COMP1521 23T1 — MIPS Functions

https://www.cse.unsw.edu.au/~cs1521/23T1/

Implementing Functions

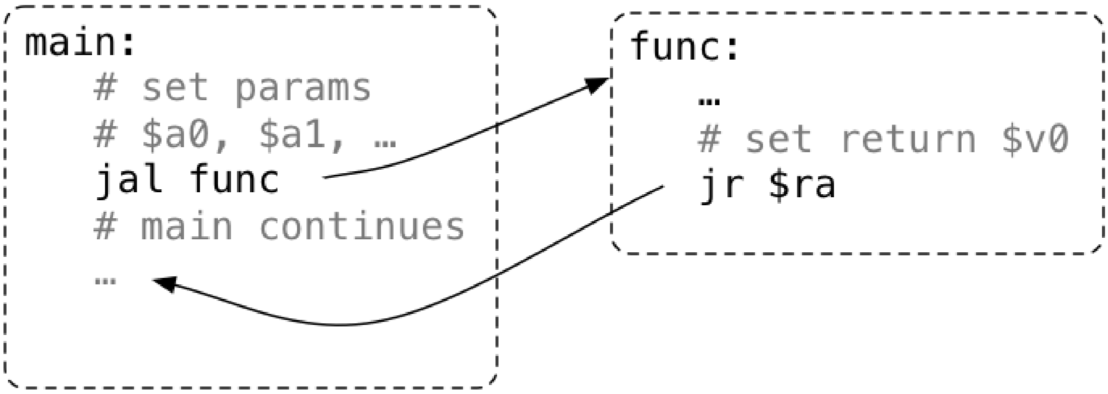
When we call a function:

- in code at the start of the function, called the ***prologue***
  - the arguments are evaluated and set up for function
  - control is transferred to the code for the function
  - local variables are created
- the code for the function body is then executed
- in code at the end of the function, called the ***epilogue***
  - the return value is set up
  - control transfers back to where the function was called from
  - the caller receives the return value

Implementing Functions Calls in MIPS Assembler

Simple view of implementing function calls in MIPS:

- load argument values into **`$a0`**, **`$a1`**, **`$a2`**, **`$a3`**.
- **`jal function`** set **`$ra`** to PC+4 and jumps to function
- function puts return value in **`$v0`**
- returns to caller using **`jr $ra`**



Function with No Parameters or Return Value

- **jal hello** sets **$ra** to address of following instruction, and transfers execution to **hello**
- **jr $ra** transfers execution to the address in **$ra**

```c
int main(void) {
    hello();
    hello();
    hello();
    return 0;
}

void hello(void) {
    printf("hi\n");
}
```

```
main:
    ...
    jal  hello
    jal  hello
    jal  hello
    ...
hello:
    la $a0, string
    li $v0, 4
    syscall
    jr $ra
    .data
string:
    .asciiz "hi\n"
```


Function with a Return Value but No Parameters

By convention, function return value is passed back in **$v0**

```c
int main(void) {
    int a = answer();
    printf("%d\n", a);
    return 0;
}

int answer(void) {
    return 42;
}
```

```
main:
    ...
    jal  answer
    move $a0, $v0
    li   $v0, 1
    syscall
    ...
answer:
    li $v0, 42
    jr $ra
```


Function with a Return Value and Parameters

By convention, first 4 parameters are passed in **$a0**, **$a1**, **$a2**, **$a3**
If there are more parameters they are passed on the stack
Paremeters too big to fit in a register, such as structs, also passed on the stack.

```c
int main(void) {
    int a = product(6, 7);
    printf("%d\n", a);
    return 0;
}

int product(int x, int y) {
    return x * y;
}
```

```
main:
    ...
    li   $a0, 6
    li   $a1, 7
    jal  product
    move $a0, $v0
    li   $v0, 1
    syscall
    ...
product:
    mul  $v0, $a0, $a1
    jr   $ra
```

Function calling another function ... DO NOT DO THIS

Functions that do not call other functions - ***leaf functions*** are easier to implement.

Function that call other function(s) are harder, because they *must* save **`$ra`**.

