Low-Level C Programming
CSEE W4840

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Goals

Function is correct
Source code is concise, readable, maintainable
Time-critical sections of program run fast enough
Object code is small and efficient

Optimize the use of three resources:

- Execution time
- Memory
- Development/maintenance time
Like Writing English

You can say the same thing many different ways and mean the same thing.

There are many different ways to say the same thing. The same thing may be said different ways. There is more than one way to say it. Many sentences are equivalent.

Be succinct.
Arithmetic

Integer Arithmetic  Fastest

Floating-point arithmetic in hardware  Slower

Floating-point arithmetic in software  Very slow

+, −
×
÷
sqrt, sin, log, etc.
slower
Simple benchmarks

```c
for (i = 0 ; i < 10000 ; ++i)
    /* arithmetic operation */
```

On a Pentium 4 with good hardware floating-point,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operator</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Operator</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ (int)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>+ (double)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* (int)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>* (double)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ (int)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>/ (double)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;&lt; (int)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>sqrt</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sin</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pow</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Simple benchmarks

On a Zaurus SL 5600, a 400 MHz Intel PXA250 Xscale (ARM) processor:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operator</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Operator</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ (int)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>+ (double)</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* (int)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>* (double)</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ (int)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>/ (double)</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;&lt; (int)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>sqrt</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sin</td>
<td>3300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pow</td>
<td>820</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Operations on char, short, int, and long probably run at the same speed (same ALU).

Same for unsigned variants

int or long slower when they exceed machine’s word size.
Arithmetic Lessons

Try to use integer addition/subtraction
Avoid multiplication unless you have hardware
Avoid division
Avoid floating-point, unless you have hardware
Really avoid math library functions
C has many bit-manipulation operators.

&  Bit-wise AND
|  Bit-wise OR
^  Bit-wise XOR
~  Negate (one’s complement)
>> Right-shift
<< Left-shift

Plus assignment versions of each.
Bit-manipulation basics

a |= 0x4;  /* Set bit 2 */
b &= ~0x4; /* Clear bit 2 */
c &= ~(1 << 3); /* Clear bit 3 */
d ^= (1 << 5); /* Toggle bit 5 */
e >>= 2; /* Divide e by 4 */
Advanced bit manipulation

/* Set b to the rightmost 1 in a */
b = a & (a ^ (a - 1));

/* Set d to the number of 1's in c */
char c, d;
d = (c & 0x55) + ((c & 0xaa) >> 1);
d = (d & 0x33) + ((d & 0xcc) >> 2);
d = (d & 0x0f) + ((d & 0xf0) >> 4);
Faking Multiplication

Addition, subtraction, and shifting are fast. Can sometimes supplant multiplication.
Like floating-point, not all processors have a dedicated hardware multiplier.

Recall the multiplication algorithm from elementary school, but think binary:

\[
\begin{align*}
101011 \\
\times \ 1101 \\
\hline
101011 \\
10101100 \\
+101011000 \\
\hline
1000101111
\end{align*}
\]

\[= 43 + 43 \ll 2 + 43 \ll 3 = 559\]
Faking Multiplication

Even more clever if you include subtraction:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
101011 \\
\times 1110 \\
1010110 \\
10101100 \\
+101011000 \\
\hline
1001011010
\end{array}
\]

\[= 43 << 1 + 43 << 2 + 43 << 3\]
\[= 43 << 4 - 43 << 2\]
\[= 602\]

Only useful
- for multiplication by a constant
- for “simple” multiplicands
- when hardware multiplier not available
Faking Division

Division is a much more complicated algorithm that generally involves decisions. However, division by a power of two is just a shift:

\[
\begin{align*}
    a / 2 &= a \gg 1 \\
    a / 4 &= a \gg 2 \\
    a / 8 &= a \gg 3
\end{align*}
\]

