The Microprocessor

The microprocessor is often considered the "brain" of a computer because it plays a central role in managing and coordinating all the operations and activities within the system. Here's why it is important to the other parts of a computer:

1. **Central Processing Unit (CPU)**: The microprocessor is the heart of the CPU, responsible for executing instructions from programs. It processes data, controls other components, and performs calculations, which are essential for the functioning of any computer.
2. **Memory (RAM and ROM)**: The microprocessor communicates with memory to retrieve and store data. It uses RAM for temporary data storage while executing programs and ROM for permanent storage of firmware. The performance of the microprocessor directly influences how quickly data can be accessed from memory.
3. **Input/Output (I/O) Devices**: The microprocessor manages the data exchange between the computer and I/O devices (e.g., keyboard, mouse, printer, display). It sends and receives signals to/from these devices, enabling user interaction with the computer.
4. **Storage Devices (Hard Drive, SSD, etc.)**: The microprocessor coordinates with storage devices to load and save data. When you open a file or install software, the microprocessor reads from or writes to storage, ensuring the correct operation of the system.
5. **Motherboard**: The microprocessor is installed on the motherboard, and the motherboard provides the necessary connections between the microprocessor and other components like memory, storage, and I/O devices. It serves as the backbone that allows the microprocessor to interact with other parts of the computer.
6. **Graphics Processing Unit (GPU)**: While the GPU handles graphical computations and rendering, the microprocessor works in tandem with the GPU to perform tasks that require heavy computation, like video processing, gaming, or machine learning. In modern systems, the CPU and GPU often share tasks and data to improve performance.
7. **Power Supply**: The power supply ensures that the microprocessor and all other components receive the necessary electrical power to function. Without a properly functioning power supply, the microprocessor cannot operate.

What is the microprocessor

A microprocessor is a small computer contained on an integrated circuit, also called a semiconductor chip or microchip. It can function as the “brain” of a personal desktop computer. A computer’s microprocessor performs arithmetic and logic operations, provides temporary memory storage, and times and regulates all elements of the computer system. Microprocessors are used in many other electronic devices, including cell phones, kitchen appliances, automobile emission-control and timing devices, electronic games, telephone switching systems, thermal controls in the home, and security systems.

Modern microprocessors combine millions of small transistors, resistors and diodes assembled on a semiconductor material to create the key components of a CPU. These components are arranged into various types of unique computer architecture to perform computations and run instructions. An average microprocessor's functions can be broken down into four main steps.

Key microprocessor steps

1. **Fetch:** The microprocessor retrieves (or "fetches") instructions from computer memory. The fetch process can be initiated by automatic or manual input.
2. **Decode:** The microprocessor "decodes" the instructions, essentially interpreting the input or command into a request and instigating a specific process or computation.
3. **Execute:** Simply put, the microprocessor performs the required or requested operation.
4. **Store:** The result of the execution is committed to the computer’s memory.

Microprocessor components

Microprocessors can complete these processes by combining the main components of a CPU into a singular circuit. The key components of a microprocessor are the following:

- **Arithmetic logic unit (ALU)**: The main logic unit of the CPU, this component performs logical operations, including mathematical calculations and data comparisons.
- **Control unit (CU):** The CU circuit interprets instructions and initiates their execution, directing the processor's basic operations.
- **Registers:** Registers provide small, fast memory storage used by a CPU to temporarily hold data and instructions during computational processes.
- **Cache memory:** Microprocessors and CPUs use cache memory, a high-speed form of memory located close to the CPU, to store frequently accessed data to accelerate performance.
- **Busses and bus interfaces:** Bus interfaces provide entry and exit points for data to travel across various groups of wires (referred to as busses), such as the address bus or data bus.

Busses and interfaces physically connect different internal components, enabling and facilitating communication within the CPU and other peripherals like input/output (I/O) units.

- **Transistors:** One of the main building blocks of ICs, transistors are small semiconductors that regulate, amplify and generate electrical currents and signals. They can also act as simple switches or be combined to form logic gates. The number of transistors is a common indicator of microprocessor power.

- **Processor cores:** Individual processing units within microprocessors are known as cores. Modern processors frequently incorporate multiple cores (dual-core, quad-core) allowing for parallel processing by enabling the performance of multiple tasks simultaneously.

