COMS31700 Design Verification:

Verification Tools

Directed Testing with Manual Checking

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Design Automation and Verification

(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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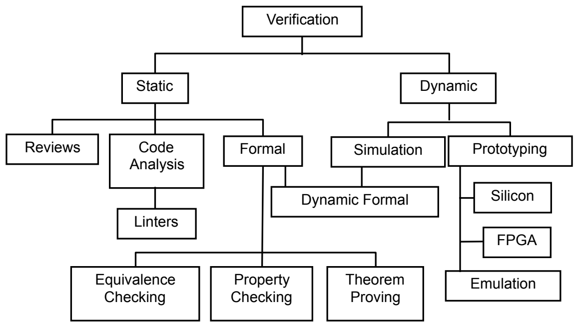
Functional Verification Approaches



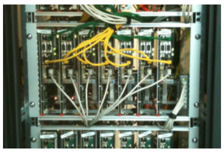
Achieving Automation

Task of Verification Engineer:

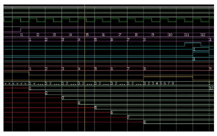
- Ensure product does not contain bugs - as fast and as cost-effective as possible.

(... and of Verification Team Leader):
  - Select/Provide appropriate tools.
  - Select a verification team.
  - Decide when cost of finding next bug violates **law of diminishing returns.**
- Parallelism, Abstraction and **Automation** can reduce the duration of verification. (Automation is currently the least applicable!)
- Automation reduces human factor, improves efficiency and reliability.
- **Verification TOOLS** are used to achieve automation.
  - Tool providers: Electronic Design Automation (EDA) industry

Tools used for Verification



- Dynamic Verification:
  - Hardware Verification Languages (HVL)
  - Testbench automation
  - Test generators
  - Coverage collection and analysis
  - General purpose HDL Simulators
    - Event-driven simulation
    - Cycle-based simulation (improved performance)
    - Waveform viewers (for debug)
  - Hardware accelerators/emulators, FPGAs
- Static Analysis / Verification Methods (Formal Methods):
  - Linting Tools
  - Equivalence checkers
  - Model checkers
    - Property Specification Languages (ABV)
  - Theorem provers
- Administration:
  - Version Control and Issue Tracking
  - Metrics
  - Data Management and Data Mining related to Metrics
- Third Party Models



Linting Tools

- Linters are **static** checkers.
- Assist in finding common coding mistakes
  - Linters exist for software and also for hardware.
    - `gcc -Wall` (When do you use this?)
- Only identify certain classes of problems
  - Many false negatives are reported.
  - Use a **filter** program to reduce false negatives.
    - Careful - don't filter true negatives though!
- Does assist in enforcing **coding guidelines!**
- Rules for coding guidelines can be added to linter.

Simulation-Based Verification

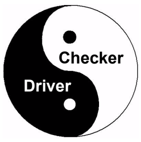
Directed testing with manual checking

Fundamentals of Simulation-based Verification

- Verification can be divided into two separate tasks
  1. Driving the design - Controllability
  2. Checking its behavior - Observability
- Basic questions a verification engineer must ask
  1. Am I driving *all possible* input scenarios?
  2. How will I know when a failure has occurred?

How do I know when I'm done?

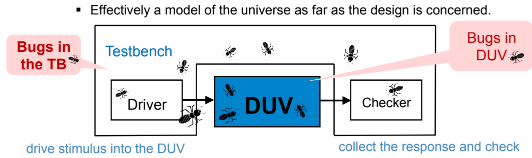
- Driving and checking are the yin and yang of verification
  - We cannot find bugs without creating the failing conditions
    - Drivers
  - We cannot find bugs without detecting the incorrect behavior
    - Checkers



What is a Testbench?

*"**Code** used to create a predetermined **input sequence** to a design, and to then observe the **response**."*

- Generic term used differently across the industry.
- Always refers to a test case/scenario.
- Traditionally, a testbench refers to code **written in a Hardware Description Language (VHDL, Verilog) at the top level of the design hierarchy**.
- **A testbench is a "completely closed" system:**
  - No inputs or outputs.
  - Effectively a model of the universe as far as the design is concerned.



Simulation-based Design Verification

- Simulate the design (not the implementation) **before** fabrication.
- **Simulating the design relies on simplifications:**
  - Functional correctness/accuracy can be a problem.

Verification Challenge: *"What input patterns to supply to the Design Under Verification (DUV) ..."*

- Simulation requires **stimulus.** It is dynamic, not just static!
- Requires to reproduce environment in which design will be used.
  - **Testbench** (Remember: Verification vs Testing!)

