An analysis of educational strategies for introductory programming courses

```c
#include "../include/pc_buffer.h"

void pc_buffer_init(PC_Buffer *buffer, uint16_t buffer_size) {
        buffer->array = malloc(sizeof(char)*buffer_size);
        buffer->buffer_SIZE = buffer_size;
        buffer->consume_count = 0;
        buffer->produce_count = 0;
}

void pc_buffer_add(PC_Buffer *buffer, char data) {
        buffer->array[buffer->produce_count++ % buffer->buffer_SIZE] = data;
}

void pc_buffer_remove(PC_Buffer *buffer, char *data) {
        *data = buffer->array[buffer->consume_count++ % buffer->buffer_SIZE];
}

bool pc_buffer_empty(PC_Buffer *buffer) {
        return buffer->produce_count == buffer->consume_count;
}

bool pc_buffer_full(PC_Buffer *buffer) {
        return buffer->produce_count - buffer->consume_count == buffer->buffer_SIZE;
}
```

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March 21, 2017

Screenshot source: https://github.com/vkottler/badgerloopControls/blob/master/Pic32/peripherals/C/pc_buffer.c

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Computer science (CS) and programming education carry the burden of preparing students for the responsibility of maintaining our growing digital infrastructure [6,11,15]. The goal of this research is to understand the motivation for modern educational strategies in courses that introduce students to programming and fundamental topics in computing.

An introductory course for any major is a student's first impression of what that field will be like to pursue [2], and I ask whether or not certain types of reform would result in improvements in both retention of students who pursue a degree in computing, as well as representation of content that is pertinent to real-world problems in that field [26-30,34,35-42]. For the latter, I examine the requirements of internship positions at top tech companies as opposed to university masters and doctoral program requirements.

I will provide a warrant for this inquiry by presenting data representing the staggering imbalance the United States faces in terms of supply of qualified and graduating computing students with the rapidly increasing demand for a workforce with computing-related qualifications [6,12-15]. This is amplified as we explore discrepancies in what job opening advertisements specify as requirements [35-41] compared to what a university offers a student with its introductory curriculum [26-30,34].

To provide context to the topic as well as the challenge an institution faces in designing a curriculum, I will explain computing topics at a high level so that programming language choice can be recognized as a critical factor that shapes the way a student thinks in addition to opening and closing doors for a future career [Appendix I].

I will provide data that describes how frequently certain languages are used [18] but will not go into depth about what types of problems languages were designed to solve. Understanding what problems certain languages solve better than others is an intimate topic that varies heavily on a programmer's preference and previous experience.

From here, I will present my research on the educational strategies, focusing on choice of language and specific features of an introductory course. At this point languages and CS terms (i.e. programming paradigms such as object-oriented or functional programming) will not be explicitly defined to maintain a perspective of objectivity.

Finally, I will summarize the results and provide an unbiased, objective recommendation based on my own research and data acquisition for what a hypothetical introductory course might look like.

Introduction

Computers & Rapid Digital Integration

Computer programming is formally defined as a process that leads from an original formulation of a computing problem to executable computer programs. More generally, it is the means of controlling a computer to complete a desired task.

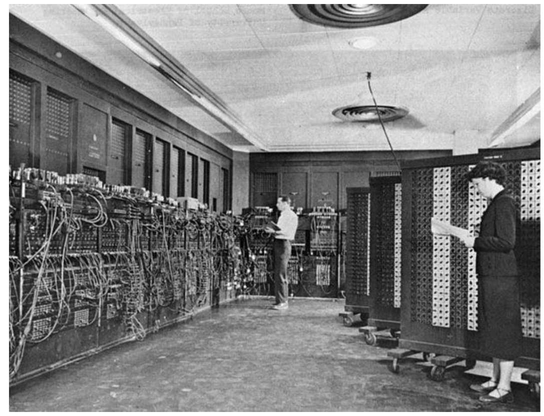

Figure 1: ENIAC at the University of Pennsylvania circa 1946, considered the first digital computer [7]

The range of tasks computers perform today, and even the definition of a computer itself has grown rapidly since the days of manually-fed, perforated tape strips and large machines that required rewiring of flipping of physical switches (Figure 1) to be controlled. A computer today can be considered anything containing a microcontroller or microprocessor that is making decisions for an electronic device or system. This covers a wide range of gadgets, and computer-occupation related jobs alone are predicted to make up 51% of all STEM related work by 2018 (Figure 2).

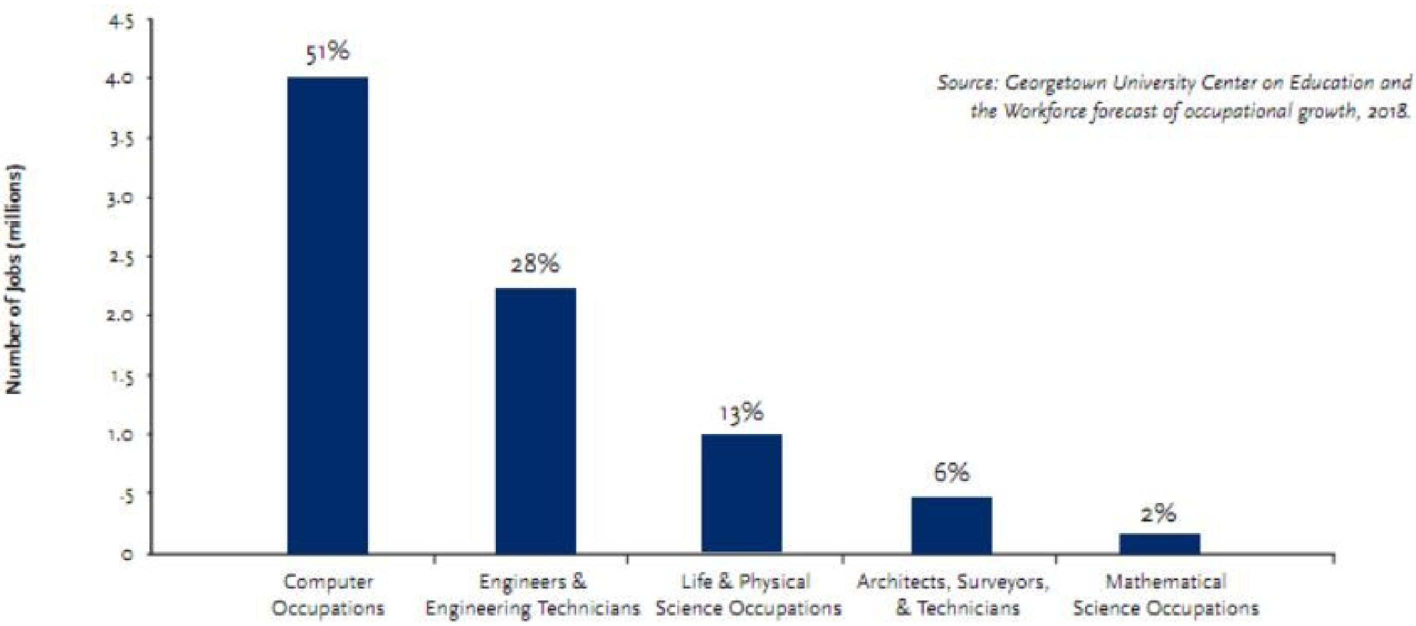

Figure 2: Predicted breakdown of available jobs in different STEM categories for 2018 [6]

It is also predicted that 65% of all jobs in the U.S. economy will require postsecondary education by 2020 [11]. Knowing roughly how many roles need to be filled in the near future and assuming a majority of these roles will require a degree of some kind, how prepared is the education system to fulfill its duty to prepare even the most immediate generation of graduating high school and college students?

