

2 ARM Cortex-M4 Instructions and Addressing Modes

Learning Objectives

- Identify the three main categories of ARM Cortex-M4 instructions: data processing, load/store, and branch.
- Perform arithmetic, logical, and shift operations using data processing instructions.
- Access and modify memory using load and store instructions with various addressing modes (immediate, register offset, pre-/post-indexed).
- Define and initialize data in memory using assembler directives and pointer-based access.

Experiment Overview

This experiment introduces the fundamental instruction set of the ARM Cortex-M4 processor. You will learn how to manipulate data in registers through arithmetic, logical, and shift operations; how to transfer data between memory and registers using load and store instructions; and how to manage data stored in memory using pointers and assembler directives.

Throughout this experiment, you will:

- Write and execute assembly programs that perform arithmetic, logical, and shift operations.
- Observe how data flows between registers and memory using different addressing modes.
- Declare and initialize data objects such as arrays and strings using assembler directives.
- Use pointers to access and modify variables stored in memory.
- Analyze the effects of each instruction on registers and status flags using the **Keil uVision5** debugger.

By the end of this lab, you will be able to write, assemble, and debug ARM Cortex-M4 programs that perform register-level computations and memory operations—forming the foundation for future experiments involving flow control, subroutines, and peripheral interfacing.

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1 Theoretical Background

As mentioned in Experiment 1, assembly instructions are split into three main categories: data processing, load/store, and branch instructions. This experiment focuses on data processing instructions, load/store instructions and their addressing modes. branch instructions and flow control will be covered in the next experiment.

1.1 Data Processing Instructions

Data processing instructions perform arithmetic and logical operations on data stored in registers. They can also manipulate the condition flags in the xPSR based on the results of the operations. Common data processing instructions take the following form:

$$\{\text{LABEL}\} \quad \text{OPCODE}\{\langle\text{cond}\rangle\}\{\text{S}\} \text{ Rd, Rn, Operand2}$$

where:

- **LABEL**: optional label for branching.
- **OPCODE**: the operation to be performed (e.g., ADD, SUB, AND, ORR).
- **<cond>**: optional condition code that predicates execution.
- **S**: optional suffix indicating whether to update the condition flags.
- **Rd**: destination register where the result is stored.
- **Rn**: first operand register.
- **Operand2**: second operand, which can be an immediate value limited to 8 bits, a register, or a barrel shifter operation (see Section 1.1.4).

1.1.1 Arithmetic Instructions

Arithmetic instructions perform basic mathematical operations. Some common arithmetic instructions include addition, subtraction, multiplication, and their variants. The following table summarizes some of the most commonly used arithmetic instructions in the ARM Cortex-M4 architecture.

Table 2.1: Common ARM Cortex-M4 Arithmetic Instructions

Instr.	Syntax	Operation	Description
ADD	ADD{S} Rd, Rn, Operand2	$Rd \leftarrow Rn + \text{Operand2}$	<i>Operand2</i> may be a register, an immediate, or a shifted register.
ADC	ADC{S} Rd, Rn, Operand2	$Rd \leftarrow Rn + \text{Operand2} + C$	Adds carry-in <i>C</i> .
SUB	SUB{S} Rd, Rn, Operand2	$Rd \leftarrow Rn - \text{Operand2}$	Standard subtraction.
SBC	SBC{S} Rd, Rn, Operand2	$Rd \leftarrow Rn - \text{Operand2} - \overline{C}$	Subtract with carry. If carry flag is clear, result is reduced by one. Used for multiword arithmetic.
RSB	RSB{S} Rd, Rn, Operand2	$Rd \leftarrow \text{Operand2} - Rn$	Reverse subtract.
MUL	MUL{S} Rd, Rn, Rm	$Rd \leftarrow (Rn \times Rm)_{[31:0]}$	$32 \times 32 \rightarrow$ low 32 bits.
MLA	MLA Rd, Rn, Rm, Ra	$Rd \leftarrow (Rn \times Rm) + Ra$	Multiply-accumulate.
MLS	MLS Rd, Rn, Rm, Ra	$Rd \leftarrow Ra - (Rn \times Rm)$	Multiply-subtract.
UMULL	UMULL RdLo, RdHi, Rn, Rm	$\{RdHi, RdLo\} \leftarrow Rn \times Rm$	Unsigned $32 \times 32 \rightarrow 64$ -bit product.
SMULL	SMULL RdLo, RdHi, Rn, Rm	$\{RdHi, RdLo\} \leftarrow Rn \times Rm$	Signed $32 \times 32 \rightarrow 64$ -bit product.

