

# **CSC 252/452: Computer Organization**

## **Fall 2025: Lecture 1**

Instructor: Yanan Guo

Department of Computer Science  
University of Rochester

### **Action Items:**

- **Get CSUG account**
- **Make sure you have VPN setup!!!!**
- **Sign up for Blackboard & Piazza**

# Outline: Class Introduction

- Introduction
  - What Are You Supposed to Learn in this Class?
  - Action Items
  - Instructor & TAs
  - Class Organization
  - How to Get Help?
  - How Will You Be Evaluated?
  - Policies

Abstraction is good, but don't forget reality

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Problem

Who scores the highest  
on the exam?

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Problem

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Algorithm

Quicksort

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Quicksort

Program

Human-readable  
language (Java, C)

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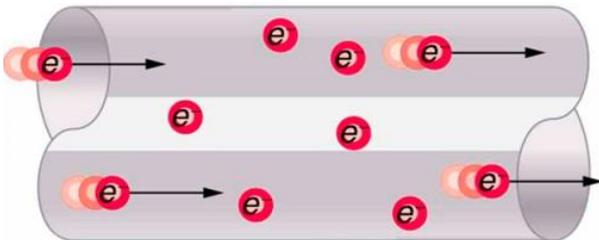
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Circuit

Electrons, Resistors,  
Capacitors, etc.

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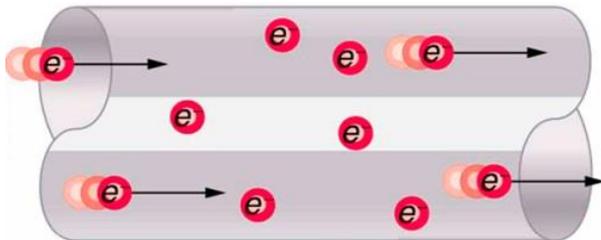
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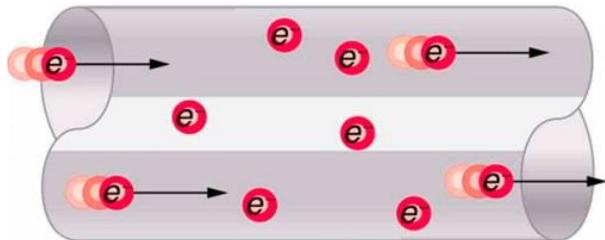
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**CSC 252/452**  
**Computer Systems--**  
**"The Reality"**

Circuit

Electrons, Resistors,  
Capacitors, etc.

# Course Theme:

## (Systems) Knowledge is Power!

- Systems Knowledge
  - How hardware (processors, memories, disk drives) plus software (operating systems, compilers, libraries) combine to support the execution of application programs
  - How you as a programmer can best use these resources
- Useful outcomes from taking 252/452

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  - Prepare for later “systems” classes in CS & ECE
    - Compilers, Operating Systems, Networks, Computer Architecture, etc.

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- Useful outcomes from taking 252/452
  - Prepare for later “systems” classes in CS & ECE
    - Compilers, Operating Systems, Networks, Computer Architecture, etc.
  - Become more effective programmers
    - Able to find and eliminate bugs efficiently
    - Able to understand and tune for program performance

# Reality #1: Data Representations

- You will learn in computers,
  - 2,147,483,647 → 01111111111111111111111111111111
  - 1 → 00000000000000000000000000000001

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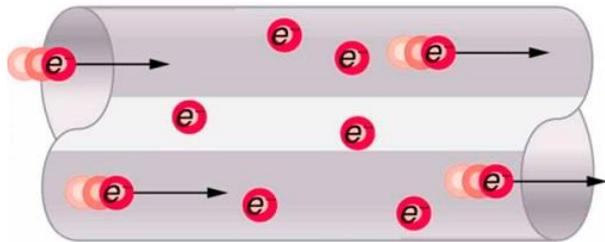
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  - $(x+y)+z = (y+z)+x$  ? Yes and **No**

# Reality #2: Assembly and Processors



Problem

---

Who scores the highest  
on the exam?

Algorithm

---

Quicksort

Program

---

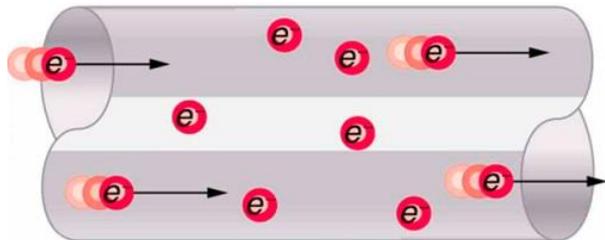
Human-readable  
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Circuit

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Electrons, Resistors,  
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# Reality #2: Assembly and Processors



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Human-readable  
language (Java, C)

Instruction Set  
Architecture

---

Machine Language

Microarchitecture

---

Hardware Design

Circuit

Electrons, Resistors,  
Capacitors, etc.

# Instruction Set Architecture

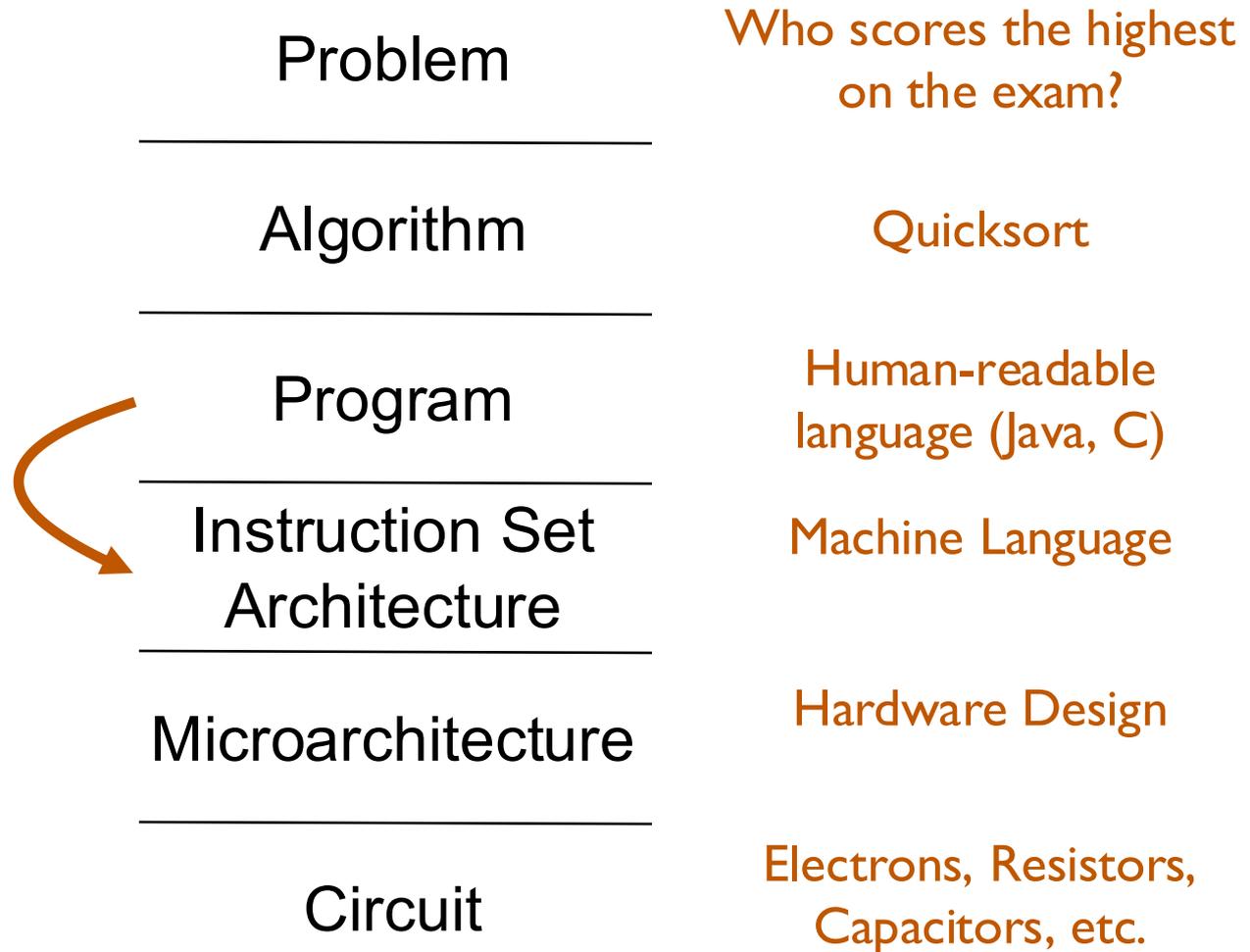
- The programmer's view of the computer is called the “instruction set architecture” (*ISA*)
  - E.g., x86, RICS-V, ARM...

# Two Fundamental Aspects of Computer Systems

Problem	Who scores the highest on the exam?
Algorithm	Quicksort
Program	Human-readable language (Java, C)
Instruction Set Architecture	Machine Language
Microarchitecture	Hardware Design
Circuit	Electrons, Resistors, Capacitors, etc.

# Two Fundamental Aspects of Computer Systems

- How is a human-readable program translated to a representation that computers can understand?



