

# Algorithms and Data Structures

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## Preface

*These notes are based on the lecture slides from the course:*  
**BU CS330: Introduction to Analysis of Algorithms**

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*Please note:* These are my personal notes, and while I strive for accuracy, there may be errors. I encourage you to refer to the original slides for precise information.  
Comments and suggestions for improvement are always welcome.

## Prerequisites

## Memory Management

### 1.1 CPU Architecture

This section provides a high-level overview of the CPU to provide context/motivation for the following algorithms and data structures.

#### Definition 1.1: Central Processing Unit (CPU)

The **CPU (Central Processing Unit)**, is a hardware component that *computes* instructions within a computer. Abstract models that define interfaces between hardware and software for a CPU are called **instruction set architectures (ISA)**.

Possible operations are detailed as **opcodes** (operation codes), which are numeric identifiers for each instruction. Moreover, the ISA defines supported data types, **registers (temporary storage locations)**, and addressing modes (ways to access memory).

ISA's are defines the instruction set, which allows for flexibility in hardware performance needs. This various categories:

- **CISC (Complex Instruction Set Computing)**: Large number of complex instructions (multiple operations per instruction).
- **RISC (Reduced Instruction Set Computing)**: Small set of simple/efficient instructions.
- **VLIW (Very Long Instruction Word)**: Enables instruction parallelism (simultaneous execution).
- **EPIC (Explicitly Parallel Instruction Computing)**: More explicit control over parallel execution.

Smaller more theoretical architectures exists such as **MISC (Minimal Instruction Set Computing)** and **OISC (One Instruction Set Computing)**, which are not used in practice. Popular CPU architectures include x86\_64, and ARM64 (64-bit), originating from x86 and ARM (32-bit).

The implementation of a CPU on a circuit board is called a **microprocessor**. Multiple CPUs on a single circuit board are **multi-core processors**, where each *core* is a fully functional CPU.

**Definition 1.2: CPU Anatomy**

The CPU is comprised of three main components:

- **ALU (Arithmetic Logic Unit):** Performs arithmetic and logical operations (e.g., addition, subtraction, AND, OR).
- **Control Unit (CU):** Directs the operation of the CPU, fetching and decoding instructions, and controlling the flow of data.
- **Memory Unit (MU):** Manages data storage and retrieval, including registers and cache memory.

All these components have volatile memory, lost when the computer is turned off.

**Definition 1.3: CPU Execution Flow**

The **CPU execution flow** is the sequence of operations that the CPU performs to execute a program. It typically follows these steps:

1. **Fetch:** Fetches the next instruction from memory.
2. **Decode:** Decodes the fetched instruction to associated opcode and operands.
3. **Execute:** Perform decoded operation using the ALU or other components.
4. **Store:** Save results of the operation back into memory or registers.

This cycle is repeated until the program completes or an interrupt occurs.

**Definition 1.4: Registers**

**Registers** are small, high-speed storage locations within the CPU that hold data temporarily during execution. Common types of registers include:

- **General-Purpose Registers (GPR):** Hold general data storage and manipulation.
- **Special-Purpose Registers:** For specific functions, such as a reference to the current line of code.
- **Floating-Point Registers:** Floating-point arithmetic (e.g., decimal numbers).

Registers are faster than main memory (RAM) and are used to store frequently accessed data during program execution.

The following is an example of the primary registers in the x86-32 (IA-32) architecture, which is a CISC architecture.

Register	Size	Purpose
EAX	32-bit	Accumulator (arithmetic / return value)
EBX	32-bit	Base register (data pointer)
ECX	32-bit	Counter (loops, shifts)
EDX	32-bit	Data register (I/O, multiply/divide)
ESI	32-bit	Source index (string / memory ops)
EDI	32-bit	Destination index (string / memory ops)
EBP	32-bit	Base/frame pointer (stack-frame anchor)
ESP	32-bit	Stack pointer
EIP	32-bit	Instruction pointer (program counter)
EFLAGS	32-bit	Flags / status register (ZF, CF, OF...)