Supply != Demand

At the high school level, CollegeBoard's Advanced Placement program offers a CS curriculum with an accompanying exam that over 6,000 of the world's leading educational institutions recognize as a legitimate measure of future college students' competence in various subjects [12]. In most cases, a high enough score on an AP exam grants a student college credit and potentially exemption from certain general graduation requirements.

In 2016, 4,810 high schools were certified to teach the AP Computer Sciences course (**11.42%** of U.S high schools) and **57,937** students took the exam (**out of 15 million** total high school students) [13, 14]. Although dismal, this is significant growth from the previous five years based on historical stagnation (Figure 3):

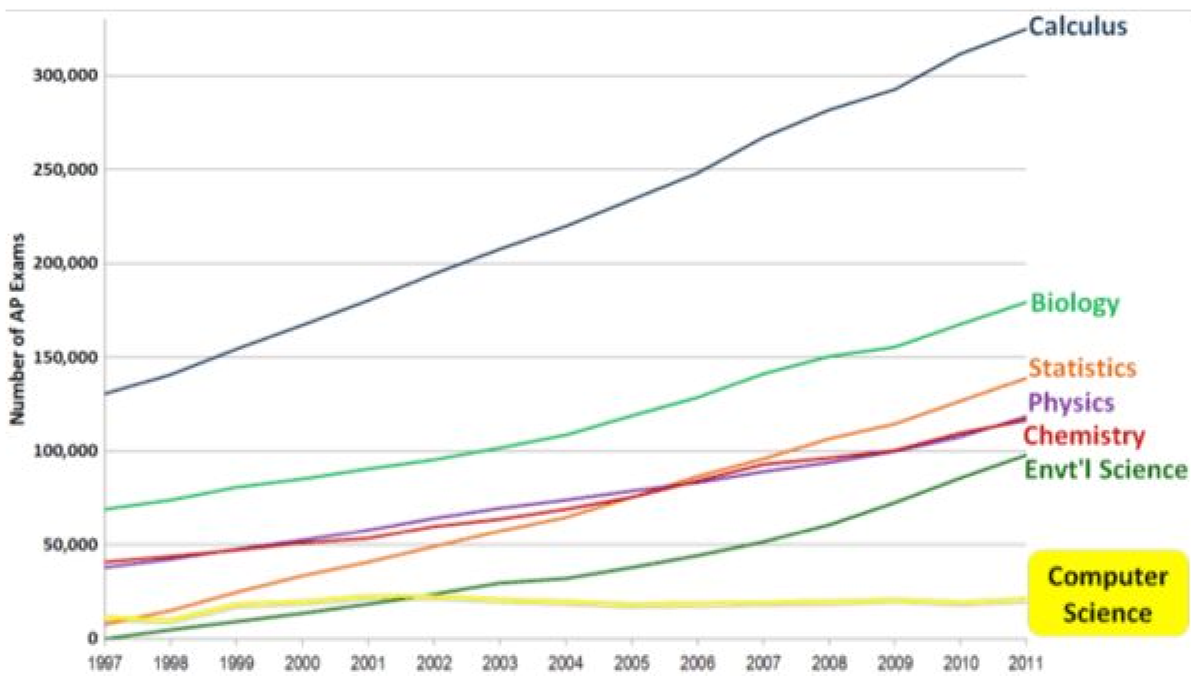

Figure 3: AP Exam Participation 1997-2011 [15]

An exact correlation between a student's future major choice and his/her AP exam portfolio has not been released since 2011, but at that time **less than 30%** of students who took the exam went on to study CS [16]. A similar trend of growth can be observed in the enrollment of computing-related majors at the college level over this same set of years (Figure 4):

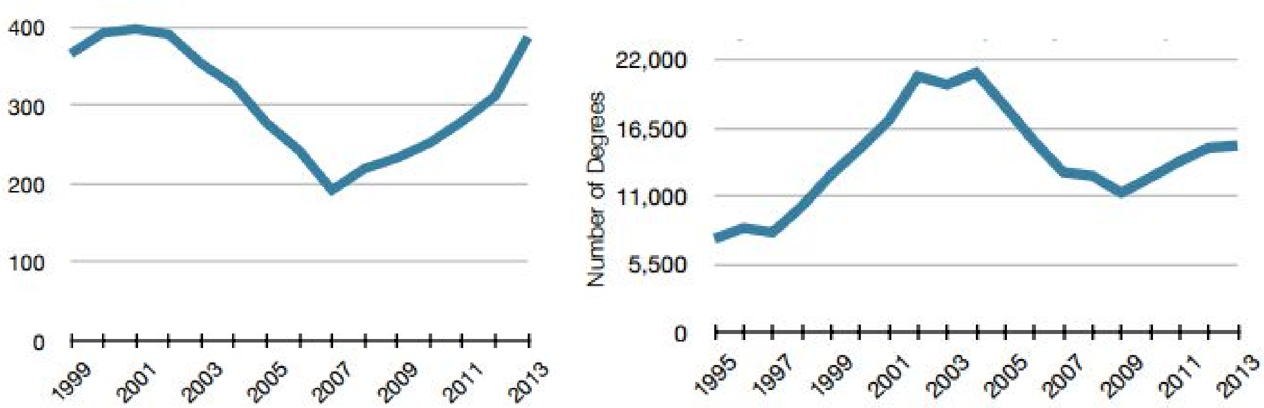

Figure 4: (Left) Average CS majors per U.S. CS Department. (Right) Total BS Production (All Departments) 2013 [15]

Implication

The education systems are having a difficult time adjusting to the societal demand for programmers. So much, that we experience a significant deficit in the number of graduating computer and information systems students relative to the number of job openings available annually (Figure 5):

