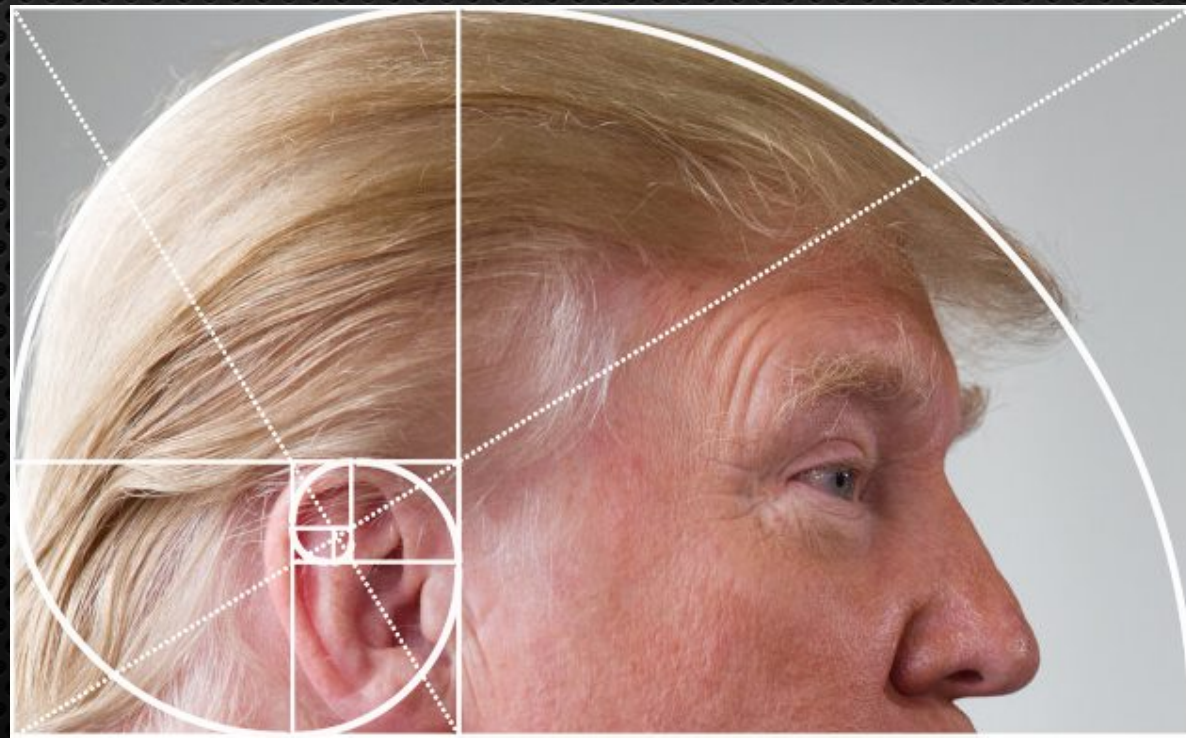


Creating a Fibonacci Generator in Assembly



Because ￣_ [ツ] _ ￣

By Will van Ketwich

@wilvk

Just a dude that does stuff... mostly with computers.



Systems Engineer at REA Group
Group Delivery Engineering, Group Technology

Assembly

WAT.



Why???

Seriously dude, why Assembly?

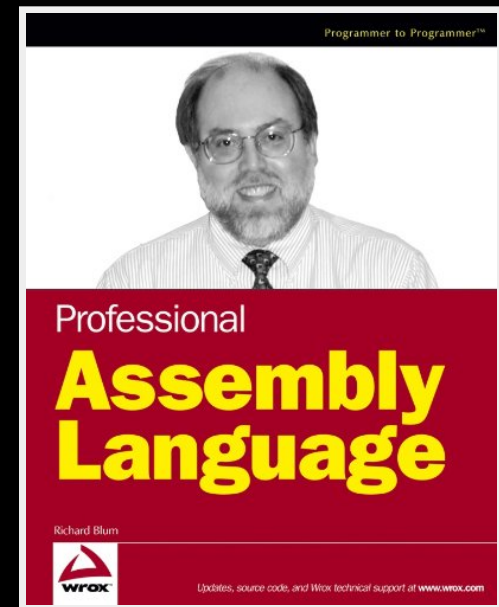
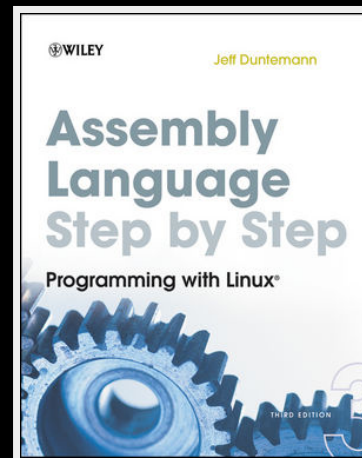
- The building blocks of all languages
- How processes work
- How to reverse engineer
- How the Linux Kernel works
- How device drivers work
- Improve troubleshooting skills
- Curiosity



How?

How to get started?

- Read a few books
- Do some examples
- Define a project
- Look online for help



A Small Project

1. Reading input from the command line
2. Get length of command line argument
3. Converting input to a number
4. Generating the Fibonacci number
5. Printing the output to screen

```
$ ./fib7 46  
2971215073
```

Decisions to be made

- Should standard libraries be used? (glibc)
- What flavour of assembly to use?

NASM, GAS, MASM, YASM?

- 64 bit or 32 bit?

The Fibonacci Sequence

The Fibonacci Algorithm

From Wikipedia:

The sequence F_n of Fibonacci numbers is defined by the recurrence relation:

$$F_n = F_{n-1} + F_{n-2}$$

with seed values:

$$F_1 = 1, F_2 = 1$$

or:

$$F_0 = 0, F_1 = 1$$

A resultant sequence

Value	0	1	1	2	3	5	8	13	21	34	55	...
Position	-	-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	...