# The “Translation” Process, a.k.a., **Compilation**

## *C Program*

```
void add() {  
    int a = 1;  
    int b = 2;  
    int c = a + b;  
}
```

**Pre-processor  
Compiler**



## *Assembly program*

```
movl    $1, -4(%rbp)  
movl    $2, -8(%rbp)  
movl    -4(%rbp), %eax  
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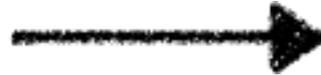
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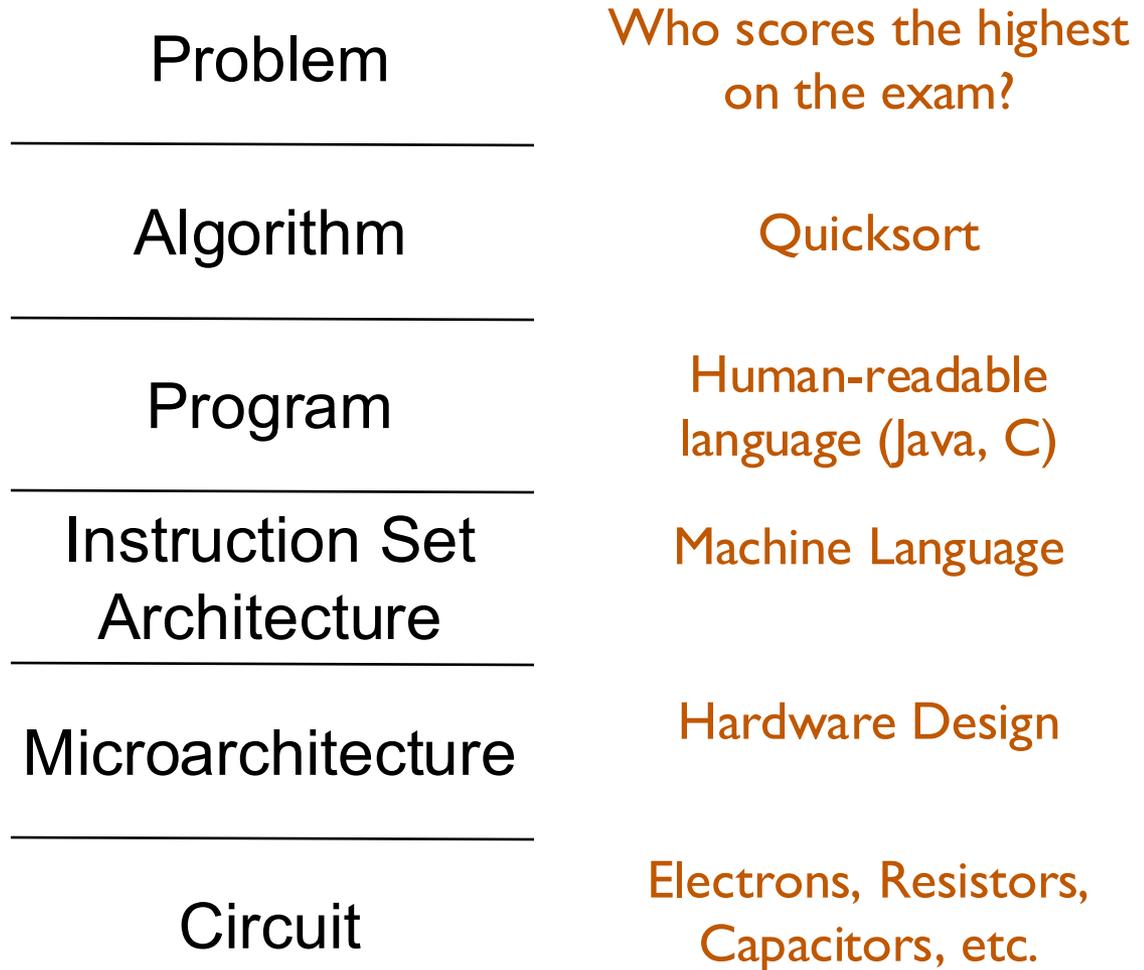
*Executable Binary*

