Consistency

COS 316: Principles of Computer System Design

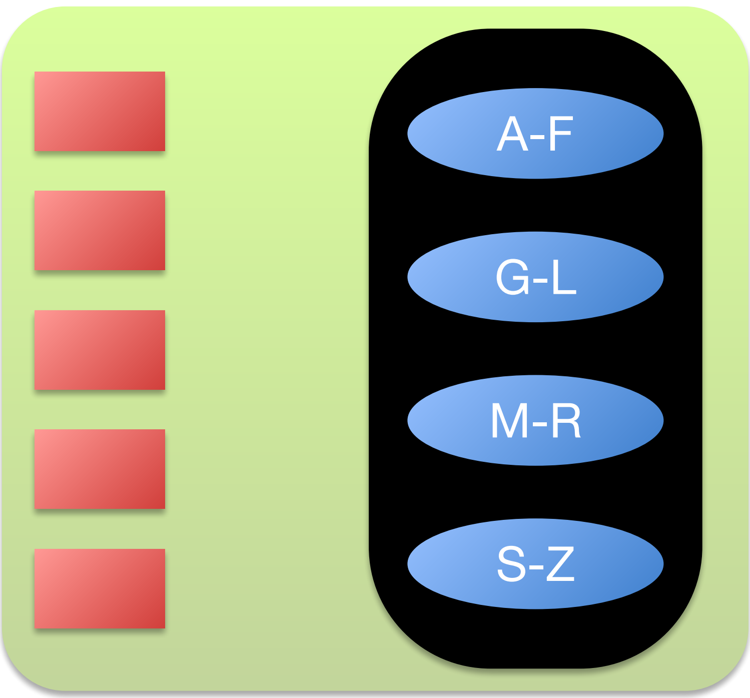
Wyatt Lloyd

Why Do We Build Systems?

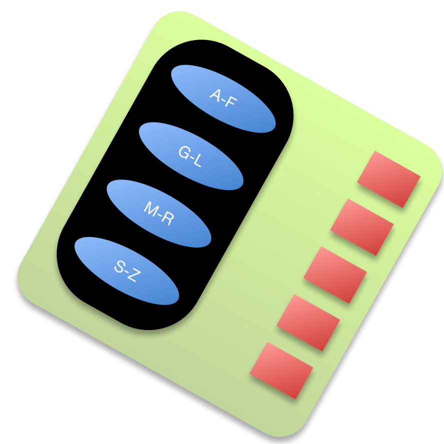
- ...
- Abstract away complexity

Distributed Systems are Highly Complex Internally

Sharding



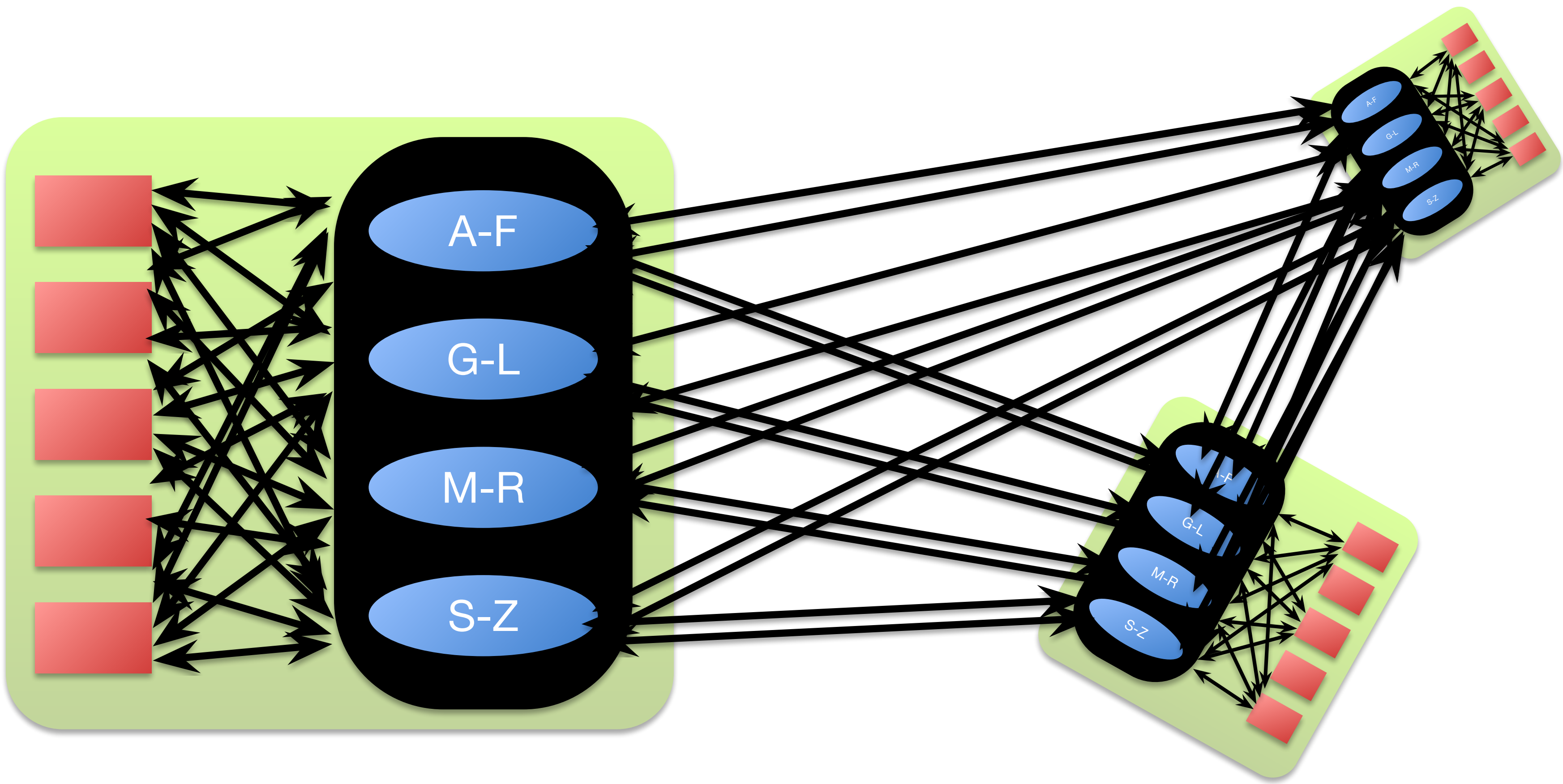
(Geo)-Replication



Concurrent access by many client

Distributed Systems are Highly Complex Internally

Sharding, Geo-Replication, Concurrency



Distributed Systems are Highly Complex Internally

Sharding, Geo-Replication, Concurrency

Consistency Models:

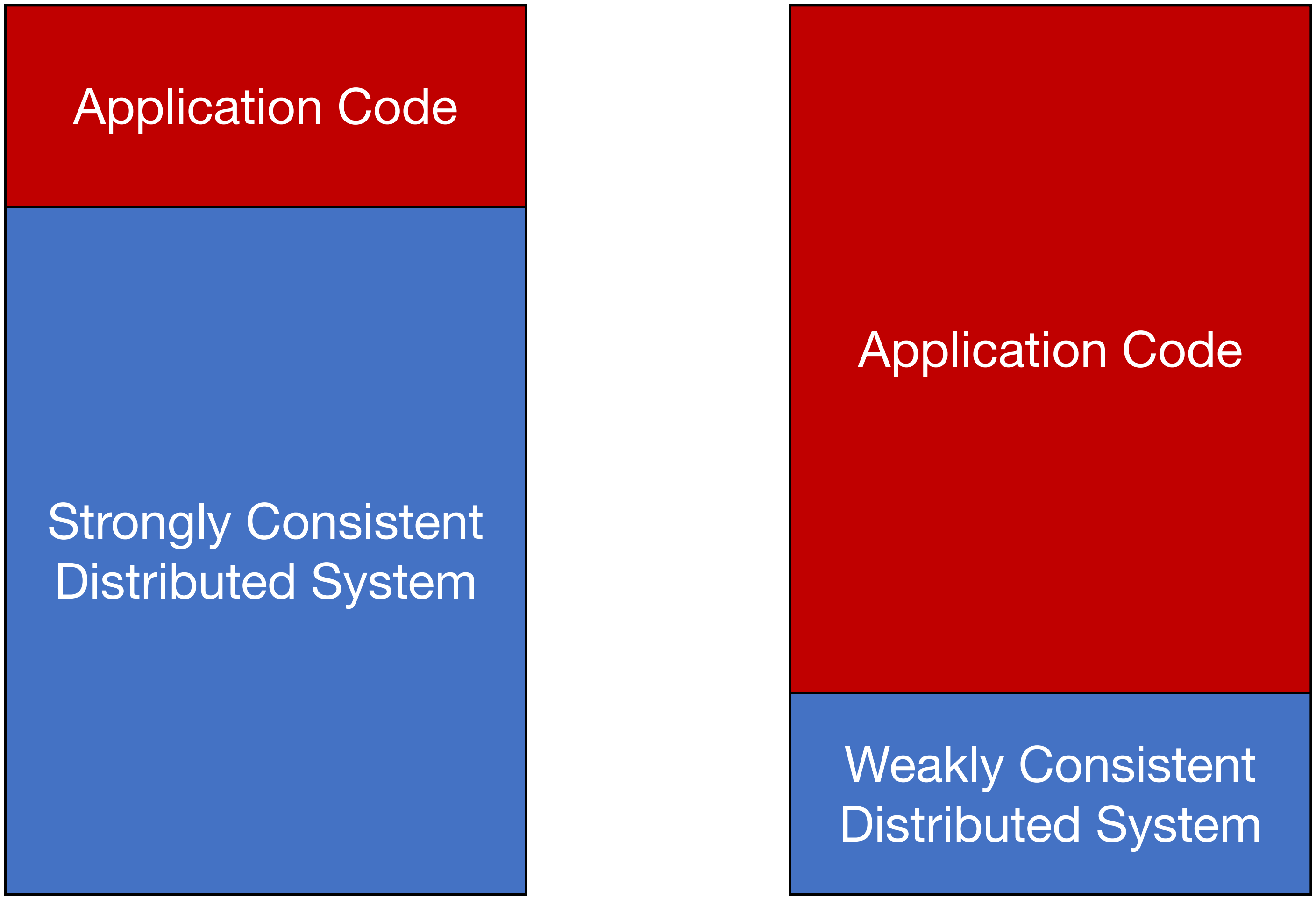
Control how much of this complexity is abstracted away

Consistency Models

- Contract between a (distributed) system and the applications that run on it

- A consistency model is a set of guarantees made by the distributed system

Stronger vs Weaker Consistency



Stronger vs Weaker Consistency

- Stronger consistency models
  + Easier to write applications
  - System must hide many behaviors

- Fundamental tradeoffs between consistency & performance
  - (Discuss CAP, PRAM, SNOW in 418!)

- Weaker consistency models
  - Harder to write applications
    Cannot (reasonably) write some applications
  + System needs to hide few behaviors

Consistency Hierarchy

Linearizability	Behaves like a single machine
↓	
Causal+ Consistency	Everyone sees related operations in the same order
↓	
Eventual Consistency	Anything goes