The Fibonacci Algorithm

As C code

```
int fib(int n)
{
    int f[n+2];
    int i;
    f[0] = 0;
    f[1] = 1;

    for (i = 2; i <= n; i++)
    {
        f[i] = f[i-1] + f[i-2];
    }
    return f[n];
}
```

Beginning our implementation

And some starting knowledge

GAS Files and Language Syntax

fib1.s - doing nothing takes something

```
.section .text
.globl _start
_start:
    nop
    # the rest of our program goes here
    movl $1, %eax
    movl $0, %ebx
    int $0x80
```

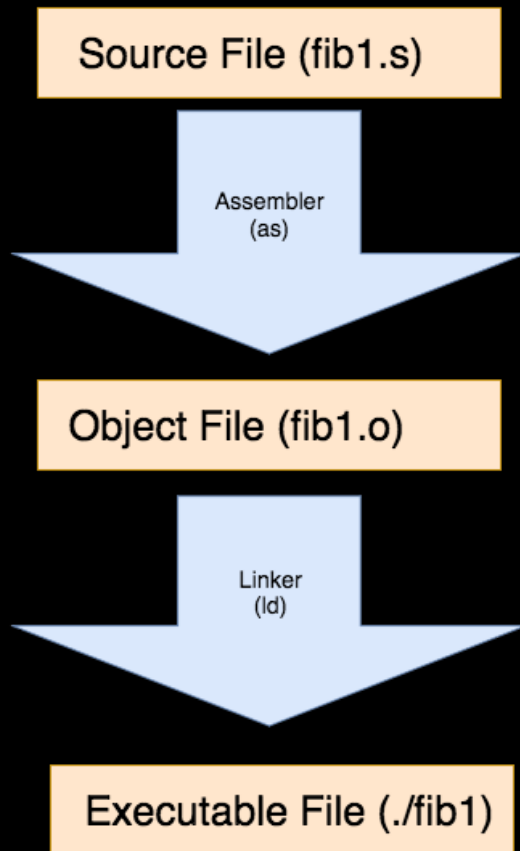
The building blocks

Opcodes and Operands

Line	Opcode	Operand 1	Operand 2	Description
nop	nop	-	-	no-operation
movl \$1,%eax	movl	\$1	%eax	copy 1 into register eax
movl \$0,%ebx	movl	\$0	%ebx	copy 0 into register ebx
int \$0x80	int	\$0x80	-	call interrupt number 0x80

The tools of the trade

Assemblers and Linkers



```
as --32 -gstabs -o fib1.o fib1.s
```

```
ld -m elf_i386 -o fib1 fib1.o
```

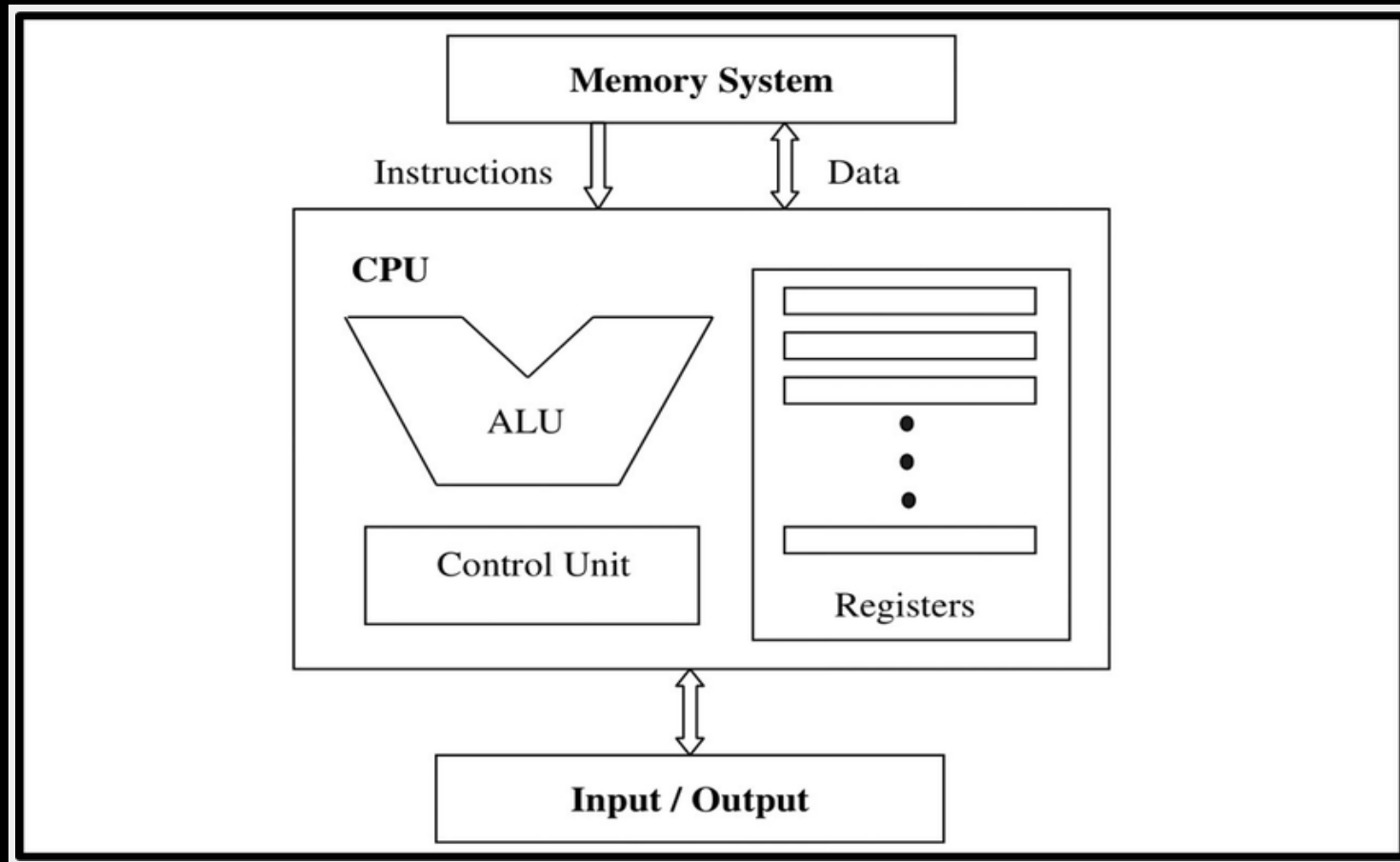
The tools of the trade

Object file utilities

- nm - lists the symbols from object files
- objdump - displays more information about object files
- elfdump - similar to objdump
- gdb - GNU debugger
- gcc - GNU compiler collection
- make - used for build toolchains

