Chapter 7: Notion of Flip Flops

I. INTRODUCTION

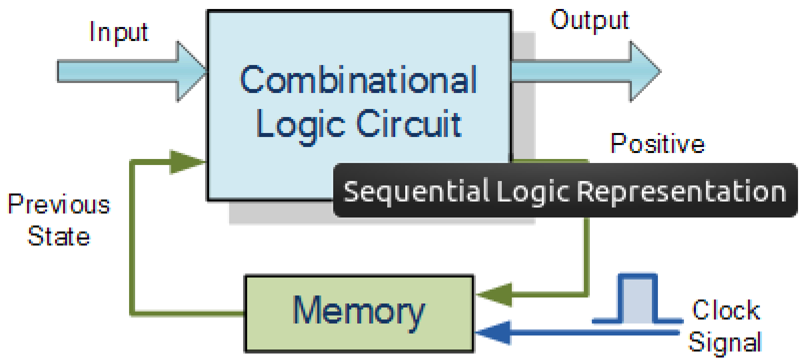
Unlike Combinational Logic circuits that change state depending upon the actual signals being applied to their inputs at that time, **Sequential Logic** circuits have some form of inherent "Memory" built in.

This means that sequential logic circuits are able to take into account their previous input state as well as those actually present, a sort of "before" and "after" effect is involved with sequential circuits.

In other words, the output state of a "sequential logic circuit" is a function of the following three states, the "present input", the "past input" and/or the "past output". *Sequential Logic circuits* remember these conditions and stay fixed in their current state until the next clock signal changes one of the states, giving sequential logic circuits "Memory".

Sequential logic circuits are generally termed as *two state* or Bistable devices which can have their output or outputs set in one of two basic states, a logic level "1" or a logic level "0" and will remain "latched" (hence the name latch) indefinitely in this current state or condition until some other input trigger pulse or signal is applied which will cause the bistable to change its state once again.

Sequential Logic Representation

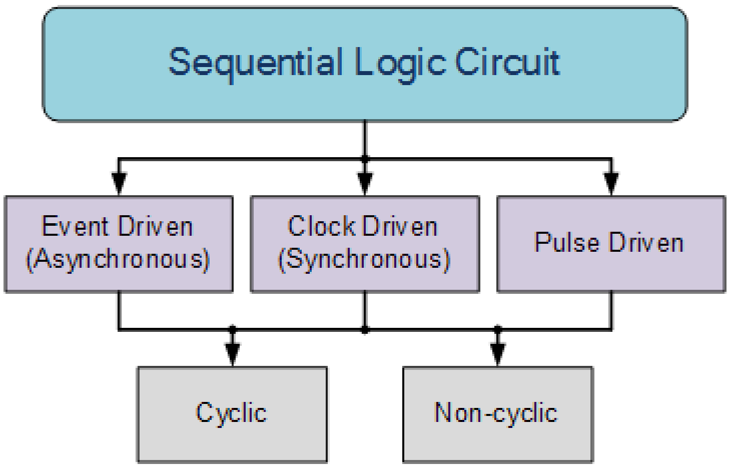


The word "Sequential" means that things happen in a "sequence", one after another and in **Sequential Logic** circuits, the actual clock signal determines when things will happen next. Simple sequential logic circuits can be constructed from standard **Bistable** circuits such as: *Flip-flops*, *Latches* and *Counters* and which themselves can be made by simply connecting together universal NAND Gates and/or NOR Gates in a particular combinational way to produce the required sequential circuit.

Classification of Sequential Logic

As standard logic gates are the building blocks of combinational circuits, bistable latches and flip-flops are the basic building blocks of sequential logic circuits. Sequential logic circuits can be constructed to produce either simple edge-triggered flip-flops or more complex sequential circuits such as storage registers, shift registers, memory devices or counters. Either way sequential logic circuits can be divided into the following three main categories:

1. Event Driven – asynchronous circuits that change state immediately when enabled.
2. Clock Driven – synchronous circuits that are synchronised to a specific clock signal.
3. Pulse Driven – which is a combination of the two that responds to triggering pulses.



As well as the two logic states mentioned above logic level “1” and logic level “0”, a third element is introduced that separates **sequential logic** circuits from their **combinational logic** counterparts, namely *TIME*. Sequential logic circuits return back to their original steady state once reset and sequential circuits with loops or feedback paths are said to be “cyclic” in nature.

II. SR Flip-Flop

The **SR flip-flop**, also known as a *SR Latch*, can be considered as one of the most basic sequential logic circuit possible. This simple flip-flop is basically a one-bit memory bistable device that has two inputs, one which will “SET” the device (meaning the output = “1”), and is labelled **S** and one which will “RESET” the device (meaning the output = “0”), labelled **R**.

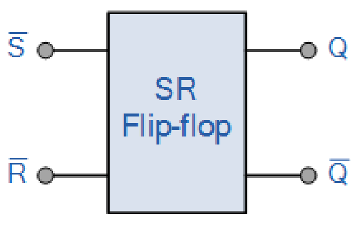
Then the SR description stands for “Set-Reset”. The reset input resets the flip-flop back to its original state with an output Q that will be either at a logic level “1” or logic “0” depending upon this set/reset condition.

