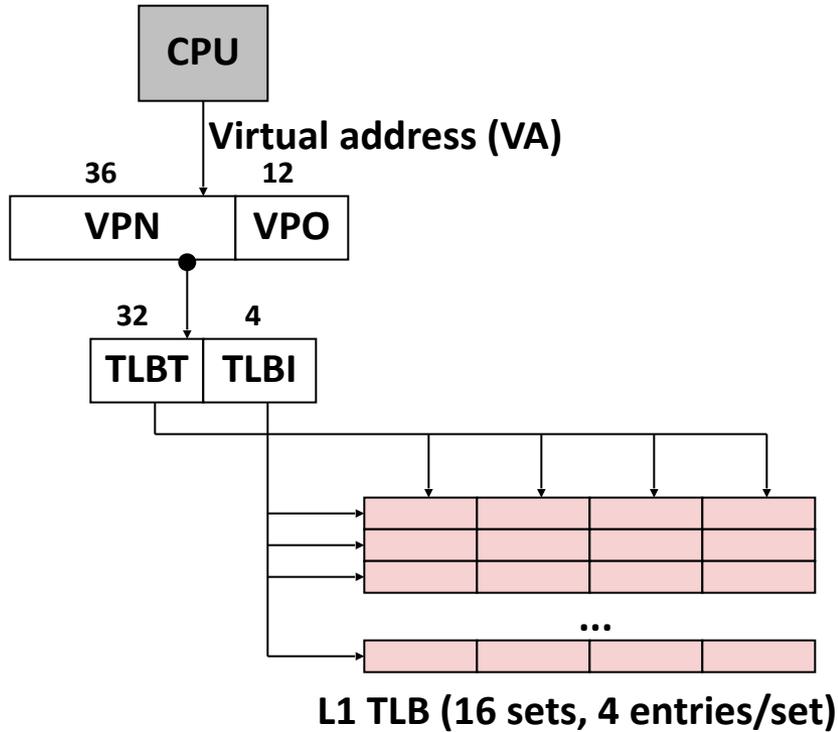
# End-to-End Core i7 Address Translation



