Computer numerical control Machines

Definition

Computer Numerical Control (CNC) is one in which the functions and motions of a machine tool are controlled by means of a prepared program containing coded alphanumeric data. CNC can control the motions of the work piece or tool, the input parameters such as feed, depth of cut, speed, and the functions such as turning spindle on/off, turning coolant on/off.

Applications

The applications of CNC include both for machine tool as well as non-machine tool areas. In the machine tool category, CNC is widely used for lathe, drill press, milling machine, grinding unit, laser, sheet-metal press working machine, tube bending machine etc. Highly automated machine tools such as turning center and machining center which change the cutting tools automatically under CNC control have been developed. In the non-machine tool category, CNC applications include welding machines (arc and resistance), coordinate measuring machine, electronic assembly, tape laying and filament winding machines for composites etc.

Advantages and Limitations

The benefits of CNC are (1) high accuracy in manufacturing, (2) short production time, (3) greater manufacturing flexibility, (4) simpler fixturing, (5) contour machining (2 to 5 –axis machining), (6) reduced human error. The drawbacks include high cost, maintenance, and the requirement of skilled part programmer.

ELEMENTS OF A CNC

A CNC system consists of three basic components

1 . Part program
2 . Machine Control Unit (MCU)
3 . Machine tool (lathe, drill press, milling machine etc)

1. Part Program

The part program is a detailed set of commands to be followed by the machine tool. Each command specifies a position in the Cartesian coordinate system (x,y,z) or motion (workpiece travel or cutting tool travel), machining parameters and on/off function. Part programmers should be well versed with machine tools, machining processes, effects of process variables, and limitations of CNC

controls. The part program is written manually or by using computer assisted language such as APT (Automated Programming Tool).
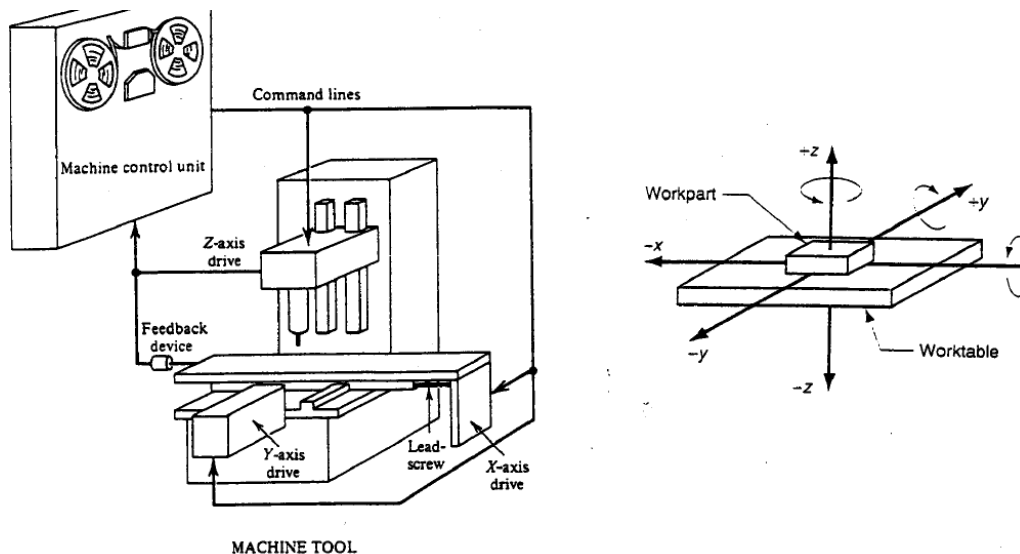
MACHINE TOOL

2. Machine Control Unit (MCU)

The machine control unit (MCU) is a microcomputer that stores the program and executes the commands into actions by the machine tool. The MCU consists of two main units: the data processing unit (DPU) and the control loops unit (CLU). The DPU software includes control system software, calculation algorithms, translation software that converts the part program into a usable format for the MCU, interpolation algorithm to achieve smooth motion of the cutter, editing of part program (in case of errors and changes). The DPU processes the data from the part program and provides it to the CLU which operates the drives attached to the machine leadscrews and receives feedback signals on the actual position and velocity of each one of the axes. A driver (dc motor) and a feedback device are attached to the leadscrew. The CLU consists of the circuits for position and velocity control loops, deceleration and backlash take up, function controls such as spindle on/off.

3. Machine Tool

The machine tool could be one of the following: lathe, milling machine, laser, plasma, coordinate measuring machine etc. Figure shows that a right-hand coordinate system is used to describe the motions of a machine tool . There are three linear axes (x,y,z), three rotational axes (i,j,k), and other axes such as tilt (9) are possible. For example, a 5-axis machine implies any combination of x,y,z, i,j,k,and 6.