

Due: See website for due date.

What to submit: A tar file that should contain the file `answers.txt`, which must be an UTF-8 encoded text file with answers for questions 1 and 2. For question 3, which asks for code, include a file named `dpipe.c` in your tar file.

Use the `submit.py` script in `~cs3214/bin/submit.py` to submit your tar file from the command line, or use the submit website. Use the target identifier 'ex1.'

The assignment will be graded on the `rlogin` cluster, so your answers must match this environment. In addition, every student will use a variant of `dpipe` that is unique to them; please visit `cs3214/fall2025/exercises/exercise1` to find the number of your variant.

Understanding Processes and Pipes

In this exercise we consider a program 'dpipe,' which, in connection with a 'netcat' utility program, can be used to turn any ordinary program into a network server. A 'netcat' utility program is a program that extends the standard Unix 'cat' utility over a network.

The learning goals of this exercise are:

- Understand how to write C code that makes system calls.
- Understand how to start and wait for processes in Unix with the `fork()` and `waitpid()` system calls.
- Understand how to create pipes as an example of an IPC (interprocess communication) facility.
- Understand how to manipulate a process's standard input and standard output file streams using standard Unix system call facilities (e.g. `dup2()`) that affect low-level file descriptors. A very similar file descriptor manipulation is performed by a shell when it sets up I/O redirection or pipes.
- Understand how to use the `strace` facility to trace a process's system calls.
- Understand how to use the `/proc` file system to obtain information about processes in a system.
- Gain a deeper understanding of process states using a practical example application that combines process management, IPC, and network I/O.

In this exercise, you are asked to observe, reverse-engineer, and then reimplement the `dpipe` program. The `dpipe` binary is provided in `~cs3214/bin/dpipe.variants/dpipe-ABC` on our machines, where `ABC` is the unique id created for you. For `netcat`, use the `~cs3214/bin/gnetcat6` binary.

To allow you to invoke those commands directly, make sure that `~cs3214/bin` and (optionally) `~cs3214/bin/dpipe.variants` are included in your `PATH` environment

variable.¹ You should already have your PATH set up from exercise 0 to include the first directory. If you haven't, do this now.

Here's an example session of how to use it. Say you're logged in to the machine 'locust' and run the command `dpipe-ABC wc gnetcat6 -l 15999`². This will produce output as follows:

```
[cs3214@locust sys1]$ ~cs3214/bin/dpipe.variants/dpipe-ABC wc gnetcat6 -l 15999
Starting: wc
Starting: gnetcat6
Running in server mode
```

Note that the shell is still waiting for `dpipe` to complete at this point. The questions listed in part 1 must be answered at this point, after you have started `dpipe`, but before the next step. You may wish to continue reading and then return to this point, after opening a second terminal on the same machine.³

The next command can be run on *any* rlogin machine, but you must replace `locust` with the name of the machine on which started the earlier command:

```
[cs3214@chinkapin ~]$ gnetcat6 locust-rlogin.cs.vt.edu 15999 < /etc/passwd
Running in client mode
      47      119      2690
[cs3214@chinkapin ~]$
```

The `gnetcat6` instance started here connected to the `gnetcat6` instance running on `locust`⁴, and sent its input there (in this case, the content of file `/etc/passwd`). `Gnetcat` (running on `locust`) outputs this data to its standard output stream, which is connected via a pipe to the standard input stream of the '`wc`' program. The standard output stream of '`wc`' is connected to the standard input stream of `locust`'s `gnetcat6` instance. Anything output by '`wc`' will then be forwarded to `chinkapin`'s `gnetcat6` instance, which outputs it to its standard output, thus appearing on the user's terminal on `chinkapin`. You have just turned the ordinary '`wc`' program into a network service! The entire scenario is shown in Figure 1.

Finally, `dpipe` exits when both of the processes it started have terminated:

```
[cs3214@locust sys1]$
```

1. Using /proc The /proc file system, originally introduced as part of the Solaris OS,

¹The latter is, however, not necessary - you can also replace `dpipe-ABC` with its full path `~cs3214/bin/dpipe.variants/dpipe-ABC` whenever you invoke it.

