# Lecture 05 Intro to x86-64 Assembly

CS213 – Intro to Computer Systems Branden Ghena – Winter 2025

Slides adapted from:

St-Amour, Hardavellas, Bustamente (Northwestern), Bryant, O'Hallaron (CMU), Garcia, Weaver (UC Berkeley)

#### Administrivia

- Pack Lab
  - Due in one week from today (Tuesday, January 28)
  - If you haven't yet, get started right away!
    - Lots of conceptually difficult parts to understand
    - Lots of C code to write, which you may have forgotten
  - Especially, make sure you don't have issues logging into Moore
    - Takes ~24 hours to fix and we won't be giving extensions for it
  - This assignment is 12% of your overall course grade, and takes at least that much effort
    - Not an "easier first assignment"

## Today's Goals

- Introduce assembly and the x86-64 Instruction Set Architecture
  - Discuss background of the factors that affected its evolution
- Understand registers: the analogy to variables in assembly

• Explore our first assembly instruction: mov

#### **Outline**

Assembly Languages

Registers

- x86-64 Assembly
  - Introduction
  - Move Instruction
  - Memory Addressing Modes

## Assembly (Also known as: Assembly Language, ASM)

Purpose of a CPU: execute instructions

High-level programs (like in C) are split into many small instructions

- Assembly is a low-level programming language where the program instructions match a particular architecture's operations
  - Assembly is a human-readable text representation of machine code
  - Each assembly instruction is one machine instruction (usually)

#### Programs can be written in assembly or machine instructions

#### C Program (source code)

```
a = (b+c) - (d+e);
```

#### **Assembly Program**

```
addq %rdi, %rsi
addq %rdx, %rcx
subq %rcx, %rsi
movq %rsi, %rax
```

#### **Machine Instructions**

0x4889D3 0x488903 0x53 0x5B

#### There are many assembly languages

- Instruction Set Architecture: All programmer-visible components of a processor needed to write software for it
  - Operations the processor can execute
  - The system's state (registers, memory, program counter)
  - The effect operations have on system state
- Each assembly language has instructions that match a particular processor's Instruction Set Architecture (ISA)
- Assembly is not portable to other architectures (like C is)

#### Which instructions should an assembly include?

Each assembly language has its own operations

There are some obviously useful instructions:

- Add, subtract, and bit shift
- Read and write memory

#### But what about:

- Only run the next instruction if these two values are equal
- Perform four pairwise multiplications simultaneously
- Add two ascii numbers together ( $^2' + ^3' = 5$ )

#### Instruction Set Philosophies

Early trend: add more instructions to do elaborate operations **Complex Instruction Set Computing** (CISC)

- Handle many different types of operations
- More options for the compiler
- Complicated hardware runs more slowly



# Opposite philosophy later began to dominate: **Reduced Instruction Set Computing** (RISC)

- Simpler (and smaller) instruction set makes it easier to build fast hardware
- Let software do the complicated operations by composing simpler ones

Modern reality is somewhere between these two

#### Mainstream Instruction Set Architectures



#### x86

Designer Intel, AMD

Bits 16-bit, 32-bit and 64-bit

**Introduced** 1978 (16-bit), 1985 (32-bit), 2003

(64-bit)

Design CISC

**Type** Register-memory

**Encoding** Variable (1 to 15 bytes)

**Endianness** Little

PCs & Servers (Core i3, i5, i7, M) x86 Instruction Set



#### **ARM** architectures

**Designer** ARM Holdings

**Bits** 32-bit, 64-bit

Introduced 1985; 31 years ago

**Design** RISC

Type Register-Register

**Encoding** AArch64/A64 and AArch32/A32

use 32-bit instructions, T32 (Thumb-2) uses mixed 16- and 32-bit instructions. ARMv7 user-

space compatibility[1]

Endianness Bi (little as default)

Smartphones (iPhone, Android),
Apple Hardware, Raspberry Pi,
Embedded systems
ARM Instruction Set



