

COMP15111 notes

Todd Davies

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1 Introduction

1.1 A Computational Model

The simplest, earliest, commonest, most important computational model is the **Von-Neumann Imperative Procedural Computer Model**

According to this model, a computer can:

1. Store information

2. Manipulate the stored information
3. Make decisions depending on the stored information

1.2 Simple View Of A Computer

The simplest model of a computer can be represented as:

$$Memory \Leftrightarrow Bus \Leftrightarrow Processor$$

1.2.1 Memory

Memory is a set of locations which can hold information, such as numbers, programs or many other types of data. Each memory location has a unique numerical address, and there are typically thousands of millions of different locations. There are various ways of depicting memory; a common one is a 'hex dump' that often looks something like this:

Address	Hex values	ASCII
00000000	48 65 6C 6C 6F 0A	Hello.

Each item that is in the memory has a unique address.

1.2.2 Bus

A bus is a bidirectional communication path. It is able to transmit addresses and numbers between components inside the computer.

1.2.3 Processor

The processor obeys a sequence of instructions, commonly referred to as a program. Historically the processor was often referred to as a CPU, however, this is inappropriate nowadays since typical processors consist of several processing cores.

1.3 Three-address instructions

Every kind of processor has a different set of instructions, real world examples include: Pentium, ARM and others

Each three-address instruction:

1. Copies the values from any two memory locations and sends them to the processor (source operands)
2. Copies some operation e.g. adds the copied numbers together
3. Copies the result back from the processor into a third memory location (destination operand)

For example, if we wanted to convert the Java code `sum = a + b;` into a three-address instruction we would:

1. Identify the two *source operands*: *a* holds 2, *b* holds 3
2. Perform the *operation*: $2 + 3 = 5$
3. Let the variable *sum* equal the answer 5. This

is the *destination operand*

1.3.1 Three address example

Question: Convert the Java code $product = c * d;$ into the three- address style and draw a two box view of it.

First we need to re-write the Java code in the three-address style:

$$product \leftarrow c * d$$

Now we can draw the box view of it (figure 1).

1.3.2 Memory bottleneck

Most processors can process instructions faster than they can be fed by memory. Each instruction in the three-address cycle requires four memory cycles:

1. Fetch the instruction
2. Read the first operand
3. Read the second operand

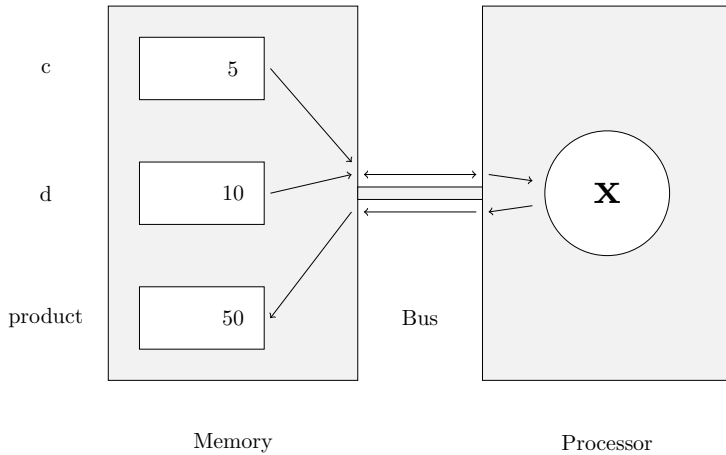


Figure 1: An example of the two box model

4. Write the result to memory

Each of these memory cycles could take hundreds of processor clock cycles to complete, and so in this time the processor would be doing nothing. However, most modern processors employ a *cache* to temporarily store commonly accessed memory locations, and so avoid some of the memory cycles.

1.4 Registers

Registers are very small amounts of storage build into a processor. Since they are inside the processor data doesn't need to be transferred over the bus, and so they are very fast. Registers are used instead of the main memory which speeds up program execution.

Each register can only hold one value and each processor will only generally have a few dozen registers (e.g. ARM has sixteen).

1.5 Instruction Styles

1.5.1 One address

The one address style can only use up to one memory location in each instruction, all other operands must be registers. An example may be:

$$R1 \leftarrow R0 + \textit{memory location}$$

1.5.2 Load-store

The load-store style cannot perform operations on memory locations at all. Instead, values from memory must be loaded into a registers before the operation takes place and then the operation can be performed on the registers. Following the operation, the result must be stored back into memory again.

$$R1 \leftarrow \textit{memory location}$$

$$R1 \leftarrow R0 + R1$$

$$\textit{memory location} \leftarrow R1$$

This means that we need extra instructions to do stuff with memory locations:

1. **Load** the value from memory into a register before the operation.
2. **Store** the value in the register back to memory after the operation.

For example, the Java code $Sum = a + b + c;$ would be run as:

R1	\leftarrow	a	(i.e. load from a)
R2	\leftarrow	b	(i.e. load from b)
R3	\leftarrow	R1 + R2	(i.e. a+b)
R4	\leftarrow	c	(i.e. load from c)
R5	\leftarrow	R3 + R4	(i.e. (a+b)+c)
Sum	\leftarrow	R5	(i.e. store to sum)

You can see that the load-store style favours lots of very simple, very fast instructions.

2 ARM

Computers obey programs which are sequences of instructions. Instructions are coded as values in memory. The sequences are held in memory adjacent memory locations. Values in memory can be interpreted as you please, from numbers to text, images or anything really!