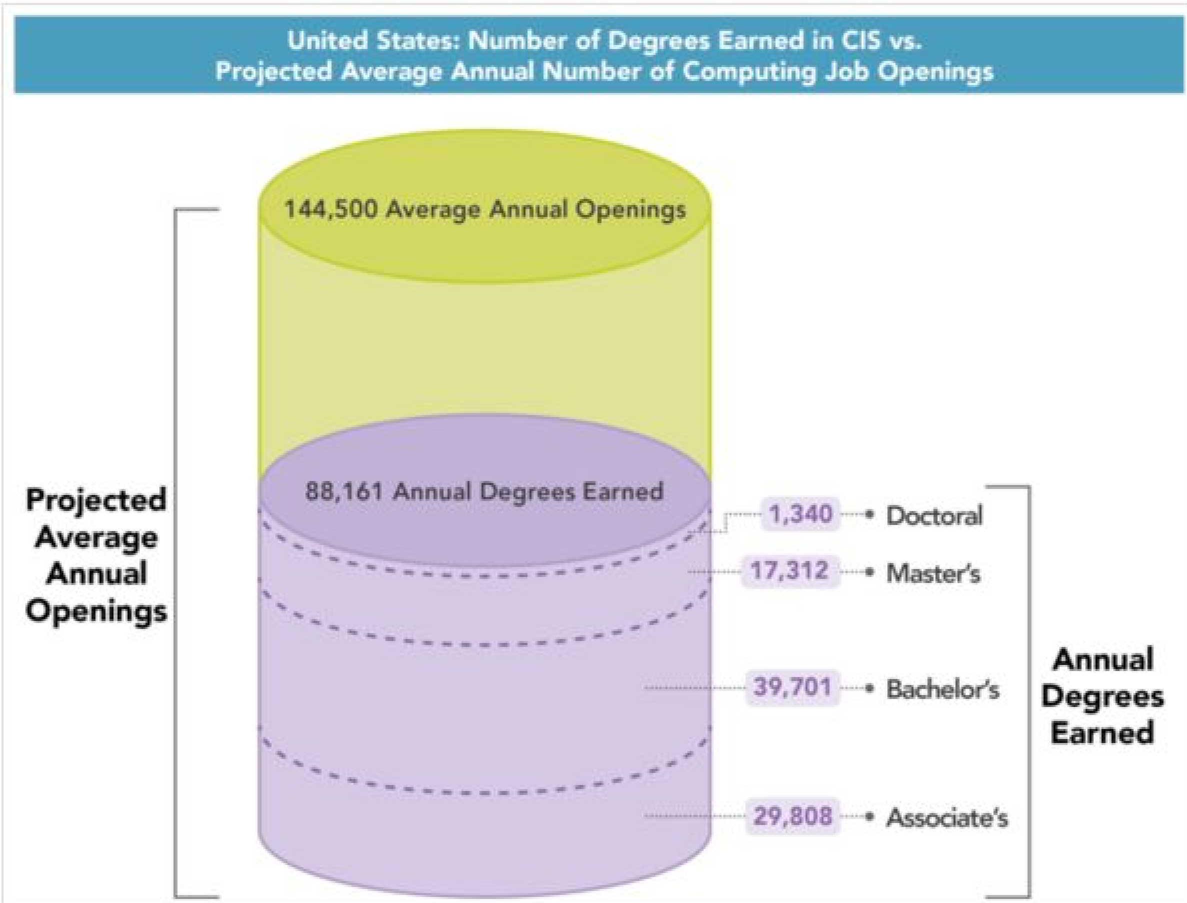

Figure 5: Ratio of jobs available in CIS fields vs. number of students graduating with relevant degrees, annually 2013 [15]

The primary implication of this provides a warrant that is two-fold to an investigation of introductory CS education:

1. It is the responsibility of an introductory CS course to retain students [2], which is necessary to reduce the annual deficit of jobs. The introductory course provides the opportunity for students to develop an identity as someone interested in CS and IT (Information Technology) in addition to serving as the first step towards actualization of such careers [2].
2. Lack of sufficient competition in the job market, and the variety of jobs available do not bode well for ease of effective curriculum implementation, academic research needs to be consulted to determine what a standardized curriculum may look like to prevent companies from making up for gaps in experience out of pocket.

One may argue that investigating introductory CS education on this basis is not warrant enough, and that the warrants are not based on arguments echoed by peer-reviewed academic research. This is a valid argument, but whether or not the educational institutions should be held accountable for the deficit of programmers is not the main focus of this research.

Background

Before reading this section, I recommend reading **Appendix I** first if computer architecture is a foreign concept. It is important to understand how a computer executes code (human readable text written in a programming language) in order to better internalize how languages are different and why it matters from the perspective of education. I will provide no additional explanation to what each programming language is and how they differ beyond this section.

High Level Language Summary

GitHut.info is a website that analyzes the code behind over *two million* projects hosted on **GitHub**—another website that provides free cloud storage for anyone seeking to store their code repositories in a central location with the ability to keep track of version and workflow using **git**, a widely used and free version control piece of software.

According to their dataset, the eight most commonly used languages on GitHub are (in order of most frequent to least frequently used) **JavaScript, Java, Python, CSS, PHP, Ruby, C++ and C** [18]. In this case the metric is total number of projects, not number of total lines of code (not a metric they track) or number of contributions per project. This information is echoed in Figure 13.

Looking at the highest average number of contributions per project, the top eight languages are (from most to least) C++, TeX, Rust, C, CSS, Scala, JavaScript, and Java.

Not all software is public on GitHub, and not all of these languages are “programming languages” where a programming language is defined as a language that you can use to create a file that can be executed by the operating system. For instance, CSS is short for cascading style-sheets and is used to style web pages and TeX is used to prepare documents such as a book or article submitted to a research journal (especially where mathematical formula will be used frequently).

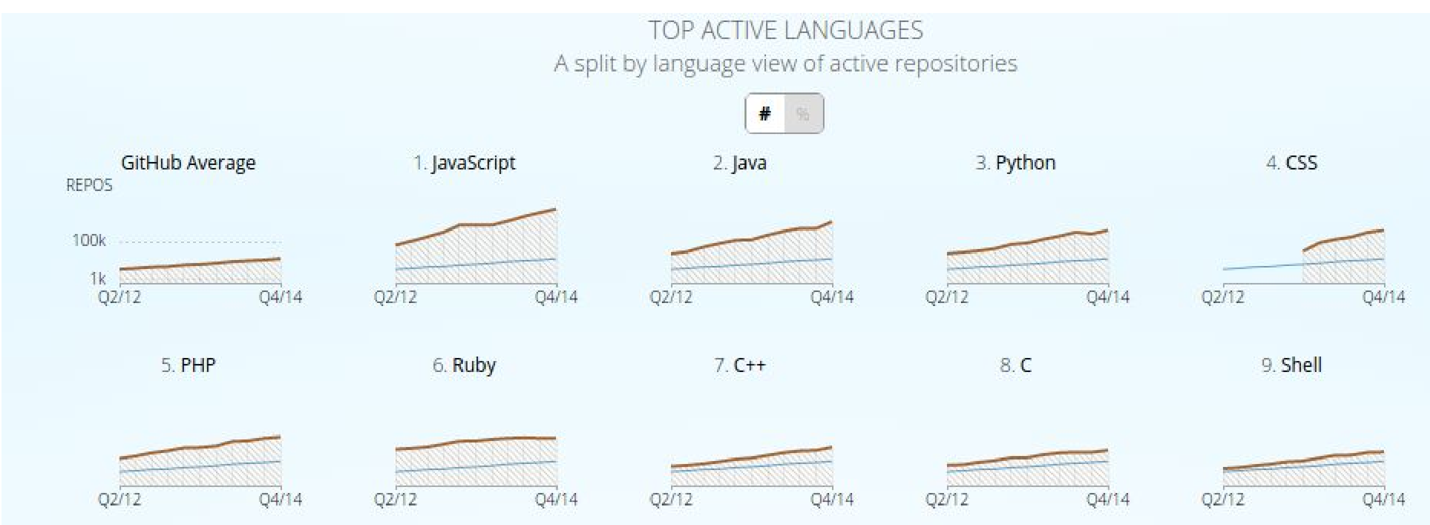

Figure 13: Top Active Langaugues from GitHut.info

Languages: Under the Hood

Optionally review the following summary of the popular languages, this will serve as context in the following discussion of the introductory CS educational strategies:

JavaScript

First created in 1995, interpreted language, most interpreters are written in C/C++. One of the three core technologies in World Wide Web content production, not based on Java despite name. [19]

Java

First created in 1995, compiles to Java bytecode that is interpreted by a Java virtual machine (JVM) written in C (Sun JVM) or C++ (Oracle JVM). Created to provide a means for developers to “write once, run anywhere” because JVMs can run on any Java virtual machine regardless of CPU architecture. [20]

Python

First created in 1991, interpreted language, interpreter written in C. Design emphasizes code readability and concision. [21]

PHP

First created in 1995, interpreted language, interpreter written in C. Server-side scripting language designed primarily for web development, can still be used as a general purpose programming language. [22]