#### **RISC-V**

Designer University of California,

Berkeley

Bits 32, 64, 128

Introduced 2010

Version 2.2

Design RISC

Type Load-store

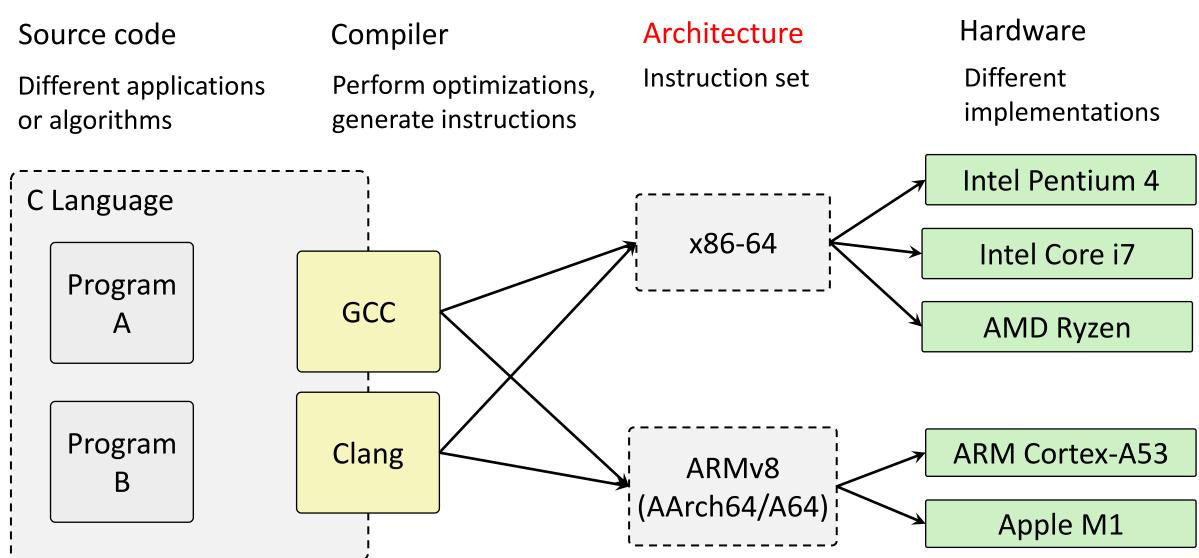
**Encoding** Variable

**Branching** Compare-and-branch

**Endianness** Little

Open-source
Relatively new, designed for cloud computing, embedded systems, academic use
RISCV Instruction Set

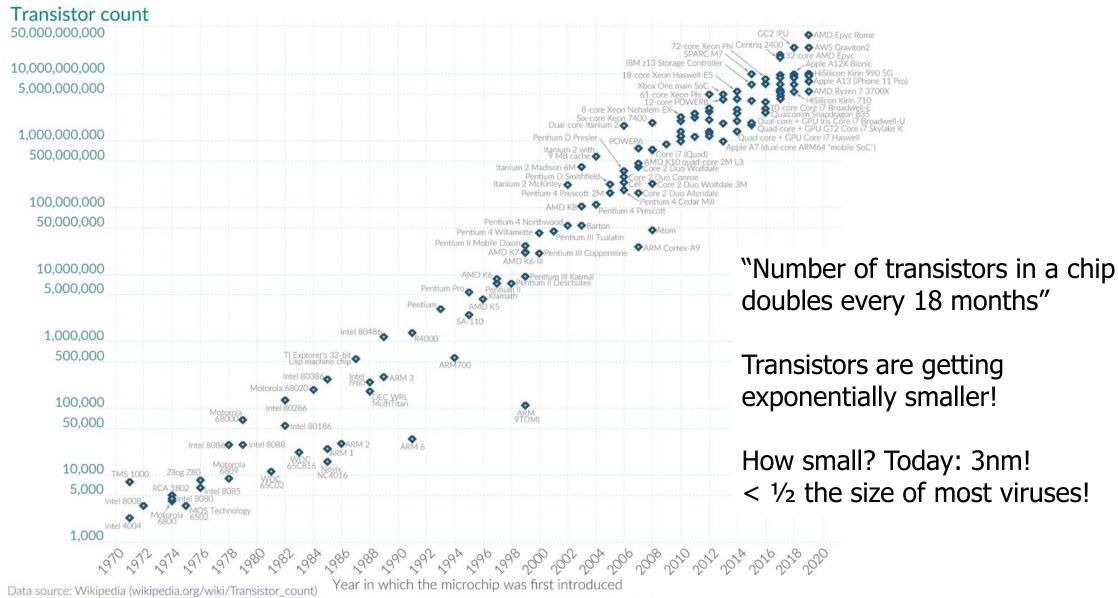
#### Instruction Set Architecture sits at software/hardware interface



#### Intel x86 Processors

- Dominate desktop and server market, and Windows laptops
  - No longer completely dominant in laptops though (MacOS moved to ARM)
- Complex instruction set computer (CISC)
  - Many different instructions with many different formats
  - But, only small subset encountered by normal programs
- Design evolved over time
  - Backwards compatible up until 8086, introduced in 1978
  - Added more features as time goes on
  - Historical legacy has large impact on architecture