```
00011001 ...
01101010 ...
11010101 ...
01110001 ...
```

- It translates a text file to an executable binary file (a.k.a., executable) consisting of a sequence of **instructions**
- Why binary? Computers understand only 0s and 1s
  - The subject of next lecture

# Back to Layers of Transformation...

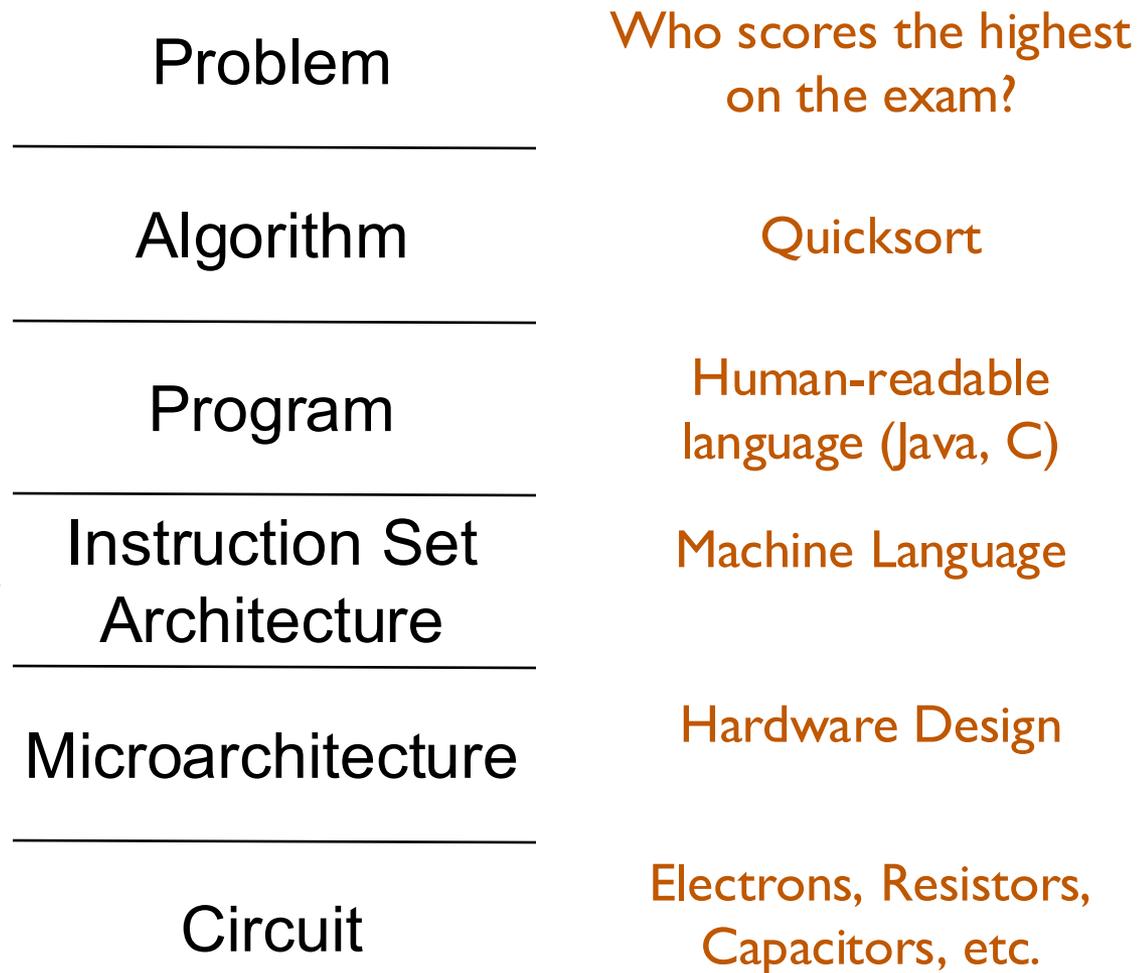
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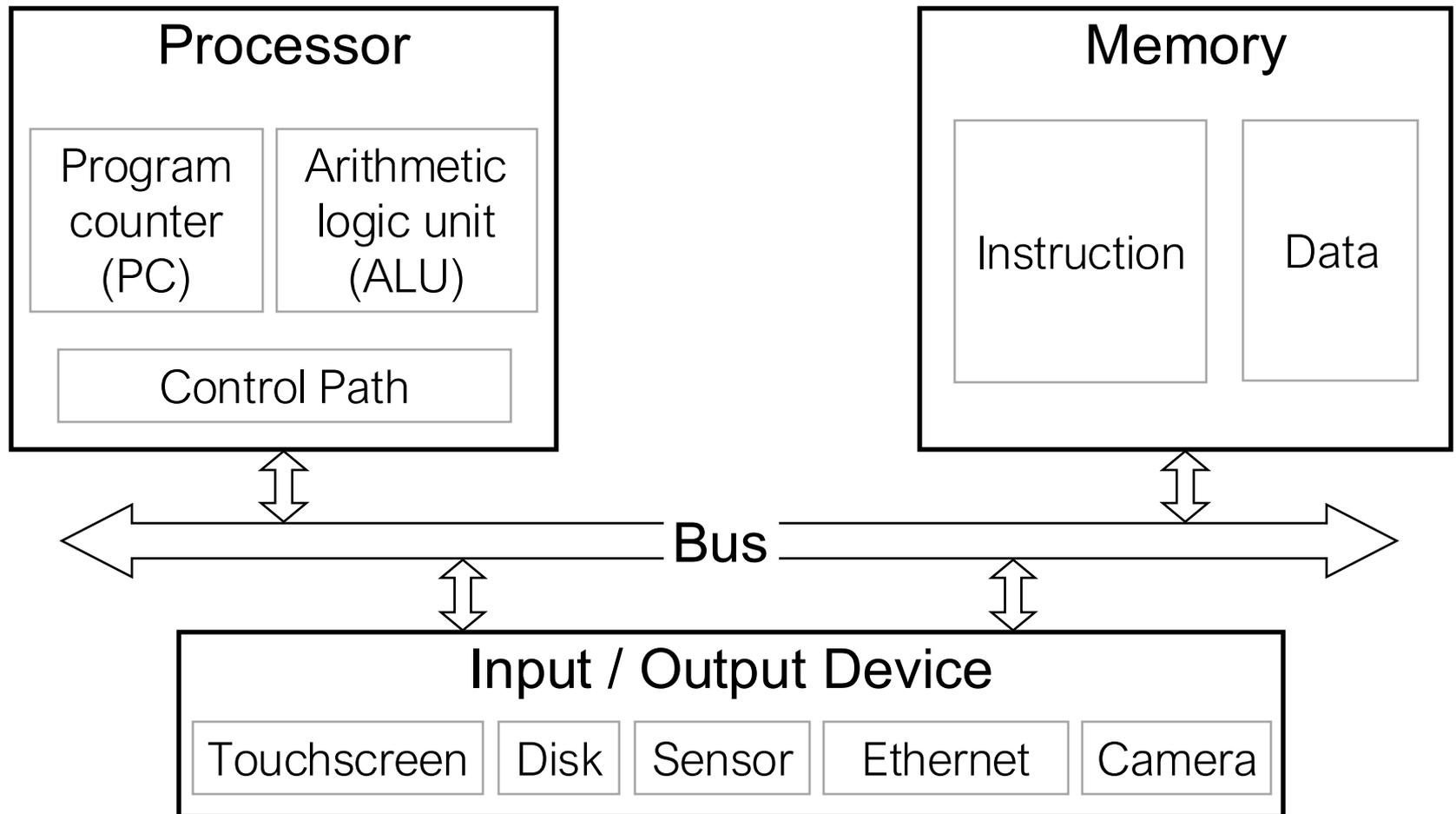
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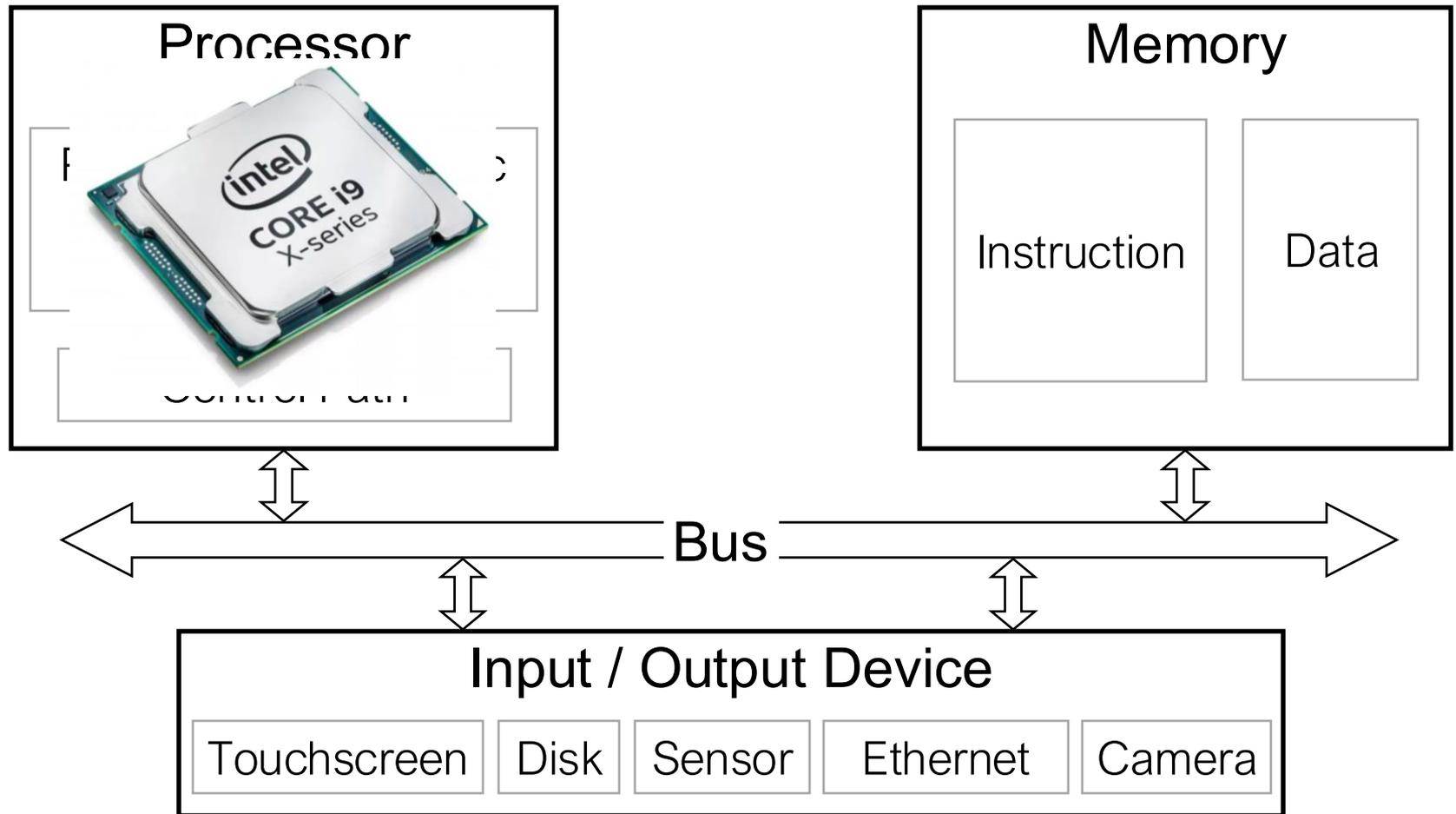
# Instruction Set Architecture

- The programmer's view of the computer is called the “instruction set architecture” (*ISA*)
  - E.g., x86, RICS-V, ARM...
- For programmer: no need to care how the instructions are implemented as long as they are somehow implemented
- Implementation of an ISA is called *microarchitecture*
- ISAs *abstract* away details of microarchitecture

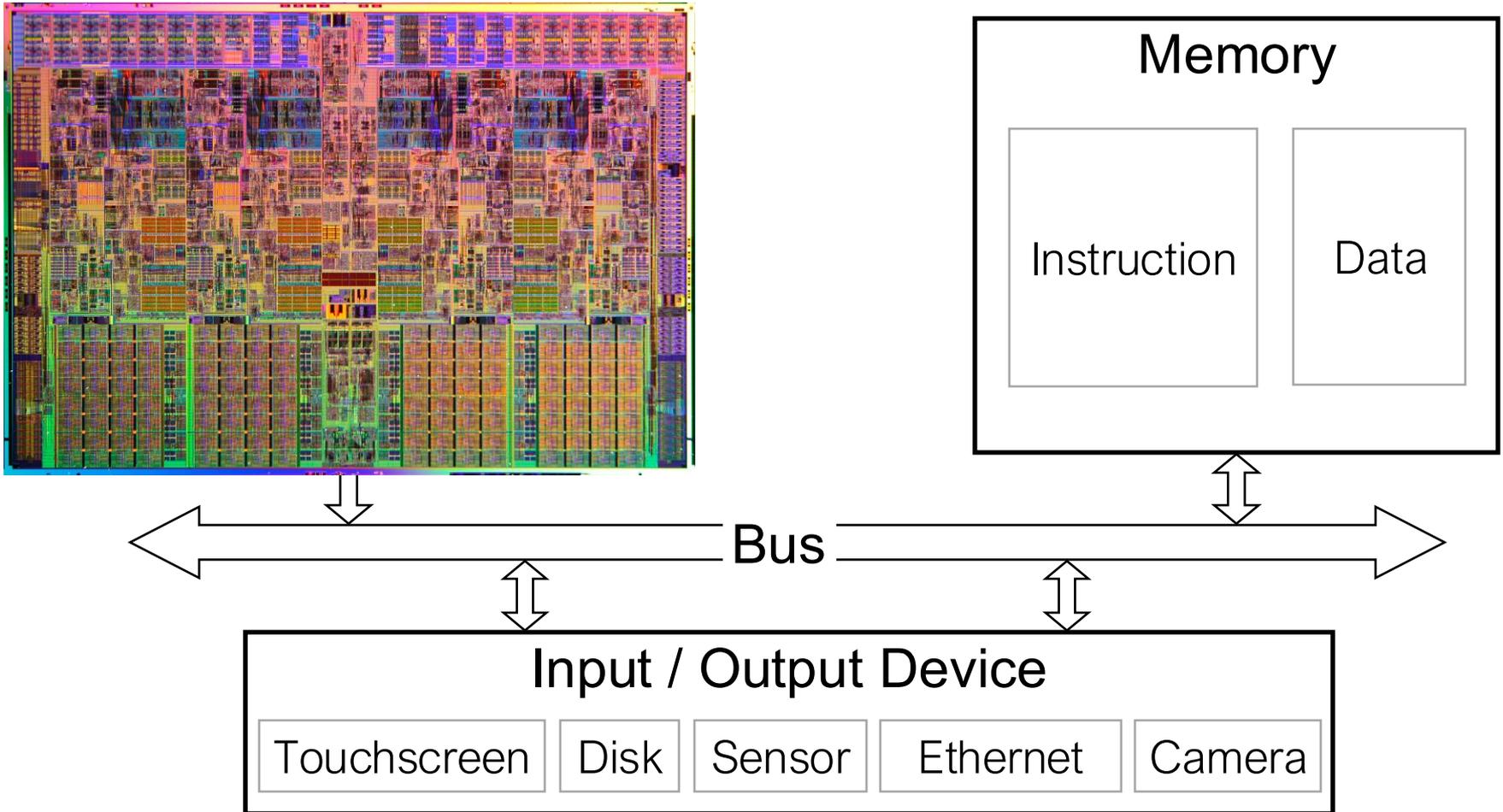
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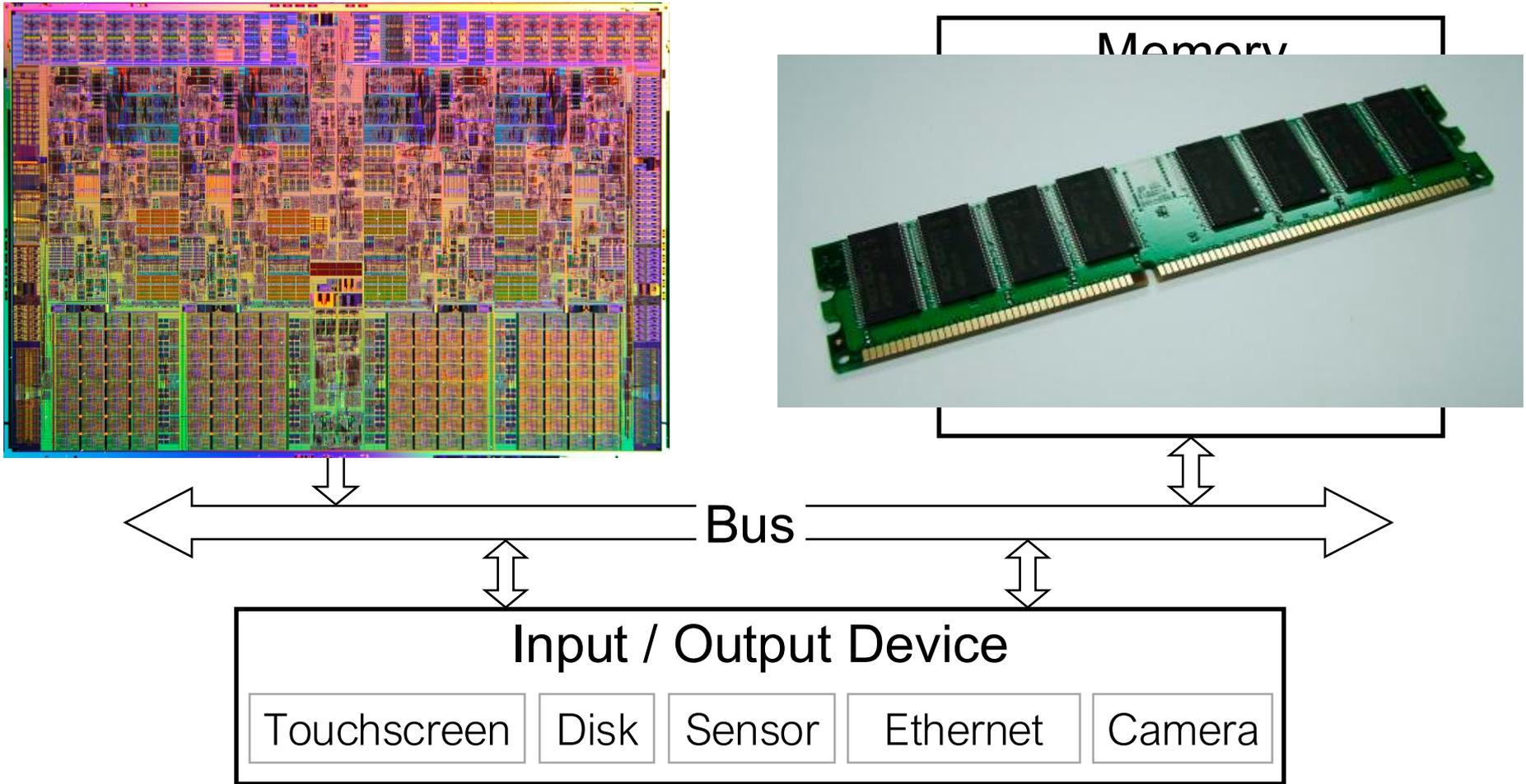
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# The Single Most Important Idea of Computers

- Executables (i.e., instructions) are stored in “memory”
- Processors read instructions from memory and execute instructions one after another

