

ARQ and Flow Control

Automatic Repeat reQuest (ARQ) is a technique to ensure reliable delivery of data by retransmitting frames that are received with errors or not at all. Flow control is the term for various techniques to stop or slow down transmissions to match the rate at which a receiver can accept data.

After this lecture you should be able to: explain how ACK frames ensure error-free transmissions; select an appropriate type of ARQ (from stop-and-wait, go-back-N and selective repeat) based on channel error rate and delay; and select appropriate flow-control method(s) to avoid over-flows.

Retransmission Protocols

Many frame-oriented data communication protocols require that the receiver acknowledge correct reception of each frame to ensure that no data is lost.

When a message is received without errors the receiver sends an “ACK” (acknowledgment) packet back to the sender to confirm correct reception.

If the transmitter does not receive the appropriate ACK frame within a certain amount of time (the timeout) it knows the frame (or ACK) was not correctly received and retransmits the frame. This technique is called ARQ (for Automatic Repeat reQuest).

There are various types of ARQ. The version just described is called **Stop and Wait ARQ**. The transmitter waits after sending each frame until it receives the ACK or timeout. This is the simplest type of ARQ since the transmitter only has to store one frame in case a retransmission is required. However, it is inefficient if there is a long delay between transmitter and receiver.

Efficiency can be improved by allowing the transmitter to send more than one frame without waiting for each one to be acknowledged. The transmitter adds a serial number (or count of the total bytes transmitted thus far) to each frame which are sent back with the ACKs. This version of ARQ is more complex and the transmitter must store all un-acknowledged frames. This increases memory requirements at the transmitter.

There are two ways that retransmissions can be handled:

The first, **Go Back N ARQ**, requires the transmitter to transmit all frames starting at the first unacknowledged one.

The second, **Selective Repeat ARQ**, allows the receiver to acknowledge individual frames (or ranges of byte counts) received. The transmitter then only has

to retransmit the lost frames. This requires that the receiver store all frames received since the first missing frame so the frames can be output in the right order.

Exercise 1: Create a table summarizing the three different types of ARQ. Include: throughput, transmitter memory, receiver memory and relative complexity.

Exercise 2: A data communication system operates at 1 Mb/s and uses 10000-bit data frames and 100-bit ACK frames. What are the frame durations? What is the throughput if there is no channel delay and no errors? If the round-trip channel delay is a 0.5s (typical for satellite links)? If go-back-N ARQ is used, assuming the transmitter can store all unacknowledged frames?

Exercise 3: Assume a transmitter has an ARQ timeout that is 5 packet durations and fails to get an ACK for every 10th frame (e.g. due to periodic noise bursts). Ignoring ACK delay and overhead, what is the throughput using go-back-N ARQ? Using Selective ARQ?

In many protocols ACKs can be appended as “piggyback” information on data frames being sent in the reverse direction. This reduces the overhead of sending ACKs.

Some protocols allow the use of a negative acknowledgment (NACK) that allows a receiver to ask for a retransmission if it knows that a frame was lost (e.g. a packet is received out of order). This can be faster than waiting for a timeout.

Flow Control

If the data sink cannot accept data as quickly as it is being received, it is possible for the received data to overflow the “buffer” memory available in a receiver.

To avoid such overflows we can use “flow control” signals. For example, on serial interfaces a “clear-to-send” signal output by the receiver can tell the trans-

mitter when the receiver is ready to accept data. This is often called “hardware” flow control.

To avoid the need for a dedicated flow-control signal line the receiver can send special characters to the transmitter to tell it when to stop and start sending data. This is called “software” flow control. The XON (start sending, also control-Q) and XOFF (stop sending, also control-S) ASCII control characters are often used for this. However, this means that these characters cannot be used as data making it more difficult to send binary data.

Another flow control method is to use ARQ with a limited “window” size (N). The sink can wait to output ACKs for received frames until there is room for additional frames.

Exercise 4: Which of the above flow control methods can be used with frame-oriented protocols? On unidirectional links?