A Reference Model for Real-Time Systems

Real-Time and Embedded Systems (M)

Lecture 2



Lecture Outline

- Why a reference model?
- Jobs and tasks
- Processors and resources
- Time and timing constraints
  - Hard real-time
  - Soft real-time
- Periodic, aperiodic and sporadic tasks
- Precedence constraints and dependencies
- Scheduling

Material corresponds to chapters 2 and 3 of Liu's book

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A Reference Model of Real-Time Systems

- Want to develop a model to let us reason about real-time systems
  - Consistent terminology
  - Lets us to focus on the important aspects of a system while ignoring the irrelevant properties and details
- Our reference model is characterized by:
  - A workload model that describes the applications supported by the system
  - A resource model that describes the system resources available to the applications
  - Algorithms that define how the application system uses the resources at all times

- Today: focus on the first two elements of the reference model
  - The remainder of the module will study the algorithms, using the definitions from this lecture

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Jobs and Tasks

- A *job* is a unit of work that is scheduled and executed by a system
  - e.g. computation of a control-law, computation of an FFT on sensor data, transmission of a data packet, retrieval of a file

- A *task* is a set of related jobs which jointly provide some function
  - e.g. the set of jobs that constitute the “maintain constant altitude” task, keeping an airplane flying at a constant altitude

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Processors and Resources

- A job executes – or is executed by the operating system – on a *processor* and may depend on some *resources*
- A processor, *P*, is an active component on which jobs scheduled
  - Examples:
    - Threads scheduled on a *CPU*
    - Data scheduled on a *transmission link*
    - Read/write requests scheduled to a *disk*
    - Transactions scheduled on a *database server*
  - Each processor has a *speed* attribute which determines the rate of progress a job makes toward completion
    - May represent instructions-per-second for a CPU, bandwidth of a network, etc.
  - Two processors are of the same *type* if they are functionally identical and can be used interchangeably
- A resource, *R*, is a passive entity upon which jobs may depend
  - E.g. memory, sequence numbers, mutexes, database locks, etc.
  - Resources have different *types* and *sizes*, but do not have a *speed* attribute
  - Resources are usually *reusable*, and are not consumed by use

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Use of Resources

- If the system contains ρ ("rho") types of resource, this means:
  - There are ρ different types of *serially reusable* resources
  - There are one or more units of each type of resource, only one job can use each unit at once (mutually exclusive access)
  - A job must obtain a unit of a needed resource, use it, then release it

- A resource is *plentiful* if no job is ever prevented from executing by the unavailability of units of the resource
  - Jobs never block when attempting to obtain a unit of a plentiful resource
  - We typically omit such resources from our discussion, since they don't impact performance or correctness

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Execution Time

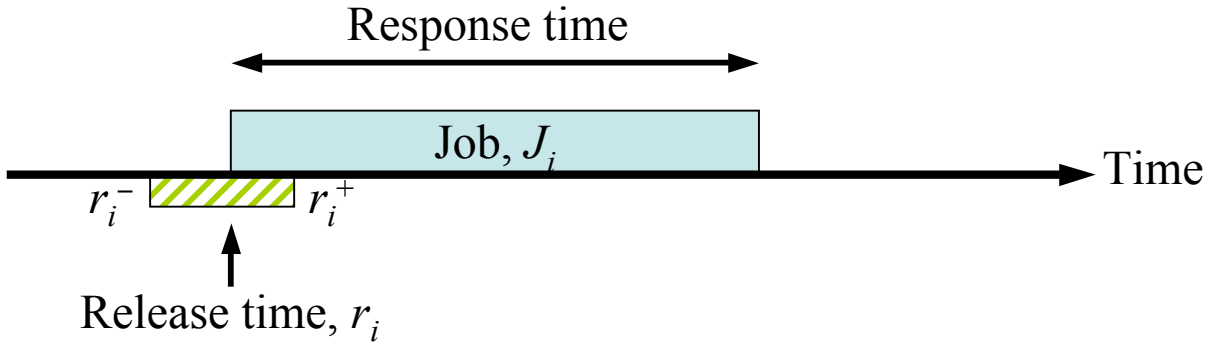
- A job J_i will execute for time e_i
  - This is the amount of time required to complete the execution of J_i when it executes alone and has all the resources it needs
  - Value of e_i depends upon complexity of the job and speed of the processor on which it is scheduled; may change for a variety of reasons:
    - Conditional branches
    - Cache memories and/or pipelines
    - Compression (e.g. MPEG video frames)
  - Execution times fall into an interval $[e_i^-, e_i^+]$; assume that we know this interval for every hard real-time job, but not necessarily the actual e_i
    - Terminology: $(x, y]$ is an interval starting immediately after x, continuing up to and including y