There is no general shift-and-add replacement for division, but sometimes you can turn it into multiplication:

\[
\begin{align*}
    a / 1.33333333 &= a * 0.75 \\
                   &= a * 0.5 + a * 0.25 \\
                   &= a \gg 1 + a \gg 2
\end{align*}
\]
Multi-way branches

if (a == 1)
    foo();
else if (a == 2)
    bar();
else if (a == 3)
    baz();
else if (a == 4)
    qux();
else if (a == 5)
    quux();
else if (a == 6)
    corge();

switch (a) {
    case 1:
        foo(); break;
    case 2:
        bar(); break;
    case 3:
        baz(); break;
    case 4:
        qux(); break;
    case 5:
        quux(); break;
    case 6:
        corge(); break;
}
Nios code for if-then-else

```
ldw r2, 0(fp)      # Fetch a from stack
cmpnei r2, r2, 1  # Compare with 1
bne r2, zero, .L2  # If not 1, jump to L2
call foo           # Call foo()
br .L3             # branch out

.L2:               
  ldw r2, 0(fp)    # Fetch a from stack (again!)
  cmpnei r2, r2, 2 # Compare with 2
  bne r2, zero, .L4 # If not 1, jump to L4
  call bar        # Call bar()
  br .L3          # branch out

.L4:
```
Nios code for switch

```
ldw   r2, 0(fp)       # Fetch a
cmpgeui r2, r2, 7    # Compare with 7
bne   r2, zero, .L2   # Branch if greater or equal
ldw   r2, 0(fp)       # Fetch a
muli  r3, r2, 4       # Multiply by 4
movhi r2, %hiadj(.L9) # Load address .L9
addi  r2, r2, %lo(.L9)
add   r2, r3, r2      # = a * 4 + .L9
ldw   r2, 0(r2)       # Fetch from jump table
jmp   r2               # Jump to label

.section .rodata
.align 2                # Jump table

.section .text
.L3:   call   foo
br     .L2
.L4:   call   bar
br     .L2
.L5:   call   baz
br     .L2
.L6:   call   quux
br     .L2
.L7:   call   quux
br     .L2
.L8:   call   corge
.L2:
```
Computing Discrete Functions

Ways to compute a “random” function:

/* OK, especially for sparse domain */
if (a == 0) x = 0;
else if (a == 1) x = 4;
else if (a == 2) x = 7;
else if (a == 3) x = 2;
else if (a == 4) x = 8;
else if (a == 5) x = 9;

/* Better for large, dense domains */
switch (a) {
    case 0: x = 0; break;
    case 1: x = 4; break;
    case 2: x = 7; break;
    case 3: x = 2; break;
    case 4: x = 8; break;
    case 5: x = 9; break;
}

/* Best: constant-time lookup table */
int f[] = {0, 4, 7, 2, 8, 9};
x = f[a]; /* assumes 0 <= a <= 5 */
Function calls

RISC processors strive to make calling cheap by passing arguments in registers. Calling, entering, and returning:

```c
int foo(int a, int b) {
    int c =
    bar(b, a);
    return c;
}
```

```assembly
foo:
    addi sp, sp, -20      # Allocate space on stack
    stw ra, 16(sp)        # Store return address
    stw fp, 12(sp)        # Store frame pointer
    mov fp, sp            # Frame pointer is new SP
    stw r4, 0(fp)         # Save a on stack
    stw r5, 4(fp)         # Save b on stack
    ldw r4, 4(fp)         # Fetch b
    ldw r5, 0(fp)         # Fetch a
    call bar              # Call bar()
    stw r2, 8(fp)         # Store result in c
    ldw r2, 8(fp)         # Return value in r2 = c
    ldw ra, 16(sp)        # Restore return address
    ldw fp, 12(sp)        # Restore frame pointer
    addi sp, sp, 20       # Release stack space
    ret                   # Return from subroutine
```
RISC processors strive to make calling cheap by passing arguments in registers. Calling, entering, and returning:

```c
int foo(int a, int b) {
    int c = bar(b, a);
    return c;
}
```