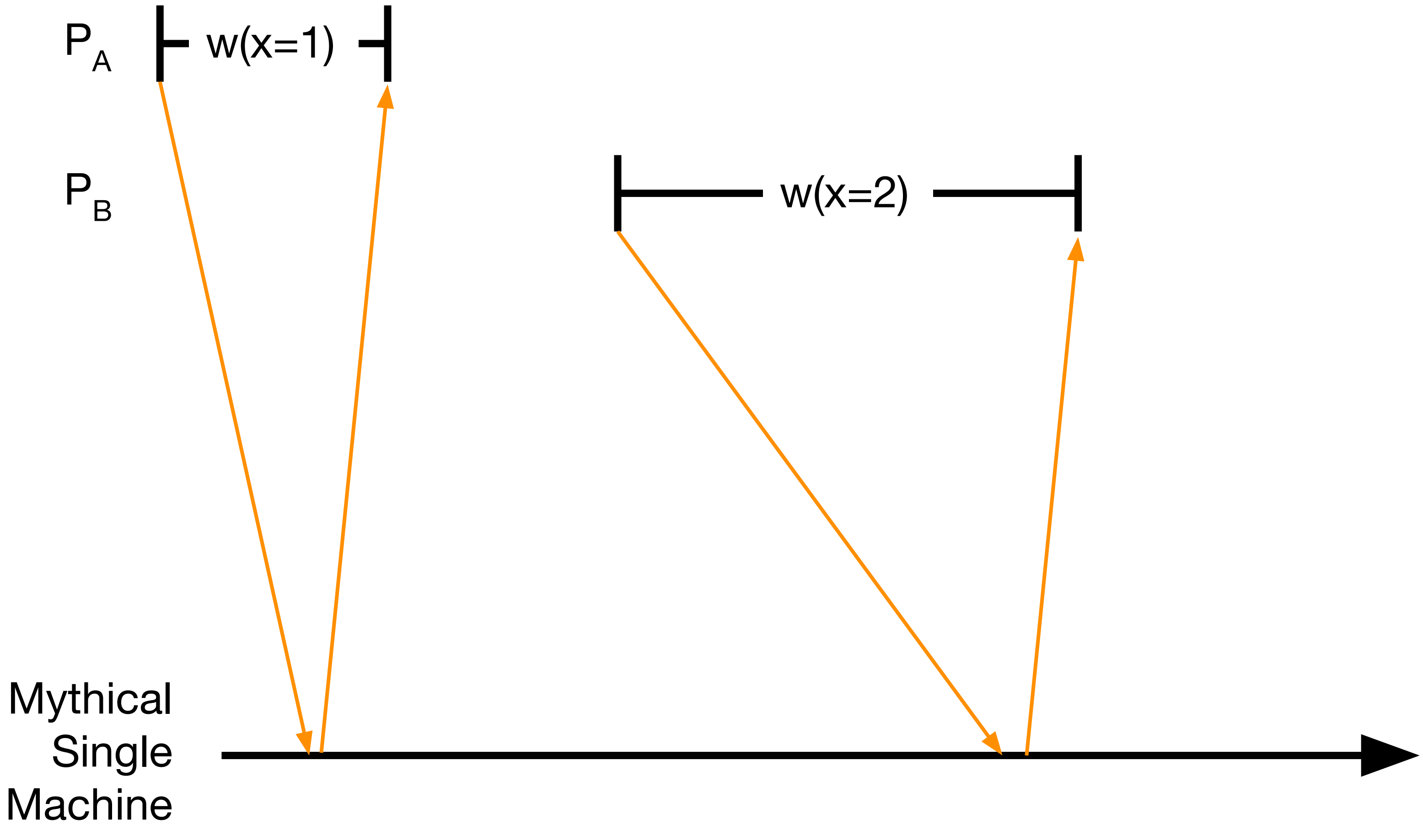
Linearizability ==
"Appears to be a Single Machine"

- External client submitting requests and getting responses from the system can't tell this is not a single machine!

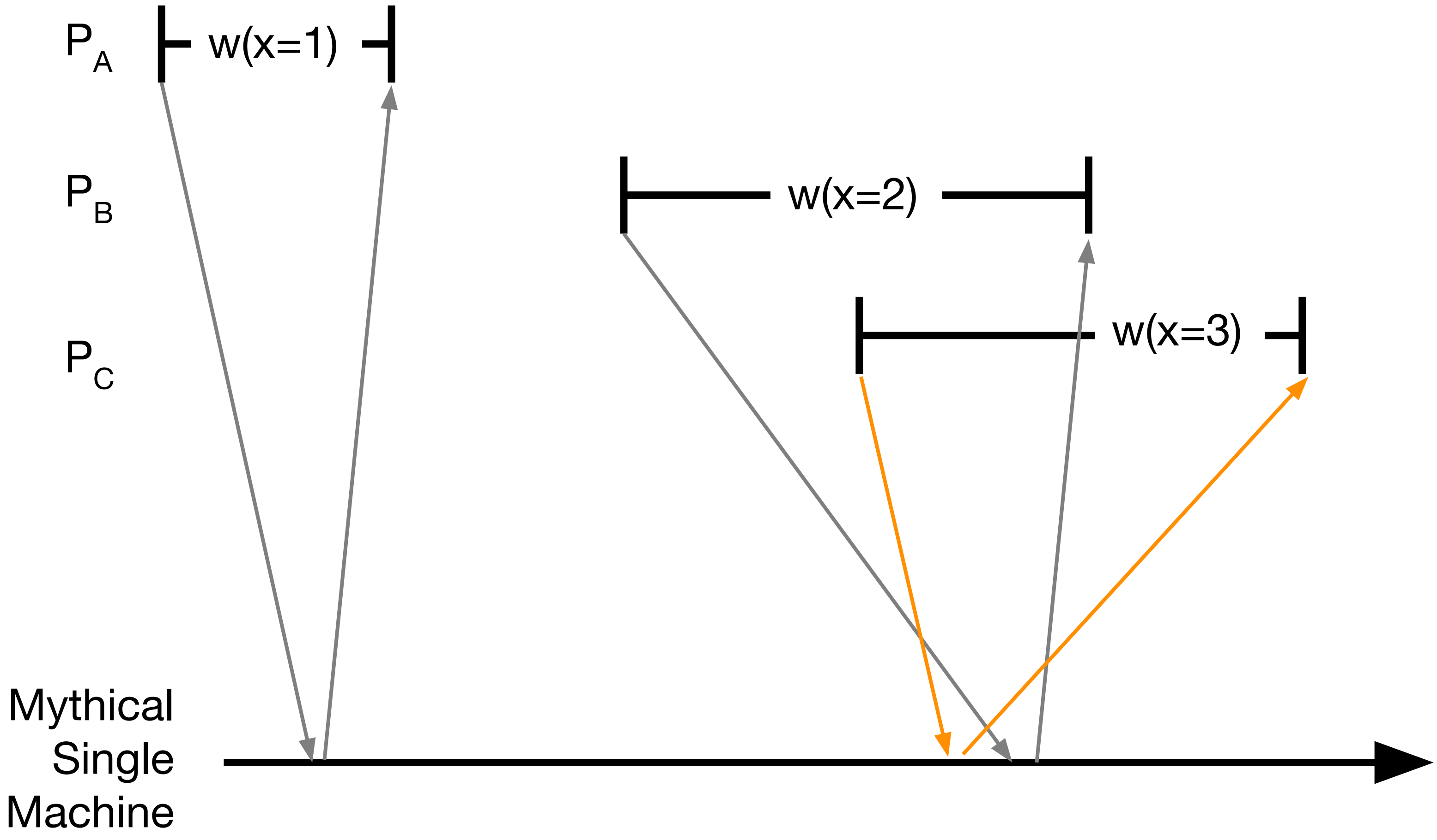
- There is some total order over all operations
  - Processes all requests one by one