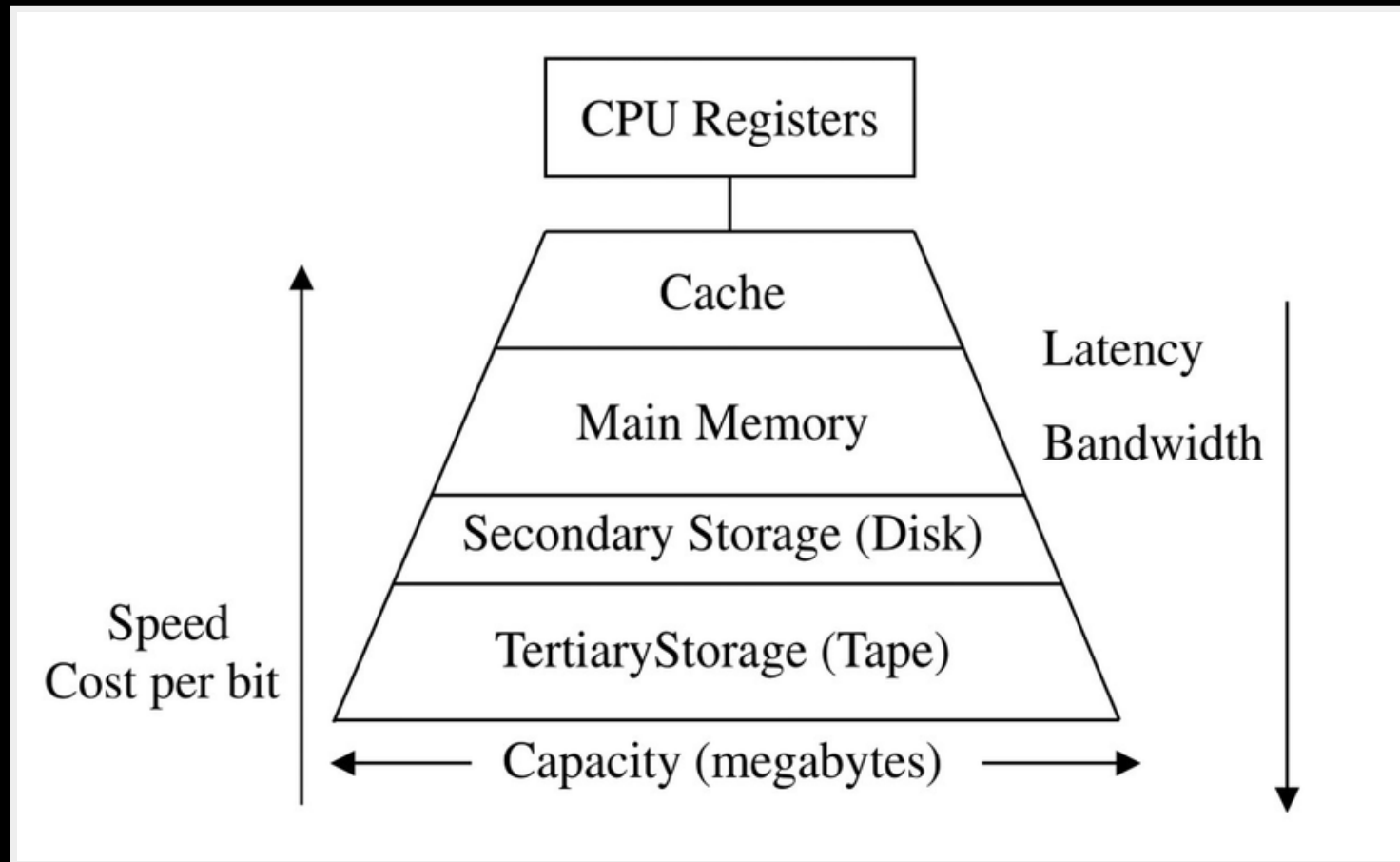
The canvas

CPU and Registers



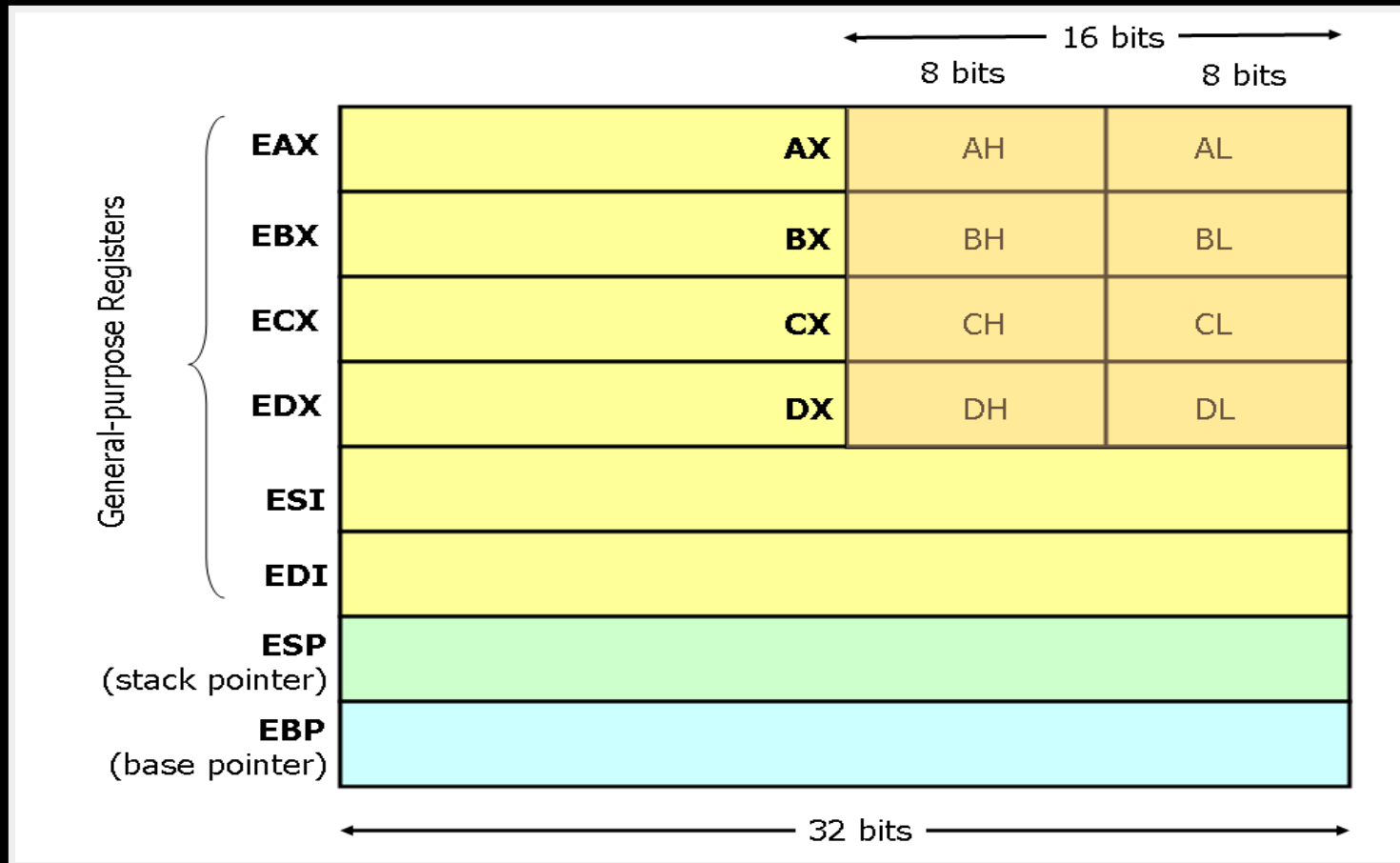
The canvas

Memory Hierarchy



The canvas

Registers



NOP

- Does nothing functional
- Takes up a clock cycle
- Can be used to fill space

`nop`

MOV

- MOVes (or copies) data from one location to another
- Can copy to/from memory, register and immediates
- Cannot copy from memory to memory

Some examples:

```
mov (%ebx), %eax # copy address pointed to by ebx to register eax
mov %ebx, (%eax) # copy value in ebx to address pointed to by eax
mov $1, %eax     # place value 1 into register eax
mov $5, (%eax)   # place value 5 into address pointed to by eax
mov %ebp, %esp   # copy value in register ebp into register esp
```

MOV - Operation Suffixes

- Different variations based on size to copy
- Used for many instructions (MOVL, PUSHL, POPL, etc.)
- Floating point versions used with the FPU and SIMD

Suffix	Type	Bits (Integer)	Bits (Floating Point)
b	byte	8	-
s	short	16	32
w	word	16	-
l	long	32	64
q	quad	64	-
t	ten bytes	-	80

Some examples:

```
movb $2, (%ebx)  # moves 0x02 into ebx
movw $2, (%ebx)  # moves 0x0002 into ebx
movl $2, (%ebx)  # moves 0x00000002 into ebx
```

INT

- Interrupts the CPU from scheduled processing
- Most interrupts are hardware-based
- Software-based interrupts are called 'soft-interrupts'
- Requesting actions from User Space in Kernel Space
 - Linux uses INT 0x80
 - MacOS uses INT 0x60
 - Windows uses INT 0x21

