

As early as the 9th century, a programmable music sequencer was invented by the Persian Banu Musa brothers, who described an automated mechanical flute player in the Book of Ingenious Devices. A similar technique used for database design is Entity-Relationship Modeling (ER Modeling). In 1801, the Jacquard loom could produce entirely different weaves by changing the "program" – a series of pasteboard cards with holes punched in them. However, because an assembly language is little more than a different notation for a machine language, two machines with different instruction sets also have different assembly languages. In the 1880s, Herman Hollerith invented the concept of storing data in machine-readable form. FORTRAN, the first widely used high-level language to have a functional implementation, came out in 1957, and many other languages were soon developed—in particular, COBOL aimed at commercial data processing, and Lisp for computer research. It is very difficult to determine what are the most popular modern programming languages. While these are sometimes considered programming, often the term software development is used for this larger overall process – with the terms programming, implementation, and coding reserved for the writing and editing of code per se. A similar technique used for database design is Entity-Relationship Modeling (ER Modeling). Debugging is a very important task in the software development process since having defects in a program can have significant consequences for its users. Text editors were also developed that allowed changes and corrections to be made much more easily than with punched cards.

Programmable devices have existed for centuries. The first step in most formal software development processes is requirements analysis, followed by testing to determine value modeling, implementation, and failure elimination (debugging). Assembly languages were soon developed that let the programmer specify instruction in a text format (e.g., ADD X, TOTAL), with abbreviations for each operation code and meaningful names for specifying addresses. For example, when a bug in a compiler can make it crash when parsing some large source file, a simplification of the test case that results in only few lines from the original source file can be sufficient to reproduce the same crash. Compilers harnessed the power of computers to make programming easier by allowing programmers to specify calculations by entering a formula using infix notation. Implementation techniques include imperative languages (object-oriented or procedural), functional languages, and logic languages. In the 1880s, Herman Hollerith invented the concept of storing data in machine-readable form. It is usually easier to code in "high-level" languages than in "low-level" ones. Many factors, having little or nothing to do with the ability of the computer to efficiently compile and execute the code, contribute to readability. Following a consistent programming style often helps readability. Provided the functions in a library follow the appropriate run-time conventions (e.g., method of passing arguments), then these functions may be written in any other language. Techniques like Code refactoring can enhance readability. Use of a static code analysis tool can help detect some possible problems. Languages form an approximate spectrum from "low-level" to "high-level"; "low-level" languages are typically more machine-oriented and faster to execute, whereas "high-level" languages are more abstract and easier to use but execute less quickly.