- Order preserves the real-time ordering between operations
  - If operation A completes before operation B begins, then A is ordered before B in real-time
  - If neither A nor B completes before the other begins, then there is no real-time order
    - (But there must be *some* total order)

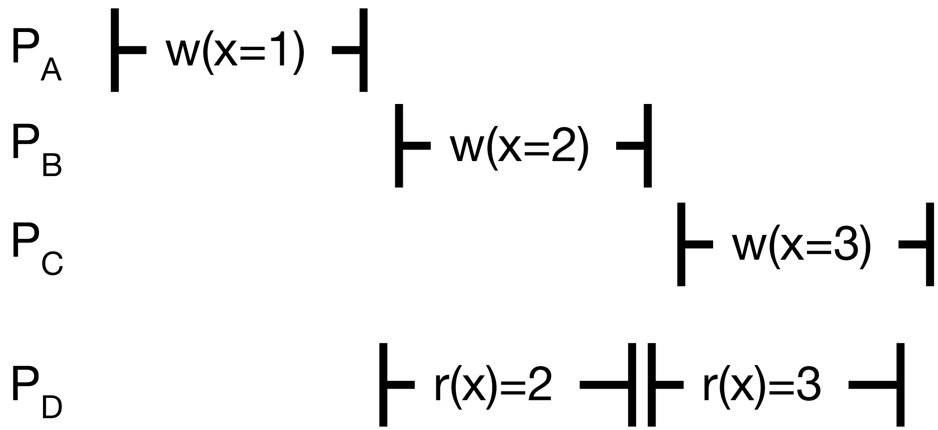
Real-Time Ordering Examples



Real-Time Ordering Examples

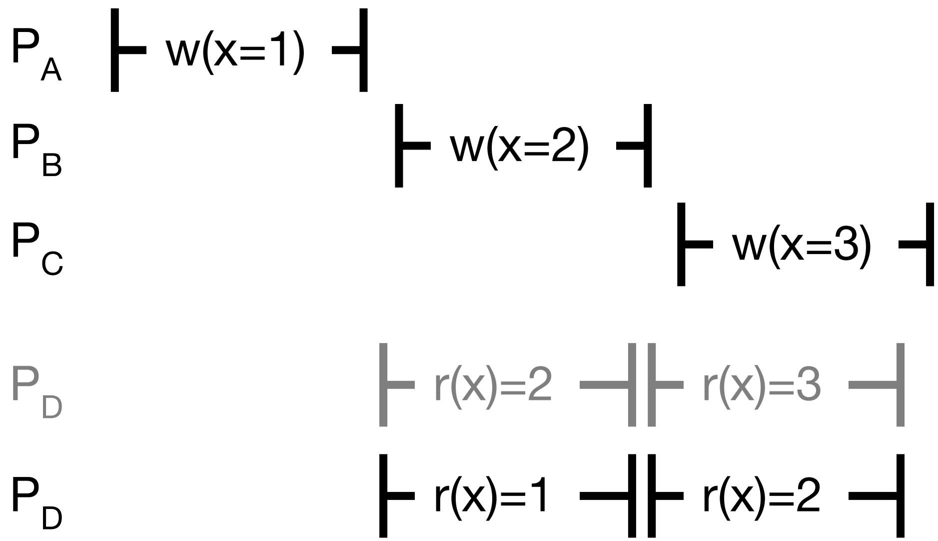


Linearizable?



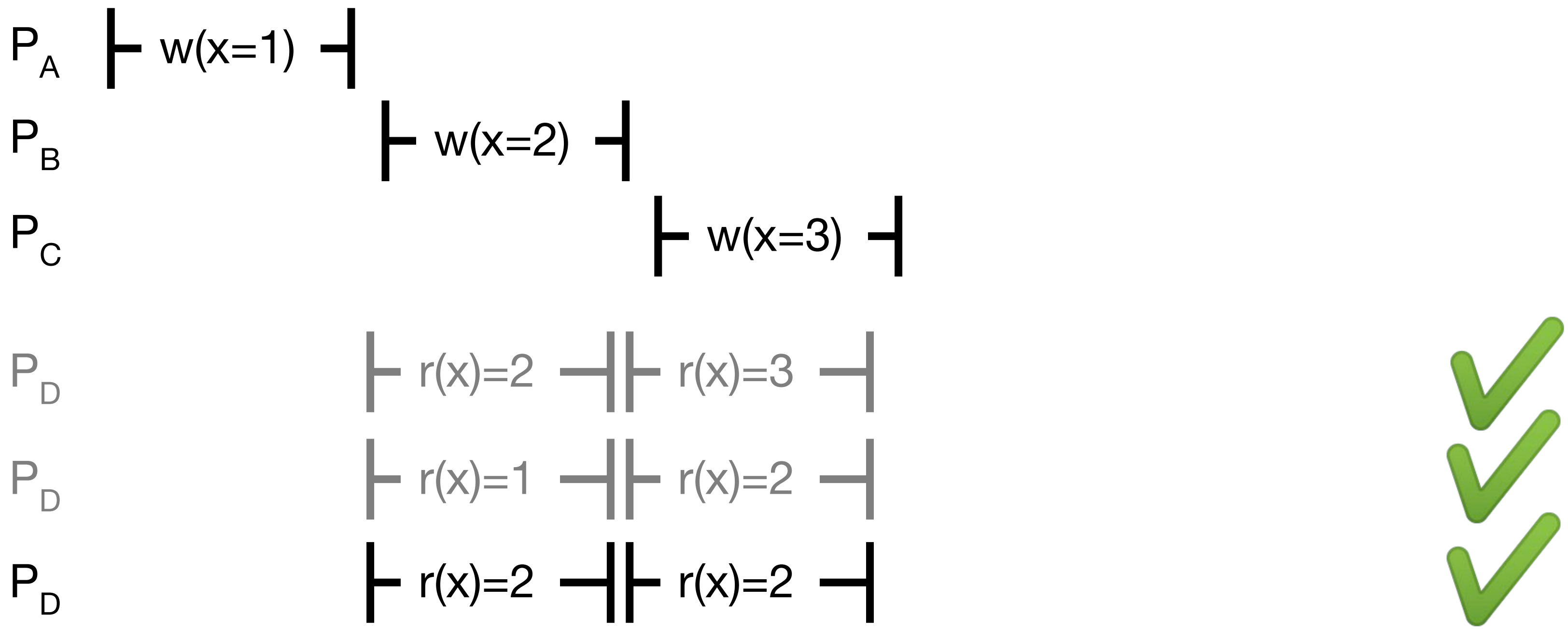
w_1, w_2, r_2, w_3, r_3

Linearizable?