Any given set of binary digits can be read as a decimal number, but not always as text, so values in memory are often represented as numbers for convenience.

2.1 Assembly Language

Assembly language is a means of representing machine instructions in a human readable form.

Each type of processor has its own assembly language (since each language is specific to a particular architecture) but each instruction typically has a lot in common:

- A mnemonic, that specifies the type of operation
- A destination, such as a register or memory location
- And one or more sources that may be registers or memory locations.
- Possibly with a comment too which will help programmers understand what's happening and aren't interpreted by the assembler.

When a program has been written in assembler, it must be *assembled* by an *assembler* to run it.

2.2 ARM instructions

ARM has many instructions but we only need three categories:

- Memory operations that move data between the memory and the registers.
- Processing operations that perform calculations using value already in registers.
- Control flow instructions are used to make decisions, repeat operations etc.

2.3 Transferring data between registers and memory

Memory operations load a value into a register from an address in memory or store the value of a register to a memory address.

For example, a into register 1 ($R1 \leftarrow a$) we would write: `LDR R1, a`

Or to store the value in register 5 into *sum* ($sum \leftarrow R5$): `STR R5, sum`

In these examples, *a* and *sum* are aliases for the addresses of memory locations.

2.4 ARM processing instructions

ARM has many different instructions to perform operations such as addition, subtraction and multiplication.

The syntax for such operations is usually:

```
[operand] [destination register] [register 1]  
[register 2]
```

For example, to add two numbers together, we might write:

```
ADD R2, R0, R1
```

This will add the value of R0 to the value of R1 and store it in R2.

2.5 ARM control instructions

The most common control instruction is the branch. Similar to **GOTO** in other languages, a branch will change the PC register (see section 2.6) to another value so the order of execution of the program is changed.

Branches can be made to be conditional by appending a conditional operator on to the command.

The syntax is something like:

B[conditional operator] [branch name]

Some examples of different conditional operators are:

Command	Function
B	Branches to a different location in the code.
BNE	Branches, but only if the previous condition was false.
BEQ	Branches, but only if the previous condition was true.

2.6 Stored programs and the Program Counter

A computer can make decisions, and choose which instructions to obey next depending upon the results of those decisions. A **Program Counter** (PC) register is used to hold the memory address of the next instruction to be executed. ARM uses register 15 as its PC.

2.7 Fetch-Execute Cycle

The processor must first fetch instructions from memory before it can execute them. This is called the fetch-execute cycle, and it involves:

1. **Fetch**: copy the instruction, pointed to by the PC, from memory and set PC to point to the next instruction
2. **Execute**: obey the instruction (exactly as before)
3. Repeat.

In ARM, the PC starts with a values of `0x00000000` when the program is initially run. On each cycle of the Fetch-Execute cycle, the PC is incremented by 4, since instructions each occupy 4 memory locations.

2.8 Decision Making

In order to make decisions, the computer mustn't just execute instructions one after the other in a linear manner. Instead, branches must be used to change the sequence of instructions to be executed.

In order to perform a conditional branch, we must first perform a compare command to perform the comparison before we do the branch.

2.8.1 An example

If we wanted to do a 1 discount on a shopping list if the price was over 20, we would do the following:

```
1      LDR R0, total ; Load the total price
2      ; into R0
```

```

3
4     CMP R0, #20  ; Compare R0 and 20
5         ; (the literal)
6     BLT nodiscount ; If the price is too low,
7         ; then don't discount
8     SUB R0, #1  ; Deduct 1
9     STR R0, total ; Store the result back
10        ; into memory
11
12     nodiscount SVC 2  ; Finish
13
14     total    DEFW 25  ; Lets say the total is \$25

```

2.9 Allocating memory

The DEFW (define word) operation puts a value in memory before the program is run. Any define operation is executed before the program is run.

The actual memory location that is used to store the value isn't known to the running program, however, an *alias* is attached to the memory location by the programmer and the memory location can be referenced

through that.

The syntax for the `DEFW` command is as follows:

```
myage DEFW 18
```

Where `myage` is the alias and `18` is the value.

`DEFW` can also be used to define a number of words:

```
squares DEFW 0, 1, 4, 9, 16, 25
```

`DEFB` stores a single byte in memory. It is useful for strings such as "hello":

```
hi DEFB "hello"
```

`DEFS` sets a block of bytes to a set value:

```
reserved_space DEFS 10, 5
```

The above will set 10 bytes to the value '5'.

3 Storing values

There are many ways to store data. For example, we could store what lights are on in a traffic light in

many different ways. First, we must decide how many different states the traffic light can be in:

Red, Red Amber, Green, Amber

You can see that we have four states. This could be represented in binary as two bits:

00	Red
01	Red Amber
10	Green
11	Amber

We could also store the states as their binary representations of their names:

R	01010010
RA	0101001001000001
G	01000111
A	01000001

You can see though, that this isn't as efficient as storing just two binary digits.

4 ARM assembly programming

4.1 Different types of values

ARM has the capacity to work with many different types and sizes of values. Each type has a different use case. The main ones are described below:

Name	length	Use
Byte	8 bits	Used for characters
Word	32 bits	Used for integer es, addresses and instructions

There are other types too (such as the halfword and doubleword) but they aren't needed for this module.

ARM processors require that memory locations are aligned. This means that values stored in memory start at specific places. For example, a word address must be a multiple of four.

This means that after a `DEFW` statement, the `ALIGN` command must be called (See 4.10.2 for more on the `ALIGN` command.).