#### Moore's Law – CPU transistors counts



# Evolution of x86 ISA

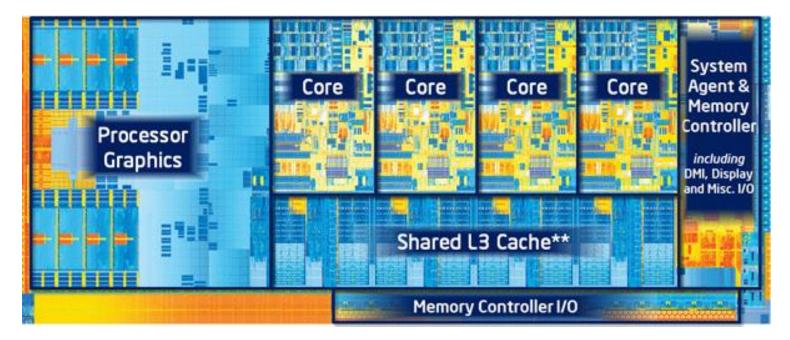
Name	Date	Transistors	Comments
8086	1978	29k	16b processor, basis for IBM PC & DOS; 1MB address space
80286	1982	134K	Elaborate (!useful) addressing; basis for IBM PC and Windows
386	1985	275K	Extended to 32b, added "flat addressing" that Linux/gcc uses
486	1989	1.9M	Improved performance; integrated FP unit into chip
Pentium	1993	3.1M	Improved performance
PentiumPro	1995	6.5M	Conditional move instructions; big change in microarch. (P6)
Pentium II	1997	7M	Merged Pentium/MMZ + PentiumPro, MMX instructions within P6
Pentium III	1999	8.2M	Integer and floating point vector instructions (SSE); Level2 cache
Pentium 4	2001	42M	8B ints and floating point formats to vector instructions
Pentium 4E	2004	125M	Hyperthreading (able to run 2 programs simultaneously), 64b
Core 2	2006	291M	P6-like, multicore, no hyperthreading
Core i7 (Nehalem)	2008	781M	Hyperthreading + multicore, TurboBoost (run fewer cores faster)
Core i3 (Nehalem)	2010	383M+177M	GPU on second silicon die within package (at 2010 version)
Core i3, i5, i7 (Sandy Bridge)	2011	997M (i7 – 4 cores)	Cores and GPU within the same processor die
Core i3, i5, i7 (Ivy Bridge)	2012	1400M (i7 – 4 cores)	Tri-gate transistors, much lower power consumption
Xeon E7 8800 V4 (Broadwell-EX)	2016	>5690M (22 cores)	14nm technology

#### Backwards Compatibility The cause of, and solution to, all of life's problems.

- Programs that worked on one x86 processor should keep working on the next one
  - Old programs work on new processors, which makes upgrading possible
  - Even today's x86-64 processors boot thinking they are 8086s!
- Adding powerful new features while keeping backwards compatibility is a careful balancing act
  - Backwards compatibility introduces a lot of constraints
  - May rule out "cleaner" designs that would break existing programs
  - The cause of some "surprising" aspects of the design of x86-64
  - "The x86 really isn't all that complex—it just doesn't make a lot of sense."
     Mike Johnson (AMD's x86 architect), 1994
- Not just a hardware thing!

#### In this class

- x86-64/EMT64: the current standard
  - Some asides on IA32: The traditional x86
- Presentation
  - Book covers x86-64; web aside on IA32
  - Labs will be based on x86-64



#### **Outline**

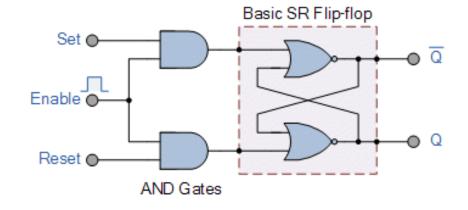
Assembly Languages

Registers

- x86-64 Assembly
  - Introduction
  - Move Instruction
  - Memory Addressing Modes

#### Hardware uses registers for variables

- Unlike C, assembly doesn't have variables as you know them
  - Instead, assembly uses *registers* to store values
- Registers are:
  - Small memory chunks of a fixed size
  - Can be read or written
  - Limited in number
  - Very fast and low power to access



- Registers are different from variables or RAM:
  - They don't have an address
    - We can only access them in assembly
  - They don't have types (just bits)
    - The operation performed determines how contents are treated

#### How many registers?

- Tradeoff between speed and availability
  - More registers can hold more variables
  - Simultaneously; all registers are slower
  - Also registers take physical space within the chip
- x86-64 has 16 registers (for integer operations)
  - Historically only 8 registers
  - Added 8 more with 64-bit extensions

#### How big should each register be?

- Registers are usually the size of a word
  - The natural unit of data for a processor
  - Width of the data type that a CPU can process in one instruction
    - Likely the size of its registers
  - Imprecise term that will inevitably slip into explanations

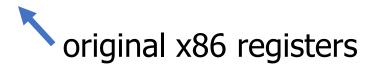
- x86 processors started with 16-bit words
- IA32 upgraded to 32-bit "double word" registers
- x86-64 upgraded again 64-bit "quad word" registers

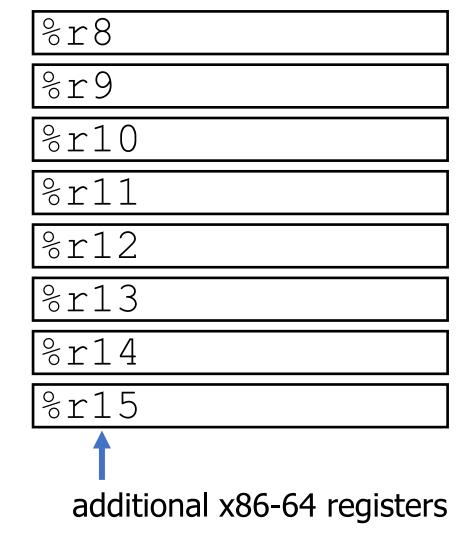
#### Why did we change the register size??

