

Lab 4: interrupts

Stanford Winter 2026

Executing is main gerund in Turing World

In this class we will exhaust all angles:

- interrupts (today)
- exceptions (today)
- non-preemptive threads (thursday)
- pre-emptive user process (couple weeks)
- kernel process (sort of all labs)
- single stepping vs regular (soon)

Today's mission.

Artifacts:

1. Complete working interrupt example (only few pages!)
2. Use to make a statistical profiler (+ < 50 lines)
3. Working system calls (!)

Knowledge(s):

- How the code runs on the raw machine. Confused? Change and re-run
- How all the pieces fit together: `config.txt`, `memmap`, `*.list`
- How to use armv6 + bcm datasheet to do real stuff.

Our ethos

No fake bullshit:

- Everything runs raw on hardware.
- Everything is small.
 - Read it; tweak it; repeat 5x = you'll understand fr.

Because small and we control everything:

- Can do things hard/impossible on "real" OS.

Rest of slides:

- ~ every fact you need to do the lab

Crash course 1: everything needed to run code

- (You need to understand for `gprof`)

First: where does the CPU start running?

???

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firmware/config.txt :

```
gpu_mem=64

arm_freq=700
core_freq=250

kernel=kernel.img          <--- the program that runs.
kernel_address=0x8000       <--- where loader will jump to.

# on the pi zero w you need this line or it won't work.
# zhouheng sun found this!
enable_uart=1
```

Ok: how to define what runs at `0x8000`?

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`libpi/memmap` : linker script that tells `ld` how to lay out code.

```
SECTIONS {
  .text 0x8000 : {
    __code_start__ = .;      <---- label: you will use <gprof>
    KEEP(*(.text.boot))     <---- put <text.boot> first (see: start.S)
    *(.text*)               <---- rest of the code ("text")
    __code_end__ = .;       <---- label: you will use <gprof>
  }
  .data : {
    *(.data*)
  }
  .bss : {
    __bss_start__ = .;      <---- zero filled data (why need this?)
    *(.bss*)
    *(COMMON)
    __bss_end__ = .;
    __prog_end__ = .;
  }
}
```

Ok: what instruction to put at 0x8000?

- `main()` ? `notmain()` ?

Ok: what instruction to put at 0x8000?

libpi/staff-start.S:

```
.section ".text.boot"
_start:
    mov sp, #0x80000000 @ initialize stack pointer (why this value?)
    @ bl notmain        @ we could jump right to notmain
    bl _cstart          @ instead: call our code to do initialization (?)
    bl rpi_reboot       @ if they return just reboot. (if not?)
```

Disassembly (timer.list):





















@ program	instruction	assembly
@ address	encoding	instruction
00008000	<__code_start__>:	
8000:	e3a0d302	mov sp, #134217728 ; 0x80000000
8004:	eb0002be	bl 8b04 <_cstart>
8008:	eb00032e	bl 8cc8 <rpi_reboot>

Ok: what does cstart do?

```
`libpi/staff-src/cstart.c`:  
void _cstart() {  
    // Q: why this?  
    gcc_mb();  
    uint8_t * bss      = (void*)__bss_start__;  
    uint8_t * bss_end  = (void*)__bss_end__;  
    while( bss < bss_end )  
        *bss++ = 0;  
    gcc_mb();  
    ...  
    uart_init();  
    notmain();  
}
```

Crash course 2: how-to user/kernel/interrupt code

The Matrix (A2-5: memorize)