4.2 Loading and storing values in memory

The commands **LDR** and **STR** are used to move values between memory and registers. The commands are detailed in full below:

Command	Function
STR	Copies the whole (32 bit) register into memory.
LDR	Loads a 32 bit word from memory into a register.
STRB	Stores a single 8 bit byte into memory from a register.
LDRB	Loads a byte from memory into a register. The upper 24 bits of the register are zeroed.

4.3 Endianness

Endianness is a property of a memory location that defines the order of the bits. There are two types of endianness, **little endian** and **big endian**.

In the word 0x12345678 there are four bytes:

- 0x12
- 0x34
- 0x56
- 0x78

In little endian, the first byte would be 0x12 since bits are read from left to right in little endian.

In big endian, the first byte would be 0x78 since bits are read from right to left in big endian.

This is important when we decide what the most and least significant bits in a word are. For example, in this instance the *lsb* is 0x12 in little endian, but 0x78 in big endian.

In this course, little endian is used, though ARM can use either.

4.4 Addressing memory

ARM uses 32 bit addresses, so there are 2^{32} different bytes that can be addressed in memory (or $\frac{2^{32}}{4}$ different words). However, there is no guarantee that the system on which the program is running will have that much memory available.

4.5 Instruction encoding

Each ARM instruction is encoded into a four byte word. The exact meaning of each of the bits varies per instruction.

For example, in the branch instruction, the first four bits specify the condition, the second four bits represent the actual operation to perform (i.e. branch) and the remaining twenty four bits define the memory location of the next instruction to branch to.

However, this presents a problem. We only have twenty four bits with which to define the next location to branch to, which allows us to define 2^{24} different locations. However, there are 2^{32} possible addresses that

we could use!

This problem is overcome by treating the 24 bits as an offset to the address of the current instruction. This works since most of the time, the address that is being branched to is fairly close to the current instruction.

In order to be able to branch to addresses before and after the current instruction, we must use two's complement to allow signed integers to be used to specify the offset. This means we can branch to any instruction at an address $\pm 2^{23}$ from the current instruction.

4.6 Literals

ARM is able to encode literal values into instructions. This saves time having to access registers or memory in order to perform operations such as arithmetic.

An example is to increment a register:

```
ADD R1, R1, #1
```

However, ARM only assigns up to 12 bits for a literal value, so we can only have 2^{12} values. However, ARM employs a strange method of encoding these values so that more useful values are available (for example, #512 is allowed, but #257 isn't).

4.6.1 Negative literals

Technically, ARM doesn't support negative literals, however, the assembler will usually be able to find a way to implement them. Some examples are given below:

```
ADD R1, #-1  →  SUB R1, #1
CMP R2, #-2  →  CMN R2, #2
MOV R3, #-3  →  MVN R3, #3
```

4.7 Supervisor calls

Supervisor calls are functions implemented by the operating system, not ARM itself. The parameter of an SVC call defines it's exact operation.

In this module, the SVC call does the following for each parameter:

SVC 0	Output a character
SVC 1	Input a character
SVC 2	Stop execution
SVC 3	Output a string
SVC 4	Output an integer

4.8 Pseudo instructions

The ARM assembler provides some instructions that are translated into sequences of more complicated instructions at the time of assembly for our convenience.

One such instruction is loading a literal into a register. This is done using the `LDR` command as usual, however a literal is used with the '=' character instead of a '#'. E.g. to load the value 100 into register one, we do:

```
LDR R1,=100
```

However, this is a pseudo instruction and will be converted by the assembler to:

```
MOV R1,#100
```

However, if the number is very large, it becomes:

```
constant DEFB 100  
LDR R1, constant
```

4.9 Loading an address into a register

The `ADR` command loads an address into a register, for example:

```
1  constant DEFB 100  
2  ADR R1, constant
```

Will load the memory address of `constant` into register one.

4.10 Directives

Directives are evaluated at the time of assembly.

4.10.1 DEF commands

The DEF{W,B,S} command reserves an amount of memory dependent on the operation used (see the table) and puts an initial value in it.

Command	Function
DEFW num	Reserves a <i>word</i> of memory and puts the initial value num in it.
DEFB value	Reserves <i>byte(s)</i> of memory and puts the initial value value in it. Note that the value can be a string literal, in which case the number of bytes reserved will be equal to the length of the string.
DEFS size, fill	Reserves a <i>block</i> of memory of size bytes and initialises them with the value fill .

4.10.2 Align

The align command leaves as many blank bytes as needed so that the next item in memory will start at a word boundary (a multiple of 4).

4.10.3 Entry

Sets the PC at the start of the program (i.e. where the program should start from)

4.10.4 EQU

Allows you to name a literal, which can go a long way to making the code more maintainable. We could define the literal 18 as *drinking_age*:

```
1  drinking_age EQU  #18
2      ; Check the person is over 18
3      CMP  R1, #drinking_age
4      BLT  too_young
```

5 Arithmetic

5.1 Making good use of registers

Registers are a precious resource when programming on ARM. When writing software to evaluate expressions, it's often tempting to load all the variables into registers first, and then perform the arithmetic in separate registers like so:

```
1    ; a = b + c + d
2    LDR  R1, b
3    LDR  R2, c
4    LDR  R3, d
5    ADD  R4, R1, R2
6    ADD  R5, R4, R3
7    STR  R5, a
```