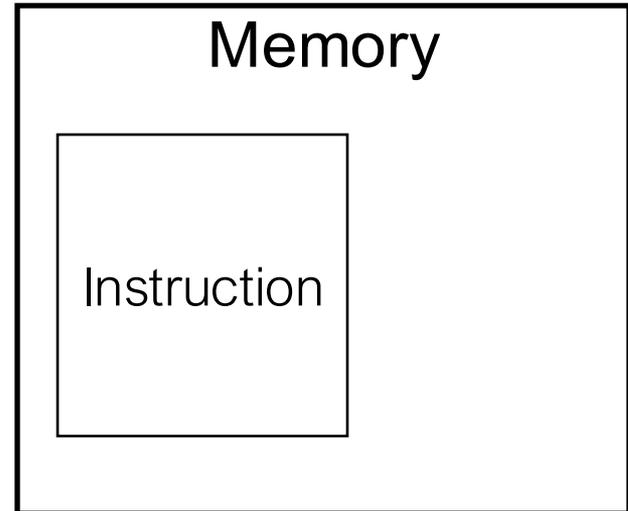
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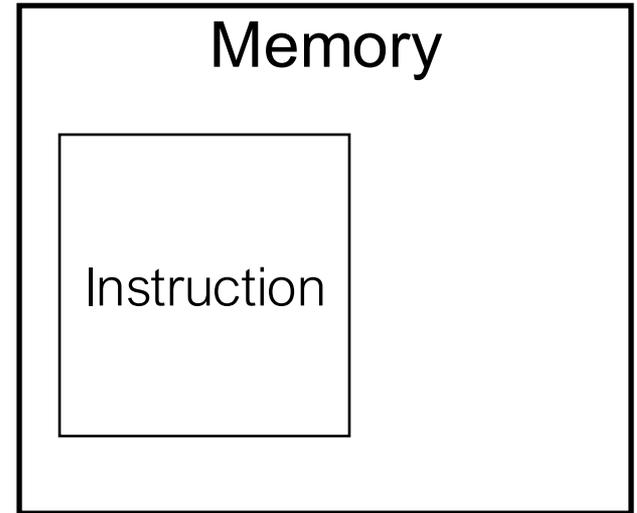
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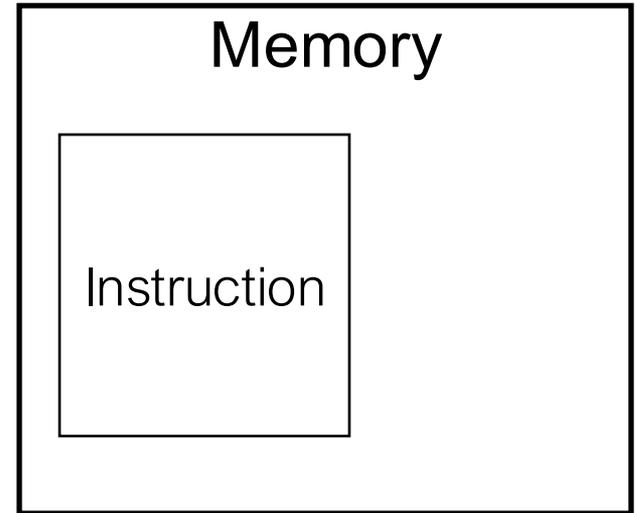
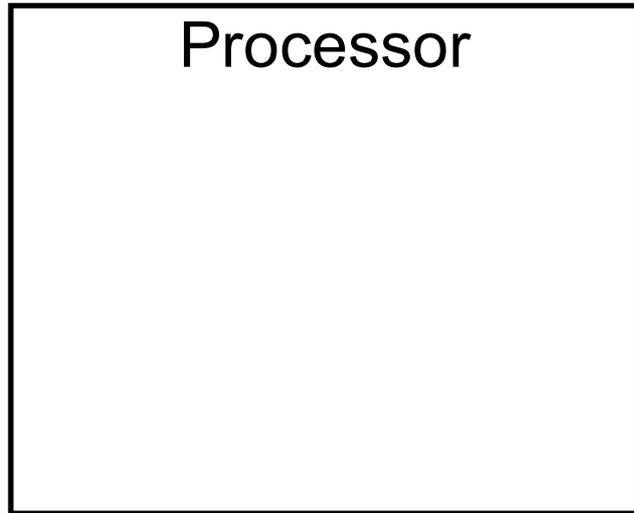
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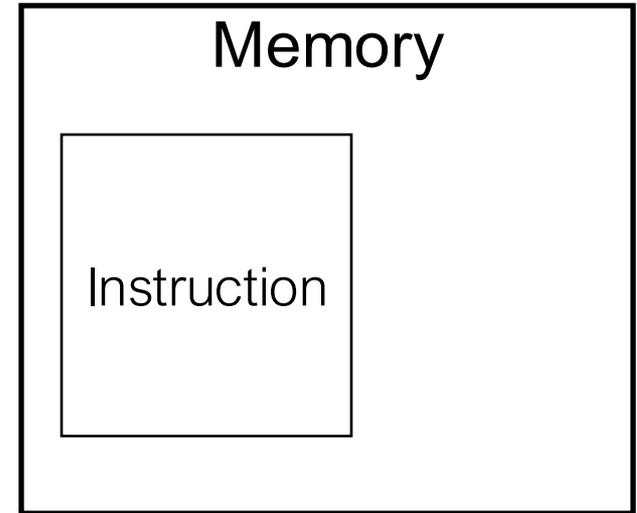
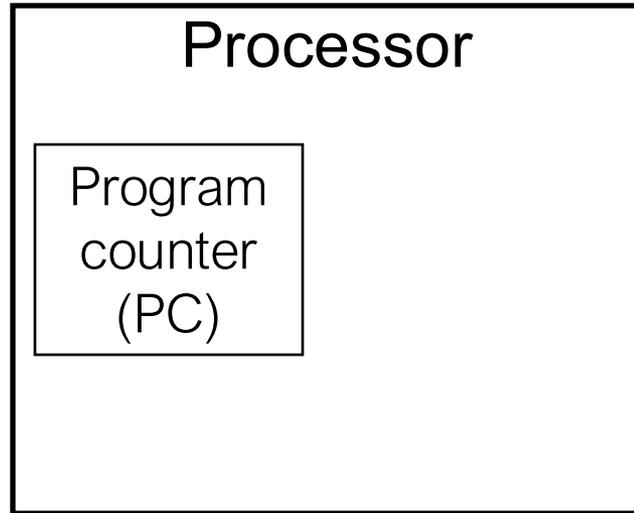
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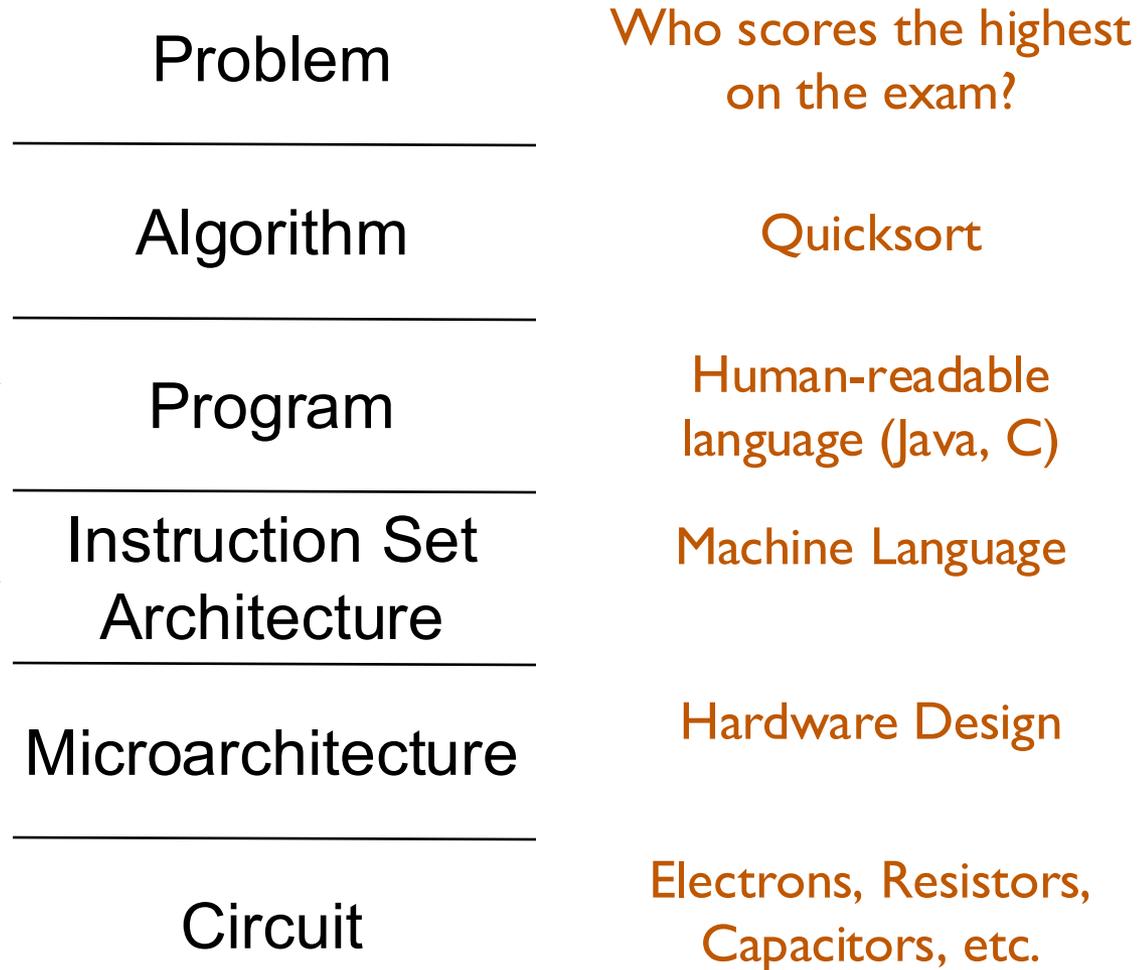
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# Back to Layers of Transformation...

How is a human-readable program translated to a representation that computers can understand?

How does a modern computer execute that program?



# Reality #3: There's more to performance than algorithmic complexity

- **Even exact op count does not predict performance**
  - Easily see 10:1 performance range depending on how code written
  - Must optimize at multiple levels: algorithm, data representations, procedures, and loops
- **Must understand system to optimize performance**
  - How programs compiled and executed
  - How to measure program performance and identify bottlenecks
  - How to improve performance without destroying code modularity and generality

# Memory System Performance Example