- Often, we can validate a system using e_i^+ for each job; we assume $e_i = e_i^+$ and ignore the interval lower bound
  - Inefficient, but safe bound on execution time

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Release and Response Time

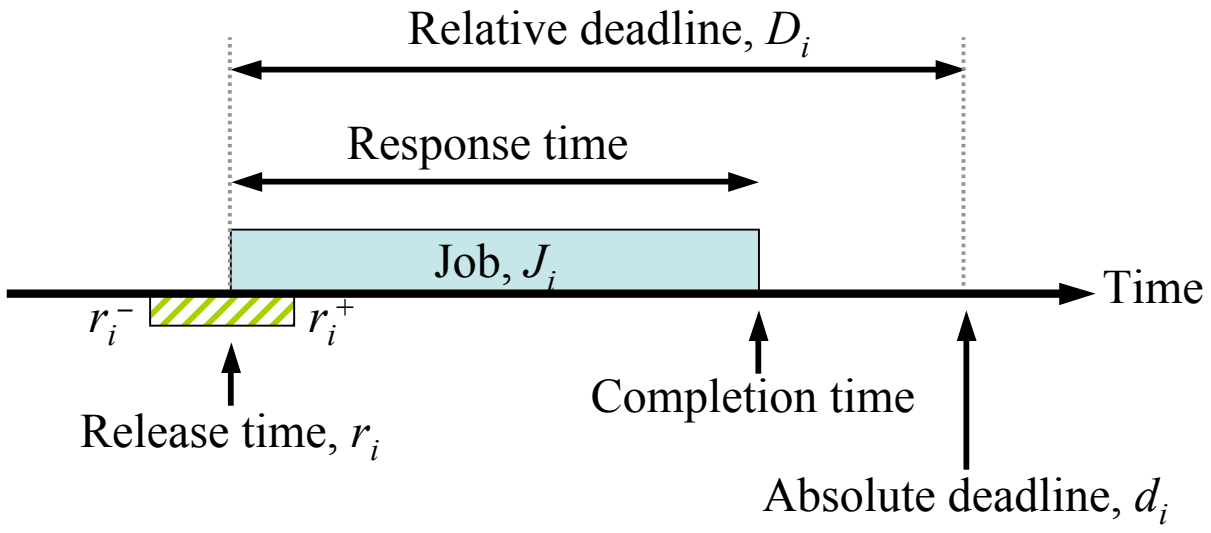
- *Release time* – the instant in time when a job becomes available for execution
  - May not be exact: *Release time jitter* so r_i is in the interval $[r_i^-, r_i^+]$
  - A job can be scheduled and executed at any time at, or after, its release time, provided its resource dependency conditions are met
- *Response time* – the length of time from the release time of the job to the time instant when it completes
  - Not the same as execution time, since may not execute continually



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Deadlines and Timing Constraints

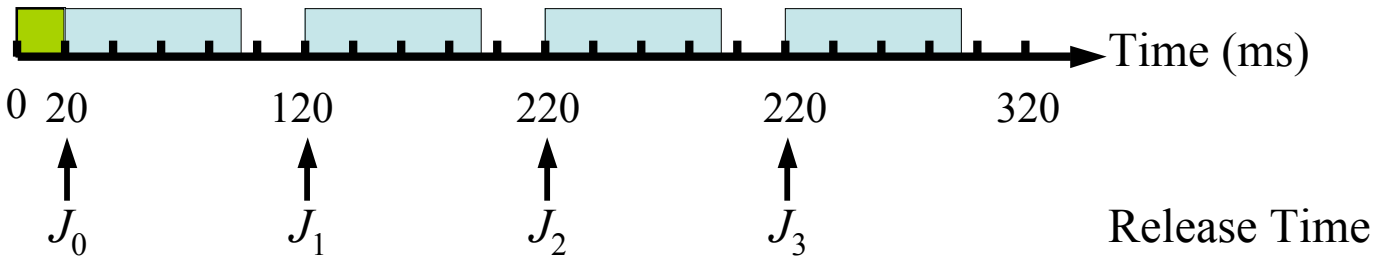
- *Completion time* – the instant at which a job completes execution
- *Relative deadline* – the maximum allowable job response time
- *Absolute deadline* – the instant of time by which a job is required to be completed (often called simply the *deadline*)
  - *absolute deadline = release time + relative deadline*
  - *Feasible interval* for a job J_i is the interval $(r_i, d_i]$
- Deadlines are examples of *timing constraints*



