epcc

Message Passing Programming

Modes, Tags and Communicators

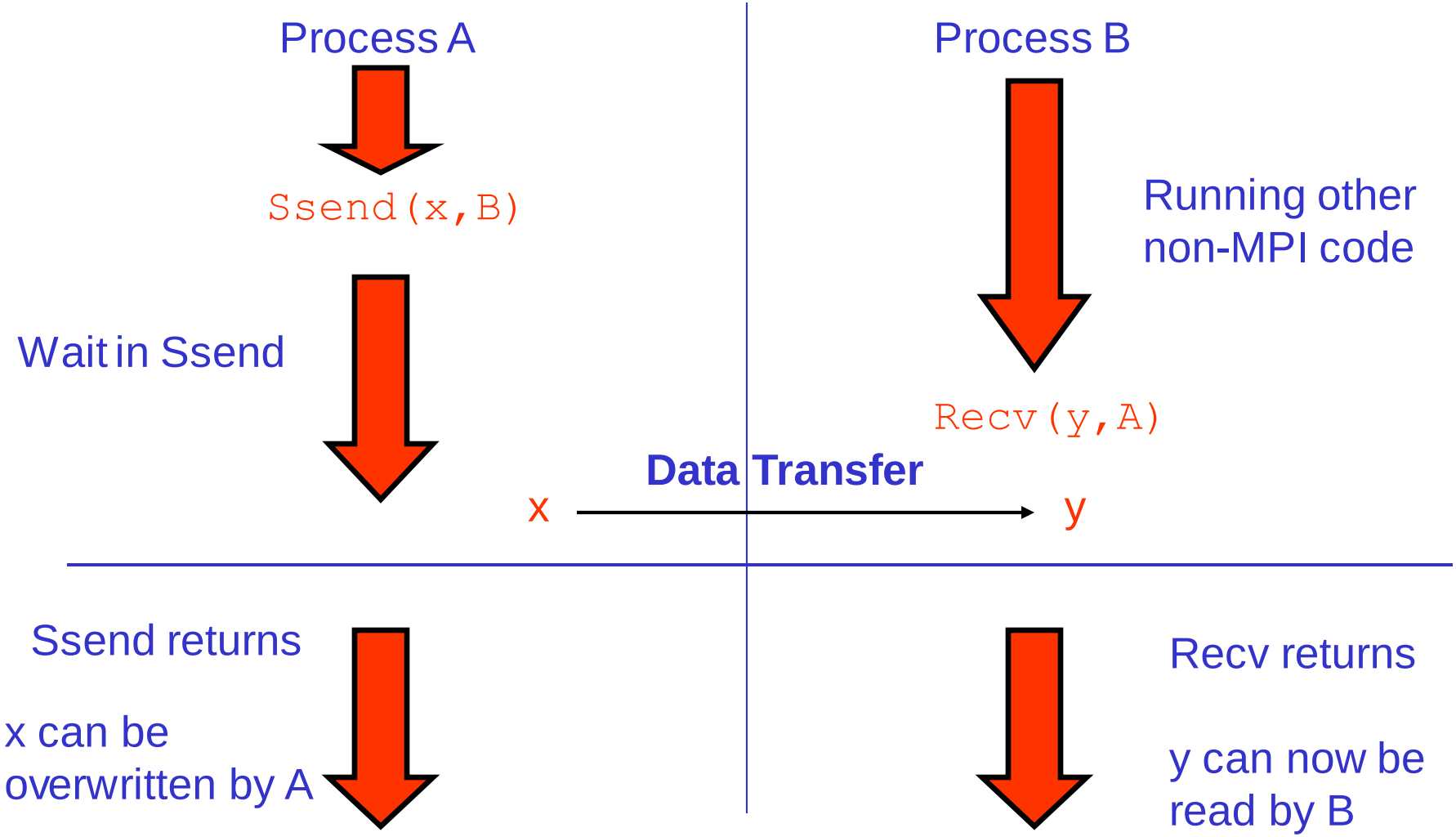
Overview

- Lecture will cover
  - explanation of MPI modes (**`Ssend`**, **`Bsend`** and **`Send`**)
  - meaning and use of message tags
  - rationale for MPI communicators
- These are all commonly misunderstood
  - essential for all programmers to understand modes
  - often useful to use tags
  - certain cases benefit from exploiting different communicators

