1.2 Hardware and Software

Computers can perform calculations and make logical decisions phenomenally faster than human beings can. Many of today's personal computers can perform billions of calculations in one second—more than a human can perform in a lifetime. *Supercomputers* are already performing *thousands of trillions (quadrillions)* of instructions per second! China's National Research Center of Parallel Computer Engineering & Technology (NRCPC) has developed the Sunway TaihuLight supercomputer can perform over 93 quadrillion calculations per second (93 *petaflops*)![3] To put that in perspective, *the Sunway TaihuLight supercomputer can perform in one second over 12 million calculations for every person on the planet!* And supercomputing upper limits are growing quickly.

3. https://www.top500.org/lists/2016/06/

Computers process data under the control of sequences of instructions called **computer programs**. These software programs guide the computer through ordered actions specified by people called computer **programmers**. In this book, you'll learn key programming methodologies that are enhancing programmer productivity, thereby reducing software development costs.

A computer consists of various devices referred to as hardware

(e.g., the keyboard, screen, mouse, hard disks, memory, DVD drives and processing units). Computing costs are *dropping dramatically*, owing to rapid developments in hardware and software technologies. Computers that might have filled large rooms and cost millions of dollars decades ago are now inscribed on silicon chips smaller than a fingernail, costing perhaps a few dollars each. Ironically, silicon is one of the most abundant materials on Earth—it's an ingredient in common sand. Silicon-chip technology has made computing so economical that computers have become a commodity.

1.2.1 Moore's Law

Every year, you probably expect to pay at least a little more for most products and services. The opposite has been the case in the computer and communications fields, especially with regard to the hardware supporting these technologies. For many decades, hardware costs have fallen rapidly.

Every year or two, the capacities of computers have approximately *doubled* inexpensively. This remarkable trend often is called **Moore's Law**, named for the person who identified it in the 1960s, Gordon Moore, co-founder of Intel —the leading manufacturer of the processors in today's computers and embedded systems. Moore's Law *and related observations* apply especially to the amount of memory that computers have for programs, the amount of secondary storage (such as solid-state drive storage) they have to hold programs and data over longer periods of time, and their processor

speeds—the speeds at which they *execute* their programs (i.e., do their work).

Similar growth has occurred in the communications field—costs have plummeted as enormous demand for communications *bandwidth* (i.e., information-carrying capacity) has attracted intense competition. We know of no other fields in which technology improves so quickly and costs fall so rapidly. Such phenomenal improvement is truly fostering the *Information Revolution*.

1.2.2 Computer Organization

Regardless of differences in *physical* appearance, computers can be envisioned as divided into various **logical units** or sections (Fig. 1.2).

Logical unit	Description
Input unit	This "receiving" section obtains information (data and computer programs) from **input devices** and places it at the disposal of the other units for processing. Most user input is entered into computers through keyboards, touch screens and mouse devices. Other forms of input include receiving voice commands, scanning images and bar codes, reading from secondary storage devices (such as hard drives, DVD drives, Blu-ray Disc™ drives and USB flash drives—also called "thumb drives" or "memory sticks"), receiving video from a webcam and having your computer receive information from the Internet (such as when you stream videos from YouTube® or download e-books from Amazon). Newer forms of input include position data from a GPS device, motion and orientation information from an *accelerometer* (a device that responds to up/down, left/right and

	forward/backward acceleration) in a smartphone or game controller (such as Microsoft® Kinect® for Xbox®, Wii™ Remote and Sony® PlayStation® Move) and voice input from intelligent assistants like Amazon Echo and Google Home.
Output unit	This "shipping" section takes information the computer has processed and places it on various **output devices** to make it available for use outside the computer. Most information that's output from computers today is displayed on screens (including touch screens), printed on paper ("going green" discourages this), played as audio or video on PCs and media players (such as Apple's iPods) and giant screens in sports stadiums, transmitted over the Internet or used to control other devices, such as robots and "intelligent" appliances. Information is also commonly output to secondary storage devices, such as solid-state drives (SSDs), hard drives, DVD drives and USB flash drives. Popular recent forms of output are smartphone and game-controller vibration, virtual reality devices like Oculus Rift® and Google Cardboard™ and mixed reality devices like Microsoft's HoloLens™.
Memory unit	This rapid-access, relatively low-capacity "warehouse" section retains information that has been entered through the input unit, making it immediately available for processing when needed. The memory unit also retains processed information until it can be placed on output devices by the output unit. Information in the memory unit is *volatile*—it's typically lost when the computer's power is turned off. The memory unit is often called either **memory**, **primary memory** or **RAM** (Random Access Memory). Main memories on desktop and notebook computers contain as much as 128 GB of RAM, though 2 to 16 GB is most common. GB stands for gigabytes; a gigabyte is approximately one billion bytes. A **byte** is eight bits. A bit is either a `0` or a `1`.
Arithmetic and logic unit (ALU)	This "manufacturing" section performs *calculations*, such as addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. It also contains the *decision* mechanisms that allow the computer, for example, to compare two items from the memory unit to determine whether they're equal. In today's systems, the ALU is implemented as part of the next logical unit, the CPU.
Central processing	This "administrative" section coordinates and supervises the operation of the other sections. The CPU tells the input unit when information should be read into the memory unit, tells the ALU when information from the memory unit should be used in calculations and tells the output unit when to send information from the memory unit to certain output devices. Many of today's computers have multiple CPUs and, hence, can perform many operations simultaneously. A **multicore processor** implements

unit (CPU)	multiple processors on a single integrated-circuit chip—a *dual-core processor* has two CPUs, a *quad-core processor* has four and an *octa-core processor* has eight. Intel has some processors with up to 72 cores. Today's desktop computers have processors that can execute billions of instructions per second. Chapter 23 explores how to write apps that can take full advantage of multicore architecture.
Secondary storage unit	This is the long-term, high-capacity "warehousing" section. Programs or data not actively being used by the other units normally are placed on secondary storage devices (e.g., your *hard drive*) until they're again needed, possibly hours, days, months or even years later. Information on secondary storage devices is *persistent*—it's preserved even when the computer's power is turned off. Secondary storage information takes much longer to access than information in primary memory, but its cost per unit is much less. Examples of secondary storage devices include solid-state drives (SSDs), hard drives, DVD drives and USB flash drives, some of which can hold over 2 TB (TB stands for tera-bytes; a terabyte is approximately one trillion bytes). Typical hard drives on desktop and notebook computers hold up to 2 TB, and some desktop hard drives can hold up to 10 TB.

Fig. 1.2

Logical units of a computer.