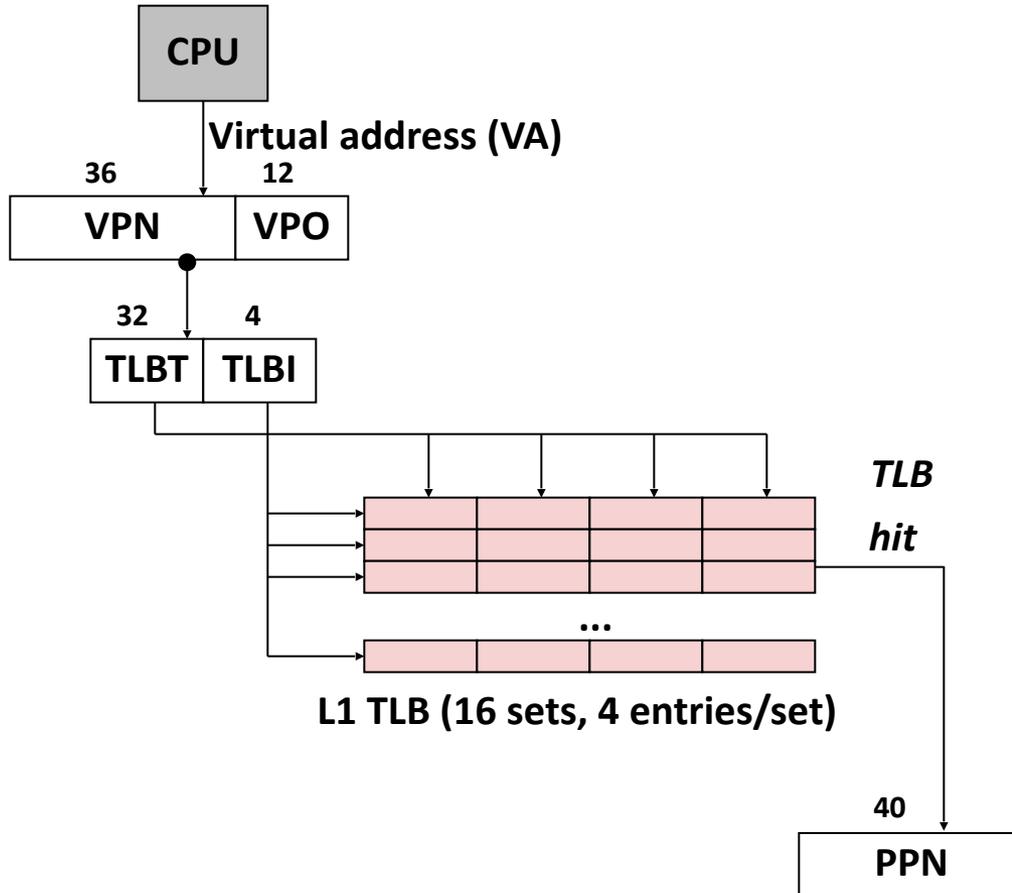
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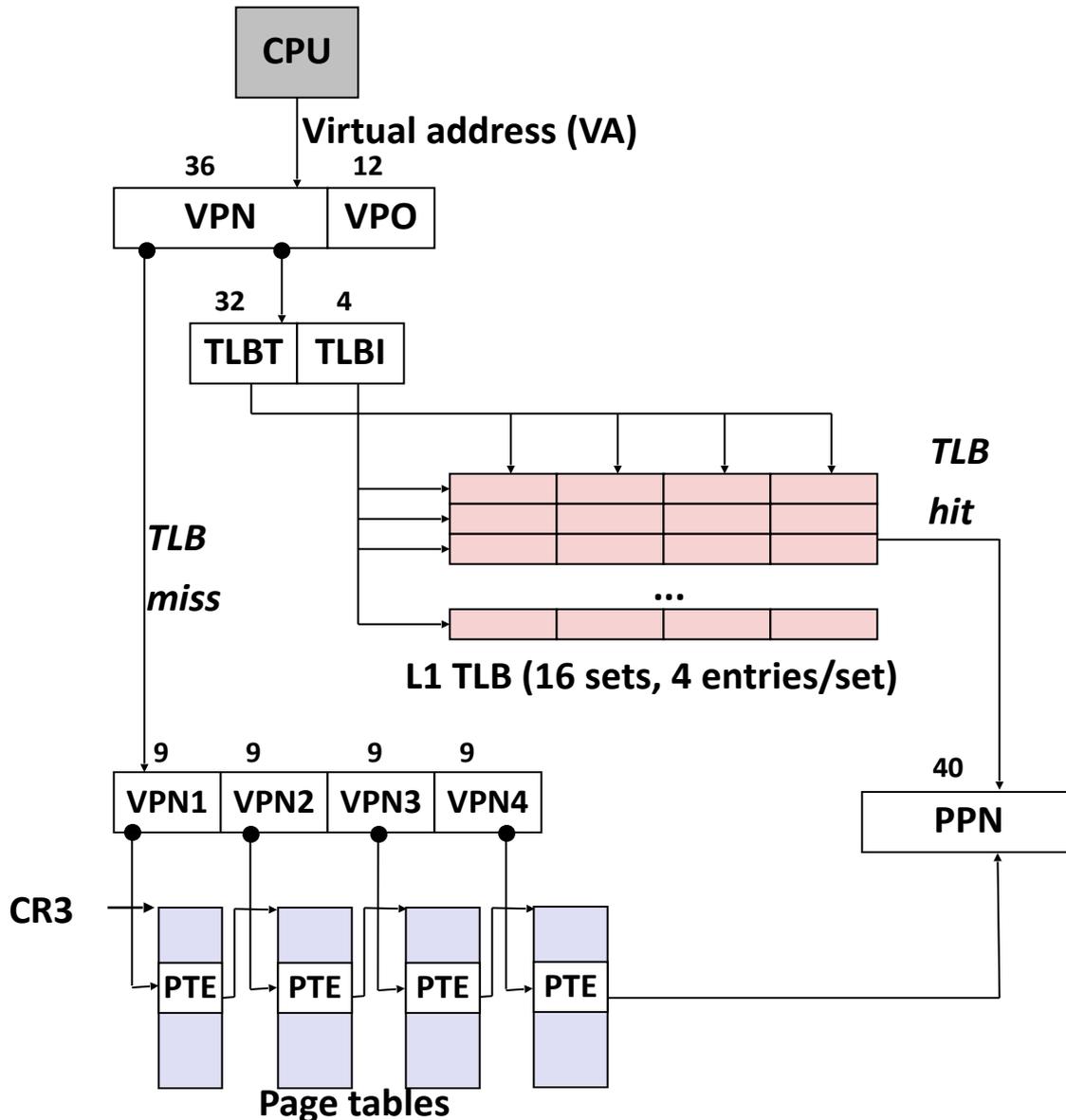
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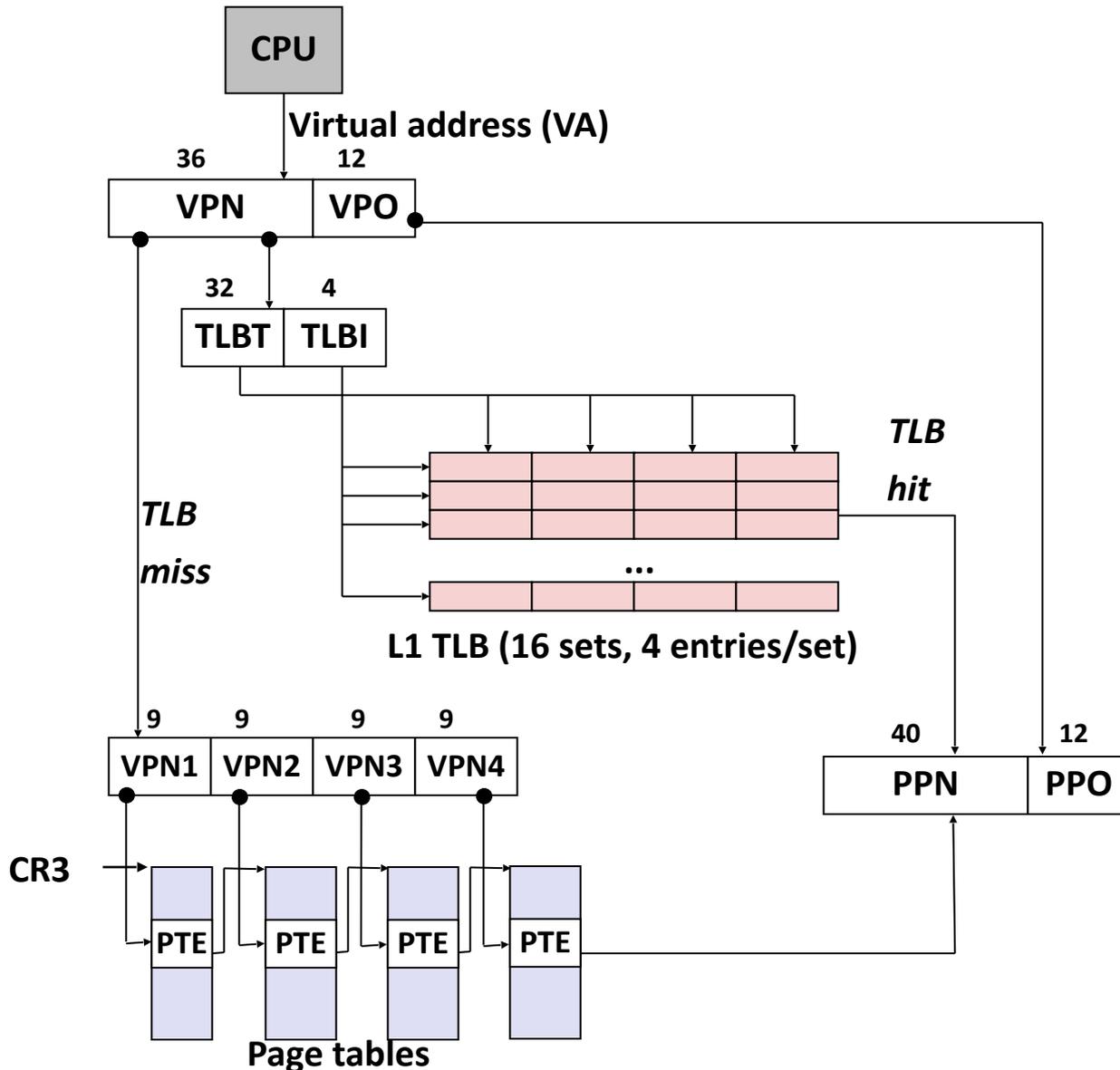
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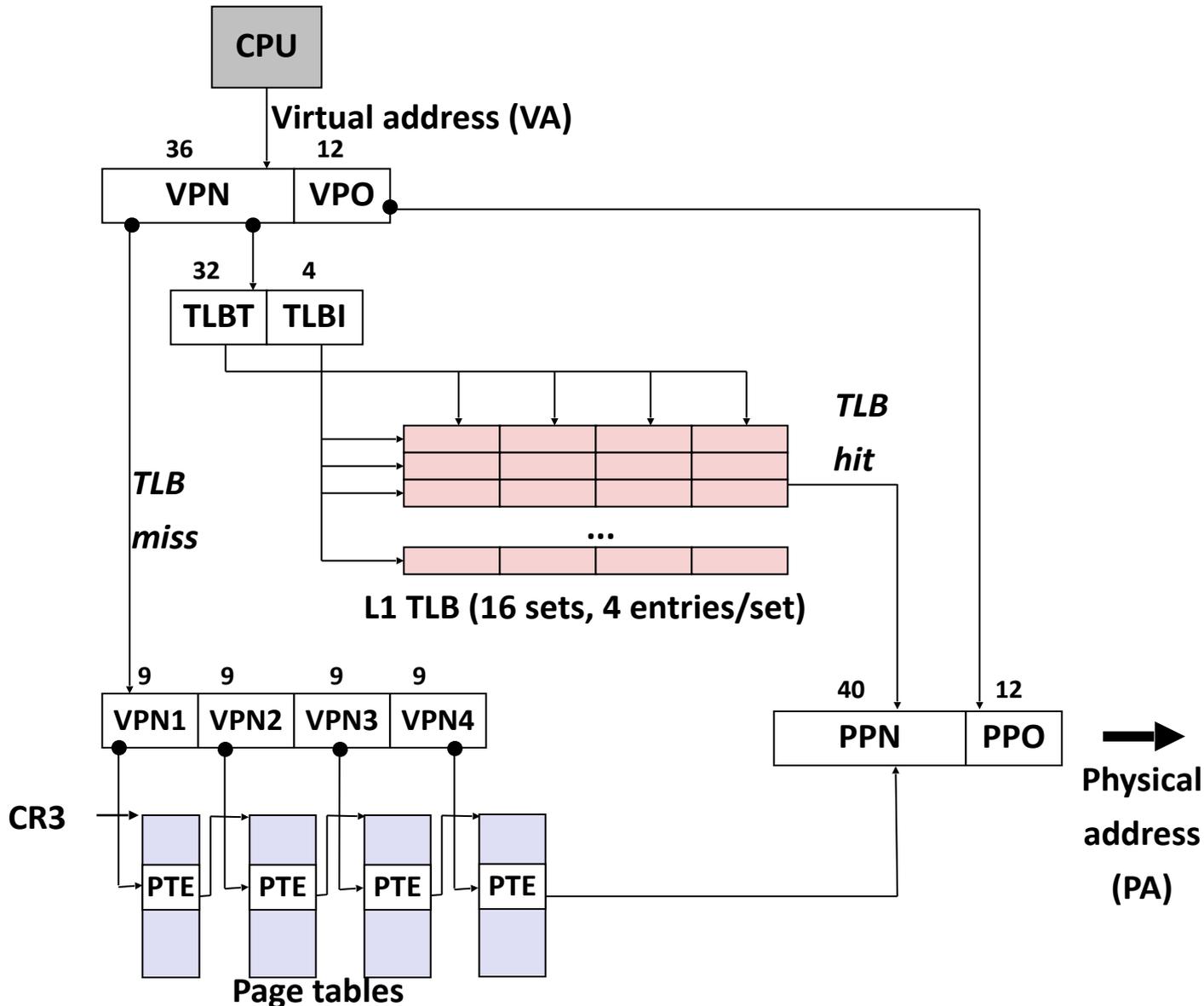
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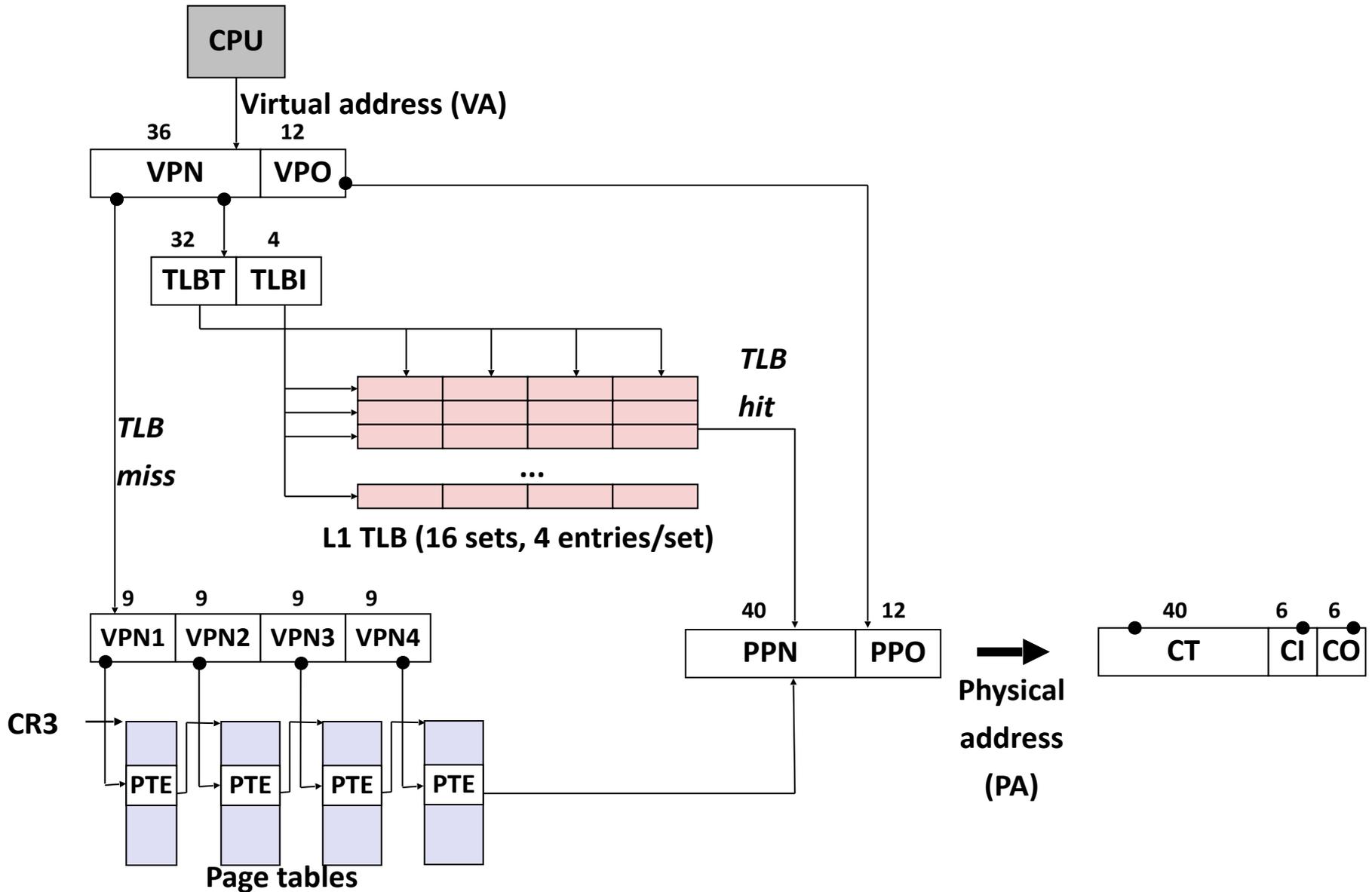
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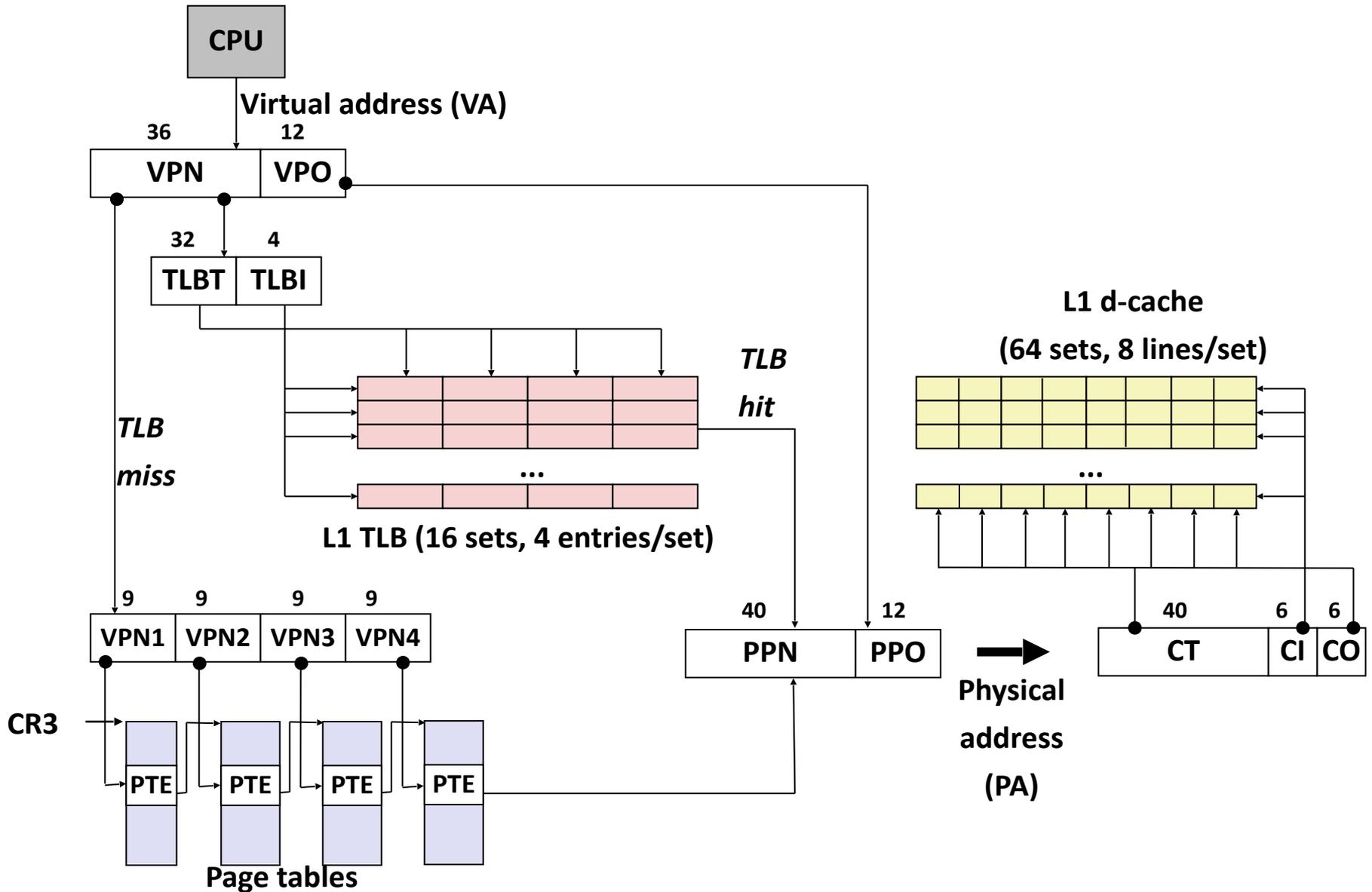
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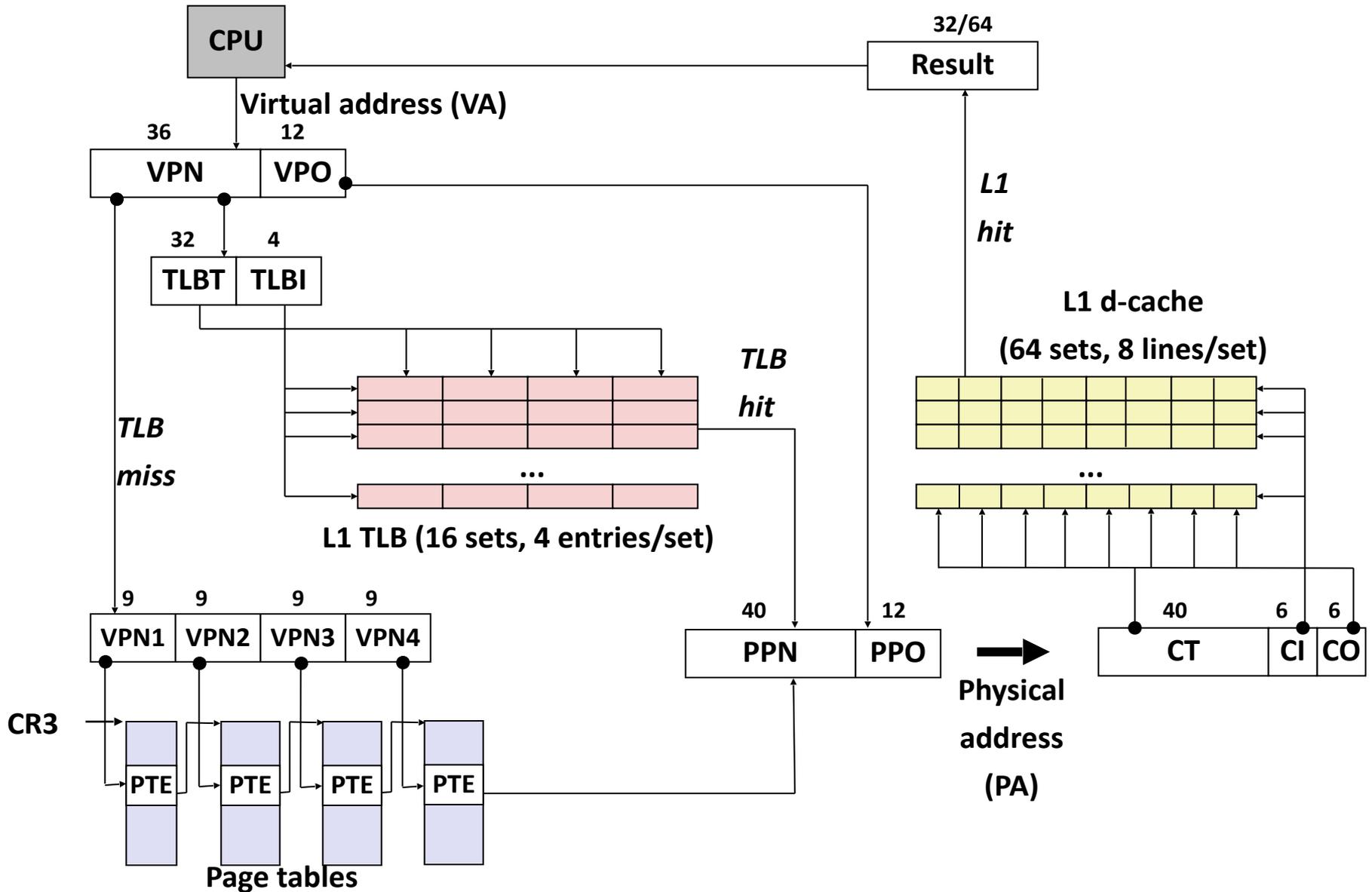
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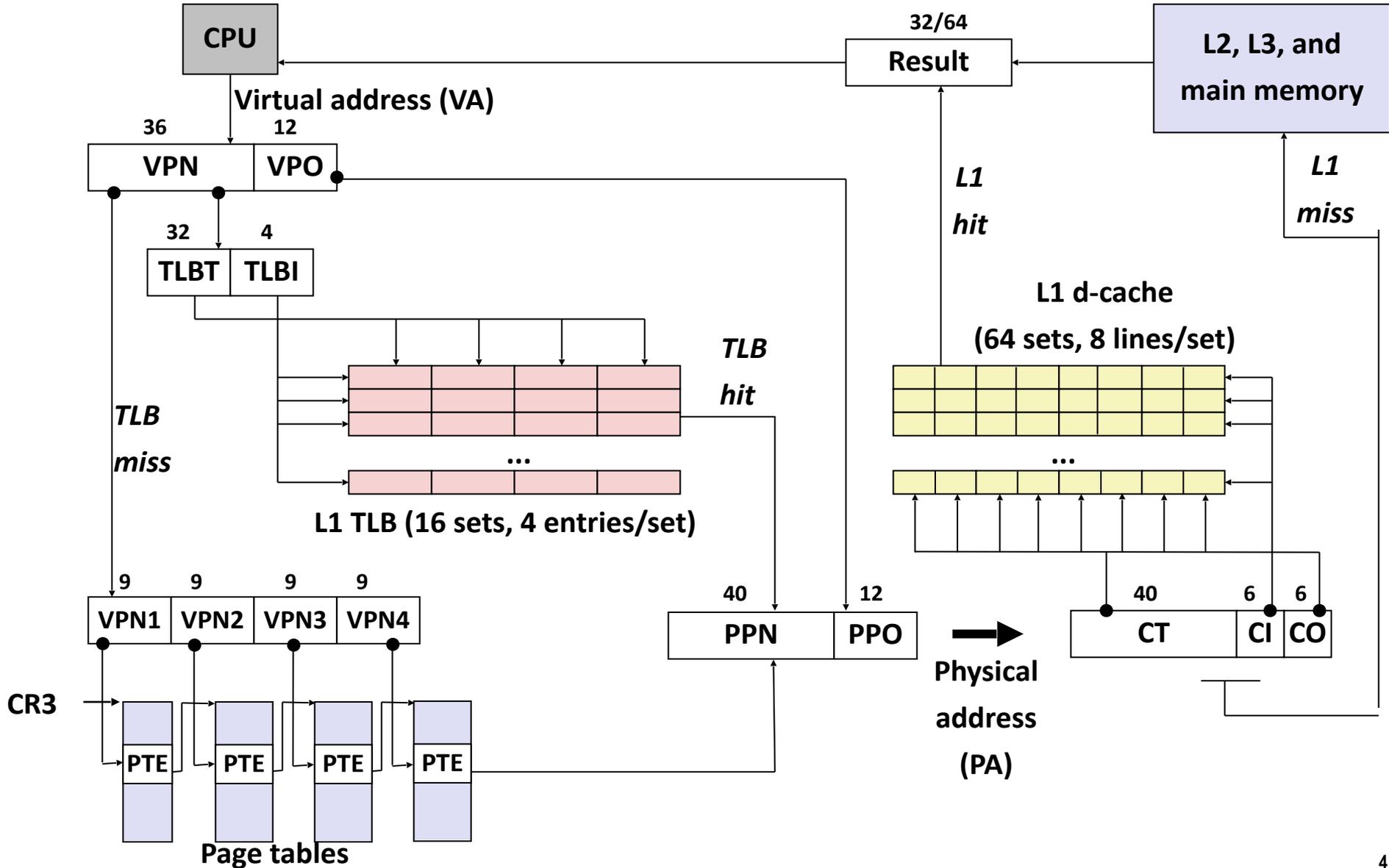
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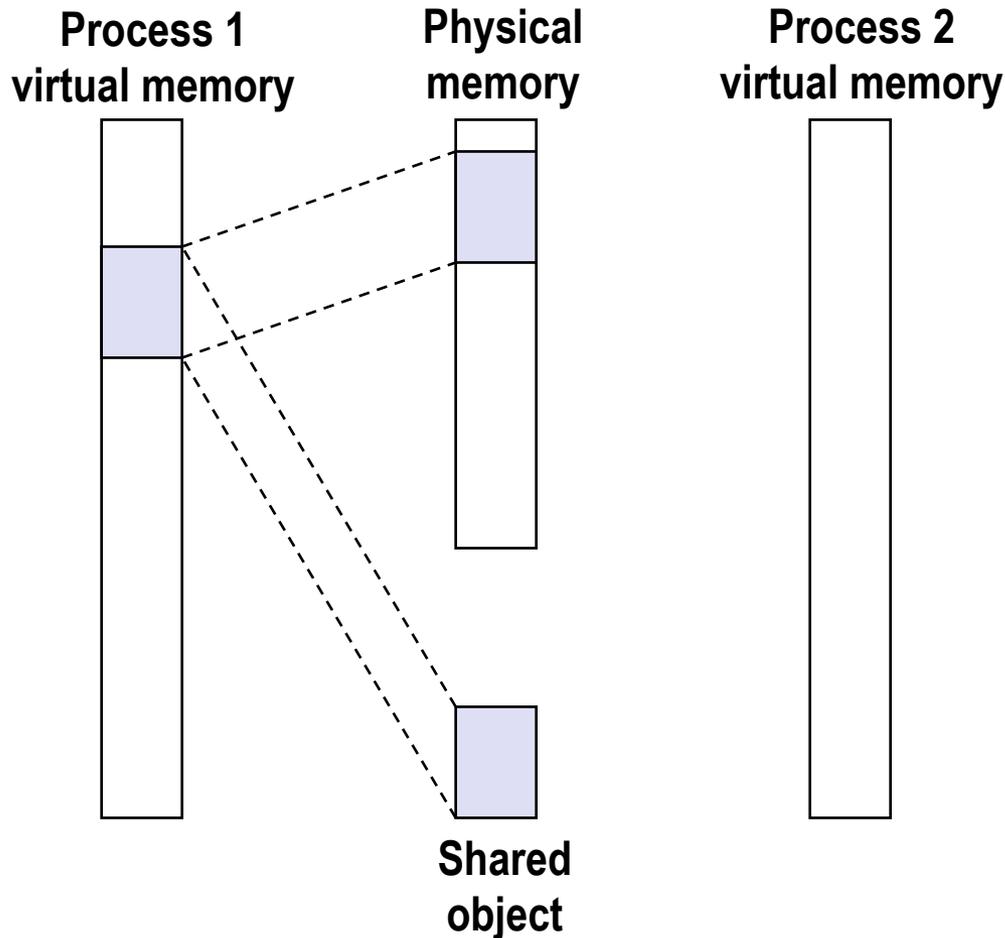


