

# COMP15111 notes

Todd Davies

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Note, extra space has been allocated for the right hand margin to allow for more extensive margin notes. Also, it gives you space to make your own annotations.

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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:

Run the command *hexdump* to generate hexdumps.

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).

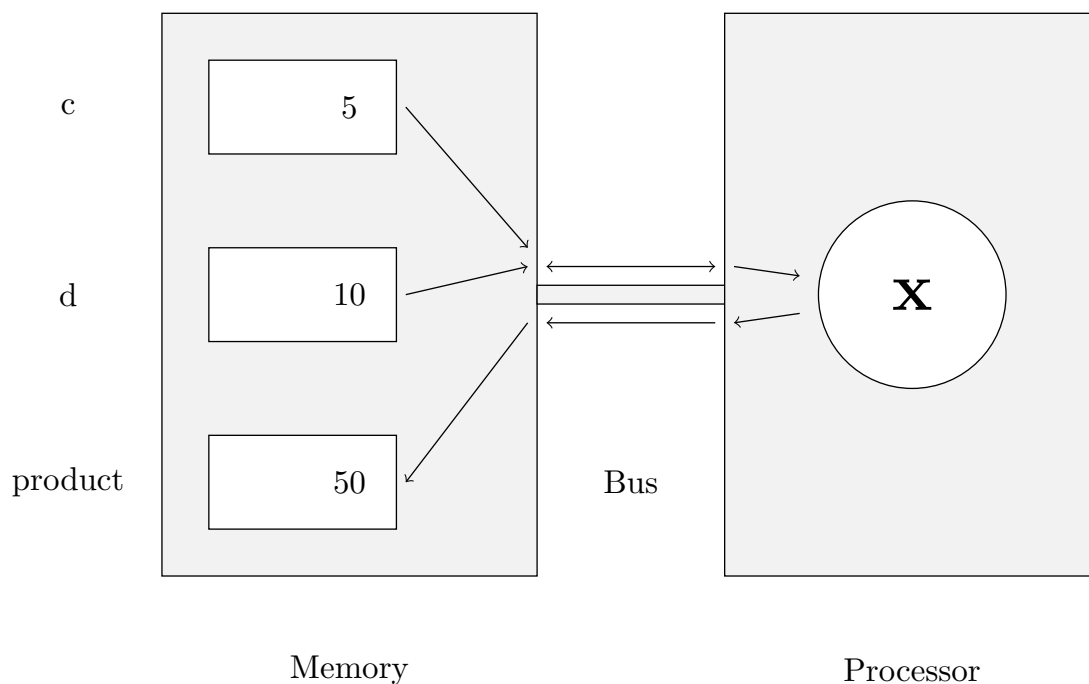


Figure 1: An example of the two box model

### 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
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.

$$\begin{aligned} R1 &\leftarrow \textit{memory location} \\ R1 &\leftarrow R0 + R1 \\ \textit{memory location} &\leftarrow R1 \end{aligned}$$

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'.

The label is associated with the lowest address (i.e. 0)

### 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 integers, 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
<code>STR</code>	Copies the whole (32 bit) register into memory.
<code>LDR</code>	Loads a 32 bit word from memory into a register.
<code>STRB</code>	Stores a single 8 bit byte into memory from a register.
<code>LDRB</code>	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.

N.b. The least significant bit is the smallest address.

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
```

CMN is compare negative.  
MVN is move not.

## 4.7 Supervisor calls

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

SWI is another name for SVC - they do the same thing.

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
```

It will load the memory address of `constant` relative to the PC into R1. When the code is assembled, it is turned into two instructions (so `ADR` is a pseudo instruction). They are:

```
1          ADD R1, R1, PC
2          LDR PC, R1
```

## 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 <i>num</i>	Reserves a <i>word</i> of memory and puts the initial value <i>num</i> in it.
DEFB <i>value</i>	Reserves <i>byte(s)</i> of memory and puts the initial value <i>value</i> 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 <i>size</i> , <i>fill</i>	Reserves a <i>block</i> of memory of <i>size</i> bytes and initialises them with the value <i>fill</i> .

### 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)
```

Note that MUL cannot use literals. To get around this, first MOV the literal into a register and then multiply.

## 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:

Note that if the code in your while loop is being executed repeatedly, then it's probably worth optimising it!