(foo):

```assembly
addi sp, sp, -4  # Allocate stack space
stw ra, 0(sp)    # Store return address
mov r2, r4       # Swap arguments (r4, r5)
mov r4, r5       # using r2 as temporary
mov r5, r2
call bar         # Call bar() (return in r2)
ldw ra, 0(sp)    # Restore return address
addi sp, sp, 4   # Release stack space
ret               # Return from subroutine
```
Strength Reduction

Why multiply when you can add?

```c
struct {
    int a;
    char b;
    int c;
} foo[10];
int i;

for (i=0 ; i<10 ; ++i) {
    foo[i].a = 77;
    foo[i].b = 88;
    foo[i].c = 99;
}
```

```c
struct {
    int a;
    char b;
    int c;
} *fp, *fe, foo[10];

fe = foo + 10;
for (fp = foo ; fp != fe ; ++fp) {
    fp->a = 77;
    fp->b = 88;
    fp->c = 99;
}
```

Good optimizing compilers do this automatically.
Unoptimized array code (fragment)

.L2:

```
    ldw    r2, 0(fp)        # Fetch i
    cmpgei r2, r2, 10      # i >= 10?
    bne    r2, zero, .L1   # exit if true
    movhi  r3, %hiadj(foo) # Get address of foo array
    addi   r3, r3, %lo(foo)
    ldw    r2, 0(fp)        # Fetch i
    muli   r2, r2, 12      # i * 12
    add    r3, r2, r3      # foo[i]
    movi   r2, 77          # foo[i].a = 77
    stw    r2, 0(r3)       # foo[i].a = 77
    movhi  r3, %hiadj(foo)
    addi   r3, r3, %lo(foo)
    ldw    r2, 0(fp)
    muli   r2, r2, 12      # compute &foo[i]
    add    r2, r2, r3      # compute &foo[i]
    addi   r3, r2, 4       # offset for b field
    movi   r2, 88          # offset for b field
    stb    r2, 0(r3)       # foo[i].b = 88
```
Unoptimized pointer code (fragment)

.L2:
    ldw  r3, 0(fp)  # fp
    ldw  r2, 4(fp)  # fe
    beq  r3, r2, .L1  # fp == fe?
    ldw  r3, 0(fp)
    movi r2, 77
    stw  r2, 0(r3)  # fp->a = 77
    ldw  r3, 0(fp)
    movi r2, 88
    stb  r2, 4(r3)  # fp->b = 88
    ldw  r3, 0(fp)
    movi r2, 99
    stw  r2, 8(r3)  # fp->c = 99
    ldw  r2, 0(fp)
    addi r2, r2, 12
    stw  r2, 0(fp)  # ++fp
    br   .L2
Optimized (-O2) array code

```
movi r6, 77          # Load constants
movi r5, 88
movi r4, 99
movhi r2, %hiadj(foo)  # Load address of array
addi r2, r2, %lo(foo)
movi r3, 10           # iteration count
.L5:
  addi r3, r3, -1     # decrement iterations
  stw r6, 0(r2)       # foo[i].a = 77
  stb r5, 4(r2)       # foo[i].b = 88
  stw r4, 8(r2)       # foo[i].c = 99
  addi r2, r2, 12     # go to next array element
  bne r3, zero, .L5    # if there are more to do
  ret
```
Optimized (-O2) pointer code

```
movhi r6, %hiadj(foo+120)  # fe = foo + 10
addi r6, r6, %lo(foo+120)
addi r2, r6, -120          # fp = foo
movi r5, 77                # Constants
movi r4, 88
movi r3, 99
.L5:
  stw  r5, 0(r2)            # fp->a = 77
  stb  r4, 4(r2)            # fp->b = 88
  stw  r3, 8(r2)            # fp->c = 99
  addi r2, r2, 12           # ++fp
  bne  r2, r6, .L5          # fp == fe?
  ret
```
How Rapid is Rapid?