Table 1.1: Primary registers of the x86-32 (IA-32) architecture. **Note:** Registers are prefixed with ‘E’ for 32-bit, ‘R’ for 64-bit in x86-64.

### Definition 1.5: Machine Code & Compilation

Code is separated into two main areas of memory management, the program itself, and the data in transit during execution. The program itself is broken up such as follows:

- **Text Segment:** The part of the program which contains the executable code.
- **Data Segment:** The part of the program which contains global and static variables.
- **Machine Code:** The compiled code of the program, which is executed by the CPU.

Once the code compiles, our data segment is further divided into two parts in memory:

- **Initialized Data:** Data given a value before the program starts (global variables).
- **Uninitialized Data:** Data yet to be assigned (local variables), which are zeroed at program start.

By memory we mean the **RAM (Random Access Memory)** hardware component, which stores temporary data, constantly communicating with the CPU or external storage (e.g., hard drive, SSD). Each memory cell is IDed by a unique monotonic **address**, often in hexadecimal format(e.g., 0xF00, 0xF01, etc).

**Definition 1.6: Operating System (OS)**

Implemented ISAs only provide an interface to the CPU; Programmers must design how their systems utilize the CPU (e.g., file and memory management), such software is called an **operating system (OS)**.

**Tip:** In an analogous sense, say we have a train riding service. The ISA would be the specifications of the trains, rails, routes, and stations needed. The physical implementation of trains, rails, and stations would be the CPU. The OS would be the train schedule system, managing external factors such as workers and other tasks effecting the train service.

**Definition 1.7: The Kernel**

The **kernel** is a **process** (a program) vital for OS operation, always running with the highest priority. It is the only program that can directly interact with the CPU and various hardware components.

Other processes running on the system are called **user processes**. This is where applications and other user-level programs run. If a user wishes to perform a task that requires hardware access (e.g., writing/reading files), they must request the kernel called a **system call (syscall)**. System calls provide an **Application Programming Interface (API)** for user processes to interact with the kernel.

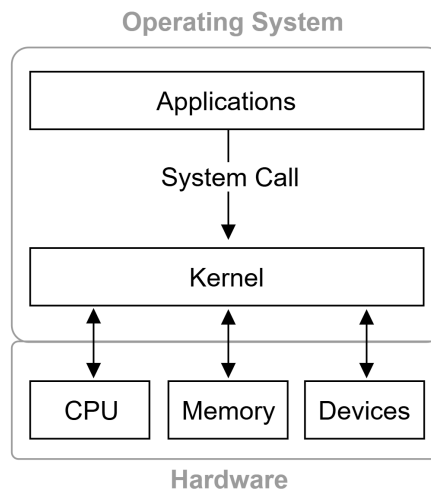


Figure 1.1: User-level applications make syscalls to the kernel to access hardware resources.



**Definition 1.8: Bus**

A **bus** is a collection of physical signal lines (wires or pins) and protocols that carry data, addresses, and control signals between components inside a computer (e.g. CPU, memory, I/O devices) or between multiple boards and peripherals. There are two main types of buses:

- **Serial Bus:** Transfers data one bit at a time over a single channel (e.g., USB).
- **Parallel Bus:** Transfers multiple bits simultaneously over multiple channels (e.g., PCI).

**Tip:** USB stands for **Universal Serial Bus**, which is a serial bus standard for connecting devices to a computer. PCI stands for **Peripheral Component Interconnect**, which is a parallel bus standard for connecting peripherals to a computer.

**Definition 1.9: Device Drivers**

The kernel exposes generic interfaces to various sub-systems (e.g., file system) that user processes can use to perform tasks; **Device drivers** implement such interfaces, translating generic system calls into hardware-specific operations for specific devices (e.g., disk drives, network cards, etc.). Drivers must be loaded into kernel space.

