

# Backlog

Inner Workings of Computer Are Not Easily Explained,  
Especially if the Spirit Is Willing But the Mind Is Weak

## MEMO

To: Carol J. Robinson, editor  
From: R. Boyd Gunning, executive editor  
Subject: Simple explanation of high-speed digital computer

A great deal has been written about the University's new computer, but no one has really explained what the computer is or how it works in terms that the layman can understand. This is what I would like to see in the *Sooner Magazine*. We want to stay away from technical expressions and scientific language, yet we must be accurate in every detail. It would be ideal if you could explain the computer without using a single computer word.

Here is a description to get you started: The University of Oklahoma High-Speed Computer is an asynchronous, parallel, highly flexible, binary research machine capable of performing either fixed-point or floating-point calculations.

Now I suggest that you talk to Professors Tuma, Viavant and Watson and have them explain this description to you. I am certain you can take care of this matter in no time.

## MEMO

To: R. Boyd Gunning, executive editor  
From: Carol J. Robinson, editor  
Subject: Simple explanation of high-speed digital computer—in no time

I have talked to Professors Tuma, Viavant and Watson. I have read volumes of material on high-speed digital computers, including "Computing Bit by Bit or Digital Computers Made Easy," "The Electronic Brain and What It Can Do," "Computers a Child Can Understand," the annual report to the President, the *Wall Street Journal* and *My Weekly Reader*. I have spent so much time at the computer building that the engineers look upon me as one of the hazards of the job, an object of pity and scorn.

And after weeks of researching, interviewing, reading, thinking, figuring, worrying and complete frustration, I have come to one solid conclusion: Computers were not meant to be explained. Rather they were meant to be accepted, tolerated or loved, depending entirely upon your point of view. I for one prefer to keep a respectful distance, regarding this elec-

tronic gargantua with a certain amount of awe and a healthy amount of caution.

Nothing is sacred from such machines, you know. Not only are computers forecasting presidential elections and the outcome of football games, but they are also choosing marriage partners by mathematics. Now I always thought there was something rather charming about the old fashioned method. I understand that even a toy manufacturer has come out with a miniature electronic computer—just the thing for your child at Christmas.

I did succeed in having your "description" explained to me, however. "Asynchronous" means that whatever the computer does, it doesn't do it all at once. "Parallel" means not serial. "Highly flexible" means that the computer can perform many different operations, while "binary" refers to the fact that the machine can understand only combinations of 1 and 0. "Research" should be self-explanatory, but "fixed and floating-point calculations" are completely beyond my high school algebra.

Someday better explanations will be written, I am certain—just as soon as the new computer is completed, tested and ready to write them.

IMAGE IS NOT AVAILABLE ONLINE DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS.

A paper copy of this issue is available at call number  
LH 1 .06S6 in Bizzell Memorial Library.