# Streaming Data Processing. AXI4-Stream Communication Protocol

# 1 Purpose

This laboratory work introduces basic information about the AXI4-Stream communication protocol. The main objective is to describe the general mechanism of this protocol and to show how it can be used to link various processing components in a computer system.

# 2 Introduction

Today's computer system components operate at different frequencies, which can result in imbalances in the load level of certain processing units. For example, if a component that has a higher processing frequency than the component to which it supplies input data, there are long time intervals in which the faster component has to wait until the slower component completes its processing before it can retrieve the provided data and process it. Thus, processing data in pipeline may become inefficient.

Therefore, it is necessary to implement a data flow control mechanism that regularizes the variable data flow traffic. One solution could be to temporarily store data in First In First Out (FIFO) buffers where it can be retrieved from by the components that need it, the time when faster modules wait for the slower ones to complete processing being significantly reduced in this way.

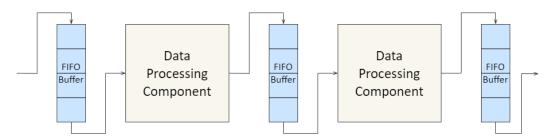


Figure 1: Using FIFOs to efficiently process data in pipeline

This type of FIFOs-based data processing is often performed using streaming communication protocols, which provide control of the data flow within the designed system and eliminate latencies caused by differences in the frequencies with which components process data. AXI4-Stream is such a protocol, which allows transfering data between interconnected modules in a streaming fashion.

# 3 AXI4-Stream Protocol Description

The AXI4-Stream protocol is used as a standard interface to connect components that wish to exchange data. The interface can be used to connect a sender, that generates data, to a receiver, that receives data. It works based on a **ready / valid** handshake.

Table 1: Interface main signals list

Signal	Source	Description
ACLK	Clock source	The global clock signal. All signals are sampled on the rising edge of
		ACLK.
ARESETn	Reset source	The global reset signal. ARESETn is active-LOW.
TDATA	Sender	The actual data that is passing across the interface.
TVALID	Sender	TVALID indicates that the sender provides valid data. The data is
		transferred when both <b>TVALID</b> and <b>TREADY</b> are asserted.
TREADY	Receiver	TREADY indicates that the receiver can accept the data in the
		current cycle.

# 3.1 Interface Signals

The interface main signals are listed in Table 1.

There are other optional signals within the interface defined by the AXI4-Stream protocol, but those listed above are mandatory in order to transfer data generated by the sender to the receiver.

## 3.2 Connecting Two Modules

Taking into account the previously described signals, two modules or components can be interconnected by simply connecting the signals in the input interface of the receiver to the signals of the same name in the output interface of the transmitter.

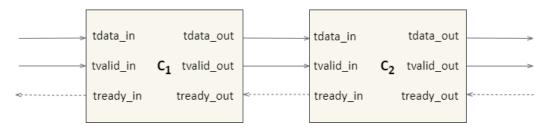


Figure 2: Two interconnected components

Figure 2 shows how the connection between two components (a sender and a receiver) is being performed.

## 3.3 Handshake Process

The **TVALID** and **TREADY** handshake determines when information is passed across the interface. A two-way flow control mechanism enables both the master and slave to control the rate at which the data and control information is transmitted across the interface.

The major rule imposed by the AXI4-Stream protocol is that, for a data transfer to occur both the **TVALID** and **TREADY** signals must be HIGH during the same clock cycle.

Base principle. The data is transffered from the sender to the receiver on the first rising edge of ACLK on which the TVALID has been set to HIGH by the sender and the TREADY has been set to HIGH by the receiver.

There are also some additional rules that must be followed by components communicating via an AXI4-Stream interface:

Rule 1. Once TVALID is asserted it must remain asserted until the handshake occurs. This means that when the sender asserts TVALID, it must keep it HIGH until the receiver asserts TREADY and a rising edge of the ACLK appears.