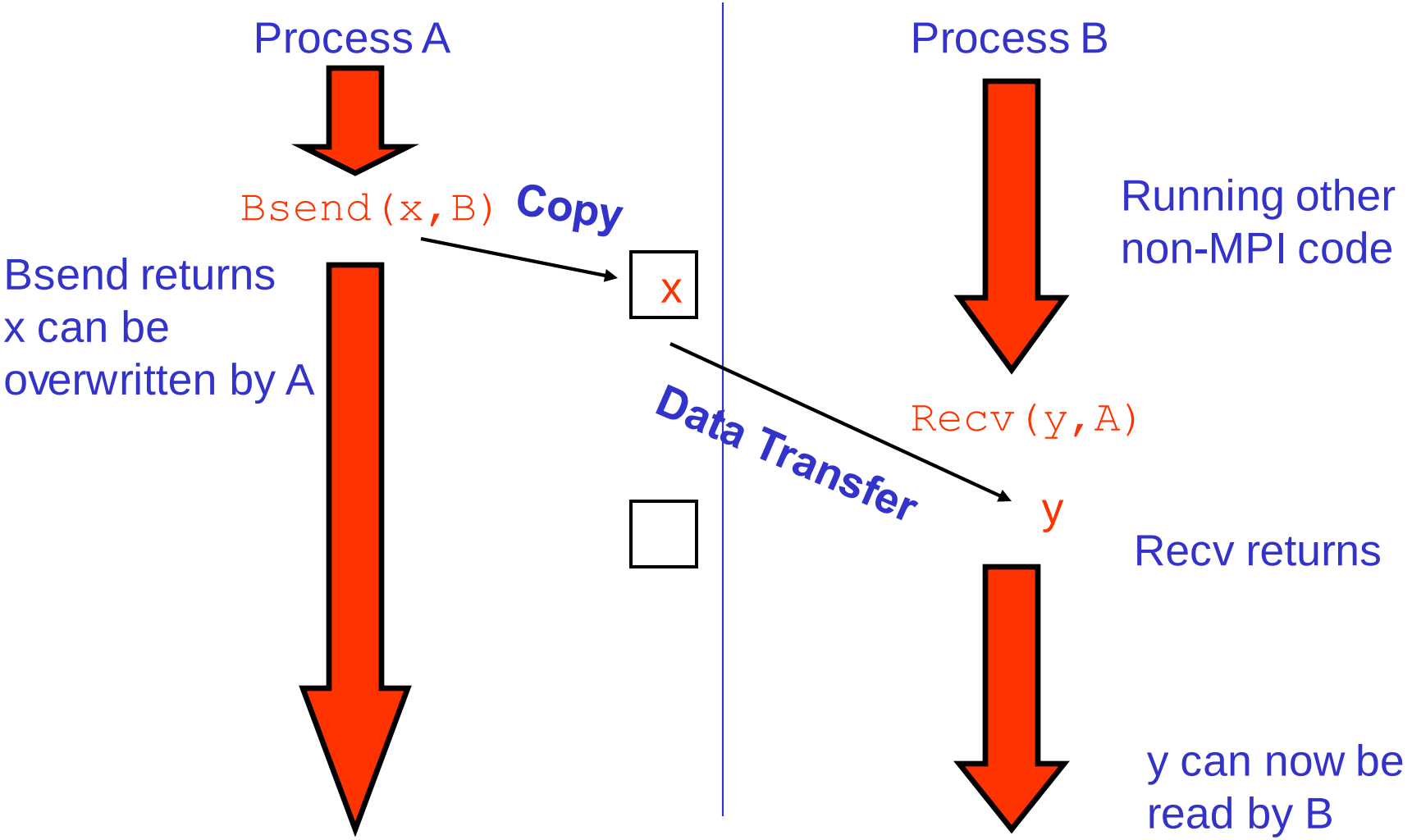
Modes

- **`MPI_Ssend`** (Synchronous Send)
  - guaranteed to be synchronous
  - routine will not return until message has been delivered
- **`MPI_Bsend`** (Buffered Send)
  - guaranteed to be asynchronous
  - routine returns before the message is delivered
  - system copies data into a buffer and sends it later on
- **`MPI_Send`** (standard Send)
  - may be implemented as synchronous or asynchronous send
  - this causes a lot of confusion (see later)

MPI_Ssend


Process A
Process B
Ssend(x,B)
Running other non-MPI code
Wait in Ssend
Recv(y,A)
Data Transfer
x
y
Ssend returns
x can be overwritten by A
Recv returns
y can now be read by B

MPI_Bsend


Process A
Process B
Bsend(x,B)
Copy
Running other
non-MPI code
Bsend returns
x can be
overwritten by A
x
Recv(y,A)
Data Transfer
y
Recv returns
y can now be
read by B