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Example

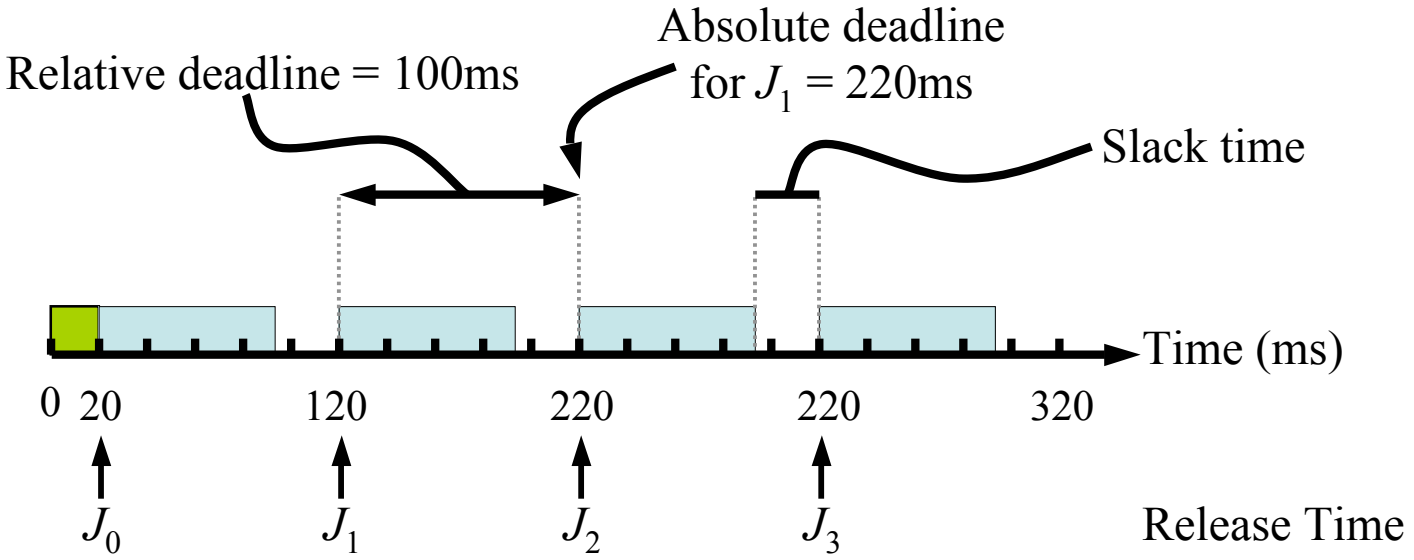
- A system to monitor and control a heating furnace
- The system takes 20ms to initialize when turned on
- After initialization, every 100 ms, the system:
  - Samples and reads the temperature sensor
  - Computes the control-law for the furnace to process temperature readings, determine the correct flow rates of fuel, air and coolant
  - Adjusts flow rates to match computed values
- The periodic computations can be stated in terms of release times of the jobs computing the control-law: $J_0, J_1, \ldots, J_k, \ldots$
  - The release time of J_k is $20 + (k \times 100)$ ms



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Example

- Suppose each job must complete before the release of the next job:
  - J_k's relative deadline is 100 ms
  - J_k's absolute deadline is $20 + ((k + 1) \times 100)$ ms
- Alternatively, each control-law computation may be required to finish sooner – i.e. the relative deadline is smaller than the time between jobs, allowing some *slack time* for other jobs



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Hard vs. Soft Real-Time Systems

- The firmness of timing constraints affects how we reason about, and engineer, the system

- If a job must never miss its deadline, then the system is described as *hard real-time*
  - A timing constraint is hard if the failure to meet it is considered a fatal error; this definition is based upon the functional criticality of a job
  - A timing constraint is hard if the usefulness of the results falls off abruptly (or may even go negative) at the deadline
  - A timing constraint is hard if the user requires *validation* (formal proof or exhaustive simulation) that the system always meets its timing constraint

- If some deadlines can be missed occasionally, with acceptably low probability, then the system is described as *soft real-time*
  - This is a *statistical constraint*