The **`jr $ra`** in `main` below **will fail**, because **`jal hello`** changed **`$ra`**

```c
int main(void) {
    hello();
    return 0;
}

void hello(void) {
    printf("hi\n");
}
```

```
main:
    jal  hello
    li $v0, 0
    jr $ra # THIS WILL FAIL
hello:
    la $a0, string
    li $v0, 4
    syscall
    jr $ra
    .data
string: .asciiz "hi\n"
```


Simple Function Call Example - C

```c
void f(void);
int main(void) {
    printf("calling function f\n");
    f();
    printf("back from function f\n");
    return 0;
}
void f(void) {
    printf("in function f\n");
}
```

source code for call_return.c

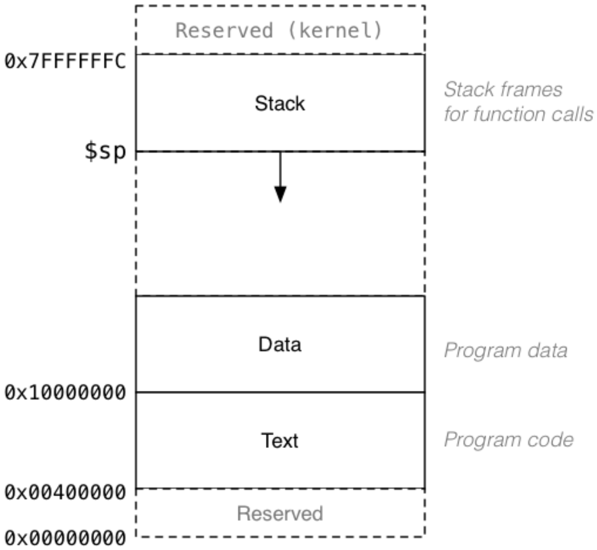
Simple Function Call Example - broken MIPS

```
    la   $a0, string0   # printf("calling function f\n");
    li   $v0, 4
    syscall
    jal  f              # set $ra to following address
    la   $a0, string1   # printf("back from function f\n");
    li   $v0, 4
    syscall
    li   $v0, 0         # fails because $ra changes since main called
    jr   $ra            # return from function main
f:
    la   $a0, string2   # printf("in function f\n");
    li   $v0, 4
    syscall
    jr   $ra            # return from function f
    .data
```

source code for call_return.broken.s

The Stack: Where it is in Memory

Data associated with a function call placed on the stack:



The Stack: Allocating Space

- **$sp** (stack pointer) initialized by operating system
- always 4-byte aligned (divisible by 4)
- points at currently used (4-byte) word
- grows downward (towards smaller addresses)
- a function can do this to allocate 40 bytes:

```
    sub   $sp, $sp, 40     # move stack pointer down
```

- a function **must** leave $sp at original value
- so if you allocated 40 bytes, before return (`jr $ra`)

```
    add   $sp, $sp, 40     # move stack pointer back
```


The Stack: Saving and Restoring Registers - the Hard Way

```
f:
    # function prologue code
    sub   $sp, $sp, 12   # allocate 12 bytes
    sw    $ra, 8($sp)    # save $ra on $stack
    sw    $s1, 4($sp)    # save $s1 on $stack
    sw    $s0, 0($sp)    # save $s0 on $stack

    ...                  # function body code

    # function epilogue code
    lw    $s0, 0($sp)    # restore $s0 from $stack
    lw    $s1, 4($sp)    # restore $s1 from $stack
    lw    $ra, 8($sp)    # restore $ra from $stack
    add   $sp, $sp, 12   # move stack pointer back
    jr    $ra            # return
```