Ruby

First created in 1995, compiles to bytecode that is interpreted by an interpreter written in C. General purpose programming language. [23]

C++

First created in 1983, compiled language, standardized by the International Organization for Standardization. General purpose programming language. [24]

C

First created in 1972, compiled language standardized by both the American National Standards Institute and the International Organization for Standardization. General purpose programming language. [25]

Research & Analysis

This section will be presented in the following order:

1. Peer-reviewed, academic research discussing methods of teaching introductory CS
2. Examination of a selection of real-world introductory CS courses
3. Comparison of the above two sections with what companies require of student interns

1. Theory of Education

In “Programming Languages and Teaching”, an independent report in 2000 authors had the following to say about the difficulty in teaching CS at the high school level:

In the experience of the author, the main problem with teaching programming languages to younger students has been that the results obtained from a lot of hard work (in most programming languages) bears little resemblance to the programs the students see and use everyday on their own computers. [1]

The authors studied the students’ results from a course they designed with **Java** as the chosen language for the following reasons:

- Object-orientation
- Relevant to industry and to the student
- Easily implemented with regard to cost and resources
- Provides a wide range of tools for the programmer and have good re-use

It is also mentioned that at this point in time, object-oriented programming was considered too difficult to be a suitable first programming style, and that many schools and institutions preferred procedural programming though the authors predicted this to be changing in favor of object-orientation [1].

Another study from the Uppsala Computing Education Research Group in 2014 concurs with the notion that it may be *unlikely* for a student to consider CS as a suitable field of study in the future without a way to relate to the material in a meaningful way [2]. Their study analyzed the ways that students “experience participation” in CS/IT by interviewing these students to find out what they believed life would be like as a computer scientist or IT engineer, how they think they became interested in the field, and what their first-year experience had been like.

Notably, their own research on the topic before the study began indicated the following:

Studies in science, technology, and math (STM) education indicate that development of identity can be problematic for many students, and that they struggle to integrate their study experiences with their perception of who they are and want to become. Identity has also been found critical for retention, and is an important underexplored research area. [2]

Their results emphasize that all of the interviewees indicate some form of creation to be a primary motivation to continue studying CS/IT. It was important to the focus group to be able to feel that they had created something of their own [2].

This language-independent feature of a course [creation] is one that may be overlooked in even the small group of introductory programming courses we will examine later.

A 2006 study took many factors into consideration with respect to language choice for an introductory programming course. Their results are summarized graphically in Figure 14:

	C	C++	Eiffel	Haskell	Java	JavaScript	Logo	Pascal	Python	Scheme	VB
Learning											
Is suitable for teaching (§2.1.1)			✓				✓	✓	✓		
Can be used to apply physical analogies (§2.1.2)			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Offers a general framework (§2.1.3)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Promotes a design driven approach for teaching software (§2.1.4)			✓	✓	*1		✓			✓	
Design and Environment											
Is interactive and facilitates rapid code development (§2.2.1)				✓			✓		✓	✓	
Promotes writing correct programs (§2.2.2)		*2	✓		*2				*2		
Allows problems to be solved in "bite-sized chunks" (§2.2.3)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Provides a seamless development environment (§2.2.4)			✓		*1						
Support and Availability											
Has a supportive user community (§2.3.1)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Is open source, so anyone can contribute to its development (§2.3.2)									✓		
Is consistently supported across environments (§2.3.3)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Is freely and easily available (§2.3.4)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Is supported with good teaching material (§2.3.5)		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Beyond Introductory Programming											
Is not only used in education (§2.4.1)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓
Is extensible (§2.4.2)	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓		✓
Is reliable and efficient (§2.4.3)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Is not an example of the QWERTY phenomena (§2.4.4)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Authors' Score	8	11	15	6	14	9	9	7	15	8	9

*1 Possibly with some IDEs, e.g. BlueJ (http://www.bluej.org)
*2 Possibly with unit testing

Figure 14: Programming Language evaluation by feature set [3]

By providing well founded criteria, this study has attempted to provide objectivity into what has been, up to now, frequently an emotive argument. [3]

There is palpable frustration in the researchers' above statement. Based on their study, Eiffel and Python are the best language candidates for an introductory course with Java following closely behind.

Before conducting this study, the researchers examined "a census of introductory programming courses within Australia and New Zealand" to understand what instructors look for when choosing a language to teach their courses. **Industry relevance** was the most common factor. A summary of the responses is available in Figure 15.

Reason	Count
Industry relevance/Marketable/Student demand	33
Pedagogical benefits of language	19
Structure of degree/Department politics	16
OOP language wanted	15
GUI interface	6
Availability/Cost to students	5
Easy to find appropriate texts	2

Figure 15: Instructors' most influential factors [3]

This study also cited the following as "the primary objective of introductory programming instruction":

to nurture novice programmers who can apply programming concepts equally well in any language.

Why, then, is so much effort placed on finding the perfect language? Why not **teach multiple languages** throughout a semester? The authors also wondered this and had the follow to say on the matter:

. . . many papers from literature argue that one language is superior for this task. Such research asserts a particular language is superior to another because, in isolation, it possesses desirable features or because changing to the new language seemed to encourage better results from students. What is shown in literature is surely only a reflection of the innumerable debates that have undoubtedly taken place within teaching institutions. [3]

A multi-language curriculum argument was not one I could find existing research on, but later on we will find out how important knowing multiple languages is for industry relevance and how many courses follow this paradigm.

A year later a study was published that attempted to summarize all existing research on the subject of introductory programming. Their goal was to provide a resource for instructors to reference when deciding how to construct their curriculum by examining existing curricula, pedagogy, language and teaching tool choices [4].

The study cited over one-hundred sources and included most notable source material in the appendix, including an excerpt for each cited study's purpose.

Surprisingly, they made the following remark in their conclusion:

We conclude that despite the large volume of literature in this area, there is little systematic evidence to support any particular approach. [4]

The title begins with "A Survey of Literature" and they later mention that the main purpose for making this assertion is so that their research provides guidance to educators partaking in curriculum design rather than "a canonical answer to the question of how to teach introductory programming." [4]

The study cites **C**, **Java**, and **C++** as consistent members of the "top four languages" club in both industry and education. Language popularity alone is not warrant enough to declare a winner, though, and the researchers had the following to say on this matter:

Despite the popularity of languages such as Java, C and C++, there has been much debate about the suitability of these languages for education, especially when introducing programming to novices (for example [66, 47, 12, 22, 23]). These languages have not been designed specifically for educational purposes, in contrast to others that have been designed with this specific purpose in mind (e.g., Python, Logo, Eiffel, Pascal). [4]

Knowing other languages were designed with **learnability as a feature** is highly compelling. Although only Python appears to belong to this category in addition to being one of the most popular languages, it remains to be seen whether the other languages are featured in the curricula of the courses under examination in the next section.

The final research article to be examined comes from early 2016 and incidentally supports this paper's warrant in its abstract:

The rapid integration of technology into our professional and personal lives has left many education systems ill-equipped to deal with the influx of people seeking computing education. [5]

This study sought to experimentally prove that incorporating subgoals—defined as "components of complex problem solutions that provide functional pieces of the final solution" [5]—allows students to perform better "while solving novel programming problems" than students carrying out the same tasks through conventional means. They found that across all assessments, the subgoal focus groups completed 36% more of the problem-solving tasks correctly. The participants were chosen so that no one had taken more than one computer programming course, or had any experience with the tool (Android App Inventor) they used to conduct the experiment.