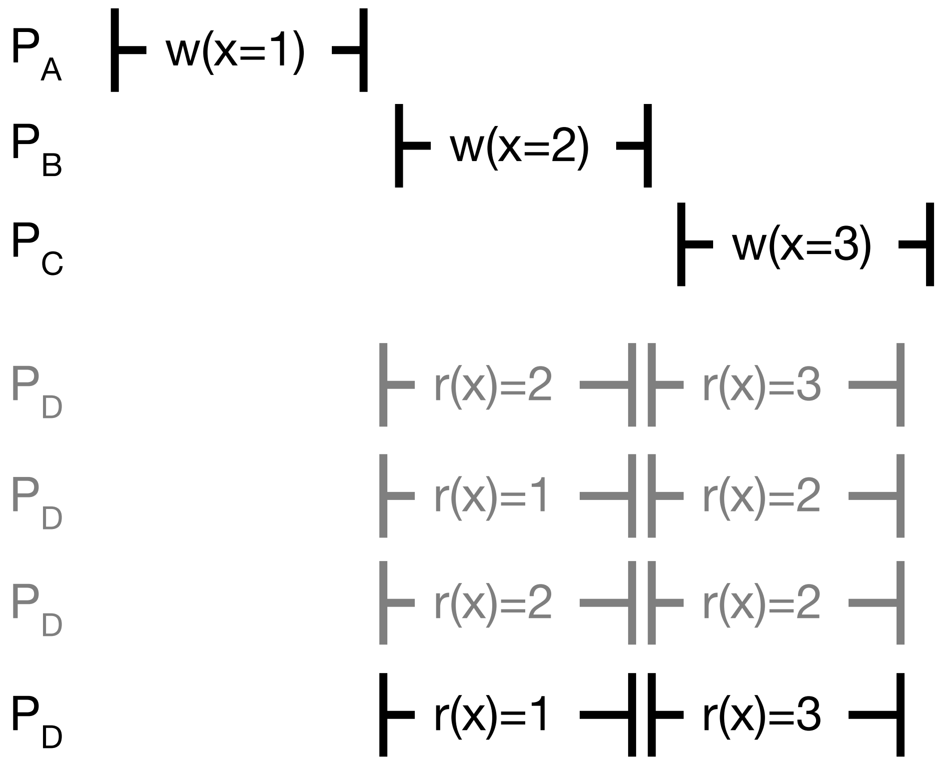
w_1, r_1, w_2, r_2, w_3

Linearizable?



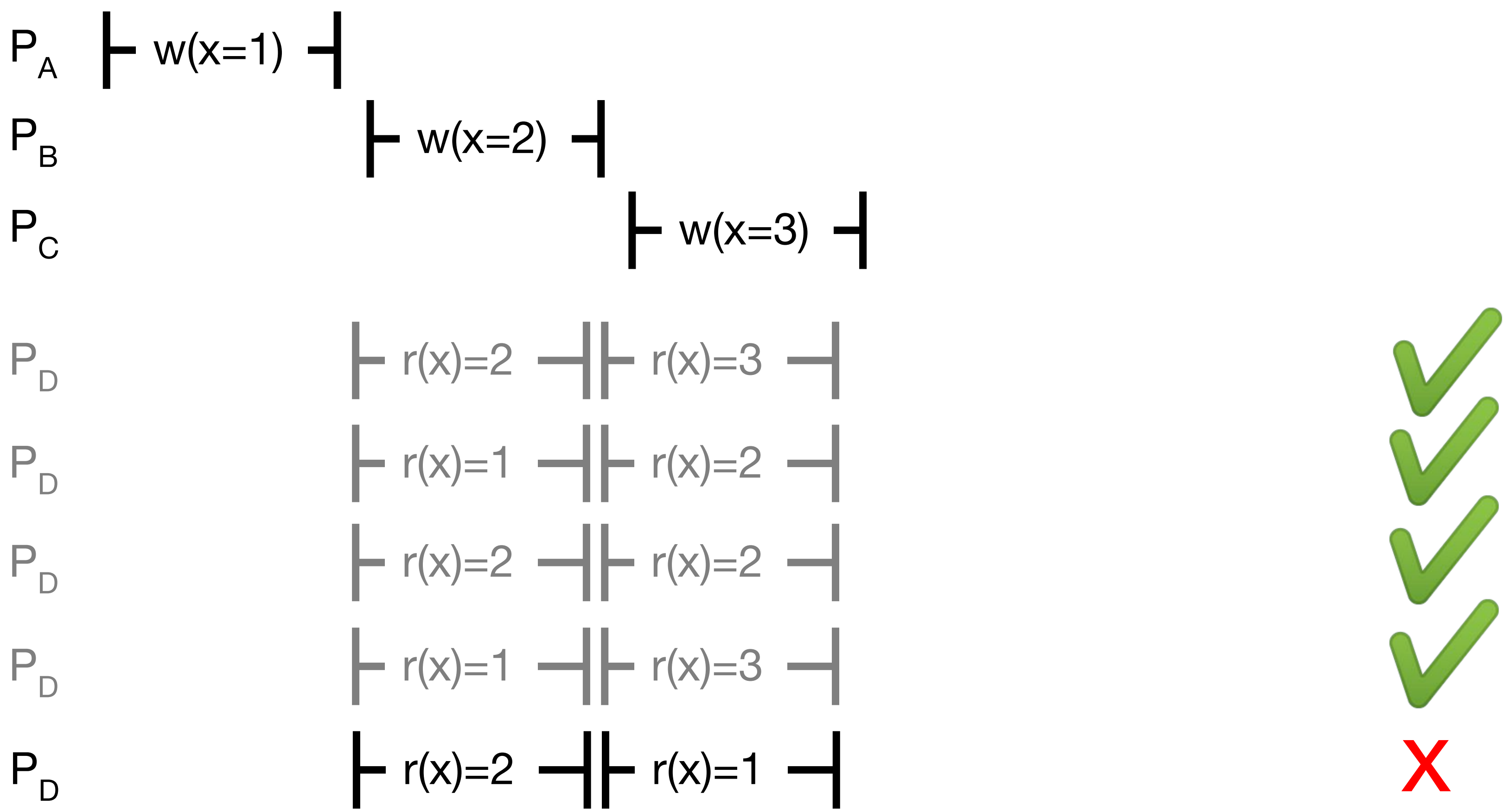
w_1, w_2, r_2, r_2, w_3

Linearizable?