- Rule 2. A sender is not permitted to wait until TREADY is asserted before asserting TVALID. In other words, the sender must report when the data it provides is valid, even if the receiver is not ready to accept it.
- Rule 3. A receiver is permitted to wait for TVALID to be asserted before asserting TREADY.

  This means that a receiver can wait for the input data to be valid before reporting that it is ready to accept it.
- Rule 4. If a receiver asserts TREADY, it is permitted to deassert TREADY before TVALID is asserted. Thus, if the receiver sets the TREADY HIGH before the TVALID was asserted by the sender, it can set TREADY back to LOW and wait for the sender to report the data is valid (see Rule 3).

Either **TVALID** or **TREADY** can be asserted first or both can be asserted in the same **ACLK** cycle. The following sections show all of these handshake sequences.

#### 3.3.1 TVALID before TREADY

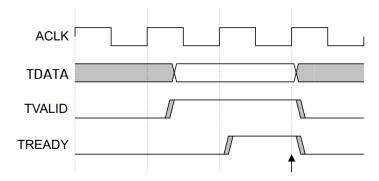


Figure 3: TVALID before TREADY handshake

In Figure 3 the sender asserts **TVALID** signal HIGH before the receiver asserts **TREADY**. Once the sender has asserted **TVALID**, the data from the sender must remain unchanged until the receiver drives the **TREADY** signal HIGH, indicating that it can accept the data. In this case, transfer takes place once the receiver asserts **TREADY** HIGH. The arrow shows when the transfer occurs.

#### 3.3.2 TREADY before TVALID

Figure 4 shows the situation when the receiver drives **TREADY** HIGH before the data is valid. This indicates that the destination can accept the data in a single cycle of **ACLK**. In this case, transfer takes place once the sender asserts **TVALID** HIGH. The arrow indicates when the transfer occurs.

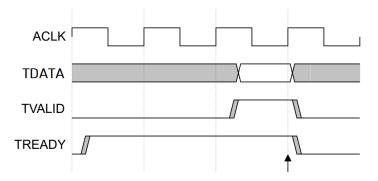


Figure 4: TREADY before TVALID handshake

#### 3.3.3 TVALID with TREADY

In Figure 5 the sender asserts **TVALID** HIGH and the receiver asserts **TREADY** HIGH in the same cycle of **ACLK**. In this case, transfer takes place in the same cycle, as shown by the arrow.

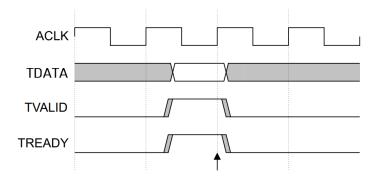


Figure 5: TREADY with TVALID handshake

To conclude, as a general rule, the data is transferred from the sender to the receiver on the first rising edge of **ACLK** when both **TVALID** and **TREADY** are HIGH.

# 4 Vivado IP Catalog Tutorial

An intellectual property core (IP core) is a functional block of logic or data used to make a field-programmable gate array (FPGA) or application-specific integrated circuit for a product. Commonly used in semiconductors, an IP core is a reusable unit of logic or integrated circuit (IC) layout design.

The IP catalog available in Vivado is a single location for AMD-supplied IP. It consists of IP cores for embedded systems, communication, interfaces, and more.

The steps needed to customize and instantiate an IP core are presented as follows. The steps are shown using an IP Core which represents a FIFO buffer as an example.

Before starting this tutorial, you have to create a new Vivado project. Open Vivado, click on  $File \rightarrow Project \rightarrow New...$  and in the opened window click Next. Provide the path or browse to the directory where you want to create the project and click Next. In the  $Project\ Type$  window select  $RTL\ Project$  and tick the  $Do\ not\ specify\ sources\ at\ this\ time$  option. The device properties that you need to choose are:

• Product category: All

• Family: Artix-7

• Package: cpg236

• Speed grade: -1

Then select from the table the xc7a35tcpg236-1 board and click Next. Click Finish.

