COMS31700 Design Verification:

Stimuli Generation

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(Acknowledgement: Avi Ziv from the IBM Research Labs in Haifa has kindly permitted the re-use of some of his slides.)

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Last Time

- Coverage
  - Code
  - Structural
  - Functional
- Coverage analysis
  - Hole analysis

(Discuss plan for coming weeks!)

Outline

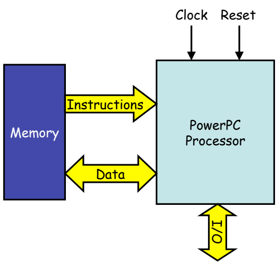
- Motivation: Advanced Stimulus Generation
- Running example – PowerPC processor
- Issues in stimuli generation
  - Level of stimuli, test length, etc.
- Randomness
- Constrained pseudo-random stimulus generation

Goals of Stimuli Generation

- Achieve all the items in the test scenarios matrix of the verification plan
  - Ensure that the scenarios in the matrix are happening
  - Ensure that "bad effects" are propagating to an existing checker
    - Hitting a bug without exposing it is worth nothing
- But also
  - Hitting and exposing all the problems we did not think about in the verification plan
  - Provide information about the design and help recreate and understand problems
  - Ensure that nothing gets broken over time

Running Example – PowerPC Processor

- Black box view
  - Interface to memory (via caches)
    - For instruction fetching
    - For data fetching and storing
  - Interface to I/O devices
    - For data fetching and storing
    - Interrupts
  - Miscellaneous interface
    - Clocks
    - Reset
    - …

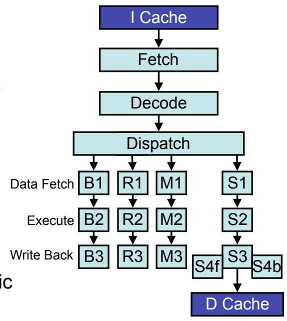


Architectural View

- RISC (Reduced Instruction Set Computer) processor
  - "Small" number of instructions (~400)
  - One simple operation per instruction
  - Fixed length instructions (32 bits = 1 word)
  - Specific load and store instructions to access memory
    - All other instructions use registers for operands
- Large register files
  - 32 general purpose registers (GPR)
  - 32 floating-point registers (FPR)
    - Used only for floating-point operations
  - Several special purpose registers
    - Condition register, link register, status register, etc.
- Complex memory model
  - Multiple level address translation
  - Coherency rules
  - (not in the scope of the lecture)

Microarchitectural View

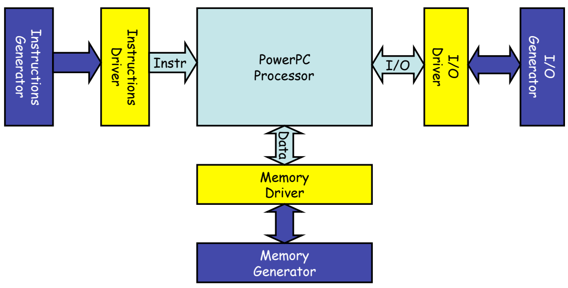
- Multi-threaded
- In-order execution
- Four instructions wide
  - Fetch
  - Decode
  - Dispatch
- Four execution units
  - B – Branch
  - S – Load Store
  - R – Simple Arithmetic
  - M – Complex Arithmetic



Extracts from the Verification Plan

- Check that all pairs of instructions are executed correctly together
  - Basic architectural requirement
  - Appears in most verification plans of processors
  - Fulfilling it is not as easy at it seems
- Check that all forwarding mechanisms between pipeline stages are working properly
  - Basic microarchitectural requirement
  - Source for many bugs in previous designs

Processor Verification Environment

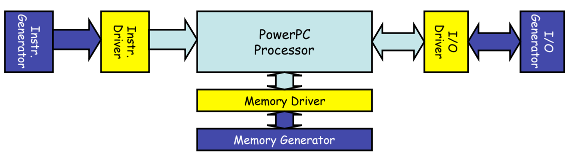


Issues in Stimuli Generation

- How many generators?
- Level of abstraction
- Online vs. offline generation
- Dynamic vs. static generation
- Test length
- Randomness

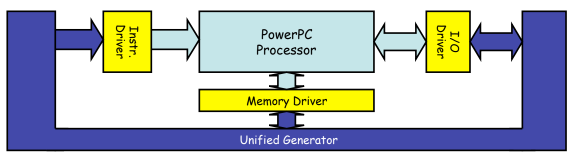
How Many Generators?