²When you try this out, please replace 15999 with a number that with high likelihood is unique so you do not conflict with other students using this machine, let's agree to using 10 000 + last 4 digits of your VT PID here. For instance, if your pid ends in 5999, you'd use 15999. If you don't want to use your PID, then use the number that is output by running: `seq 10000 19999 | shuf | tail -1`

³Hint: `ssh` to `portal.cs.vt.edu`, then choose the machine on which your other shell session runs. If you're using `vscode` you already have the ability to open a second terminal on the same machine. Or you can use `ssh`'s jump option by doing `ssh -J you@rlogin.cs.vt.edu you@locust` to hop onto `locust`.

⁴You must specify the hostname as given, in the form `locust-rlogin.cs.vt.edu`. Please don't blindly copy these instructions, replace it with the hostname of the machine your `gnetcat6` is running on. It should be shown in your prompt; if not, run the command `hostname` to see it.

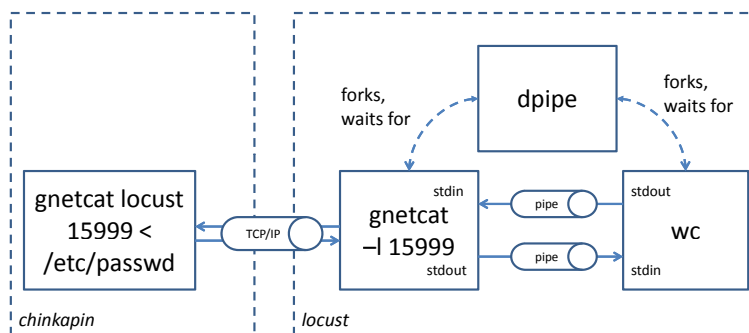


Figure 1: Using dpipe to cross-link two programs' standard input and output streams.

is a mechanism by which the Linux kernel provides information about processes to users. This information is organized in directories and files that can be accessed using ordinary tools such as `ls` or `cat`. However, they do not represent actual directories or files – rather, their content is created dynamically when a user accesses them, based on the current state of the system and its processes. The kernel creates a directory for each process, which is named for its pid. Within the directory, there are additional files and directories that describe the current state of the process.

After you have started `dpipe` with `'wc'` and `'gnetcat -l ...'`, use the `ps (1)` command to find the process ids of these three processes, then use `ps` or `/proc` to find the parent process id, the process group id, and the current status of these processes.

(a) Provide the following information in table form:

Process	PID	Parent PID	Process Group ID	State
dpipe-ABC				
gnetcat				
wc				

You may find the `proc (5)` man page useful.⁵

Use the single letter Linux shorthand for the process state. (Omit additional identifiers such as `s` or `+` you may see.)

(b) You should find that all three processes are in the same state. To which of the 3 states of the simplified process state diagram discussed in lecture does this state correspond?

(c) Now examine the `/proc/nnnnn/fd` directories for each process. Use `ls -l`. For each process's open file descriptors, enter in the table below the device or object to which it refers. Enter N/O if a file descriptor is not currently in use.

⁵The number (5) in parentheses denotes the section of the man pages in which the information is found. On the command line, you would type `man 5 proc` to access this page in section 5. `man proc` works too, in this case, because only section 5 of the manual has an entry for `proc`.

File Descriptor	dpipe-ABC	wc	gnetcat6
(stdin) 0			
(stdout) 1			
(stderr) 2			
3			

Look at Figure 1 and convince yourself that dpipe indeed creates the arrangement shown there (minus the network connection, which has not yet been created).

2. **Using strace.** Processes use system calls to obtain services from the kernel. The program 'strace' is a utility that can display which system calls a process is executing. strace can trace individual processes from start to end; on request, it can trace child and ancestor processes as well, and it can even trace already running processes. Familiarize yourselves with the 'strace' command (use 'man strace', for instance). Frequently used switches include `-f`, `-e`, `-p`, `-ff`, and `-o` which you should memorize.