Note: *C* denotes the carry flag in xPSR. *Operand2* may be an immediate or a shifted register depending on the encoding.

1.1.2 Logical and Move Instructions

Logical instructions perform bitwise operations on data, while move instructions transfer data between registers or load immediate values. The following table summarizes some of the most commonly used logical and move instructions in the ARM Cortex-M4 architecture.

Table 2.2: Logical and Move Instructions

Instr.	Syntax	Operation	Description
AND	AND Rd, Rn, Operand2	$Rd \leftarrow Rn \& \text{Operand2}$	Bitwise AND.
ORR	ORR Rd, Rn, Operand2	$Rd \leftarrow Rn \text{Operand2}$	Bitwise OR.
EOR	EOR Rd, Rn, Operand2	$Rd \leftarrow Rn \oplus \text{Operand2}$	Bitwise XOR.
BIC	BIC Rd, Rn, Operand2	$Rd \leftarrow Rn \& \neg \text{Operand2}$	Bit clear.
MVN	MVN Rd, Operand2	$Rd \leftarrow \neg \text{Operand2}$	Bitwise NOT of operand.
MOV	MOV Rd, Operand2	$Rd \leftarrow \text{Operand2}$	Register or immediate move.
MOVW	MOVW Rd, #imm16	$Rd[15:0] \leftarrow \text{imm16}$	Write low halfword.
MOVT	MOVT Rd, #imm16	$Rd[31:16] \leftarrow \text{imm16}$	Write high halfword (low preserved).

Note: C denotes the carry flag in xPSR. *Operand2* may be an immediate or a shifted register depending on the encoding.

In this experiment, you will work with bitwise logical instructions to manipulate individual bits within registers. Such operations are fundamental in microcontroller programming, where control and status registers often contain multiple configuration fields packed into a single 32-bit word. Understanding how to set, clear, toggle, or test specific bits without altering the rest of the register is essential for safely modifying hardware configurations and controlling peripherals.

Set and Clear Bits To set, clear, or toggle specific bits in a register, you can use the following logical instructions:

- **ORR Rd, Rn, #mask:** Sets bits in *Rd* where the corresponding bits in *mask* are 1.
- **BIC Rd, Rn, #mask:** Clears bits in *Rd* where the corresponding bits in *mask* are 1.
- **EOR Rd, Rn, #mask:** Toggles bits in *Rd* where the corresponding bits in *mask* are 1.

BIC is essentially an **AND** operation with the negated mask, i.e., **BIC Rd, Rn, #mask** is equivalent to **AND Rd, Rn, #~mask**.

Check Bits To check whether certain bits are set or cleared, you can use the **AND** instruction followed by a comparison:

- **AND Rd, Rn, #mask:** Isolates bits in *Rn* where the corresponding bits in *mask* are 1. The result is stored in *Rd*.
- You can then use **CMP Rd, #0** to determine if the result is zero (all masked bits cleared) or non-zero (at least one bit set).
- Alternatively, you can use **TST Rn, #mask**, which performs the **AND** operation and updates the condition flags without storing the result.

*The **TST** instruction and its interaction with the condition flags will be explored in more detail in the next experiment, where you will learn how conditional execution and branching depend on flag states.*

1.1.3 Shift and Rotate Instructions

Table 2.3: Shift and Rotate Instructions

Instr.	Syntax	Operation	Description
LSL	LSL Rd, Rm, #sh Rs	$Rd \leftarrow Rm \ll sh$	Logical left shift by immediate or by register.
LSR	LSR Rd, Rm, #sh Rs	$Rd \leftarrow Rm \gg sh$	Logical right shift (zero fill).
ASR	ASR Rd, Rm, #sh Rs	$Rd \leftarrow Rm \ggg sh$	Arithmetic right shift (sign fill).
ROR	ROR Rd, Rm, #sh Rs	$Rd \leftarrow \text{ROR}(Rm, sh)$	Rotate right by immediate or by register.
RRX	RRX Rd, Rm	$Rd \leftarrow \text{ROR}_C(Rm, 1)$	Rotate right 1 bit through carry (uses C as incoming bit 31, outgoing bit 0 \rightarrow C).

Note: Shift amount can be an immediate #sh (0–31) or a register Rs (low 8 bits used). For immediates: LSL #0 = no shift; LSR #0 is treated as shift by 32; ASR #0 is treated as shift by 32; ROR #0 means RRX.

Not all shift/rotate instructions are explicitly present in the ARMv7-M ISA. For example, there is no ROL (rotate left) or ASL (arithmetic shift left) instruction, as these operations can be achieved using existing shift instructions: ROL can be implemented using ROR with a complementary shift amount, and ASL is equivalent to LSL.