- Distributed generators
  - Each interface has its own generator
  - Each generator works on its own
  - Advantages
    - Simple
    - Easy to reuse
  - Disadvantages
    - Hard to reach corner cases in coordinated fashion



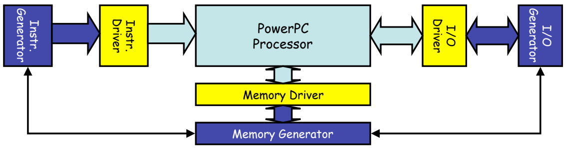
How Many Generators?

- Single generator
  - One generator controls all the interfaces
  - Advantages
    - All the interfaces can work together toward a common goal
  - Disadvantages
    - Complex
    - Hard to reuse



How Many Generators?

- Synchronized generators
  - Each interface has its own generator
  - The generators share information and synchronize
  - Advantages
    - Can reuse each generator separately
    - Can work together towards a common goal



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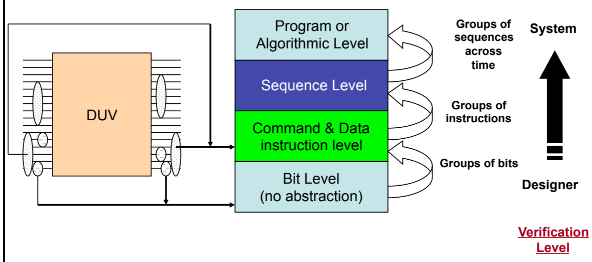
Abstraction Level of Generation



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What Does Abstraction Level Mean?

- Communication between:
  the user and the generator
    - How the user specifies directives to the generator
- Internal representation and operation level in the generator
    - The level in which the generator generates the stimuli
- Communication between:
  the generator and the driver
    - The generator sends information at high level of abstraction
    - The driver translates into bits using the appropriate protocol

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Which Abstraction Level To Choose?

- Communication between the user and the generator
  - Use level similar to the level of the verification plan
  - In our case – the sequence level
- Internal representation and operation level in the generator
  - Conflicting requirements
    - Address user requests (at their level) → high level of abstraction
    - Need sufficient detail → low level of abstraction
  - In many cases we use two or more levels of generation
    - First we build a high-level skeleton of the stimuli based on the user request
    - Next we add lower-level details
- Communication between the generator and the driver
  - Use the lowest level in which the generator operates
  - Special case – error injection

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Error Injection

- Error detection and recovery are very important mechanisms in hardware designs
  - They are also very hard to verify
- Error injection is usually done at the lowest level of abstraction
  - The value of a bit (or set of bits) is flipped when they are injected into the DUV
- To allow error injection, the generator needs to operate and communicate with the driver at the bit level
  - This creates extra burden and unnecessarily increases complexity for normal cases
- Possible solution – create separate error injection interface between the generator and driver
  - At the low level of the error injection
  - At the normal level with instructions on how to inject the error

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Online Vs Offline Generation

When to generate stimuli?

- **Offline** generation (pre-run):
  - The entire stimuli are generated **before the simulation** begins
  - The generation and simulation can be two separated processes
- **Online** generation (on-the-fly):
  - Stimuli generation **during simulation**
  - The next element is generated when needed by the driver
  - The generator must be part of the verification environment

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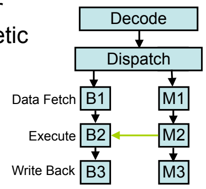
Offline Generation

- Why
  - Can separate the generation from simulation
    - Use external tools, emulation, …
  - Can use more complex algorithms for generation
    - For example, **generate out of order**, e.g. instruction sequences (processors) or action sequences (robotics)
  - May be compulsory (Where?)
- Why not
  - Need to connect the generation output to the verification environment
  - Cannot use information directly from the DUV and environment
  - Hard to react to responders

Generating Instructions Out Of Order

- Goal – forward data from M2 to B2
  - Branch is dispatched after arithmetic instruction
  - Both reach stage 2 together
  - Branch waits for the arithmetic instruction to complete



How can we generate a test, i.e. a sequence of instructions, that achieves this goal (efficiently and effectively)?