However, this is pointless - the values in the registers R4 and R5 aren't going to be needed again, so we may as well do:

```
1    ; a = b + c + d
2    LDR  R1, b
```

```
3   LDR  R2, c
4   LDR  R3, d
5   ADD  R1, R1, R2
6   ADD  R1, R1, R3
7   STR  R1, a
```

But, we can optimise even further here. Instead of loading all the variables into registers before we do arithmetic, we can save a register and load only the ones we need before each `ADD` instruction:

```
1   ; a = b + c + d
2   LDR  R1, b
3   LDR  R2, c
4   ADD  R1, R1, R2
5   LDR  R2, d
6   ADD  R1, R1, R2
7   STR  R1, a
```

Sometimes, it's useful to re-order an arithmetic expression so it can be implemented using less registers. This can often be achieved by increasing the nesting of brackets in an expression such as this:

$$(b - e) + (c * d) = ((c * d) + b - e)$$

Though these expressions are both equal, the right hand side will use a register less in ARM code, since each instruction can be executed sequentially, however the left hand side requires two expressions to be evaluated (and stored in a total of three registers) and then both expressions added together.

5.2 Using literals in expressions

If there is a literal in the expression you want to evaluate, then it's possible to use a literal instead of a register. For example, these two programs will end up with the same answer in R0 but the one on the right uses less registers:

1	; (a + 5) * b	1	; (a + 5) * b
2	LDR R0, 5	2	LDR R0, a
3	LDR R1, a	3	ADD R0, R0, #5
4	ADD R0, R0, R1	4	LDR R1, b
5	LDR R1, b	5	MUL R0, R0, R1
6	MUL R0, R0, R1	6	
7		7	
8	five DEFW 5	8	
9		9	

Literals can be any expression that the assembler can evaluate, for example, the following are all valid:

```
ADD R0, R0, #(1 + 2)
```

```
ADD R0, R0, #-2
```

```
ADD R0, R0, #(2 - 1)
```

5.3 Status flags

ARM has some 1-bit status flags that are set after a **CMP** instruction as shown below:

Flag	Meaning
Negative	Previous result was negative
Zero	Previous result was zero
Carry	Previous add or subtract generated a carry
Overflow	The previous add or subtract overflowed and went out of range

You can get any data operation to alter the flags by appending **S** to the instruction. For example:

SUBS R0, R1, R2

The above command will subtract **R2** from **R1** and store the result in **R0**, but it will also set the flags according to the value of **R0**. For example, if the value in **R0** was negative after the operation, the **Negative** flag would be set.

5.4 Other useful arithmetic commands

The **RSB** command is reverse subtract, and is useful for negating a literal:

RSB R1, R0, #0; R1 = 0 - R0 = -R0

The **MLA** command is multiply and add. It can only use registers as operands.

MLA R1, R2, R3, R4 ; R1 = (R2 * R3) + R4

6 If and While

6.1 If statements in ARM

Given an if statement written in Java such as this:

```
1  if(condition)
2  {
3      actionStatement;
4  }
```

How would we convert that into ARM assembly? The best way is to do the following:

1. Check to see if the condition is else
2. If it is, then branch to the end of the if statement
3. Otherwise, perform the action statement

An example implementation may be:

```
1  CMP  R1, R2 ; Compare two registers
2  BGE  endif ; The condition
3  MOV  R1, #0 ; Whatever the action
4      ; statement may be
```

5 `endif`

Note that it is often easier to implement the inverse of some comparisons. For example, if we were evaluating (`a >= b`) we could do either of these:

- 1. Check whether `a` is greater than `b`
 2. Check whether `a` is equal to `b`
 3. Work out how to branch away if both are false
- 1. Inverse the comparison and check if `a` is less than `b`
 2. Branch away if it is

6.2 **If else statements**

If else statements are much like if statements, except that if the condition is false then you branch to the else action, and if the condition is true, then you branch to after the else statement once you've executed the action. Here's an example:

Lets implement `if(a==b) a += 1; else b += 1;`
:

```
1    LDR  R0, a
2    LDR  R1, b
3    CMP  R0, R1  ; Compare
4    BNE  else ;If they aren't equal
5    ADD  R0, R0, #1
6    B    end
7  else  ADD  R1, R1, #1
8  end
```

6.3 While statements

Implementing a while statement in ARM assembler is very similar to implementing an if statement, except after you have executed the action statement, you branch back to the initial condition again, like so:

```
1    ; Compare two registers
2    start CMP  R1, R2
3    ; The condition
4    BGE  endif
```

```

5    ; Whatever the action statement may be
6    ADD R1, R1, #1
7    ; Branch back to the start
8    B start
9    endif

```

In ARM, we can make *any* instruction have a conditional code on it. Consequently, we can get rid of a branch instruction, like so:

```

1    ; Compare two registers
2    start CMP R1, R2
3    ; Add only if the flag is less than
4    ADDLT R1, R1, #1
5    ; Branch back to the start
6    BLT start
7    endif

```

You can compare the result of an arithmetic instruction with zero by appending S to the instruction like so:

```

1    start ADDS R0, #1
2    BNE start
3    endif

```

This will keep adding 1 to R0 until it reaches 0. This is often useful when translating for loops that count up to a number. Instead of counting up, you can count down using the **SUBS** instruction and only iterate if the result isn't zero.

7 Addresses and Addressing

When a processor references memory it needs to produce an address.

The address needs the same number of bits as the memory address. i.e. 32 in ARM

addressing modes - mechanisms for generating addresses

7.1 Direct Addressing

Direct addressing is a mode where the address is simply contained within the instruction.