# Memory Mapping For Sharing

- Multiple processes often share data
  - Different processes that run the same code (e.g., shell)
  - Different processes linked to the same standard libraries
  - Different processes share the same file
- It is wasteful to create exact copies of the share object
- Memory mapping allow us to easily share objects
  - Different VM pages point to the same physical page/object

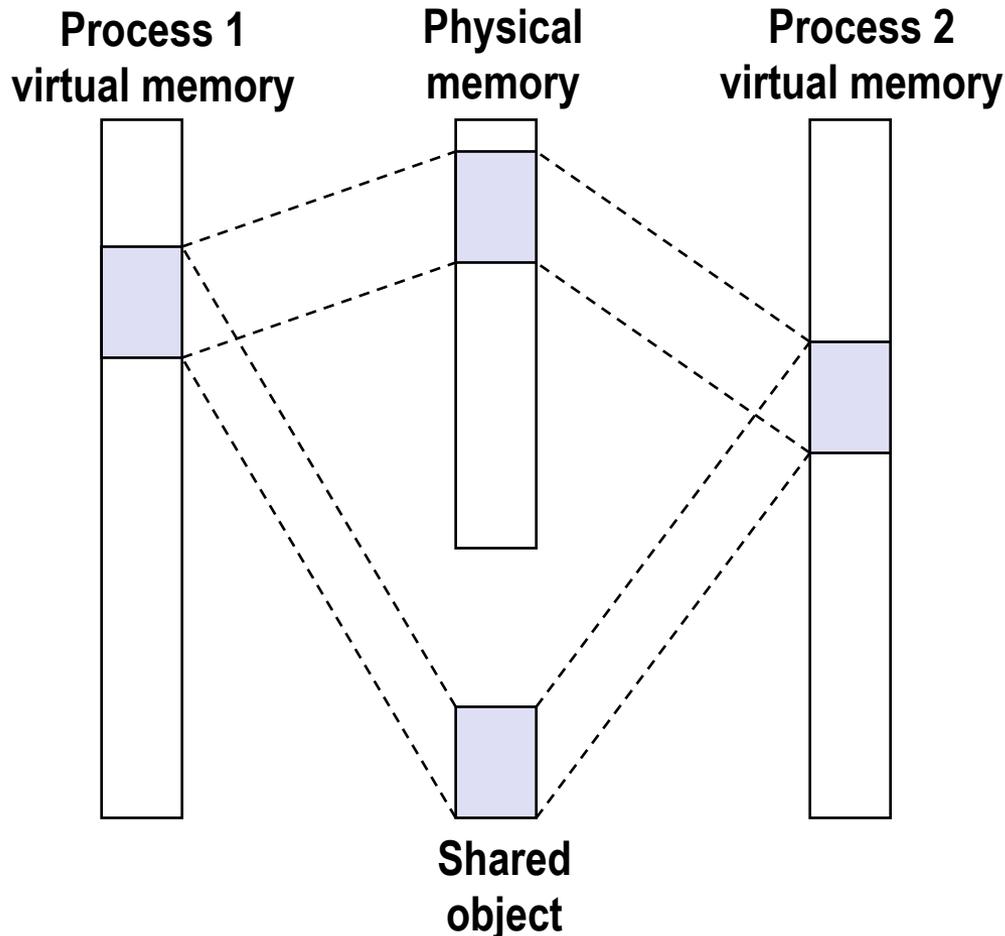
# Sharing Revisited: Shared Objects

- Process 1 maps the shared object.
- The kernel remembers that the object (backed by a unique file) is mapped by Proc. 1 to some physical pages.



# Sharing Revisited: Shared Objects

- Process 2 maps the shared object.



- The kernel remembers that the object (backed by a unique file) is mapped by Proc. 1 to some physical pages.
- Now when Proc. 2 wants to access the same object, the kernel can simply point the PTEs of Proc. 2 to the already-mapped physical pages.

# The Problem...

- What if Proc. 2 now wants to modify the shared object, but doesn't want the modification to be visible to Proc. 1

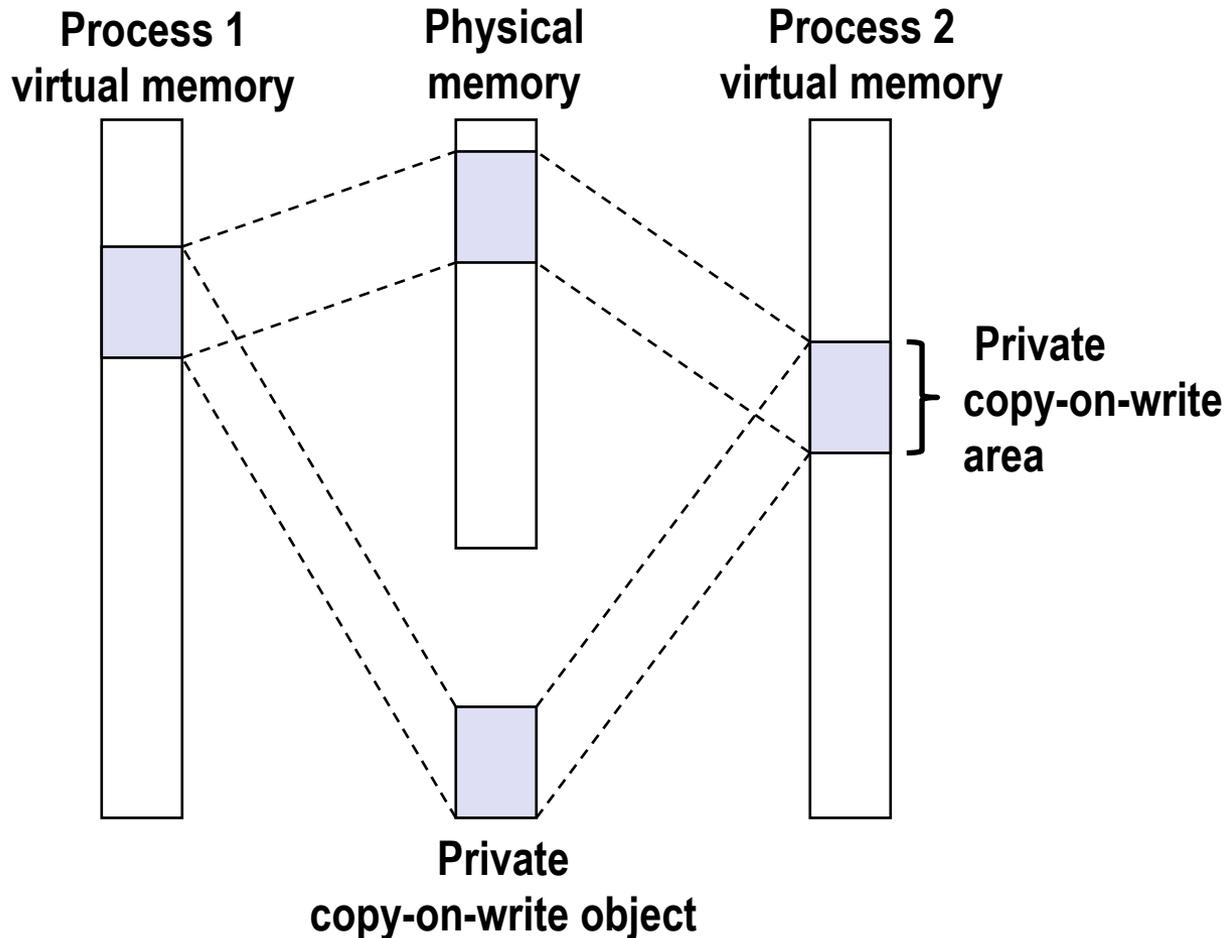
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- Simplest solution: always create duplicate copies of shared objects at the cost of wasting space. Not ideal.
- Idea: Copy-on-write (COW)
  - First pretend that both processes will share the objects without modifying them. If modification happens, create separate copies.

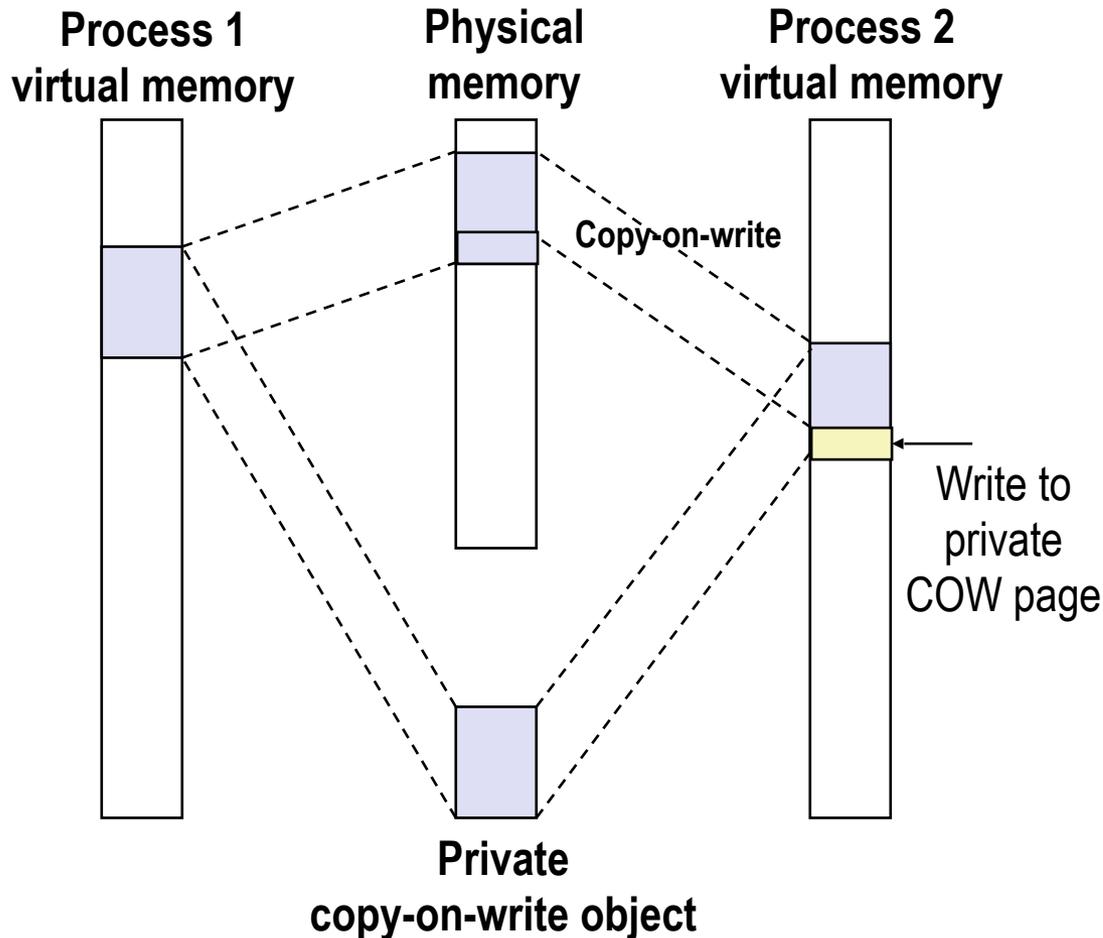
# Private Copy-on-write (COW) Objects



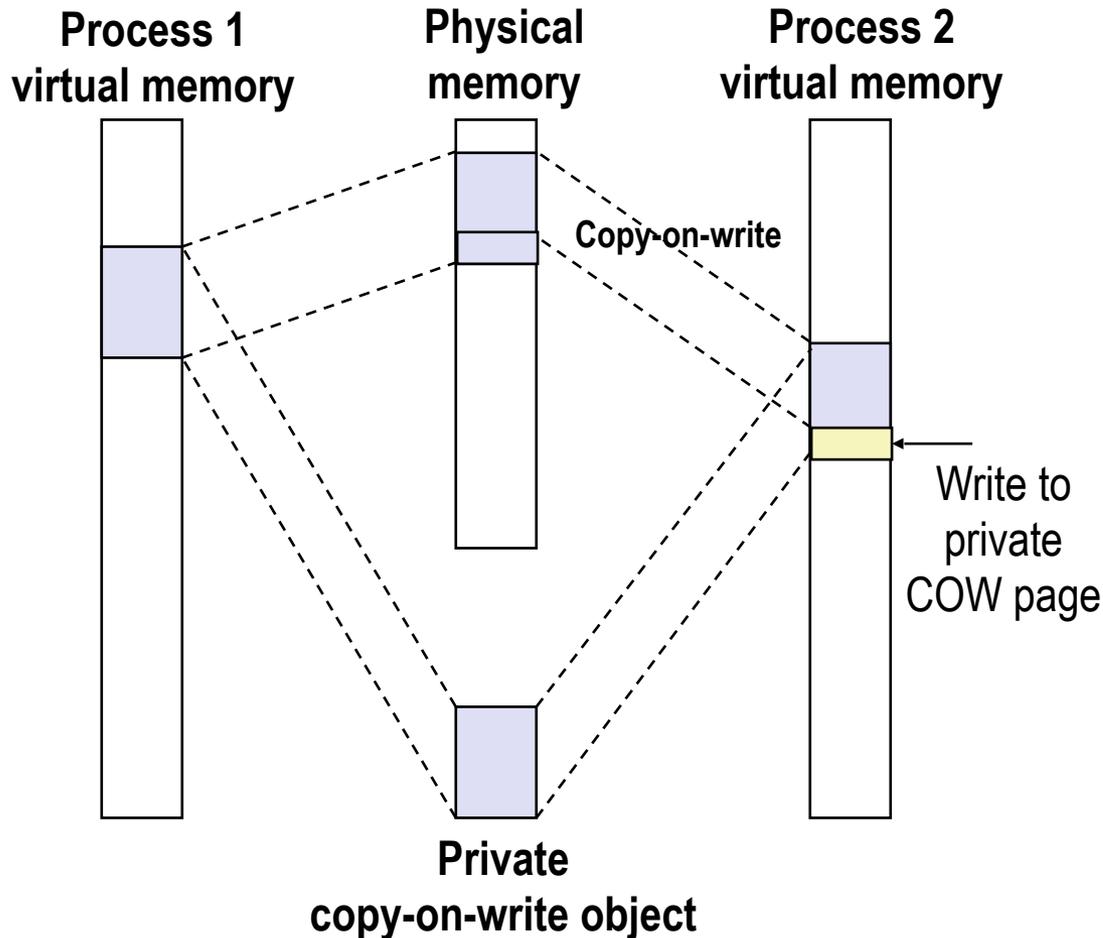
- Two processes mapping a *private copy-on-write (COW)* object.
- Area flagged as private copy-on-write (COW)
- PTEs in private areas are flagged as read-only

# Private Copy-on-write (COW) Objects

- Instruction writing to private page triggers page (protection) fault.

