

AM2: Protected-Mode Programming

Duration: 3 hours

Components: Lab exercises and report.

Objectives:

- (a) To examine how protected-mode programming is done on x86 based computer.
- (b) To evaluate the advantages of protected-mode programming compared to real-mode programming in x86 microprocessor.
- (c) To develop protected-mode assembly language programs which utilize the floating-point unit (FPU) on x86 based computer.
- (d) To develop Win32 Console programs based on x86 assembly language.

1. Floating-Point Unit

The Intel 8086 processor was designed to handle only integer arithmetic. This turned out to be a problem for graphics and calculation-intensive software using floating-point calculations. It was possible to emulate floating-point arithmetic purely through software, but the performance penalty was severe. Programs such as *AutoCad* (by Autodesk) demanded a more powerful way to perform floating-point math. Intel sold a separate floating-point coprocessor chip named the 8087, and upgraded it along with each processor generation. Beginning from Intel 80486, the floating-point hardware was integrated into the processor and known as the floating-point unit (FPU).

1.1 FPU Register Stack

The FPU does not use the general-purpose registers (EAX, EBX, etc.). Instead, it has its own set of registers called a *register stack*. It loads values from memory into the register stack, performs calculations, and stores stack values into memory. FPU instructions evaluate mathematical expressions in *postfix* format. The following, for example, is called an *infix expression*: $(5 * 6) + 4$. The postfix equivalent is

$$5 \ 6 \ * \ 4 \ +$$

The infix expression $(A + B) * C$ requires parenthesis to override the default precedence rules (multiplication before addition). The parenthesis is not required in the equivalent postfix expression:

$$A \ B \ + \ C \ *$$

1.1.1 Expression Stack

A stack holds intermediate values during the evaluation of postfix expressions. Figure 1.1 shows the steps required to evaluate the postfix expression $5 \ 6 \ * \ 4 \ +$. The stack entries are labelled ST(0) and ST(1), with ST(0) indicating where the stack pointer would normally be pointing.

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