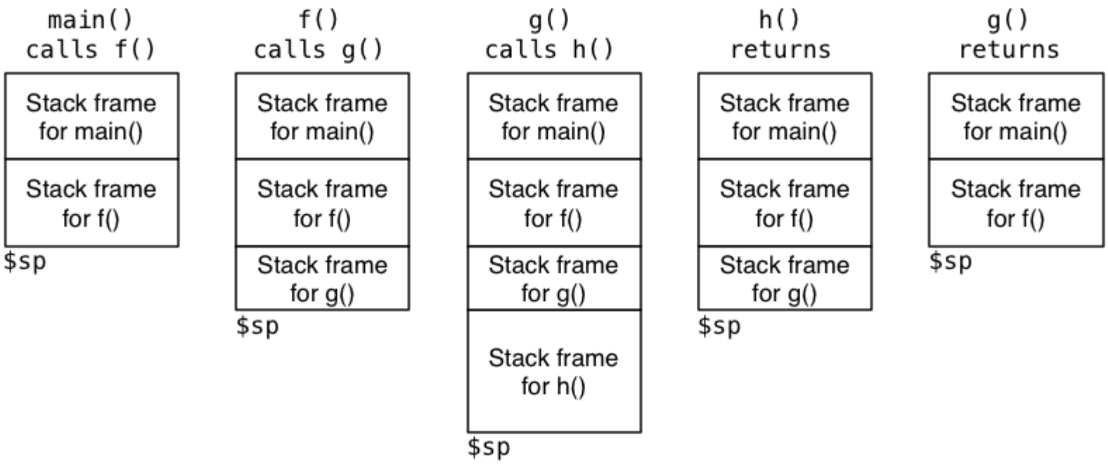
The Stack: Saving and Restoring Registers - the Easy way

```
f:
    # function prologue code
    push $ra             # save $ra on $stack
    push $s1             # save $s1 on $stack
    push $s0             # save $s0 on $stack

    ...                  # function body code

    # function epilogue code
    pop  $s0             # restore $s0 from $stack
    pop  $s1             # restore $s1 from $stack
    pop  $ra             # restore $ra from $stack
```

- note must **pop** everything **push**-ed, must be in reverse order
- **push** & **pop** are pseudo-instructions
    - available only on mipsy, not other MIPS emulators
    - **push** & **pop** often real instruction or psudo instructions on other archicturese

The Stack: Growing & Shrinking

How stack changes as functions are called and return:



Function calling another function ... how to do it right

A function that calls another function must save **$ra**.

```
main:
    # prologue
    push   $ra           # save $ra on $stack

    jal   hello          # call hello

    # epilogue
    pop  $ra             # recover $ra from $stack
    li   $v0, 0          # return 0
    jr   $ra             #
```

Simple Function Call Example - correct hard way

```
    la   $a0, string0   # printf("calling function f\n");
    li   $v0, 4
    syscall
    jal  f              # set $ra to following address
    la   $a0, string1   # printf("back from function f\n");
    li   $v0, 4
    syscall
    lw   $ra, 0($sp)    # recover $ra from $stack
    addi $sp, $sp, 4    # move stack pointer back to what it was
    li   $v0, 0         # return 0 from function main
    jr   $ra            #
f:
    la   $a0, string2   # printf("in function f\n");
    li   $v0, 4
    syscall
    jr   $ra            # return from function f
```

source code for call_return_raw.s

Simple Function Call Example - correct easy way

```
    la   $a0, string0   # printf("calling function f\n");
    li   $v0, 4
    syscall
    jal  f              # set $ra to following address
    la   $a0, string1   # printf("back from function f\n");
    li   $v0, 4
    syscall
    pop $ra             # recover $ra from $stack
    li   $v0, 0         # return 0 from function main
    jr   $ra            #
# f is a leaf function so it doesn't need an epilogue or prologue
f:
    la   $a0, string2   # printf("in function f\n");
    li   $v0, 4
    syscall
    jr   $ra            # return from function f
```

source code for call_return.s

MIPS Register usage conventions

- **$a0..$a3** contain first 4 arguments
- **$v0** contains return value
- **$ra** contains return address
- if function changes **$sp**, **$fp**, **$s0..$s7** it restores their value
- callers assume **$sp**, **$fp**, **$s0..$s7** unchanged by call (**jal**)
- a function may destroy the value of other registers e.g. **$t0..$t9**
- callers must assume value in e.g. **$t0..$t9** changed by call (**jal**)

MIPS Register usage conventions (not covered in COMP1521)

- floating point registers used to pass/return float/doubles
- similar conventions for saving floating point registers
- stack used to pass arguments after first 4
- stack used to pass arguments which do not fit in register
- stack used to return values which do not fit in register
- for example a struct can be an C function argument or function return value
  but a struct can be any number of bytes

Example - Returning a Value - C

```
int answer(void);
int main(void) {
    int a = answer();
    printf("%d\n", a);
    return 0;
}
int answer(void) {
    return 42;
}
```

source code for return_answer.c

Example - Returning a Value - MIPS

```
# code for function main
main:
    begin                   # move frame pointer
    push  $ra               # save $ra onto stack
    jal   answer            # call answer(), return value will be in $v0
    move  $a0, $v0          # printf("%d", a);
    li    $v0, 1            #
    syscall                 #
    li    $a0, '\n'         # printf("%c", '\n');
    li    $v0, 11           #
    syscall                 #
    pop   $ra               # recover $ra from stack
    end                     # move frame pointer back
    li    $v0, 0            # return
    jr    $ra               #
# code for function answer
answer:
    li   $v0, 42            # return 42
    jr   $ra                #
```

