Floating-Point Numbers
Floating-point

• Topics
  – Binary fractions
  – Floating-point representation
  – Conversions and rounding error
Binary fractions

• Now we can store integers
  – But what about general real numbers?
• Extend positional binary integers to store fractions
  – Designate a certain number of bits for the fractional part
  – These bits represent negative powers of two
  – (Just like fractional digits in decimal fractions!)

\[
\begin{array}{ccccccc}
4 & 2 & 1 & 1/2 & 1/4 & 1/8 \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
101.101
\]

\[
4 + 1 + 0.5 + 0.125 = 5.625 \quad \text{(alternatively: 5 + 5/8)}
\]
Another problem

- For scientific applications, we want to be able to store a wide range of values
  - From the scale of galaxies down to the scale of atoms
- Doing this with fixed-precision numbers is difficult
  - Even signed 64-bit integers
    - Perhaps allocate half for whole number, half for fraction
    - Range: $\sim 2 \times 10^{-9}$ through $\sim 2 \times 10^9$

Floating-point demonstration using Super Mario 64:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hdFG2GcNuA
Floating-point numbers

• Scientific notation to the rescue!
  - Traditionally, we write large (or small) numbers as $x \cdot 10^e$
  - This is how floating-point representations work
    • Store exponent and fractional parts (the significand) separately
    • The decimal point “floats” on the number line
    • Position of point is based on the exponent

\[
\begin{align*}
0.0123 \times 10^2 \\
0.123 \times 10^1 \\
1.23 &= 1.23 \times 10^0 \\
12.3 &\times 10^{-1} \\
123.0 &\times 10^{-2}
\end{align*}
\]
Floating-point numbers

- However, computers use binary
  - So floating-point numbers use base 2 scientific notation \( (x \cdot 2^e) \)

- Fixed width field
  - Reserve one bit for the sign bit (0 is positive, 1 is negative)
  - Reserve \( n \) bits for biased exponent (bias is \( 2^{n-1} - 1 \))
    - Avoids having to use two’s complement
  - Use remaining bits for normalized fraction (implicit leading 1)
    - Exception: if the exponent is zero, don’t normalize

\[
\begin{align*}
2.5 & \rightarrow 0 \, 1000 \, 010 \\
\text{Value} & = (-1)^s \times 1.f \times 2^E
\end{align*}
\]
Aside: Offset binary

- Alternative to two’s complement
  - Actual value is stored value minus a constant K (in FP: $2^{n-1} - 1$)
  - Also called biased or excess representation
  - Ordering of actual values is more natural

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Binary</th>
<th>Unsigned</th>
<th>Two’s C</th>
<th>Offset-127</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0000 0000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0000 0001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0111 1110</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0111 1111</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000 0000</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>-128</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000 0001</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>-127</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1111 1110</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1111 1111</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example range (int8_t):
Floating-point numbers

Not evenly spaced! (as integers are)

Consider these examples:

- $1.00000 \times 2^0 \rightarrow 1.00001 \times 2^0$
- $1.00000 \times 2^{100} \rightarrow 1.00001 \times 2^{100}$

Adding a least-significant digit adds more value with a higher exponent than with a lower exponent.
Representable values for 6-bit floating-point format. There are $k = 3$ exponent bits and $n = 2$ fraction bits. The bias is 3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Bit representation</th>
<th>Exponent</th>
<th>Fraction</th>
<th>$2^E \times M$</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Decimal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero</td>
<td>0 0000 000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{64}$</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$\frac{0}{512}$</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smallest positive</td>
<td>0 0000 001</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{64}$</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{8}$</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{512}$</td>
<td>0.001953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 0000 010</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{64}$</td>
<td>$\frac{2}{8}$</td>
<td>$\frac{2}{512}$</td>
<td>0.003906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 0000 011</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{64}$</td>
<td>$\frac{3}{8}$</td>
<td>$\frac{3}{512}$</td>
<td>0.005859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Largest denormalized</td>
<td>0 0000 111</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{64}$</td>
<td>$\frac{7}{8}$</td>
<td>$\frac{7}{512}$</td>
<td>0.013672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smallest normalized</td>
<td>0 0001 000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{64}$</td>
<td>$\frac{0}{8}$</td>
<td>$\frac{8}{512}$</td>
<td>0.015625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 0001 001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{64}$</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{8}$</td>
<td>$\frac{9}{512}$</td>
<td>0.017578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 0110 110</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{2}$</td>
<td>$\frac{6}{8}$</td>
<td>$\frac{6}{16}$</td>
<td>0.875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 0110 111</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{2}$</td>
<td>$\frac{7}{8}$</td>
<td>$\frac{7}{16}$</td>
<td>0.9375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 0111 000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{8}$</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{8}$</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 0111 001</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{8}$</td>
<td>$\frac{9}{8}$</td>
<td>1.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 0111 010</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$\frac{2}{8}$</td>
<td>$\frac{10}{8}$</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 1110 110</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>$\frac{128}{8}$</td>
<td>$\frac{1792}{8}$</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 1110 111</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>$\frac{128}{8}$</td>
<td>$\frac{1920}{8}$</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infinity</td>
<td>0 1111 000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\infty$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2.35** Example nonnegative values for 8-bit floating-point format. There are $k = 4$ exponent bits and $n = 3$ fraction bits. The bias is 7.