Generating Instructions Out Of Order

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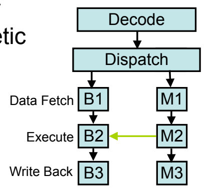


4	Lw G10, 60(G21)
4	Add G7, G9, G13
2	Mul G1, G2, G3
3	Div G4, G5, G6
1	Br 100(G1)

Generation Order: **Br – Mul** – Div – Lw - Add
Execution Order: Lw – Add – **Mul** – Div - **Br**

Online Generation

- Why
  - The generator can use information about the state of the environment and DUV for improving the quality of generation
    - Makes reaching corner cases easier
  - The only solution for responders
  - Generally small memory footprint
- Why not
  - Must generate items in order
  - Limited complexity
  - <any other reasons why not>

Mixing online and offline Generation

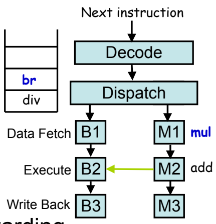
- Online and offline generation can be mixed within a verification environment
- Which designs would benefit from this combination?
  - (Example will be discussed in lecture.)

Dynamic vs. Static Generation

- In static generation the generator is not aware of the state of the DUV and the environment
  - Generation decisions are based entirely on the internal state of the generator
  - Less restrictive view: the generator is aware of what and when it is allowed to generate
    - In calc1 the generator knows not to generate a new command before a response for the previous command has been received
- In dynamic generation the generator is fully aware of the state of the DUV and the environment and generates based on this information
  - The generator can react to interesting states in the DUV

Dynamic Instruction Generation Example

- Goal – forward data from M2 to B2
  - The generator identifies the potential forwarding condition "on the fly", i.e. when it spots the **mul** instruction
  - It generates instruction(s) that will block the **br**(anch) from dispatching with the **mul** instruction
  - It generates a **br** instruction with the same register as the destination of the **mul** instruction to create the dependency that triggers forwarding



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Does This Example Work?

- This example may not work!
- Main reason:
  - There is a distance (in terms of time) from the entry point of instructions to the processor to the dispatch queue. This distance creates delays.
  - Many bad things can happen while the br instruction travels this distance
    - For example, exceptions that flush the pipes
  - By the time the br instruction reaches the relevant stage in the pipe to trigger forwarding, the interesting condition may already have gone

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Dynamic Vs. Static Generation

- Dynamic generation is based on reaction while static generation is based on planning
- In general, reaction is harder than planning
  - Time is a factor
  - Unexpected events can get in the way
- Most generators use dynamic features lightly
  - Observe and react to shallow or stable states and resources
    - For example, architectural registers

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Offline Dynamic Generation

- *Dynamic and static* generation should not be confused with *online and offline* generation
- An offline generator can use dynamic generation by using a reference model that provides information about the state of the DUV
  - The level and accuracy of the information depends on the abstraction level and accuracy of the reference model

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Test Length

- Two extreme approaches for selecting the test length
- Use short tests
  - The shortest tests that can fulfill the requirement in the verification plan
  - For the instruction pairs requirement use tests with just two instructions ☺
- Use long tests
  - Combine many requirements in a single test
  - Wrap a test with initial and ending sequences

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Why Short Tests?

- Easy to create
- Easy to debug
- Easy to maintain
- Short time to simulate each

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Why Long Tests?