Verification Challenge: *"... and knowing what is expected for the output for a properly working design."*

- **Simulation outputs are checked externally** against design intent (specification)
  - Errors cannot be proven not to exist!

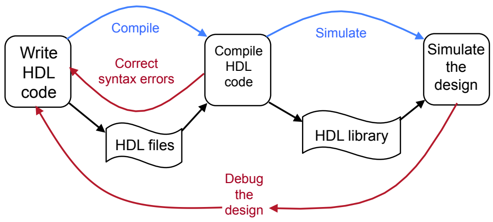
Two types of simulators: **event-based** and **cycle-based**

General HDL Simulators

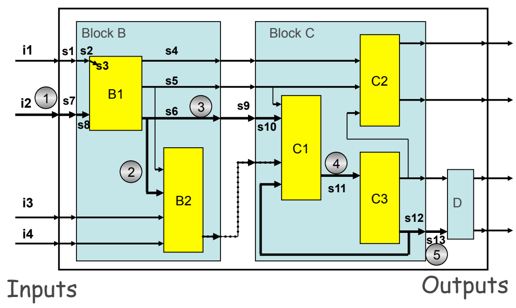
- Most Popular Simulators in Industry
  - **Mentor Graphics ModelSim/Questa**
  - **Cadence NCSim**
  - Synopsys VCS
- Support for full language coverage
  - "EVENT DRIVEN" algorithms
- VHDL's execution model is defined in detail in the IEEE LRM (Language Reference Manual)
- Verilog's execution model is defined by Cadence's Verilog-XL simulator ("reference implementation")

Simulation based on Compiled Code

- To simulate with **ModelSim:**
  - Compile HDL source code into a library.
  - Compiled design can be simulated.



Event Flow Example



Event-based Simulators

Event-based simulators are driven based on **events.** ☺

- Outputs are a function of inputs:
  - The outputs change only when the inputs do.
  - **The event is the input changing.**
  - An event causes the simulator to re-evaluate and calculate new output.
- Outputs (of one block) may be used as inputs (of another) ...
- **Re-evaluation happens until no more changes propagate through the design.**
- Zero delay cycles are called **delta cycles!**

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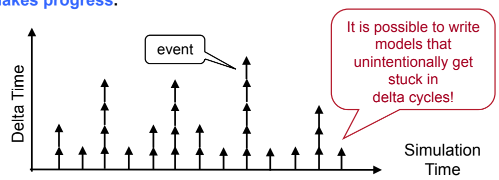
Delta Cycles

- **Event propagation** may cause new values being assigned after **zero** delays.
  - (Remember, this is only a **model** of the physical circuit.)
- Although **simulation time** does **not advance**, the **simulation makes progress.**



- NOTE: Simulation progress is first along the zero/delta-time axis and then along the simulation time axis.

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Event Driven Principles

- The event simulator maintains many lists:
  - A list of all **atomic** executable blocks
  - Fanout lists: A data structure that represents the interconnect of the blocks via signals
  - **A time queue** – points in time when events happen
  - **Event queues** – one queue pair for each entry in the time queue
    - Signal update queue
    - Computation queue
- The simulator needs to process all these queues at simulation time.

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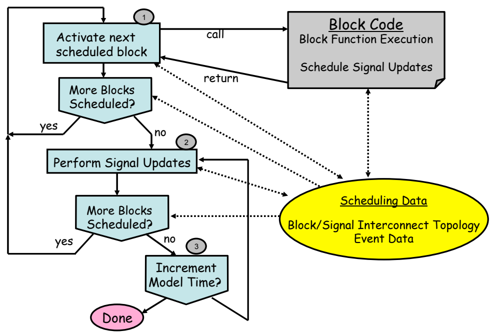
Core Algorithm of an Event-Driven Simulation Engine



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Simulation Speed

What is holding us back?

Speedup strategies

Improving Simulation Speed

- The most obvious bottle-neck for functional verification is simulation throughput
- There are several ways to improve throughput
  - Parallelization
  - Compiler optimization techniques
  - Changing the level of abstraction
  - Methodology-based subsets of HDL
    - Cycle-based simulation
  - Special simulation machines

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Parallelization

- Efficient parallel simulation algorithms are hard to develop
  - Much parallel event-driven simulation research
  - Has not yielded a breakthrough
  - Hard to compete against "trivial parallelization"
- Simple solution – run independent testcases on separate machines
  - Workstation "SimFarms"
  - 100s - 1000s of engineer's workstations run simulation in the background

Compiler Optimization Techniques

- Treat sequential code constructs like general programming language
- All optimizations for language compilers apply:
  - Data/control-flow analysis
  - Global optimizations
  - Local optimizations (loop unrolling, constant propagation)
  - Register allocation
  - Pipeline optimizations
  - etc.
- Global optimizations are limited because of model-build turn-around time requirements
  - Example: modern microprocessor is designed with ~1Million lines of HDL
    - Imagine the compile time for a C-program with ~1M lines!