- Registers need to be able to hold memory addresses
- So, the size of a register limits the total size of memory!!
  - Each address is a single byte of memory
- Memory limitations based on register size
  - 16-bit registers: 2<sup>16</sup> addresses = 2<sup>16</sup> bytes = **64** KB of RAM
  - 32-bit registers: 2<sup>32</sup> addresses = 2<sup>32</sup> bytes = 4 GB of RAM
  - 64-bit registers: 2<sup>64</sup> addresses = 2<sup>64</sup> bytes = **16** EB of RAM
    - Kilobyte, Megabyte, Gigabyte, Terabyte, Petabyte, Exabyte
- We moved to 32-bit in the early 90s and 64-bit in the late-00s
  - No computer has 128-bit words, although many have special-purpose registers that big

#### x86-64 64-bit Integer Registers

%rax
%rbx
%rcx
%rdx
%rsi
%rdi
%rsp
%rbp





## Historical Register Purposes

#### **Name Origin** (mostly obsolete)

%rax Accumulate

%rbx | Base

%rcx | Counter

%rdx | Data

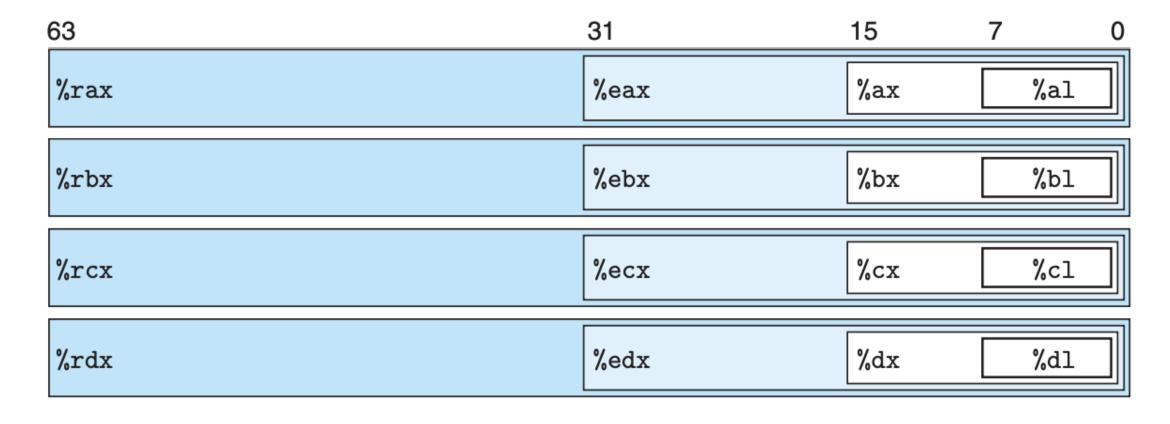
%rsi | Source Index

%rdi Destination Index

Stack Pointer (still important)

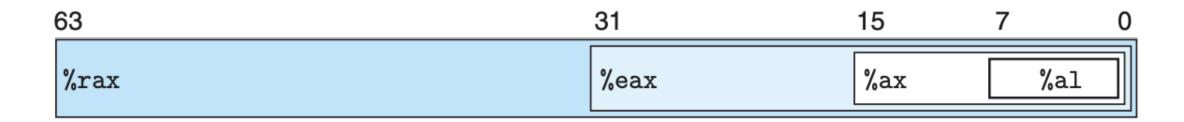
8rbp Base Pointer

#### x86-64 Register Access Options



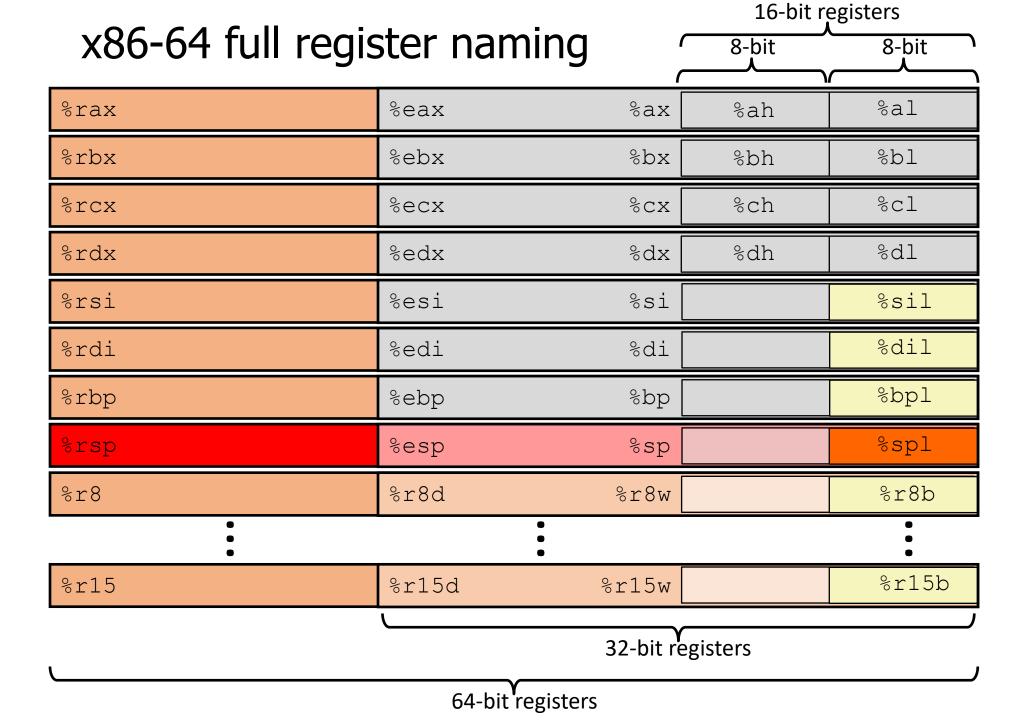
Registers can be accessed by any of these names to work with 8-byte, 4-byte, 2-byte, or 1-byte data