what about values higher than this one?
NaNs

- **NaN** = “Not a Number”
  - Result of 0/0 and other undefined operations
  - Propagate to later calculations
  - **Quiet** and **signaling** variants (qNaN and sNaN)
  - Allowed a neat trick during my dissertation research:
## Floating-point numbers

1. Normalized

| s | \(\neq 0 \& \neq 255\) | f |

2. Denormalized

| s | 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 | f |

3a. Infinity

| s | 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 |

3b. NaN

| s | 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 | \(\neq 0\) |
Floating-point issues

- **Rounding error** is the value lost during conversion to a finite significand
  - **Machine epsilon** gives an upper bound on the rounding error
    - (Multiply by value being rounded)
  - Can compound over successive operations
- **Lack of associativity** caused by intermediate rounding
  - Prevents some compiler optimizations
- **Cancellation** is the loss of significant digits during subtraction
  - Can magnify error and impact later operations

```c
double a = 100000000000000000000.0;
double b = -a;
double c = 3.14;
if (((a + b) + c) == (a + (b + c))) {
    printf("Equal!\n");
} else {
    printf("Not equal!\n");
}
```

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.491264 (7)</td>
<td>1.613647 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 2.491252 (7)</td>
<td>- 1.613647 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.000012 (2)</td>
<td>0.000000 (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(5 digits cancelled) (all digits cancelled)
Floating-point issues

- Many numbers cannot be represented exactly, regardless of how many bits are used!
  - E.g., $0.1_{10} \rightarrow 0.00011001100110011001100_2 \ldots$

- This is no different than in base 10
  - E.g., $1/3 = 0.33333333 \ldots$

- If the number can be expressed as a sum of negative powers of the base, it can be represented exactly
  - Assuming enough bits are present
## Floating-point standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Bits</th>
<th>Exp</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Dec</th>
<th>M_Eps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bfloat16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7+1</td>
<td>2.408</td>
<td>7.81e-03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEEE half</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10+1</td>
<td>3.311</td>
<td>9.77e-04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEEE single</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23+1</td>
<td>7.225</td>
<td>1.19e-07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEEE double</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>52+1</td>
<td>15.955</td>
<td>2.22e-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEEE quad</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>112+1</td>
<td>34.016</td>
<td>1.93e-34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTES:**

- Sig is `<explicit>[+<implicit>]` bits
- Dec = \( \log_{10}(2^{\text{Sig}}) \)
- M_Eps (machine epsilon) = \( b^{-(p-1)} = b^{(1-p)} \)
  (upper bound on relative error when rounding to 1)
Floating-point standards

IEEE Floating-Point Numbers

Value is: \((-1)^{\text{sign}} \times 1.\text{frac} \times 2^{\text{exp}}\)

- **Single**: Sign (1 bit), Exponent (8 bits), Fraction (23 bits)
- **Double**: Sign (1 bit), Exponent (11 bits), Fraction (52 bits)
- **Quad**: Sign (1 bit), Exponent (15 bits), Fraction (112 bits)
## Conversion and rounding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From:</th>
<th>Int32</th>
<th>Int64</th>
<th>Float</th>
<th>Double</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Int32</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int64</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Float</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **O** = overflow possible
- **R** = rounding possible
- "-" is safe
Rounding

Round-to-even: round to nearest, on ties favor even numbers to avoid statistical biases

