

Introduction to Microprocessors and Microcontroller

Microprocessor

A **microprocessor** is a computer processor that incorporates the functions of a central processing unit on a single integrated circuit (IC), or at most a few integrated circuits.^[2] The microprocessor is a multipurpose, clock driven, register based, digital-integrated circuit that accepts binary data as input, processes it according to instructions stored in its memory, and provides results as output. Microprocessors contain both combinational logic and sequential digital logic. Microprocessors operate on numbers and symbols represented in the binary numeral system.

The integration of a whole CPU onto a single chip or on a few chips greatly reduced the cost of processing power, increasing efficiency. Integrated circuit processors are produced in large numbers by highly automated processes, resulting in a low per-unit cost. Single-chip processors increase reliability because there are many fewer electrical connections to fail. As microprocessor designs improve, the cost of manufacturing a chip (with smaller components built on a semiconductor chip the same size) generally stays the same.

Before microprocessors, small computers had been built using racks of circuit boards with many medium- and small-scale integrated circuits. Microprocessors combined this into one or a few large-scale ICs. Continued increases in microprocessor capacity have since rendered other forms of computers almost completely obsolete (see history of computing hardware), with one or more microprocessors used in everything from the smallest embedded systems and handheld devices to the largest mainframes and supercomputers.

Microcontroller

A **microcontroller** (MCU for *microcontroller unit*, or UC for *μ-controller*) is a small computer on a single integrated circuit. In modern terminology, it is similar to, but less

sophisticated than, a system on a chip or SoC; an SoC may include a microcontroller as one of its components. A microcontroller contains one or more CPUs (processor cores) along with memory and programmable input/output peripherals. Program memory in the form of ferroelectric RAM, NOR flash or OTP ROM is also often included on chip, as well as a small amount of RAM. Microcontrollers are designed for embedded applications, in contrast to the microprocessors used in personal computers or other general purpose applications consisting of various discrete chips.

Microcontrollers are used in automatically controlled products and devices, such as automobile engine control systems, implantable medical devices, remote controls, office machines, appliances, power tools, toys and other embedded systems. By reducing the size and cost compared to a design that uses a separate microprocessor, memory, and input/output devices, microcontrollers make it economical to digitally control even more devices and processes. Mixed signal microcontrollers are common, integrating analog components needed to control non-digital electronic systems.

Some microcontrollers may use four-bit words and operate at frequencies as low as 4 kHz, for low power consumption (single-digit milliwatts or microwatts). They will generally have the ability to retain functionality while waiting for an event such as a button press or other interrupt; power consumption while sleeping (CPU clock and most peripherals off) may be just nanowatts, making many of them well suited for long lasting battery applications. Other microcontrollers may serve performance-critical roles, where they may need to act more like a digital signal processor (DSP), with higher clock speeds and power consumption.