

Table of Contents

Programming language 3

Programming language

See also: [Programming Languages](#)

Snippet from [Wikipedia](#): [Programming language](#)

A **programming language** is a system of notation for writing computer programs.

Programming languages are described in terms of their syntax (form) and semantics (meaning), usually defined by a formal language. Languages usually provide features such as a type system, variables and mechanisms for error handling. An implementation of a programming language in the form of a compiler or interpreter allows programs to be executed, either directly or by producing an executable.

Computer architecture has strongly influenced the design of programming languages, with the most common type (imperative languages—which implement operations in a specified order) developed to perform well on the popular von Neumann architecture. While early programming languages were closely tied to the hardware, over time, they have developed more abstraction to hide implementation details for greater simplicity.

Thousands of programming languages—often classified as imperative, functional, logic, or object-oriented—have been developed for a wide variety of uses. Many aspects of programming language design involve tradeoffs—for example, exception handling simplifies error handling, but at a performance cost. Programming language theory is the subfield of computer science that studies the design, implementation, analysis, characterization, and classification of programming languages.

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