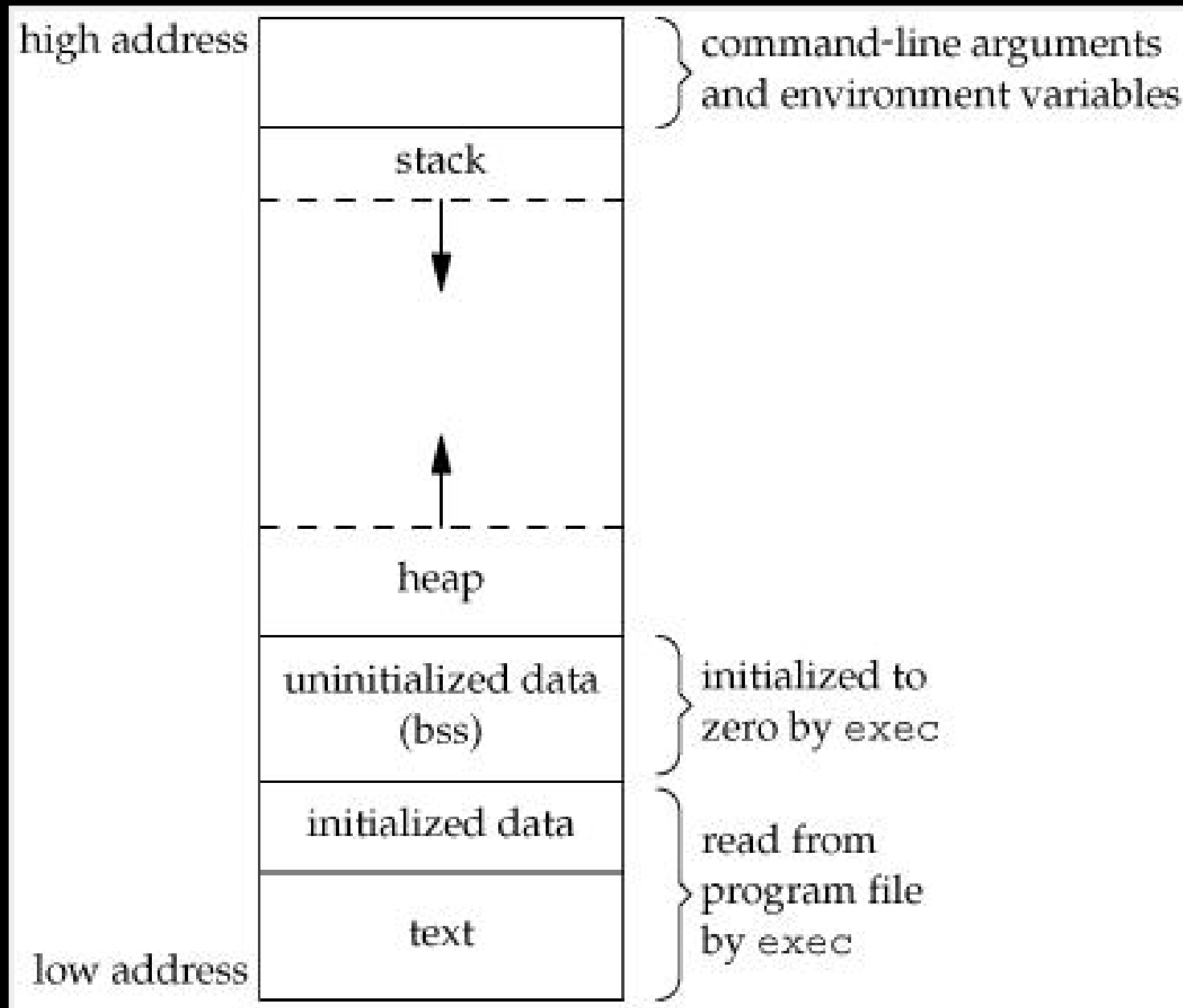
```
# exit with return code 0
movl $1, %eax
movl $0, %ebx
int 0x80
```

- Modern CPUs/OSes use SYSCALL but INT is still valid

1. Reading input from the command line

1. Reading input from the command line
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Memory Layout



Command Line Arguments in the Stack

Stack	Data
...	
ESP + n+8	< pointer to second environment variable >
ESP + n+4	< pointer to first environment variable >
ESP + n	< NULL for end of command line arguments >
ESP + n-4	< pointer to last string argument >
...	
ESP + 12	< pointer to second string argument >
ESP + 8	< pointer to a string that contains the first argument >
ESP + 4	< pointer to a string containing the name of the application >
ESP + 0	< number of arguments on command line >
...	

A Simple Print Utility

fib2.s

```
# stack args example
.section .text
.globl _start
_start:

    nop
    movl %esp, %ebp      # take a copy of the stack pointer esp into ebp
    addl $8, %ebp        # address of first arg in stack
    movl (%ebp), %ecx    # move the address of the first arg into ecx

    movl $4, %edx        # set the length of our string to 4
    movl $4, %eax        # indicate to int 0x80 that we are doing a write
    movl $0, %ebx        # indicate to int 0x80 that we are writing to file descriptor 0
    int $0x80            # call int 0x80 for write

    movl $1, %eax        # exit gracefully
    movl $0, %ebx        # with return code 0
    int $0x80            # call int 0x80 for exit
```

Viewing the Stack in GDB

A demo



2. Get length of command line argument

1. Reading input from the command line
2. Get length of command line argument
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Approach

- Find address of first command line argument string
- Get length of string
- Print string to stdout

Source

fib3.s

```
# framework - get first argument from the command line and print to stdout
.section .text
.globl _start
_start:
    nop
    movl %esp, %ebp      # take a copy of esp to use
    addl $8, %ebp        # address of first arg in stack
    movl (%ebp), %edi    # move arg address into esi for scasb
    push %edi            # store the string address as edi gets clobbered

    movl $50, %ecx       # set ecx counter to a high value
    movl $0, %eax        # zero al search char
    movl %ecx, %ebx      # copy our max counter value to edx
    cld                 # set direction down
    repne scasb          # iterate until we find the al char

    subl %ecx, %ebx      # subtract from our original ecx value
    dec %ebx            # remove null byte at the end of the string from the count
    pop %ecx            # restore our string address into ecx
    mov %ebx, %edx       # move our count value to edx for the int 80 call

    movl $4, %eax        # set eax to 4 for int 80 to write to file
    movl $0, %ebx        # set ebx for file to write to as stdout (file descriptor 0)
    int $0x80           # make it so
    movl $1, %eax        # set eax for int 80 for system exit
    movl $0, %ebx        # set ebx for return code 0
    int $0x80           # make it so again
```

Source

New Code

```
movl (%ebp), %edi    # move arg address into esi for scasb
push %edi            # store the string address as edi gets clobbered

movl $50, %ecx       # set ecx counter to a high value
movl $0, %eax        # zero al search char
movl %ecx, %ebx       # copy our max counter value to edx
cld                  # set direction down
repne scasb          # iterate until we find the al char

subl %ecx, %ebx       # subtract from our original ecx value
dec %ebx              # remove null byte at the end of the string from the c
pop %ecx              # restore our string address into ecx
mov %ebx, %edx        # move our count value to edx for the int 80 call
```


repne scasb

Scanning Strings

- edi - points to address of string to scan
- al - stores the byte to scan until
- ecx - stores the result of the scan count
- requires registers set up before running (like INT)
- the cld opcode clears the direction flag
- each iteration increases edi and decreases ecx