A basic NAND gate SR flip-flop circuit provides feedback from both of its outputs back to its opposing inputs and is commonly used in memory circuits to store a single data bit. Then the SR flip-flop actually has three inputs, Set, Reset and its current output Q relating to it’s current state or history. The term “Flip-flop” relates to the actual operation of the device, as it can be “flipped” into one logic Set state or “flopped” back into the opposing logic Reset state.

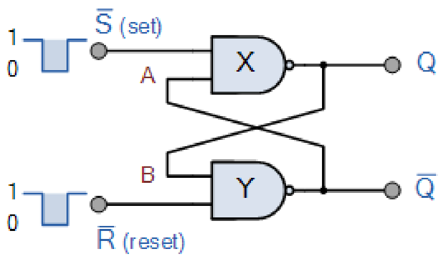
a) The NAND Gate SR Flip-Flop

The simplest way to make any basic single bit set-reset SR flip-flop is to connect together a pair of cross-coupled 2-input NAND gates as shown, to form a Set-Reset Bistable also known as an active LOW SR NAND Gate Latch, so that there is feedback from each output to one of the other NAND gate inputs. This device consists of two inputs, one called the *Set*, S and the other called the *Reset*, R with two corresponding outputs Q and its inverse or complement Q (not-Q) as shown below.

The Basic SR Flip-flop



Symbol



Circuit

Consider
the circuit shown above. If the input R is at logic level “0” (R = 0) and input S is at logic level “1” (S = 1), the NAND gate *Y* has at least one of its inputs at logic “0” therefore, its output Q must be at a logic level “1” (NAND Gate principles). Output Q is also fed back to input “A” and so both inputs to NAND gate *X* are at logic level “1”, and therefore its output Q must be at logic level “0”.

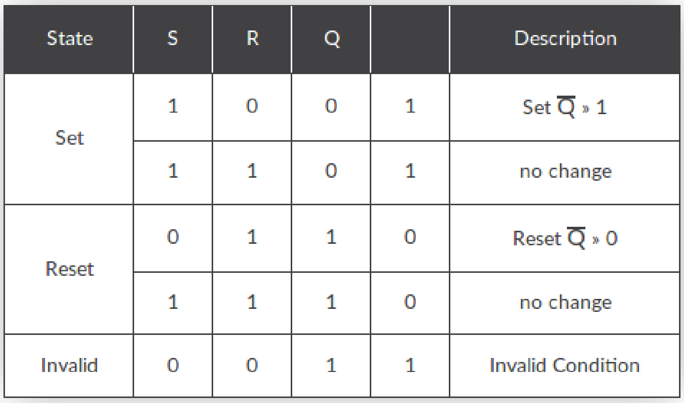
Again NAND gate principals. If the reset input R changes state, and goes HIGH to logic “1” with S remaining HIGH also at logic level “1”, NAND gate *Y* inputs are now R = “1” and B = “0”. Since one of its inputs is still at logic level “0” the output at Q still remains HIGH at logic level “1” and there is no change of state. Therefore, the flip-flop circuit is said to be “Latched” or “Set” with Q = “1” and Q = “0”.

Reset State

In this second stable state, Q is at logic level “0”, (not Q = “0”) its inverse output at Q is at logic level “1”, (Q = “1”), and is given by R = “1” and S = “0”. As gate *X* has one of its inputs at logic “0” its output Q must equal logic level “1” (again NAND gate principles). Output Q is fed back to input “B”, so both inputs to NAND gate *Y* are at logic “1”, therefore, Q = “0”.

If the set input, S now changes state to logic “1” with input R remaining at logic “1”, output Q still remains LOW at logic level “0” and there is no change of state. Therefore, the flip-flop circuits “Reset” state has also been latched and we can define this “set/reset” action in the following truth table.

Truth Table for this Set-Reset Function



State	S	R	Q		Description
Set	1	0	0	1	Set $\overline{Q}$ » 1
	1	1	0	1	no change
Reset	0	1	1	0	Reset $\overline{Q}$ » 0
	1	1	1	0	no change
Invalid	0	0	1	1	Invalid Condition

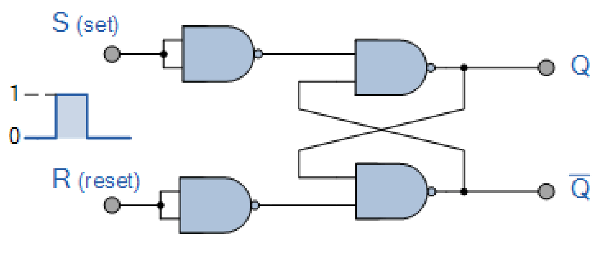
It can be seen that
when both inputs S = “1” and R = “1” the outputs Q and Q can be at either logic level “1” or “0”, depending upon the state of the inputs S or R BEFORE this input condition existed. Therefore the condition of S = R = “1” does not change the state of the outputs Q and Q.