Summary of Findings - Academic Research

One study examined a multitude of languages and scored them based on a set of criteria [3], but a later and more thorough study pointed out that making a recommendation on programming language choice may not be the ideal approach to creating the most effective introductory programming curriculum [4]. The same study revealed a discrepancy in language popularity and learnability— the most popular and most widely used languages in industry are not necessarily the most logical candidates for introductory education [4].

Most of the studies testified that the subjectivity and bias can be hard to eliminate at individual institutions but concur that **industry relevance** [1-5] and **student engagement that promotes a sense of accomplishment** [1-2,4-5] are crucial to a successful course.

Next, we will determine whether or not the researched ideologies are being effectively put into practice today.

2. Existing Techniques

How is introductory CS being taught, and what is the scope of a modern introductory CS course? Six examples have been reviewed to answer this question:

AP Computer Science A, Fall 2014 [26]

Language: Java

Justification:

> *Since any natural language (e.g., English) allows inconsistencies and ambiguities, solutions in computer science require a communication medium more formal than a natural language. For this reason, the AP Computer Science A course requires that potential solutions of problems be written in the Java programming language.*

Topics: Object-Oriented Program Design, Program Implementation, Program Analysis, Standard Data Structures, Standard Operations and Algorithms, Computing in Context.

Takeaway: This course is designed with preparing students for university in mind. They focus on enabling students to learn how to use programming to solve problems. Avoiding topics of computer architecture and hardware is appropriate here as part of their motivation is to get students excited about CS.

[UW-Madison] COMP SCI 301: Introduction to Data Programming [27]

Language: Python

Justification: Not found on course guide or in class syllabus.

Topics: Instruction and experience in the use of a programming language for beginners, program design, development of good programming style.

Takeaway: Course for students not pursuing CS as a major. Focuses on problem solving using programming and caters to the computer illiterate (not an insult, CS50 employs a similar strategy) by encouraging use of a web-based tool to execute code.

[UW-Madison] COMP SCI 302: Introduction to Programming [28]

Language: Java

Justification: Java is widely used to write programs for all kinds of computers to run.

Topics: analyze problems and formulate algorithms; create robust, user-friendly, well-structured and well-documented Java programs; read basic Java programs to determine their purpose; and have a basic understanding of how computers work.

Takeaway: Introductory course for CS majors. This class focuses on Java executed within Eclipse IDE and charges students $67 dollars out of pocket to complete homework from an online textbook.

[MIT] 6.00SC: Introduction to Computer Science and Programming [29]

Language: Python

Justification: language for expressing computations.

Topics: learning about the process of writing and debugging a program, learning about the process of moving from a problem statement to a computational formulation of a method for solving the problem, L learning a basic set of "recipes"—algorithms, learning how to use simulations to shed light on problems that don't easily succumb to closed form solutions, learning about how to use computational tools to help model and understand data.

Takeaway: emphasis on competence for seeking a job in any field as this course serves as an introduction for students who do and do not intend to major in CS.

[Harvard] CS50 [30]

Languages: Scratch, C, Python, JavaScript (all in one semester!)

Justification:

> *Insofar as CS50 is not only an introduction to the intellectual enterprises of computer science but also the art of programming, we introduce students along the way to a number of languages so that they exit the course not having only learned X, where X is some language, but having learned how to program (procedurally). Since 2007 have we first introduced students to Scratch, thereafter spending much of the semester in C, introducing students toward term's end to PHP, SQL, and JavaScript (plus HTML and CSS).*

Topics: Scratch, C, Arrays, Algorithms, Memory, Data Structures, HTTP, Machine Learning, Python, SQL and JavaScript.

Takeaway: Exposure to many topics instead of mastering one language is a seemingly unorthodox approach to introducing students to computing but shows the institution's willingness to innovate.

[Stanford] Computer Science 101 (Self-Paced) [34]

Language: JavaScript

Justification:

> *CS101 uses a variant of Javascript. However, the code used in CS101 is very stripped down, avoiding all sorts of boilerplate that would get in the way of learning. As a result, CS101 code does not look like full, professional Javascript code.*

Topics: The nature of computers and code, what they can and cannot do; how computer hardware works: chips, cpu, memory, disk; necessary jargon: bits, bytes, megabytes, gigabytes; how software works: what is a program, what is "running"; how digital images work; computer code: loops and logic; big ideas: abstraction, logic, bugs; how structured data works; how the internet works: ip address, routing, ethernet, wi-fi; computer security: viruses, trojans, and passwords; analog vs. digital; digital media, images, sounds, video, compression.

Takeaway: This free course available online acknowledges the breadth of computer related topics and caters to a zero-prior-experience audience.

Summary of Findings - Existing Courses

Stanford and Harvard follow a new paradigm: online and free to enroll or enrollment available to general public, emphasis on breadth of coverage versus depth of programming skill in one language.

MIT directly mentions awareness of preparing students for a job while UW-Madison fails to provide any warrant for their decisions in curriculum implementation and has by far the least amount of public information regarding the curriculum.

Notably, the variance in curriculum coverage is seemingly more volatile than one would expect in other STEM related courses. First, second and third semester calculus are much more likely to cover similar topics than introductory CS school-to-school, but the academic research provides a number of explanations for this.

Stanford's course focuses the least on programming tasks, and this approach aligns with the importance of a student's interpretation of what working in the field entails detailed in the Uppsala Computing Education Research Group's study.

We will now assess the content coverage of these courses from the perspective of successful tech companies and their internship positions for CS students.

3. Real World Demand

Jobs found through intern.supply. A lot of applications are seasonal and therefore closed for the upcoming Summer, so information could not be found for: Google, Microsoft, SpaceX, GitHub, HP. LinkedIn and more.

Figure 15 is a summary of my findings when observing the job descriptions for Software Engineering internships at State Farm, Facebook, Apple, Qualcomm, Tesla, Twilio, and Intel:

Language	State Farm	Facebook	Apple	Qualcomm	Tesla	Twilio	Intel
Java	x	x					
Python				x	x	x	x
JavaScript		x			x		
C++		x	x	x	x		x
C			x	x	x		x
PHP		x					
Perl		x		x	x		x
.NET or C#	x						
Mobile (Java-Android Swift-iOS)	x		x	x			
Web (HTML, CSS)	x	x			x		
SQL	x				x		

Topics & Experience	State Farm	Facebook	Apple	Qualcomm	Tesla	Twilio	Intel
Databases	x					x	
Linux			x	x			
Web APIs			x				
Previous Internship Experience		x	x		x		x
Networking			x	x	x		

Figure 15: Aggregate Data [35-41]

In most cases, companies list **multiple languages** as **minimum requirements** to be considered as an applicant for their advertised position [35-41]. Companies also list many topics as minimum requirements that are not covered in introductory CS courses [26-30, 34], which leaves a lot of content to be covered in the next few courses.

Each job listing also had requirements that no other listing had, so this representation of data is not exhaustive by any measure.