Some Arithmetic

$ecx = 50 - (\text{len(string)} + 1)$

but we want len(string)

$\text{len(string)} + 1 = 50 - ecx$

$\text{len(string)} = (50 - ecx) - 1$

```
subl %ecx, %ebx    # subtract from our original ecx value
dec %ebx           # remove null byte at the end of the string from the
```

Labels, CALL, RET and the Stack

labels

- points to an addresses in memory
- label addresses resolved with ld

Standard labels:

```
my_function:
```

Local labels:

```
.my_local_function:
```

Labels, CALL, RET and the Stack

CALL and RET

CALL:

- places next instruction address on the stack
- jumps execution to address of label

RET:

- RET jumps execution back to the next address on the stack
- functions are just a logical placing of CALL and RET
- no set order to location of labels

Functions

A Simple Example

```
call get_string_length  
mov %eax, %ebx
```

```
...
```

```
get_string_length:  
mov $1, %eax  
ret
```

The implementation

fib4.s

```
# framework - refactor into separate functions
.section .text
.globl _start

# entrypoint of application
_start:
    nop
    movl %esp, %ebp    # take a copy of esp to use
    addl $8, %ebp      # address of first arg in stack
    movl (%ebp), %edi   # move arg address into esi for scasb
    push %edi          # store the string address as edi gets clobbered
    call get_string_length
    pop %ecx           # restore our string address into ecx
    call print_string
    call exit

# get length of string pointed to by edi and place result in ebx
get_string_length:
    movl $50, %ecx     # set ecx counter to a high value
    movl $0, %eax      # zero al search char
    movl %ecx, %ebx     # copy our max counter value to edx
    cld                # set direction down
    repne scasb        # iterate until we find the al char
    movl %ecx, %edx     # move count into edx
    subl %ecx, %ebx     # subtract from our original ecx value
    dec %ebx           # remove null byte at the end of the string from the count
    ret

# print the string in ecx to the length of ebx
print_string:
    mov %ebx, %edx     # move our count value to edx for the int 80 call
    movl $4, %eax      # set eax to 4 for int 80 to write to file
    movl $0, %ebx      # set ebx for file to write to as stdout (file descriptor 0)
    int $0x80          # make it so
    ret

# exit the application
exit:
    movl $1, %eax      # set eax for int 80 for system exit
    movl $0, %ebx      # set ebx for return code 0
```

3. Converting input to a number

1. Reading input from the command line
2. Get length of command line argument
3. Converting input to a number
4. Generating the Fibonacci number
5. Printing the output to screen

long_from_string

As (pseudo) C code

```
long long_from_string(*char number_string)
{
    int i=0;
    long return_value=0;
    int temp_value=0;
    char digit = number_string[i];

    while(digit >= '0' && digit <= '9')
    {
        temp_value = digit - 48;
        return_value *= 10;
        return_value += temp_value;
        digit = number_string[++i];
    }

    return return_value;
}
```


long_from_string

fib5.s

```
long_from_string:
    xor %eax, %eax # set eax as our result register
    xor %ecx, %ecx # set ecx(cl) as our temporary byte register
.top:
    movb (%edi), %cl
    inc %edi
    cmpb $48, %cl # check if value in ecx is less than ascii '0'. exit
    jl .done
    cmpb $57, %cl # check if value in ecx is greater than ascii '9'. exit
    jg .done
    sub $48, %cl
    imul $10, %eax
    add %ecx, %eax
    jmp .top
.done:
    ret
```

ASCII

Dec	Hex	Char	Dec	Hex	Char	Dec	Hex	Char	Dec	Hex	Char
0	00	Null	32	20	Space	64	40	@	96	60	`
1	01	Start of heading	33	21	!	65	41	A	97	61	a
2	02	Start of text	34	22	"	66	42	B	98	62	b
3	03	End of text	35	23	#	67	43	C	99	63	c
4	04	End of transmit	36	24	\$	68	44	D	100	64	d
5	05	Enquiry	37	25	%	69	45	E	101	65	e
6	06	Acknowledge	38	26	&	70	46	F	102	66	f
7	07	Audible bell	39	27	'	71	47	G	103	67	g
8	08	Backspace	40	28	(	72	48	H	104	68	h
9	09	Horizontal tab	41	29	)	73	49	I	105	69	i
10	0A	Line feed	42	2A	*	74	4A	J	106	6A	j
11	0B	Vertical tab	43	2B	+	75	4B	K	107	6B	k
12	0C	Form feed	44	2C	,	76	4C	L	108	6C	l
13	0D	Carriage return	45	2D	-	77	4D	M	109	6D	m
14	0E	Shift out	46	2E	.	78	4E	N	110	6E	n
15	0F	Shift in	47	2F	/	79	4F	O	111	6F	o
16	10	Data link escape	48	30	0	80	50	P	112	70	p
17	11	Device control 1	49	31	1	81	51	Q	113	71	q
18	12	Device control 2	50	32	2	82	52	R	114	72	r
19	13	Device control 3	51	33	3	83	53	S	115	73	s
20	14	Device control 4	52	34	4	84	54	T	116	74	t
21	15	Neg. acknowledge	53	35	5	85	55	U	117	75	u
22	16	Synchronous idle	54	36	6	86	56	V	118	76	v
23	17	End trans. block	55	37	7	87	57	W	119	77	w
24	18	Cancel	56	38	8	88	58	X	120	78	x
25	19	End of medium	57	39	9	89	59	Y	121	79	y
26	1A	Substitution	58	3A	:	90	5A	Z	122	7A	z
27	1B	Escape	59	3B	;	91	5B	[	123	7B	{
28	1C	File separator	60	3C	<	92	5C	\	124	7C	|
29	1D	Group separator	61	3D	=	93	5D	]	125	7D	}
30	1E	Record separator	62	3E	>	94	5E	^	126	7E	~
31	1F	Unit separator	63	3F	?	95	5F	_	127	7F	□

Compare and Jump Opcodes

- CMP compares two values and sets flags based on the result
- Flags include carry, zero, overflow/underflow
- The flags are used to jump to a label/address

Many types of jump flags:

- jg = jump if greater than
- jl = jump if less than
- je = jump if equal
- jge = jump if greater than or equal
- jle = Jump if less than or equal
- jmp = jump unconditionally
- and so on.