This text does not concern assembly code or low-level programming, so **do not** get caught up on the specifics of this next example:

**Example 1.1: Assembly Code**

Here is an assembly code example that demonstrates both initialized and uninitialized data. Initialized data is placed in the '.data' section, while uninitialized data is placed in the '.bss' section:

```
.intel_syntax noprefix           ; Specification
section .data                   ; Initialized data section
    num1    dd    7              ; num1 is initialized to 7
    num2    dd    3              ; num2 is initialized to 3

section .bss                    ; Uninitialized data section
    temp    resd 1                ; temp is reserved (uninitialized)
    result  resd 1                ; result is reserved (uninitialized)

section .text                   ; Code section
    global _start

_start:
```

```
mov eax          ; Load num1 into eax
mov             eax          ; Store num1 in temp
mov ebx          ; Load num2 into ebx
add eax ebx      ; Add num2 to eax (eax = num1 + num2)
mov             eax          ; Store the sum in result

mov             ; syscall number for exit
mov             ; exit code 0
mov             ; execute system call
```

In this example, ‘num1’ and ‘num2’ are initialized before execution, while ‘temp’ and ‘result’ are uninitialized and only receive values during program execution. syscalls act on the value of register rax; Hence, The syscall opcode and its destination index are loaded before calling.

■

## 1.2 Stack Data Structures

Let's talk about our first data structure, the stack:

### Definition 2.1: Stack

A **stack data structure** is a collection of elements that follows a **Last In, First Out** (LIFO) principle. I.e., in a stack of plates, the last added plate is the first one to be removed, not the middle or bottom/first plate. Each *plate* in the stack is called a **stack frame**.

Now let's look at how our programs utilize the stack:

### Definition 2.2: Call Stack

A **call stack** is a stack which keeps track of function calls in a program as well as any local variables within such functions.

This is why we say a variable is in **scope**, as when a function is taken off the stack, or a new stack frame is placed on top, the variables in the previous or discarded stack frame are **no longer accessible**.

Let's illustrate this with the following diagram:

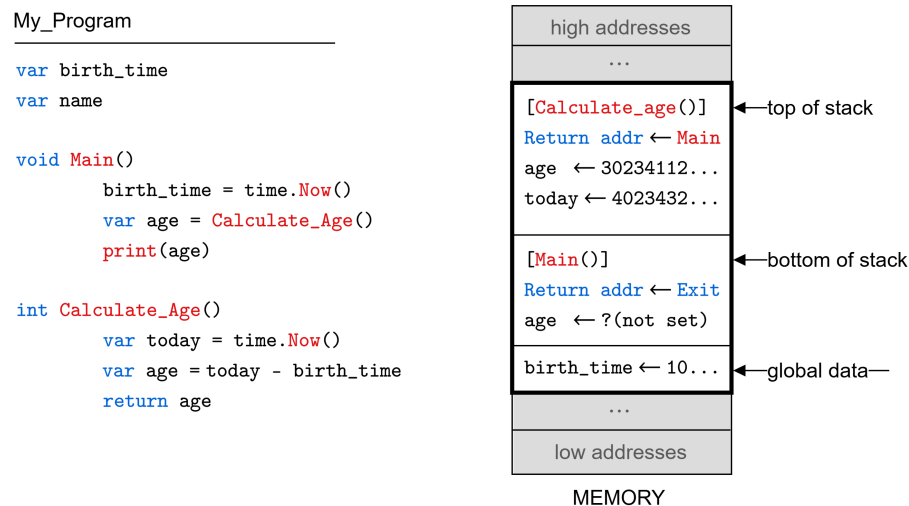


Figure 1.2: Here is a simplified look at how memory manages the stack. On the left is our program written in some abstract language, and on the right is the call stack in memory (simplified). The program has a global ‘birth\_time’ variable, which is initialized in the **Main** function. The **Main** function then calls the **Calculate\_Age** function which uses the ‘birth\_time.’ Looking at the memory, we see at the bottom of our memory contains global variables accessible to any frame. Next, is the bottom of the stack, containing a return address to exit the program, while awaiting the result of the function call for ‘age’. The top of our stack contains another frame that we will return the value a new ‘age’ (not the same as the one before) not accessible from the main function. This new frame also contains a new local variable ‘today.’ Once this function returns, **Main** will have the result of its local variable ‘age.’. Concretely, the ‘age’ variable in both the **Main** and **Calculate\_Age** function are completely separate despite sharing the same *name*.