- Need fewer tests
- Less time to simulate
  - Overall less time as we do not need to repeat the initialization sequence for every test ;)
- Test is not at or near the initial state most of the time
- Use less traveled paths and greater variety of exploration
- Reach target in more ways
  - Often leads to reaching the target in unexpected ways

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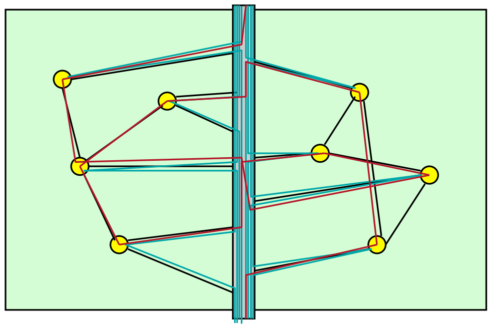
Short Vs. Long



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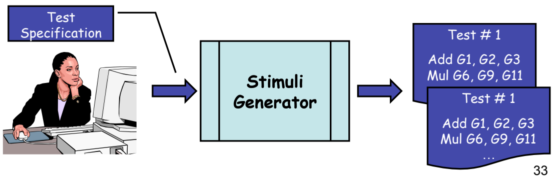
Randomness - Motivation

- The first time we press the button a test is created
- What happens when we press the button a second time?
  - **The same test appears**
    ➔ our stimuli generator is deterministic



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Why Deterministic?

- Useful before random environment is ready
  - It is much easier to create a driver that reads deterministic tests and injects them into the DUV
- Previously developed test suite
  - For example, architectural compliance suite
- Known quality
- Avoid (potentially) extremely long generation times

(Do not confuse deterministic with manual!)

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Why Not Deterministic?

- A given test can be used only once
  - It is useless unless something has changed in the
    - DUV
    - Environment
- The test specification has limited reuse capabilities
- Modern verification methodology employs many workstations that simulate many test cases
  - We cannot afford to provide different test specifications for each test case to be simulated
- What about hitting and exposing all the problems we did not think about in the verification plan?

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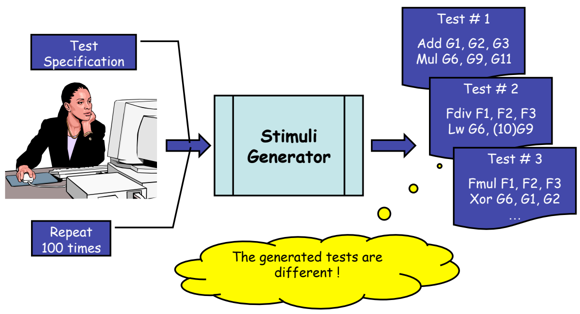
Random Stimuli Generation



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Pure Random Generation

- The opposite end of the spectrum to deterministic generation
- The generator generates random sequences of ‘0’s and ‘1’s that are packed into instructions
- Theoretically, this might seem like the ideal solution
  - Avoid blind spots in the verification plan
- BUT practically, not very useful for verification
  - Most generated test cases are invalid
  - Most valid test cases are not interesting

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Side Note – *Pseudo* Random

- When using random number generators, “random” decisions are controlled by a seed
  - Given the value of the seed, random decisions are deterministic
- Pseudo random is essential in verification because of the need to reproduce specific tests
  - For example, to reproduce bugs
- Essential requirement for **Pseudo Random Test Generator:**
  - Need (at least) **repeatability!**
    - Achieved by using the same seed to seed the generator.

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Constrained Random Generation

- The stimuli generator is constrained to generate
  - **Valid** tests
  - Tests that meet the user requests
- There are many (infinite number of) tests that fulfill these constraints
- The generator can choose any such test

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Example – Instruction Pair Generation

- The test specification is a test with an add instruction followed by an xor instruction
  - Comes from the first extract of our verification plan
- The test should look like
- Everything else can be randomized

```
add_xor_test

Start:
  …
  Add ??, ??, ??
  Xor ??, ??, ??
  …
```

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Random Decisions for add_xor_test

- Registers of add instruction
- Data of add instruction
- Registers of xor instruction
- Data of xor instruction