Changing the Level of Abstraction

- Common theme:
  - Cut down the number of scheduled events
  - Create larger sections of un-interrupted sequential code
  - Use less fine-grained model structure
    - →Smaller number of schedulable blocks
  - Use higher-level operators
  - Use zero-delay wherever possible
- Data abstractions
  - Use binary over multi-value bit values
  - Use word-level operations over bit-level operations

Changing the Level of Abstraction

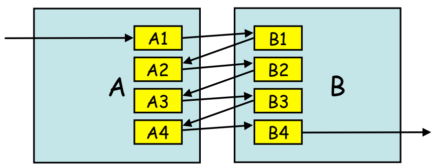
```
s(0) <= a(0) xor b(0);
c(0) <= a(0) and b(0);
s(1) <=  a(1) xor b(1) xor c(0);
c(1) <= (a(1) and b(1)) or (b(1) and c(0)) or (c(0) and a(1));
sum_out(1 to 0) <= s(1 to 0);
carry_out <= c(1);
```

```
s(2 to 0) <= ('0' & a (1 to 0)) +  ('0' & b(1 to 0) );
sum_out(1 to 0) <= s(1 to 0);
carry_out <= s(2);
```

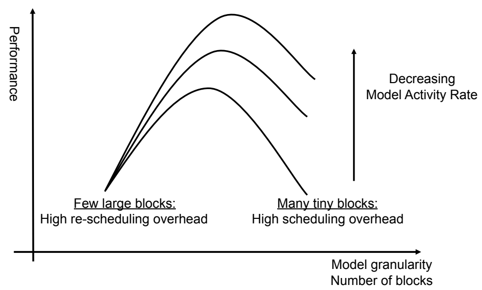
```
process (a, b)
begin
   s(2 to 0) <= ('0' & a (1 to 0)) +  ('0' & b(1 to 0) );
   sum_out(1 to 0) <= s(1 to 0);
   carry_out <= s(2);
end process
```


Changing the Level of Abstraction

- Scheduling the small blocks
  - {A1, B1, A2, B2, A3, B3, A4, B4}
  - Each small block is executed once
- Scheduling the big blocks
  - {A, B, A, B, A, B, A, B}
  - A = A1 and A2 and A3 and A4
  - Each small block is executed 4 times

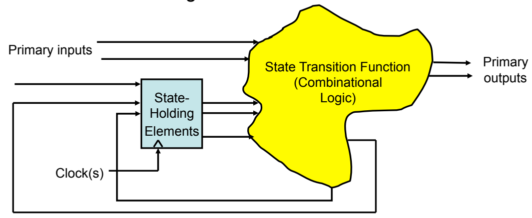


Changing the Level of Abstraction



Synchronous Design Methodology

- The design is comprised of
  - State-holding (storage) elements
  - Combinational logic for state transition function

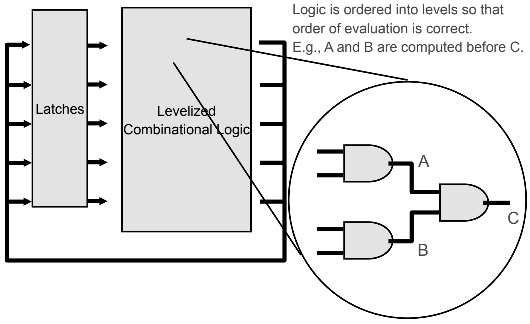


Cycle Based Model Build Flow

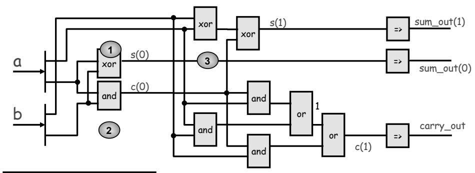
- Language compile – synthesis-like process
  - Simpler because of missing physical constraints
  - Logic mapped to a non-cyclic network of Boolean functions
  - Hierarchy is preserved
- Flatten hierarchy – crush design hierarchy to increase optimization potential
- Optimization – minimize the size of the model to increase simulation performance
- Levelize logic
- Translate to instructions

Model Build – Levelization

Logic is ordered into levels so that order of evaluation is correct.
E.g., A and B are computed before C.