```
void copyij(int src[2048][2048],
            int dst[2048][2048])
{
    int i,j;
    for (i = 0; i < 2048; i++)
        for (j = 0; j < 2048; j++)
            dst[i][j] = src[i][j];
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2.0 GHz Intel Core i7 Haswell

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4.3ms

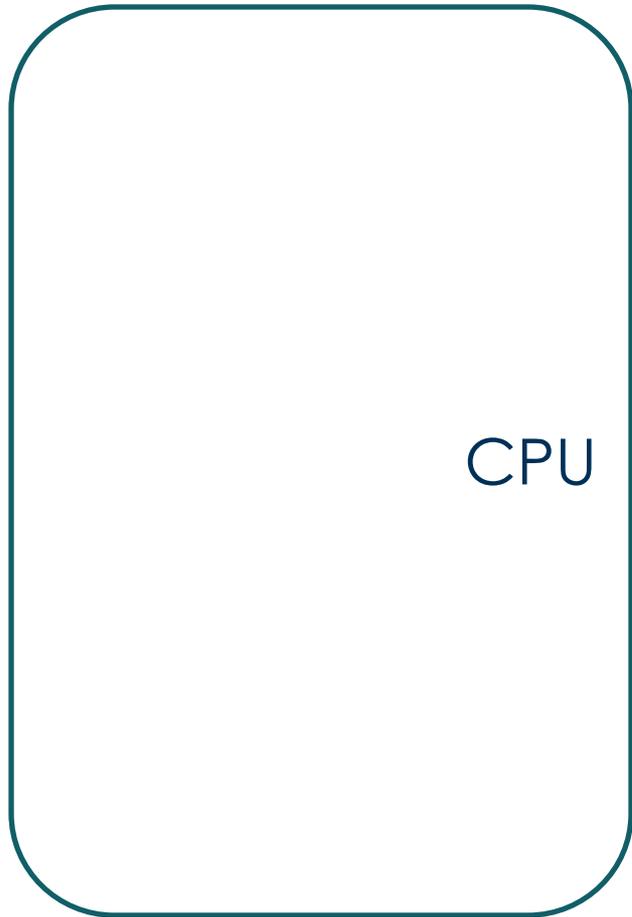
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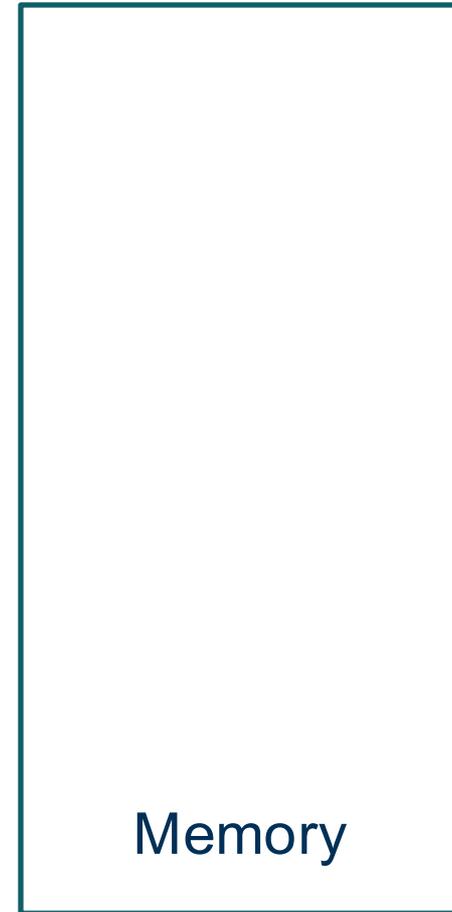
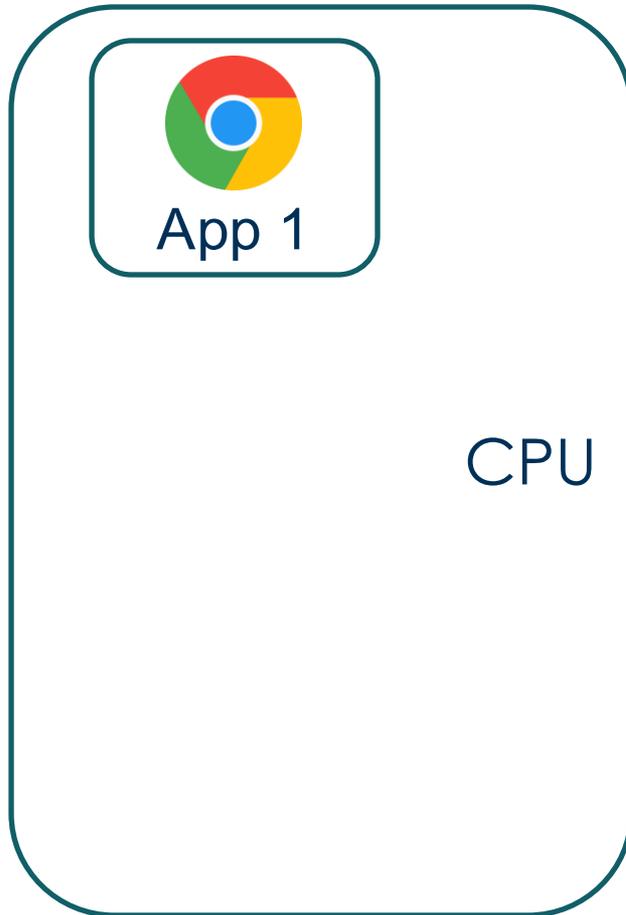
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- Microarchitecture: Hierarchical memory organization
- Performance depends on access patterns
  - Including how step through multi-dimensional array

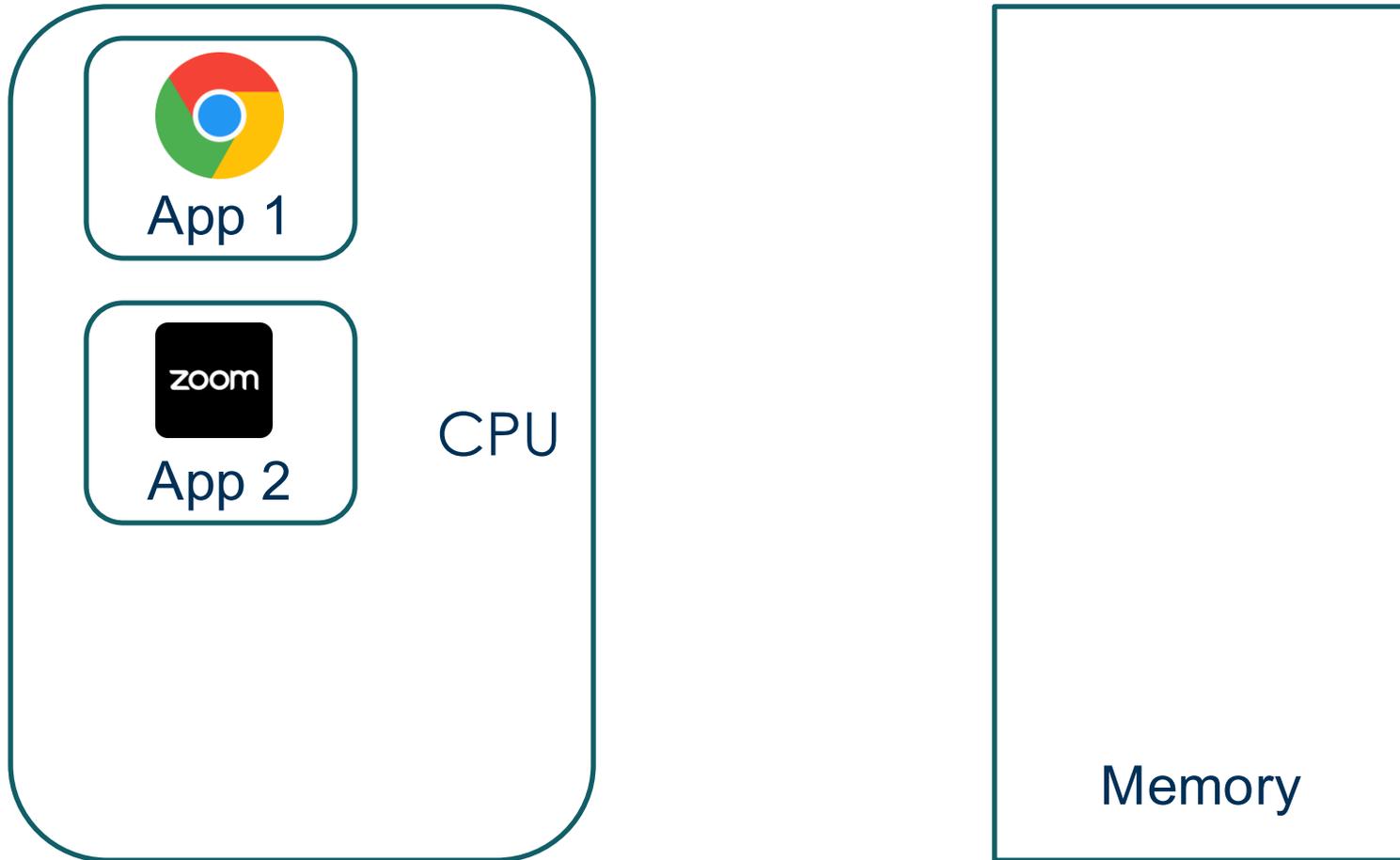
# Reality #4: Processes and Memory Management