… but also

- Prelude sequence
- Epilogue sequence
- Start address of the program
- Processor operation mode
- Behavior of caches, I/O, …
- …

```
add_xor_test

Start:
  …
  Add ??, ??, ??
  Xor ??, ??, ??
  …
```

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How To Make Random Decisions

- Pure random decisions
  - Most tests will be invalid
- Constrained random decisions
  - Limit random decisions to those that lead to valid tests
  - Choose uniformly among valid possibilities
  - Result
    - Generated tests are valid
    - Most random decisions are not interesting
      ➔ Small gain in test quality
- “Smart” constrained random decisions
  - Bias decision toward interesting cases
  - Can lead to significant improvement in test quality

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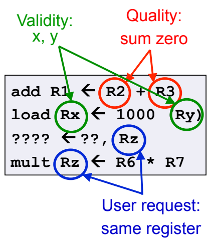
“Smart” Decisions for add_xor_test

- Data of add instruction
  - Result = 0
  - Overflow
  - Long sequences of ‘1’s (long carry chains)
- Registers of add instruction
  - special registers, e.g. G0 for PowerPC
- Registers of xor instruction
  - Same registers as used for add instruction to create dependencies
- Start address of the program
  - Page 0
  - Start of page
  - Near end of page



These requirements can be expressed as *constraints.*

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Smart Decisions

- These decisions usually represent generic knowledge of what is interesting in verification
  - Examples:
    - Add with result 0 is interesting in all addition operations
    - Interdependency between registers is interesting in all processors
    - G0 is an interesting operand in all PowerPC processors
- This collection of knowledge is often called **“Testing Knowledge”**
- The testing knowledge is usually incorporated in the generation environment
  - The generation tool you buy
  - The generator / driver you develop

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Using Testing Knowledge

- Ideally, the testing knowledge can be applied automatically during stimuli generation
- The generator **biases** random decisions towards interesting scenarios using the testing knowledge
  - Other cases are not shut-down completely to avoid missing cases we never thought about.
- Stimuli generators that use testing knowledge are often called **“biased random stimuli generators”**
- Users can **change the bias** to reach verification goals
  - We will see examples later and can explore how this works when developing the testbench for A2. ☺

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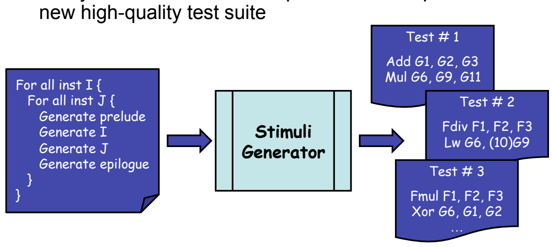
All Instruction Pairs Generation

- With a **biased random stimuli generator** we can generate tests that cover all the specific items of the **all instruction pairs** extract from the verification plan
- Every activation of the test specification will produce a new high-quality test suite



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Abstraction level mismatch

- The same approach cannot work for the forwarding path verification requirement

Why?

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Abstraction level mismatch

- The same approach cannot work for the forwarding path verification requirement – **Why?**
  - There is a difference between the language of the test and the language of the requirement
    - The test language is instructions, registers, memory
      - This is what we can influence
    - The requirement language (i.e. scenario in the verification plan) is based on microarchitectural events, e.g. control signals (flags) for the forwarding logic
      - This is our target wrt the verification plan and possibly functional coverage
- Three possible solutions
  - Manual translation
  - Automatic translation
  - “Loose” generation

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Manual Translation

- The user provides a description of an instruction sequence that creates the event
  - For example, mul followed by div followed by br, where br uses the same register as the target of mul
- The generator randomly fills in missing details
  - For example, registers and data of div
- Suffers from all the disadvantages of manual test creation
  - Labor intensive
  - Error prone
  - Hard to maintain

