They are the building blocks for all software, from the simplest applications to the most sophisticated ones.  
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.  
In 1206, the Arab engineer Al-Jazari invented a programmable drum machine where a musical mechanical automaton could be made to play different rhythms and drum patterns, via pegs and cams.  
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.  
Some languages are more prone to some kinds of faults because their specification does not require compilers to perform as much checking as other languages.  
Proficient programming thus usually requires expertise in several different subjects, including knowledge of the application domain, specialized algorithms, and formal logic.  
Scripting and breakpointing is also part of this process.  
Relatedly, software engineering combines engineering techniques and principles with software development.  
Many programmers use forms of Agile software development where the various stages of formal software development are more integrated together into short cycles that take a few weeks rather than years.  
One approach popular for requirements analysis is Use Case analysis.  
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).  
A study found that a few simple readability transformations made code shorter and drastically reduced the time to understand it.  
It is usually easier to code in "high-level" languages than in "low-level" ones.  
 High-level languages made the process of developing a program simpler and more understandable, and less bound to the underlying hardware.  
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.