1.1.4 Barrel Shifter

The barrel shifter is a hardware feature that allows for efficient shifting and rotating of register values as part of data processing instructions. It can perform operations such as logical shifts (left or right), arithmetic shifts, and rotations on the second operand (**Operand2**) before it is used in the instruction without wasting extra instructions or cycles.

Examples of barrel shifter usage:

ADD	R0, R2, R1, LSL #2	; R0 = R2 + (R1 << 2) using barrel shifter
SUB	R3, R4, R5, LSR #1	; R3 = R4 - (R5 >> 1) using barrel shifter
ORR	R6, R7, R8, ROR #3	; R6 = R7 (R8 rotated right by 3)

Listing 2.1: Barrel shifter examples

1.2 Load and Store Instructions

Since the ARM Cortex-M4 follows the RISC design philosophy, it uses a load/store architecture. This means that arithmetic and logical instructions operate only on registers. Any data in memory must first be loaded into a register before processing, and results must be stored back to memory if they need to be preserved.

Table 2.4: Load and Store Instructions (Summary)

Instr.	Syntax Example	Description
LDR / STR	LDR/STR Rt, [Rn, #off]	Load/store a 32-bit word.
LDRB / STRB	LDRB/STRB Rt, [Rn, #off]	Load/store an 8-bit byte.
LDRH / STRH	LDRH/STRH Rt, [Rn, #off]	Load/store a 16-bit halfword.
LDRSB / LDRSH	LDRSB/LDRSH Rt, [Rn, #off]	Load signed byte/halfword and sign-extend to 32 bits.
LDRD / STRD	LDRD/STRD Rt, Rt2, [Rn, #off]	Load/store a 64-bit doubleword (two registers).

```

Reset_Handler
    LDR    R0, =XVAL          ; R0 = &XVAL (address of XVAL)
    LDR    R1, [R0]           ; R1 = 0x12345678 (load word from memory)
    ADR    R5, XVAL           ; R5 = PC-relative address of XVAL (if in range)

    LDRB   R2, [R0]           ; R2 = 0x78 (lowest byte of XVAL)
    LDRH   R3, [R0]           ; R3 = 0x5678 (lowest halfword of XVAL)

    MOV    R4, #0xFF          ; R4 = 0xFF
    LDR    R0, YPTR           ; R0 = contents of YPTR = &YVAL
    STRB   R4, [R0]           ; store 0xFF into YVAL (low byte only)

STOP    B    STOP

    AREA   MYDATA, DATA, READONLY
XVAL    DCD  0x12345678       ; word in memory
YPTR    DCD  YVAL             ; contains the address of YVAL

    AREA   MYDATA2, DATA, READWRITE
YVAL    DCD  0

    END

```

Listing 2.2: Examples of Load and Store Instructions

1.2.1 Loading Addresses and Values: LDR, LDR =, and ADR

In ARM assembly, it is important to distinguish between loading a *value* from memory and loading the *address* of a label. Although these instructions look similar, their behavior and purpose differ depending on how the assembler interprets them.

- **LDR Rn, label** Loads the 32-bit *value* stored at the memory address identified by **label** into register Rn. The CPU performs a direct memory read:

$$Rn \leftarrow [label]$$

Example: `LDR R0, XVAL` loads the contents of `XVAL` (e.g., `0x12345678`) into `R0`.

- **LDR Rn, =label** Loads the *address* of **label** into Rn, rather than the data stored at that address. The assembler generates this by either constructing the address using `MOVW/MOVT` instructions or placing it in a nearby *literal pool* for PC-relative loading.¹

$$Rn \leftarrow \&label$$

Example: `LDR R0, =XVAL` places the address of `XVAL` in `R0`.

- **ADR Rn, label** Loads the *address* of **label** into Rn by computing it relative to the current program counter. This method requires no literal pool or memory access but only works for nearby addresses (about ± 4 KB in Thumb mode):

$$Rn \leftarrow PC + \text{offset}(label)$$

¹For more details, see ARM Developer Documentation, “Literal pools and LDR =const”. <https://developer.arm.com/documentation/dui0473/m/dom1359731147760>

1.2.2 Understanding Pointer Declarations

The directive `YPTR DCD YVAL` reserves a 32-bit word at the label `YPTR` and initializes it with the address of `YVAL`. In other words, `YPTR` acts as a *pointer variable* that holds the address of another variable (`YVAL`). Executing `LDR Rn, YPTR` loads the 32-bit contents stored at `YPTR`—that is, the address of `YVAL`—into `Rn`, making `Rn` a pointer to `YVAL`.