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Hard vs. Soft Real-Time Systems

- Note: there may be no advantage in completing a job early
  - It is often better to keep *jitter* (variation in timing) in the response times of a stream of jobs small

- Timing constraints can be expressed in many ways:
  - Deterministic
    - e.g. the relative deadline of every control-law computation is 50 ms; the response time of at most 1 out of 5 consecutive control-law computations exceeds 50ms
  - Probabilistic
    - e.g. the probability of the response time exceeding 50 ms is less than 0.2
  - In terms of some usefulness function
    - e.g. the usefulness of every control-law computation is at least 0.8

  [In practice, usually *deterministic* constraints, since easy to validate]

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Examples: Hard & Soft Real-Time Systems

- Hard real-time:
  - Flight control
  - Railway signalling
  - Anti-lock brakes
  - Etc.

- Soft real-time:
  - Stock trading system
  - DVD player
  - Mobile phone
  - Etc.

Can you think of more examples?

Is the distinction always clear cut?

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Types of Task

- There are various types of task
  - Periodic
  - Aperiodic
  - Sporadic

- Different execution time patterns for the jobs in the task
- Must be modelled differently
  - Differing scheduling algorithms
  - Differing impact on system performance
  - Differing constraints on scheduling

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Modelling Periodic Tasks

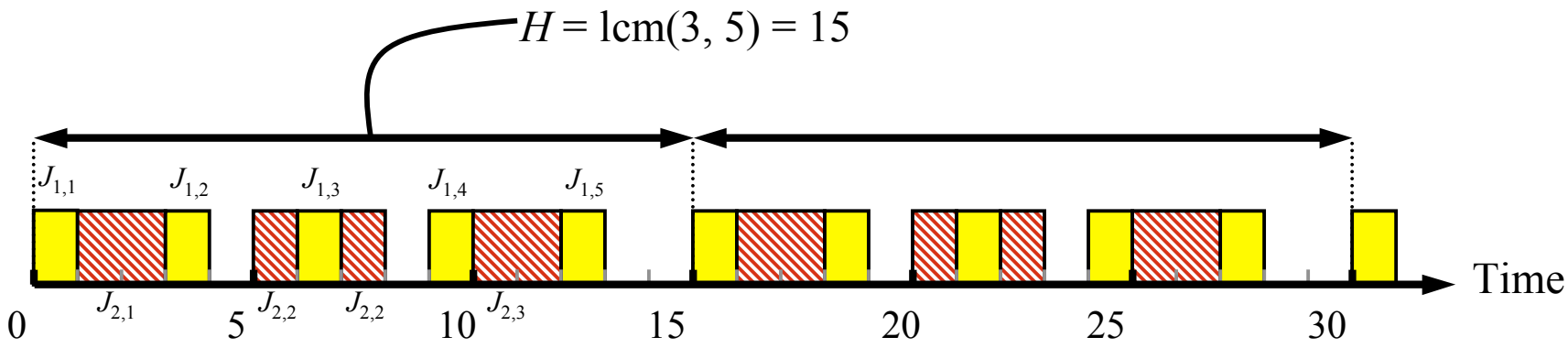
- A set of jobs that are executed repeatedly at regular time intervals can be modelled as a *periodic task*

- Each periodic task T_i is a sequence of jobs $J_{i,1}, J_{i,2}, \ldots, J_{i,n}$
  - The *phase* of a task T_i is the release time $r_{i,1}$ of the first job $J_{i,1}$ in the task. It is denoted by φ_i ("phi")
  - The *period* p_i of a task T_i is the minimum length of all time intervals between release times of consecutive jobs
  - The execution time e_i of a task T_i is the maximum execution time of all jobs in the periodic task
  - The period and execution time of every periodic task in the system are known with reasonable accuracy at all times

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Modelling Periodic Tasks

- The *hyper-period* of a set of periodic tasks is the least common multiple of their periods: $H = \text{lcm}(p_i)$ for i = 1, 2, …, n
  - Time after which the pattern of job release/execution times starts to repeat, limiting analysis needed
- Example:
  - $T_1 : p_1 = 3, e_1 = 1$
  - $T_2 : p_2 = 5, e_2 = 2$



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Modelling Periodic Tasks

- The ratio $u_i = e_i/p_i$ is the *utilization* of task T_i
  - The fraction of time a periodic task with period p_i and execution time e_i keeps a processor busy
- The *total utilization* of a system is the sum of the utilizations of all tasks in a system: $U = \sum u_i$
- We will usually assume the relative deadline for the jobs in a task is equal to the period of the task
  - It can sometimes be shorter than the period, to allow slack time