However, the input state of S = “0” and R = “0” is an undesirable or invalid condition and must be avoided. The condition of S = R = “0” causes both outputs Q and Q to be HIGH together at logic level “1” when we would normally want Q to be the inverse of Q. The result is that the flip-flop looses control of Q and Q, and if the two inputs are now switched “HIGH” again after this condition to logic “1”, the flip-flop becomes unstable and switches to an unknown data state based upon the unbalance as shown in the following switching diagram.

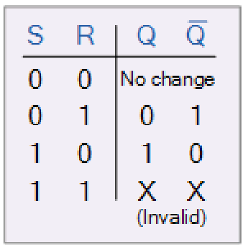
Then, a simple NAND gate SR flip-flop or NAND gate SR latch can be set by applying a logic “0”, (LOW) condition to its Set input and reset again by then applying a logic “0” to its Reset input. The SR flip-flop is said to be in an “invalid” condition (Meta-stable) if both the set and reset inputs are activated simultaneously.

As we have seen above, the basic NAND gate SR flip-flop requires logic “0” inputs to flip or change state from Q to Q and vice versa. We can however, change this basic flip-flop circuit to one that changes state by the application of positive going input signals with the addition of two extra NAND gates connected as inverters to the S and R inputs as shown.

b) Positive NAND Gate SR Flip-flop

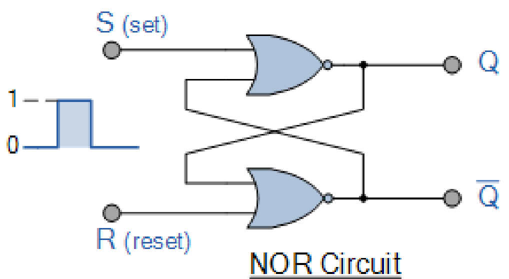


NAND Circuit

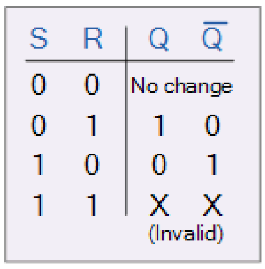


S	R	Q	$\overline{Q}$
0	0	No change	
0	1	0	1
1	0	1	0
1	1	X	X
		(Invalid)	

As well as using NAND gates, it is also possible to construct simple one-bit **SR Flip-flops** using two cross-coupled NOR gates connected in the same configuration. The circuit will work in a similar way to the NAND gate circuit above, except that the inputs are active HIGH and the invalid condition exists when both its inputs are at logic level “1”, and this is shown below.



NOR Circuit

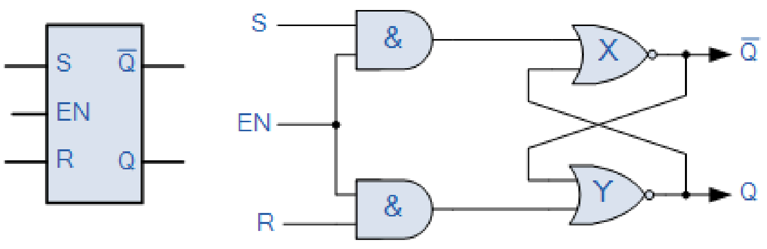


S	R	Q	$\overline{Q}$
0	0	No change	
0	1	1	0
1	0	0	1
1	1	X	X (Invalid)

c) Gated or Clocked SR Flip-Flop

It is sometimes desirable in sequential logic circuits to have a bistable SR flip-flop that only changes state when certain conditions are met regardless of the condition of either the Set or the Reset inputs. By connecting a 2-input AND gate in series with each input terminal of the SR Flip-flop a Gated SR Flip-flop can be created. This extra conditional input is called an “Enable” input and is given the prefix of “EN“. The addition of this input means that the output at Q only changes state when it is HIGH and can therefore be used as a clock (CLK) input making it level-sensitive as shown below.

Gated SR Flip-flop



III. JK Flip-Flop

The basic S-R NAND flip-flop circuit has many advantages and uses in sequential logic circuits but it suffers from two basic switching problems.

I. 1. the Set = 0 and Reset = 0 condition (S = R = 0) must always be avoided

II. 2. if Set or Reset change state while the enable (EN) input is high the correct latching action may not occur

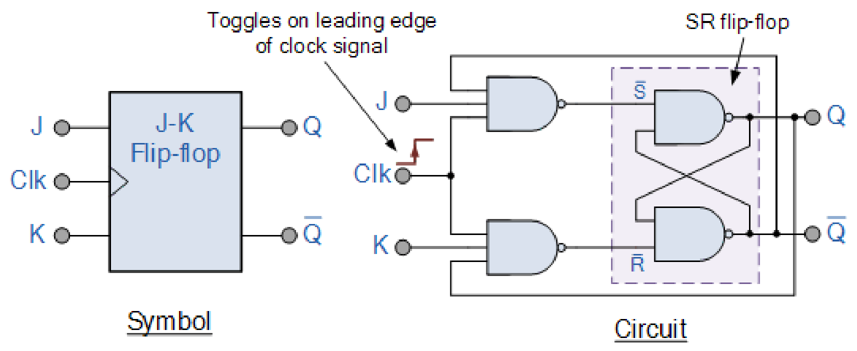
Then to overcome these two fundamental design problems with the SR flip-flop design, the **JK flip Flop** was developed.