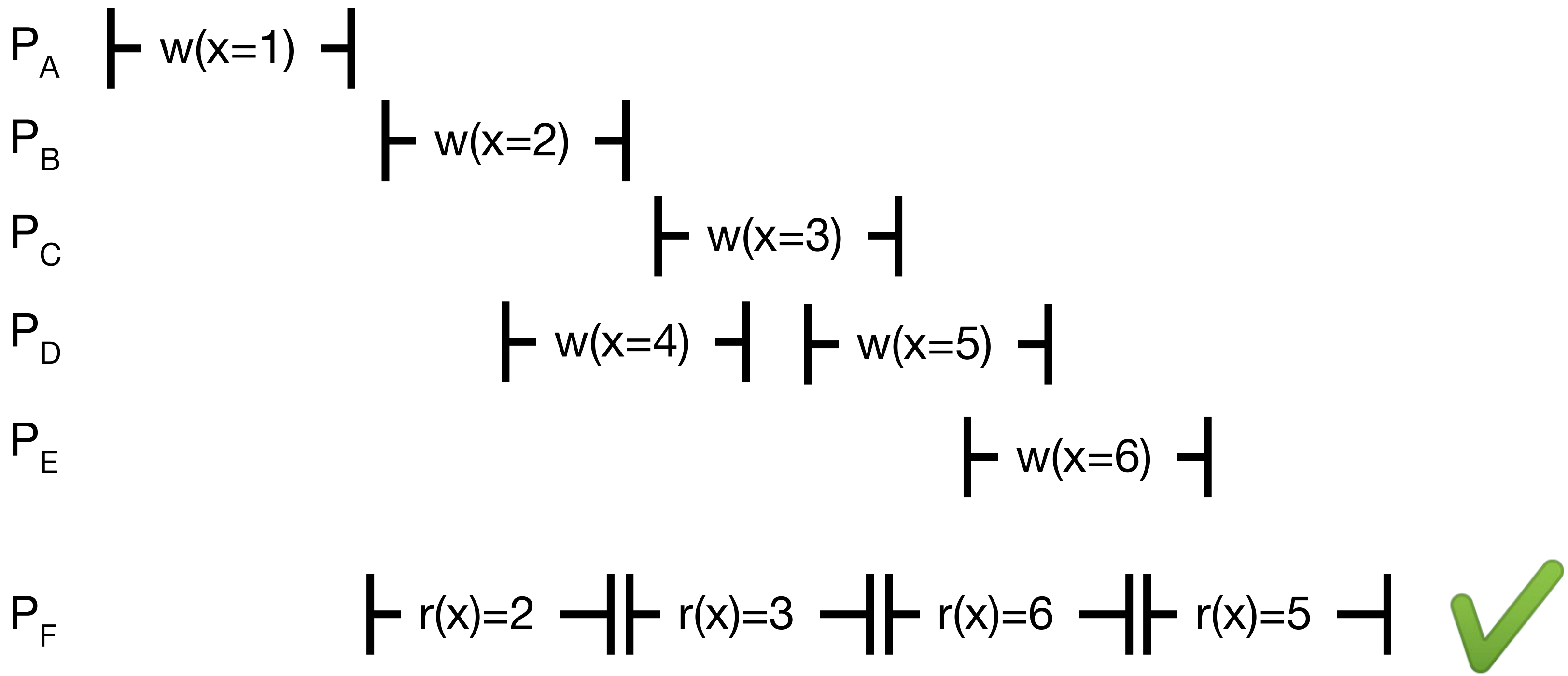


w_1, r_1, w_2, w_3, r_3

Linearizable?



Linearizable?