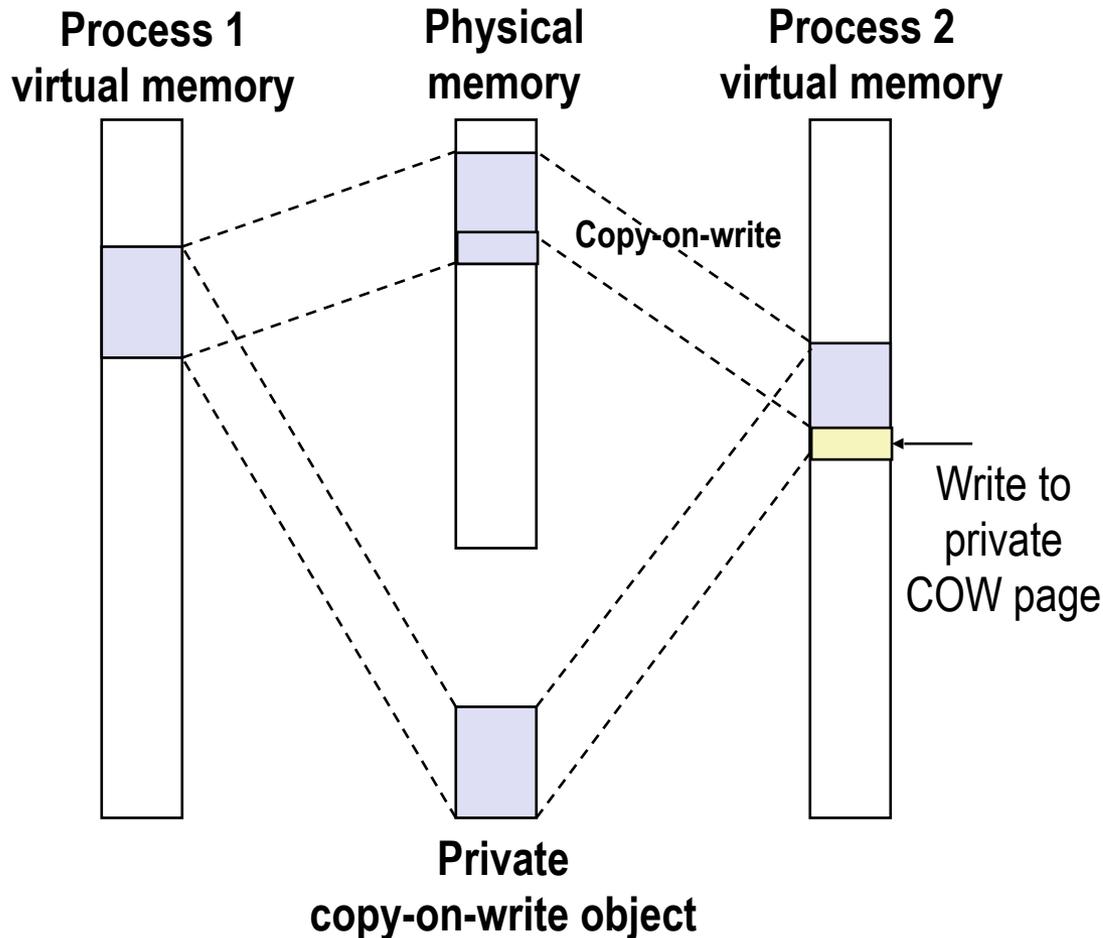


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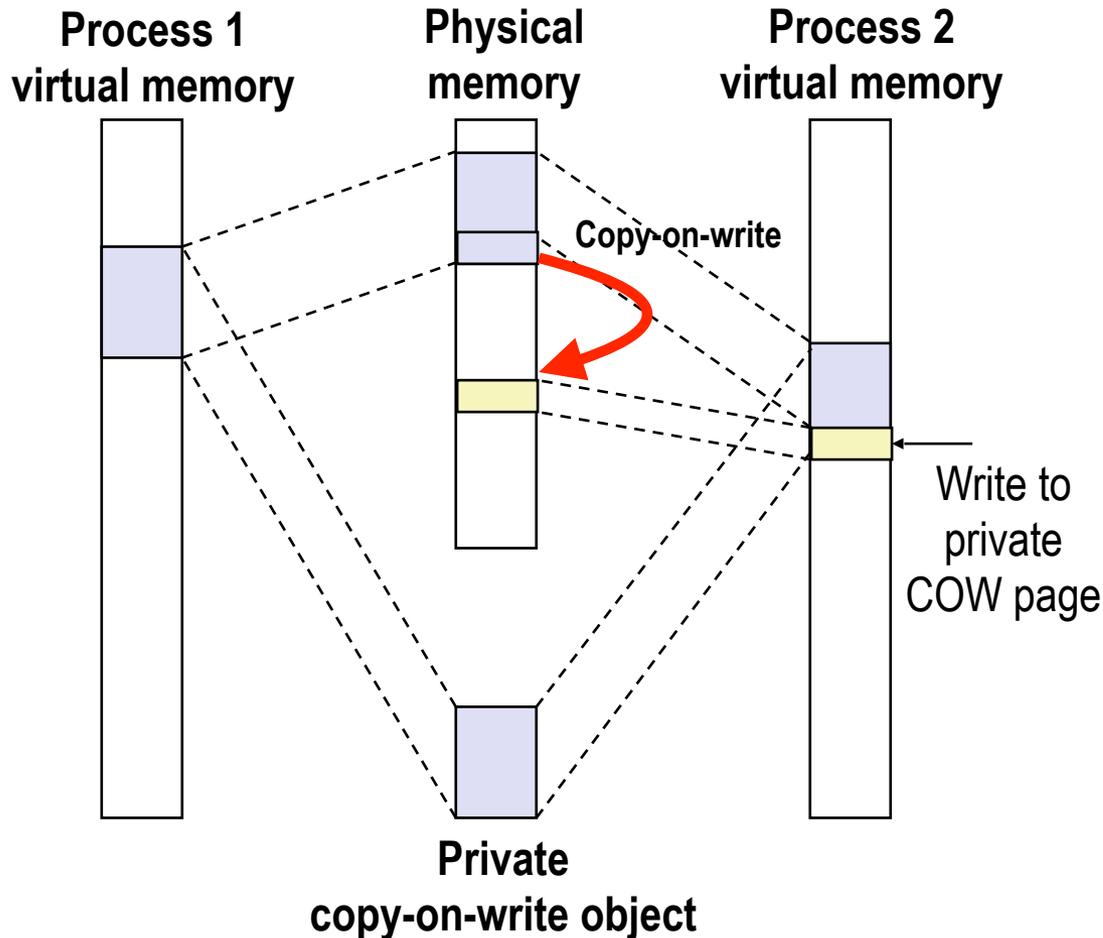
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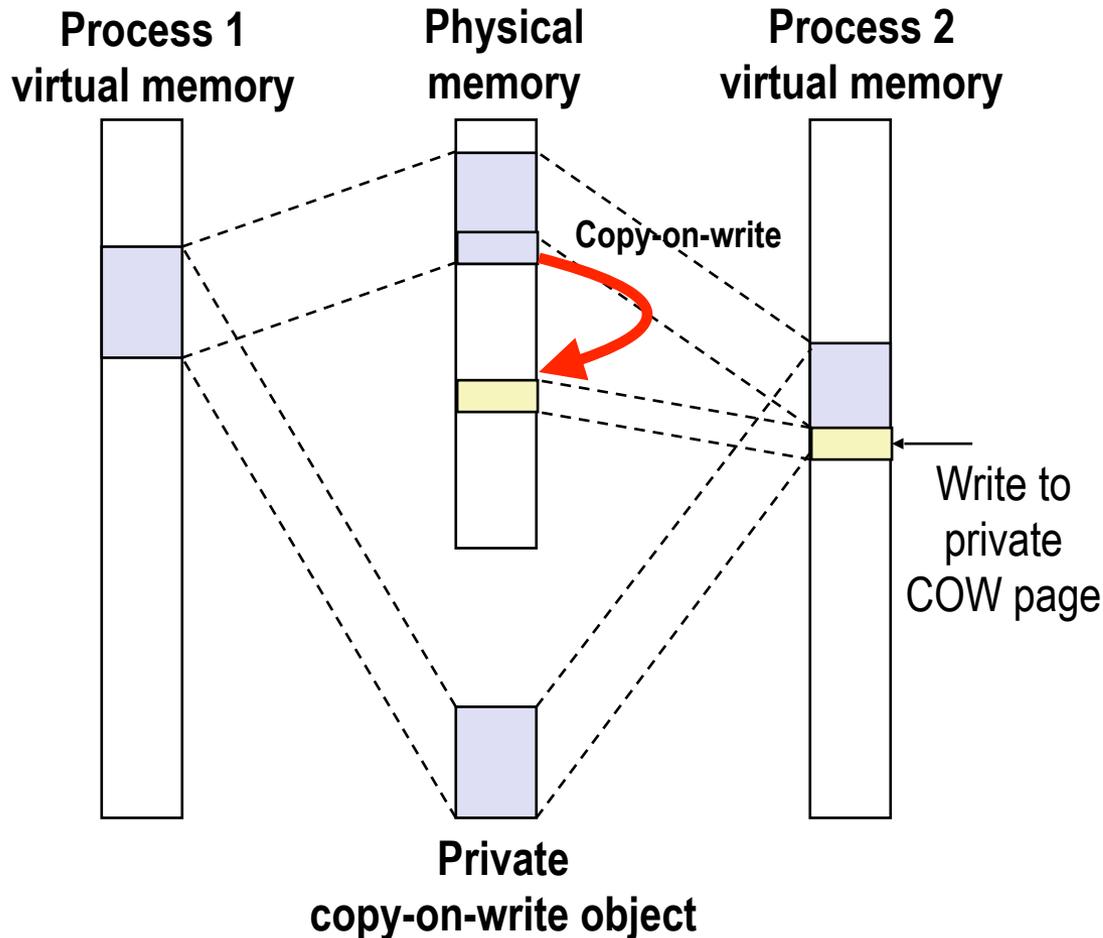
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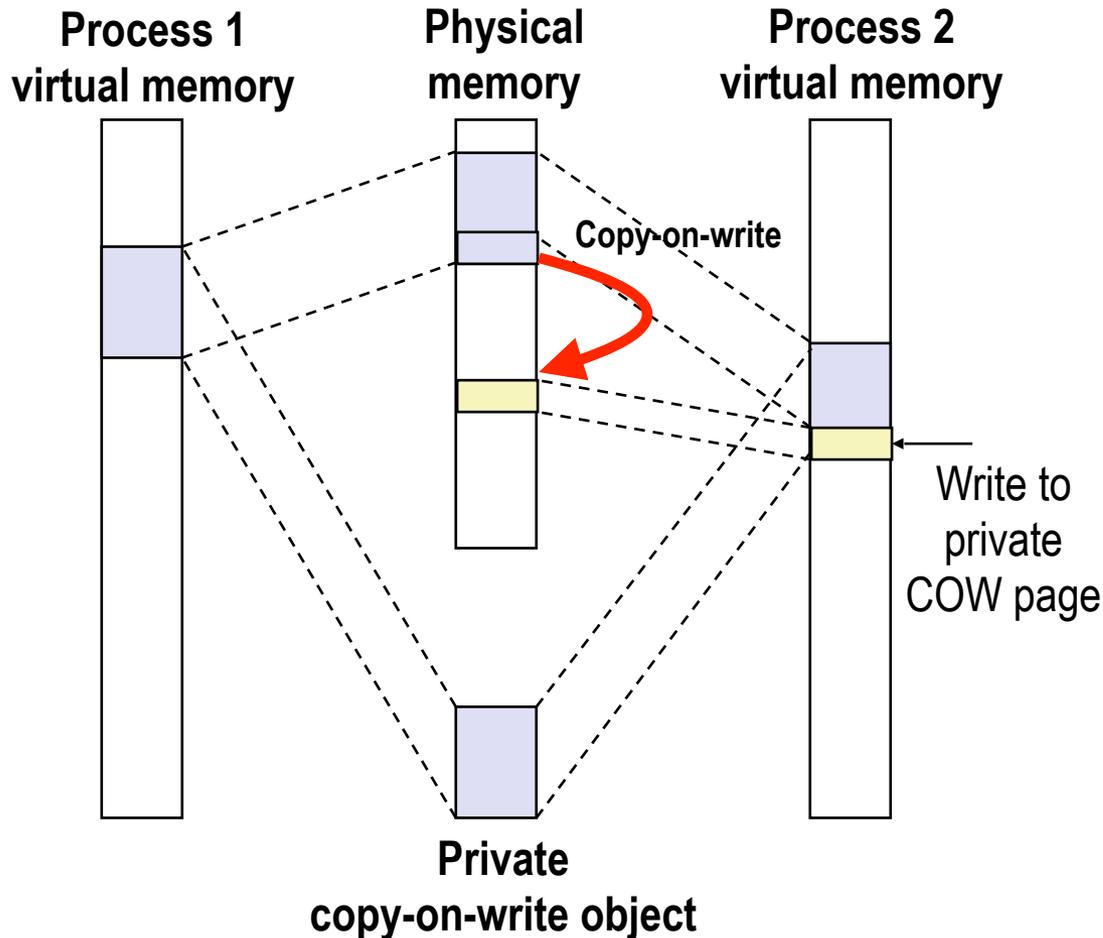
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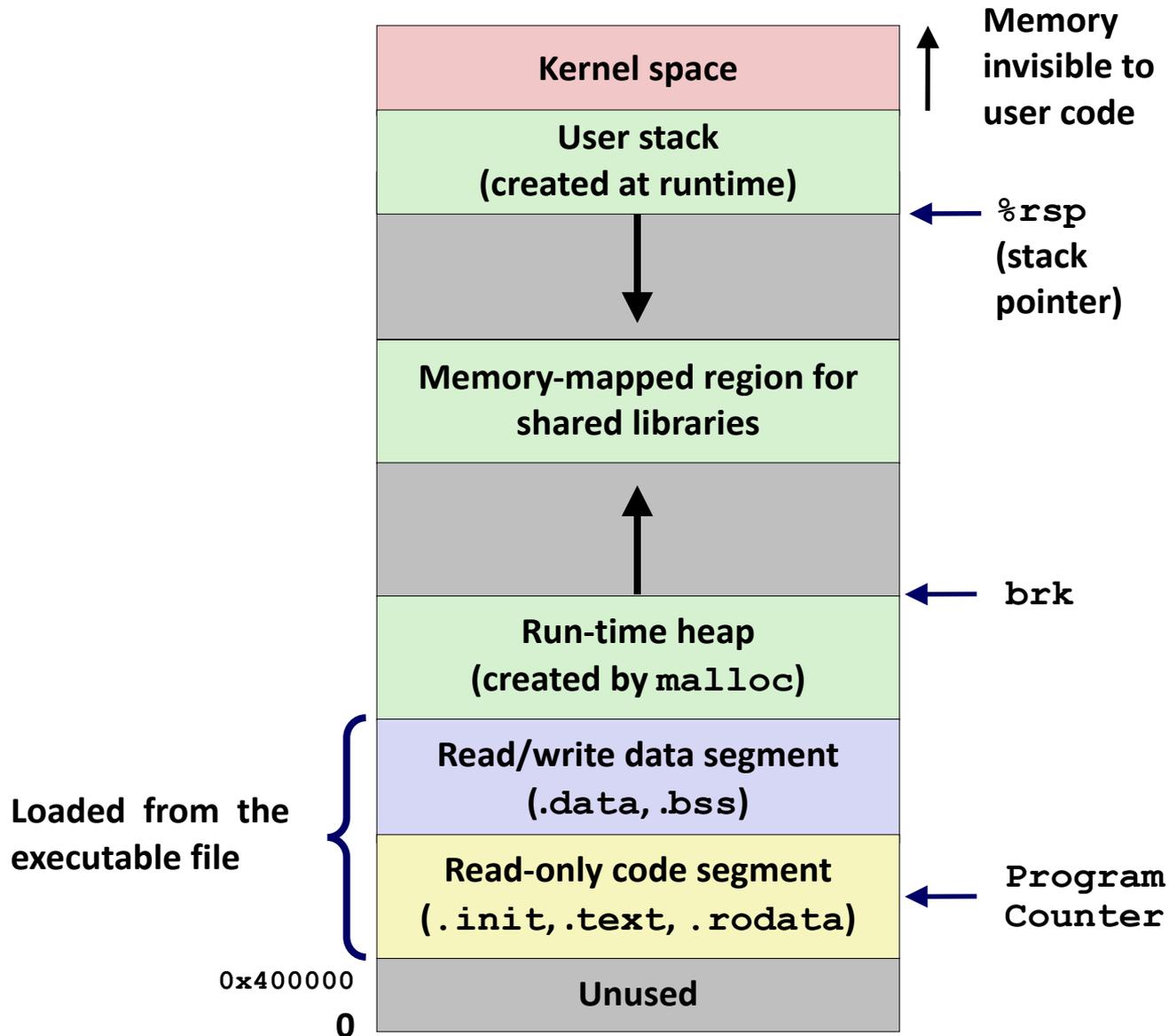