#### x86-64 Register Access Options



The same data can be accessed under different names and widths

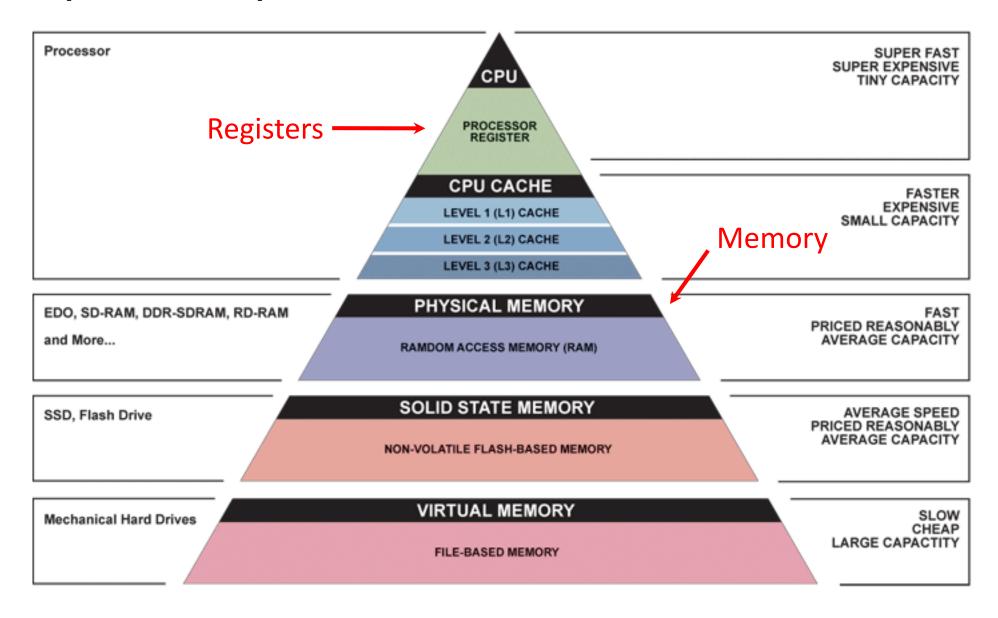
- Example: store 64-bit value 0x000000000010A0B in %rax
  - %rax: 0x000000000010A0B (64-bit)
  - %eax: 0x00010A0B (32-bit)
  - %ax: 0x0A0B (16-bit)
  - %al: 0x0B (8-bit)



#### Registers versus Memory

- What if there are more variables than registers?
  - Keep most frequently used in registers and move the rest to memory (called spilling to memory)
- Why not put all variables in memory?
  - Smaller is faster: registers 100-500 times faster
  - Memory Hierarchy
    - Registers: 16 registers \* 64 bits = 128 Bytes
    - RAM: 4-32 GB
    - SSD: 100-1000 GB

#### Memory Hierarchy



#### Special-purpose register: Instruction Pointer

- Instruction Pointer: %rip (not listed in prior tables)
  - Contains the address of the currently executing instruction
  - Actually special-purpose, only used for this one thing

- Processor hardware uses %rip when loading instructions
  - Load instruction from memory pointed to by %rip
  - Advance %rip to the next instruction
  - Repeat
  - Note: hardware does this automatically, you don't (usually) interact with this at all

## Break + Question

Which of these is FALSE?

- [A] Registers are faster to access than memory
- [B] Registers do not have a type
- [C] Registers can have special purposes
- [D] Registers are dynamically created as needed

Break + Question

Which of these is FALSE?

[A] Registers are faster to access than memory

[B] Registers do not have a type

[C] Registers can have special purposes

[D] Registers are dynamically created as needed

There are a fixed number of registers for a given architecture

#### **Outline**

Assembly Languages

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  - Move Instruction
  - Memory Addressing Modes

#### Writing Assembly Code? In 2025???

- Chances are, you'll never write a program in assembly, but understanding assembly is the key to the machine-level execution model:
  - Behavior of programs in the presence of bugs
    - When high-level language model breaks down
  - Tuning program performance
    - Understanding compiler optimizations and sources of program inefficiency
  - Implementing systems software
    - What are the "states" of processes that the OS must manage
    - Using special units (timers, I/O co-processors, etc.) inside processor!
  - Fighting malicious software
    - Distributed software is in binary form

#### Example x86-64 Assembly

```
.text
.globl multstore
.type multstore, @function
# multiply and store to memory
multstore:
   pushq %rbx # save to stack
   movq %rdx, %rbx
   call mult2
   movq %rax, (%rbx)
   popq # restore from stack
   ret
```

#### Example x86-64 Assembly

```
.text
.globl multstore
.type multstore, @function
# multiply and store to memory
multstore:
   pushq %rbx # save to stack
   movq %rdx, %rbx
                                           Various assembly
   call mult2
                                           instructions
   movq %rax, (%rbx)
   popq # restore from stack
   ret
```