## Step 1. Open the Vivado IP Catalog

Open the Window vertical menu and select IP Catalog.

## Step 2. Select the IP Core

In the opened window, open the AXI Infrastructure folder and double click on AXI4-Stream Data FIFO, as shown in Figure 6.

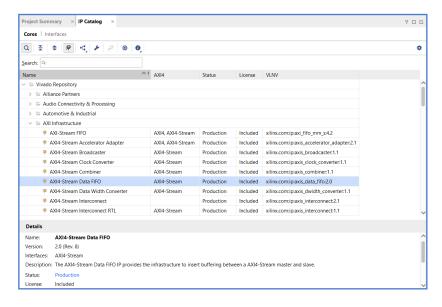


Figure 6: Selecting the IP Core

## Step 3. Customize the IP Core

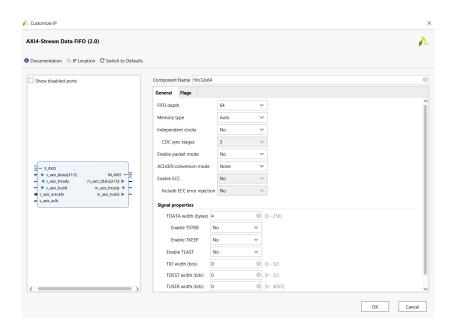


Figure 7: Customizing the IP Core

In the customization window, you can set the values of various parameters to make the IP Core meet your needs. For our example, set the component name to fifo32x64, the FIFO Depth to 64 and the TDATA Width to 4 bytes, as shown in Figure 7, then press the OK button.

## Step 4. Generate the output products

In the Generate Output Products window, click on Generate.

## Step 5. Declare and instantiate the IP Core

When the synthesis is completed, open the IP Sources tab from the Sources window, then navigate



Figure 8: The location of the instantiation template file

to  $IP \to fifo34x64 \to Instantiation\ Template$  and open the fifo32x64.vho file. Figure 8 shows the location of this file.

In the fifo32x64.vho file you can find the component declaration of the IP Core and the instantiation template, so you can use the generated IP Core as a component of a higher level module in your project.

# 5 Vivado Simulation Tutorial Using Stimulus Files

Reading signal values from file is an alternative way of generating stimuli for the design under test (DUT). This is typically useful when the design has to be tested using real data such as values measured by sensors. The testbench sequence and timing is hard-coded in a stimulus file that is read by the VHDL testbench, line by line.

This tutorial shows the steps needed to include a stimulus file in a Vivado project and describes an example of processing data read from the file and writing the results to an output file.

Note: Use the project created for the previous tutorial in Section 4. The flow that you need to follow is described step by step as follows.

## Step 1. Include the stimulus file in the project

The stimulus file used in this example is the *temperature.csv* file which is given in the Appendix A.1 and structured as follows:

```
timestamp, temperature 1, temperature 2
timestamp, temperature 1, temperature 2
...
timestamp, temperature 1, temperature 2
```

The values in the timestamp column are strings and the values in the temperature columns are 32-bit floating-point values. The data stored in this file represent the values read by two temperature sensors, together with the corresponding timestamps.

To include the file in your project, in the *Project Manager* section from the *Flow Navigator* click on *Add Sources*. Select *Add or create simulation sources* and press *Next*. Click on *Add files*. In the navigation window select for the *Files of type* field the value *All Files* and navigate to the location of the *temperature.csv* file on your computer. After finding the file, select it, press *OK* and then *Finish*.

The file should be visible now in the Sources window, in the Simulation Sources  $\rightarrow$  sim\_1  $\rightarrow$  CSV directory.

## Step 2. Generate the IP Core for subtracting two floating-point values

The IP Core that you need to generate is *Floating-point* and it can be found in the *Vivado Repository*  $\rightarrow$  *Math Functions*  $\rightarrow$  *Floating Point* directory of the IP Catalog.