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**Please Note:** The above figure is a simplified version; This presentation derivatives from what actually happens for teaching sake. In the following pages we define the stack frame in more detail.

**Tip:** A lot of demonstrations (including this text) will show the stack growing **upwards**; This is strictly because it's easier to visualize and does not accurately portray what a stack really does or looks like. In the following pages we will clear this up, and show how the stack actually grows from top-to-bottom. Of course, there is always room for deviation if a developer wishes to implement a stack in some other arbitrary way. Nonetheless, the following is what one might typically expect in a stack implementation.

**Definition 2.3: Instructions**

The CPU register (IP/EIP) is the **instruction pointer**, pointing to the next operation to execute. All commands are baked into the CPU; This includes the **ALU (Arithmetic Logic Unit)**, **Memory Unit (load/store)**, and **Control Unit (branching/looping)**. All instructions are given a numeric ID called an **opcode** (operation code).

The CPU fetches the instruction from memory, decodes it, and executes it. This process is repeated until the program terminates. Languages like assembly interface this with human-readable mnemonics, such as ‘MOV’, ‘ADD’, ‘SUB’, etc (as seen in Example 1.1).

**Definition 2.4: Stack Frame Anatomy**

Under the x86-32 calling convention Two registers keep track our place in the stack:

- **Base Pointer (BP/EBP):** Points to the base (i.e. “bottom”) of the current function’s stack frame.
- **Stack Pointer (SP/ESP):** Points to the “top” of the current function’s stack frame, i.e., the next free byte where a push would land.

When the program starts, the operating system *reserves* a contiguous region of memory for the stack. By convention, the *bottom* of that region lies at a higher address, and the stack “grows downward” toward lower addresses as data is pushed. If the stack pointer ever moves past the reserved limit—a **stack overflow** occurs.

A single **stack frame** itself is a contiguous block of memory in which the function stores:

- **Parameters:** The arguments passed in by the caller,
- **Return Address:** The address of the next instruction to execute after the function returns,
- **Old Base Pointer:** The caller’s ‘EBP’, saved so that on return we can restore the previous frame,
- **Local Variables:** Space for any locals or temporaries that the function needs.

This is why variables in previous or new functions calls become “**out of scope**” (no longer accessible), as they belong to some other stack frame; When it comes to **Global Variables**, they live in a separate region of memory, defined by the **data segment** (1.5).

Moreover, a call to a new function invokes the call instruction, this automatically pushes the return address to the current frame onto the stack. Additionally, the CPU reserves the **EAX** register for the return value (number or address) of a function. When the function returns, it can place its result in ‘EAX’, and the caller can retrieve it from there. During constant use the ‘EAX’ register may contain garbage data from previous use, unless explicitly set to zero or some other value.

High Addresses		
Contents	Offset	Notes
(Parameters 3, 4, ...)	$EBP + 16, +20, \dots$	Third-and-onward arguments, if any.
Parameter 2	$EBP + 12$	Second argument passed on stack.
Parameter 1	$EBP + 8$	First argument passed on stack.
Return Address	$EBP + 4$	Auto-pushed by the <code>call</code> instruction.
Old EBP (Saved BP)	$EBP + 0$	The caller's base pointer
Current Frame (locals/temporaries)		
Local Variable 1	$EBP - 4$	First 4-byte local (or smallest slot).
Local Variable 2	$EBP - 8$	Next 4-byte local or part of a larger object.
...	$\vdots$	(additional locals at $EBP - 12, -16, \dots$ )
Low Addresses		

Table 1.2: Typical x86-32 Stack-Frame Layout, where offsets are typically a multiple of 4 bytes.