This simple **JK flip Flop** is the most widely used of all the flip-flop designs and is considered to be a universal flip-flop circuit. The two inputs labelled “J” and “K” are not shortened abbreviated letters of other words, such as “S” for Set and “R” for Reset, but are themselves autonomous letters chosen by its inventor Jack Kirby to distinguish the flip-flop design from other types.

The sequential operation of the JK flip flop is exactly the same as for the previous SR flip-flop with the same “Set” and “Reset” inputs. The difference this time is that the “JK flip flop” has no invalid or forbidden input states of the SR Latch even when S and R are both at logic “1”.

The **JK flip flop** is basically a gated SR flip-flop with the addition of a clock input circuitry that prevents the illegal or invalid output condition that can occur when both inputs S and R are equal to logic level “1”. Due to this additional clocked input, a JK flip-flop has four possible input combinations, “logic 1”, “logic 0”, “no change” and “toggle”. The symbol for a JK flip flop is similar to that of an *SR Bistable Latch* as seen in the previous tutorial except for the addition of a clock input.

a) The Basic JK Flip-flop

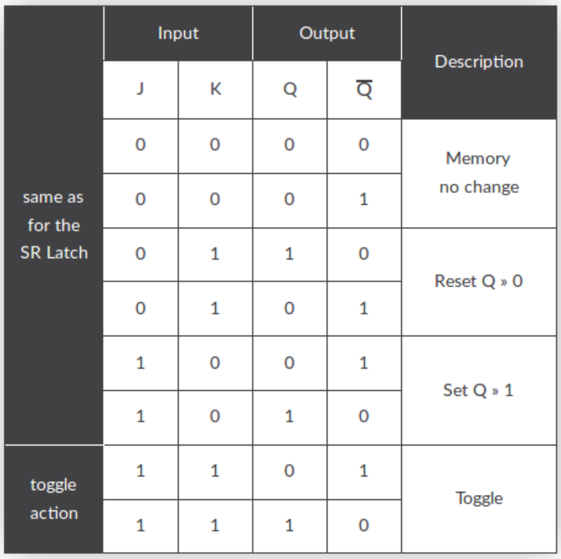


Both the S and the R inputs of the previous SR bistable have now been replaced by two inputs called the J and K inputs, respectively after its inventor Jack Kilby. Then this equates to: J = S and K = R.

The two 2-input AND gates of the gated SR bistable have now been replaced by two 3-input NAND gates with the third input of each gate connected to the outputs at Q and Q. This cross coupling of the SR flip-flop allows the previously invalid condition of S = “1” and R = “1” state to be used to produce a “toggle action” as the two inputs are now interlocked.

If the circuit is now “SET” the J input is inhibited by the “0” status of Q through the lower NAND gate. If the circuit is “RESET” the K input is inhibited by the “0” status of Q through the upper NAND gate. As Q and Q are always different we can use them to control the input. When both inputs J and K are equal to logic “1”, the JK flip flop toggles as shown in the following truth table.

The Truth Table for the JK Function



	Input		Output		Description
	J	K	Q	$\overline{Q}$	
same as for the SR Latch	0	0	0	0	Memory no change
	0	0	0	1	
	0	1	1	0	Reset Q » 0
	0	1	0	1	
	1	0	0	1	Set Q » 1
	1	0	1	0	
toggle action	1	1	0	1	Toggle
	1	1	1	0	

Then the JK flip-flop is basically an SR flip flop with feedback which enables only one of its two input terminals, either SET or RESET to be active at any one time thereby eliminating the invalid condition seen previously in the SR flip flop circuit.

Also when both the J and the K inputs are at logic level “1” at the same time, and the clock input is pulsed “HIGH”, the circuit will “toggle” from its SET state to a RESET state, or visa-versa. This results in the JK flip flop acting more like a T-type toggle flip-flop when both terminals are “HIGH”.

Although this circuit is an improvement on the clocked SR flip-flop it still suffers from timing problems called “race” if the output Q changes state before the timing pulse of the clock input has time to go “OFF”. To avoid this the timing pulse period (T) must be kept as short as possible (high frequency). As this is sometimes not possible with modern TTL IC’s the much improved **Master-Slave JK Flip-flop** was developed.

IV. D-type Flip-Flop Circuit

One of the main disadvantages of the basic **SR NAND Gate Bistable** circuit is that the indeterminate input condition of SET = “0” and RESET = “0” is forbidden.