Translate to Instructions




```
1  Load temp1, a(0)
   Load temp2, b(0)
   Xor temp1, temp2, temp3
   Store temp3, s(0)
2  And temp1, temp2, temp3
   Store temp3, c(0)
   Load temp1, a(1)
   Load temp2, b(1)
3  Xor temp1, temp2, temp3
   ...
```

We can convert every Boolean function into a minimal set (~4 or better) of instructions

Parallelism in Generated Code Cycle-Sim

- Word-level operations can be easily parallelized

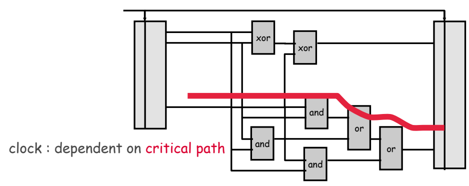
A(0 to 31) <= B(0 to 31) and C(0 to 31) and D(0 to 31)

Is translated into

```
LoadWord R1,  B(0 to 31)
LoadWord R2,  C(0 to 31)
AND R1, R1, R2
LoadWord R2,  D(0 to 31)
AND R1, R1, R2
StoreWord R1, A(0 to 31)
```


Synchronous Design Methodology

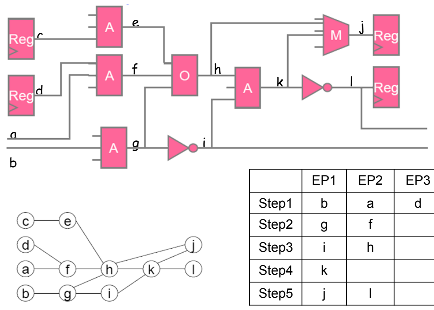
- Clock the design only so fast as the longest possible combinational delay path settles before cycle is over
- Cycle time depends on the longest topological path
  - Hazards/Races do not disturb function
  - Longest topological path can be analytically calculated w/o using simulation -> stronger result w/o sim patterns



Hardware Acceleration

- Programs created for cycle simulation are very simple
  – Small set of instructions
  – Simple control – no branches, loops, functions
- Operations at the same level can be executed in parallel
- Hardware acceleration uses these facts for fast simulation by utilizing
  – Very large number of small and simple special-purpose processors
  – Efficient communication and scheduling

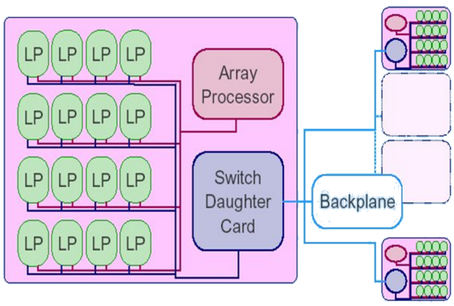
Scheduling Example



	EP1	EP2	EP3	EP4
Step1	b	a	d	c
Step2	g	f		e
Step3	i	h		
Step4	k			
Step5	j	l		

12 steps serial, 5 steps parallel

Accelerator Basic Structure



Principle of Operation

- Compiler transforms combinational logic into Boolean operations
- Compiler schedules interprocessor communications using a fast broadcast technique
- Emulation performance dictated by
  – Number of processors
  – Number of levels in the design

Simulation Speed Comparison

Event Simulator	1
Cycle Simulator	20
Event driven cycle Simulator	50
Acceleration	1000
Emulation	100000

Verification Languages

Raising the level of abstraction

Verification Languages

- Need to be designed to address **verification** principles.
- Deficiencies in RTL languages (HDLs such as Verilog and VHDL):
  - **Verilog** was designed with focus on describing low-level hardware structures.
    - No support for **data structures** (records, linked lists, etc).
    - Not object/aspect-oriented.
      - Useful when several team members develop testbenches.
  - VHDL was designed for large design teams.
- Limitations inhibit **efficient** implementation of verification strategy.
- High-level verification languages are (currently):
  - **System Verilog**
    - IEEE 1800 [2005] Standard for System Verilog- Unified Hardware Design, Specification, and Verification Language
  - e-language used for Cadence's Specman Elite [IEEE P1647]
  - (Synopsys' Vera, System C)

Features of High-Level Verification Languages

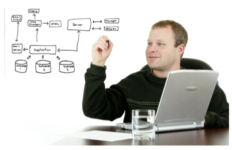
- Raising the level of abstraction:
  - From bits/vectors to high-level data types/structures
    - lists, structs, scoreboards including ready made functions to access these
- Support for building the verification environment
  - Enable testbench automation
  - Modularity
    - Object/aspect oriented languages
    - Libraries (VIP) to enable re-use
- Support for test generation
  - Constrained random test generation features
    - Control over randomization to achieve the target values
    - Advanced: Connection to DUV to generate stimulus depending on DUV state
- Support for coverage
  - Language constructs to implement functional coverage models

Any other *verification* Languages?