$w_1, w_2, r_2, w_4, w_3, r_3, w_6, r_6, w_5, r_5$

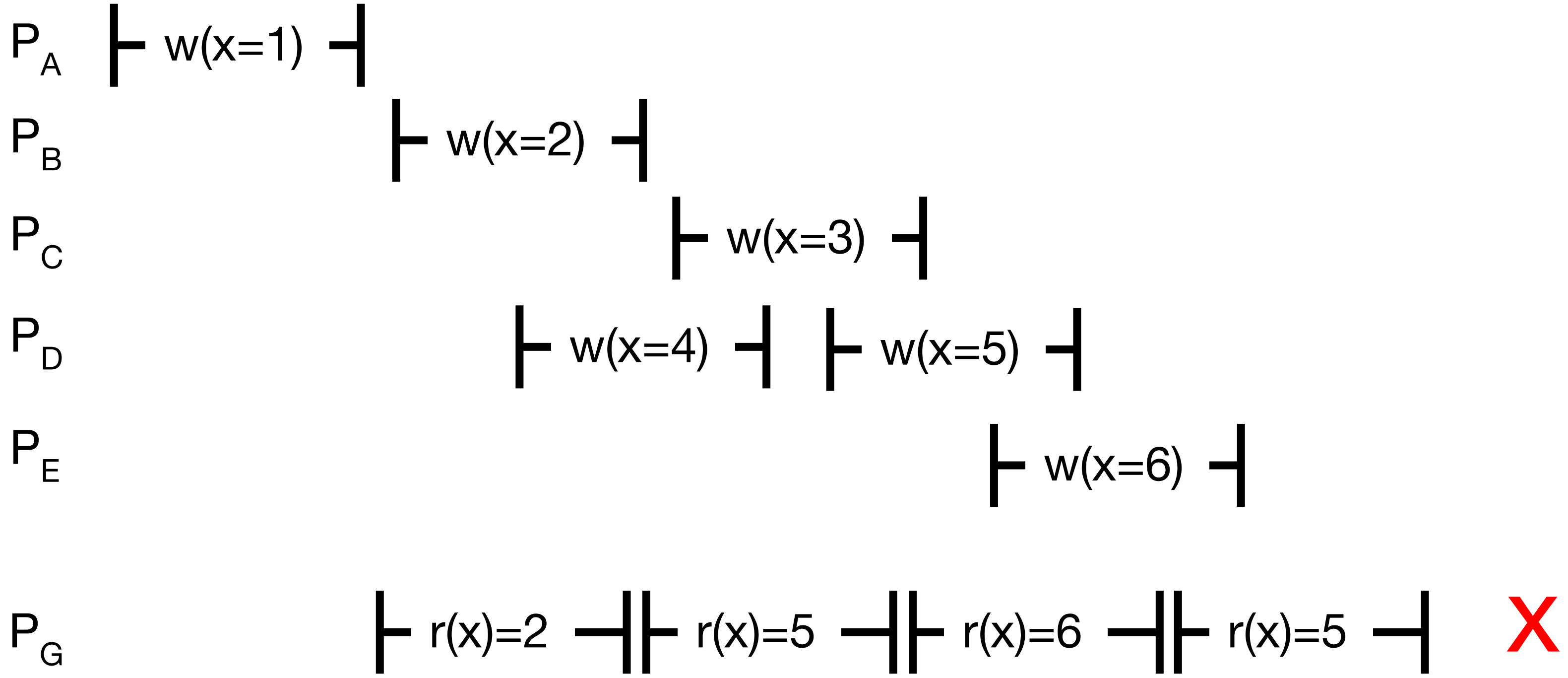
OR

$w_1, \mathbf{w_4}, w_2, r_2, w_3, r_3, w_6, r_6, w_5, r_5$

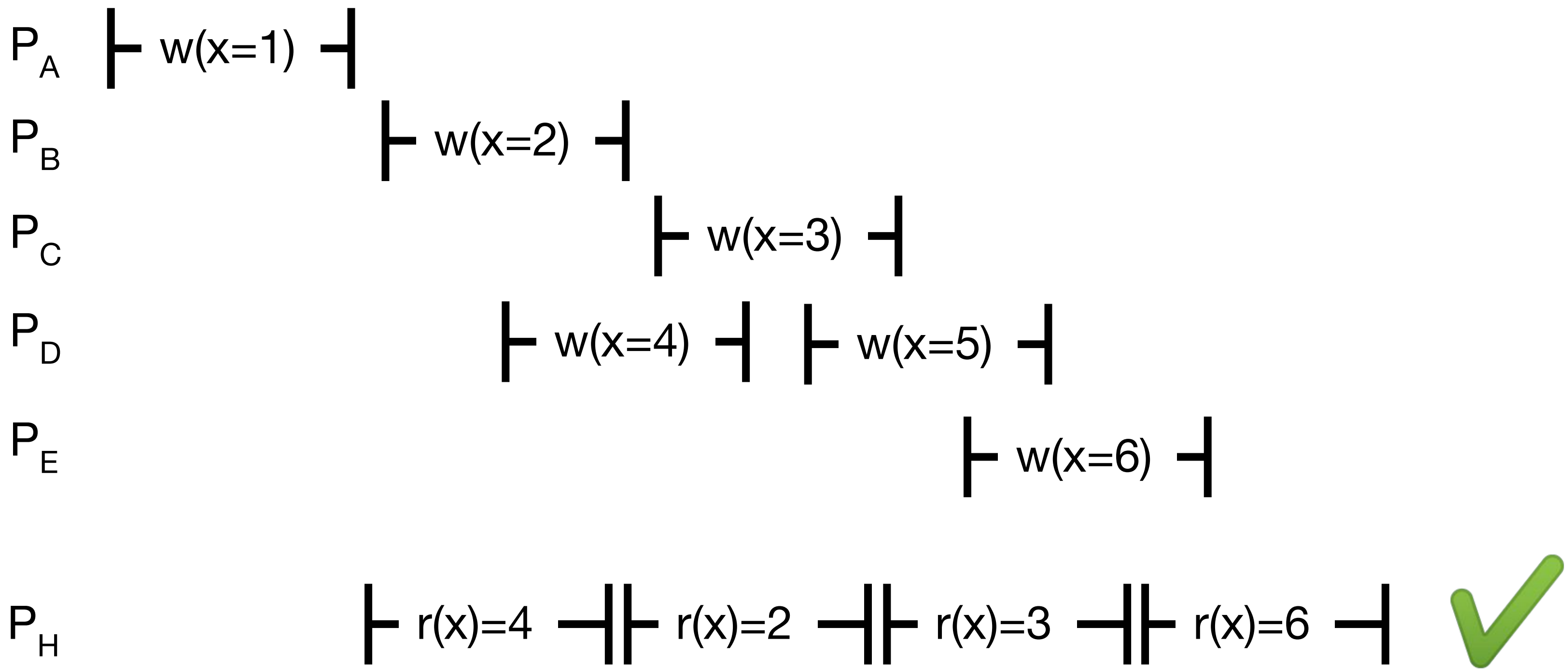
OR

$w_1, w_2, r_2, w_3, r_3, \mathbf{w_4}, w_6, r_6, w_5, r_5$

Linearizable?

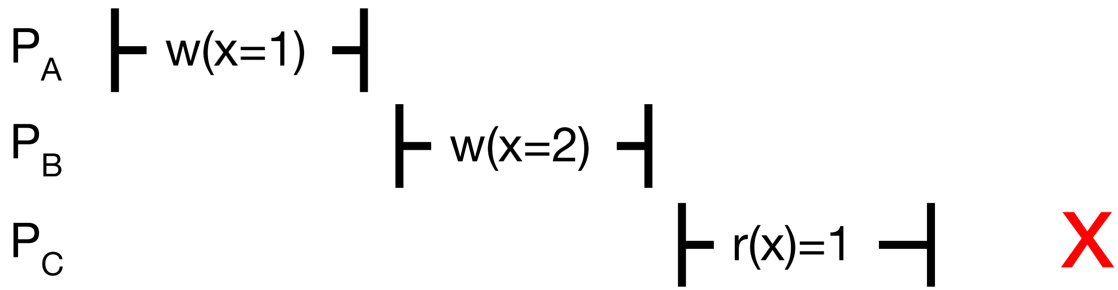


Linearizable?



$w_1, w_4, r_4, w_2, r_2, w_3, r_3, w_5, w_6, r_6$

Linearizable?



