

CS341L, Fall 2025
Data Lab - part a: Manipulating Bits by yourself
Assigned: 9/5/25, Due: Friday 9/12/2025 at 11:59PM

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this assignment is to become more familiar with bit-level representations of integers and floating point numbers. You'll do this by solving a series of programming "puzzles." Many of these puzzles are quite artificial, but you'll find yourself thinking much more about bits in working your way through them.

This semester we are trying something different in the way we generate code in this lab. So we have divided it into two parts.

Part a: Which is described in this document, consists of doing by yourself only a few of the simplest and easiest puzzles, so that you warm up for the hardest ones and practice how to approach this kind of problem using only bitwise operators in C.

You only have one week to complete this part so you need to start working right away. Ask as many questions as you need; download all the appropriate files, and learn what the restrictions are for the code you produce to solve these puzzles. You will also learn how to use the testing platform included in the tar file provided.

Make sure you attend all the office hours you can in this first week and extra office hours can be provided they can also be done via zoom.

Part b: Consists of building an experimental setting to find solutions to the more challenging puzzles and evaluate those solutions. But more on this later, when we publish the statement for **part b** which is coming up. **You will have 2 weeks for this second part.**

2 Logistics

This is an individual project. All handins are electronic on Canvas. Clarifications and corrections will be posted on the course Canvas page. As in all assignments, you may discuss your general strategy for solving the problems with classmates verbally or online in a verbal style. You may not share solutions themselves with your classmates, you may not hunt for solutions on the internet nor produce the code for them using generative AI, and you may not receive help from outside the class. Document any people with whom you discussed the assignment privately in a file in your directory entitled **CREDITS**. If you consult any outside source that helped you find a solution you must also include that in the file CREDITS.

3 Handout Instructions

The datalab source files are available in Canvas for this course in a .tar file. These source files are also available in the CS machines in the path specified on canvas. The only file you will be modifying is `bits.c`. **As described above, you must also add and submit a file entitled CREDITS if you got help from any outside source.** We recommend that you work with lobogit, git, or with another control version software, to keep your work properly backed up.

The `bits.c` file contains a skeleton for each of the programming puzzles for which you will provide a solution. Your assignment is to complete each function skeleton using only *straightline* code for the integer puzzles (i.e., no loops or conditionals) and a limited number of C arithmetic and logical operators. Specifically, you are *only* allowed to use the following eight operators:

! ~ & ^ | + << >>

A few of the functions further restrict this list. Also, you are not allowed to use any constants longer than 8 bits. See the comments in `bits.c` for detailed rules and a discussion of the desired coding style. In fact, read those comments thoroughly before you begin.

4 The Puzzles

This section describes the puzzles that you will be solving in `bits.c` for this part a of the Datalab.

4.1 Bit Manipulations

Table 1 describes a set of functions that manipulate and test sets of bits. The “Rating” field gives the difficulty rating (the number of points) for the puzzle, and the “Max ops” field gives the maximum number of operators you are allowed to use to implement each function. See the comments in `bits.c` for more details on the desired behavior of the functions. You may also refer to the test functions in `tests.c`. These are used as reference functions to express the correct behavior of your functions, although they don’t satisfy the coding rules for your functions.

Name	Description	Rating	Max Ops
<code>copyLSB(x)</code>	set all bits of result to least significant bit of x	2	5
<code>evenBits()</code>	return word with all even-numbered bits set to 1	1	8

Table 1: Bit-Level Manipulation Functions.

4.2 Two's Complement Arithmetic

Table 2 describes a set of functions that make use of the two's complement representation of integers. Again, refer to the comments in `bits.c` and the reference versions in `tests.c` for more information.

Name	Description	Rating	Max Ops
<code>isTmin()</code>	returns 1 if x is the minimum, two's complement number, 0 otherwise	1	10

Table 2: Arithmetic Functions

4.3 Floating-Point Operations

For this part of the assignment, you will implement some common single-precision floating-point operations. In this section, you are allowed to use standard control structures (conditionals, loops), and you may use both `int` and `unsigned` data types, including arbitrary unsigned and integer constants. You may not use any unions, structs, or arrays. Most significantly, you may not use any floating point data types, operations, or constants. Instead, any floating-point operand will be passed to the function as having type `unsigned`, and any returned floating-point value will be of type `unsigned`. Your code should perform the bit manipulations that implement the specified floating point operations.

Table 3 describes a set of functions that operate on the bit-level representations of floating-point numbers. Refer to the comments in `bits.c` and the reference versions in `tests.c` for more information.