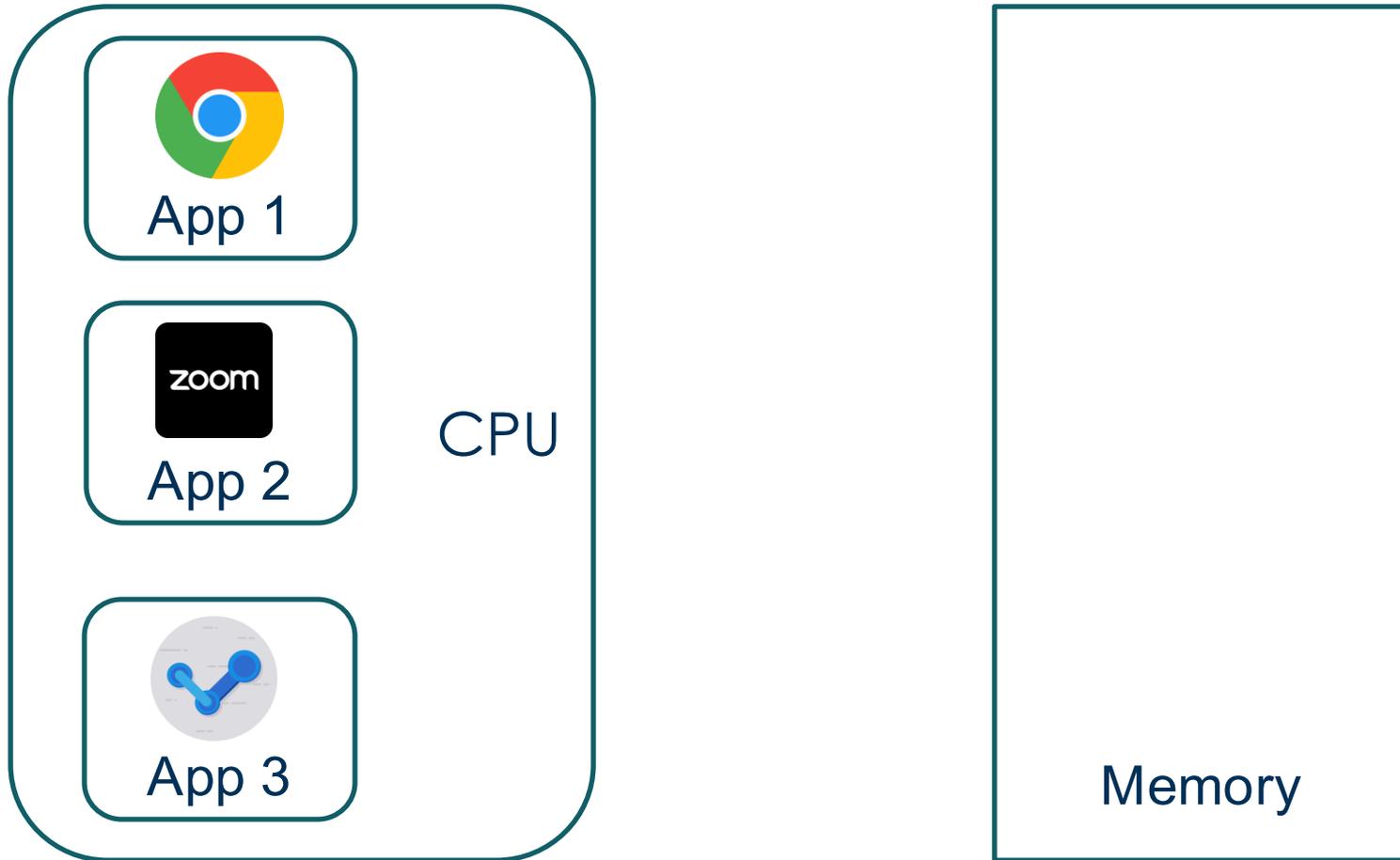
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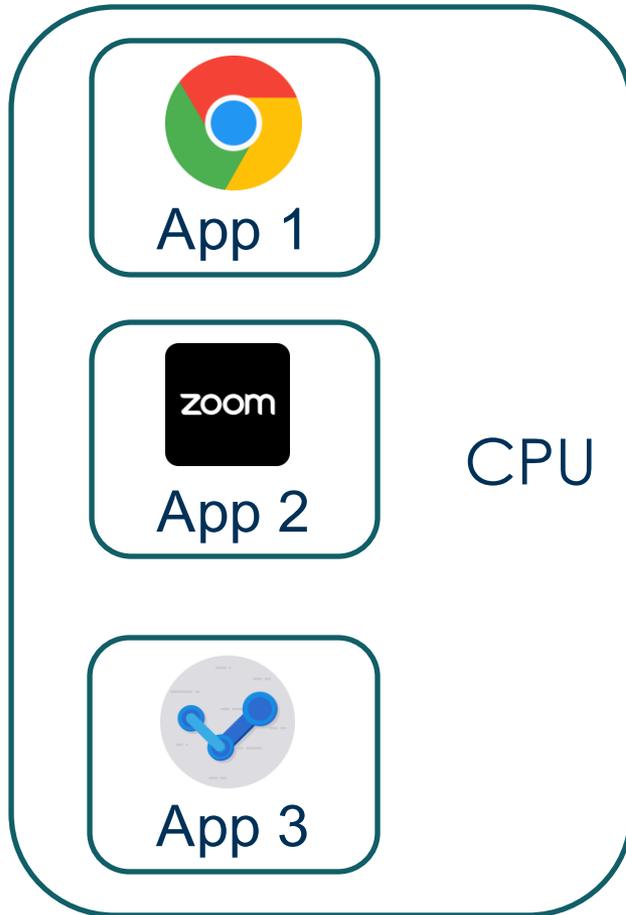
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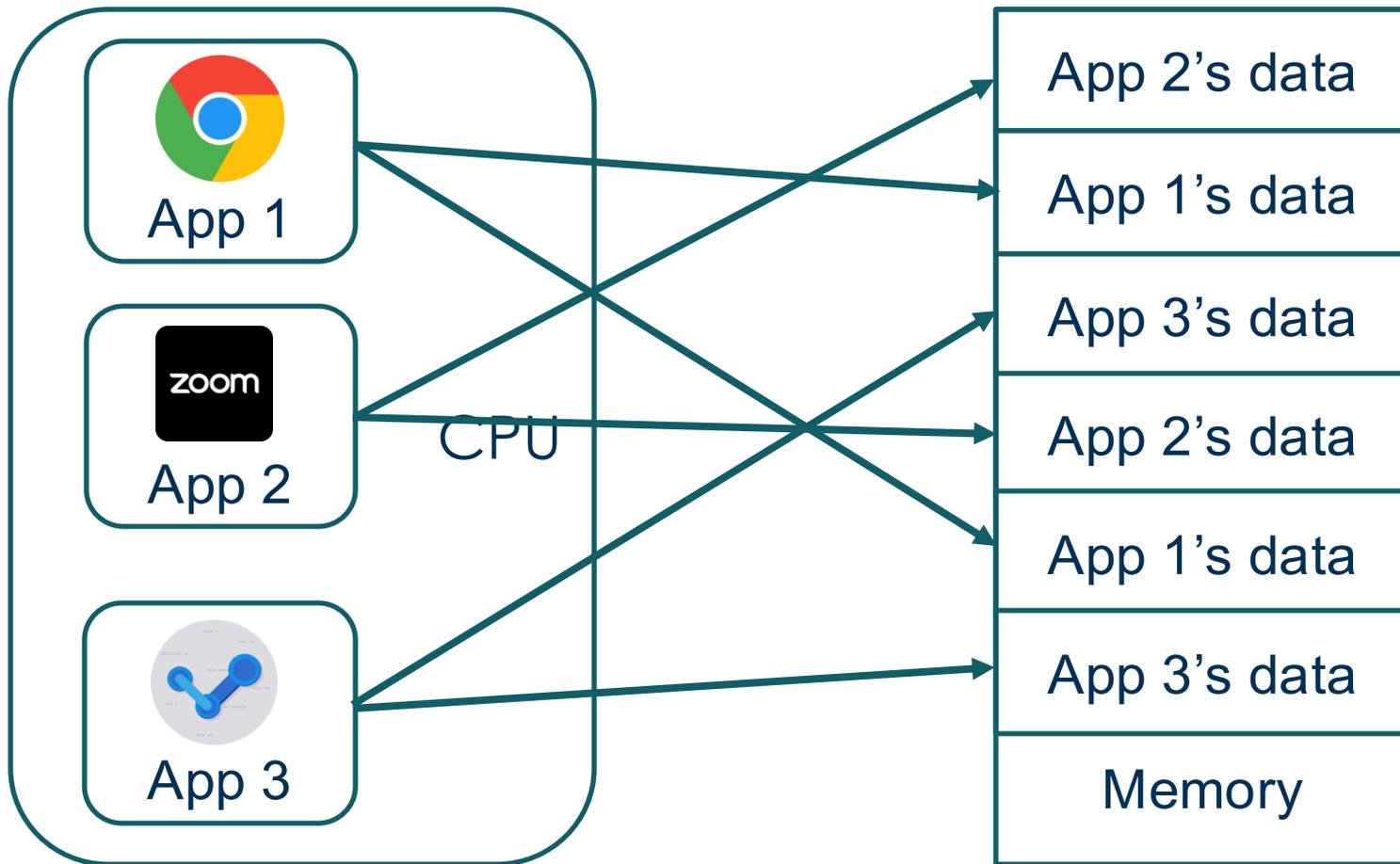
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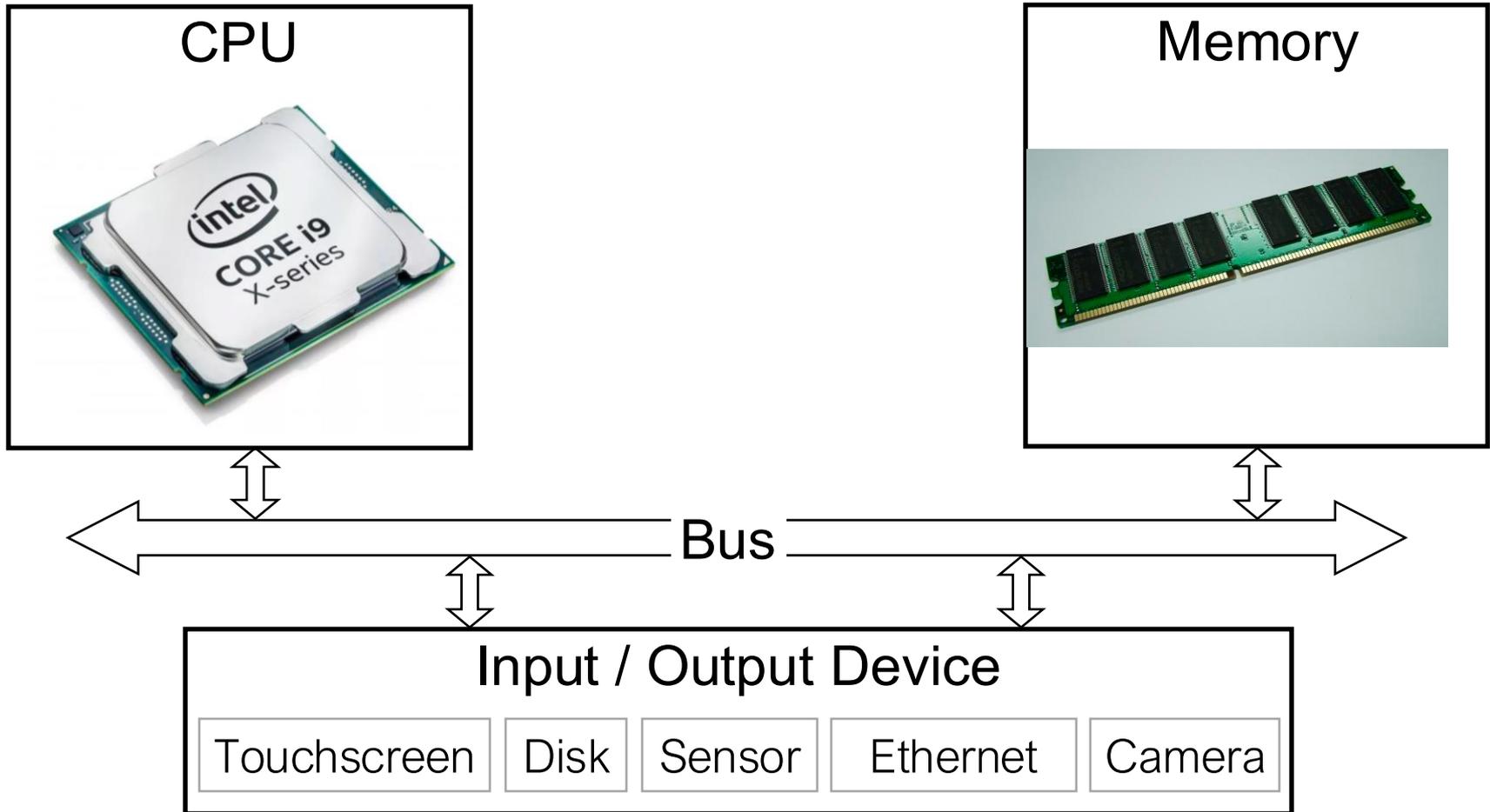
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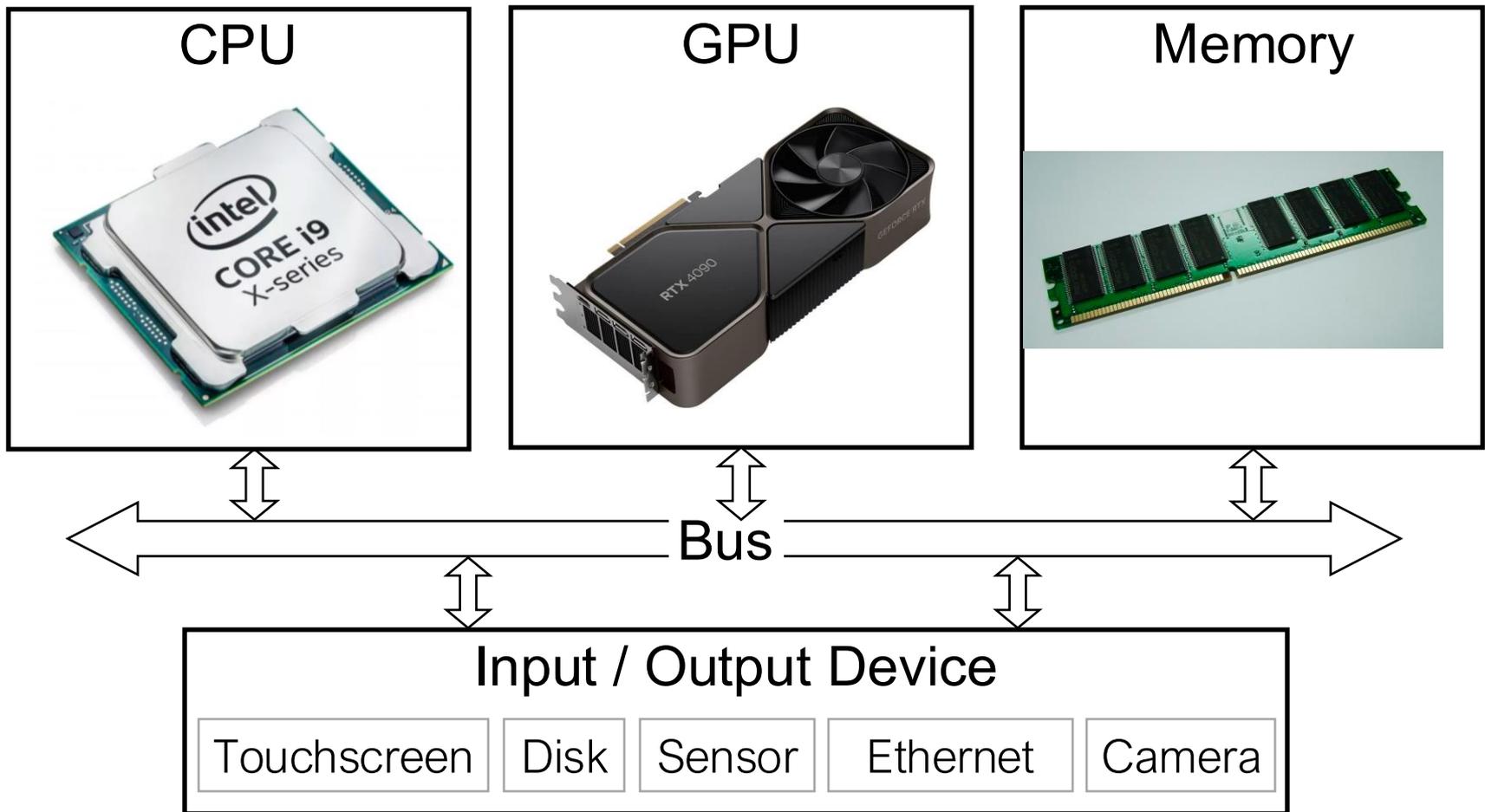
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# Reality #5: GPUs



