They are the building blocks for all software, from the simplest applications to the most sophisticated ones.  
However, with the concept of the stored-program computer introduced in 1949, both programs and data were stored and manipulated in the same way in computer memory.  
For example, COBOL is still strong in corporate data centers often on large mainframe computers, Fortran in engineering applications, scripting languages in Web development, and C in embedded software.  
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.  
However, Charles Babbage had already written his first program for the Analytical Engine in 1837.  
Programming involves tasks such as analysis, generating algorithms, profiling algorithms' accuracy and resource consumption, and the implementation of algorithms (usually in a particular programming language, commonly referred to as coding).  
Ideally, the programming language best suited for the task at hand will be selected.  
Integrated development environments (IDEs) aim to integrate all such help.  
Methods of measuring programming language popularity include: counting the number of job advertisements that mention the language, the number of books sold and courses teaching the language (this overestimates the importance of newer languages), and estimates of the number of existing lines of code written in the language (this underestimates the number of users of business languages such as COBOL).  
Trade-offs from this ideal involve finding enough programmers who know the language to build a team, the availability of compilers for that language, and the efficiency with which programs written in a given language execute.  
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.  
This can be a non-trivial task, for example as with parallel processes or some unusual software bugs.  
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.  
They are the building blocks for all software, from the simplest applications to the most sophisticated ones.  
It affects the aspects of quality above, including portability, usability and most importantly maintainability.