Direct Memory Access-DMA

What is DMA?

Direct Memory Access (DMA) transfers the block of data between the *memory* and *peripheral devices* of the system, **without the participation** of the **processor**. The unit that controls the activity of accessing memory directly is called a **DMA controller**. Other mode of transfer is programmed I/O and interrupt driven I/O

The processor **relinquishes the system bus** for a few clock cycles. So, the DMA controller can accomplish the task of data transfer via the system bus.

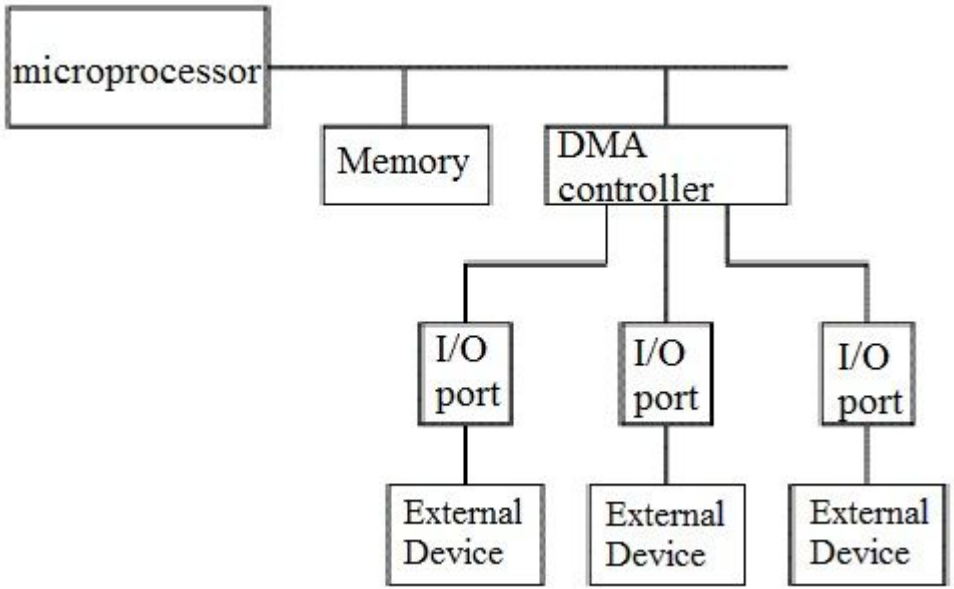
In **programmed I/O**, the processor keeps on scanning whether any device is ready for data transfer. If an I/O device is ready, the processor **fully dedicates** itself in transferring the data between I/O and memory. It transfers data at a **high rate, but it can't get involved in any other activity** during data transfer. This is the major **drawback** of programmed I/O.

In **Interrupt driven I/O**, whenever the device is ready for data transfer, then it raises an **interrupt to processor**. Processor completes executing its ongoing instruction and saves its current state. It then switches to data transfer which causes a **delay**. Here, the processor doesn't keep scanning for peripherals ready for data transfer. But, it is **fully involved** in the data transfer process. So, it is also not an effective way of data transfer.

The above two modes of data transfer are not useful for transferring a large block of data. But, the DMA controller completes this task at a faster rate and is also effective for transfer of large data block.

DMA controller

DMA controller provides an interface between the bus and the input-output devices. Although it transfers data without intervention of processor, it is controlled by the processor. The processor initiates the DMA controller by sending the starting address, Number of words in the data block and direction of transfer of data .i.e. from I/O devices to the memory or from main memory to I/O devices.