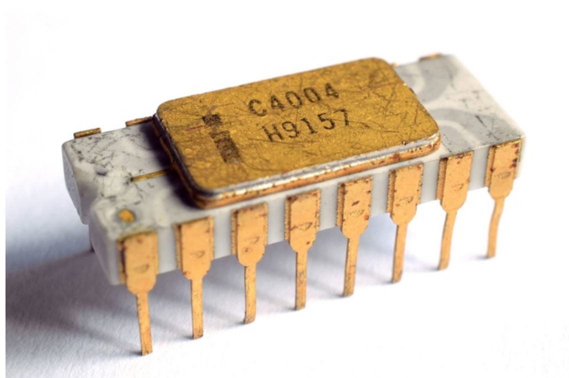
- **Clock:** Although not all microprocessors contain an internal clock, they are all clock driven. Some rely on external clock chips, which are known for improved accuracy. Whether internal or external, a microprocessor's clock cycle determines the frequency at which it will carry out commands. Modern clock speeds are measured in megahertz (MHz) and gigahertz (GHz).

Evolution of Microprocessors

1. First Generation – 4bit Microprocessors

The Intel corporation came out with the first generation of microprocessors in 1971. They were 4-bit processors namely Intel 4004. The speed of the processor was 740 kHz taking 60k instructions per second. It had 2300 transistors and 16 pins inside.

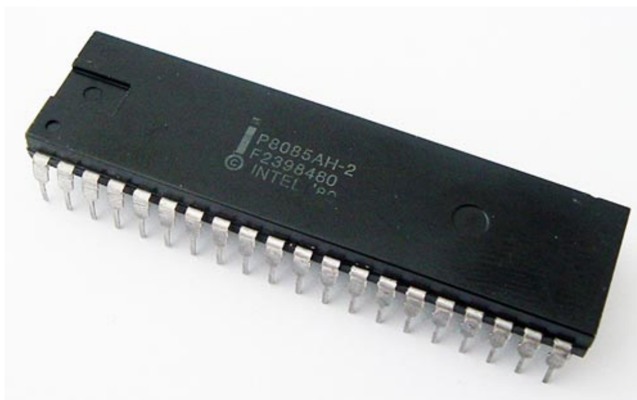
Built on a single chip, it was useful for simple arithmetic and logical operations. A control unit was there to understand the instructions from memory and execute the tasks.



2. Second Generation – 8bit Microprocessor

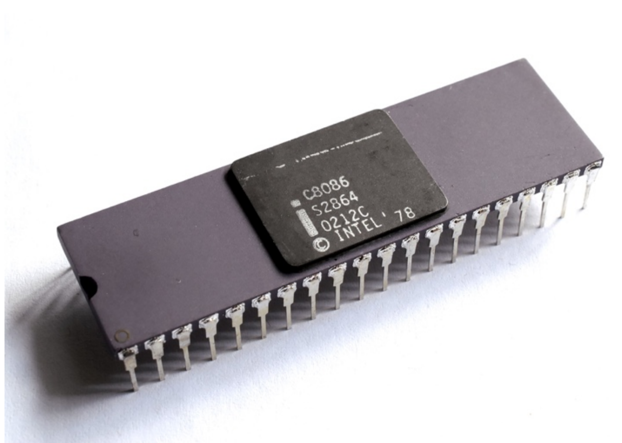
The second generation began in 1973 by Intel as the first 8 – bit microprocessor. It was useful for arithmetic and logic operations on 8-bit words. The first processor was 8008 with a clock speed of 500kHz and 50k instructions per second.

Followed by an 8080 microprocessor in 1974 with a speed of 2 MHz and 60k instruction per second. Lastly came the 8085 microprocessor in 1976 having an ability of 769230 instruction per second with 3 MHz speed.



3. Third Generation – 16bit Microprocessor

The third generation began with 8086-88 microprocessors in 1978 with 4.77, 8 & 10 MHz speed and 2.5 million instructions per second. Other important inventions were Zilog Z800, and 80286, which came out in 1982 and could read 4 million instructions per second with 68 pins inside.



4. Fourth Generation – 32bit Microprocessors

Intel was still the leader as many companies came out with 32-bit microprocessors around 1986. Their clock speed was between 16 MHz to 33 MHz with 275k transistors inside.

One of the first ones was the Intel 80486 microprocessor of 1986 with 16-100MHz clock speed and 1.2 Million transistors with 8 KB of cache memory. Followed by the PENTIUM microprocessor in 1993 which had 66 MHz clock speed and 8-bit of cache memory.

5. Fifth Generation – 64bit Microprocessors

Began in 1995, the Pentium processor was one of the first 64-bit processors with 1.2 GHz to 3 GHz clock speed. There were 291 Million transistors and 64kb instruction per second.