In binary, to round to bit $i$, examine bit $i+1$:
- If 0, round down
- If 1 and any of the bits following are 1, round up
- Otherwise, round up if bit $i$ is 1 and down if bit $i$ is 0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>1.40</th>
<th>1.60</th>
<th>1.50</th>
<th>2.50</th>
<th>$-1.50$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Round-to-even</td>
<td>$1$</td>
<td>$2$</td>
<td>$2$</td>
<td>$2$</td>
<td>$-2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round-toward-zero</td>
<td>$1$</td>
<td>$1$</td>
<td>$1$</td>
<td>$2$</td>
<td>$-1$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round-down</td>
<td>$1$</td>
<td>$1$</td>
<td>$1$</td>
<td>$2$</td>
<td>$-2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round-up</td>
<td>$2$</td>
<td>$2$</td>
<td>$2$</td>
<td>$3$</td>
<td>$-1$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.37  Illustration of rounding modes for dollar rounding. The first rounds to a nearest value, while the other three bound the result above or below.
Floating-point issues

• Single vs. double precision choice
  – Theme: system design involves tradeoffs
  – Single precision arithmetic is faster
    • Especially on GPUs (vectorization & bandwidth)
  – Double precision is more accurate
    • More than twice as accurate!
  – Which do we use?
    • And how do we justify our choice?
    • Does the answer change for different regions of a program?
    • Does the answer change for different periods during execution?
    • This is an open research question (talk to me if you’re interested!)
Manual conversions

• To fully understand how floating-point works, it helps to do some conversions manually
  – This is unfortunately a bit tedious and very error-prone
  – There are some general guidelines that can help it go faster
  – You will also get faster with practice
  – Use the fp.c utility (posted on the resources page) to generate practice problems and test yourself!
    • Compile: gcc -o fp fp.c -lm
    • Run: ./fp <exp_len> <sig_len>
    • It will generate all positive floating-point numbers using that representation
    • Choose one and convert the binary to decimal or vice versa

...
Textbook’s technique

\( e \): The value represented by considering the exponent field to be an unsigned integer

\( E \): The value of the exponent after biasing

\( 2^E \): The numeric weight of the exponent

\( f \): The value of the fraction

\( M \): The value of the significand

\( 2^E \times M \): The (unreduced) fractional value of the number

\( V \): The reduced fractional value of the number

Decimal: The decimal representation of the number

If this technique works for you, great!
If not, here's another perspective...
Converting floating-point numbers

• Floating-point → decimal:
  - 1) Sign bit \( (s) \):
    • Value is negative iff set
  - 2) Exponent \( (\text{exp}) \):
    • All zeroes: denormalized \( (E = 1\text{-bias}) \)
    • All ones: NaN unless \( f \) is zero (which is infinity) – DONE!
    • Otherwise: normalized \( (E = \text{exp-bias}) \)
  - 3) Significand \( (f) \):
    • If normalized: \( M = 1 + f / 2^m \) (where \( m \) is the # of fraction bits)
    • If denormalized: \( M = f / 2^m \) (where \( m \) is the # of fraction bits)
  - 4) Value = \((-1)^s \times M \times 2^E\)

Note: bias = \(2^{n-1} - 1\) (where \( n \) is the # of exp bits)
Converting floating-point numbers

- Decimal → floating-point (normalized only)
  - 1) Convert to unsigned fractional binary format
    - Set sign bit
  - 2) Normalize to 1.xxxxxx
    - Keep track of how many places you shift left (negative for shift right)
    - The “xxxxxx” bit string is the significand (pad with zeros on the right)
    - If there aren’t enough bits to store the entire fraction, the value is rounded
  - 3) Encode resulting binary/shift offset (E) using bias representation
    - Add bias and convert to unsigned binary
    - If the exponent cannot be represented, result is zero or infinity

Example (4-bit exp, 3-bit frac):

2.75 (dec) → 10.11 (bin) → 1.011 x 2^1 (bin) → 0 1000 011

Bias = 2^{4-1} – 1 = 7

Exp: 1 + 7 = 8

Note:

bias = 2^{n-1} - 1
(where n is the # of exp bits)
12345_{10} \rightarrow 11000000111001_2
\rightarrow 1.1000000111001_2 \times 2^{13}

\text{exp} = 13 + 127 \text{ (bias)} = 140 = 10001100_2

\rightarrow 0 \ 10001100 \ 1000000011100100000000000

(note the shared bits that appear in all three representations)
Exercises

- What are the values of the following numbers, interpreted as floating-point numbers with a 3-bit exponent and 2-bit significand?
  - What about a 2-bit exponent and a 3-bit significand?

\[
\begin{align*}
001100 & \quad 011001 \\
\end{align*}
\]

- Convert the following values to a floating-point value with a 4-bit exponent and a 3-bit significand. Write your answers in hex.

\[
\begin{align*}
-3 & \quad 0.125 & \quad 120 & \quad \infty \\
\end{align*}
\]