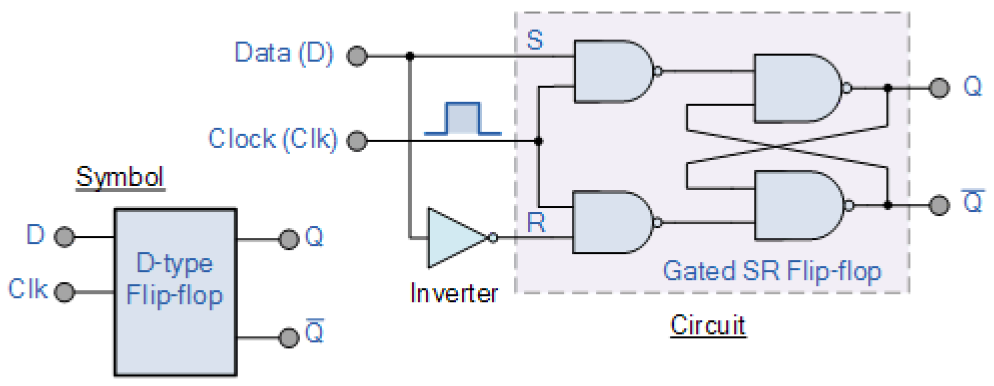
This state will force both outputs to be at logic “1”, over-riding the feedback latching action and whichever input goes to logic level “1” first will lose control, while the other input still at logic “0” controls the resulting state of the latch.

But in order to prevent this from happening an inverter can be connected between the “SET” and the “RESET” inputs to produce another type of flip flop circuit known as a *Data*

Latch, *Delay flip flop*, *D-type Bistable*, *D-type Flip Flop* or just simply a **D Flip Flop** as it is more generally called.

The **D Flip Flop** is by far the most important of the clocked flip-flops as it ensures that ensures that inputs S and R are never equal to one at the same time. The D-type flip flop are constructed from a gated SR flip-flop with an inverter added between the S and the R inputs to allow for a single D (Data) input.

Then this single data input, labelled "D" and is used in place of the "Set" signal, and the inverter is used to generate the complementary "Reset" input thereby making a level-sensitive D-type flip-flop from a level-sensitive SR-latch as now S = D and R = not D as shown.



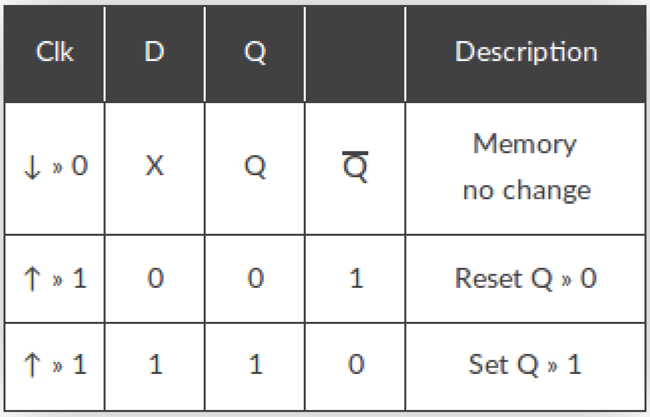
We remember that a simple SR flip-flop requires two inputs, one to "SET" the output and one to "RESET" the output. By connecting an inverter (NOT gate) to the SR flip-flop we can "SET" and "RESET" the flip-flop using just one input as now the two input signals are complements of each other. This complement avoids the ambiguity inherent in the SR latch when both inputs are LOW, since that state is no longer possible.

Thus this single input is called the "DATA" input. If this data input is held HIGH the flip flop would be "SET" and when it is LOW the flip flop would change and become "RESET". However, this would be rather pointless since the output of the flip flop would always change on every pulse applied to this data input.

To avoid this an additional input called the "CLOCK" or "ENABLE" input is used to isolate the data input from the flip flop's latching circuitry after the desired data has been stored. The effect is that D input condition is only copied to the output Q when the clock input is active. This then forms the basis of another sequential device called a **D Flip Flop**.

The "D flip flop" will store and output whatever logic level is applied to its data terminal so long as the clock input is HIGH. Once the clock input goes LOW the "set" and "reset" inputs of the flip-flop are both held at logic level "1" so it will not change state and store whatever data was present on its output before the clock transition occurred. In other words the output is "latched" at either logic "0" or logic "1".

Truth Table for the D-type Flip Flop



Clk	D	Q		Description
↓ » 0	X	Q	$\overline{Q}$	Memory no change
↑ » 1	0	0	1	Reset Q » 0
↑ » 1	1	1	0	Set Q » 1

Note that: ↓ and ↑ indicates direction of clock pulse as it is assumed D-type flip flops are edge triggered

V. Shift Register

This sequential device loads the data present on its inputs and then moves or “shifts” it to its output once every clock cycle, hence the name **Shift Register**.

A *shift register* basically consists of several single bit “D-Type Data Latches”, one for each data bit, either a logic “0” or a “1”, connected together in a serial type daisy-chain arrangement so that the output from one data latch becomes the input of the next latch and so on.

Data bits may be fed in or out of a shift register serially, that is one after the other from either the left or the right direction, or all together at the same time in a parallel configuration.