Name	Description	Rating	Max Ops
<code>float_abs(uf)</code>	Compute bit-level equivalent of absolute value of f	2	10

Table 3: Floating-Point Functions. Value `f` is the floating-point number having the same bit representation as the unsigned integer `uf`.

The included program `fshow` helps you understand the structure of floating point numbers. To compile `fshow`, switch to the handout directory and type:

```
unix> make
```

You can use `fshow` to see what an arbitrary pattern represents as a floating-point number:

```
unix> ./fshow 2080374784
```

```
Floating point value 2.658455992e+36
Bit Representation 0x7c000000, sign = 0, exponent = f8, fraction = 000000
Normalized. 1.0000000000 X 2^(121)
```

You can also give `fshow` hexadecimal and floating point values, and it will decipher their bit structure.

5 Evaluation

Your score will be computed out of a maximum of 30 points based on the following distribution:

6 Correctness points.

8 Performance points.

16 Explanation and style points.

Correctness points. The puzzles you must solve have been given a difficulty rating between 1 and 2, such that their weighted sum totals to 6. We will evaluate your functions using the `btest` program, which is described in the next section. You will get full credit for a puzzle if it passes all of the tests performed by `btest`, and no credit for this aspect otherwise.

Performance points. Our main concern at this point in the course is that you can get the right answer. However, we want to instill in you a sense of keeping things as short and simple as you can. Furthermore, some of the puzzles can be solved by brute force, but we want you to be more clever. Thus, for each function we've established a maximum number of operators that you are allowed to use for each function. This limit is very generous and is designed only to catch egregiously inefficient solutions. You will receive two points for each correct function that satisfies the operator limit.

Explanation and style points. Each solution to a puzzle must be explained, in other words you need to describe how you came up with that solution; 4 points per puzzle are reserved for this. We might ask you to provide the explanations in a session with the TA or the instructor. Or you may get a question in an exam about one of your solutions.

Included here is an evaluation of the style of your solutions and your commenting. Your solutions should be as clean and straightforward as possible. Your comments should be informative, but they need not be extensive.

Autograding your work

We have included some autograding tools in the handout directory — `btest`, `dlc`, and `driver.pl` — to help you check the correctness of your work.

- **btest**: This program checks the functional correctness of the functions in `bits.c`. To build and use it, type the following two commands:

```
unix> make
unix> ./btest
```

Notice that you must rebuild `btest` each time you modify your `bits.c` file.

You'll find it helpful to work through the functions one at a time, testing each one as you go. You can use the `-f` flag to instruct `btest` to test only a single function:

```
unix> ./btest -f bitAnd
```

You can feed it specific function arguments using the option flags `-1`, `-2`, and `-3`:

```
unix> ./btest -f bitAnd -1 7 -2 0xf
```

Check the file `README` for documentation on running the `btest` program.

- **dlc:** This is a modified version of an ANSI C compiler from the MIT CILK group that you can use to check for compliance with the coding rules for each puzzle. The typical usage is:

```
unix> ./dlc bits.c
```

The program runs silently unless it detects a problem, such as an illegal operator, too many operators, or non-straightline code in the integer puzzles. Running with the `-e` switch:

```
unix> ./dlc -e bits.c
```

causes `dlc` to print counts of the number of operators used by each function. Type `./dlc -help` for a list of command line options.

- **driver.pl:** This is a driver program that uses `btest` and `dlc` to compute the correctness and performance points for your solution. It takes no arguments:

```
unix> ./driver.pl
```

Your instructors will use `driver.pl` to evaluate your solution.

6 Handin Instructions for this part a

You will upload your final version of `bits.c` (plain text) and the `CREDITS` file in pdf format into Canvas, at the appropriate place for this assignment.

7 Advice

- Don't include the `<stdio.h>` header file in your `bits.c` file, as it confuses `dlc` and results in some non-intuitive error messages. You will still be able to use `printf` in your `bits.c` file for debugging without including the `<stdio.h>` header, although `gcc` will print a warning that you can ignore.
- The `dlc` program enforces a stricter form of C declarations than is the case for C++ or that is enforced by `gcc`. In particular, any declaration must appear in a block (what you enclose in curly braces) before any statement that is not a declaration. For example, it will complain about the following code:

```
int aFunc(int x)
{
    int a = x;
    a *= 3;      /* Statement that is not a declaration */
    int b = a;   /* ERROR: Declaration not allowed here */
}
```