$\Rightarrow$ Many useful, real-world, systems fit this model; and it is easy to reason about such periodic tasks

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Responding to External Events

- Many real-time systems are required to respond to external events
- The jobs resulting from such events are *sporadic* or *aperiodic* jobs
  - A sporadic job has a hard deadlines
  - An aperiodic job has either a soft deadline or no deadline
- The release time for sporadic or aperiodic jobs can be modelled as a random variable with some probability distribution, $A(x)$
  - $A(x)$ gives the probability that the release time of the job is not later than x
- Alternatively, if discussing a stream of similar sporadic/aperiodic jobs, $A(x)$ can be viewed as the probability distribution of their inter-release times

[Note: sometimes the terms *arrival time* (or *inter-arrival time*) are used instead of release time, due to their common use in queuing theory]

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Modelling Sporadic and Aperiodic Tasks

- A set of jobs that execute at irregular time intervals comprise a sporadic or aperiodic task
  - Each sporadic/aperiodic task is a stream of sporadic/aperiodic jobs
- The inter-arrival times between consecutive jobs in such a task may vary widely according to probability distribution $A(x)$ and can be arbitrarily small
- Similarly, the execution times of jobs are identically distributed random variables with some probability distribution $B(x)$

$\Rightarrow$ Sporadic and aperiodic tasks occur in some real-time systems, and greatly complicate modelling and reasoning

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Precedence Constraints and Dependencies

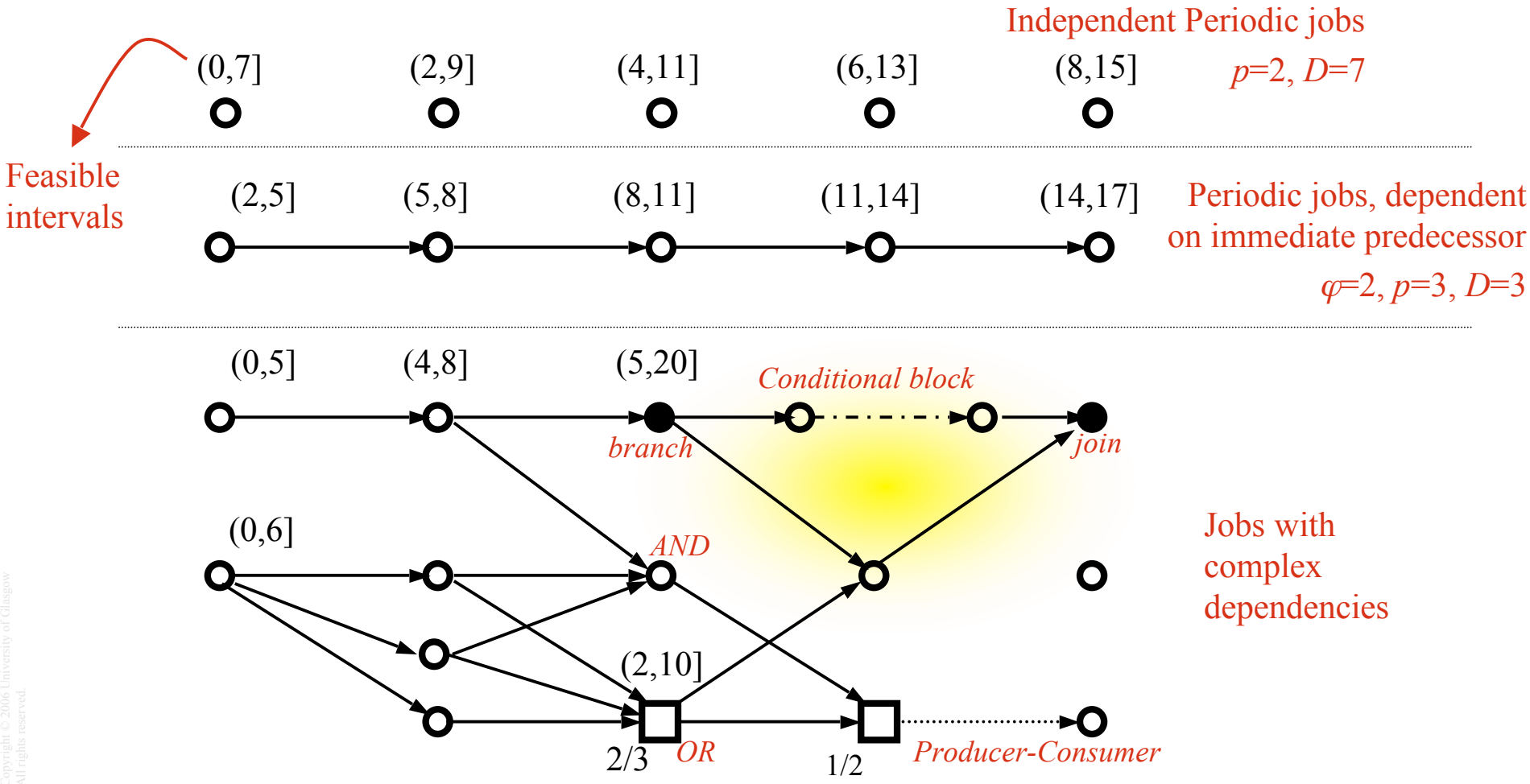
- The jobs in a task, whether periodic, aperiodic or sporadic, may be constrained to execute in a particular order
  - This is known as a *precedence constraint*
  - A job J_i is a *predecessor* of another job J_k (and J_k a *successor* of J_i) if J_k cannot begin execution until the execution of J_i completes
    - Denote this by saying $J_i < J_k$
  - J_i is an *immediate predecessor* of J_k if $J_i < J_k$ and there is no other job J_j such that $J_i < J_j < J_k$
  - J_i and J_k are *independent* when neither $J_i < J_k$ nor $J_k < J_i$