- Instruction writing to private page triggers page (protection) fault.
- Handler checks the area protection, and sees that it's a COW object
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- Instruction restarts upon handler return.
- Copying deferred as long as possible!

# Today

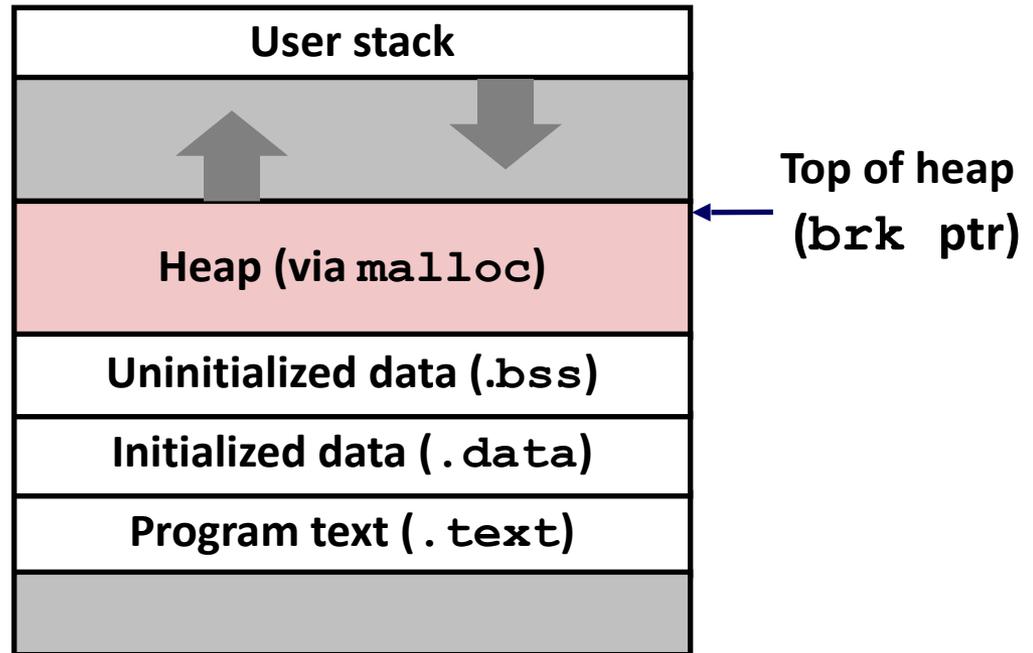
- Memory mapping
- Dynamic memory allocation
  - Basic concepts
  - Implicit free lists

# Process Address Space



# Dynamic Memory Allocation

- Programmers use *dynamic memory allocators* (such as `malloc`) to acquire VM at run time.
- Dynamic memory allocators manage an area of process virtual memory known as the *heap*.



# The malloc/free Functions

```
#include <stdlib.h>
```

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

- Successful:
  - Returns a pointer to a memory block of at least **size** bytes aligned to an 8-byte (x86) or 16-byte (x86-64) boundary
  - If **size == 0**, returns NULL
- Unsuccessful: returns NULL (0) and sets **errno**

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## Other functions

- `calloc`: Version of `malloc` that initializes allocated block to zero.
- `realloc`: Changes the size of a previously allocated block.
- `sbrk`: Used internally by allocators to grow or shrink the heap

# malloc Example

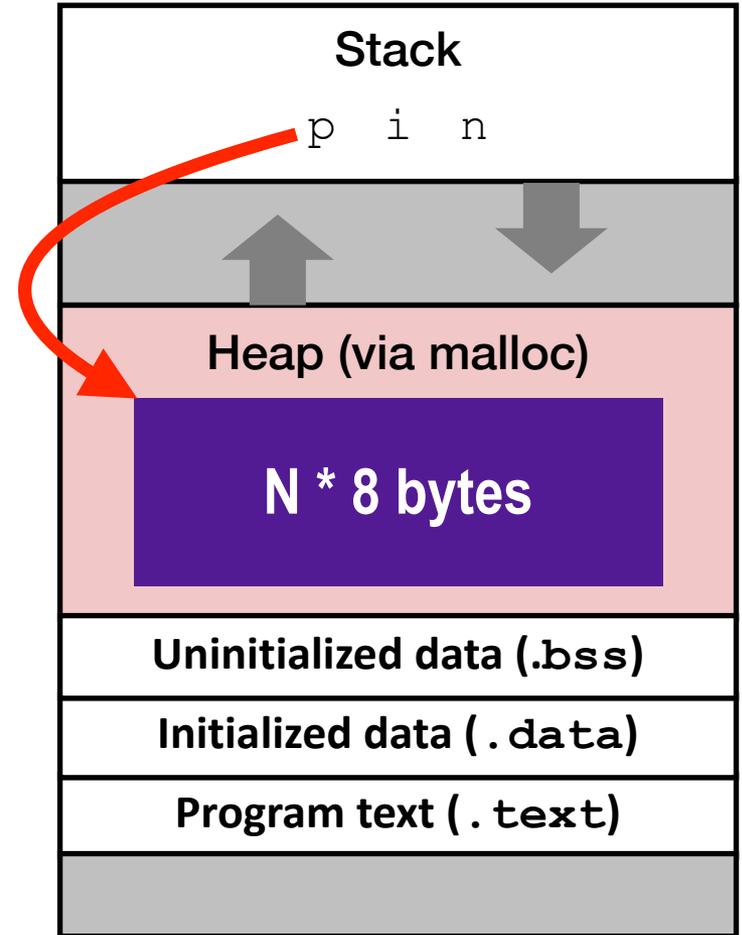
```
#include <stdio.h>
#include <stdlib.h>

void foo(int n) {
    int i, *p;

    /* Allocate a block of n ints */
    p = (int *) malloc(n * sizeof(int));
    if (p == NULL) {
        perror("malloc");
        exit(0);
    }

    /* Initialize allocated block */
    for (i=0; i<n; i++)
        p[i] = i;

    /* Return allocated block to the heap */
    free(p);
}
```



# Why Do We Need Dynamic Allocation?

- Some data structures' size is only known at runtime. Statically allocating the space would be a waste.
- More importantly: access data across function calls. Variables on stack are destroyed when the function returns!!!

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void bar() {
    int *p = foo(5);