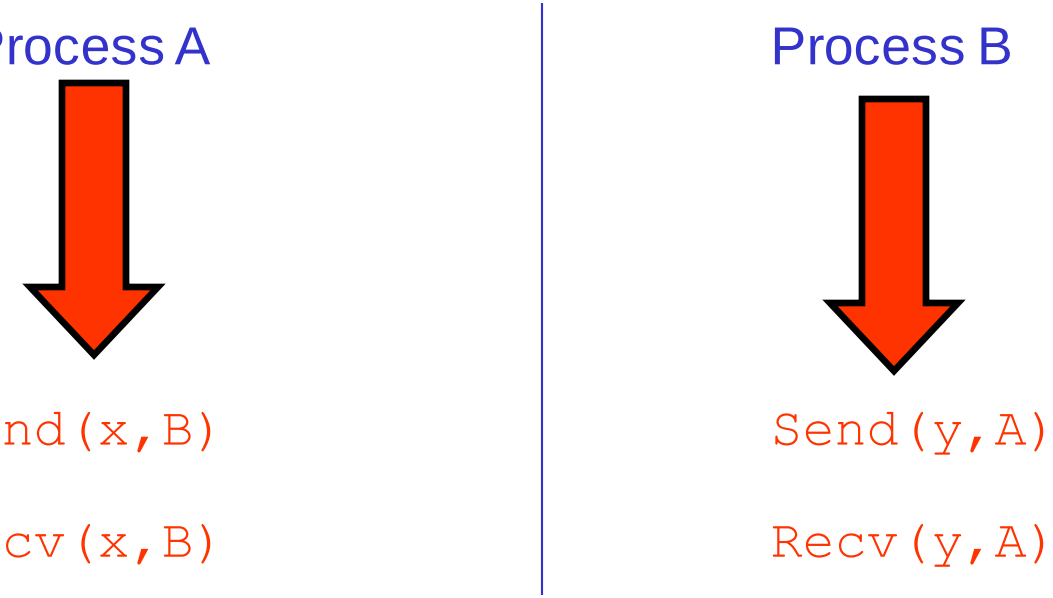
Notes

- **`Recv`** is always synchronous
  - if process B issued **`Recv`** before the **`Bsend`** from process A, then B would wait in the **`Recv`** until **`Bsend`** was issued
- Where does the buffer space come from?
  - for **`Bsend`**, the user provides a single large block of memory
  - make this available to MPI using **`MPI_Buffer_attach`**
- If A issues another **`Bsend`** before the **`Recv`**
  - system tries to store message in free space in the buffer
  - if there is not enough space then **`Bsend`** will FAIL!

Send

- Problems
  - **Ssend** runs the risk of deadlock
  - **Bsend** less likely to deadlock, and your code may run faster, but
    - the user must supply the buffer space
    - the routine will FAIL if this buffering is exhausted
- **MPI_Send** tries to solve these problems
  - buffer space is provided by the system
  - **Send** will normally be asynchronous (like **Bsend**)
  - if buffer is full, **Send** becomes synchronous (like **Ssend**)
- **MPI_Send** routine is unlikely to fail
  - but could cause your program to deadlock if buffering runs out

MPI_Send



- This code is NOT guaranteed to work
  - will deadlock if **Send** is synchronous
  - is guaranteed to deadlock if you used **Ssend**!

Solutions

- To avoid deadlock
  - either match sends and receives explicitly
  - eg for ping-pong
    - process A sends then receives
    - process B receives then sends
- For a more general solution use non-blocking communications (see later)
- For this course you should program with **`Ssend`**
  - more likely to pick up bugs such as deadlock than **`Send`**