This requires an instruction longer than the address size which is a problem because ARMs maximum bit

length is 32.

So far, we assumed that direct addressing uses LDR/STR instructions, for example:

```
LDR  R0,  b
LDR  R1,  c
ADD  R0,  R0, R2
STR  R0,  a
```

This looks like direct addressing but on ARM it's 'faked' by the assembler as a pseudo-instruction

7.1.1 Problems with direct addressing

ARM: both instructions and addresses are 32 bits, but the instruction also specifies operation so it can't contain every possible address.

Solution: allow a register to contain an address, use the address in the register to do loads and stores.

This is **Register Indirect Addressing**

7.2 Register Indirect Addressing

The address is held in the register

It takes only a few bits to select a register (4 bits in the case of ARM R0-R15)

A register can (typically) hold an arbitrary address (32 bits in the case of ARM)

ARM has register indirect addressing

Example loading a register from a memory location:
LDR R0, b

Could be done using register indirect addressing:

ADR	R2,	b	Move the address of b into R2
LDR	R0,	[R2]	Use address in R2 to fetch the value of b

This is still a bit limited - addresses are:

- range limited (within ADR 'instruction')
- fixed

but:

- ADRL pseudo-op allows larger range (at a price)
- having addresses a variable once it is often used again
- variable are usually 'near' each other

7.2.1 Address Arithmetic

We can operate on registers, so we can:

- store/load/move addresses
- do arithmetic to calculate addresses

Rather than use e.g. extra ADD instructions, we often use **Base + Offset Addressing** - address addition done within the operand.

We have actually been using this all along: Base = PC register.

7.3 Offset Addressing

In offset addressing the address is calculated from a register value and a number.

The register specifier is just a few bits, The offset can be 'fairly small'.

With one register 'pointer' any of several variables in nearby addresses may be addressed.

ARM allows offsets of 12 bits in LDR/STR

These bits can be added or subtracted, for example:

```
LDR    R0, [R1, #8]
STR    R3, [R6, #-0x240]
LDR    R7, [R2, #short-constant]
```

This provides a range of ± 4 kilobytes around a 'base' register

In practice this method is adequate for most purposes.

8 Strings, bit shifts, rotations and tables

8.1 Working with Strings

A String is just a list of bytes where each byte represents a character. The last byte in the list is the null byte which contains the value 0.

8.1.1 Loading a String

In order to load the String into a register, the ADRL command must be used, for example:

```
1  msg DEFB  "My message", 0
2    ALIGN
3
4    ADRL  R0, msg
5    SVC  3
```

8.1.2 Finding the length of a String

In order to find the length of a String, we need only to loop over each byte in the String until we get to the null byte, and add up how many iterations we've done as we go along:

```
1    ADRL R1, message
2    MOV  R2, #0
3    count LDRB R0, [R1, R2]
4    CMP  R0, #0
5    ADDNE R2, R2, #1
6    BNE  count
7    STR  R2, length
```

8.1.3 Getting the index of a character in a String

In order to do the equivalent of `String.indexOf(character)`, we can do something similar to finding the length of the String, but we only need to loop until we get to the character we're looking for.

```

1  ADRL R1, message
2  LDRB R2, character
3  count LDRB R0, [R1] #1
4  CMP  R0, #0
5  BEQ  end
6  CMP  R0, R2
7  BNE  count
8  end  ADRL R0, message
9  SUB  R1, R1, R0
10 SUB  R1, R1, #1
11 STR  R0, index

```

8.2 Bit shifting and rotations

Shift operations move all the bits in a word in one direction or another. For example:

Shift direction	Resultant word
No shift	10011011
Left shift	00110110
Right shift	01001101

You might have noticed that a zero is appended to whatever side the bits are moving away from in order

to ensure that the word is still the same number of bits as before.

Rotation operations are very similar to shift operations, except instead of padding the word with zeroes, the bit that was lost is appended to the other side of the word:

Rotation direction	Resultant word
No rotation	10011011
Left rotation	00110111
Right rotation	11001101

ARM has four different operations for shifting and rotations:

Mnemonic	Meaning	Function
LSL n	Logical shift left	Shifts left by n bits. Any bits that are lost are zeroed.
LSR n	Logical shift right	Shifts right by n bits. Any bits that are lost are zeroed.
ASR n	Arithmetic shift right	Shifts right by n bits. Any bits that are lost are set as the sign bit (to preserve the signed bit).
ROR n	Rotate Right	Rotates right by n bits.

8.3 Accessing a row in a table

We can use bit shifts to access a row in a table:

```
1    ADRL    R1, table
```

```

2    LDR  R2, [R1, R0, LSL #2]
3
4    table  DEFW  0
5    DEFW  3
6    DEFW  6
7    DEFW  9
8    DEFW  12
9    DEFW  15
10   DEFW  18

```

This snippet will allow us to access the row with an index stored in R0, so if R0 was 2 then the output in R2 would be 6.

9 Stacks

A stack is a data structure that is used by ARM assembly (and in a variety of other computing applications) to help maintain the state of a program.

The only operations that can be performed on a Stack are **push** and **pop**. The former adds an item onto the stack and the latter removes the last item from

the stack. Because these are the only two operations, a Stack is a type of *Last In First Out* data structure.