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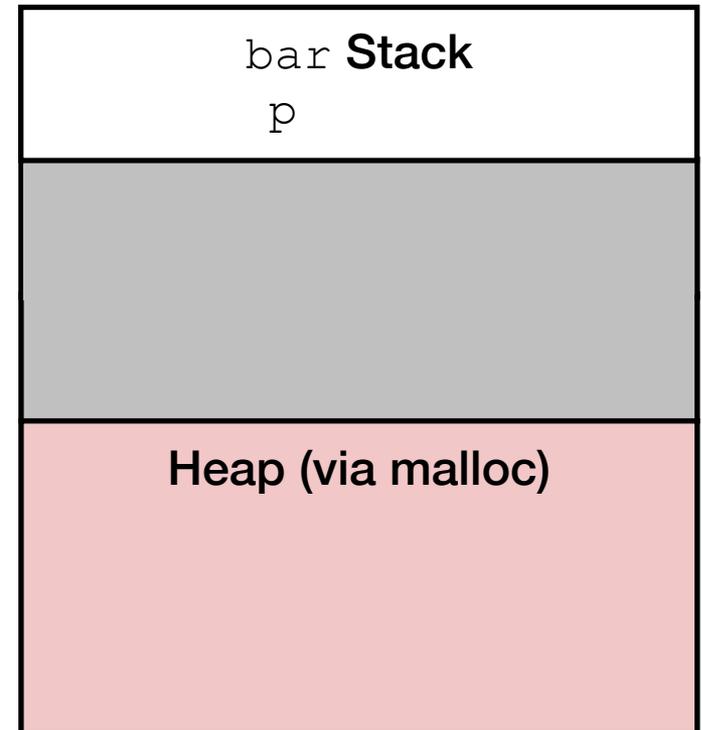
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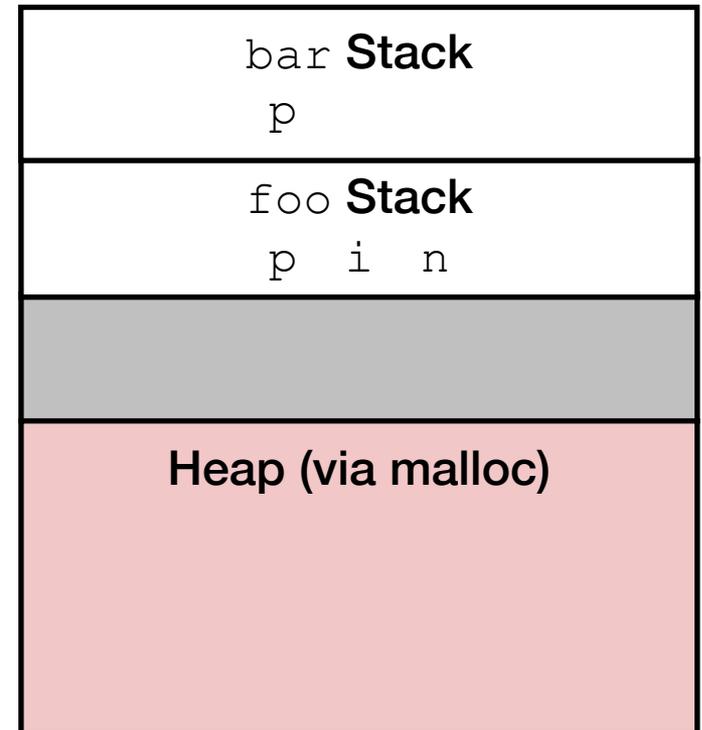
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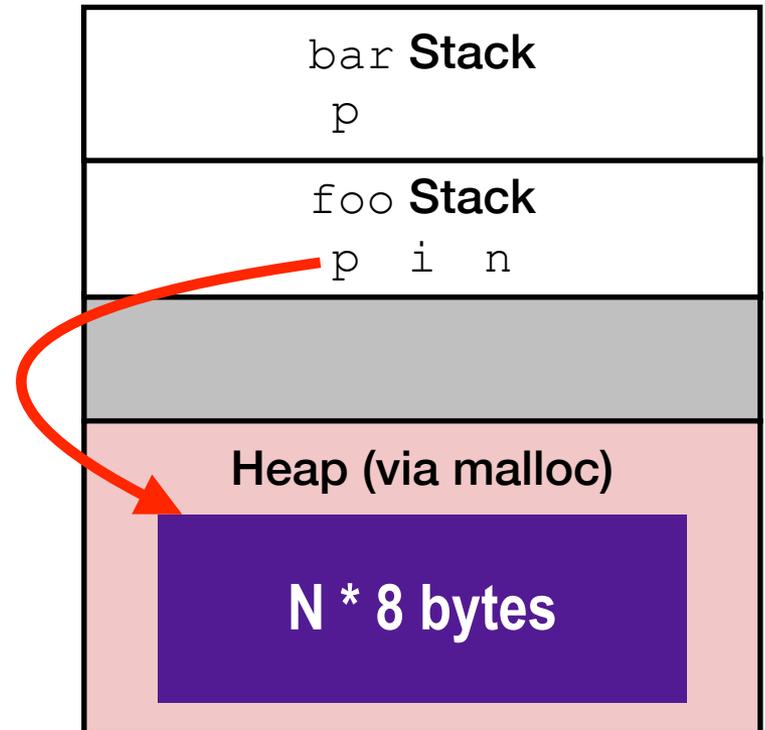
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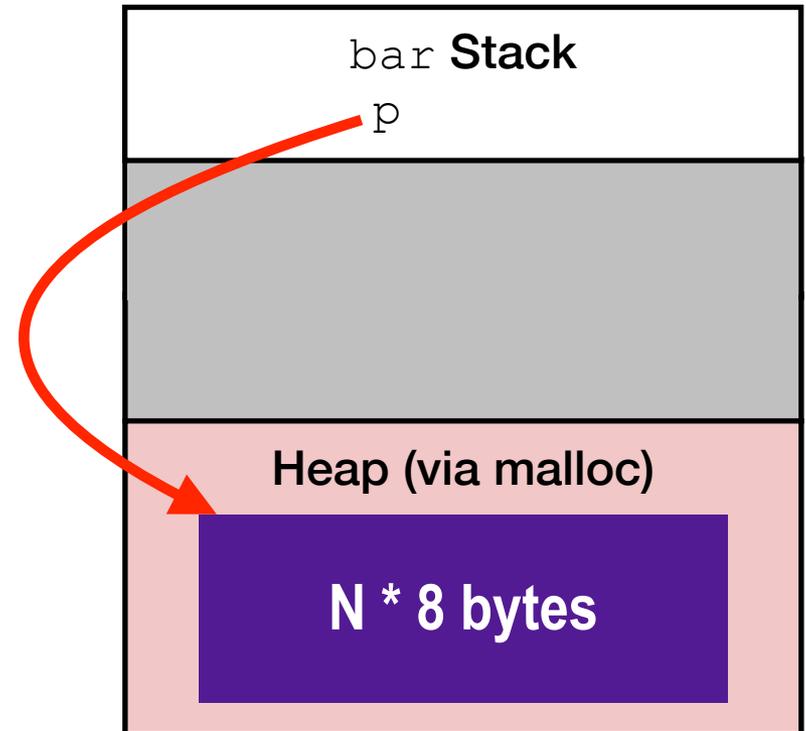
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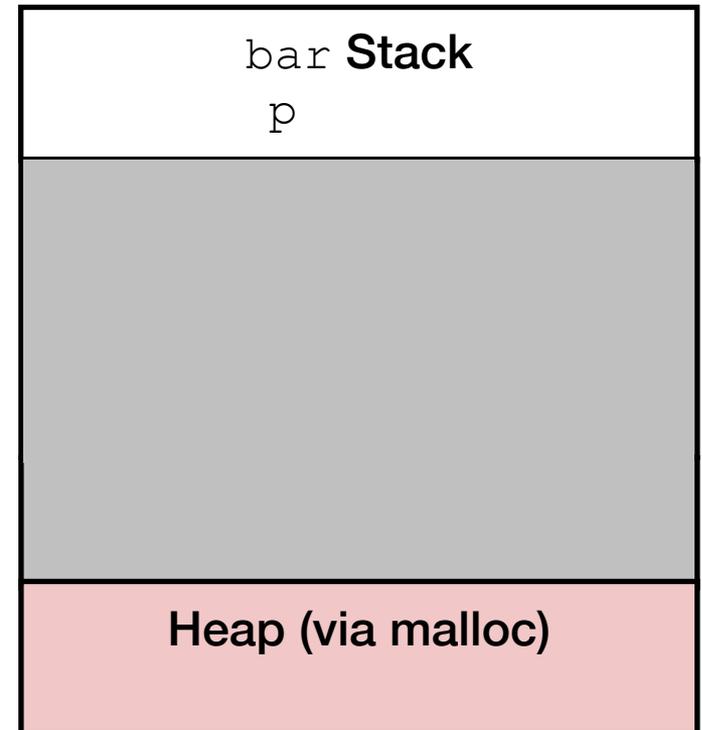
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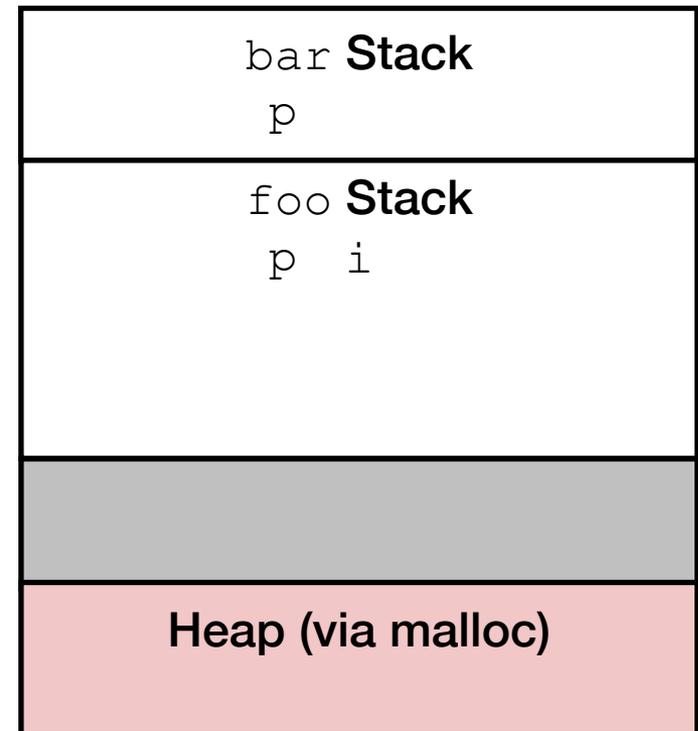
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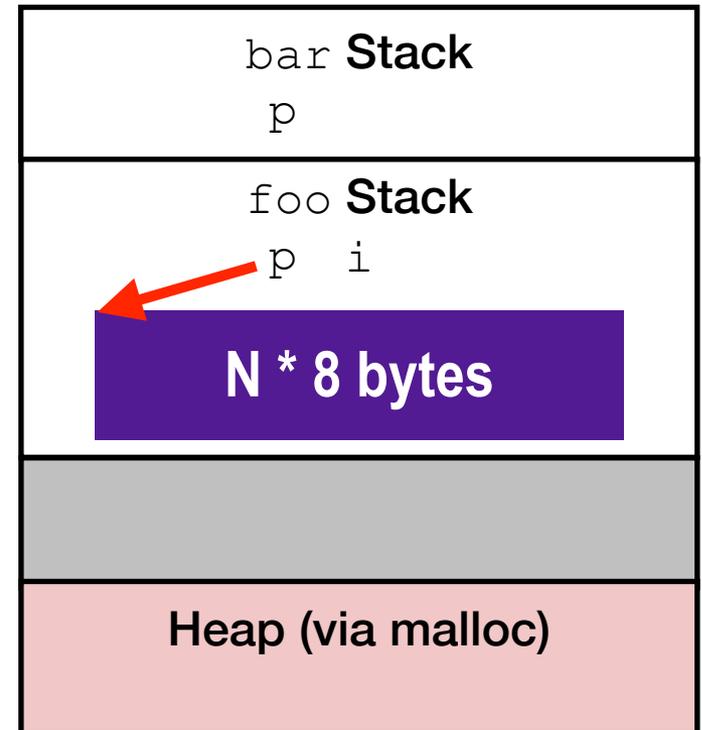
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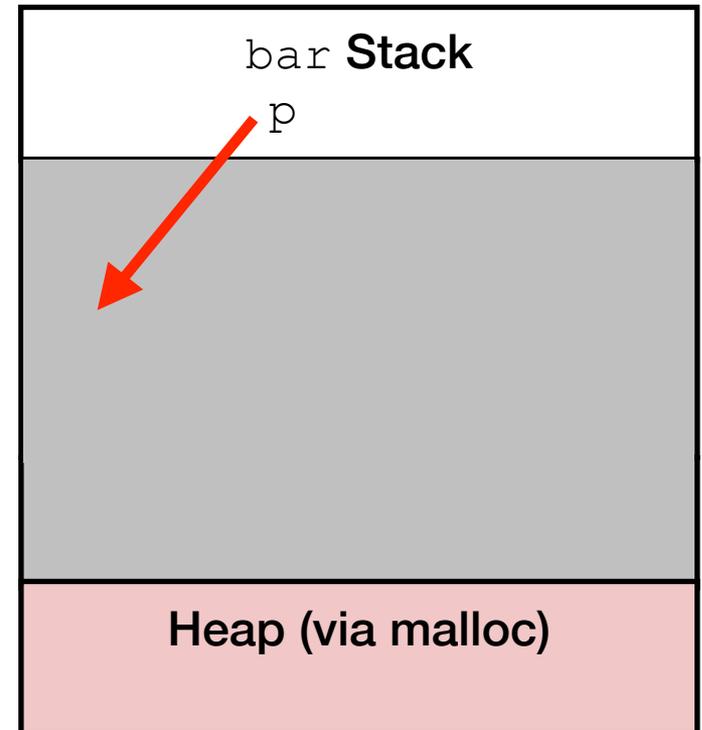
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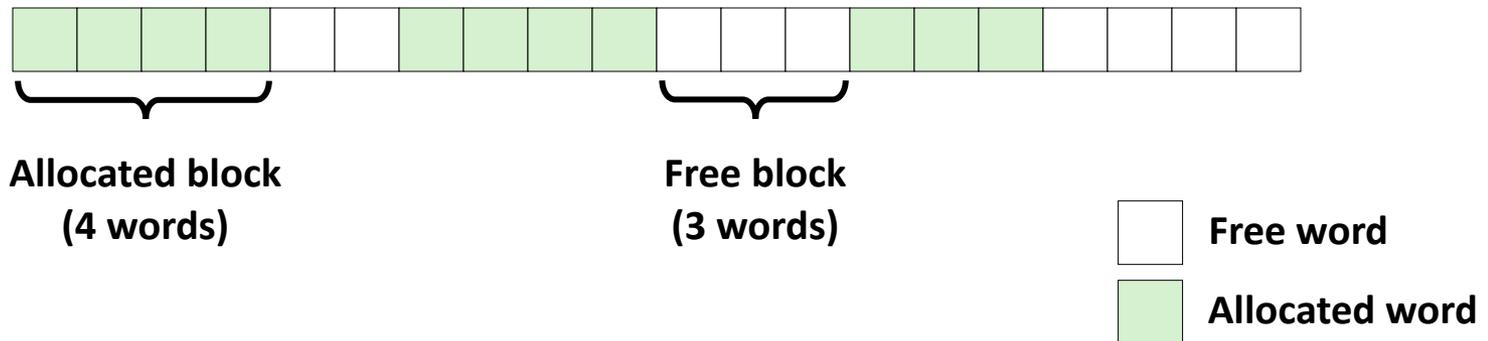
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# Dynamic Memory Allocation

- Allocator maintains heap as collection of variable sized *blocks/chunks*, which are either *allocated* or *free*
- Blocks that are no longer used should be free-ed to save space



- Assumptions Made in This Lecture
  - Memory is word addressed
  - Words are int-sized

# Dynamic Memory Allocation

- Types of allocators
  - *Explicit allocator*: application (i.e., programmer) allocates and frees space
    - E.g., `malloc` and `free` in C
  - *Implicit allocator*: application allocates, but does not free space
    - E.g. garbage collection in Java, JavaScript, Python, etc...
- Will discuss simple explicit memory allocation today