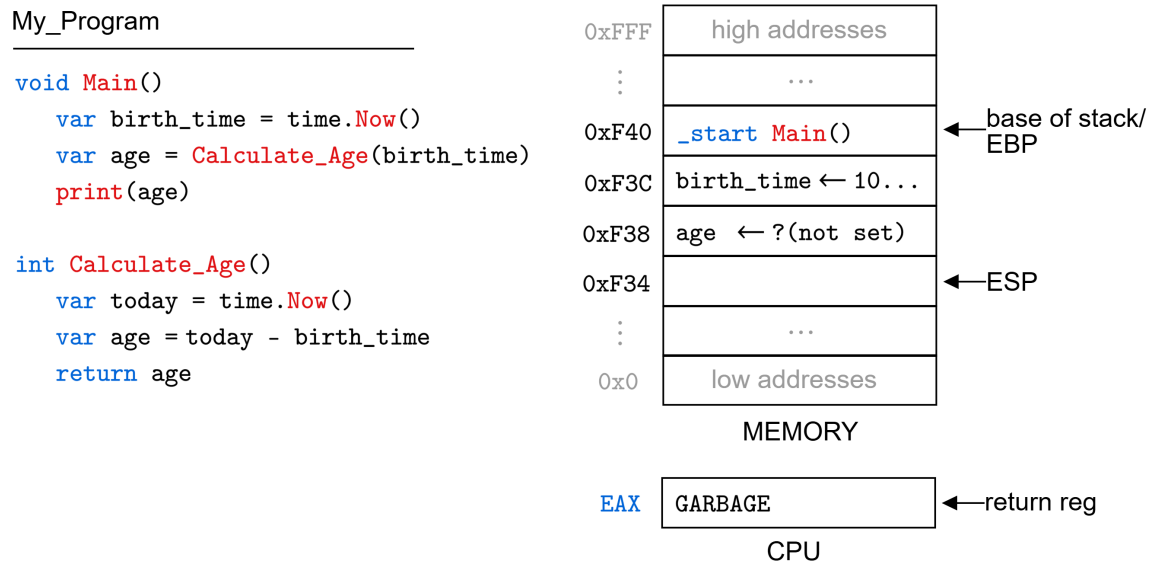


Figure 1.3: Revisiting Figure (1.2) with slight alterations to the code: This is a snapshot of the code executing right before `CalculateAge(birth_time)` is called. For simplicity sake, let's say the stack begins at address `0xF40` (Hexadecimal), growing downwards. Here the base of the stack and the EBP are one and the same. We include the CPU's EAX (return register), which contains garbage. Address `0xF38` is currently just reserved space for 'age'.