Relevance to Structured Programming

- Jumps, Compares and Labels
- basis of Structured Programming Constructs
- counters and comparisons

Can create:

- Selection - if..else..then
- Iteration - while, repeat, for, do..while

4. Generating the Fibonacci Number

1. Reading input from the command line
2. Get length of command line argument
3. Converting input to a number
4. Generating the Fibonacci number
5. Printing the output to screen

The Fibonacci Function

fib6.s

```
# input: eax holds our fibonacci n
# processing: iterate the fibonacci sequence n times
# output: return our fibonacci result in ebx

fibonacci:
    pushl %ebp          # preserve ebp
    mov %esp, %ebp      # copy the stack pointer to ebp for use
    mov %eax, %ebx       # make a copy of our fib(n) value for allocating an array on the stack
    addl $2, %ebx        # add 2 extra spaces to the array size in case n=1 or n=1
    subl %ebx, %esp      # add the size of our array to the stack to allocate the required space
    xor %ecx, %ecx       # set our counter to zero
    movl %ecx, (%esp, %ecx, 4) # initialise our array with 0 for esp[0]
    incl %ecx            # increase our counter
    movl %ecx, (%esp, %ecx, 4) # initialise our array with 1 for esp[1]
    incl %ecx            # our counter/iterator should be at 2 now

.fib_loop:
    cmp %eax, %ecx       # compare our counter (ecx) to n (eax)
    jge .fib_done        # if it's greater or equal, we're done
    movl -4(%esp, %ecx, 4), %ebx # get the value in the stack at esp-1 from our current stack pointer
    movl -8(%esp, %ecx, 4), %edx # get the value in the stack esp-2 from our current stack pointer location
    addl %edx, %ebx       # add the values esp-1 and esp-2 together
    movl %ebx, (%esp, %ecx, 4) # place the result in the current stack location
    incl %ecx            # bump our counter
    jmp .fib_loop        # loop again

.fib_done:
    movl %ebp, %esp      # move our copy of the stack pointer back to esp
    popl %ebp            # retrieve the original copy of ebp from the stack
```

Coming back to our C algorithm

```
int fib(int n)
{
    int f[n+2];
    int i;
    f[0] = 0;
    f[1] = 1;

    for (i = 2; i <= n; i++)
    {
        f[i] = f[i-1] + f[i-2];
    }
    return f[n];
}
```

Creating stack space

fib6.s

```
fibonacci:
    pushl %ebp          # preserve ebp
    mov %esp, %ebp     # copy the stack pointer to ebp for use

    mov %eax, %ebx     # make a copy of our fib(n) value for allocating an array on the stack
    addl $2, %ebx       # add 2 extra spaces to the array size in case n=1 or n=1
    shl $2, %ebx        # multiply by 4 as we are using longs (32 bits)
    subl %ebx, %esp     # add the size of our array to the stack to allocate the required space

    xor %ecx, %ecx      # set our counter to zero
    movl %ecx, (%esp, %ecx, 4) # initialise our array with 0 for esp[0]
    incl %ecx           # increase our counter
    movl %ecx, (%esp, %ecx, 4) # initialise our array with 1 for esp[1]
    incl %ecx           # our counter/iterator should be at 2 now
```


Saving the stack pointer (esp)

When modifying ESP in a function

```
fibonacci:
    pushl %ebp      # preserve ebp as we are going to use it to store our stack pointer
    mov %esp, %ebp # copy the stack pointer to ebp for use

...

.fib_done:
    movl %ebp, %esp # move our copy of the stack pointer back to esp
    popl %ebp      # retrieve the original copy of ebp from the stack
    ret
```

Variable initialisation

- using longs (32 bit values)
- each long is 4 bytes
- we shift left twice to multiply by 4

```
shl $2, %ebx
```

- our stack grows downward, hence subtract for more space

```
subl %ebx, %esp
```

Indexed memory MOV formats

ABSOLUTE INDEXED MEMORY LOCATION

copy ecx into the memory address $\text{esp} + (4 * \text{ecx})$

```
movl %ecx, (%esp, %ecx, 4)
```

ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE INDEXED MEMORY

copy the memory location at $(\text{esp} + (4 * \text{ecx}) - 4)$ into ebx

```
movl -4(%esp, %ecx, 4), %ebx
```

THE GENERAL RULE IS:

```
relative_offset(absolute_offset, index, size)
```

The core of the Fibonacci implementation

```
.fib_loop:                                # we begin our for loop here
    cmp %eax, %ecx                        # compare our counter (ecx) to n (eax) if it's greater
    jge .fib_done
    movl -4(%esp, %ecx, 4), %ebx          # get the value in the stack at esp-1 from our current
    movl -8(%esp, %ecx, 4), %edx          # get the value in the stack esp-2 from our current st
    addl %edx, %ebx                       # add the values esp-1 and esp-2 together
    movl %ebx, (%esp, %ecx, 4)            # place the result in the current stack location
    incl %ecx                             # bump our counter
    jmp .fib_loop                        # loop again
```