# Allocation Example

```
p1 = malloc(4)
```



```
p2 = malloc(5)
```

```
p3 = malloc(6)
```

```
free(p2)
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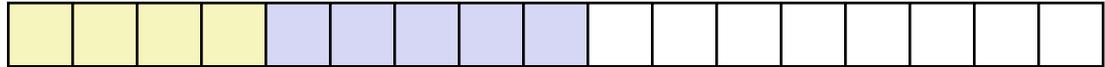
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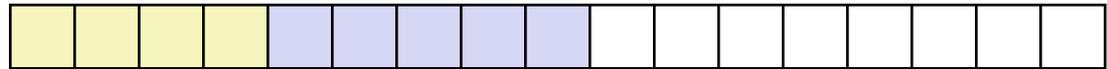
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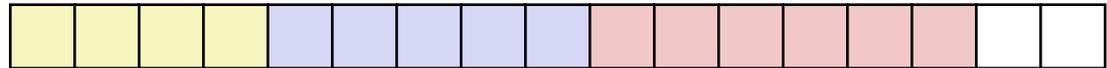
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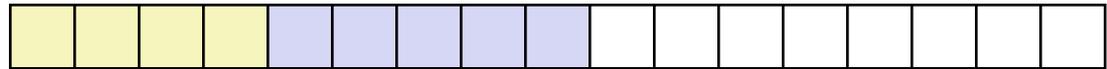
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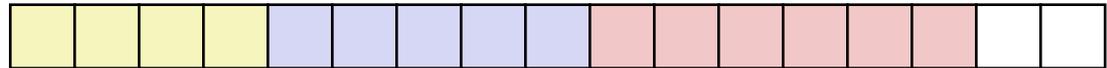
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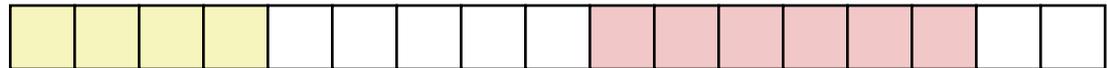
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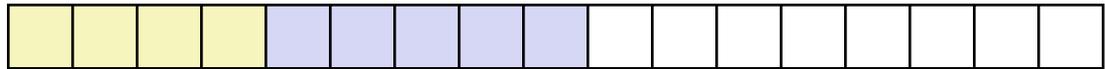
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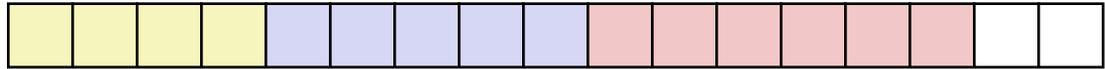
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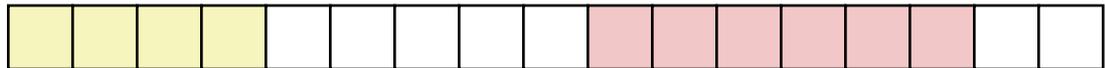
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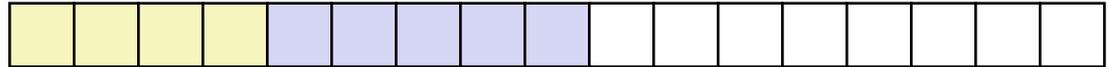
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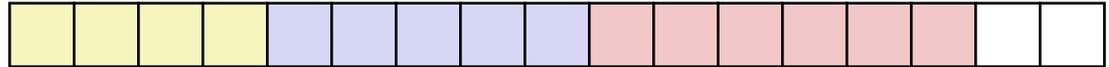
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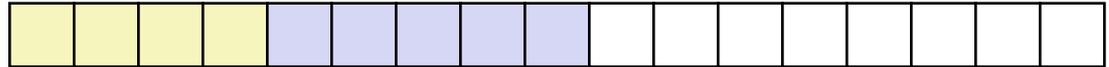
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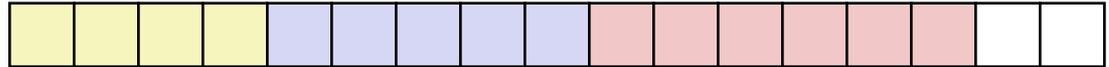
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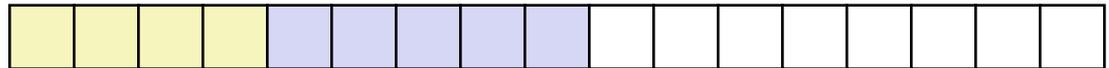
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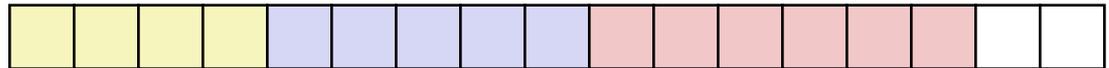
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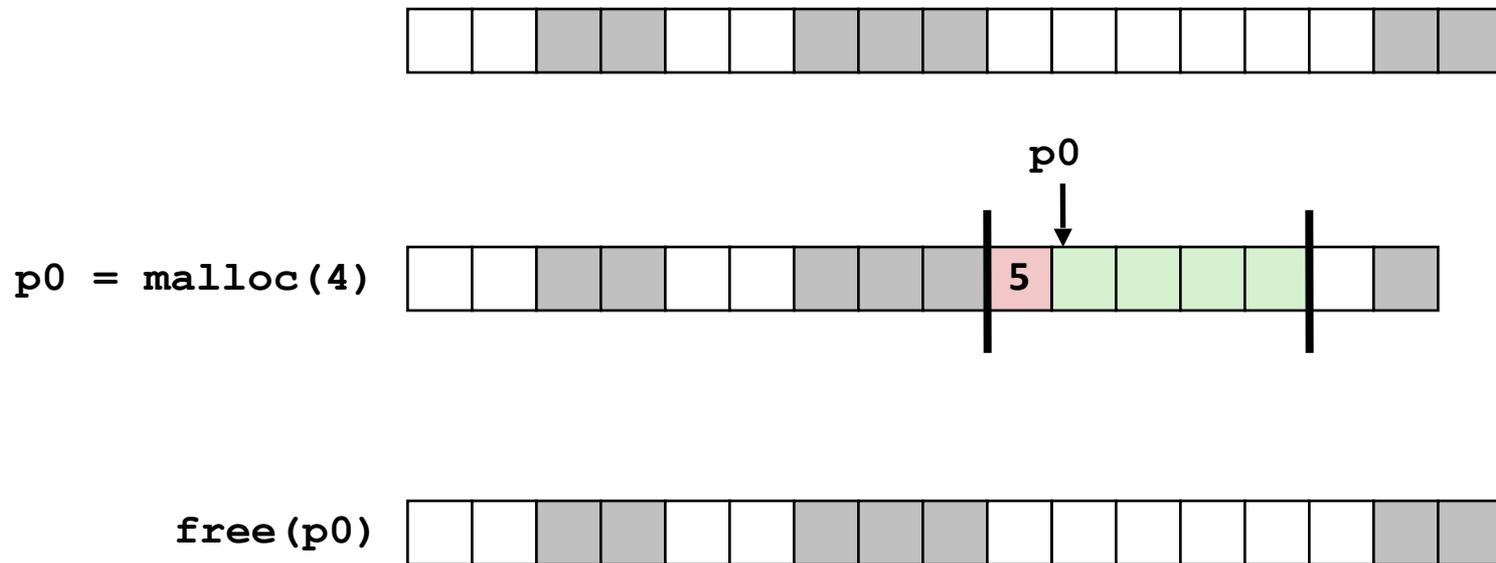
- Depends on the pattern of future requests

# Key Issues in Dynamic Memory Allocation

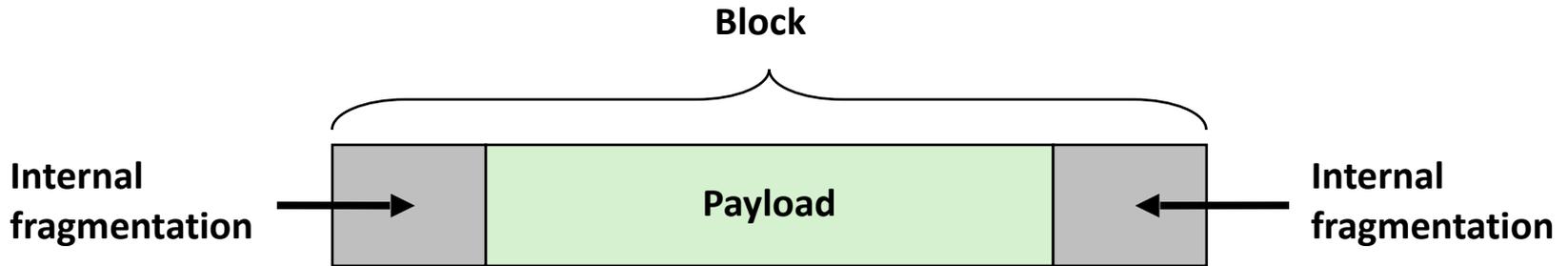
- Free:
  - How do we know how much memory to free given just a pointer?
  - How do we keep track of the free blocks?
  - How do we reinsert freed block?
- Allocation:
  - What do we do with the extra space when allocating a structure that is smaller than the free block it is placed in?
  - How do we pick a block to use for allocation -- many might fit?

# Knowing How Much to Free

- Standard method
  - Keep the length of a block in the word preceding the block.
    - This word is often called the *header field* or *header*
  - Requires an extra word for every allocated block

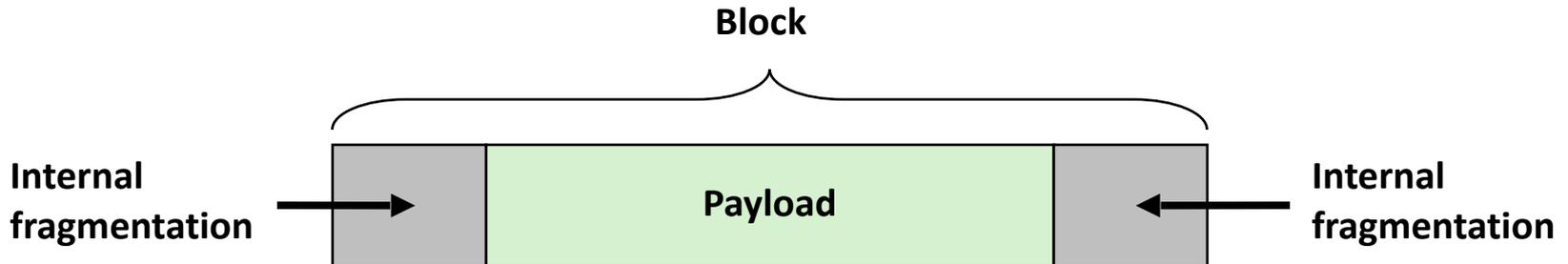


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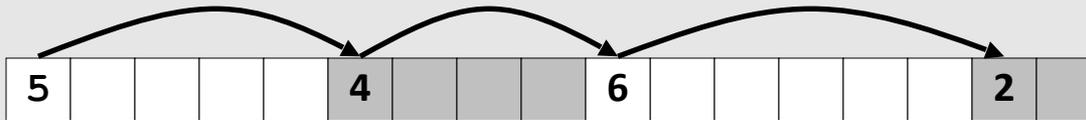
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- For a given block, *internal fragmentation* occurs if payload is smaller than block size
- Caused by
  - Overhead of maintaining heap data structures
  - Padding for alignment purposes
  - Explicit policy decisions (e.g., to return a big block to satisfy a small request)

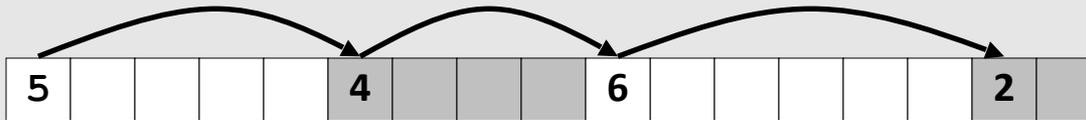
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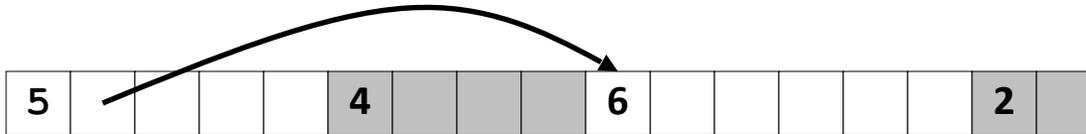


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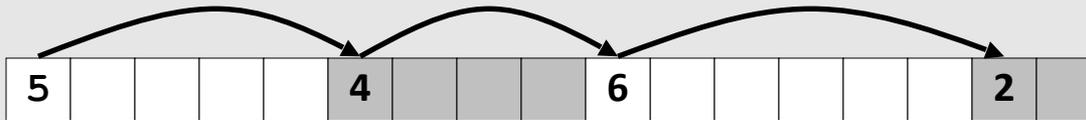


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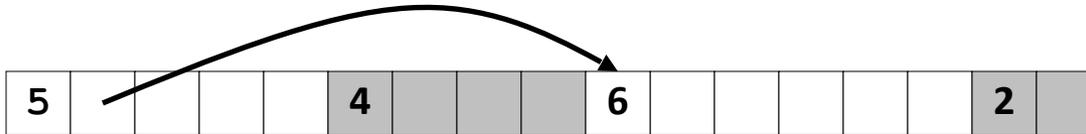


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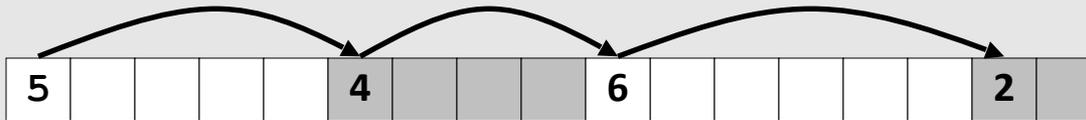
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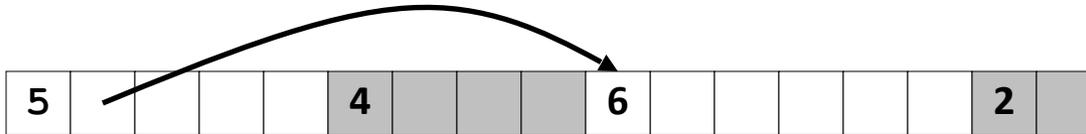
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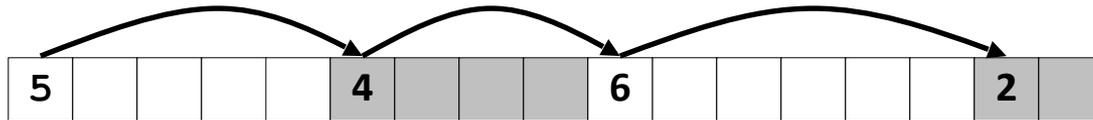
- Method 3: *Segregated free list*
  - Different free lists for different size classes
- Method 4: *Blocks sorted by size*
  - Can use a balanced tree (e.g. Red-Black tree) with pointers within each free block, and the length used as a key

# Today

- Memory mapping
- Dynamic memory allocation
  - Basic concepts
  - Implicit free lists

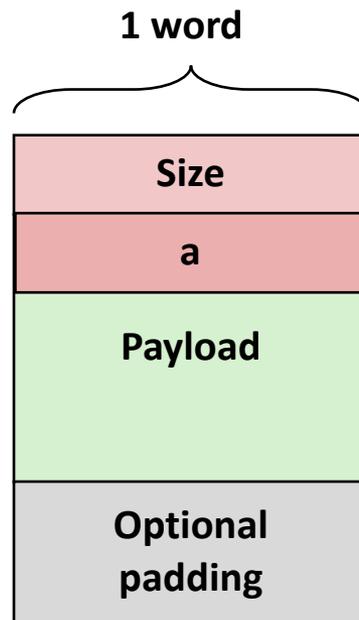
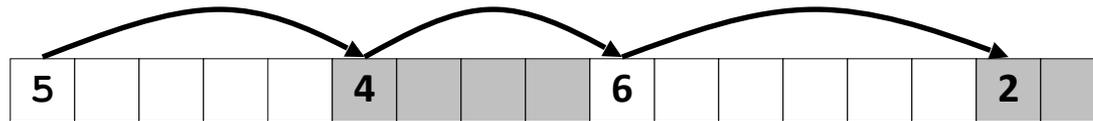
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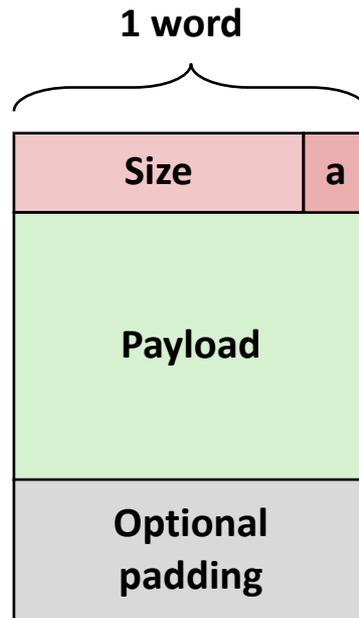
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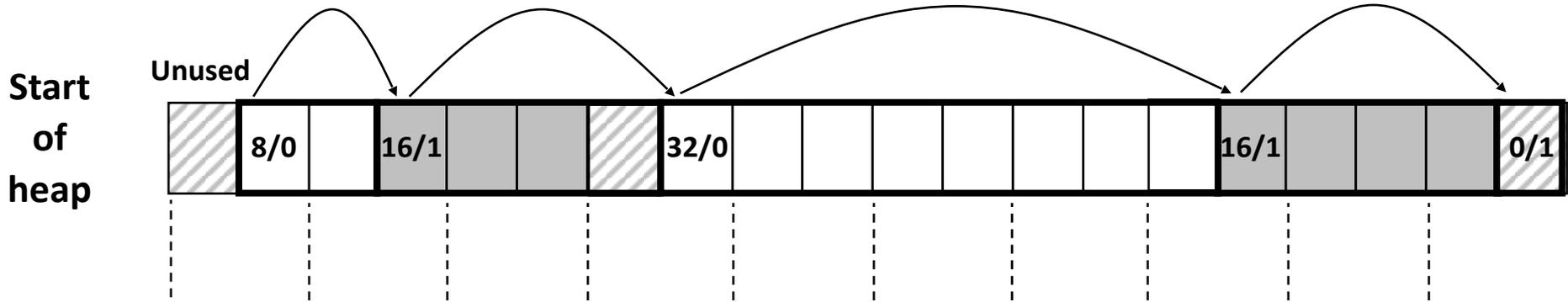


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# Detailed Implicit Free List Example



Double-word  
aligned

Allocated blocks: shaded

Free blocks: unshaded

Headers: labeled with size in bytes/allocated bit

# Finding a Free Block

- **First fit:**
  - Search list from beginning, choose **first** free block that fits
  - Can take linear time in total number of blocks (allocated and free)
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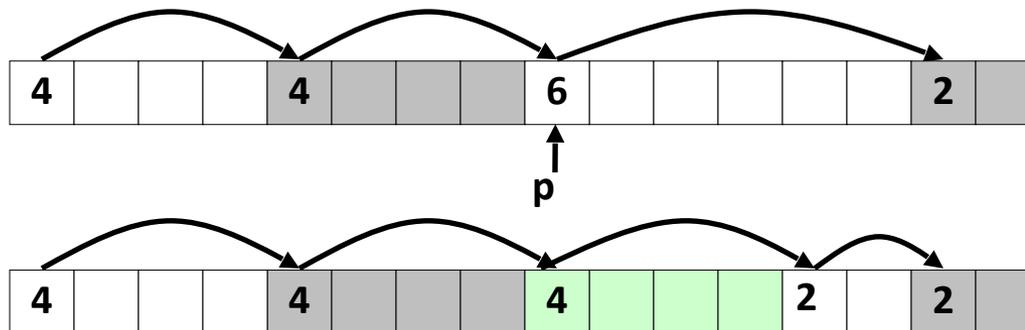
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- **Best fit:**
  - Search the list, choose the **best** free block: fits, with fewest bytes left over
  - Keeps fragments small—usually improves memory utilization
  - Will typically run slower than first fit

# Allocating in Free Block

- Allocated space might be smaller than free space
- We could simply leave the extra space there. Simple to implement but causes internal fragmentation
- Or we could **split** the block



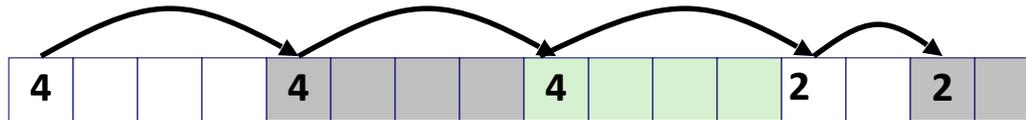
```
void addblock(ptr p, int len) {  
    int newsize = ((len + 1) >> 1) << 1; // round up to even  
    int oldsize = *p & -2; // mask out low bit  
    *p = newsize | 1; // set new length  
    if (newsize < oldsize)  
        *(p+newsize) = oldsize - newsize; // set length in remaining  
}
```

# Freeing a Block

- Simplest implementation:
  - Need only clear the “allocated” flag

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void free_block(ptr p) { *p = *p & -2 }
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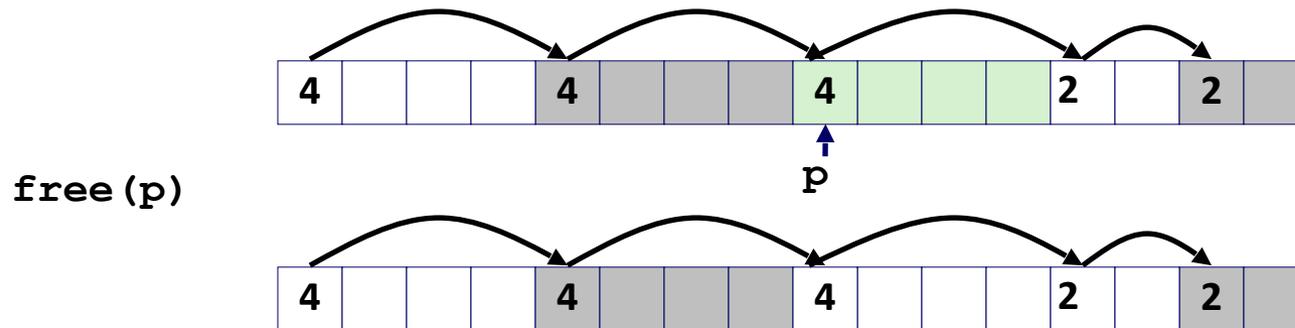


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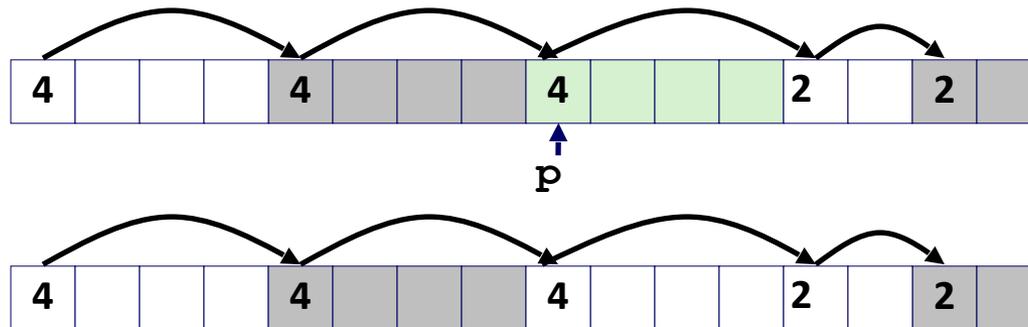


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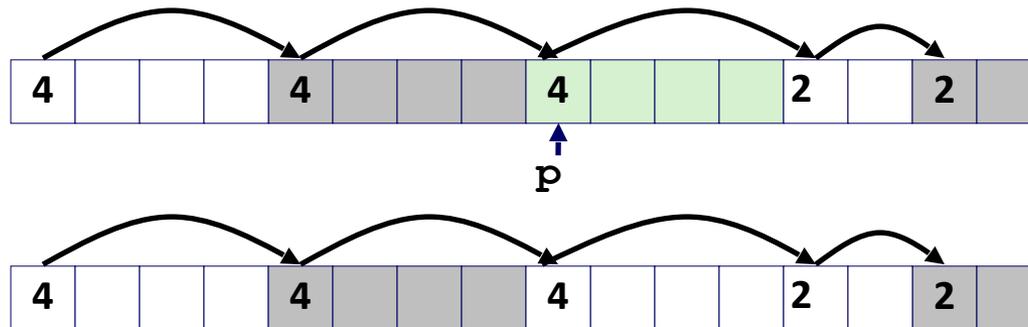
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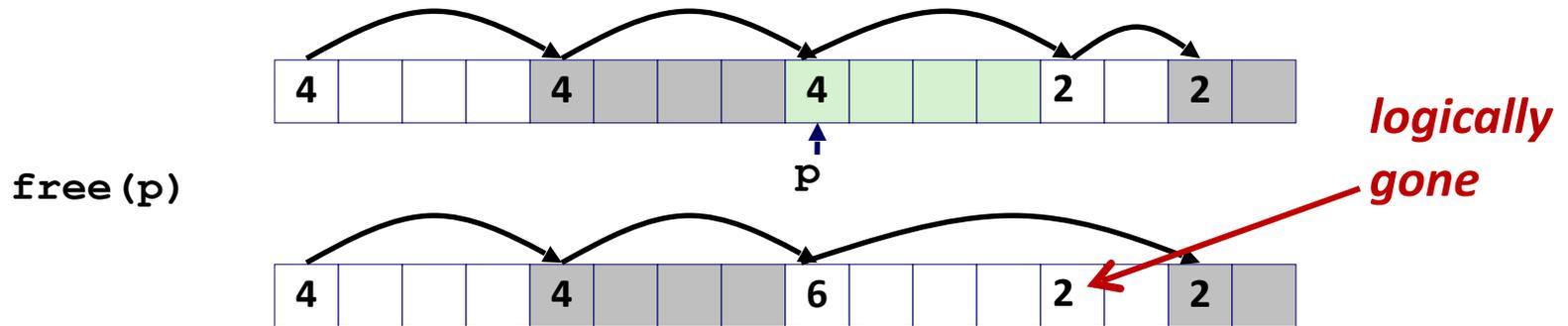


malloc(5) **Oops!**

***There is enough free space, but the allocator won't be able to find it***

# Coalescing

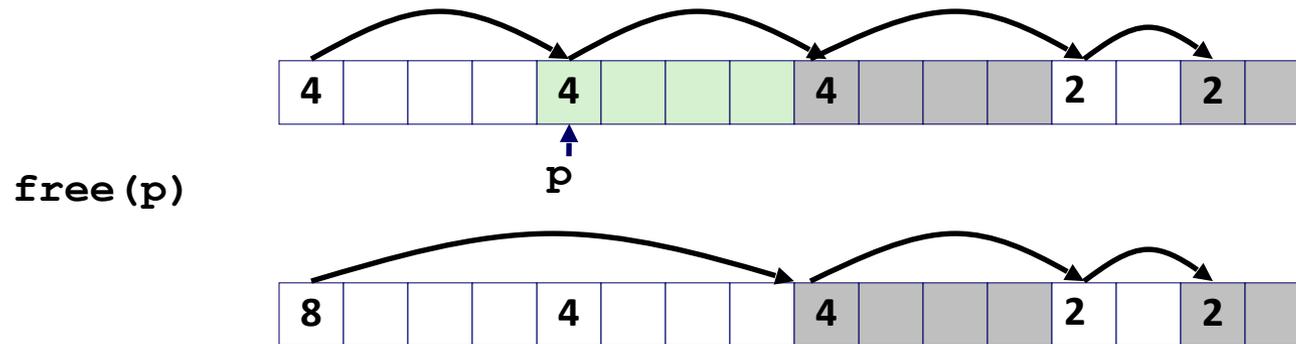
- Join (*coalesce*) with next/previous blocks, if they are free
  - Coalescing with next block



