Storing Data: Disks and Files

Chapter 7

"Yes, I am the table of my memory. I'll wipe away all frivolous records." — Shakespeare, Hamlet

Disks and Files

- DBMS stores information on ("hard") disks.
- This has major implications for DBMS design:
  - READ: transfer data from disk to main memory (RAM).
  - WRITE: transfer data from RAM to disk.
- Both are high-cost operations, relative to in-memory operations, so must be planned carefully!

Why Not Store Everything in Main Memory?

- Costs too much. $1000 will buy you either 128MB of RAM or 7.5GB of disk today.
- Main memory is volatile. We want data to be saved between runs. (Obviously!)
- Typical storage hierarchy:
  - Main memory (RAM) for currently used data.
  - Disk for the main database (secondary storage).
  - Tapes for archiving older versions of the data (tertiary storage).

Disks

- Secondary storage device of choice.
- Main advantage over tapes: random access vs. sequential.
- Data is stored and retrieved in units called disk blocks or pages.
- Unlike RAM, time to retrieve a disk page varies depending upon location on disk.
- Therefore, relative placement of pages on disk has major impact on DBMS performance!

Components of a Disk

- The platters spin (say, 9000rpm).
- The arm assembly is moved in or out to position a head on a desired track.
- Tracks under heads make a cylinder (imaginary).
- Only one head reads/writes at any one time.
- Block size is a multiple of 512 or 4096 (which is fixed).

Accessing a Disk Page

- Time to access (read/write) a disk block:
  - seek time (moving arm to position disk head on track)
  - rotational delay (waiting for block to rotate under head)
  - transfer time (actually moving data to/from disk surface)
- Seek time and rotational delay dominate.
  - Seek time varies from about 1 to 20msec
  - Rotational delay varies from 0 to 10msec
  - Transfer rate is about 1mb per 4KB page
- Key to lower I/O cost: reduce seek/rotation delays! Hardware vs. software are solutions?
Arranging Pages on Disk

- 'Next' block concept:
  - blocks on same track, followed by
  - blocks on same cylinder, followed by
  - blocks on adjacent cylinder
- Blocks in a file should be arranged sequentially on disk (by 'next'), to minimize seek and rotational delay.
- For a sequential scan, pre-fetching several pages at a time is a big win!

RAID

- Disk Array: Arrangement of several disks that gives abstraction of a single, large disk.
- Goals: Increase performance and reliability.
- Two main techniques:
  - Data striping: Data is partitioned; size of a partition is called the striping unit. Partitions are distributed over several disks.
  - Redundancy: More disks > more failures. Redundant information allows reconstruction of data if a disk fails.

RAID Levels

- Level 0: No redundancy
- Level 1: Mirrored (two identical copies)
  - Each disk has a mirror image (check disk)
  - Parallel reads, a write involves two disks.
  - Maximum transfer rate = transfer rate of one disk
- Level 0+1: Stripping and Mirroring
  - Parallel reads, a write involves two disks.
  - Maximum transfer rate = aggregate bandwidth

RAID Levels (Contd.)

- Level 3: Bit-Interleaved Parity
  - Stripping Unit: One bit. One check disk.
  - Each read and write request involves all disks; disk array can process one request at a time.
- Level 4: Block-Interleaved Parity
  - Stripping Unit: One disk block. One check disk.
  - Parallel reads possible for small requests; large requests can utilize full bandwidth
  - Writes involve modified block and check disk
- Level 5: Block-Interleaved Distributed Parity
  - Similar to RAID Level 4, but parity blocks are distributed over all disks

Disk Space Management

- Lowest layer of DBMS software manages space on disk.
- Higher levels call upon this layer to:
  - allocate/de-allocate a page
  - read/write a page
- Request for a sequence of pages must be satisfied by allocating the pages sequentially on disk! Higher levels don’t need to know how this is done, or how free space is managed.

Buffer Management in a DBMS

- Page management scheme
- Disk and main memory
- Main memory
- Disk
- Buffer pool
- Buffer requests from higher levels
- Data must be in RAM for DBMS to operate on it
- Table of <frame, page> pairs is maintained.
When a Page is Requested ...

- If requested page is not in pool:
  - Choose a frame for replacement
  - If frame is dirty, write it to disk
  - Read requested page into chosen frame
- Pin the page and return its address.
- If requests can be predicted (e.g., sequential scans) pages can be pre-fetched several pages at a time!