Tommy Kelly, CEO of Verilab:

"Above all else, the Ideal Verification Engineer will know how to construct software."

- Toolkit contains not only Verilog, VHDL, SystemVerilog and e, but also Python, Lisp, mySQL, Java, ... ☺



Directed Testing

Focus on checking

The Importance of Driving and **Checking**

- Drivers activate the bug.
- The observable effects of the bug then need to propagate to a checker.
- A checker needs to be in place to detect the incorrect behaviour.

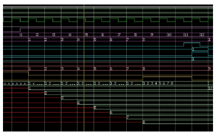
All three are needed to find bugs!

Checking: How to predict expected results

- Methods for checking:
  - **Directed testing:**
    - Because we know what will be driven, a checker can be developed for each test case individually.
- Sources for checking:
  - Understanding of the inputs, outputs and the transfer function of the DUV.
  - Understanding of the design context.
  - Understanding of the internal structures and algorithms (uarch).
  - Understanding of the top-level design description (arch).
  - **Understanding of the specification.**
- **Beware:**
  - Often, all outputs of the design must be checked at every clock cycle!
    - However, if the outputs are not specified clock-cycle for clock-cycle, then verification should not be done clock-cycle for clock cycle!
  - Response verification should not enforce, expect, nor rely on an output being produced at a specific clock cycle.

Limitations of Using Waveform Viewers as Checkers

- Often come as part of a simulator.
- **Most common verification tools used...**
  - Used to **visually inspect** design/testbench/verification environment.
  - Recording waves decreases performance of simulator. (Why?)
- **Don't use viewer to determine if DUV passes/fails a test.**
  - **Why not?**
- **Can use waveform viewer for debugging.**
  - Consider costs and alternatives.
  - Benefits of automation.
  - Need to increase productivity.



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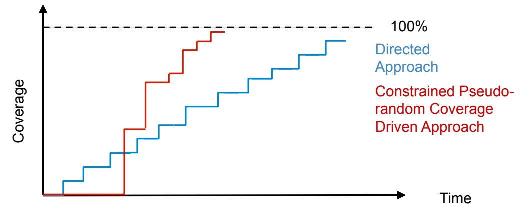
Limitations of Directed Testing: Coverage



Criteria:
- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- Maintainability
- Re-usability

Directed testing has many shortfalls wrt these criteria.

Why would one use Directed Testing?

Need to increase productivity!

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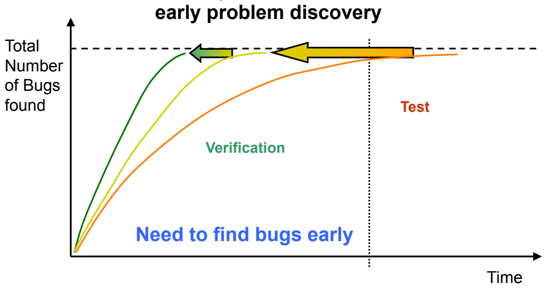
Impact of Increasing Verification Productivity

Productivity improvements drive early problem discovery



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Verification Tools

Third Party Models

Metrics

Third Party Models

- Chip needs to be verified in its **target environment.**
  - Board/SoC Verification
- Do you develop or purchase behavioural models (specs) for board parts?
  - Buying them may seem expensive!
  - Ask yourself:
    "If it was not worth designing on your own to begin with, why is writing your own model now justified?"
  - The model you develop is not as reliable as the one you buy.
  - The one you buy is used by many others - not just yourself.
- Remember: In practice, it is often more expensive to develop your own model to the **same degree of confidence** than licensing one.

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Metrics

- Not really verification tools - but managers love metrics and measurements!
  - Managers often have little time to personally assess progress.
  - They want something measurable.
- **Coverage** is one metric - will be introduced later.
- **Others metrics include:**
  - Number of lines of code
  - Ratio of lines of code (between design and verifier)
  - Drop of source code changes
  - Number of outstanding issues

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Summary

We have covered:

- Verification Tools & Languages
- Basic testbench components
- Writing directed tests
- The importance of Driving and Checking
- Checking when we use directed testing
- Limitations of directed testing
- Cost of debug using waveforms

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