5. Printing the output to screen

1. Reading input from the command line
2. Get length of command line argument
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print_long

fib7.s

```
print_long:
    push %ebp
    mov %esp, %ebp
    add $10, %esp
    mov $10, %ecx
    mov %ebx, %eax
    # copy the stack pointer to ebp for use
    # add 10 to esp to make space for our string
    # set our counter to the end of the stack space allocated (higher)
    # our value ebx is placed into eax for division

.loop_pl:
    xor %edx, %edx
    mov $10, %ebx
    div %ebx
    # clear edx for the dividend
    # ebx is our divisor so we set it to divide by 10
    # do the division
    addb $48, %dl
    # convert the quotient to ascii
    movb %dl, (%esp, %ecx, 1)
    # place the string byte into memory
    dec %ecx
    # decrease our counter (as we are working backwards through the number)
    cmp $0, %ax
    # exit if the remainder is 0
    je .done_pl
    jmp .loop_pl
    # loop again if necessary

.done_pl:
    addl %ecx, %esp
    # shift our stack pointer up to the start of the buffer
    incl %esp
    # add 1 to the stack pointer for the actual first string byte
    sub $10, %ecx
    # as we are counting down, we subtract 10 from ecx to give the actual number of
    neg %ecx
    # convert to a positive value
    mov %ecx, %edx
    # move our count value to edx for the int 80 call
    mov %esp, %ecx
    # move our string start address into ecx
    movl $4, %eax
    # set eax to 4 for int 80 to write to file
    movl $0, %ebx
    # set ebx for file to write to as stdout (file descriptor 0)
    int $0x80
    # make it so
    movl %ebp, %esp
    # move our copy of the stack pointer back to esp
    popl %ebp
    # retrieve the original copy of ebp from the stack
    ret
```

Overview

From comments (for brevity)

```
# allocate space on the stack for 10 characters
```

```
# start a loop and check if value is zero - jump to done if so
```

```
# divide the number by 10 and take the remainder as the first dig
```

```
# add 48 to the number to make it an ascii value
```

```
# store the byte in the address esp + ecx
```

```
# jump to start of loop
```

- Essentially the opposite of `long_to_string`

DIV

division

- $a / b = y$ remainder z
- dividend / divisor = [quotient, remainder]
- $\text{eax} / \text{ebx} = [\text{eax}, \text{edx}]$

```
...  
  
    mov %ebx, %eax           # our value ebx is placed into eax for division  
.loop_pl:  
    xor %edx, %edx           # clear edx for the dividend  
    mov $10, %ebx            # ebx is our divisor so we set it to divide by 10  
    div %ebx                  # do the division  
    addb $48, %dl             # convert the quotient to ascii  
  
...
```


NEG

multiplying by -1

```
neg %eax
```

- takes two's complement of number
- most significant bit indicates sign
- 1 = negative, 0 = positive
- number inverted and 1 added to result
- loose absolute range (eg. 8 bits holds -128 to 127)
- $\text{NEG}(-12) = 12$
- $11110100 \rightarrow 00001011 + 1 = 00001100$

Printing to stdout and shuffling some registers

```
mov %ecx, %edx      # move our count value to edx for the int 80 call
mov %esp, %ecx      # move our string start address into ecx
movl $4, %eax       # set eax to 4 for int 80 to write to file
movl $0, %ebx       # set ebx for file to write to as stdout (file descriptor 0)
int $0x80           # make it so
```

Conclusion

Results and limitations

- working program

```
_start:
    nop
    movl %esp, %ebp           # take a copy of esp to use
    addl $8, %ebp             # address of first arg in stack
    movl (%ebp), %edi         # move arg address into esi for scasb
    call get_string_length    # get the length of the argument string passed in
    call long_from_string     # get a numeric value from our argument
    call check_valid_input    # if the result is zero, exit
    call fibonacci            # run our fibonacci sequence
    call print_long           # print the last value in the sequence
    call exit                 # exit gracefully
```

- no error checking
- limited by 32-bit
- sub-optimal code

Conclusion

Most of the work doing standard library things

Conclusion

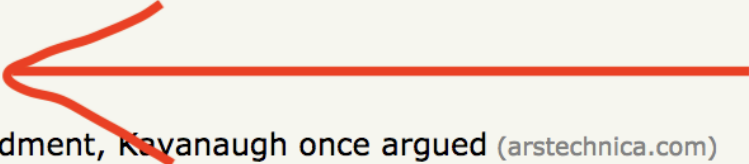
Insight into language composition

- Jumps are GOTOs
- Frowned upon in higher level languages - Dijkstra
- Fundamental units of operation in any application

Conclusion

It was fun!

I got some HackerNews rep from a blog post on it!

- 21. ▲ ML-powered newspaper for showing news from many political perspectives (knowherenews.com)
30 points by jadt157 8 hours ago | hide | 15 comments
 - 22. ▲ How social-media platforms dispense justice (economist.com)
57 points by privong 13 hours ago | hide | 25 comments
 - 23. BuildZoom (YC W13) is hiring for a new team: junior sales/ops talent
2 hours ago | hide
 - 24. ▲ Spontaneous knotting of an agitated string (2007) (nih.gov)
53 points by ColinWright 11 hours ago | hide | 21 comments
 - 25. ▲ Companies worry more about access to software developers than capital (cnbc.com)
111 points by ScottWRobinson 8 hours ago | hide | 119 comments
 - 26. ▲ Beijing's Three Options: Unemployment, Debt, or Wealth Transfers (carnegieendowment.org)
112 points by mooreds 11 hours ago | hide | 99 comments
 - 27. ▲ Creating a Fibonacci Generator in Assembly (seso.io)
11 points by willvk 5 hours ago | hide | 4 comments
 - 28. ▲ NSA metadata program "consistent" with Fourth Amendment, Kavanaugh once argued (arstechnica.com)
159 points by colejohnson66 8 hours ago | hide | 59 comments
 - 29. ▲ A year later, Equifax has faced little fallout from losing data (techcrunch.com)
- 

Conclusion

Call to action

- Learning continuum
- Learn as part of something larger

Helps with understanding of:

- LLVM
- eBPF
- GPU Assembly
- WebAssembly

Thank you!

Questions?

@wilvk