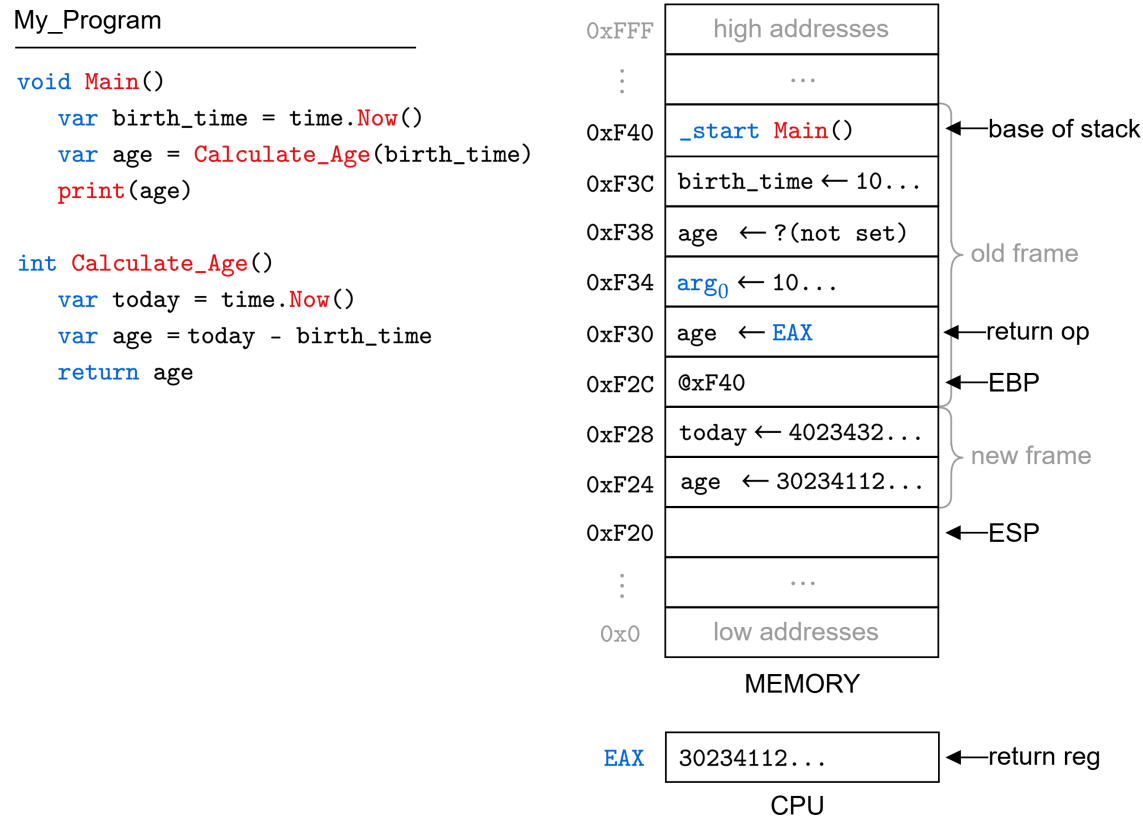


Figure 1.4: Revisiting Figure (1.3) at the moment the function `CalculateAge(birth_time)` has supplied its return value to the EAX register, and is about to return. We see that before calling `CalculateAge(birth_time)`: The old frame pushed its arguments (`birth_time`) onto the stack, then the return address (IP/Next Instruction) onto the stack, and finally the old EBP (Base Pointer) onto the stack. The ‘new frame’ then sets the saved EBP address to the current EBP, concluding the old frame into the ‘new frame’. Moreover, since the offset looks for local variables below `0xF40`, the above ‘`birth_time`’ and ‘`age`’ are **out of scope** for the ‘new frame’, vice-versa. **Note:** This is still a high-level abstraction of what actually happens sequentially with opcodes; Nonetheless, this is the fundamental idea of how a stack works.

This concludes our discussion on stack structures; We continue with the heap structure next.

### 1.3 Heap Data Structures

So far we have simply said global data is declared in the **data segment** of memory. There is a second segment of memory that builds on top of this called the **heap**:

#### Definition 3.1: Heap – Dynamic vs. Static Memory

When a program runs there is a **static** (fixed) region reserved for the program's data segment (local/global variables). During execution, more objects may be created, needing additional memory; A new region of memory is reserved **dynamically**, building upwards from the top of the data segment, called the **heap**.

Language protocols either **manually** (e.g., Assembly, C) or **automatically** (e.g., Python, Java) manage this memory:

- **Manual Memory Management:** The programmer must explicitly allocate and deallocate memory using functions like 'malloc' and 'free' in C.
- **Automatic Memory Management:** The language runtime automatically allocates and deallocates memory, often using a **garbage collector** to reclaim unused memory (no variables pointing to it).

Unlike the stack, this allows values to be accessed from anywhere in the program, regardless of the function call or scope.

To continue we must understand what a hash table is, and how arrays and objects work in memory:

#### Definition 3.2: Hash Table

A **hash table** is a data structure that maps keys to values, allowing for efficient retrieval of values based on their keys. It uses a **hash function**, which takes a key (e.g. a number or string) as input and produces a fixed-size (i.e., output modulo the table size) hash value for the index.

**Note:** The input in many context (typically cryptographic), may be called 'data' or 'message'; The output: hash, checksum, fingerprint, or digest.

#### Definition 3.3: Arrays in Memory

In memory array elements are stored sequentially. A reference to an array is a pointer to the first element. To terminate reading an array, we must either know the size of said array or have some sentinel value (e.g., 'null' or '0') to indicate the end of the array.