```

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  $\pm 4$  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
```

Here, we use R1 to store the message, R0 to read each character, and R2 to keep the count.

### 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
```

Note how this snippet has an optimisation to use one less register during the looping process than the string length snippet does. It only uses one register to loop over the string and then works out the number of times it's looped after the character has been found.

## 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.

Shifting to the left is like multiplying by two, and shifting to the right is like dividing by two.

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 <i>n</i>	Logical shift left	Shifts left by <i>n</i> bits. Any bits that are lost are zeroed.
LSR <i>n</i>	Logical shift right	Shifts right by <i>n</i> bits. Any bits that are lost are zeroed.
ASR <i>n</i>	Arithmetic shift right	Shifts right by <i>n</i> bits. Any bits that are lost are set as the sign bit (to preserve the signed bit).
ROR <i>n</i>	Rotate Right	Rotates right by <i>n</i> 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.

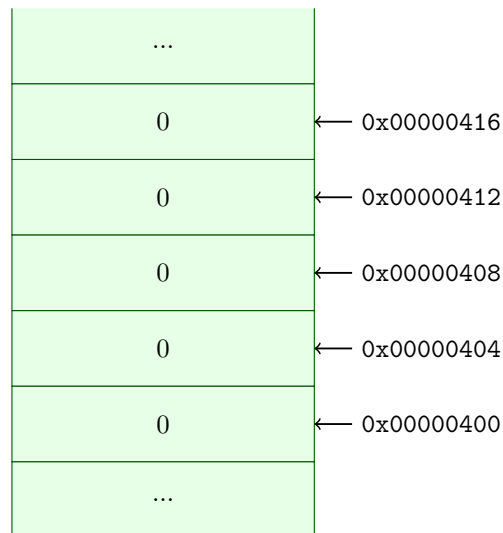
is usually initialised using the **DEFS** command to reserve a block of space in memory. This means that the stack will be a fixed size.

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

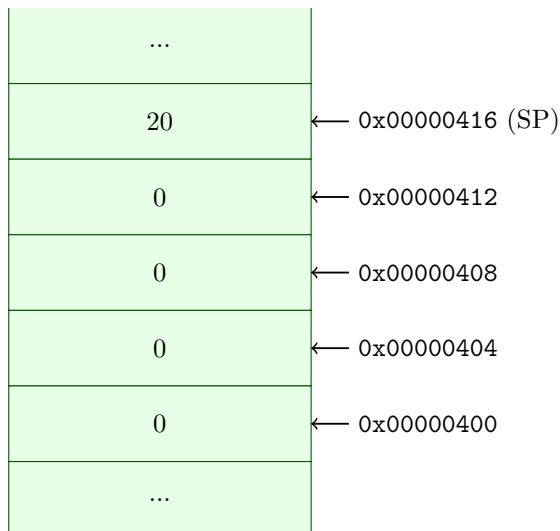
The ARM command for a stack push is `PUSH`. An example might be:

```
PUSH  \#20
```

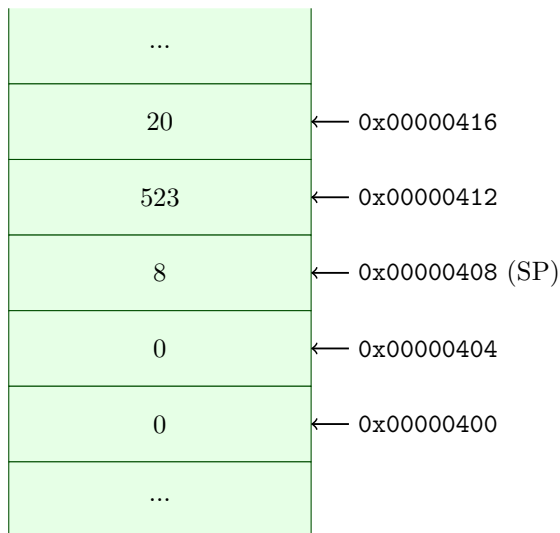
Or if you wanted to push one or more registers:

```
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:

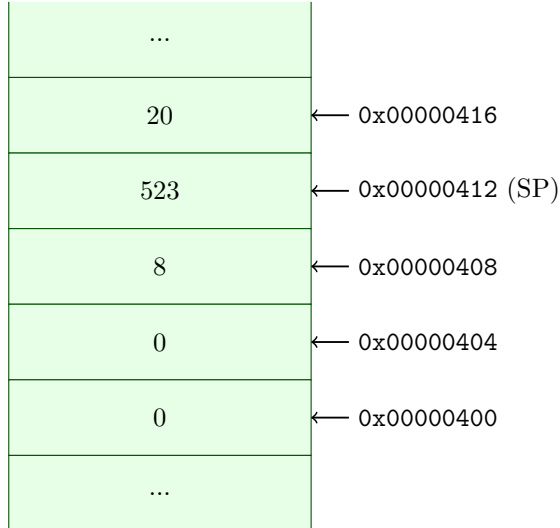


## 9.2 Popping from the stack

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.

Note that we don't actually have to reset the memory location 0x00000408 since it will be overwritten on any subsequent push and since the stack pointer is behind it, it will never be read from.

## 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.

Of course, we could use post indexed addressing in order to do the same thing: LDR R1, [SP], #4

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