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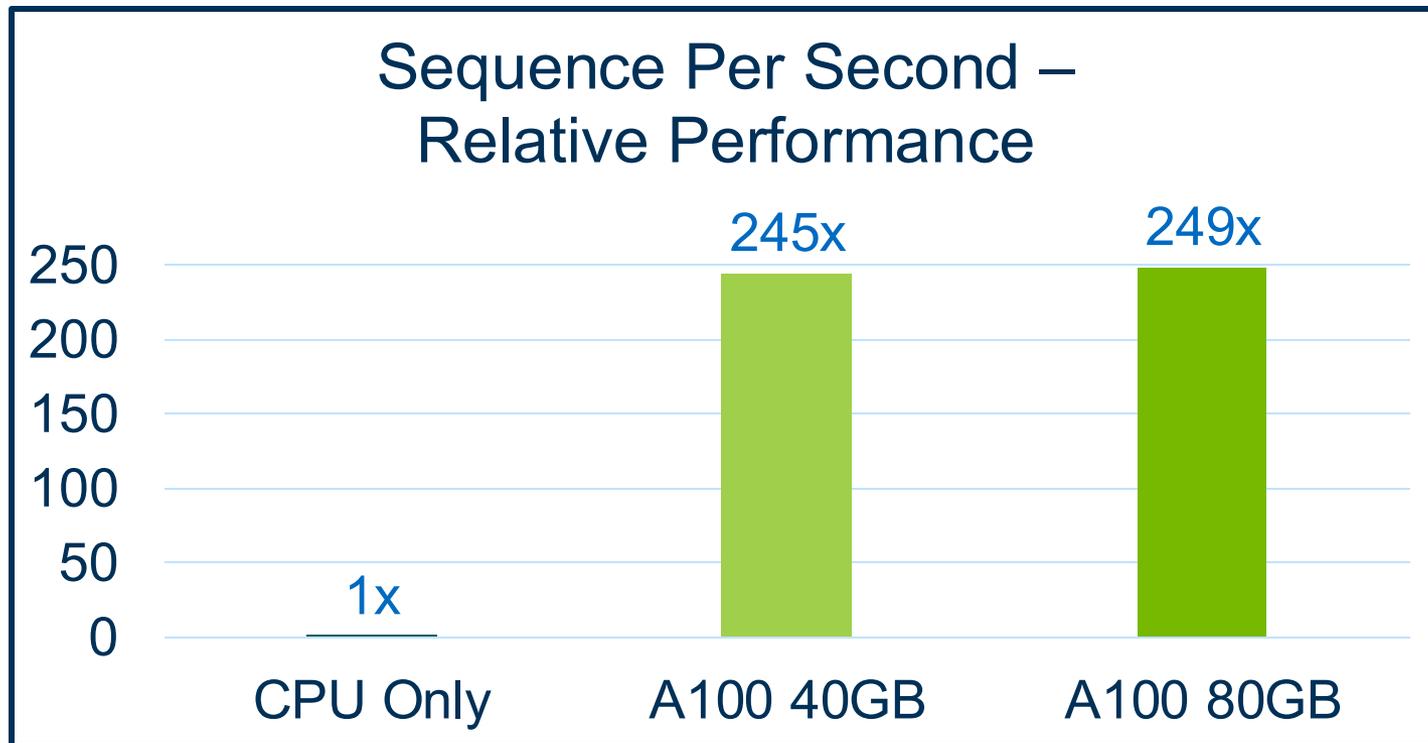


## Reality #5: GPUs

- “Graphics” Processing Units are used as AI accelerators

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<https://www.nvidia.com/en-us/data-center/a100/>

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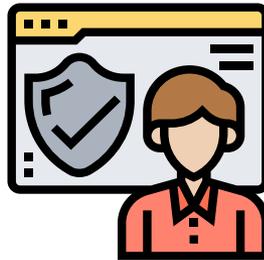
- “Graphics” Processing Units are used as AI accelerators
  - How do GPUs work?
  - How are they different than CPUs?
    - Hardware design
    - Software design
  - How to program GPUs to achieve best performance?

