

IEEE Trial-Use Standard for Microprocessor Universal Format for Object Modules



IEEE Std 695



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Draft American National Standard

**IEEE Trial-Use Standard for
Microprocessor Universal Format for
Object Modules**

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of the
IEEE Computer Society

Draft American National Standard

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Foreword

(This Foreword is not a part of IEEE Std 695, IEEE Trial-Use Standard for Microprocessor Universal Format for Object Modules.)

With the passage of time, microprocessor system capabilities are increasing, just as did those of the minicomputers of the previous generation and the mainframes before them. With larger memories come larger programs, and with them, the necessity of partitioning programs into smaller, more manageable units that are linked together into the final program. Thus arises the need for relocatable and linkable code modules.

Unlike their larger cousins, the minicomputers and mainframes, microprocessors are often used in multivendor situations where the same software must work with a variety of operating systems and configurations and usually where the original computer manufacturer does not hold a dominant sway over the software formats. The ability to relocate and link code from a variety of vendors is in the interest of the user, and to that end a standard object module format is desirable.

A second, perhaps even more compelling reason for a standard object module format arises from the fact that many users of microprocessors are not limited to one architecture or CPU. These users are compelled to support all of their target processors with all stages of the software translation process, even though many operations need not depend on the actual target CPU. With a standard format, only those functions that necessarily relate to the target machine architecture need specialization; linking and relocation of the object modules can be done for all processors with a single program.

MUFOM, the Microprocessor Universal Format for Object Modules, is designed to apply to a variety of target machines. It permits the linking and relocating functions to be isolated from the specification of target architecture, so that a user may employ a single program for these functions across all CPUs.

Processes

MUFOM is specified with the realization that an object module may undergo five processes in its life cycle and that these processes may be separate programs or may be combined into a single program.

The first process in the life of an object module is its creation by a compiler or assembler. Such a process almost always must be concerned with the architecture of the target machine and is not specified in this standard.

The second process is normally that of linking separately translated modules into one module and resolving external references. A partial linking may take several modules and produce a new module with still unresolved external references, which may require yet another linking. Linking may not be required for compilations that reference no external procedures.

The third process is relocation. This process assigns absolute memory addresses to module locations and adjusts address fields previously generated with address constants (or expressions) relative to the module entry points. Often relocation and linking are done simultaneously. The object module that comes out of the relocater is normally an absolute module with all address fields completely specified.

The fourth process evaluates loader expressions. These may be generated in the process of linking and relocating, or they may be initially generated by the source language translator. Usually, it is only after relocation that all necessary operands for evaluation are available. The result of the evaluation is a memory image that only needs loading. Aside from considerations such as word size and back links, expression evaluation does not depend on the target machine.

The fifth process is the loading of the absolute module into memory in the target machine. This may be specific to the word size of the target machine. Other than that dependency, loading may be done independently of the CPU architecture. Often the loading function is included with relocation and expression evaluation. For purposes of consideration in this standard, a translator that converts the MUFOM format absolute code module into a target-machine-dependent format is considered to be doing the loading functions. The loading process marks the end of the life cycle of the object module.

MUFOM is defined consistently across all five processes so that a load module is in a format that is a proper subset of the format for an absolute module, which in turn is a proper subset of the format for a relocatable module, which similarly is a proper subset of the format for a linkable module. Thus, a single syntax defines all three formats, with the simple qualification that there are particular commands

that are destined to be swallowed by the linker and that there are other commands for the relocater and still others for the loader.

Portability

MUFOM is based on CUFOM, the CERN Universal Format for Object Modules. MUFOM is designed for maximum portability of object modules between conforming systems. For this reason, all commands are specified as ASCII text derived from a minimum character set. For internal use an equivalent binary format is encouraged, and Appendix B gives an example of a binary implementation.

Many existing object module formats were considered to ensure their ease of translation into MUFOM in a direct way. In general, a MUFOM command represents a single function. Portability of MUFOM modules to other formats was not considered to be of sufficient value or feasibility to warrant serious attention.

At the time that this standard was approved for trial use the members of the Working Group on Microprocessor Relocatable Object Code Format were as follows:

Gregg Marshall, *Chairman*

Geoff Baldwin
Richard James, III

Jean Montuelle
Tom Pittmann

Stephen Savitsky
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When the IEEE Standards Board approved this standard on March 21, 1985, it had the following membership:

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IEEE Trial-Use Standard for Microprocessor Universal Format for Object Modules

1. Scope

This standard specifies the format of linkable, relocatable, and absolute object modules for binary computers of arbitrary word size and architecture. Two levels of compliance are specified, minimum and full.