More on Buffer Management

- Requestor of page must unpin it, and indicate whether page has been modified:
  - dirty bit is used for this.
- Page in pool may be requested many times,
  - a pin count is used. A page is a candidate for replacement if pin count = 0.
- CC & recovery may entail additional I/O when a frame is chosen for replacement.
  (Write-Ahead Log protocol; more later.)

Buffer Replacement Policy

- Frame is chosen for replacement by a replacement policy:
  - Least-recently-used (LRU), Clock, MRU etc.
- Policy can have big impact on # of I/O's; depends on the access pattern.
- Sequential footing: Nasty situation caused by LRU + repeated sequential scans.
  - # buffer frames < # pages in file means each page request causes an I/O. MRU much better in this situation (but not in all situations, of course).

DBMS vs. OS File System

- OS does disk space & buffer mgmt: why not let OS manage these tasks?
- Differences in OS support: portability issues
- Some limitations, e.g., files can't span disks.
- Buffer management in DBMS requires ability to:
  - pin a page in buffer pool, force a page to disk (important for implementing CC & recovery),
  - adjust replacement policy, and pre-fetch pages based on access patterns in typical DB operations.

Record Formats: Fixed Length

- Information about field types same for all records in a file; stored in system catalogs.
- Finding i'th field requires scan of record.

Record Formats: Variable Length

- Two alternative formats (# fields is fixed):
  - First format: no delimiters
  - Second format: fields delimited by special symbols

Field / Count

Fields Delimited by Special Symbols

A way of Field Offsets

- Second offers direct access to i'th field, efficient storage of nulls (special don't know value); small directory overhead.
Files of Records

- Page or block is OK when doing I/O, but higher levels of DBMS operate on records, and files of records.
- FILE: A collection of pages, each containing a collection of records. Must support:
  - insert/delete/modify record
  - read a particular record (specified using record id)
  - scan all records (possibly with some conditions on the records to be retrieved)

Unordered (Heap) Files

- Simplest file structure contains records in no particular order.
- As file grows and shrinks, disk pages are allocated and de-allocated.
- To support record level operations, we must:
  - keep track of the pages in a file
  - keep track of free space on pages
  - keep track of the records on a page
- There are many alternatives for keeping track of this.

Heap File Implemented as a List

- The header page id and Heap file name must be stored somewhere.
- Each page contains 2 pointers plus data.

Heap File Using a Page Directory

- The entry for a page can include the number of free bytes on the page.
- The directory is a collection of pages; linked list implementation is just one alternative.
  - Much smaller than linked list of all HF pages!
Indexes

- A Heap file allows us to retrieve records:
  - by specifying the \( \text{rid,cr} \)
  - by scanning all records sequentially
- Sometimes, we want to retrieve records by specifying the \text{values in one or more fields}, e.g.,
  - Find all students in the “CS” department
  - Find all students with a \text{gpa} > 3
- \text{Indexes} are file structures that enable us to answer such value-based queries efficiently.

System Catalogs

- For each index:
  - \text{structure} (e.g., B+ tree) and search key fields
- For each relation:
  - \text{name, file_name, file_structure} (e.g., Heap file)
  - \text{attribute name and type}, for each attribute
  - \text{index name}, for each index
  - \text{integrity constraints}
- For each view:
  - \text{view name and definition}
- Plus \text{statistics, authorization, buffer pool}, etc.
  - *Catalogs are themselves stored as relations!*

Summary

- Disks provide cheap, non-volatile storage.
  - Random access, but cost depends on location of page on disk; important to arrange data sequentially to minimize \text{seek and rotation} delays.
- Buffer manager brings pages into \text{RAM}.
  - \text{Pages} stay in \text{RAM} until released by requestor.
  - Written to disk when frame chosen for replacement (which is sometime after requestor releases the page).
  - Choice of frame to replace based on \text{replacement policy}.
  - Tries to \text{pre-fetch} several pages at a time.

Summary (Contd.)

- \text{DBMS vs. OS File Support}
  - DBMS needs features not found in many OS's, e.g., forcing a page to disk, controlling the order of pages writes to disk, files spanning disks, ability to control pre-fetching and page replacement policy based on predictable access patterns, etc.
- Variable length record format with field offset directory offers support for direct access to \( i \text{th field and null values} \).
- Slotted page format supports variable length records and allows records to move on page.

Summary (Contd.)

- File layer keeps track of pages in a file and supports abstraction of a collection of records.
  - Pages with free space identified using linked list or directory structure (similar to how pages in file are kept track of).
- Indexes support efficient retrieval of records based on the values in some fields.
- Catalog relations store information about relations, indexes, and views. *(Information that is common to all records in a given collection.)*