Linearizability == “Appears to be a Single Machine”

- There is some total order over all operations
  - Processes all requests one by one

- Order preserves the real-time ordering between operations
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    - (But there must be *some* total order)

How to Provide Linearizability?

1. Use a single machine 😊

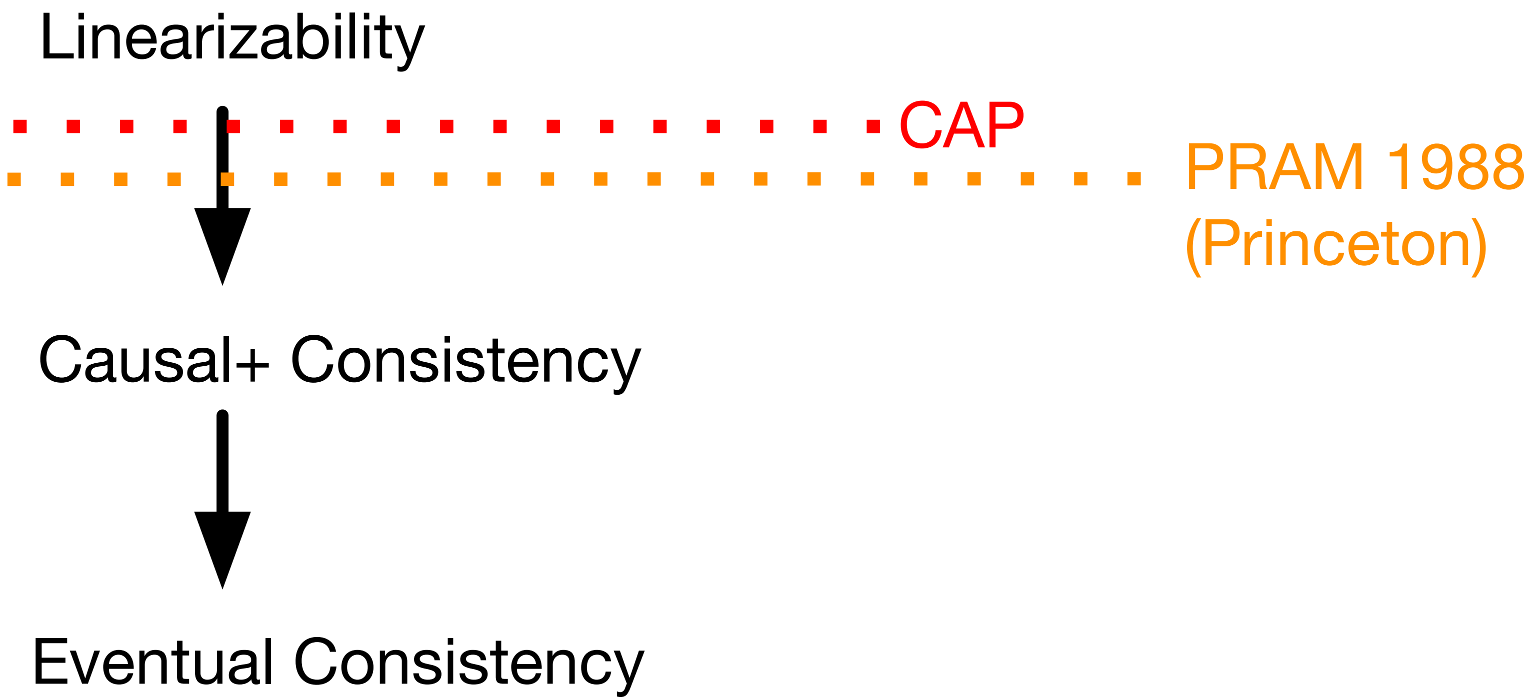
2. Use “state-machine replication” on top of a consensus protocol like Paxos
   - Distributed system appears to be single machine that does not fail!!
   - Covered extensively in 418

3. …

Consistency Hierarchy

Linearizability	Behaves like a single machine
↓	
Causal+ Consistency	Everyone sees related operations in the same order
↓	
Eventual Consistency	Anything goes

Consistency Hierarchy



Causal+ Consistency Informally

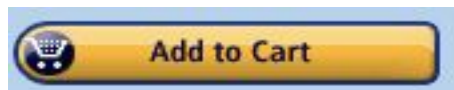
1. Writes that are potentially causally related must be seen by everyone in the same order.
2. Concurrent writes may be seen in a different order by different entities.
   - Concurrent: Writes not causally related

- Potential causality: event *a* could have a causal effect on event *b.*
  - Think: is there a path of information from *a* to *b*?
    - *a* and *b* done by the same entity (e.g., me)
    - *a* is a write and *b* is a read of that write
    - + transitivity

Causal+ Sufficient

↓ Then ↓

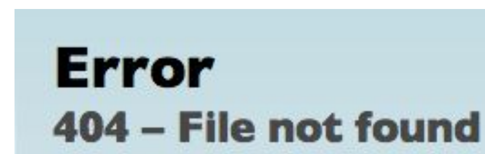
Employment retained



↓ Then ↓

Purchase retained

↓ Then ↓



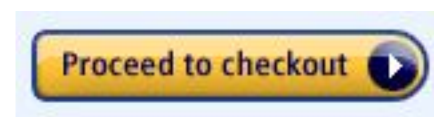
Deletion retained

Causal+ Sufficient

↓ Then ↓

↓ Then ↓

↓ Then ↓



Causal+ Not Sufficient
(Need Linearizability)

- Need a total order of operations
  - e.g., Alice's bank account ≥ 0

- Need a real-time ordering of operations
  - e.g., Alice changes her password, Bob cannot login with old password

Consistency Hierarchy

Linearizability	Behaves like a single machine
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Eventual Consistency

- Anything goes for now…
  - (If updates stop,
    eventually all copies of the data are the same)

- But, eventually consistent systems often try to provide consistency and often do
  - e.g., Facebook's TAO system provided linearizable results 99.9994% of the time [Lu et al. SOSP '15]

- "Good enough" sometimes
  - e.g., 99 vs 100 likes

Consistency Model Summary

- Consistency model specifies strength of abstraction
  - Linearizability □ Causal+ □ Eventual
  - Stronger hides more, but has worse performance
- When building an application, what do you need?
  - Select system(s) with necessary consistency
  - Always safe to pick stronger
- When building a system, what are your guarantees?
  - Must design system such that they always hold
  - Must confront fundamental tradeoffs with performance
    - What is more important?