# Reality #6: Security

- Security was considered a software level problem.



Encryption



Permission control

...

- **But all data are stored in hardware**
  - What if hardware has security flaws, which it does...
  - These flaws can be exploited without physical access!
  - **This is what I work on**

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  - **Action Items**
  - Instructor & TAs
  - Class Organization
  - How to Get Help?
  - How Will you Be Evaluated?
  - Policies

# Action Items

- Get a CSUG account.
  - [cycle1.csug.rochester.edu](https://cycle1.csug.rochester.edu) (or cycle2, cycle3)
  - If you don't already have one, go to this link:  
<https://accounts.csug.rochester.edu/>
  - **YOU WILL NEED VPN** to access these machines if you are not using campus WiFi!! Follow the instructions (<https://tech.rochester.edu/remote-access-vpn-tutorials/>) to set up the university VPN.
    - TAs will help with VPN setup too.
- Sign up for Blackboard (<https://learn.rochester.edu/>)
- Sign up for Piazza (<https://piazza.com/rochester/fall2025/csc252452>)

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# Who Are We?

- **Myself: Yanan Guo**
  - WH 3403, [yanan.guo@rochester.edu](mailto:yanan.guo@rochester.edu)
  - Office hours Thursday 11am - 12pm (zoom link on course website)
  - Got a PhD degree
  - Got some industry experience
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- ***TAs: 2 Grads + 5 UGs***
  - Office hours and contacts on course website
  - They share the same zoom link for office hours
  - Did very well themselves in this course before
  - Really care about you learning the material and succeeding
- **Coming to office hours does NOT mean you are weak!**

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# Class Organization -- Where to Find Stuff

- Course Website: <http://cs.rochester.edu/courses/252/fall2025/>
  - General info, syllabus, schedule, contacts & office hours
  - Programming assignments details
  - Slides
  - Practice problems, past exams
- Blackboard
  - Announcements
  - Grades
- Piazza: <https://piazza.com/rochester/fall2025/csc252452>
- CSUG machines for programming assignments submissions

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  - **Be sure to check the posted questions before contacting a staff member!**

# Getting Help

- For technical (lectures, assignments, exam) or logistics (accounts) questions, post a question on Piazza.
  - Option 1: question visible to everyone; you can choose to remain anonymous to other students (**but not to the staff**).
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  - Please answer questions posted by other students!
- Going to office hours.
- Schedule meeting via email.

# Textbook

- Required textbook
  - Bryant and O'Hallaron's *Computer Systems: A Programmer's Perspective* (3rd edition)
- Some recommended (but not required) textbooks
  - *Computer Organization and Design: The Hardware Software Interface*, ARM Edition. More emphasis on hardware. This is where I learnt Computer Systems.
  - *Introduction to Computing Systems: From Bits and Gates to C and Beyond*, 2/e.
  - *Structured Computer Organization*, 6/e. More emphasis on SW.

# Outline: Class Introduction

- Introduction
  - What Are You Supposed to Learn in this Class?
  - Action Items
  - Instructor & TAs
  - Class Organization
  - How to Get Help?
  - **How Will You Be Evaluated?**
  - Policies

# How Will You Be Evaluated?

- Programming Assignments: 40%
  - 5 assignments, 8% each
- 1 midterm exam, 25%
- 1 comprehensive final exam, 35%

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- You could work in pairs
  - Only 1 submission per pair
  - Fill out a form if you work in pairs
- Share ideas but not artifacts (e.g., code, sketch)

# Programming Environment

- Develop code (or at least test it) on the CSUG Linux boxes ([csug.rochester.edu](http://csug.rochester.edu))
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- Projects will be mostly in C and x86 assembly.
- We only accept ANSI-C that can be compiled by the default GCC on the CSUG Linux boxes

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- **All exams are open book (means your book won’t help)**
  - They will in fact probably **hurt**
  - **Memorization won’t help. Thinking will.**

# Programming Assignments and Exams

The assignments were often very different from what we were learning in the course, causing a lot of frustration in the beginning. People had to rely on outside sources to get a grounding of how to do an assignment.

The exams are structured to be significantly harder than the examples covered in class which means there is strong need for critical thinking on the spot during exams.

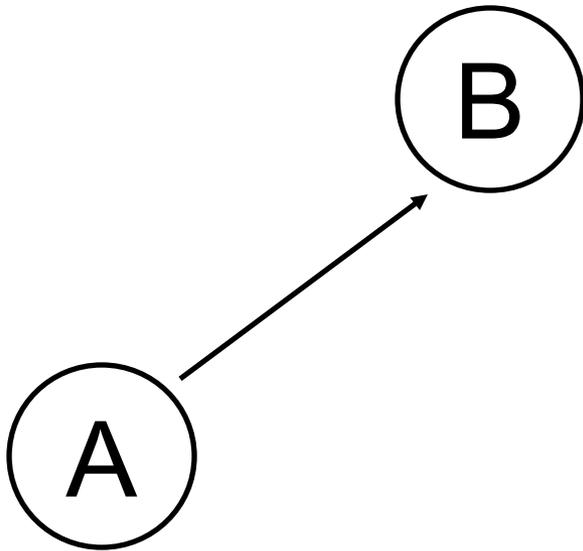
This is a feature, not a bug.

# Here is how to think of the projects, exams, and lectures (loosely)...

- Lectures teach you how to go from **A** to **B**
- Projects ask you to go from **B** to **C**
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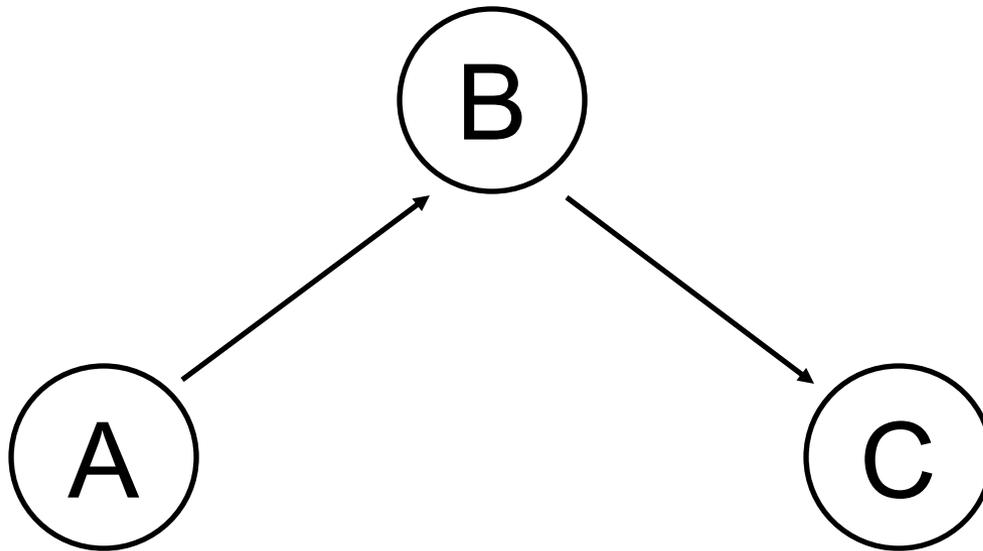
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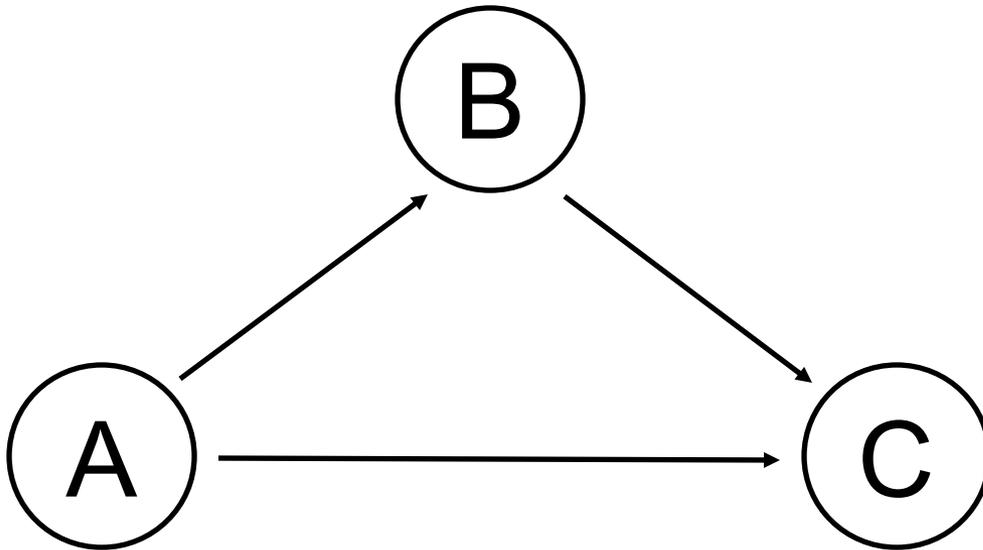
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# Example: A2--Bomblab

- What you need to do:
  - You will get a binary file (a bomb)
  - There are a few phases in the bomb
  - It expects to type in certain string in each phase when you execute the bomb
    - If you type in the correct string, you defuse the bomb
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  - Use gdb to figure out the instructions in this binary
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# Example: A2--Bomblab

- What do we teach you?
  - Instructions VS Executable Binary
  - Instruction Format
  - Common Instructions
  
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- Similarly, you are welcome to read anything you find on the web, but you must close all web pages before beginning to write your code. You are not permitted to repeatedly consult a source. You can read it, understand it, put it away, and write your own similar code, but you **must not copy anything**. Both electronic copy-and-paste and copying through short-term memory are expressly forbidden.

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- Posting homework and project solutions to public repositories on sites like GitHub is a violation of the College's Academic Honesty Policy, Section V.B.2 "Giving Unauthorized Aid."

# CSC 252/452 Will Be Hard

- Be prepared
- We will go back and forth between software and hardware layers
  - For ISA
    - ISA with C programming
    - ISA with microarchitecture
- It covers many aspects of computer systems
  - CSC 252/452 is programmer centric
  - It enables you to write programs that are more reliable and efficient

**Welcome and Enjoy!**