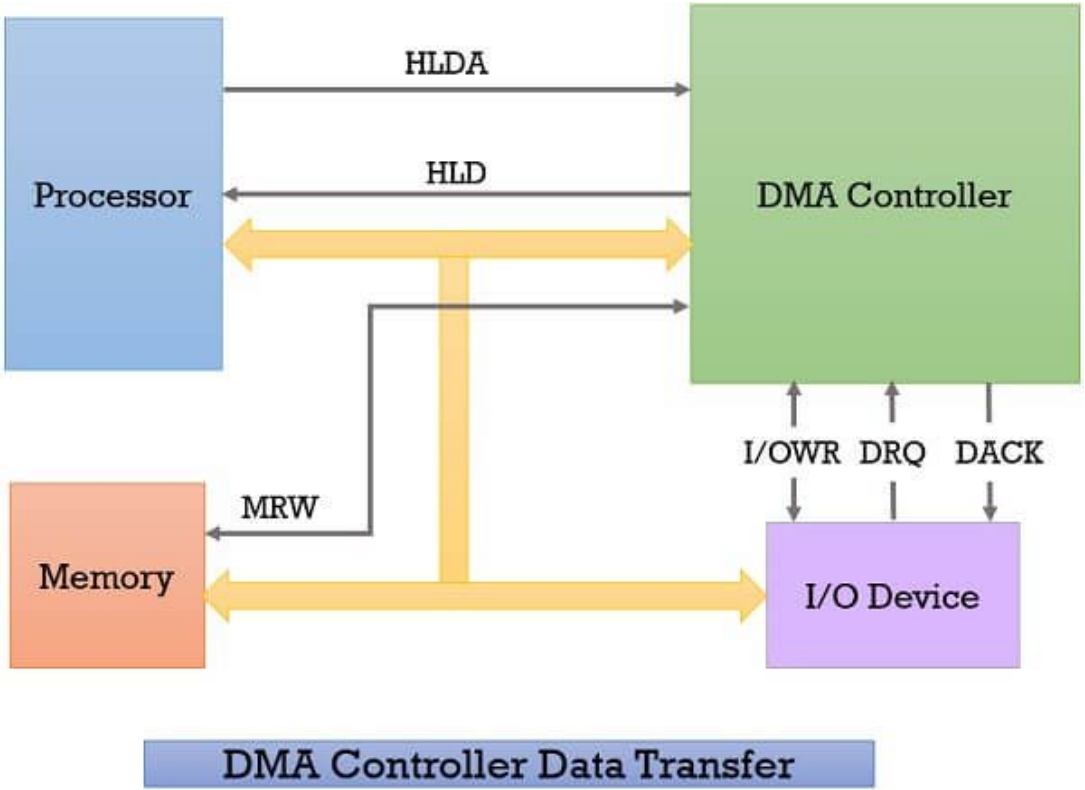


The DMA controller transfers the data in three modes:

1. **Burst Mode:** Here, once the DMA controller gains the charge of the system bus, then it releases the system bus only after **completion** of data transfer. Till then the CPU has to wait for the system buses.
2. **Cycle Stealing Mode:** In this mode, the DMA controller **forces** the CPU to stop its operation and **relinquish the control over the bus** for a **short term** to DMA controller. After the **transfer of every byte**, the DMA controller **releases** the **bus** and then again requests for the system bus. In this way, the DMA controller steals the clock cycle for transferring every byte.

   Example CPU can carry out other instructions which do not require memory like ADD/SUB two **register** variables. So at this time parallely the DMA works on the transferring b/w I/O and main memory while the CPU handles instructions which do not require MM.
   But there might arrive a situation where CPU may require the MM for eg to execute LOAD/STORE instructions. But since DMA has the control over the memory bus CPU has to wait till it gets it back. So at this time the CPU activity gets slowed down by some amount. Initially CPU is having control over MM through MM bus. Now data is ready in DMA buffer. It has to take the bus from CPU. Meanwhile CPU cannot carry out it's tasks which involved MM. So CPU is slowed down a bit as the DMA "stole" it's cycles. "Stealing a cycle" means taking control over the bus.
3. **Transparent Mode:** Here, the DMA controller takes the charge of system bus only if the **processor does not require the system bus**.