In the Operation Selection tab of the Customize IP window choose select Add/Subtract for the Operation Selection and Subtract for the Add/Subtract and FMA Operator options. In the Precision of Inputs tab of the same window select the Single option. Set the component name to fp\_subtractor and generate the IP Core, as described in the previous tutorial.

#### Step 3. Include the design source file in the project

The design used for tesing is implemented in the *temperature\_subtractor.vhd* file and it performs the subtraction of two floating point values. It is designed in a structural manner, using the previously generated *fifo32x64* IP Core and an IP Core for performing the subtraction, which you have customized and generated in the previous step. The block design is shown in Figure 9. The content of the *temperature\_subtractor.vhd* file is listed in Appendix A.2.

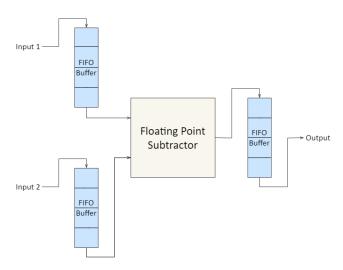


Figure 9: The block design of the example module

In the *Project Manager* section from the *Flow Navigator* click on *Add Sources*. Select *Add or create design sources* and press *Next*. Click on *Add files*. In the navigation window select for the *Files of type* field the value *All Files* and navigate to the location of the *temperature\_subtractor.vhd* file on your computer. After finding the file, select it, press *OK* and then *Finish*.

## Step 4. Include the testbench file in the project

Follow the same steps to include the *testbech\_stimulus\_file.vhd* in your project as a simulation source. The content of the file is also listed in Appendix A.3.

This file is used to read the values stores in the *temperature.csv* file, to provide it to the module being tested and to write an output file. There are two distinct processes in the testbench file. The first one is used to read data from the input file, while the second process writes the results to the output file. The subprograms and types needed for reading and writing external files in VHDL are located in the TEXTIO package. This package is part of the std library.

The input file is opened in read\_mode as follows:

```
file sensors_data : text open read_mode is "temperature.csv";
```

The file is read line by line using the readline function. On every rising edge of the aclk signal when the module being tested is ready to accept data, a new line is read.

The output file is automatically created at simulation by opening it in write\_mode as shown below:

```
file results : text open write_mode is "C:/SCS/AXI4Stream/temperature_results.csv";
```

Note: Make sure you provide the absolut path to your own project directory followed by the name of the output file.

#### Step 5. Run behavioral simulation and validate the results

In the Simulation section of the Flow Navigator click on Run Simulation and then on Run Behavioral Simulation. Simulate the design for at least 1700 ns or until the value of the wr\_count signal is greater than the value of the rd\_count signal to be sure that all the results produced by the module for every pair of input values were successfully written in the output file. You can validate your results by comparing the content of your output file with the content of the valid\_results.csv file. The content of this file is also listed in A.4.

# 6 Exercises

- 1. Follow the steps presented in Section 4 to generate a FIFO buffer IP Core.
- 2. Follow the tutorial in Section 5 to simulate the design in temperature\_subtractor.vhd file using the temperature.csv stimulus file. Validate your result using the numbers in valid\_results.csv file.
- 3. The current implementation of the temperature\_subtractor.vhd performs the  $t_1 t_2$  difference for every pair of  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  given as inputs. Modify the implementation so that the result provided for a pair of  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  is  $\sqrt{|t_1 t_2|}$ .

## Hints

- You have to generate two more IP Cores for computing the absolut value and the square root and to instantiate them in the top level temperature\_subtractor module.
- In order to compute the absolut value and the square root, you have to generate the corresponding IP Cores starting from the same *Floating-point* IP Core which is used for the fp\_subtractor module. In the customization window select the corresponding options for the operation performed by the IP Core (Absolut Value and Square-root).
- The block design of the module you need to implement is shown in Figure 10.