Automatic Generation

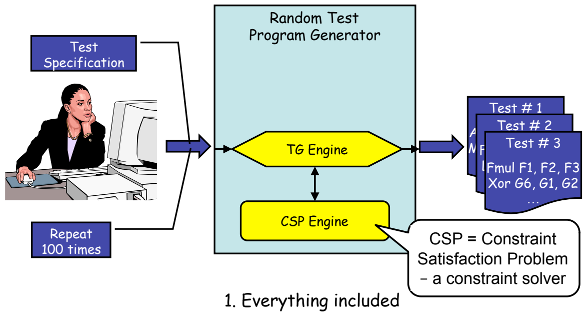
- The generator is aware of the microarchitecture of the processor and knows how to translate a microarchitectural request to a sequence of instructions
  - Such generators are often called **"Deep Knowledge"** test generators
- Advantages
  - Generated tests cover the requested event with high probability
- Disadvantages
  - High development cost
  - Potentially long generation time
  - Sensitive to changes in the design
    ➔ high maintenance cost

"Loose" Generation

We exploit the power of *massive* generation:

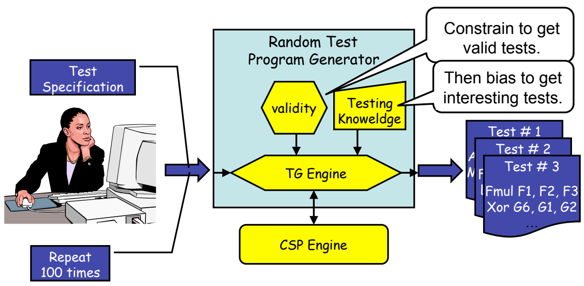
- Use the "normal" test vocabulary to bias the generated tests toward tests that *improve the probability* of hitting the requested event
  - Increase probability of complex arithmetic and branch instructions
  - Increase probability of read after write dependencies
    - Reduce the number of registers available
- How do we know whether this was successful, i.e. whether the desired events have been created?
  - **Coverage** is used to determine success
- In practice, this is an iterative process

Putting It All Together: Building a Random Test Program Generator - I



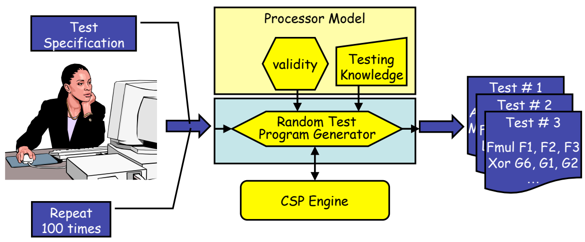
1. Everything included

Putting It All Together: Building a Random Test Program Generator - II



2. External CSP Engine

Putting It All Together: Building a Random Test Program Generator - III



3. Model-based test generator

Model-based Test Generator

Three main layers:

- General purpose CSP engine (solver)
  - May be specific for stimuli generation, but can be shared among various tools
- Processor model
  - Description of a specific processor
    - Instruction set, registers, memory model, etc.
  - Testing knowledge specific to the processor
- Processor test generation engine
  - Knows about the concept, vocabulary of processors
  - Generic testing knowledge of processors
  - Can translate the user request, processor model, and testing knowledge into a CSP and the CSP solution into a test program

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Summary: Stimuli Generation

- Generated stimuli need to be
  - **Valid**
    - Behavior of DUV under the test is fully specified
      - NOTE: Valid is not necessarily legal
    - The verification environment can determine if the DUV behaved correctly
  - **Interesting**
    - Improve coverage
    - Reach corner cases
    - Find bugs
  - **Meet specific user requirements from the verification plan**
    - Resource reuse, interdependencies

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Summary: Main Principles of Test Generation

	Mainly Deterministic (i.e. written for a specific scenario)	Mainly Biased Pseudo Random (i.e. created using bias control)
Offline Generation (prior to sim)	Single scenario test. Usually **written by hand** to verify a specific scenario. Most often **early** in verification process.	Test case **generators** using random parameters to bias the stimulus. **Architecturally correct tests** are created and then exercised via simulation.
Online Generation (during sim)	Single scenario test cases with **some random generation** of peripheral inputs. Random generations used only for inputs not critical to the test case intent.	Stimulus generated **each cycle** using parameter biasing to determine that cycle's input. The environment must have the knowledge of legal and illegal scenarios.

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