Figure 16 displays the number of times a language was included as a requirement out of the seven job listings analyzed:

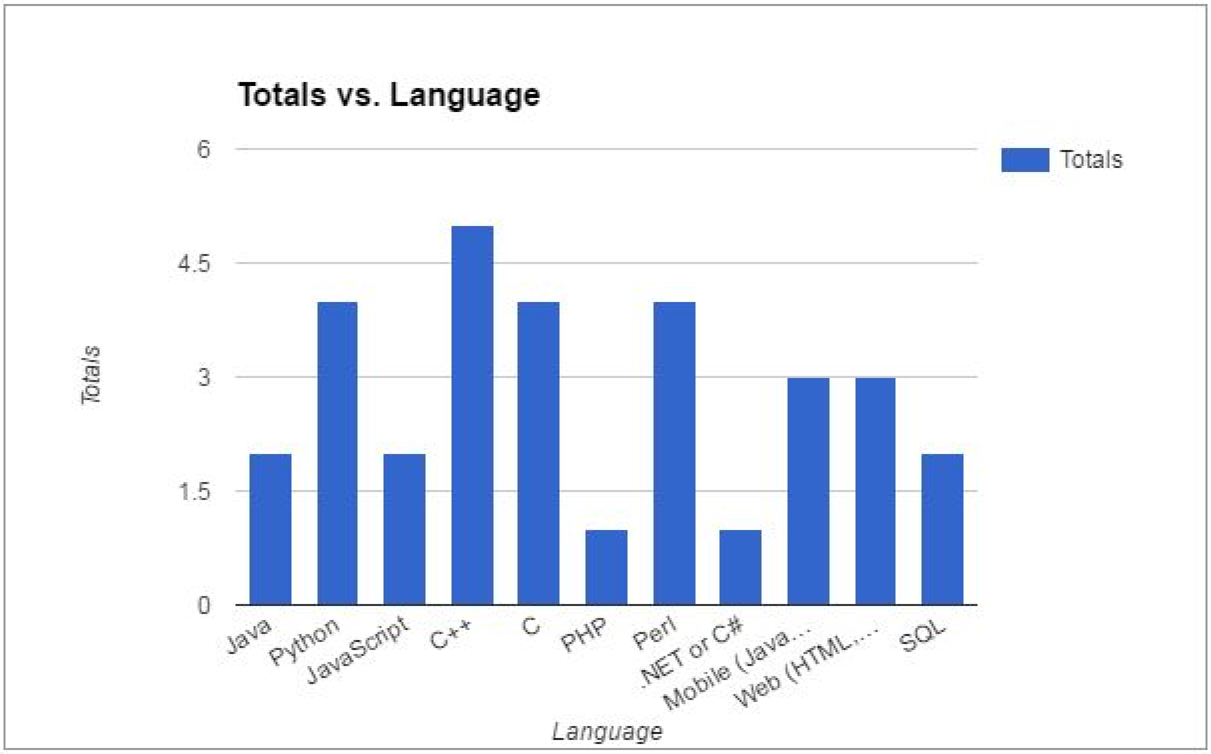

Figure 16: Language Totals [35-41]

Figure 17 shows how frequently some of the most common topics and experience requirements were listed in the sample set:

Figure 17: Topics & Experience Totals [35-41]

Conclusion

Computer programming is a skill that has a rapidly increasing demand that our current educational infrastructure is having difficulty meeting [6,15]. Every year, there are fewer people graduating with programming-related degrees of varying levels than there are job openings for people with these skills [15].

Academic research comments on the difficulty of selecting programming languages for introductory CS courses. In general, for research that does make recommendations for which languages are best suited to teach students, current introductory courses seem to follow their guidance. There are exceptions to this, and some research undermines the very idea of evaluating languages at all because common languages aren't necessarily the best languages for education.

Even in a small sample size of courses and job descriptions, the mismatch of content being covered and requirements for candidates is evidence that the introductory programming course design does not incorporate the requirements of things outside of academia. This is an area that academic research would suggest needs improvement, as many sources assert that industry relevance is the most important factor in designing CS curricula.

Based on the data acquired, I argue that C and C++ should be the main languages to use when designing introductory curricula. Appendix I and the definitions of other languages point out that C is foundational, and to ignore its role in computing is inexcusable.

I also argue the academic researchers would agree that Harvard's CS50 and Stanford's CS 101 are among the nation's current best introductory computer sciences courses, and if research could be conducted that attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of each school's overall curricula, it may be possible to make less generic recommendations on how to design a course using inductive reasoning.

Hopefully future research takes such an approach so the field of computing can continue to advance and innovate, giving new students more of a fighting chance to navigate the vast ocean of information and contribute to work being done at academic institutions and private tech companies alike.

In the meantime, it may be best to follow the advice of some of computing's prominent figures:

“First learn computer science and all the theory. Next develop a programming style. Then forget all that and just hack.” - George Carrette [10]

"Most good programmers do programming not because they expect to get paid or get adulation by the public, but because it is fun to program." - Linus Torvalds

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Appendix I: What Computers Are and How They Work

Figure 6: Intel CPU front and back, 2013 [8]

Computer systems in the broadest sense provide infrastructure to our lives: commerce, transportation, energy and more. Before an aspiring computer scientist or programmer is prepared to assist in the development of large-scale or meaningful systems, training and education must take place in an environment with only a single device that is executing code.

Most commonly the device in question is a personal computer, where the physical hardware executing code is a CPU (central processing unit) that implements AMD64 (commonly x86-64 or just x64) instruction set architecture (Figure 6). The instruction set architecture is a standard that describes the expected behavior of the CPU when executing each different instruction, where an instruction is a binary number that may be 16, 32, or 64 bits long and where a bit is a single binary digit [17].

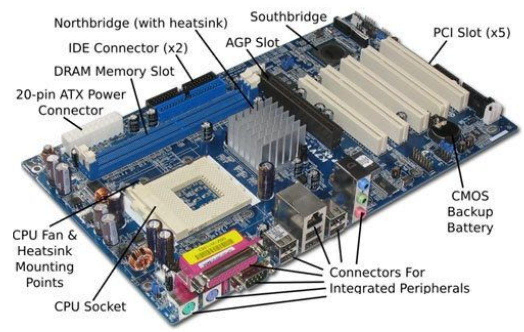

Figure 7: Motherboard with components labeled

But what about peripherals like mice, keyboards, monitors and audio equipment? With only the ability to work with numbers, how are we able to interact with and control these physical mediums? Digital electronics solve this problem by additionally defining specifications for physical interfaces that peripheral hardware must use to connect to and communicate with other hardware. USB is one example of such an interface, and the USB standard defines both the type of connector to use as well as the rules for communicating over the physical cable. Another requirement for achieving advanced functionality is the ability to store information both temporarily and permanently. We refer to the hardware performing these tasks as memory or storage. A printed-circuit board (PCB) is often the item that each of these components connects to—temporarily or secured firmly in place in the case of the CPU and USB device—and permanently in the case of passive components such as capacitors and resistors (Figure 7).

The CPU has hundreds of gold pads or pins on its underside that connect to the motherboard, and the motherboard contains a dozen layers of thin copper traces (wires) that connect the CPU to the rest of the devices on board.

To better understand how a computer functions let's look at an example "program" or set of instructions organized to accomplish a specific task. These instructions would be stored in the CPU's internal memory after the CPU fetches it from another form of permanent storage or memory, and memory is organized so that groups of 8 bits, called a byte, are "individually addressable" where an address is 32 or more bits wide so that there are at least 2^{32} unique locations. For scale, a memory that has 32 bit memory addresses can hold a maximum of 4 gigabytes of information. Notice that $2^{32} = 4{,}294{,}967{,}296$—the "giga" prefix does not follow standard SI conventions. Because computers use binary numbering instead of decimal, it makes more sense to group numbers by 2^{10} (1,024) than 10^3 (1,000), and the two are close enough to continue using the same prefixes.

Machine Code: The Language of Computers

Knowing a computer is limited to the operations described in its instruction set, and that these instructions are binary numbers, how are we able to use plain text and English to control what's happening?