Example - Argument & Return - C

```c
void two(int i);
int main(void) {
    two(1);
}
void two(int i) {
    if (i < 1000000) {
        two(2 * i);
    }
    printf("%d\n", i);
}
```

source code for two_powerful.c

Example - Argument & Return - MIPS (main)

```
main:
    begin                   # move frame pointer
    push   $ra              # save $ra onto stack
    li     $a0, 1
    jal    two              # two(1);
    pop    $ra              # recover $ra from stack
    end                     # move frame pointer back
    li     $v0, 0           # return 0
    jr     $ra              #
```

source code for two_powerful.s

Example - Argument & Return - MIPS (two)

```
two:
    begin                   # move frame pointer
    push   $ra              # save $ra onto stack
    push   $s0              # save $s0 onto stack
    move   $s0, $a0
    bge    $a0, 1000000, two_end_if
    mul    $a0, $a0, 2
    jal    two
two_end_if:
    move   $a0, $s0
    li     $v0, 1           # printf("%d");
    syscall
    li     $a0, '\n'        # printf("%c", '\n');
    li     $v0, 11
    syscall
    pop    $s0              # recover $s0 from stack
    pop    $ra              # recover $ra from stack
    end                     # move frame pointer back
    jr     $ra              # return from two
```

Example - More complex Calls - C

```c
int main(void) {
    int z = sum_product(10, 12);
    printf("%d\n", z);
    return 0;
}
int sum_product(int a, int b) {
    int p = product(6, 7);
    return p + a + b;
}
int product(int x, int y) {
    return x * y;
}
```

source code for more_calls.c

Example - more complex Calls - MIPS (main)

```
main:
    begin                   # move frame pointer
    push  $ra               # save $ra onto stack
    li    $a0, 10           # sum_product(10, 12);
    li    $a1, 12
    jal   sum_product
    move  $a0, $v0          # printf("%d", z);
    li    $v0, 1
    syscall
    li    $a0, '\n'         # printf("%c", '\n');
    li    $v0, 11
    syscall
    pop   $ra               # recover $ra from stack
    end                     # move frame pointer back
    li    $v0, 0            # return 0 from function main
    jr    $ra               # return from function main
```

source code for more_calls.s

Example - more complex Calls - MIPS (sum_product)

```
sum_product:
    begin                   # move frame pointer
    push   $ra              # save $ra onto stack
    push   $s0              # save $s0 onto stack
    push   $s1              # save $s1 onto stack
    move   $s0, $a0         # preserve $a0 for use after function call
    move   $s1, $a1         # preserve $a1 for use after function call
    li     $a0, 6           # product(6, 7);
    li     $a1, 7
    jal    product
    add    $v0, $v0, $s0    # add a and b to value returned in $v0
    add    $v0, $v0, s1   # and put result in $v0 to be returned
    pop    $s1              # recover $s1 from stack
    pop    $s0              # recover $s0 from stack
    pop    $ra              # recover $ra from stack
    end                     # move frame pointer back
    jr     $ra              # return from sum_product
```

source code for more_calls.s

Example - more complex Calls - MIPS (product)

- a function which doesn't call other functions is called a ***leaf function***
- its code *can* be simpler...

```c
int product(int x, int y) {
    return x * y;
}
```

source code for more_calls.c

```
product:                # product doesn't call other functions
                        # so it doesn't need to save any registers
    mul  $v0, $a0, $a1  # return argument * argument 2
    jr   $ra            #
```

source code for more_calls.s

Example - strlen using array - C

C

```c
int main(void) {
    int i = my_strlen("Hello");
    printf("%d\n", i);
    return 0;
}
int my_strlen(char *s) {
    int length = 0;
    while (s[length] != 0) {
        length++;
    }
    return length;
}
```

source code for strlen_array.c

Simple C

```c
int main(void) {
    int i = my_strlen("Hello");
    printf("%d\n", i);
    return 0;
}
int my_strlen(char *s) {
    int length = 0;
loop:;
    if (s[length] == 0) goto end;
       length++;
    goto loop;
end:;
    return length;
}
```