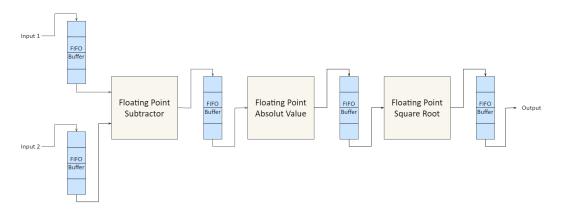


Figure 10: The block design of required module

# References

- [1] AMBA 4 AXI4-Stream Protocol Specification Arm [accessed Oct. 2024], https://documentation-service.arm.com/static/642583d7314e245d086bc8c9?token=
- [2] How the axi-style ready/valid handshake works [accessed Oct. 2024], https://vhdlwhiz.com/how-the-axi-style-ready-valid-handshake-works/
- [3] Vivado Design Suite User Guide: Designing with IP (UG896) Using the IP Catalog [accessed Oct. 2024], https://docs.xilinx.com/r/en-US/ug896-vivado-ip/Using-the-IP-Catalog

[4] Stimulus file read in testbench using TEXTIO [accessed Oct. 2024], https://vhdlwhiz.com/stimulus-file/

# A Code appendix

# A.1 Temperature Stimuli File

# A.2 Temperature Subtractor Design

```
library IEEE:
use IEEE.STD_LOGIC_1164.ALL;
entity temperature_subtractor is
    Port ( aclk : in STD_LOGIC;
           aresetn : in STD_LOGIC;
           t1_tvalid : in STD_LOGIC;
           t1_tready : out STD_LOGIC;
           t1_tdata : in STD_LOGIC_VECTOR (31 downto 0);
           t2_tvalid : in STD_LOGIC;
           t2_tready : out STD_LOGIC;
           t2_tdata : in STD_LOGIC_VECTOR (31 downto 0);
           tout_tvalid : out STD_LOGIC;
           tout_tready : in STD_LOGIC;
           tout_tdata : out STD_LOGIC_VECTOR (31 downto 0));
end temperature_subtractor;
architecture Structural of temperature_subtractor is
COMPONENT fp_subtractor
  PORT (
    aclk : IN STD_LOGIC;
    s_axis_a_tvalid : IN STD_LOGIC;
    {\tt s\_axis\_a\_tready} \; : \; {\tt OUT} \; {\tt STD\_LOGIC};
    s_axis_a_tdata : IN STD_LOGIC_VECTOR(31 DOWNTO 0);
    s_axis_b_tvalid : IN STD_LOGIC;
    s_axis_b_tready : OUT STD_LOGIC;
    s_axis_b_tdata : IN STD_LOGIC_VECTOR(31 DOWNTO 0);
    m_axis_result_tvalid : OUT STD_LOGIC;
    m_axis_result_tready : IN STD_LOGIC;
    m_axis_result_tdata : OUT STD_LOGIC_VECTOR(31 DOWNTO 0)
  );
END COMPONENT;
COMPONENT fifo32x64
  PORT (
    s_axis_aresetn : IN STD_LOGIC;
    s_axis_aclk : IN STD_LOGIC;
    s_axis_tvalid : IN STD_LOGIC;
    s_axis_tready : OUT STD_LOGIC;
    s_axis_tdata : IN STD_LOGIC_VECTOR(31 DOWNTO 0);
    m_axis_tvalid : OUT STD_LOGIC;
    m_axis_tready : IN STD_LOGIC;
    m_axis_tdata : OUT STD_LOGIC_VECTOR(31 DOWNTO 0)
  );
END COMPONENT;
signal temp1_tdata, temp2_tdata, dif_tdata : STD_LOGIC_VECTOR (31 downto 0);
signal temp1_tready, temp2_tready, dif_tready : STD_LOGIC;
signal temp1_tvalid, temp2_tvalid, dif_tvalid : STD_LOGIC;
begin
    fifo_in_t1 : fifo32x64 port map (
        s_axis_aresetn => aresetn,
        s_axis_aclk => aclk,
        s_axis_tvalid => t1_tvalid,
        s_axis_tready => t1_tready,
        s_axis_tdata => t1_tdata,
        m_axis_tvalid => temp1_tvalid,
        m_axis_tready => temp1_tready,
        m_axis_tdata => temp1_tdata
    );
    fifo_in_t2 : fifo32x64 port map (
        s_axis_aresetn => aresetn,
        s_axis_aclk => aclk,
        s_axis_tvalid => t2_tvalid,
```

```
s_axis_tready => t2_tready,
        s_axis_tdata => t2_tdata,
       m_axis_tvalid => temp2_tvalid,
       m_axis_tready => temp2_tready,
       m_axis_tdata => temp2_tdata
   );
   sub : fp_subtractor port map (
       aclk => aclk,
       s_axis_a_tvalid => temp1_tvalid,
       s_axis_a_tready => temp1_tready,
        s_axis_a_tdata => temp1_tdata,
       s_axis_b_tvalid => temp2_tvalid,
       s_axis_b_tready => temp2_tready,
       s_axis_b_tdata => temp2_tdata,
       m_axis_result_tvalid => dif_tvalid,
       m_axis_result_tready => dif_tready,
        m_axis_result_tdata => dif_tdata
   );
   fifo_out : fifo32x64 port map (
        s_axis_aresetn => aresetn,
       s_axis_aclk => aclk,
       s_axis_tvalid => dif_tvalid,
       s_axis_tready => dif_tready,
       s_axis_tdata => dif_tdata,
       m_axis_tvalid => tout_tvalid,
       m_axis_tready => tout_tready,
       m_axis_tdata => tout_tdata
   ):
end Structural;
```