Address	Label	Contents
0x2000	XVAL	0x12345678
0x2004	YPTR	0x2008 (address of YVAL)
0x2008	YVAL	0x00000000

1.2.3 Declaring Arrays and Strings

Data in assembly is defined using *assembler directives* that reserve and optionally initialize memory. Common directives include `DCD`, `DCW`, and `DCB`, which define words, halfwords, and bytes, respectively. These are typically placed within a `DATA` area to create arrays, lookup tables, buffers, or strings.

- `DCD` — Define Constant Word (32 bits per element)
- `DCW` — Define Constant Halfword (16 bits per element)
- `DCB` — Define Constant Byte (8 bits per element)
- `SPACE` — Reserve uninitialized memory (in bytes)
- `FILL` — Fill memory with a specified value for a given length

	AREA	MYDATA, DATA, READONLY	
NUMBERS	DCD	10, 20, 30, 40	<i>; array of 32-bit integers</i>
BYTES	DCB	1, 2, 3, 4	<i>; array of bytes</i>
TEXT	DCB	"HELLO", 0	<i>; null-terminated ASCII string</i>
BUFFER	SPACE	64	<i>; reserve 64 bytes (uninitialized)</i>
PATTERN	FILL	0xFF, 64	<i>; fill 64 bytes with 0xFF</i>

Listing 2.3: Declaring arrays and strings in memory

Each label (e.g., `NUMBERS`, `TEXT`) marks the starting address of a data object in memory. You can load these addresses into registers using `LDR R0, =NUMBERS` or `ADR R0, TEXT`, then access individual elements through the appropriate addressing modes.

Note: Strings are stored as consecutive ASCII characters in memory. A terminating zero (0x00) is typically appended to indicate the end of the string, similar to C-style strings.

1.3 Addressing Modes

Addressing modes define how the effective address or operand value is obtained by an instruction. The ARM Cortex-M4 supports several common addressing modes, summarized below:

Table 2.5: General Addressing Modes in ARM Cortex-M4

Mode	Syntax Example	Description
Immediate	MOV R0, #10	Operand is a constant value encoded in the instruction.
Register Direct	MOV R0, R1	Operand is taken directly from a register.
Register Indirect	LDR R0, [R1]	Register holds the address of the operand in memory.
Register Offset	LDR R0, [R1, R2]	Effective address = base register + offset register.
Immediate Offset	LDR R0, [R1, #4]	Effective address = base register + constant offset.
Pre-indexed	LDR R0, [R1, #4]!	Base updated first, then memory access.
Post-indexed	LDR R0, [R1], #4	Memory access first, then base register updated.

```

; Immediate Offset
LDR    R0, [R1, #4]    ; R0 = word at memory[R1 + 4]
; Register Offset
LDR    R0, [R1, R2]    ; R0 = word at memory[R1 + R2]
; Pre-indexed
LDR    R0, [R1, #4]!   ; R1 = R1 + 4, then load R0 = [R1]
; Post-indexed
LDR    R0, [R1], #4    ; load R0 = [R1], then R1 = R1 + 4

```

Listing 2.4: Examples of Offset, Pre-indexed, and Post-indexed Addressing Modes

2 Procedure

2.1 Examples

2.1.1 Example 1 — Data Processing Instructions

This example demonstrates various arithmetic and bitwise operations on registers.

```
        AREA RESET, CODE, READONLY
        EXPORT __Vectors
__Vectors
        DCD 0x20001000
        DCD Reset_Handler
        ALIGN

        AREA MYCODE, CODE, READONLY
        ENTRY
        EXPORT Reset_Handler
Reset_Handler
        ; Load values from memory into registers
        LDR    R1, NUM1          ; R1 = 50
        LDR    R2, NUM2          ; R2 = 12

        ; Arithmetic operations
        ADD     R3, R1, R2        ; R3 = 50 + 12 = 62
        SUB     R3, R3, #4        ; R3 = 62 - 4 = 58
        MUL     R4, R3, R2        ; R4 = 58 * 12 = 696

        ; Logical operations
        AND     R5, R4, #0xFF     ; R5 = 696 & 0xFF = 0xB8 (184)
        ORR     R5, R5, #0x01     ; R5 = 0xB8 | 0x01 = 0xB9 (185)
        BIC     R5, R5, #0x08     ; R5 = 0xB9 & ~0x08 = 0xB1 (177)
        EOR     R5, R5, #0x02     ; R5 = 0xB1 ^ 0x02 = 0xB3 (179)

        ; Shift and Barrel Shifter
        LSL     R8, R4, #4        ; logical left shift by 4 bits
        LSR     R9, R4, #8        ; logical right shift by 8 bits
        ADD     R5, R5, R5, LSL #1 ; R5 = R5 + (R5 << 1) = 3 * R5
        ; Store result in memory using a pointer
        LDR     R6, RP            ; R6 = address of RESULT
        STR     R5, [R6]         ; RESULT = R5

        ; Read back for verification
        LDR     R7, [R6]         ; R7 = RESULT
STOP     B      STOP

        AREA CONSTANTS, DATA, READONLY
NUM1     DCD     50              ; First integer
NUM2     DCD     12              ; Second integer
RP       DCD     RESULT          ; Pointer to RESULT variable

        AREA MYDATA, DATA, READWRITE
RESULT   DCD     0              ; Will hold the final computed value
        END
```

