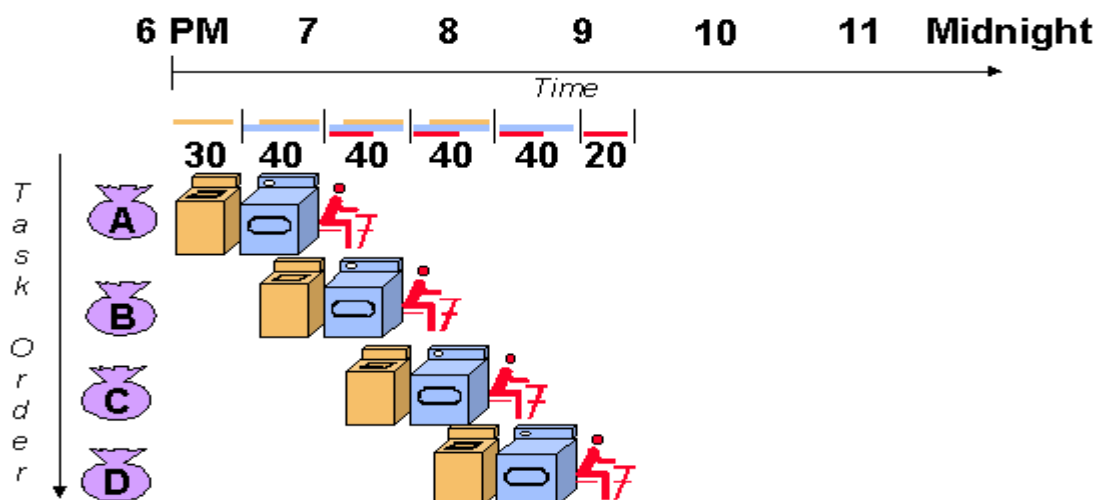# RISC PIPELINING

Pipelining, a standard feature in RISC processors, is much like an assembly line. Because the processor works on different steps of the instruction at the same time, more instructions can be executed in a shorter period of time.

A useful method of demonstrating this is the laundry analogy. Let's say that there are four loads of dirty laundry that need to be washed, dried, and folded. We could put the the first load in the washer for 30 minutes, dry it for 40 minutes, and then take 20 minutes to fold the clothes. Then pick up the second load and wash, dry, and fold, and repeat for the third and fourth loads. Supposing we started at 6 PM and worked as efficiently as possible, we would still be doing laundry until midnight.
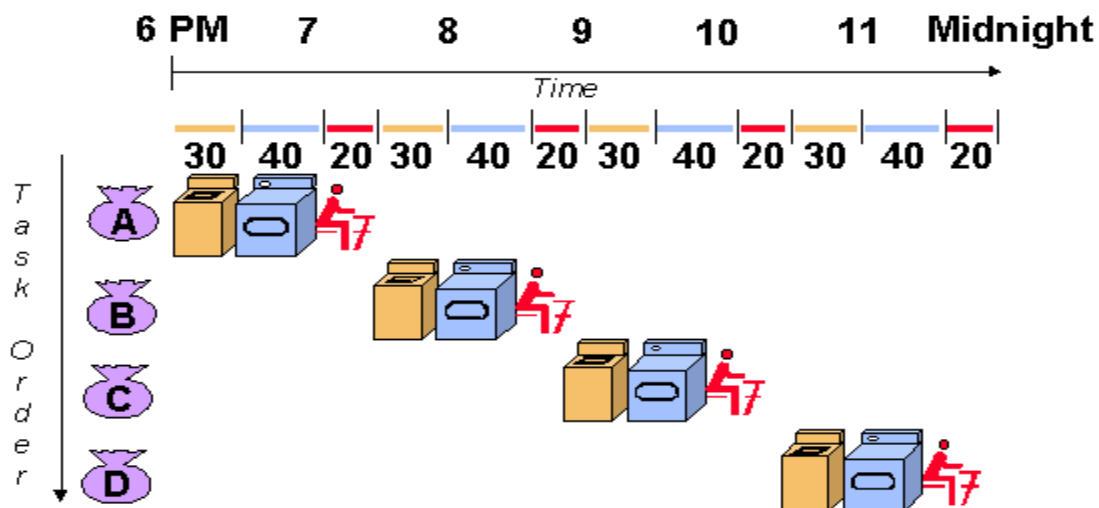
However, a smarter approach to the problem would be to put the second load of dirty laundry into the washer after the first was already clean and whirling happily in the dryer. Then, while the first load was being folded, the second load would dry, and a third load could be added to the pipeline of laundry. Using this method, the laundry would be finished by 9:30.

In RISC pipelining different processors have different numbers of steps, they are basically variations of these five, used in the MIPS R3000 processor:

1. fetch instructions from memory
2. read registers and decode the instruction
3. execute the instruction or calculate an address
4. access an operand in data memory
5. write the result into a register

If you glance back at the diagram of the laundry pipeline, you'll notice that although the washer finishes in half an hour, the dryer takes an extra ten minutes, and thus the wet clothes must wait ten minutes for the dryer to free up. Thus, the length of the pipeline is dependent on the length of the longest step. Because RISC instructions are simpler than those used in pre-RISC processors (now called CISC, or Complex Instruction Set Computer), they are more conducive to pipelining. While CISC instructions varied in length, RISC instructions are all the same length and can be fetched in a single operation. Ideally, each of the stages in a RISC processor pipeline should take 1 clock cycle so that the processor finishes an instruction each clock cycle and averages one cycle per instruction (CPI).