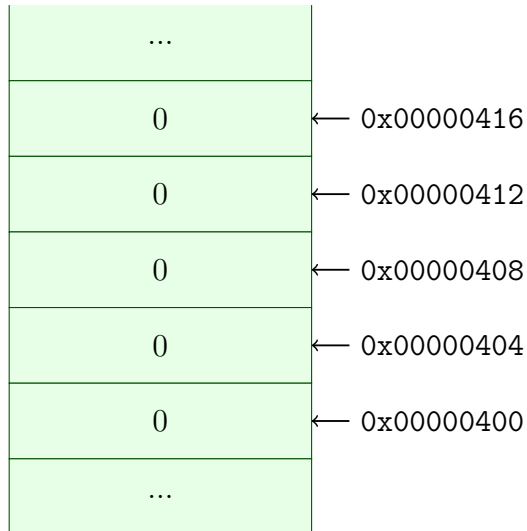
is usually initialised using the **DEFS** command to reserve a block of space in memory. This means that the stack will be a fixed size.

In ARM assembly, one register is reserved as the Stack Pointer (SP). This keeps track of the memory location that addresses the last item in the stack.

Stacks can be implemented where the stack pointer starts at the highest memory address in the range allocated to the stack, or where it starts at the bottom. In ARM assembly, it is usual to start the stack pointer at the highest address and work down.

9.1 Pushing to a stack

Lets initialise a stack of five memory locations:



The stack pointer will currently be pointed at 0x00000420, so the next stackable memory location will be 0x00000416.

If we want to *push* an item onto the stack, we need to do two things:

- Write the value to the current memory location addressed by the stack pointer.
- Decrement the stack pointer by 4

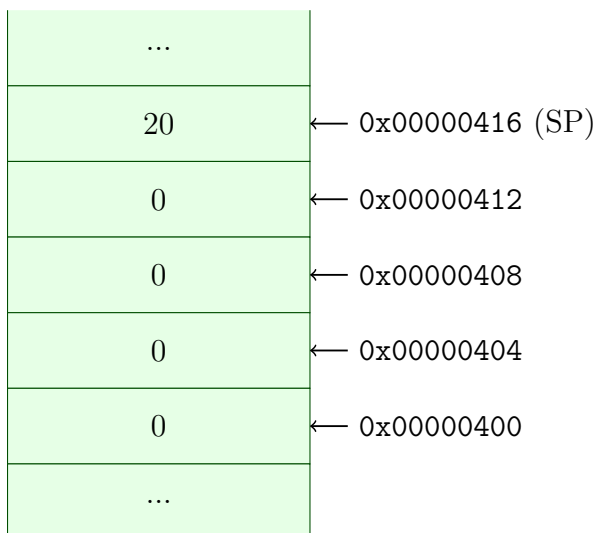
The ARM command for a stack push is `PUSH`. An example might be:

```
PUSH    \#20
```

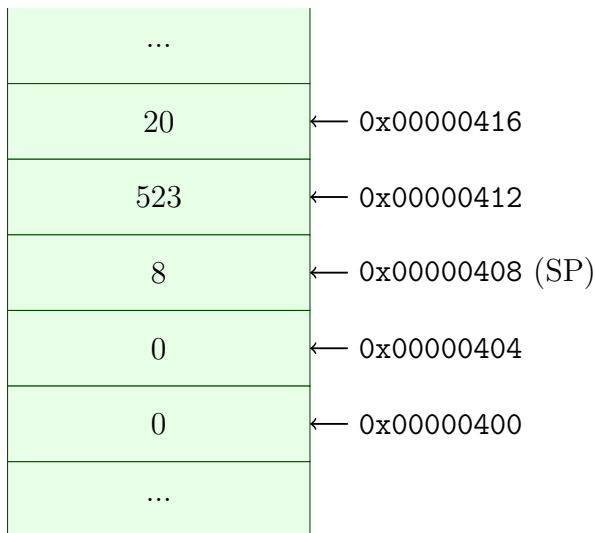
Or if you wanted to push one or more registers:

```
PUSH    R1, R2, R3
```

If we executed the first of these commands (`PUSH #20`), the stack would look like this:



Executing `PUSH R2, R3` when the values of `R2` and `R3` were 523 and 8 respectively would result in a stack such as:



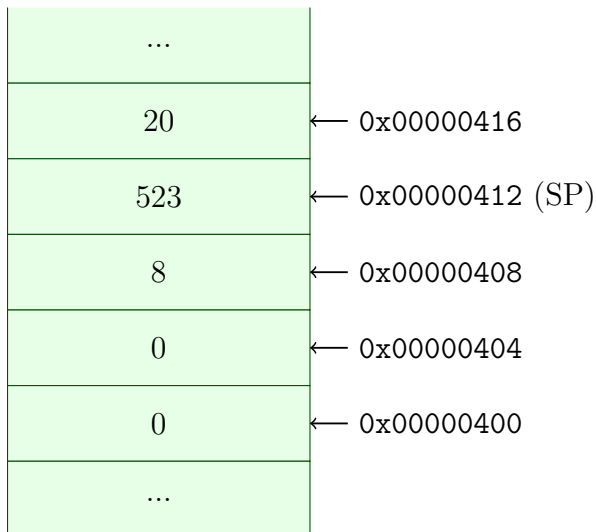
9.2 Popping from the stack

The ARM syntax to pop an item from the stack is very similar. To pop the last item from the stack into `R1`

the command would be:

```
POP R1
```

The stack would now look like:



And the value of R1 would be 8. This works for multiple registers too just like the PUSH command does.