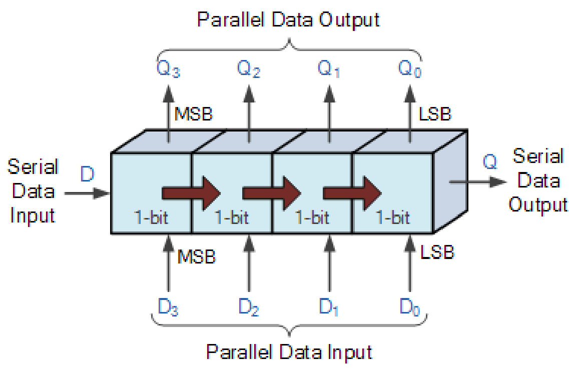
The number of individual data latches required to make up a single **Shift Register** device is usually determined by the number of bits to be stored with the most common being 8-bits (one byte) wide constructed from eight individual data latches.

Shift Registers are used for data storage or for the movement of data and are therefore commonly used inside calculators or computers to store data such as two binary numbers before they are added together, or to convert the data from either a serial to parallel or parallel to serial format. The individual data latches that make up a single shift register are all driven by a common clock (Clk) signal making them synchronous devices.

Shift register IC’s are generally provided with a *clear* or *reset* connection so that they can be “SET” or “RESET” as required. Generally, shift registers operate in one of four different modes with the basic movement of data through a shift register being:

a. Serial-in to Parallel-out (SIPO) - the register is loaded with serial data, one bit at a time, with the stored data being available at the output in parallel form.
b. Serial-in to Serial-out (SISO) - the data is shifted serially “IN” and “OUT” of the register, one bit at a time in either a left or right direction under clock control.
c. Parallel-in to Serial-out (PISO) - the parallel data is loaded into the register simultaneously and is shifted out of the register serially one bit at a time under clock control.
d. Parallel-in to Parallel-out (PIPO) - the parallel data is loaded simultaneously into the register, and transferred together to their respective outputs by the same clock pulse.

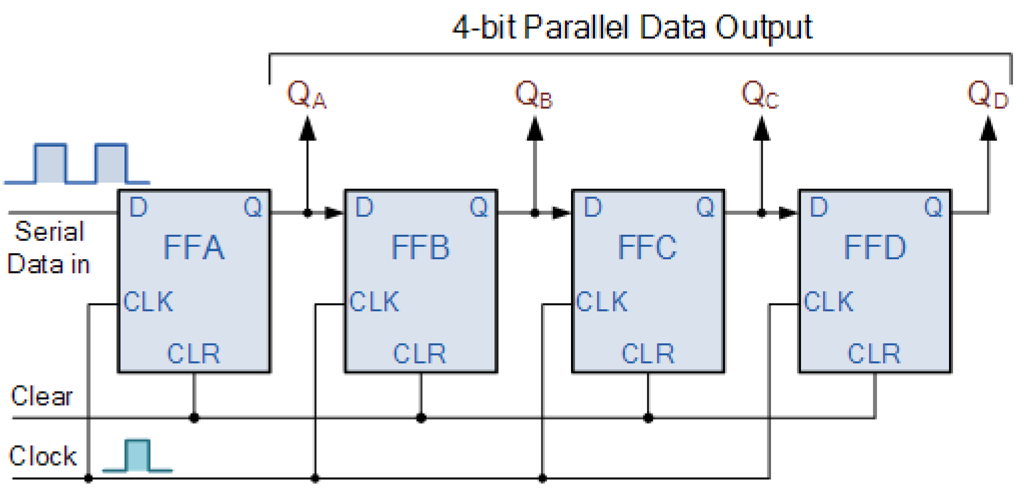
The effect of data movement from left to right through a shift register can be presented graphically as:



Also, the directional movement of the data through a shift register can be either to the left, (left shifting) to the right, (right shifting) left-in but right-out, (rotation) or both left and right shifting within the same register thereby making it *bidirectional*. In this tutorial it is assumed that all the data shifts to the right, (right shifting).

Serial-in to Parallel-out (SIPO) Shift Register

4-bit Serial-in to Parallel-out Shift Register



The operation is as follows. Lets assume that all the flip-flops (FFA to FFD) have just been RESET (CLEAR input) and that all the outputs Q_A to Q_D are at logic level “0” ie, no parallel data output.

If a logic “1” is connected to the DATA input pin of FFA then on the first clock pulse the output of FFA and therefore the resulting Q_A will be set HIGH to logic “1” with all the other outputs still remaining LOW at logic “0”. Assume now that the DATA input pin of FFA has returned LOW again to logic “0” giving us one data pulse or 0-1-0.

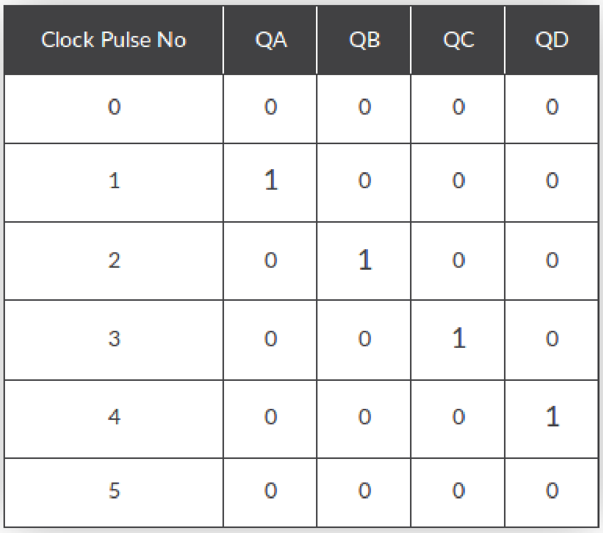
The second clock pulse will change the output of FFA to logic “0” and the output of FFB and Q_B HIGH to logic “1” as its input D has the logic “1” level on it from Q_A. The logic “1” has now moved or been “shifted” one place along the register to the right as it is now at Q_A.

