Transactions

- A transaction is a sequence of database operations with the following properties (ACID):
  - Atomic: Operations of a transaction are executed all-or-nothing, and are never left “half-done”
  - Consistency: Assume all database constraints are satisfied at the start of a transaction, they should remain satisfied at the end of the transaction
  - Isolation: Transactions must behave as if they were executed in complete isolation from each other
  - Durability: If the DBMS crashes after a transaction commits, all effects of the transaction must remain in the database when DBMS comes back up

SQL transactions

- A transaction is automatically started when a user executes an SQL statement
- Subsequent statements in the same session are executed as part of this transaction
  - Statements see changes made by earlier ones in the same transaction
  - Statements in other concurrently running transactions do not see these changes
- COMMIT command commits the transaction
  - Its effects are made final and visible to subsequent transactions
- ROLLBACK command aborts the transaction
  - Its effects are undone

Fine prints

- Schema operations (e.g., CREATE TABLE) implicitly commit the current transaction
  - Because it is often difficult to undo a schema operation
- Many DBMS support an AUTOCOMMIT feature, which automatically commits every single statement
  - For DB2:
    - db2 command-line processor turns it on by default
    - You can turn it off with option +C
  - More examples to come when we cover database API’s

Atomicity

- Partial effects of a transaction must be undone when
  - User explicitly aborts the transaction using ROLLBACK
    - E.g., application asks for user confirmation in the last step and issues COMMIT or ROLLBACK depending on the response
  - The DBMS crashes before a transaction commits
- Partial effects of a modification statement must be undone when any constraint is violated
  - However, only this statement is rolled back; the transaction continues
- How is atomicity achieved?
  - Logging (to support undo)
Durability
- Effects of committed transactions must survive DBMS crashes
- How is durability achieved?
  - Forcing all changes to disk at the end of every transaction?
    - Too expensive: DBMS manipulates data in memory
  - Logging (to support redo)

Consistency
- Consistency of the database is guaranteed by constraints and triggers declared in the database and/or transactions themselves
  - Whenever inconsistency arises, abort the statement or transaction, or (with deferred constraint checking or application-enforced constraints) fix the inconsistency within the transaction

Isolation
- Transactions must appear to be executed in a serial schedule (with no interleaving operations)
- For performance, DBMS executes transactions using a serializable schedule
  - In this schedule, operations from different transactions can interleave and execute concurrently
  - But the schedule is guaranteed to produce the same effects as a serial schedule
- How is isolation achieved?
  - Locking, multi-version concurrency control, etc.

SQL isolation levels
- Strongest isolation level: SERIALIZABLE
  - Complete isolation
  - SQL default
- Weaker isolation levels: REPEATABLE READ, READ COMMITTED, READ UNCOMMITTED
  - Increase performance by eliminating overhead and allowing higher degrees of concurrency
  - Trade-off: sometimes you get the “wrong” answer

READ UNCOMMITTED
- Can read “dirty” data
  - A data item is dirty if it is written by an uncommitted transaction
- Problem: What if the transaction that wrote the dirty data eventually aborts?
- Example: wrong average
  - -- T1:
    UPDATE Student
    SET GPA = 3.0
    WHERE SID = 142;
    ROLLBACK;
  - -- T2:
    SELECT AVG(GPA)
    FROM Student;
- Example: different averages
  - -- T1:
    UPDATE Student
    SET GPA = 3.0
    WHERE SID = 142;
    COMMIT;
  - -- T2:
    SELECT AVG(GPA)
    FROM Student;

READ COMMITTED
- No dirty reads, but non-repeatable reads possible
  - Reading the same data item twice can produce different results
- Example: different averages
  - -- T1:
    UPDATE Student
    SET GPA = 3.0
    WHERE SID = 142;
    COMMIT;
  - -- T2:
    SELECT AVG(GPA)
    FROM Student;
REPEATABLE READ

* Reads are repeatable, but may see phantoms
* Example: different average (still!)

- T1:
  - T2:
    SELECT AVG(GPA)
    FROM Student;

INSERT INTO Student
VALUES(789, 'Nelson', 10, 1.0);
COMMIT;

SELECT AVG(GPA)
FROM Student;
COMMIT;

Summary of SQL isolation levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isolation level/ anomaly</th>
<th>Dirty reads</th>
<th>Non-repeatable reads</th>
<th>Phantoms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>READ UNCOMMITTED</td>
<td>Possible</td>
<td>Possible</td>
<td>Possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>READ COMMITTED</td>
<td>Impossible</td>
<td>Possible</td>
<td>Possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REPEATABLE READ</td>
<td>Impossible</td>
<td>Impossible</td>
<td>Possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERIALIZABLE</td>
<td>Impossible</td>
<td>Impossible</td>
<td>Impossible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Syntax: At the beginning of a transaction, SET TRANSACTION ISOLATION LEVEL isolation_level {READ ONLY|READ WRITE};
  - READ UNCOMMITTED can only be READ ONLY