```
void free_block(ptr p) {  
    *p = *p & -2;           // clear allocated flag  
    next = p + *p;         // find next block  
    if ((*next & 1) == 0)  
        *p = *p + *next;   // add to this block if  
                            // not allocated  
}
```

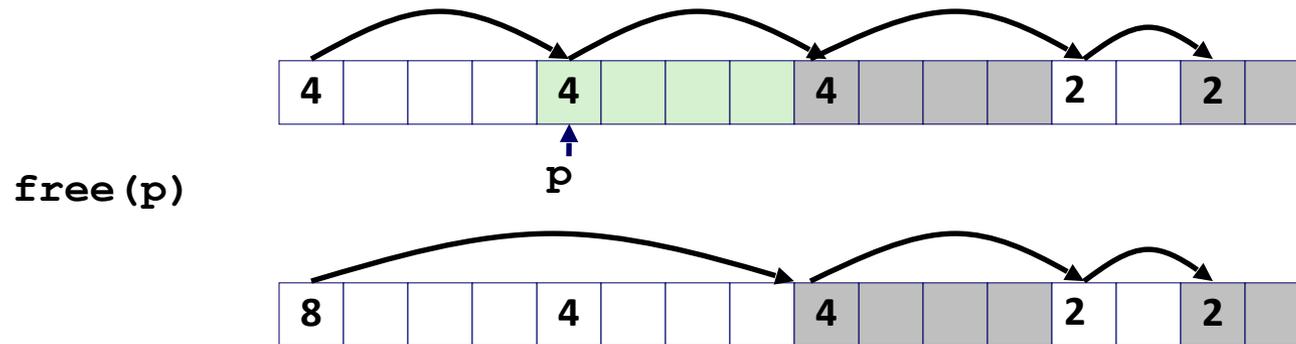
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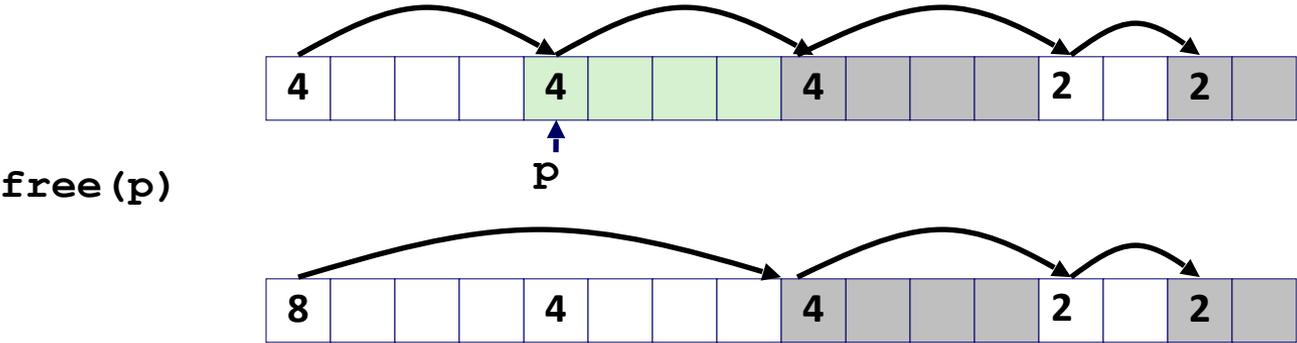
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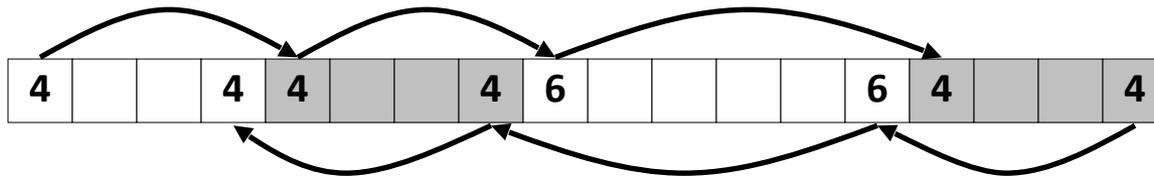
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  - Linear time solution: scans from beginning



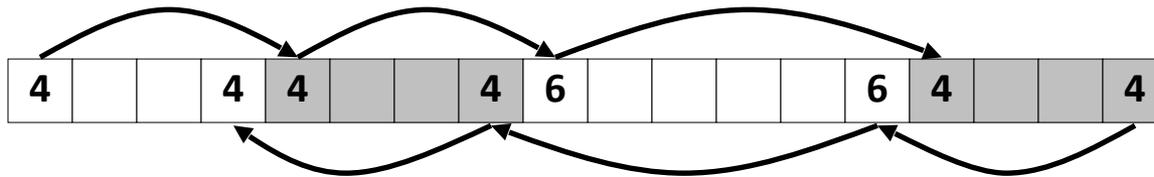
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- *Boundary tags* [Knuth73]
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  - Important and general technique!

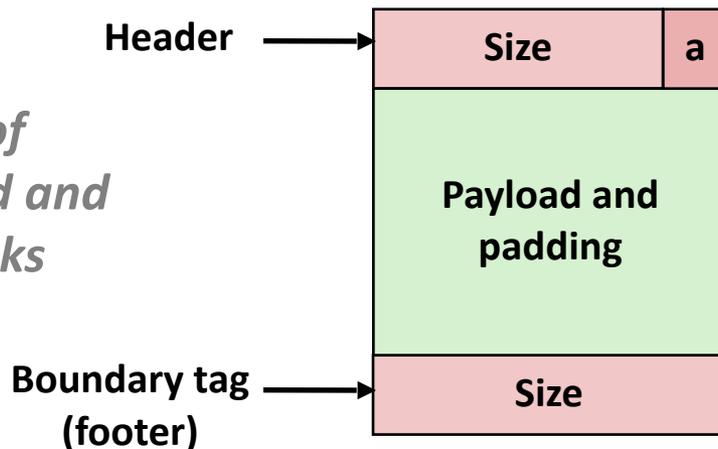


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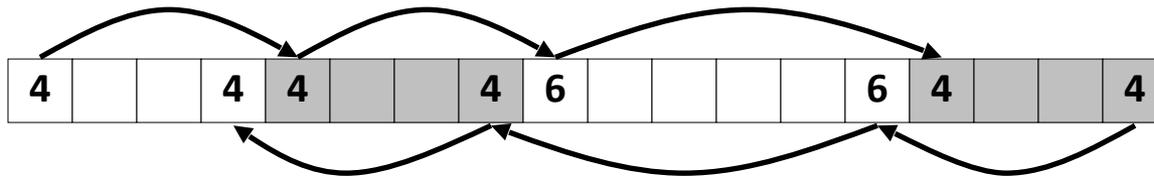
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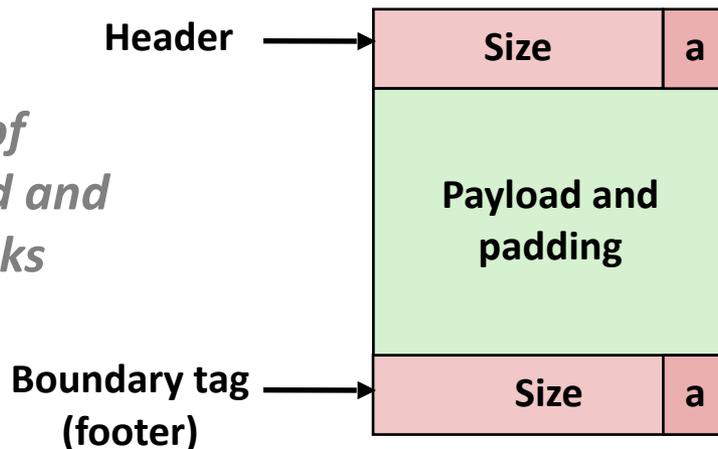
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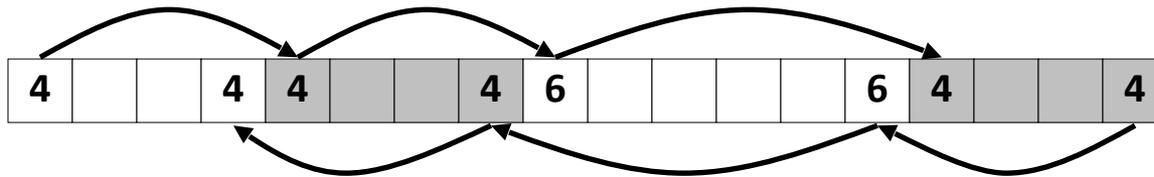
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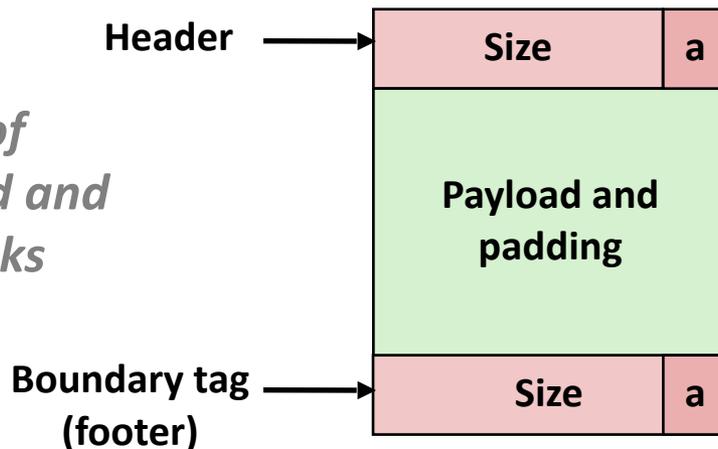
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- **Disadvantages?** (Think of small blocks...)



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- **Coalescing policy:**
  - **Immediate coalescing:** coalesce each time `free` is called
  - **Deferred coalescing:** try to improve performance of `free` by deferring coalescing until needed. Examples:
    - Coalesce as you scan the free list for `malloc`
    - Coalesce when the amount of external fragmentation reaches some threshold

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- However, the concepts of splitting and boundary tag coalescing are general to **all** allocators