#### Example x86-64 Assembly

```
.text
.globl multstore
.type multstore, @function
# multiply and store to memory
                                             Comments use the
multstore:
                                             # symbol
   pushq %rbx # save to stack
   movq %rdx, %rbx
   call mult2
   movq %rax, (%rbx)
   popq # restore from stack
   ret
```

# Example x86-64 Assembly

```
.text
.globl multstore
.type multstore, @function
# multiply and store to memory
                                          Labels are arbitrary
multstore:
                                          names that mark a
   pushq %rbx # save to stack
                                          section of code
   movq %rdx, %rbx
   call mult2
                                          We'll get back to these
   movq %rax, (%rbx)
                                          later
   popq # restore from stack
   ret
```

## Example x86-64 Assembly

```
.text
.globl multstore
.type multstore, @function
# multiply and store to memory
multstore:
   pushq %rbx # save to stack
   movq %rdx, %rbx
   call mult2
   movq %rax, (%rbx)
   popq # restore from stack
   ret
```

Assembler directives (mostly ignore these)

Can be used to specify data versus code regions, make functions linkable with other code, and many other tasks.

### x86-64 Instructions

General Instruction Syntax:

```
op src, dst
```

- 1 operator, 2 operands
  - op = operation name ("operator")
  - src1 = source location ("source")
  - dst = destination location ("destination")

Keep hardware simple via regularity

## Careful! Two Syntaxes for Assembly

#### **Intel/Microsoft Format**

```
lea eax,[ecx+ecx*2]
sub esp,8
cmp dword ptr [ebp-8],0
mov eax,dword ptr [eax*4+100h]
```

#### ATT Format

```
leal (%ecx,%ecx,2),%eax
subl $8,%esp
cmpl $0,-8(%ebp)
movl $0x100(,%eax,4),%eax
```

- Intel/Microsoft mnemonics vs. ATT
  - Operands listed in opposite order: mov Dest, Src vs. movl Src, Dest
  - Constants not preceded by '\$', Denote hex with 'h' at end: 100h vs. \$0x100
  - Operand size indicated by operands rather than operator suffix: sub vs. subq
  - Addressing format shows effective address computation: [eax\*4+100h] vs. \$0x100(,%rax,4)
- gcc (gas), gdb, objdump work on the ATT format
  - We will always use the ATT format as well

## Short Break + Example x86-64 Assembly

```
.text
.globl multstore
.type multstore, @function
# multiply and store to memory
multstore:
   pushq %rbx # save to stack
   movq %rdx, %rbx
                                      What might this instruction do?
   call mult2
   movq %rax, (%rbx)
                                      (op src, dst)
   popq # restore from stack
   ret
```

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## Three Basic Kinds of Instructions

- 1. Transfer data between memory and register
  - Load data from memory into register
    - %reg = Mem[address]
  - Store register data into memory
    - Mem[address] = %reg

Remember: Memory is indexed just like an array of bytes!

2. Perform arithmetic operation on register or memory data

• 
$$c = a + b;$$
  $z = x << y;$   $i = h \& g;$ 

- 3. Control flow: what instruction to execute next
  - Unconditional jumps to/from procedures
  - Conditional branches

## **Moving Data**

- General form: mov source, destination
  - Missing letter specifies size of operands
  - Reminder: backwards compatibility means "word" = 16 bits
  - Lots of these in typical code
- movb src, dst
  - Move 1-byte "byte"
- movw src, dst
  - Move 2-byte "word"

- movl src, dst
  - Move 4-byte "long word"
- movq src, dst
  - Move 8-byte "quad word"
  - Native size for x86-64

Note: Instructions *must* be used with properly-sized register names And they're also a helpful hint about the sizes being used

# Operand Types (src and dst)

- Immediate: Constant integer data
  - Examples: \$0x400, \$-533
  - Like C literal, but prefixed with `\$'
  - Encoded with 1, 2, 4, or 8 bytes *depending on the instruction*
- **Register:** 1 of 16 integer registers
  - Examples: %rax, %r13
  - But %rsp reserved for special use
  - Others have special uses for particular instructions

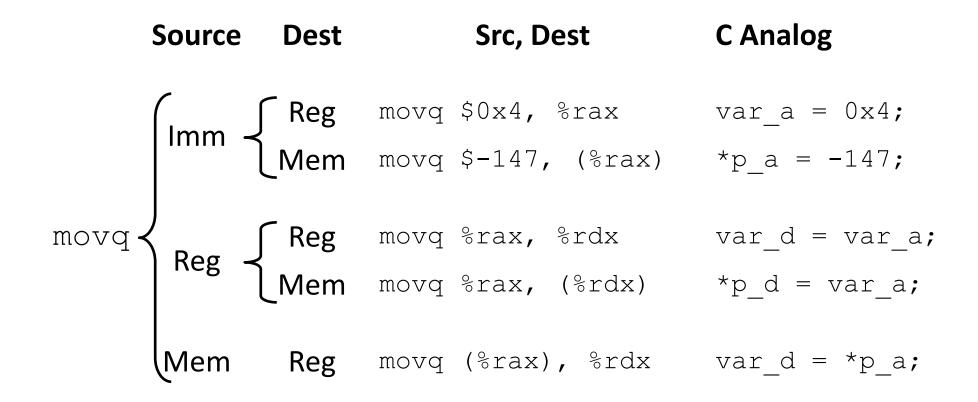
- %rax %rcx %rdx %rbx %rsi %rdi %rsp %rbp %rN (r8-r15)
- **Memory:** Consecutive bytes of memory at a computed address
  - Simplest example: (%rax) treats value of %rax as an address  $\rightarrow$  access memory
  - Various other "address modes" we'll talk about later

## **MOV Operand Combinations**

Cannot do memory-memory transfer with a single instruction

How would you do it?

