LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Terminology corrected

Editor:


The statement (p. 67, last sentence under the heading "Design") reads: "During this phase, a draft of the computer program development specification is prepared" To be correct, it should read "product specification" instead of "development specification." There is a significant difference between a computer program's development specification, which documents requirements, and its product specification, which documents design.

The authority for this correction is Air Force Regulation 800-14 Vol. II, p. 2-3, par. 2-8 ("Computer Program Development in the System Acquisition Life Cycle"), on which the article's development cycle information appears largely to be based. The specific subparagraph is b. "Design Phase," which states "product specification" rather than "development specification."

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Structured assembler endorsed

Editor:


For three years I worked with several groups of engineers and programmers using a mnemonic assembler which, through the efforts of Tom Spross at Hewlett-Packard Company, was transformed into a structured assembler similar to that described by Mr. Duncan. As the new features were added to the assembler, they were eagerly accepted by everyone—"We want more!"—and no one expressed any desire to return to the mnemonic assembler. Based on my experience with both types of assemblers used by many people on several large projects, I can say unequivocally that the IEEE Task P694 chairman's reasons for wanting to continue use of mnemonic assemblers bear little relation to modern software production requirements nor to human factors in software engineering.

I propose the following steps be taken to increase the human factors considerations in assembly languages:

- Get out of the "tar pit." Disband IEEE Task P694; mnemonic assemblers, even when standardized, are not productive.
- Educate. An article in Computer describing Mr. Duncan's techniques,* plus another article describing structured assemblers in current use, would enable many readers to realize the quagmire nature of a mnemonic assembler.
- Develop leading standards. IEEE Task P694 is trying to document the past. Let us plan now for the future; it will be here by the time the standard is done.

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*That article, "Level-Independent Notation for Microcomputer Programs," by F. G. Duncan, has been published already in IEE Micro, May 1981, pp. 47-52. Ed.

To be considered for publication, a letter to the editor must be accompanied by a statement giving Computer permission to publish that letter.

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