9.3 Other ways of accessing the stack

It's important to remember that the stack is just a set of memory locations, and the stack pointer is just a normal register. This means that other commands for accessing memory can also be used to access and manipulate the stack. For example, take a look at this block:

```
1    LDR  R1, SP
2    ADD  SP, SP, #4
```

This will load the value of the memory location addressed by the value inside the stack pointer into R1 and then increment the stack pointer by 4. Essentially, this is doing the same thing as POP R1 will do.

In order to do the same thing for pushing to the stack we can do:

```
1    SUB  SP, SP, #4
2    STR  R1, SP
```

9.4 Stacks and method calls

It is important that when a program branches from one method to another, the values stored in the registers are not overwritten for when the program branches back to the original method.

This problem is resolved by pushing the values stored in the registers onto the stack before a branch is made, and then popping them off the stack once the method has finished executing. Alternately, the method that is being called can preserve the values in the registers by pushing and popping them to and from the stack at the start and the end of the method. Obviously, only one such method needs to be employed, so it's best to stick to one convention for the whole program.

10 Methods

The most basic way of calling a method in ARM assembly is by using the BL command. This will do two things:

1. Move the current value of the program counter into the link register.
2. Branch to the label defined in the instruction.

The method being called will use move the value of the link register back into the program counter once it has finished execution. Here's an example:

```
1
2   start  B main
3
4   add R1R2 ADD  R1, R1, R2
5       ; Move the value of the Link
6       ; Register back into the PC
7   MOV  PC, LR
8
9   main  MOV  R1, #4
10      MOV  R2, #2
11      BL   addR1R2
12
```

This program will move the values 4 and 2 into R1 and R2 respectively, and then branch to a method that will add the two registers together and store the result in R1.

10.1 Saving the value of registers

What if a method used lots of registers internally. We should make sure that the state of the registers is the same at the end of the method as they are at the start of the method, since otherwise there could be issues with corrupted data.

The easiest way to do this is to stack the parameters, like so:

```
1  method
2      ; First lets store the registers
3      ; we're going to use into memory
4      PUSH  {R0-R2}
5      ; =====
6      ; Do stuff with the registers
7      ; =====
8      POP   {R0-R2}
9      ; Branch back to the calling instruction
10     MOV   PC, LR
```

10.2 Passing parameters

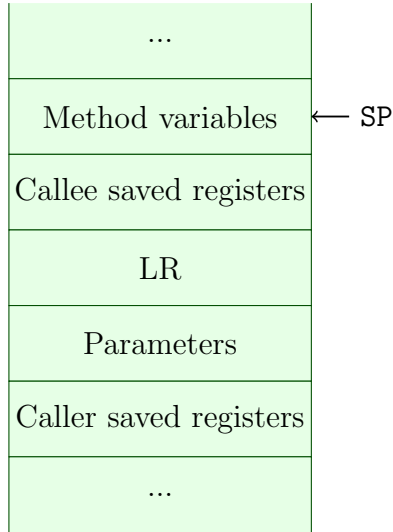
Passing parameters to a method is easy; just add them to the stack! To do this, just load the variable into a register, then add it to the stack:

```
1    LDR  R0, myvar
2    STR  R0, [SP, #-4] !
```

When the method wants to access a parameter, it can just load the value in memory addressed by the stack pointer, adding an offset of **#4** if the second parameter needs to be accessed, **#8** for the third and so on. If the fourth parameter was to be loaded, then the instruction would be `LDR R0 [SP, #12]`.

10.3 Stack frames

A stack frame is a set of stacked values that are related to a particular method call. They usually have a format that is specific to the method being called. For example:



11 Switch statements

Obviously, a switch statement could be compiled down to a series of **if else** statements and then converted into ARM assembly. However, if we had a long list of conditions, and our condition was either near the bottom of the list, or maybe even the **default** choice,

then we'd need to test the switch expression against all of the conditions before being able to decide what to do.

This has the potential to be very inefficient, so thankfully, there is another way to do it. We can use the value of the switch variable to branch directly to the piece of code that we want to execute for that case.

This can be achieved using a table of values where the offset in the table corresponds to the next address to load into the PC (i.e. the branch location). For example:

```
1  ; Define a table of variables with
2  ; the locations to branch to
3  swtable DEFW case0
4    DEFW  case1
5    DEFW  default
6    DEFW  case2
7  ; Load the base address of the table
8  ; into R1
9    ADR  R1, swtable
10 ; Load the value of R1 into the PC.
11 ; Offset the value in R1 by (R0*4)
```

```
12    LDR    PC, [R1, R0, LSL, #2]
13
14    case0 ; Do stuff
15        B end
16
17    case1 ; Do stuff
18        B end
19
20    case2 ; Do stuff
21        B end
22
23    default ; Do stuff
24        B end
```

It's important to catch cases where the expression isn't in the table too, for example, if (following the previous example) the values we wanted to implement specific logic for were (0, 1, 3), then we would need to catch cases where the value was less than 0 and greater than 3.

```
1    CMP    R0, #0
2    BLT    default
3    CMP    R0, #3
4    BGT    default
```

The above would go before the table lookup would occur.

12 Types of values

12.1 Signed and unsigned integers

Lets assume that integers only have 8 bits, and so can hold 2^8 (256) different values. If we use a signed integer, the most significant bit would indicate whether the number was negative or not. This means that we loose a bit's worth of data and therefore can only represent the numbers $0 - 128$, though we do gain the ability to distinguish negative numbers from positive numbers.

