SQL: Transactions

CompSci 316
Introduction to Database Systems

Announcements (Tue. Oct. 8)

- Homework #1 grading finished
- Sample solutions to Homework #2 and 2012 midterm posted on Sakai
- Midterm in class this Thursday
  - Open-book, open-notes
  - Covers materials all the way to today’s lecture
- Project milestone #1 due next Thursday

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
- 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
  - You can turn it on/off through the API (e.g., JDBC)
    - Examples later in this lecture
  - For PostgreSQL:
    - `psql` command-line processor turns it on by default
    - You can turn it off at the `psql` prompt by typing:
      `\set AUTOCOMMIT 'off'`

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?

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: -- T2:
    ```sql
    UPDATE Student
    SET GPA = 3.0
    WHERE SID = 142;
    SELECT AVG(GPA)
    FROM Student;
    ROLLBACK;
    COMMIT;
    ```

READ COMMITTED

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

- Reads are repeatable, but may see phantoms
- Example: different average (still!)
  
  ```sql
  -- T1:  -- T2:
  INSERT INTO Student
  VALUES(789, 'Nelson', 10, 1.0);
  COMMIT;

  SELECT AVG(GPA)
  FROM Student;

  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,
  ```sql
  SET TRANSACTION ISOLATION LEVEL
  isolation_level [READ ONLY | READ WRITE];
  ```
- READ UNCOMMITTED can only be READ ONLY

Transactions in programming (JDBC)

- Set isolation level for the current transaction
  ```java
  con.setTransactionIsolationLevel(isolation_level);
  ```
  Where `isolation_level` is one of `TRANSACTION_SERIALIZABLE` (default), `TRANSACTION_REPEATABLE_READ`, `TRANSACTION_READ_COMMITTED`, and `TRANSACTION_READ_UNCOMMITTED`

- Set the transaction to be read-only or read/write (default)
  ```java
  con.setReadOnly(true | false);
  ```

- Turn on/off `AUTOCOMMIT` (commits every single statement)
  ```java
  con.setAutoCommit(true | false);
  ```

- Commit/rollback the current transaction (when `AUTOCOMMIT` is off)
  ```java
  con.commit();
  con.rollback();
  ```
ANSI isolation levels are lock-based

- **READ UNCOMMITTED**
  - Short-duration locks: lock, access, release immediately

- **READ COMMITTED**
  - Long-duration write lock: do not release write locks until commit

- **REPEATABLE READ**
  - Long-duration locks on all data items accessed

- **SERIALIZABLE**
  - Lock ranges to prevent insertion as well

An isolation level not based on locks

Snapshot isolation in Oracle

- Based on multiversion concurrency control
  - Used in Oracle, PostgreSQL, MS SQL Server, etc.

- How it works
  - Transaction $X$ performs its operations on a private snapshot of the database taken at the start of $X$
  - $X$ can commit only if it does not write any data that has been also written by a transaction committed after the start of $X$

- Avoids all ANSI anomalies

- But is NOT equivalent to **SERIALIZABLE** because of write skew anomaly

Write skew example

- Constraint: combined balance $A + B \geq 0$
- $A = 100, B = 100$
- $T_1$ checks $A + B - 200 \geq 0$, and then proceeds to withdraw 200 from $A$
- $T_2$ checks $A + B - 200 \geq 0$, and then proceeds to withdraw 200 from $B$
- Possible under snapshot isolation because the writes (to $A$ and to $B$) do not conflict
- But $A + B = -200 < 0$ afterwards!
Bottom line

- Group reads and dependant writes into a transaction in your applications
  - E.g., enrolling a class, booking a ticket

- Anything less than SERIALABLE is potentially very dangerous
  - Use only when performance is critical
  - READ ONLY makes weaker isolation levels a bit safer