## **MOV Operand Combinations**

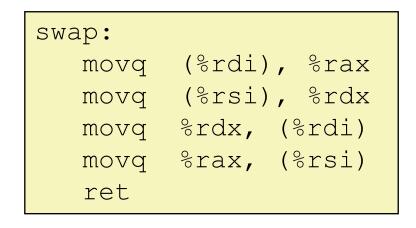


Cannot do memory-memory transfer with a single instruction

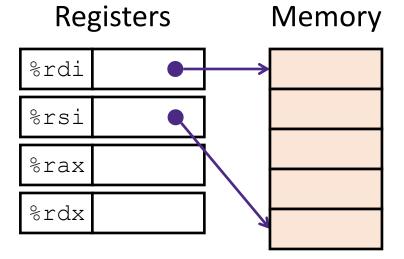
How would you do it? 1) Mem->Reg, 2) Reg->Mem

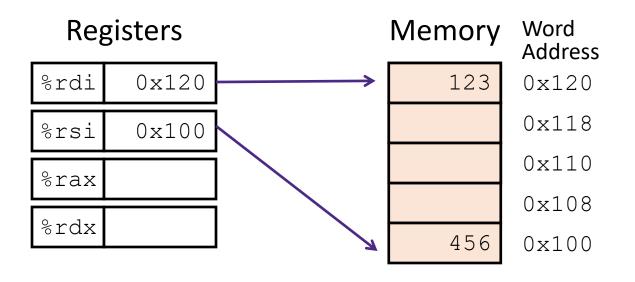
```
void swap(long* xp, long* yp)
{
  long t0 = *xp;
  long t1 = *yp;
  *xp = t1;
  *yp = t0;
}
```

```
RegisterVariable%rdi⇔xp%rsi⇔yp%rax⇔t0%rdx⇔t1
```

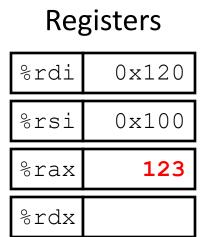


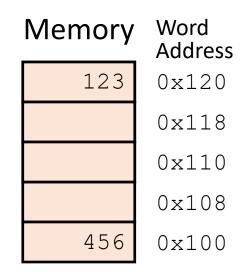
#### Initial state:





```
swap:
    movq (%rdi), %rax # t0 = *xp
    movq (%rsi), %rdx # t1 = *yp
    movq %rdx, (%rdi) # *xp = t1
    movq %rax, (%rsi) # *yp = t0
    ret
```



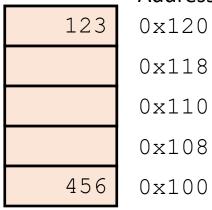


```
swap:
    movq (%rdi), %rax # t0 = *xp
    movq (%rsi), %rdx # t1 = *yp
    movq %rdx, (%rdi) # *xp = t1
    movq %rax, (%rsi) # *yp = t0
    ret
```

## Registers

%rsi %rax	0x100
%rdx	456

# Memory Word Address

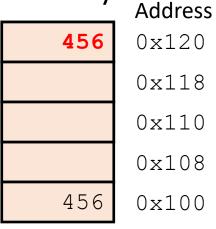


```
swap:
    movq (%rdi), %rax # t0 = *xp
    movq (%rsi), %rdx # t1 = *yp
    movq %rdx, (%rdi) # *xp = t1
    movq %rax, (%rsi) # *yp = t0
    ret
```

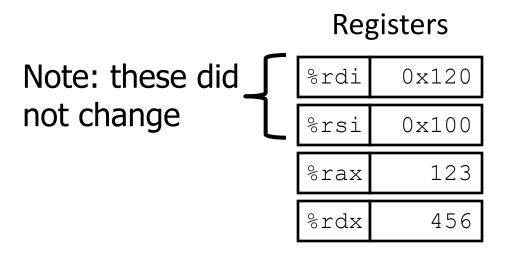
#### Registers

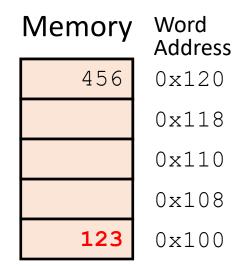
%rdi	0x120
%rsi	0x100
%rax	123
%rdx	456

## Memory Word



```
swap:
    movq (%rdi), %rax # t0 = *xp
    movq (%rsi), %rdx # t1 = *yp
    movq %rdx, (%rdi) # *xp = t1
    movq %rax, (%rsi) # *yp = t0
    ret
```





```
swap:
  movq (%rdi), %rax # t0 = *xp
  movq (%rsi), %rdx # t1 = *yp
  movq %rdx, (%rdi) # *xp = t1
  movq %rax, (%rsi) # *yp = t0
  ret
```

## Break + Open Question

How does the number of available registers affect a system?