Modes						
<div> <div>Privileged modes</div> <div>Exception modes</div> </div>						
User	System	Supervisor	Abort	Undefined	Interrupt	Fast interrupt
R0	R0	R0	R0	R0	R0	R0
R1	R1	R1	R1	R1	R1	R1
R2	R2	R2	R2	R2	R2	R2
R3	R3	R3	R3	R3	R3	R3
R4	R4	R4	R4	R4	R4	R4
R5	R5	R5	R5	R5	R5	R5
R6	R6	R6	R6	R6	R6	R6
R7	R7	R7	R7	R7	R7	R7
R8	R8	R8	R8	R8	R8	 R8_fiq
R9	R9	R9	R9	R9	R9	 R9_fiq
R10	R10	R10	R10	R10	R10	 R10_fiq
R11	R11	R11	R11	R11	R11	 R11_fiq
R12	R12	R12	R12	R12	R12	 R12_fiq
R13	R13	 R13_svc	 R13_abt	 R13_und	 R13_irq	 R13_fiq
R14	R14	 R14_svc	 R14_abt	 R14_und	 R14_irq	 R14_fiq
PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC
CPSR	CPSR	CPSR	CPSR	CPSR	CPSR	CPSR
		 SPSR_svc	 SPSR_abt	 SPSR_und	 SPSR_irq	 SPSR_fiq

 indicates that the normal register used by User or System mode has been replaced by an alternative register specific to the exception mode

Mechanics (memorize)

Modes:

- User: Unprivileged.
- Privileged: System, Super, Abort, Undef, Int, Fast Int

Switch modes:

- System call, exception, interrupt.
- Or: (if privileged) by changing CPSR.

Registers:

- One single copy of r0-r7, PC, CPSR registers.
- Two copies of: r8-r12 (FIQ vs world)
- Privileged modes but System have private copies of r13, r14, SPSR.

SPSR/CPSR [A2-11]

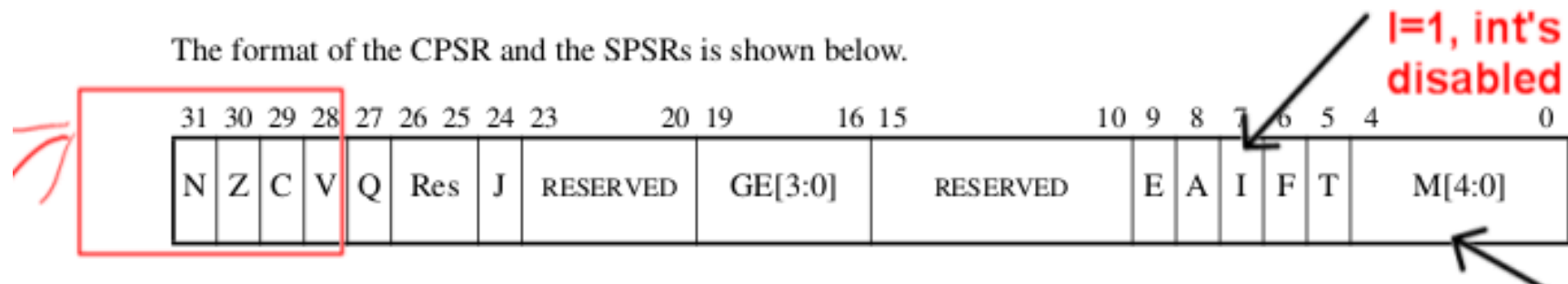
A2.5 Program status registers

The *Current Program Status Register* (CPSR) is accessible in all processor modes. It contains condition code flags, interrupt disable bits, the current processor mode, and other status and control information. Each exception mode also has a *Saved Program Status Register* (SPSR), that is used to preserve the value of the CPSR when the associated exception occurs.

———— **Note** ————

User mode and System mode do not have an SPSR, because they are not exception modes. All instructions that read or write the SPSR are UNPREDICTABLE when executed in User mode or System mode.

The format of the CPSR and the SPSRs is shown below.



Ok: but Y?

Don't want user to do kernel stuff:

- So have Priv / Unpriv (pretty close to universal).
- Why system call?

When get an interrupt/exception: all registers are live

- Need some way to know where you got an exception (register?)
- Need to set PC to something (what happens to old?)
- Need some way to point somewhere to save registers:
 - Stack? Requires legal stack pointer *all time*.
 - Various Register hacks: scratch registers, shadows, register windows

Crash course 3: Code: how to setup interrupts.

- see the code: `0-timer-int`