Direct Memory Access Controller & it’s Working



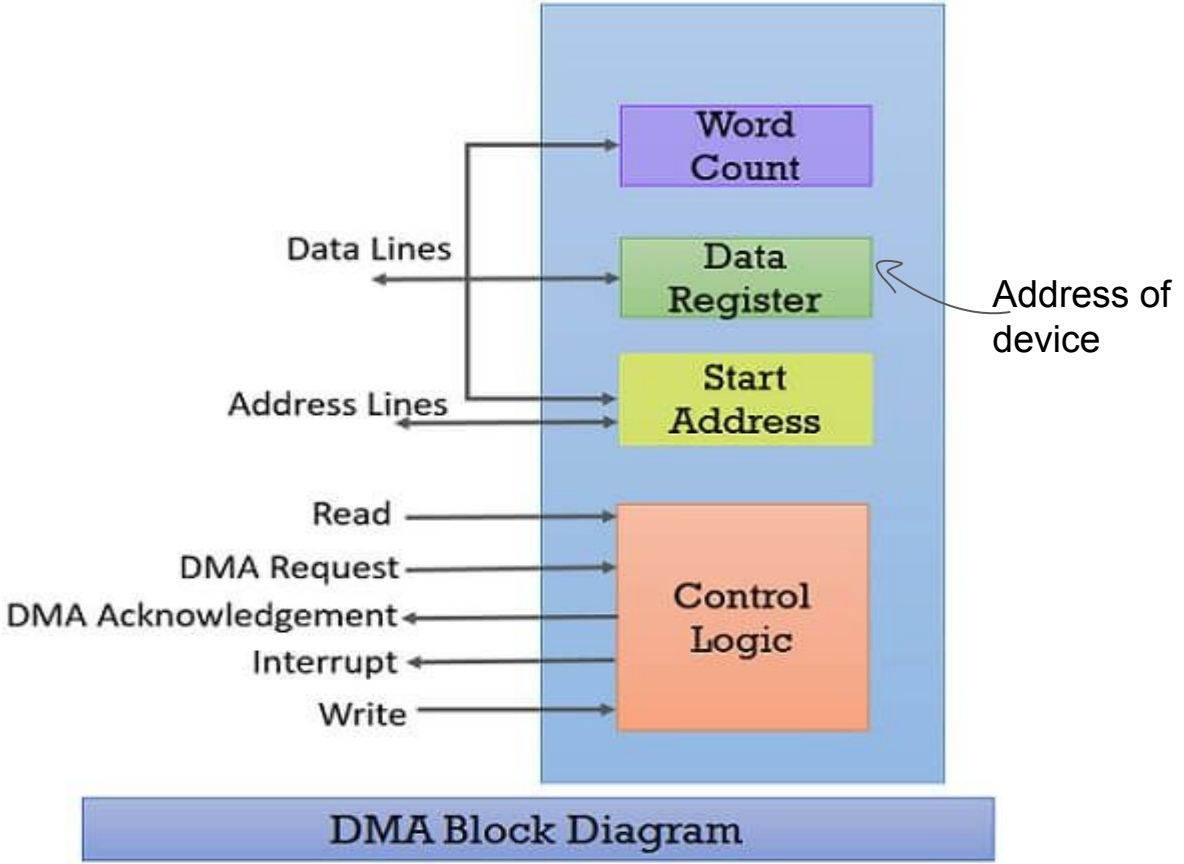
DMA Controller Data Transfer

Operations of DMA

1. Whenever an I/O device wants to transfer the data to or from memory, it sends the DMA request (**DRQ**) to the DMA controller. DMA controller accepts this DRQ and asks the CPU to hold for a few clock cycles by sending it the Hold request (**HLD**).
2. CPU receives the Hold request (HLD) from DMA controller and relinquishes the bus and sends the Hold acknowledgement (**HLDA**) to DMA controller.
3. After receiving the Hold acknowledgement (HLDA), DMA controller acknowledges I/O device **(DACK)** that the data transfer can be performed and DMA controller takes the charge of the system bus and transfers the data to or from memory.
4. When the data transfer is accomplished, the DMA raise an **interrupt** to let know the processor that the task of data transfer is finished and the processor can take control over the bus again and start processing where it has left.

Now the DMA controller can be a separate unit that is shared by various I/O devices, or it can also be a part of the I/O device interface.

Direct Memory Access Diagram



Function of DMA

Whenever a processor is requested to read or write a block of data, i.e. transfer a block of data, it instructs the DMA controller by sending the following information.

1. The first information is whether the data has to be read from memory or the data has to be written to the memory. It passes this information via **read or write control lines** that is between the processor and DMA controllers **control logic unit**.
2. The processor also provides the **starting address** of/ for the data block in the memory, from where the data block in memory has to be read or where the data block has to be written in memory. DMA controller stores this in its **address register**. It is also called the **starting address register**.
3. The processor also sends the **word count**, i.e. how many words are to be read or written. It stores this information in the **data count** or the **word count** register.
4. The most important is the **address of I/O device** that wants to read or write data. This information is stored in the **data register**

Direct Memory Access Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages:

1. Transferring the data without the involvement of the processor will **speed up** the read-write task.
2. DMA **reduces the clock cycle** requires to read or write a block of data.
3. Implementing DMA also **reduces the overhead** of the processor.

Disadvantages

1. As it is a hardware unit, it would **cost** to implement a DMA controller in the system.
2. Cache **coherence** problem can occur while using DMA controller.