## A.3 Tesbench Stimulus File

```
library IEEE;
use IEEE.STD_LOGIC_1164.ALL;
use STD.TEXTIO.ALL;
use IEEE.STD_LOGIC_TEXTIO.ALL;
use IEEE.STD_LOGIC_SIGNED.ALL;
use IEEE.NUMERIC_STD.ALL;
entity testbench_stimulus_file is
end testbench_stimulus_file;
architecture Tb of testbench_stimulus_file is
component temperature_subtractor is
    Port ( aclk : in STD_LOGIC;
           aresetn : in STD_LOGIC;
           t1_tvalid : in STD_LOGIC;
           t1_tready : out STD_LOGIC;
           t1_tdata : in STD_LOGIC_VECTOR (31 downto 0);
           t2_tvalid : in STD_LOGIC;
           t2_tready : out STD_LOGIC;
           t2_tdata : in STD_LOGIC_VECTOR (31 downto 0);
           tout_tvalid : out STD_LOGIC;
           tout_tready : in STD_LOGIC;
           tout_tdata : out STD_LOGIC_VECTOR (31 downto 0));
end component;
constant T : time := 20 ns;
signal aclk, aresetn : STD_LOGIC := '0';
signal t1_tdata, t2_tdata, tout_tdata : STD_LOGIC_VECTOR (31 downto 0) := (others => '0');
signal t1_tready, t2_tready : STD_LOGIC := '0';
signal t1_tvalid, t2_tvalid, tout_tvalid : STD_LOGIC := '0';
signal rd_count, wr_count : integer := 0;
signal end_of_reading : std_logic := '0';
```

```
aclk <= not aclk after T / 2;</pre>
aresetn <= '0', '1' after 5 * T; -- reset the FIFO buffers at first
-- design under test
dut : temperature_subtractor port map (
   aclk => aclk,
    aresetn => aresetn,
    t1_tvalid => t1_tvalid,
    t1_tready => t1_tready,
    t1_tdata => t1_tdata,
    t2_tvalid => t2_tvalid,
    t2_tready => t2_tready,
    t2_tdata => t2_tdata,
    tout_tvalid => tout_tvalid,
    tout_tready => '1',
    tout_tdata => tout_tdata
);
-- read values from the input file
process (aclk)
    file sensors_data : text open read_mode is "temperature.csv";
    variable in_line : line;
    variable timestamp : string(1 to 16);
    variable temperature1 : std_logic_vector(31 downto 0);
    variable temperature2 : std_logic_vector(31 downto 0);
    variable space : character;
    variable comma : character;
begin
    if rising_edge(aclk) then
        if aresetn = '1' and end_of_reading = '0' then
            if not endfile(sensors_data) then
                if t1_tready = '1' and t2_tready = '1' then
                     -- read from the file only when the module is ready to accept data
                    readline(sensors_data, in_line);
                    read(in_line, timestamp);
                    t1_tvalid <= '1';
                    t2_tvalid <= '1';
                    read(in_line, comma);
                    read(in_line, temperature1);
                    t1_tdata <= temperature1;</pre>
                    read(in_line, comma);
                    read(in_line, temperature2);
                    t2_tdata <= temperature2;</pre>
                    rd_count <= rd_count + 1;
                    report "Values measured at time t = " & timestamp & " successfully read";
                else
                    t1_tvalid <= '0';</pre>
                    t2_tvalid <= '0';
                end if:
                file_close(sensors_data);
                end_of_reading <= '1';</pre>
            end if;
        end if;
    end if:
end process;
-- write results in the output file
process
    -- TO DO: provide the absolute path of the project directory followed by "temperature_results.csv"
```

