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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.  
It is usually easier to code in "high-level" languages than in "low-level" ones.  
Compiling takes the source code from a low-level programming language and converts it into machine code.  
 Machine code was the language of early programs, written in the instruction set of the particular machine, often in binary notation.  
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.  
By the late 1960s, data storage devices and computer terminals became inexpensive enough that programs could be created by typing directly into the computers.  
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).  
To produce machine code, the source code must either be compiled or transpiled.  
This can be a non-trivial task, for example as with parallel processes or some unusual software bugs.