How much time does the following loop take?

```c
for ( i = 0 ; i < 1024 ; ++i) a += b[i];
```

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operation</th>
<th>Cycles per iteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memory read</td>
<td>2 or 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loop overhead</td>
<td>≈4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>6–12</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Nios runs at 50 MHz, one instruction per cycle,

\[
6 \cdot 1024 \cdot \frac{1}{50\text{MHz}} = 0.12\mu s \text{ or } 12 \cdot 1024 \cdot \frac{1}{50\text{MHz}} = 0.24\mu s
\]
Double-checking

GCC generates good code with -O7:

```
movhi r4, %hiadj(b)  # Load &b[0]
addi r4, r4, %lo(b)
movi r3, 1024        # Iteration count
.L5:
    # cycles
    ldw r2, 0(r4)  # Fetch b[i]  2-7
    addi r3, r3, -1  # --i  1
    addi r4, r4, 4  # next b element  1
    add r5, r5, r2  # a += b[i]  1
    bne r3, zero, .L5  # repeat if i > 0  3
    mov r2, r5  # result
    ret
```
Features in order of increasing cost

1. Integer arithmetic
2. Pointer access
3. Simple conditionals and loops
4. Static and automatic variable access
5. Array access
6. Floating-point with hardware support
7. Switch statements
8. Function calls
9. Floating-point emulation in software
10. Malloc() and free()
11. Library functions (sin, log, printf, etc.)
12. Operating system calls (open, sbrk, etc.)
/* fixed address: visible to other files */
int global_static;

/* fixed address: only visible within file */
static int file_static;

/* parameters always stacked */
int foo(int auto_param)
{
    /* fixed address: only visible to function */
    static int func_static;
    /* stacked: only visible to function */
    int auto_i, auto_a[10];
    /* array explicitly allocated on heap */
    double *auto_d = malloc(sizeof(double)*5);

    /* return value in register or stacked */
    return auto_i;
}
Dynamic Storage Allocation
Dynamic Storage Allocation

\[
\downarrow \text{free( } \quad \text{malloc( } \quad \text{free( } \quad \text{malloc( } \\
\]

\[
\downarrow \text{free( } \quad \text{malloc( } \quad \text{free( } \quad \text{malloc( } \\
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\]
Dynamic Storage Allocation

\[
\text{free(} \quad \text{malloc(} \quad \text{free(} \quad \text{malloc(}
\]

\[
\text{free(} \quad \text{malloc(} \quad \text{malloc(}
\]

\[
\text{free(} \quad \text{malloc(} \quad \text{malloc(}
\]
Dynamic Storage Allocation

\[
\downarrow \text{free}() \\
\downarrow \text{malloc}()
\]
Dynamic Storage Allocation

\[
\downarrow \text{free(\[\text{allocated memory}\])}
\]

\[
\downarrow \text{malloc(\[\text{allocated memory}\])}
\]
Dynamic Storage Allocation

Rules:

Each allocated block contiguous (no holes)

Blocks stay fixed once allocated

malloc()

Find an area large enough for requested block

Mark memory as allocated

free()

Mark the block as unallocated
Simple Dynamic Storage Allocation

Maintaining information about free memory
  Simplest: Linked list

The algorithm for locating a suitable block
  Simplest: First-fit

The algorithm for freeing an allocated block
  Simplest: Coalesce adjacent free blocks
Simple Dynamic Storage Allocation

malloc

free
Simple Dynamic Storage Allocation

malloc( )

free( )
Simple Dynamic Storage Allocation

malloc()
Simple Dynamic Storage Allocation

malloc( )

free( )
Simple Dynamic Storage Allocation

malloc()
Storage Classes Compared

On most processors, access to automatic (stacked) data and globals is equally fast.

Automatic usually preferable since the memory is reused when function terminates.

Danger of exhausting stack space with recursive algorithms. Not used in most embedded systems.

The heap (malloc) should be avoided if possible:

- Allocation/deallocation is unpredictably slow
- Danger of exhausting memory
- Danger of fragmentation

Best used sparingly in embedded systems
“Magical” memory locations that, when written or read, send or receive data from hardware.

Hardware that looks like memory to the processor, i.e., addressable, bidirectional data transfer, read and write operations.