begin

```
file results : text open write_mode is "C:/SCS/Lab06/temperature_results.csv";
        variable out_line : line;
   begin
        wait until rising_edge(aclk);
        if aresetn = '0' then
            wait until rising_edge(aresetn);
        end if:
        if wr_count <= rd_count then
            if tout_tvalid = '1' then
                                         -- write the result only when it is valid
                write(out_line, wr_count);
                write(out_line, string'(", "));
                write(out_line, tout_tdata);
                writeline(results, out_line);
                wr_count <= wr_count + 1;</pre>
            end if;
        else
            file_close(results);
            report "execution finished...";
            wait:
        end if:
    end process;
end Tb;
```

## A.4 Valid Results

```
0, 0011111111011011110000101001000000
1, 001111111101111101011100001010000
2, 001111111110000111101011100010000
3, 001111111110011001100110011010000
4, 001111111110010100011110101110000
5, 001111111110100110011001101000000
6, 0011111111101000010100011111100000
7, 001111111110011110101110000110000
8, 001111111110101000111101011100000
9, 001111111110100011110101110010000
10, 001111111110101110000101001000000
11, 001111111110110101110000101000000
12, 001111111110100110011001100110000
13, 0011111111101011110000101001000000
14, 001111111110111010111000010110000
15, 001111111110110011001100110100000
16, 001111111110101011100001010010000
17, 001111111110110101110000101010000
18, 001111111110100110011001101000000
19, 001111111110100011110101110010000
20, 0011111111101010111100001010010000
21, 0011111111101010111100001010010000
22, 0011111111101111101011100001010000
24, 001111111111000101000111101100000
26, 001111111111001010001111010110000
27, 001111111110110011001100110100000
28, 001111111110110101110000101000000
29, 001111111111000010100011110110000
30, 001111111111000101000111101010000
31, 001111111111010100011110101110000
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32, 001111111111010100011110101110000

- 33, 001111111111010100011110101110000
- 34, 001111111111100110011001100110000
- 35, 001111111111100001010001111100000
- 36, 001111111111000101000111110000
- 37, 00111111111111011100001010010000000
- 38, 00111111111011001100110011010000
- 39, 001111111111010111000010100100000
- 40, 00111111111111101000101001000000
- 41, 001111111111100110011001100110000
- 11, 001111111111110011001100110011
- $42,\ 0011111111111100110011001100110000$
- 43, 001111111111100011110101110000000
- 44, 0011111111110100011111010111000000
- $45,\ 0011111111111100001010001111010000$
- 46, 001111111111100001010001111010000