```

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

```

Which is equal to STR R1, [SP, #-4]!

## 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
```

If a method calls another method, then the link register will need to be stacked too!

## 10.2 Passing parameters

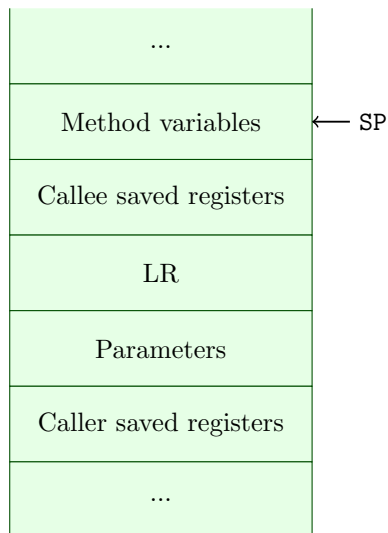
Passing parameters to a method is easy; just add them to the stack! To do this, just load the variable into a register, then add it to the stack:

```
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
```

The LSL command is used to shift the bits in R1 left. The number of places shifted is equal to the value of R0. This has the effect of adding (4\*R0) onto R1.

```

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.

As you should already know, using a signed integer is also known as 2's complement.

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 26).

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 its 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, let's 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 register. This would include the current program status register (CSPR) 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

```

### 13.2.2 Having multiple interrupts

An interrupt vector table can be used to select the correct address to branch to when multiple interrupts are in place. All that is needed is a table of pointers to various methods for handling

the different peripherals. Then, it's easy to find the correct peripheral by using the value set in the status register as an index in the table.

### 13.2.3 How an SVC call works

We know that an **SVC** call is a software *interrupt*. This means there will be an interrupt handler that will be called to do something once the **SVC** instruction is executed. However, we include a parameter between 0 and 4 when we use a software interrupt, and this parameter defines the exact behaviour of the interrupt.

How then, does the interrupt handler know what parameter was used then? Well, these are the processes that go on when an **SVC** call happens:

1. Branch an link to the interrupt handler, save registers using `STMFD SP, R0-R2, LR`.
2. Load the link register into a register and take off #4. This will be the **SVC** X instruction.  
`LDR R0, [LR, #-4]`
3. Clear the top eight bits (the conditional code and the instruction code). Use `BIC R0, R0, 0xFF000000`
4. Logic shift right by 8 places (this will give us the 16 bit parameter, with the upper 16 bits all zeroed) `LSR R1, R0, #8`.
5. Load the start of the interrupt vector table into R2: `LDR R2, vector_table`
6. Now, we should load the interrupt into the PC with an offset of  $R1 * \#4$  using `LDR PC, [R2, R1, LSL #4]`
7. We can finally restore the registers using `LDMFD SP, R0-R2, PC`. At the same time, we can set the PC back to where it was.

## 13.3 Direct Memory Access

Direct Memory Access (DMA) is a way of avoiding excess CPU overhead for data transfer between peripherals. If each interrupt takes 100 instructions to execute, and data is being sent byte by byte to the processor, then the process may use up a lot of CPU time, especially if there's lots of data being transferred.

The solution to this is to have an external, hardware based solution on the motherboard with access to memory. This will take care of the interrupts for us instead of the CPU. This allows peripherals to write directly to memory rather than having to go through the CPU. The hardware controller can give the CPU an interrupt once every kilobyte or so is written, which would reduce the load on the CPU by 1000 times.

DMA is good, since it reduces load on the CPU, and enables greater parallelization, however, it requires extra hardware which makes the system more complicated. Besides, the memory of the computer and the peripheral itself are still doing the same amount of work; only the load on the CPU has been lessened.