Followed by i3, i5, i7 microprocessors in 2007, 2009, 2010 respectively. These were some of the key points of this generation.

Different Microprocessor specifications

Microprocessor	Year	Word Length	Memory	Pins	Clock
4004	1971	4-bit	1 KB	16	750kHz
8085	1976	8-bit	64 KB	40	3-6 MHz
8086	1978	16-bit	1MB	40	5-8 MHz
80286	1982	16-bit	16MB real 4 GB virtual	68	6-12.5 MHz
80386	1985	32-bit	4GB real 64TB virtual	132 14X14 PGA	20-33 MHz
80486	1989	32-bit	4GB real 64TB virtual	168 17X17 PGA	25-100 MHz
Pentium	1993	32-bit	4GB real 32-bit address	237 PGA	60-200

			64-bit data bus		
Pentium Pro	1995	32-bit	64GB real 36-bit address bus	387 PGA	150-200 MHz
Pentium II	1997	32-bit	–	–	233-400 MHz
Pentium III	1999	32-bit	64GB	370 PGA	600-1.3 MHz
Pentium 4	2000	32-bit	64GB	423 PGA	600-1.3 GHz
Itanium	2001	64-bit	64 address lines	423 PGA	733 MHz-1.3 GHz

Word Length

The **word length** of a microprocessor is the number of bits it can process in a single operation or instruction. Common word lengths include **4-bit, 8-bit, 16-bit, 32-bit, and 64-bit**.

Memory

The **memory** associated with a microprocessor refers to the amount of data the processor can directly access and manage. It includes various types like main memory (RAM), cache memory, and virtual memory.

Pins

The **pins** of a microprocessor are physical connectors that facilitate communication between the processor and the external world, including memory, peripherals, and other components.

Clock

The **clock** of a microprocessor refers to the timing signal used to synchronize its operations. It is measured in Hertz (Hz), with modern processors operating in **megahertz (MHz)** or **gigahertz (GHz)**.

Microprocessor Architecture:

- **CISC (Complex Instruction Set Computing):**
  - Examples: Intel x86 series, AMD processors.
  - Characteristics: Rich instruction set, easier programming.
- **RISC (Reduced Instruction Set Computing):**
  - Examples: ARM processors, Apple M1/M2.
  - Characteristics: Simpler instructions, higher efficiency, and speed.
- **Hybrid Architectures:**
  - Combine features of CISC and RISC.
  - Examples: Modern Intel and AMD processors.

Microprocessor with robots

The microprocessors are integral components in robots. They serve as the **brain** of a robot, controlling and coordinating its various functions. Here's how microprocessors are used in robotics:

Sensor Integration

Robots often use sensors (e.g., cameras, proximity sensors, accelerometers, gyros, ultrasonic sensors) to perceive their environment. Microprocessors handle data from these sensors, process it, and make decisions on how the robot should react (e.g., avoid obstacles, pick up objects, navigate through a maze).

Decision Making

A robot often needs to make decisions based on the data it receives. Microprocessors can run algorithms (such as artificial intelligence or machine learning models) to analyze sensor data and make real-time decisions, such as recognizing objects, identifying patterns, or responding to changes in the environment.

Communication

Microprocessors are responsible for enabling communication within the robot and with external devices (e.g., remote controls, other robots, or a central system). This can involve wireless communication protocols like Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, or Zigbee, enabling the robot to receive instructions or send status updates.

Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning

More advanced robots use microprocessors to run AI algorithms. These processors may handle machine learning models that enable the robot to learn from its environment and improve its performance over time. For example, robots designed for tasks like speech recognition, object detection, or navigation in dynamic environments often rely on AI, which requires substantial computational power.

Embedded Systems

In many robots, especially small ones like drones, robotic arms, or autonomous vehicles, **microcontrollers** (a type of microprocessor) serve as embedded systems. These embedded microprocessors perform real-time control tasks with low power consumption and small physical footprints, ideal for battery-powered robots.

Real-Time Processing

Many robotic systems need to process information in real-time. Microprocessors are responsible for executing tasks without delay, ensuring that the robot reacts quickly to changes in its environment. For example, in autonomous vehicles, the microprocessor must process data from sensors in real-time to make decisions like braking or steering.

Microprocessor in future

Microprocessors are expected to continue evolving and developing in the future, driven by advances in technology and the growing demands of various industries. Here's a look at how microprocessors might evolve in the future:

Smaller and More Efficient

Faster Performance

Heterogeneous Integration

New Materials and Manufacturing Processes

Security Features

Email (mayas.mohammed@uomus.edu.iq)