- A job with a precedence constraint becomes ready for execution once when its release time has passed and when all predecessors have completed

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Task Graphs

- Can represent the precedence constraints among jobs in a set J using a directed graph $G = (J, <)$; each node represents a job represented; a directed edge goes from J_i to J_k if J_i is an immediate predecessor of J_k



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Task Graphs: Dependencies & Constraints

- Normally a job must wait for the completion of all immediate predecessors; an *AND* constraint
  - Unfilled circle in the task graph
- An *OR* constraint indicates that a job may begin after its release time if only some of the immediate predecessors have completed
  - Unfilled squares in the task graph
- Represent conditional branches and joins by filled in circles
- Represent a pair of producer/consumer jobs with a dotted edge

- Use to visualise structure of real time systems

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Functional Parameters

- Jobs may have priority, and in some cases may be interrupted by a higher priority job
  - A job is *preemptable* if its execution can be interrupted in this manner
  - A job is *non-preemptable* if it must run to completion once started
    - Many preemptable jobs have periods during which they cannot be preempted; for example when accessing certain resources
  - The ability to preempt a job (or not) impacts the scheduling algorithm
  - The *context switch time* is the time taken to switch between jobs
    - Forms an overhead that must be accounted for when scheduling jobs

- Response to missing a deadline can vary
  - Some jobs have optional parts, that can be omitted to save time (at the expense of a poorer quality result)
  - Usefulness of late results varies; some applications tolerate some delay, others do not

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Scheduling

- Jobs scheduled and allocated resources according to a chosen set of scheduling algorithms and resource access-control protocols
  - Scheduler implements these algorithms
- A scheduler specifically assigns jobs to processors
- A schedule is an assignment of all jobs in the system on the available processors.
- A *valid schedule* satisfies the following conditions:
  - Every processor is assigned to at most one job at any time
  - Every job is assigned at most one processor at any time
  - No job is scheduled before its release time
  - The total amount of processor time assigned to every job is equal to its maximum or actual execution time
  - All the precedence and resource usage constraints are satisfied

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Scheduling

- A valid schedule is also a *feasible schedule* if every job meets its timing constraints.
  - *Miss rate* is the percentage of jobs that are executed but completed too late
  - *Loss rate* is the percentage of jobs that are not executed at all

- A hard real time scheduling algorithm is *optimal* if the algorithm always produces a feasible schedule if the given set of jobs has feasible schedules

- Many scheduling algorithms exist: main focus of this module is understanding real-time scheduling

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Summary

- Outline of terminology and a reference model:
  - Jobs and tasks
  - Processors and resources
  - Time and timing constraints
    - Hard real-time
    - Soft real-time
  - Periodic, aperiodic and sporadic tasks
  - Precedence constraints and dependencies
  - Scheduling

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