CSE 141L Lab 1. 8-Bit Instruction Set Architecture

Due Friday, October 6.

In this lab, you will design the instruction set for a processor. You will design the hardware for that processor in subsequent labs. This will be an 8-bit processor which you will optimize for a few simple programs (described on the next page). For this lab, you will design the instruction set and instruction formats, and code three programs to run on your instruction set. Given the extreme limit on instruction bits, the target programs and their needs should be considered carefully. The best design will come from an iterative process of designing an ISA, then coding the programs, then redesigning the ISA.

Your instruction set architecture should feature fixed-length instructions 8 bits wide. Your instruction-set specification should describe:

- what operations it supports and what their opcodes are.
- how many instruction formats it supports and what they are (in detail -- how many bits for each field, and where they're found in the instruction). Your instruction format description should be detailed enough that someone could write an assembler (a program that creates machine code from assembly code) for it.
- number of registers, and how many; general-purpose or specialized.
- the size of main memory.
- addressing modes supported (this applies to both memory instructions and branch instructions).

In order to fit this all in 8 bits, the memory demands of these programs will have to be small. For example, you will have to be clever to have a conventional main memory even as big as 256 bytes. However, for the programs you are going to run, you may not need all that. You should consider how much data space you will need before you finalize your instruction format. You can assume that instructions are stored in a different memory, so that your data addresses need only be big enough to hold data. You should also notice that these programs probably don’t need procedure calls and stack pointers. This will be an 8-bit machine otherwise, meaning that memory is byte-addressable, and registers and all important data types are all 8 bits.

When implemented, this will be a single-cycle machine, so realize that there is a limit to what can be done in a single cycle. For example, assume you cannot read two memory locations (or read one and write one) in a single cycle. However, you will be able to design a register file that reads two and writes one register in a cycle.

To simplify the ISA design process, you need only optimize for the following two goals:

1. Minimize dynamic instruction count (i.e., the number of instructions executed during the running of a particular program).
2. Simplify your processor hardware design.

You are welcome to also optimize for other things (e.g., cycle time, ease of pipelining), but if you do so, we will expect you to discuss that optimization intelligently, and these two goals should still take highest priority.

Generic ISAs (that is, ISAs that will execute other programs just as efficiently as those shown here) will be seriously frowned upon. We really want you to optimize for these programs only.

You will turn in a lab report no more than eight pages long. The report will answer the following questions. In describing your architecture, keep in mind that the person grading it has much less experience with your ISA than you do. It is your responsibility to make everything clear.

For all the labs, your report will have two parts: a lab report (in this case, your ISA description) and the answers to all questions. Since, particularly in this case, a good report will already have the answers to many of the questions, it is okay to put something like “2. See section 3 of ISA description” as an answer. But for short answers, it is probably wiser to just repeat the answer.
Questions for lab 1:

1. What instruction formats are supported and what do they look like? Give an example of each.

2. What instructions are supported and what are their opcodes?

3. How many registers are supported? Is there anything special about the registers?

4. How are branches supported? What is the maximum branch distance supported?

5. What addressing modes are supported? How are addresses calculated (including instruction addresses for branches)? Give an example.

6. How large is the main memory?

7. In what ways did you optimize for dynamic instruction count?

8. In what ways did you optimize for ease of design?

9. If you optimized for anything else, what and how? (It’s OK if you didn’t)

10. Your chief competitor just announced a load-store ISA with three operands, two registers (i.e., a 1-bit register specifier), and 32 instructions (5 opcode bits). Tell me why your ISA is better.

11. What do you think will be the bottleneck in your design (i.e., what “resource” (loosely defined) will you run out of most quickly for bigger, more complex programs)?

12(a). What would you have done differently if you had 2 more bits for instructions?
12(b). 2 fewer bits?

13. Can you classify your machine in any of the classical ways (e.g., stack machine, accumulator, register, load-store)? If so, which? If not, give me a name for your class of machine.

14. Give an example of an “assembly language” instruction in your machine, then translate it into machine code.

for 15-17, give assembly instructions. Make sure your assembly format is either very obvious or well described. If you also want to include machine code, the effort will not be wasted, since you will need it later. We will not correct/grade the machine code. State any assumptions you make.

15. Write a program to compute A * B. A is in location 0, B is in location 1. Write the result (16 bits) in locations 126 (high bits) and 127 (low bits). Since we haven’t learned number systems yet (at least in this class), you can interpret the numbers as signed (twos complement) or unsigned – but tell us which.
15(b). What is the dynamic instruction count of this program if A = 37 and B = 60?

16. Write a program that searches for a “run of three.” A run of three occurs when three consecutive bytes hold values (assume unsigned numbers) which are increasing by one (e.g., 8, 9, 10 or 99, 100, 101). Location 125 holds the size of the search array (N). Search locations 0 to N-1 for the run of three. If a run is found, put the address of the first element in memory location 126. If none is found, put –1 in location 126. N will never be bigger than 120.
16(b). What is the dynamic instruction count of this program if M(125)=72, a run of three is found starting at address 60, and four runs of two are found along the way?

17. Write a program which counts the number of symmetric values which are in locations 0-75. A value is symmetric if the value is the same regardless of which end is considered the most significant bit. For example 01100110 and 10111101 are both symmetric, but 00110001 is not. Write the result in location 76.
17(b). What is the dynamic instruction count of this program if there are 10 symmetric values found?