E.g., An array of 3 integers (4 bytes each) occupying [0xF00-0xF0C]: [1, 2, 3, null].



Objects behave very similarly to arrays, but with a few key differences:

**Definition 3.4: Objects in Memory**

An **Object** (or **struct**), is a collection of key-value pairs, where each key is called a **field** or **attribute** and each value can be any data type (e.g., number, string, or address).

Attributes are stored in array like fashion, where each element is a fixed-offset from the head (start) of the object. The object itself is a pointer to the first element. Accessing attributes works differently in compiled (e.g., C) vs. interpreted (e.g., Python) languages:

- **Compiled Languages:** There is no lookup, as the compiler has *hardcoded* the offsets of each attribute interaction (e.g., ‘object.attribute’ is translated to a direct memory access).
- **Interpreted Languages:** The interpreter looks up a hash table lookup for the attribute name.

Depending on the use case, objects may be stored in the heap or stack:

- **Static Objects:** An objects whose size is known at compile time can be allocated on the stack. I.e., no changes to the object are made after creation (e.g., Math and Time objects, which purely exist to compute).
- **Dynamic Objects:** Often just called **objects**, are allocated on the heap, allowing for dynamic resizing and modification (e.g., a student object with attributes like ‘name’, ‘age’, and ‘grades’ that can change over time).

We define the following for completeness sake:

**Definition 3.5: Classes & Interfaces**

Object-oriented programming is a paradigm where objects are the main building blocks of the program. A **class** is a blueprint for defining how an object will behave once **instantiated** (created). In this paradigm, functions are called **methods**, as they are defined and used within the class (i.e., globally does not exist in independence).

Some languages (e.g., Java, C++) support **interfaces** (or protocols), which specify a set of methods that implementing classes must provide. Although the terminology varies (abstract classes, traits, protocols, etc.), they all ultimately describe capabilities an object must fulfill.

**Tip:** Often when trying to print an object in Java we see `ClassName@HEX`, where `HEX` is the object’s identity hash code instead of the memory address; Memory access poses security risks to memory manipulation.

One last definition:

### Definition 3.6: Strings & Characters in Memory

A **character** is represented by a numeric code unit:

- In C, a single **char** (1 byte) typically holds an ASCII code (0–127).
- In Java, **char** is a 16-bit UTF-16 code unit (U+0000..U+FFFF). ASCII values (0–127) map directly to the same Unicode code points, so:

```
char c = 'A';
System.out.println((int)c); // prints 65, since 'A' is U+0041
```

Characters beyond U+FFFF use two **char** values (a surrogate pair). This allows us to do things like checking for valid characters:

```
if ((c >= 'a' && c <= 'z') || (c >= 'A' && c <= 'Z')) {
    // c is in 'a'..'z' or 'A'..'Z'
}
```

We can also perform arithmetic on **char**:

```
char c = 'A';           // U+0041 (65)
char next = (char)(c + 1); // 'B' (66)
```

---

Typically, a **string** is stored as a contiguous array of **characters**. In low-level languages (e.g. C), that array ends with a null terminator (`\0`) and literal strings reside in the data segment. In higher-level languages (e.g. Java, Python), strings are full objects with methods. For e.g.,

**C:**

- String literals (e.g. `"Hello"`) are placed in the (often read-only) data segment.
- Runtime-constructed strings (via `malloc`, `strcpy`, etc.) live on the heap.

**Java:**

- Compile-time literals are **interned** (stored as a single shared copy) into the **String Constant Pool** section (specially reserved on the heap).
- Any other **String** (e.g. via `new String(...)`, concatenation, or user input) also resides on the heap but outside the pool.
- Because Java strings are immutable, interning lets multiple references share the same character data.