• What if x86-64 only had two registers?

• What if x86-64 instead had 512 registers?

## Break + Open Question

- How does the number of available registers affect a system?
  - What if x86-64 only had two registers?
    - "Register Pressure" becomes a problem
    - Accessing 3+ things at once requires memory
    - Way more memory reads/writes
  - What if x86-64 instead had 512 registers?
    - Most of the registers would never be used
      - For any realistic program
    - Could have spent that silicon on something more important

## **Outline**

Assembly Languages

Registers

- x86-64 Assembly
  - Introduction
  - Move Instruction
  - Memory Addressing Modes

## Memory Addressing Modes: Basic

- Common need: interact with memory
  - Exact address might be made of multiple parts
- Indirect: (R) Mem[Reg[R]]
  - Data in register R specifies the memory address
  - Like pointer dereference in C
  - Example: movq (%rcx), %rax
- Displacement: D(R) Mem[Reg[R]+D]
  - Data in register R specifies the *start* of some memory region
  - Constant displacement D specifies the offset from that address
  - Example: movq 8(%rbp), %rdx

## Complete Memory Addressing Modes

#### General:

- D(Rb,Ri,S) Mem[Reg[Rb]+Reg[Ri]\*S+D]
  - Rb: Base register (any register)
  - Ri: Index register (any register except %rsp)
  - S: Scale factor (1, 2, 4, 8) why these numbers?
  - D: Constant displacement value (a.k.a. immediate)

# Sizes of common C types!

## Special cases (see textbook Figure 3.3 or next slide)

- D(Rb,Ri) Mem[Reg[Rb]+Reg[Ri]+D] (S=1)
- (Rb,Ri,S) Mem[Reg[Rb]+Reg[Ri]\*S] (D=0)
- (Rb, Ri) Mem[Reg[Rb]+Reg[Ri]] (S=1, D=0)
- (,Ri,S) Mem[Reg[Ri]\*S] (Rb=0,D=0)

## Full list of addressing mode forms

Туре	Form	Operand value	Name
Immediate	\$Imm	Imm	Immediate
Register	$\mathbf{r}_a$	$R[r_a]$	Register
Memory	Imm	M[Imm]	Absolute
Memory	(r <sub>a</sub> )	$M[R[r_a]]$	Indirect
Memory	$Imm(r_b)$	$M[Imm + R[r_b]]$	Base + displacement
Memory	$(r_b, r_i)$	$M[R[r_b] + R[r_i]]$	Indexed
Memory	$Imm(r_b, r_i)$	$M[Imm + R[r_b] + R[r_i]]$	Indexed
Memory	$(\mathbf{r}_i, \mathbf{s})$	$M[R[r_i] \cdot s]$	Scaled indexed
Memory	$Imm(,r_i,s)$	$M[Imm + R[r_i] \cdot s]$	Scaled indexed
Memory	$(\mathbf{r}_b, \mathbf{r}_i, s)$	$M[R[r_b] + R[r_i] \cdot s]$	Scaled indexed
Memory	$Imm(r_b, r_i, s)$	$M[Imm + R[r_b] + R[r_i] \cdot s]$	Scaled indexed

Figure 3.3 Operand forms. Operands can denote immediate (constant) values, register values, or values from memory. The scaling factor s must be either 1, 2, 4, or 8.

%rdx	0xf000
%rcx	0x0100

Expression	Address Computation	Address
0x8(%rdx)		
(%rdx,%rcx)		
(%rdx,%rcx,4)		
0x80(,%rdx,2)		

%rdx	0xf000
%rcx	0x0100

Expression	Address Computation	Address
0x8(%rdx)	%rdx + 0x8	0xf008
(%rdx,%rcx)		
(%rdx,%rcx,4)		
0x80(,%rdx,2)		

%rdx	0xf000
%rcx	0x0100

Expression	Address Computation	Address
0x8(%rdx)	%rdx + 0x8	0xf008
(%rdx,%rcx)	%rdx + %rcx*1	0xf100
(%rdx,%rcx,4)		
0x80(,%rdx,2)		

%rdx	0xf000
%rcx	0x0100

Expression	Address Computation	Address
0x8(%rdx)	%rdx + 0x8	0xf008
(%rdx,%rcx)	%rdx + %rcx*1	0xf100
(%rdx,%rcx,4)	%rdx + %rcx*4	0xf400
0x80(,%rdx,2)		

%rdx	0xf000
%rcx	0x0100

Expression	Address Computation	Address
0x8(%rdx)	%rdx + 0x8	0xf008
(%rdx,%rcx)	%rdx + %rcx*1	0xf100
(%rdx,%rcx,4)	%rdx + %rcx*4	0xf400
0x80(,%rdx,2)	%rdx*2 + 0x80	0x1e080

## **Outline**

Assembly Languages

Registers

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