Note that the numbers $0 - 127$ are represented as the same as both signed and unsigned integers, however, when a number reaches the value 128, then as a signed integer it would mean -1 and as an unsigned integer it would mean 128.

It is important to note, that ARM has different types

of compare instructions for signed and unsigned integers. We can use this to our advantage in the switch example outlined in the previous section (see page).

If we treat the register `R0` as a signed integer, we will have to check whether it is below 0 and whether it's above 4. However, if we use unsigned comparisons, we only need to check whether the register is above 4 since any negative value will be represented as a positive value much larger than 4!

```
1    CMP    R0, #4
2    BHI    default
```

12.2 Booleans in ARM assembly

Since a boolean value is either true or false, it is obvious that we only need a minimum of one bit to represent it. However, due to the difficulties of accessing just one bit in the ARM architecture, it actually make more sense to represent a boolean as a byte, where the least significant bit is either 1 or 0 depending on the value of the boolean.

This is easy, since it means that booleans are represented as the integers 0 and 1. Testing a boolean value is easy too, since all you need to do is compare it to zero or one.

```
CMP  R1, #0
```

12.2.1 Logical operators in ARM

ARM assembly implements four logical operators:

- AND (logical AND)
- ORR (logical OR)
- EOR (logical XOR)
- BIC (bit clear)
- MVN (logical not)

All of these are self explanatory except from the bit clear one, which is explained using a table:

A	B	BIC A B
0	0	0
0	1	0
1	0	1
1	1	0

BIC is equivalent to $A \& \neg B$. If B is high, then the output will be 0, otherwise, it will be A.

13 Communicating with Peripherals

A peripheral is a device that is attached to a computer. This could be a keyboard, mouse, printer or arguably even the main memory of the computer.

There are two methods of interfacing with peripherals; polling and interrupts.

13.1 Polling

Polling is where the CPU will constantly check for an update from a peripheral. This involves using a loop to check the contents of a status register and then reading any data from the peripheral.

The status register is a memory mapped register that both the CPU and peripheral have access to. When the peripheral has data to transfer to the CPU, it will change the value of the status register to match a specific pattern (usually setting just one bit in the register). For example, the test pattern may be setting bit 7 high. Next time the CPU checks the status register, if bit 7 is high, then it will know there is data waiting for it.

If this is the case, then the CPU will then read the data register. This is also a memory mapped register, and will contain the data from the peripheral.

13.1.1 Memory mapping

A memory mapped register appears to be located at a specific memory location, but instead actually is situated inside the peripheral and is *mapped* so that it appears to be at a memory address.

13.1.2 Implementing polling

In this simple implementation of a polling loop, we're assuming that the `status_register` and `data_register` have already been set up as aliases to the correct memory locations.

```
1    ; Load the program relative
2    ; address into R1
3    ADR R1, status_reg
4    loop
5    ; Use R1 as a pointer to
6    ; load the data in the status
7    ; register into R0
8    LDR R0, [R1]
9    ; Test the content of the
```

```
10    ; status register
11    TST R0, 0x80
12    ; Loop if the test failed
13    BEQ loop
14    ; Load the content from the
15    ; data register into R0
16    ADR R1, data_reg
17    LDR R0, [R1]
```

13.1.3 The TST instruction

TST performs a bitwise **AND** on it's operands (a register and a literal test pattern). It then updates the flags for a subsequent conditional instruction. If the result of the AND was zero, then subsequent **EQ** conditional instructions will execute - i.e. it compares the result of the AND operation to zero.

Using the example in the polling implementation, lets execute the command **TST R0, 0x80**, first where the test condition is not met, and then when it is:

Content of R0	00000000
Test pattern	10000000
Result	00000000

Content of R0	10110100
Test pattern	10000000
Result	10000000

In the second run, you can see that the result isn't zero, so the test pattern must have been met.

13.2 Interrupts

Unlike the polling method, an interrupt is initiated by the peripheral rather than the CPU. It follows the following steps:

1. **Stop the program** This is often done by the interrupt automatically, and works just like a branch and link.
2. **Save important registers** The `STMFD` command can be used to save important registers. This would include the current program status register (CPSR) and any registers modified by the

interrupt handler.

3. **Run the interrupt handler** This would usually involve double checking the status register to make sure that the data is ready to be read and then reading the data inside the data register.
4. **Restore the saved registers** Use LDMFD to restore the registers just like we did to save them.
5. **Restart the program** Copy the Link register into the program counter and add on #4 so that the next instruction is executed and the program carries on as before.

13.2.1 An implementation of an interrupt

This is how an interrupt may be implemented:

```
1  ; Stage 1 has already happened
2  ; When we branched here
3  interrupt
4  ; Stage 2 - save registers
5  STMFD SP!, {R0, R1}
6  ; Stage 3 - run the interrupt
```

```
7      ; handler
8      ; Check the status_reg
9      ADR    R1, status_reg
10     LDRB   R0, [R1]
11     TST    R0, #0x80
12     ; Go to an error if the
13     ; TST failed
14     BEQ    error
15     ; Load the data_reg info
16     ADR    R1, data_reg
17     LDRB   R0, [R1]
18     ; Store the data_reg info
19     LDR    R1, data
20     STR    R0, [R1]
21     ; Acknowledge the transfer
22     LDR    R1, acknowledge
23     STR    #1, R1
24     ; Step 4 - restore the
25     ; registers
26     LDMFD  SP!, {R0, R1}
27     ; Step 5 - Branch back to
28     ; where we came from
29     SUBS   PC, LR, #4
```