Listing 2.5: Arithmetic and bitwise operations example

2.1.2 Example 2 — Load/Store with Different Addressing Modes

This example demonstrates load and store instructions using various addressing modes.

```
AREA    RESET, CODE, READONLY
EXPORT  __Vectors
__Vectors
DCD     0x20001000          ; Initial SP (example)
DCD     Reset_Handler      ; Reset vector
AREA    MYCODE, CODE, READONLY
ENTRY
EXPORT  Reset_Handler
Reset_Handler
; Base address of the array
LDR     R0, =ARRAY          ; R0 = &ARRAY
; -----
; 1) Immediate Offset: EA = R0 + #8 (third element)
; -----
LDR     R1, [R0, #8]        ; R1 = ARRAY[2] = ? (expect 30)
LDR     R7, =OUT
STR     R1, [R7, #0]        ; OUT[0] = R1
; -----
; 2) Pre-indexed: R2 = [R2 + #4], then R2 = R2 + #4
;    Use a scratch pointer so R0 remains the base.
; -----
MOV     R2, R0              ; R2 = &ARRAY
LDR     R3, [R2, #4]!       ; R2 -> &ARRAY[1], R3 = ARRAY[1] = ? (expect
20)
STR     R3, [R7, #4]        ; OUT[1] = R3
; After this, R2 now points at ARRAY[1].
; -----
; 3) Post-indexed: R4 = [R4], then R4 = R4 + #12
;    Load first element, then advance pointer to the 4th.
; -----
MOV     R4, R0              ; R4 = &ARRAY
LDR     R5, [R4], #12       ; R5 = ARRAY[0] = ? (expect 10), R4 ->
&ARRAY[3]
STR     R5, [R7, #8]        ; OUT[2] = R5
; -----
; 4) Register Offset: EA = R0 + R6
;    Offset register holds byte offset (multiple of 4 for words).
; -----
MOV     R6, #12             ; byte offset to ARRAY[3]
LDR     R8, [R0, R6]        ; R8 = ARRAY[3] = ? (expect 40)
STR     R8, [R7, #12]       ; OUT[3] = R8
; read second element via register offset
MOV     R6, #4             ; byte offset to ARRAY[1]
LDR     R9, [R0, R6]        ; R9 = ARRAY[1] = ? (expect 20)
STOP    B                  STOP
AREA    CONSTS, DATA, READONLY
ARRAY   DCD     10, 20, 30, 40      ; four words at consecutive addresses
AREA    MYDATA, DATA, READWRITE
OUT     DCD     0, 0, 0, 0          ; capture buffer for observed loads. Could be
replaced by space 16
END
```

Listing 2.6: Load/store with different addressing modes example

2.2 Tasks

2.2.1 Task 1 — Bitwise Register Manipulation

Start with `R0 = 0x12345678`. Perform the following operations and observe the results in the debugger (verify in hex and binary):

- Clear bits 4–7 (second hex nibble).
- Set bits 8–11 (force that nibble to `F`).
- Toggle bits 28–31 (highest nibble).

Hint: Use `BIC`, `ORR`, and `EOR` with appropriate masks.

2.2.2 Task 2 — Addressing Modes with an Array

Given:

ARRAY	DCD	0x11, 0x22, 0x33, 0x44
OUT	SPACE	16

Load each element using a different addressing mode, then store to `OUT`:

- 0x11 via *immediate offset*
- 0x22 via *pre-indexed*
- 0x33 via *post-indexed*
- 0x44 via *register offset*

Hint: Put `ARRAY`'s base in `R1` (e.g., `LDR R1, =ARRAY`). Verify `OUT` in memory after execution.