The minimum compliance level affords sufficient flexibility to link separately compiled modules, to relocate addresses in simple ways, and to load the resulting absolute object modules with a minimal loader.

The full compliance level affords all of the functionality of the minimum level and adds to it arbitrary address expression handling, type checking capability, librarian control commands, and other useful functions for full generality.

A conforming implementation may extend the command or function set of MUFOM for greater efficiency in dealing with machine-specific requirements, but object modules containing such extensions shall not be said to be conforming to this standard. Such extensions are not specified in this standard.

This standard also does not specify

- (1) The source language features to be supported by way of MUFOM modules
- (2) The structure of relocatable code libraries
- (3) The format of the optional binary equivalent
- (4) Algorithms for linking, relocating, and loading
- (5) The architecture of the host machine
- (6) The architecture of the target machine, including word size, size of memory, memory organization, or instruction format

This standard is derived from documents in the public domain and contains no patented or proprietary material.

2. Definitions

The following definitions give the meanings of the technical words as they are used in this standard and are intended to reflect the accepted use of the defined words.

absolute code. Data or executable machine code in memory or an image thereof. Distinguish from **relocatable code**.

absolute loader. A process which can load one or more sections of **absolute code** only at the locations specified by the sections. *See:* **relocator**.

binary information. Bit patterns to be loaded into memory.

character form. The (printable) character representation of **binary information** as opposed to the bit pattern representation.

checksum. A deterministic function of a file's contents. If a file is copied and the **checksum** of the copy is different from the original, there has been an error in copying.

code. Data or executable machine code. *See:* **absolute code** and **relocatable code**.

command. Control information for a **linker**, **relocator**, or **loader**. Distinguish from **code**.

comments. Information that is readable by people. To be distinguished from **binary information** and **character form**.

external definition. The definition, within a section, of a symbol which is referenced by other sections. An exported global symbol.

external reference. The specification, within a

section, of a symbol which is defined outside that **section**. An imported global symbol.

format. The language in which **object modules** are specified.

librarian. The **process** which performs operations, such as maintenance, upon a **library**.

library. A set of **object modules**.

linkage editor. A **process** which combines **object modules** into a single **object module** satisfying links between the **object modules**.

linker. Same as **linkage editor**.

load pointer. A pointer for a **section** which is dynamically maintained by the **loader**. It indicates where the next item of **code** is to be loaded. It is initialized to a **starting load address**.

loader. Same as **absolute loader**.

MAU. Abbreviation for **minimum addressable unit**.

minimum addressable unit. For a given **processor**, the amount of memory located between an address and the next address. It is not necessarily equivalent to a word or a byte. Abbreviated **MAU**.

module. Same as **object module**.

MUFOM. Acronym for Microprocessor Universal Format for Object Modules.

object module. A set of **sections** of **absolute code** or **relocatable code**, together with **commands**.

process. A program which is executed by a **processor**. In this document the denotation is restricted to **linker**, **relocator**, expression evaluator, and **loader**.

processor. A computing machine, albeit perhaps a virtual machine.

program. A set of data and instructions which defines the operations to be performed by a **processor**.

relocatable code. Position-independent code which can be loaded at an arbitrary memory location. It generally requires both **relocation** and expression evaluation to become **absolute code**.

relocator. A process which assigns absolute addresses to a **section** of **relocatable code** to produce **absolute code**.

relocation. The function of the **relocator**.

replication. The loading of repetitive data by means of an abbreviated specification.

section. A part of a **program** with ancillary information (**commands**) which becomes a **segment** when loaded.

segment. A contiguous region in memory with arbitrary boundaries.

shall. Is required to ... , are required to

should. Is advised to ... , are advised to

starting load address. The address at which the loading of a **section** begins.

type. An attribute of a symbol, value, or **section**. The definition of a symbol type is left to the implementer.

weak external. An **external reference** which need not be satisfied during linking.

3. References

[1] ANSI X3.4-1977, American National Standard Code for Information Interchange.¹

[2] ANSI X3.43-1977, American National Standard Representations of Local Time of the Day for Information Interchange.

[3] ISO 3307-1975, Representations of Time of the Day—Information Interchange.²

4. Introduction

4.1 Commands. A MUFOM object module is a sequence of commands. These commands are introduced by a two-letter mnemonic and are terminated by a period. Thus,

MBI8080.
ASP,100.
LDC30001.
ME.

is a well-formed module. Detailed descriptions of

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²ISO publications are available from Sales Department, The American National Standards Institute, 1430 Broadway, New York, NY 10018.