When the third clock pulse arrives this logic “1” value moves to the output of FFC (Q_C) and so on until the arrival of the fifth clock pulse which sets all the outputs Q_A to Q_D back again to logic level “0” because the input to FFA has remained constant at logic level “0”.

The effect of each clock pulse is to shift the data contents of each stage one place to the right, and this is shown in the following table until the complete data value of 0-0-0-1 is stored in the register. This data value can now be read directly from the outputs of Q_A to Q_D.

Then the data has been converted from a serial data input signal to a parallel data output. The truth table and following waveforms show the propagation of the logic “1” through the register from left to right as follows.

Basic Data Movement Through A Shift Register



Clock Pulse No	QA	QB	QC	QD
0	0	0	0	0
1	1	0	0	0
2	0	1	0	0
3	0	0	1	0
4	0	0	0	1
5	0	0	0	0

In the previous Shift Register example we saw that if we apply a serial data signal to the input of a *Serial-in to Serial-out Shift Register*, the same sequence of data will exit from the last flip flip in the register chain.

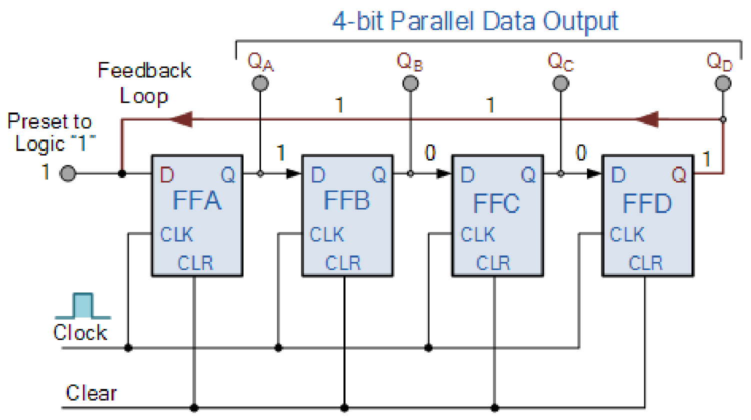
This serial movement of data through the resister occurs after a preset number of clock cycles thereby allowing the SISO register to act as a sort of time delay circuit to the original input data signal.

VI. Ring Counter

But what if we were to connect the output of this shift register back to its input so that the output from the last flip-flop, Q_D becomes the input of the first flip-flop, Q_A. We would then have a closed loop circuit that "recirculates" the same bit of DATA around a continuous loop for every state of its sequence, and this is the principal operation of a **Ring Counter**.

Then by looping the output back to the input, (feedback) we can convert a standard shift register circuit into a ring counter. Consider the circuit below.

4-bit Ring Counter

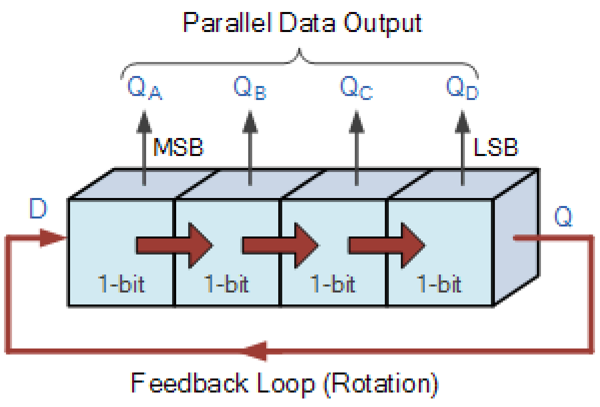


The synchronous **Ring Counter** example above, is preset so that exactly one data bit in the register is set to logic "1" with all the other bits reset to "0". To achieve this, a "CLEAR" signal is firstly applied to all the flip-flops together in order to "RESET" their outputs to a logic "0" level and then a "PRESET" pulse is applied to the input of the first flip-flop (FFA) before the clock pulses are applied. This then places a single logic "1" value into the circuit of the ring counter.

So on each successive clock pulse, the counter circulates the same data bit between the four flip-flops over and over again around the "ring" every fourth clock cycle. But in order to cycle the data correctly around the counter we must first "load" the counter with a suitable data pattern as all logic "0's" or all logic "1's" outputted at each clock cycle would make the ring counter invalid.

This type of data movement is called "rotation", and like the previous shift register, the effect of the movement of the data bit from left to right through a ring counter can be presented graphically as follows along with its timing diagram:

Rotational Movement of a Ring Counter



Since the ring counter example shown above has four distinct states, it is also known as a "modulo-4" or "mod-4" counter with each flip-flop output having a frequency value equal to one-fourth or a quarter (1/4) that of the main clock frequency.