With slight alterations to our code in Figure (1.4), we illustrate heaps and arrays:

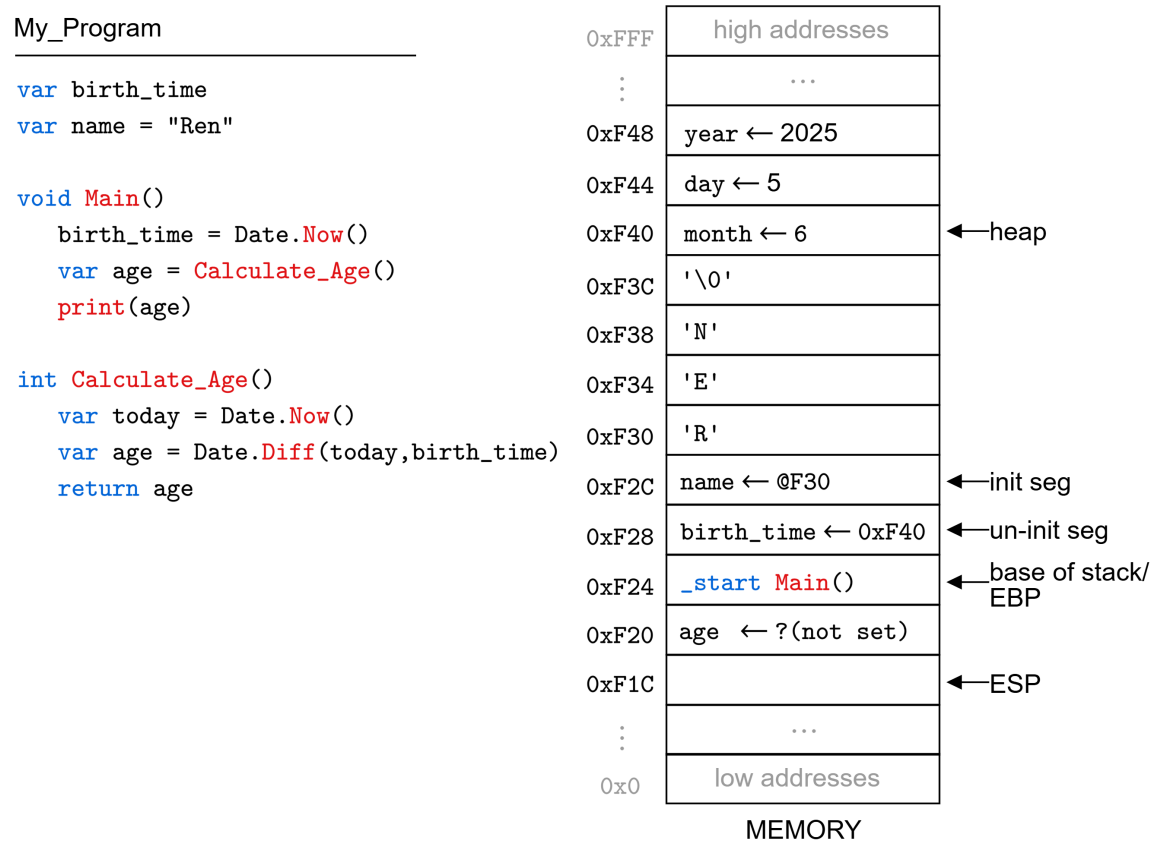


Figure 1.5: Here `birth_time` and `name` are global variables. Following the C convention, `birth_time` is placed in the uninitialized data segment, while `name` is placed in the initialized data segment. Since `name` is a string, it holds a reference to the first character in the string, which is stored contiguously in the initialized data segment ending with a null terminator (`'\0'`). During execution, `Date.Now()` a method call from a `Date` object is called; This method returns a new object, which is placed on the heap with its attributes (`month`, `day`, `year`) stored contiguously in memory. **Note:** Methods such as `Date.Diff()` are code (not data), which do not live in the heap or stack.

A small note regarding the example above:

#### Definition 3.7: Factory Method

A **factory method** is a function that creates and returns an object, often initializing it with default values or parameters. In Figure (1.5), the method `Date.Now()` is a factory method that creates a new `Date` object with the current date and time.

## Bibliography