The instructions typically cover behaviors such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, bit-shifting, logical operations and many different types of memory read and write operations.

Verbs such as "add" and "subtract" are much more meaningful than 10101010, 01010101 or whatever sequence of numbers happens to represent those instructions. The direction translation of machine code into human-readable representation is known as assembly language. Observe the example in Figure 8:

Assembly Language	Machine Code
add $t1, t2, $t3	04CB: 0000 0100 1100 1011
addi $t2, $t3, 60	16BC: 0001 0110 1011 1100
and $t3, $t1, $t2	0299: 0000 0010 1001 1001
andi $t3, $t1, 5	22C5: 0010 0010 1100 0101
beq $t1, $t2, 4	3444: 0011 0100 0100 0100
bne $t1, $t2, 4	4444: 0100 0100 0100 0100
j 0x50	F032: 1111 0000 0011 0010
lw $t1, 16($s1)	5A50: 0101 1010 0101 0000
nop	0005: 0000 0000 0000 0101
nor $t3, $t1, $t2	029E: 0000 0010 1001 1110
or $t3, $t1, $t2	029A: 0000 0010 1001 1010
ori $t3, $t1, 10	62CA: 0110 0010 1100 1010
ssl $t2, $t1, 2	0455: 0000 0100 0101 0101
srl $t2, $t1, 1	0457: 0000 0100 0101 0111
sw $t1, 16($t0)	7050: 0111 0000 0101 0000
sub $t2, $t1, $t0	0214: 0000 0010 0001 0100

Figure 8: Assembly (left) with corresponding machine code (right). Specific assembly language and instruction set unknown

From left to right, an assembly instruction includes an abbreviation for the action being performed followed by the CPU registers (main, working memory) that denote the source and destination arguments.

The first line would cause register t1 to store the addition of t2 and t3: $t1 = $t2 + $t3.

From Assembly to High Level Languages

In order to represent text with numbers, the American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII) defines a mapping between decimal values 0-255 (0-[2^8 - 1] for 2^8 total symbols, one byte is required to represent an ASCII character or symbol). There are many variations of this standard, but Figure 9 shows the most common arrangement.

Dec	Hx	Oct	Char	Dec	Hx	Oct	Html	Chr	Dec	Hx	Oct	Html	Chr	Dec	Hx	Oct	Html	Chr
0	0	000	NUL (null)	32	20	040		Space	64	40	100	@	@	96	60	140	`	`
1	1	001	SOH (start of heading)	33	21	041	!	!	65	41	101	A	A	97	61	141	a	a
2	2	002	STX (start of text)	34	22	042	"	"	66	42	102	B	B	98	62	142	b	b
3	3	003	ETX (end of text)	35	23	043	#	#	67	43	103	C	C	99	63	143	c	c
4	4	004	EOT (end of transmission)	36	24	044	$	$	68	44	104	D	D	100	64	144	d	d
5	5	005	ENQ (enquiry)	37	25	045	%	%	69	45	105	E	E	101	65	145	e	e
6	6	006	ACK (acknowledge)	38	26	046	&	&	70	46	106	F	F	102	66	146	f	f
7	7	007	BEL (bell)	39	27	047	'	'	71	47	107	G	G	103	67	147	g	g
8	8	010	BS (backspace)	40	28	050	(	(	72	48	110	H	H	104	68	150	h	h
9	9	011	TAB (horizontal tab)	41	29	051	)	)	73	49	111	I	I	105	69	151	i	i
10	A	012	LF (NL line feed, new line)	42	2A	052	*	*	74	4A	112	J	J	106	6A	152	j	j
11	B	013	VT (vertical tab)	43	2B	053	+	+	75	4B	113	K	K	107	6B	153	k	k
12	C	014	FF (NP form feed, new page)	44	2C	054	,	,	76	4C	114	L	L	108	6C	154	l	l
13	D	015	CR (carriage return)	45	2D	055	-	-	77	4D	115	M	M	109	6D	155	m	m
14	E	016	SO (shift out)	46	2E	056	.	.	78	4E	116	N	N	110	6E	156	n	n
15	F	017	SI (shift in)	47	2F	057	/	/	79	4F	117	O	O	111	6F	157	o	o
16	10	020	DLE (data link escape)	48	30	060	0	0	80	50	120	P	P	112	70	160	p	p
17	11	021	DC1 (device control 1)	49	31	061	1	1	81	51	121	Q	Q	113	71	161	q	q
18	12	022	DC2 (device control 2)	50	32	062	2	2	82	52	122	R	R	114	72	162	r	r
19	13	023	DC3 (device control 3)	51	33	063	3	3	83	53	123	S	S	115	73	163	s	s
20	14	024	DC4 (device control 4)	52	34	064	4	4	84	54	124	T	T	116	74	164	t	t
21	15	025	NAK (negative acknowledge)	53	35	065	5	5	85	55	125	U	U	117	75	165	u	u
22	16	026	SYN (synchronous idle)	54	36	066	6	6	86	56	126	V	V	118	76	166	v	v
23	17	027	ETB (end of trans. block)	55	37	067	7	7	87	57	127	W	W	119	77	167	w	w
24	18	030	CAN (cancel)	56	38	070	8	8	88	58	130	X	X	120	78	170	x	x
25	19	031	EM (end of medium)	57	39	071	9	9	89	59	131	Y	Y	121	79	171	y	y
26	1A	032	SUB (substitute)	58	3A	072	:	:	90	5A	132	Z	Z	122	7A	172	z	z
27	1B	033	ESC (escape)	59	3B	073	;	;	91	5B	133	[	[	123	7B	173	{	{
28	1C	034	FS (file separator)	60	3C	074	<	<	92	5C	134	\	\	124	7C	174			|
29	1D	035	GS (group separator)	61	3D	075	=	=	93	5D	135	]	]	125	7D	175	}	}
30	1E	036	RS (record separator)	62	3E	076	>	>	94	5E	136	^	^	126	7E	176	~	~
31	1F	037	US (unit separator)	63	3F	077	?	?	95	5F	137	_	_	127	7F	177	&#127;	DEL

Source: www.LookupTables.com

Figure 9: First 128 ASCII symbols, notice that not all symbols represent printable characters

This is how computers store text in memory, which is important because even with assembly language, there must be something to translate the assembly language text into machine code before it can execute.

This concept of translation can be applied again so that a new language can become assembly, which in turn becomes machine code. We can even do the same thing with our new languages.

This is where the term high level languages come from; the more translations required before code becomes machine readable, the higher level the language. For example, C is a language that compiles (term used to describe the translation from a programming language to machine language) into assembly language, where assembly language is then assembled into machine language by an assembler. If the code referenced code in other files or places in memory, a linker is responsible for piecing everything together for the final, executable machine code to be ready for use (Figure 10).

