

Elixir Concurrency

Programming II - Elixir Version

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Concurrency

Elixir was designed for concurrent programming. You will quickly learn how to divide your program into communicating processes and thereby give it far better structure. Try the following:

```
defmodule Wait do

  def hello do
    receive do
      x -> IO.puts("aaa! surprise, a message: #{x}")
    end
  end
end

end
```

The `IO.puts` procedure will output the string to the stdout and insert the `x` value by means of string interpolation. Compile and load the above module in the Elixir interactive shell `iex` (the returned PID number may be different):

```
iex(1)> c("wait.ex")
[Wait]

iex(2)> p = spawn(Wait, :hello, [])
#PID<0.92.0>
```

The variable `p` is now bound to the *process identifier* of spawned process. The process was created and called the procedure `hello/0` (this is how we name a function with zero arguments). It is now suspended waiting for incoming messages. In the same Elixir `iex` shell execute the command:

```
iex(3)> send p, "hello"
...
```

Now register the process identifier under the name `:foo` after having started a new process (the one above died after having received the message):

```
iex(4)> p = spawn(Wait, :hello, [])  
#PID<0.99.0>
```

```
iex(5)> Process.register(p, :foo)  
true
```

```
iex(6)> send :foo, "hello"  
...
```

1 Tic-Tac-Toe

In the example above the only thing we sent was a string but we can send arbitrary complex data structures. The `receive` statement can have several clauses that try to match incoming messages. Only if a match is found will a clause be used. Try this:

```
defmodule Tic do  
  
  def first do  
    receive do  
      {:tic, x} ->  
        IO.puts(("tic: #{x}"))  
        second()  
    end  
  end  
  
  defp second do  
    receive do  
      {:tac, x} ->  
        IO.puts(("tac: #{x}"))  
        last()  
      {:toe, x} ->  
        IO.puts(("toe: #{x}"))  
        last()  
    end  
  end  
  
  defp last do  
    receive do  
      x ->  
        IO.puts(("end: #{x}"))  
    end  
  end  
end
```

```
    end
  end

end
```

Then in the `iex` shell execute the following commands:

```
iex(1)> c("tic.ex")
[Tic]

iex(2)> p = spawn(Tic, :first, [])
#PID<0.103.0>

iex(3)> send p, {:toe, :bar}
...

iex(4)> send p, {:tac, :gurka}
...

iex(5)> send p, {:tic, :foo}
...
```

In what order were they received by the process? Note how messages are queued and how the process selects in what order to process them.