Does not always behave like memory:

- Act of reading or writing can be a trigger (data irrelevant)
- Often read- or write-only
- Read data often different than last written
Memory-Mapped I/O Access in C

```c
#define SWITCHES ((volatile char *) 0x1800)
#define LEDS ((volatile char *) 0x1810)

void main() {
  for (;;) {
    *LEDS = *SWITCHES;
  }
}
```
What’s With the Volatile?

```c
#define ADDRESS  ((char *) 0x1800)
#define VADDRESS  ((volatile char *) 0x1800)

char foo() {
    char a = *ADDRESS;
    char b = *ADDRESS;
    return a + b;
}

char bar() {
    char a = *VADDRESS;
    char b = *VADDRESS;
    return a + b;
}
```

Compiled with optimization:

```assembly
foo:
    movi r2, 6144
    ldbu r2, 0(r2)
    add r2, r2, r2
    andi r2, r2, 0xff
    ret

bar:
    movi r3, 6144
    ldbu r2, 0(r3)
    ldbu r3, 0(r3)
    add r2, r2, r3
    andi r2, r2, 0xff
    ret
```
Altera I/O

/* Definitions of alt_u8, etc. */
#include "alt_types.h"

/* IORD_ALTERA_AVALON... for the ‘PIO’ device */
#include "altera_avalon_pio_regs.h"

/* Auto-generated addresses for all peripherals */
#include "system.h"

int main() {
    alt_u8 sw;
    for (;;) {
        sw = IORD_ALTERA_AVALON_PIO_DATA(SWITCHES_BASE);
        IOWR_ALTERA_AVALON_PIO_DATA(LEDS_BASE, sw);
    }
}
Memory-mapped I/O puts the processor in charge: only it may initiate communication.

Typical operation:

- Check hardware conditions by reading “status registers”
- When ready, send next “command” by writing control and data registers
- Check status registers for completion, waiting if necessary

Waiting for completion: “polling”
“Are we there yet?” “No” “Are we there yet?” “No” “Are we there yet?” “No” “Are we there yet?” “No”
Idea: have hardware initiate communication when it wants attention.

Processor responds by immediately calling an interrupt handling routine, suspending the currently-running program.
Unix Signals

The Unix environment provides “signals,” which behave like interrupts.

```c
#include <stdio.h>
#include <signal.h>

void handleint() {
    printf("Got an INT\n");
    /* some variants require this */
    signal(SIGINT, handleint);
}

int main() {
    /* Register signal handler */
    signal(SIGINT, handleint);
    /* Do nothing forever */
    for (;;) {
    }
    return 0;
}
```
#include "system.h"
#include "altera_avalon_pio_regs.h"
#include "alt_types.h"

static void button_isr(void* context, alt_u32 id)
{
    /* Read and store the edge capture register */
    *(volatile int*) context =
        IORD_ALTERA_AVALONPIO_EDGE_CAP(BUTTONPIO_BASE);

    /* Write to the edge capture register to reset it */
    IOWR_ALTERA_AVALONPIO_EDGE_CAP(BUTTONPIO_BASE, 0);

    /* Reset interrupt capability for the Button PIO */
    IOWR_ALTERA_AVALONPIO_IRQ_MASK(BUTTONPIO_BASE, 0xf);
}
#include "sys/alt_irq.h"
#include "system.h"

volatile int captured_edges;

static void init_button_pio()
{
  /* Enable all 4 button interrupts. */
  IOWR_ALTERA_AVALON_PIO_IRQ_MASK(BUTTON_PIO_BASE, 0xf);

  /* Reset the edge capture register. */
  IOWR_ALTERA_AVALON_PIO_EDGE_CAP(BUTTON_PIO_BASE, 0x0);

  /* Register the ISR. */
  alt_irq_register( BUTTON_PIO_IRQ,
                   (void *) &captured_edges,
                   button_isr );
}
Debugging Skills
The Edwards Way to Debug

1. Identify undesired behavior
2. Construct linear model for desired behavior
3. Pick a point along model
4. Form desired behavior hypothesis for point
5. Test
6. Move point toward failure if point working, away otherwise
7. Repeat #4–#6 until bug is found