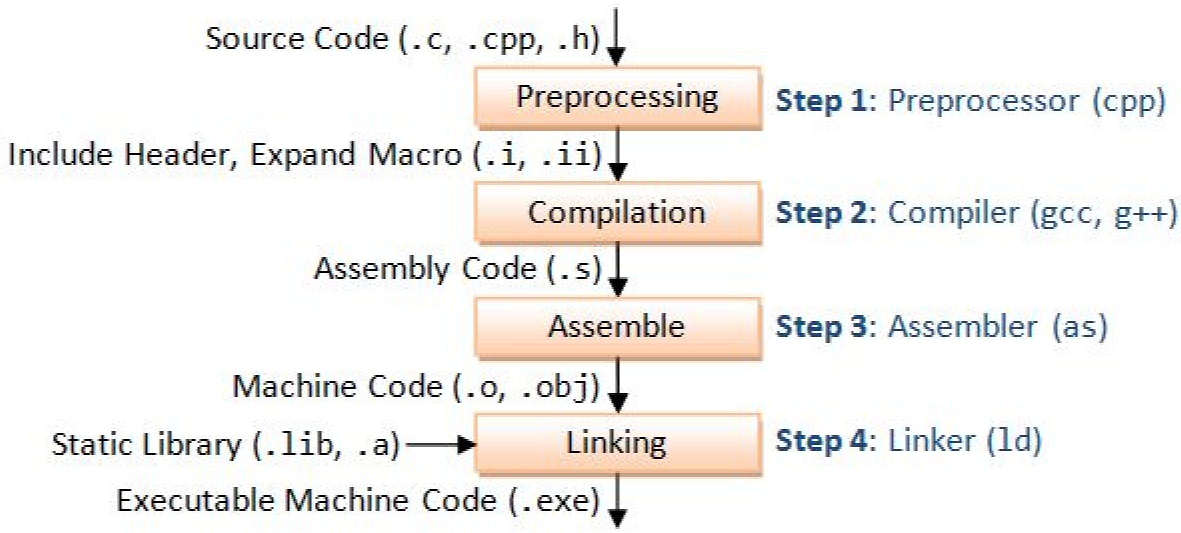

Figure 10: The process for turning high-level code into executable instructions [31]

Let's look at how a single line of C translates into assembly in Figure 11 and then how a short C program represents a corresponding assembly program in Figure 12:

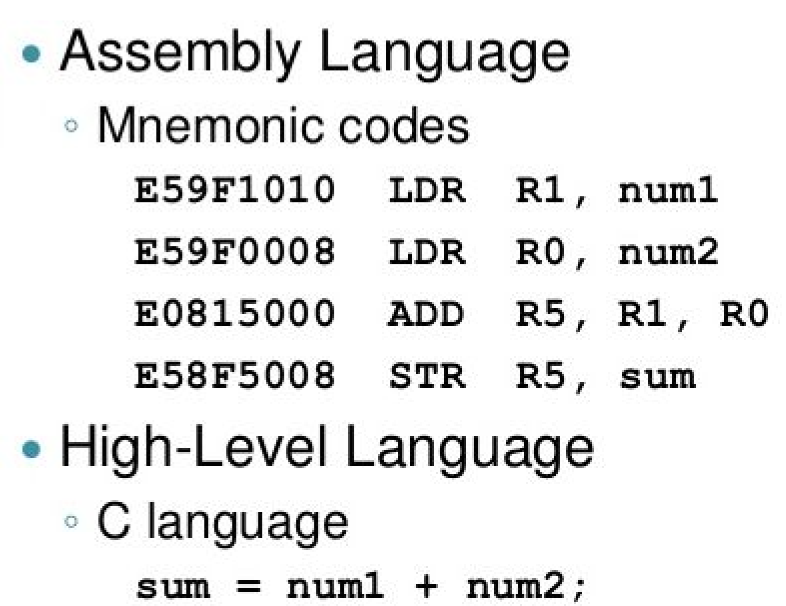

Figure 11: C (below) and Assembly (above) Comparison I [32]

Notice that we can store the result of a sum of two numbers in one line, but in the assembly num1 and num2 are values being loaded into registers R1 and R2, and sum represents a specific position in memory that we write this result to. We are always aware of where things are from the perspective of the CPU, but in the C code we have abstracted num1, num2 and sum into variables, perhaps because the choice of register and memory location is arbitrary, and that we trust the preprocessor, compiler, assembler and linker to keep track of everything without us needing to know where it is.

```
Main:
    mov WDTCN, #0DEh
    mov WDTCN, #0ADh
    xrl a, #0xF0    ; invert bits 7-4
    orl a, #0x0C    ; set bits 3-2
    anl a, #0xFC    ; reset bits 1-0
    mov P0, a       ; send to port0
```

```
void main (void) {
char x;
WDTCN = 0xDE;
WDTCN = 0xAD;
x = x ^ 0xF0;
x = x | 0x0C;
x = x & 0xFC;
P0 = x;
}
```

Figure 12: C (right) and Assembly (left) Comparison II [33]

Seeing a more complete program provides better insight into what problems higher level languages solve and why we use them. x is a variable that we would like to represent a character (hence *char x*), typically meaning that we want to keep track of a meaningful ASCII value. With assembly, we would just have to remember that, for the register we choose to represent and keep track of x, we want it to always be 8 bits so we need to make sure to use instructions that perform operations with only 8 bits.

We also notice that C leverages the conventions of mathematical expressions: the left side of an equation represents the element that will hold the result of the operation taking place on the right side of the equation. The ampersand represents a logical *and* operation, the up-facing caret represents a logical *exclusive-or* and the pipe represents a logical *or*.

The main takeaway is that **a high level language can not ever replace assembly language completely**. It provides convenience for factors that a programmer does not need to be in control of for the task at hand, but in cases where full control is required, assembly language may need to be used. That, or rules may need to be given to the preprocessor, compiler, assembler or linker to ensure that those tasks are carried out according to the programmer's desired output.

A computing problem can be solved with programming in many different ways. The final noteworthy topic relevant to fully understanding this notion is that many common high-level languages are based not in assembly, but in C.

Appendix II: Advice from Intern Supply [42]

How to Know When You're Ready to Apply

If you never apply for an internship you have zero chance at getting an offer. It's that simple. Everyone is ready and you have nothing to lose by applying. Companies receive thousands of applicants every year and getting rejected one year will not affect your chances later on. So, how can you increase your chances?

Freshman

Your options are definitely limited as a Freshman, but you should absolutely still be applying. Some general tips are that there are internship programs set up specifically targeted for Freshman at companies such as Google, Microsoft, Facebook, etc. These are worth applying to, but don’t rely on getting them or even hearing back. They’re highly competitive and you should keep looking after applying. However, some lesser known options are companies outside of the Software Industry. Insurance companies, Automobile companies, and Government agencies all hire Software Interns. You can also try local companies in your area. Even if they don’t list an internship application, sending an email can’t hurt.

Sophomore

Many students don’t make an effort to get an internship until their Junior year, but once you’ve taken or are taking Data Structures and Algorithms you have all the knowledge you need to start. At this point you hopefully have some side projects on your resume, if not then make something. Having side projects are key to answering behavioral questions in an interview and attracting attention to your resume. Have your friends, family, and school career center review your resume, then send it off to all the companies that interest you. The subreddit /r/cscareerquestions reviews resumes every Tuesday and Saturday and the subreddit is also a great resource in general.

The next step is to start preparing for interviews. This includes both behavioral and technical. Your Data Structures and Algorithms class is a good start to preparing for technical questions, but more practice is required. If you wait till a company schedules an interview with you, it’ll be too late. Get on LeetCode and learn how to study effectively.

Junior

As a Junior, companies are going to expect you to know your Data Structures and Algorithms inside and out. Many companies have a similar or the same interview process for Junior-year internships and New-Grad full-time employees. You must practice your technical questions, both on LeetCode and on a whiteboard. With that said, even if you don’t have the technical questions down it's still smart to apply as applications open. It's better to be early and fail a couple interviews than to wait till the last minute and have all the spots be full. Chances are you won’t get an offer at the first company you interview with and every interview should be taken as a learning experience towards your next one.