Run dpipe-ABC under strace, creating again the constellation of processes described in the introduction (wc and gnetcat6), and use gnetcat6 on another machine to send data until dpipe exits. Use the `-ff` and `-o` switches to strace to obtain separate listings for dpipe and its child processes.

- (a) Identify which system calls your assigned dpipe process made. From the relevant strace output, copy the entries corresponding to the system calls `pipe2()`, `close()`, `fork()`, `waitpid()`, and `exit()`.

Hint: Linux's implementation of the `fork()` system call is actually called `clone()`, `waitpid()` is implemented using `wait4()`, and `exit()` corresponds to `exit_group()`.

`pipe2` is a GNU extension that is not part of POSIX. It acts like `pipe`, except that it also provides the option to set flags on the file descriptors pipe returns.

- (b) Identify some of the system calls the process executing 'wc' made. Select the entries corresponding to `write()`, `dup2()`, `close()`, and `execve()`. Stop at the first `execve()` call that was successful (listed as returning 0 in strace's output.) The following system calls will be specific to the program dpipe started so they are not actually part of dpipe (recall that `exec()` *replaces* the current program, but continues the current process and thus continues the strace of that process.

- (c) Like part b), except for the process executing 'gnetcat6'.

Note that the traces for part (b) and (c) correspond to the system calls made by the child processes spawned by dpipe-ABC between `fork()` and `exec()`.

- (d) Now, rerun strace with the switches `-f -e wait4,accept,read` without connecting the gnetcat6 client (like in part 1). All three processes will be inside the kernel, in one of these three system calls. Answer the following questions for each process:

- What is the state for each process, using the nomenclature of the simplified process state diagram discussed in lecture?
- Which process is in which system call?
- How can each process's state be explained from the semantics of that system call?

Use the following example format for your answer: Process 'dpipe' is in the (insert state here) state in the (insert system call here) system call because it is (describe what caused it to be in this state).

If you are uncertain about the semantics of any of these system calls, be sure to read their man pages or ask on the discussion forum.

3. Implement dpipe-ABC.

Armed with the knowledge gained in the previous part, implement dpipe-ABC so that it issues **exactly** the system calls you've observed in the traces, in the same order.

In general, you should be looking for C functions with the same name as the system calls that appears in the strace. You may have noticed the C-like syntax in the strace output. However, for some system calls, you should instead use a POSIX function that wraps the actual system call. Notably, we recommend that you use `fork()` instead of calling `clone(2)` and `waitpid()` instead of `wait4`.

Although the OS will use predictable file descriptors in `pipe2()`, your program should use variables and not constants, e.g. calling `close(3)` would not be an acceptable solution.

Use the `execvp()` frontend for the `execve()` system call. Make sure you implement argument passing correctly. `dpipe` should first invoke the program whose name is given as its first argument, without passing any additional arguments to it. Then it should interpret the second argument as the name of a second program and pass the third argument as the first argument to the second program, the fourth argument as the second, and so on. It is customary to set `argv[0]` to the name of the program itself, and your invocations of `execvp()` should do the same. Hint: it is possible to achieve this without creating a complete copy of the `argv[]` array passed to `dpipe`'s main program by crafting a NULL-terminated subarray with careful pointer manipulation.

If done correctly, the strace output for the relevant system calls ⁶ in your `dpipe-ABC` implementation must be identical to the output obtained from the provided `dpipe-ABC`; in fact, this is what the autograder software will check. Note that the autograder will use examples other than `gnetcat6`.

⁶these include the `pipe2`, `clone`, and `wait`-related calls, as well as the file descriptor-related calls for the file descriptors you create, manipulate, and close. You may find that your code and the provided `dpipe` executable's traces differ before and after those those calls, due to differences in the initialization portion.

Important: even though the relative order of some of the system calls is not important for the correct functioning of dpipe, your assigned variant of dpipe will have a specific ordering your submission must reproduce to obtain full credit.

Make sure that your dpipe-ABC does not return to the prompt prematurely, or fails to return to the prompt after its children have exited.

Important: We will use the compiler switches `-O -Wall -Werror` when compiling your program. If you compile without these switches, and any warnings occur in your code, you run the risk of failing our autograding scripts.