source code for strlen_array.simple.c

Example - strlen using pointer - C

```c
int main(void) {
    int i = my_strlen("Hello");
    printf("%d\n", i);
    return 0;
}
int my_strlen(char *s) {
    int length = 0;
    while (s[length] != 0) {
        length++;
    }
    return length;
}
```

source code for strlen_array.c

Example - strlen using pointer - MIPS (my_strlen)

```
la   $a0, string    # my_strlen("Hello");
jal  my_strlen
move $a0, $v0       # printf("%d", i);
li   $v0, 1
syscall
li   $a0, '\n'      # printf("%c", '\n');
li   $v0, 11
syscall
pop   $ra           # recover $ra from stack
end                 # move frame pointer back
li   $v0, 0         # return 0 from function main
jr   $ra            #
```

source code for strlen_array.s

Storing A Local Variables On the Stack

- some local (function) variables must be stored on stack
- e.g. variables such as arrays and structs

```
int main(void) {
    int squares[10];
    int i = 0;
    while (i < 10) {
        squares[i] = i * i;
        i++;
    }
```

source code for squares.c

```
main:
    sub  $sp, $sp, 40
    li   $t0, 0
loop0:
    mul  $t1, $t0, 4
    add  $t2, $t1, $sp
    mul  $t3, $t0, $t0
    sw   $t3, ($t2)
    add  $t0, $t0, 1
    b    loop0
end0:
```

source code for squares.s

Example - strlen using pointer - C

```
int main(void) {
    int i = my_strlen("Hello");
    printf("%d\n", i);
    return 0;
}
int my_strlen(char *s) {
    int length = 0;
    while (s[length] != 0) {
        length++;
    }
    return length;
}
```

source code for strlen_array.c

What is a Frame Pointer

- frame pointer **$fp** is a second register pointing to stack
- by convention, set to point at start of stack frame
- provides a fixed point during function code execution
- useful for functions which grow stack (change **$sp**) during execution
- makes it easier for debuggers to forensically analyze stack
  - e.g if you want to print stack backtrace after error
- using a frame pointer is optional - both in COMP1521 and generally
- a frame pointer is often omitted when fast execution or small code a priority

Example of Growing Stack Breaking Function Return

```c
void f(int a) {
    int length;
    scanf("%d", &length);
    int array[length];
    // ... more code ...
    printf("%d\n", a);
}
```

source code for frame_pointer.c

```
f:
    # prologue
    sub   $sp, $sp, 4
    sw    $ra, 0($sp)

    li    $v0, 5
    syscall
    # allocate space for
    # array on stack
    mul   $t0, $v0, 4
    sub   $sp, $sp, $t0
    # ... more code ...

    # epilogue
    # breaks because $sp  has changed
    lw    $ra, 0($sp)
    add   $sp, $sp, 4
    jr    $ra
```

source code for frame_pointer.broken.s

Example of Frame Pointer Use - Hard Way

```c
void f(int a) {
    int length;
    scanf("%d", &length);
    int array[length];
    // ... more code ...
    printf("%d\n", a);
}
```

source code for frame_pointer.c

```
f:
    # prologue
    sub   $sp, $sp, 8
    sw    $fp, 4($sp)
    sw    $ra, 0($sp)
    add   $fp, $sp, 8

    li    $v0, 5
    syscall
    mul   $t0, $v0, 4
    sub   $sp, $sp, $t0
    # ... more code ...

    # epilogue
    lw    $ra, -4($fp)
    move  $sp, $fp
    lw    $fp, 0($fp)
    jr    $ra
```

source code for frame_pointer.s

Example of Frame Pointer Use - Easy Way

```c
void f(int a) {
    int length;
    scanf("%d", &length);
    int array[length];
    // ... more code ...
    printf("%d\n", a);
}
```

source code for frame_pointer.c

```
f:
    # prologue
    begin
    push $ra

    li   $v0, 5
    syscall
    mul  $t0, $v0, 4
    sub  $sp, $sp, $t0
    # ... more code ...

    # epilogue
    pop $ra
    end
    jr   $ra
```

source code for frame_pointer.s

- **begin** & **end** are pseudo-instructions available only on mipsy