Tags

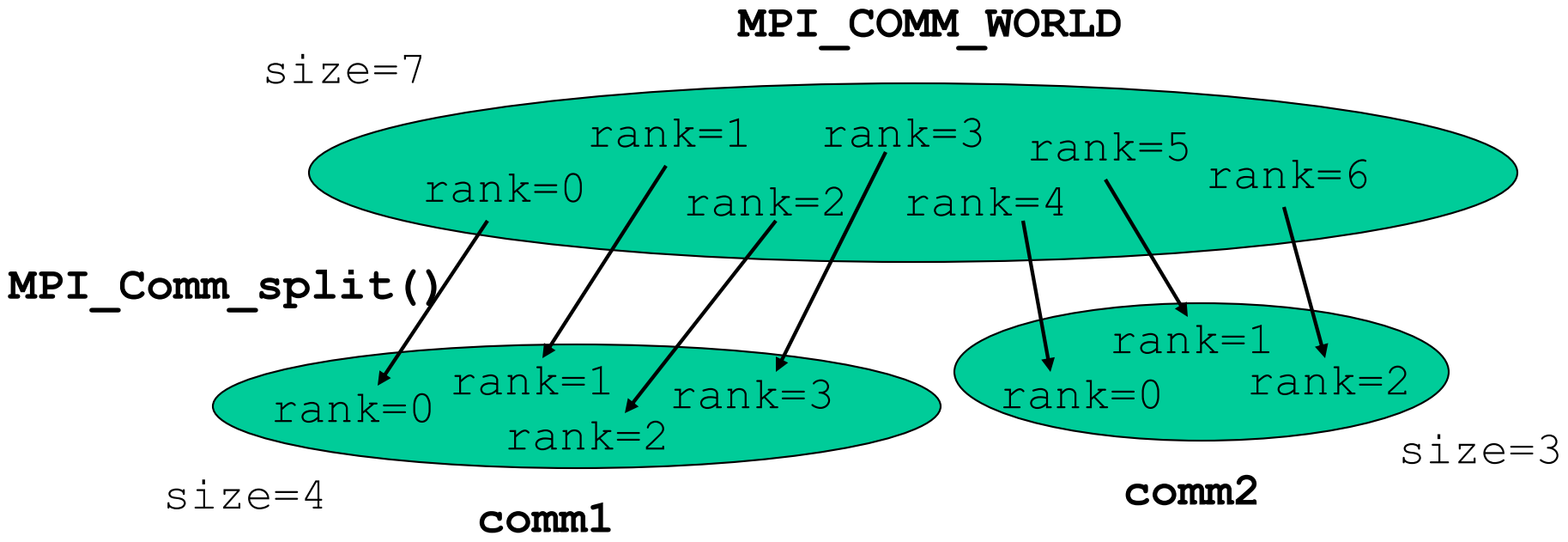
- Every message can have a tag
  - this is a non-negative integer value
  - maximum value set by MPI_TAG_UB attribute (at least 32767)
  - not everyone uses them
  - many MPI programs set all tags to zero
- Tags can be useful in some situations
  - can choose to receive messages only of a given tag
- Most commonly used with **`MPI_ANY_TAG`**
  - receives the most recent message regardless of the tag
  - user then finds out the actual value by looking at the **`status`**

Communicators

- All MPI communications take place within a communicator
  - a communicator is fundamentally a group of processes
  - there is a pre-defined communicator: **`MPI_COMM_WORLD`** which contains ALL the processes
    - also **`MPI_COMM_SELF`** which contains only one process
- A message can ONLY be received within the same communicator from which it was sent
  - unlike tags, it is not possible to wildcard on **`comm`**

Uses of Communicators (i)

- Can split **MPI_COMM_WORLD** into pieces
  - each process has a new rank within each sub-communicator
  - guarantees messages from the different pieces do not interact
    - can attempt to do this using tags but there are no guarantees



Uses of Communicators (ii)

- Can make a copy of **`MPI_COMM_WORLD`**
  - e.g. call the **`MPI_Comm_dup`** routine
  - containing all the same processes but in a new communicator

- Enables processes to communicate with each other safely within a piece of code
  - guaranteed that messages cannot be received by other code
  - this is **essential** for people writing parallel libraries (eg a Fast Fourier Transform) to stop library messages becoming mixed up with user messages
    - user cannot intercept the the library messages if the library keeps the identity of the new communicator a secret
    - not safe to simply try and reserve tag values due to wildcarding

Summary (i)

- Question: Why bother with all these send modes?
- Answer
  - it is a little complicated, but you should make sure you understand
  - **`Ssend`** and **`Bsend`** are clear
    - map directly onto synchronous and asynchronous sends
  - **`Send`** can be either synchronous or asynchronous
    - MPI is trying to be helpful here, giving you the benefits of **`Bsend`** if there is sufficient system memory available, but not failing completely if buffer space runs out
    - in practice this leads to endless confusion!
- The amount of system buffer space is variable
  - programs that run on one machine may deadlock on another
  - you should **NEVER** assume that **`Send`** is asynchronous!

Summary (ii)

- Question: What are the tags for?
- Answer
  - if you don't need them don't use them!
    - perfectly acceptable to set all tags to zero
  - can be useful for debugging
    - eg always tag messages with the rank of the sender

Summary (iii)

- Question: Can I just use **MPI_COMM_WORLD**?
- Answer
  - yes: many people never need to create new communicators in their MPI programs
  - however, it is probably bad practice to specify **MPI_COMM_WORLD** explicitly in your routines
    - using a variable will allow for greater flexibility later on, eg:

```
MPI_Comm comm;          /* or INTEGER for Fortran */
comm = MPI_COMM_WORLD;
...
MPI_Comm_rank(comm, &rank);
MPI_Comm_size(comm, &size);
....
```