The "MODULO" or "MODULUS" of a counter is the number of states the counter counts or sequences through before repeating itself and a ring counter can be made to output any modulo number. A "mod-n" ring counter will require "n" number of flip-flops connected together to circulate a single data bit providing "n" different output states.

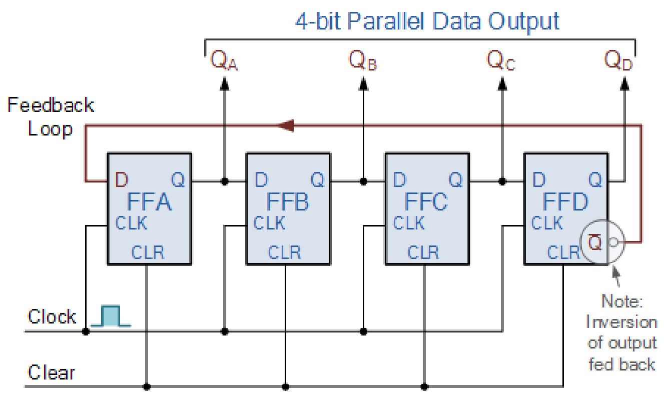
For example, a mod-8 ring counter requires eight flip-flops and a mod-16 ring counter would require sixteen flip-flops. However, as in our example above, only four of the possible sixteen states are used, making ring counters very inefficient in terms of their output state usage.

Johnson Ring Counter

The **Johnson Ring Counter** or "Twisted Ring Counters", is another shift register with feedback exactly the same as the standard *Ring Counter* above, except that this time the inverted output Q of the last flip-flop is now connected back to the input D of the first flip-flop as shown below.

The main advantage of this type of ring counter is that it only needs half the number of flip-flops compared to the standard ring counter then its modulo number is halved. So a "n-stage" Johnson counter will circulate a single data bit giving sequence of 2n different states and can therefore be considered as a "mod-2n counter".

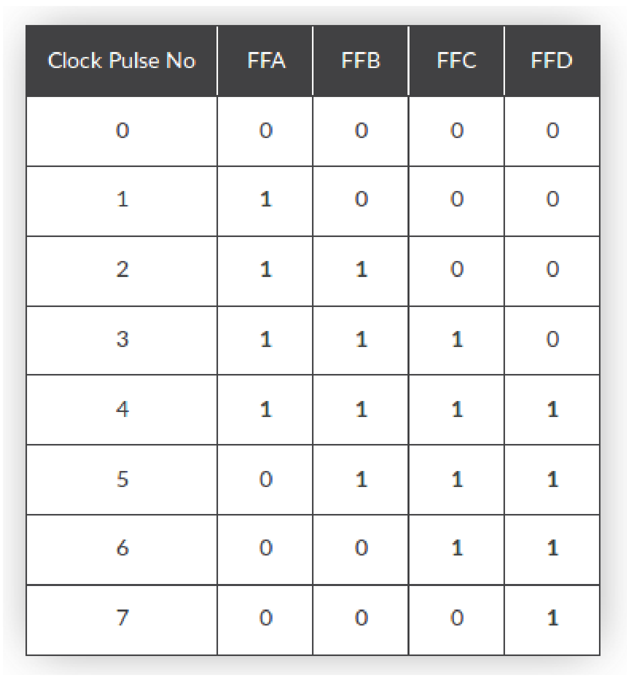
4-bit Johnson Ring Counter



This inversion of Q before it is fed back to input D causes the counter to "count" in a different way. Instead of counting through a fixed set of patterns like the normal ring counter such as for a 4-bit counter, "0001"(1), "0010"(2), "0100"(4), "1000"(8) and repeat, the Johnson counter counts up and then down as the initial logic "1" passes through it to the right replacing the preceding logic "0".

A 4-bit Johnson ring counter passes blocks of four logic "0" and then four logic "1" thereby producing an 8-bit pattern. As the inverted output Q is connected to the input D this 8-bit pattern continually repeats. For example, "1000", "1100", "1110", "1111", "0111", "0011", "0001", "0000" and this is demonstrated in the following table below.

Truth Table for a 4-bit Johnson Ring Counter



Clock Pulse No	FFA	FFB	FFC	FFD
0	0	0	0	0
1	1	0	0	0
2	1	1	0	0
3	1	1	1	0
4	1	1	1	1
5	0	1	1	1
6	0	0	1	1
7	0	0	0	1

As well as counting or rotating data around a continuous loop, ring counters can also be used to detect or recognise various patterns or number values within a set of data. By connecting simple logic gates such as the *AND* or the *OR* gates to the outputs of the flip-flops the circuit can be made to detect a set number or value.

Standard 2, 3 or 4-stage **Johnson Ring Counters** can also be used to divide the frequency of the clock signal by varying their feedback connections and divide-by-3 or divide-by-5 outputs are also available.

For example, a 3-stage Johnson Ring Counter could be used as a 3-phase, 120 degree phase shift square wave generator by connecting to the data outputs at A, B and NOT-B.

The standard 5-stage Johnson counter such as the commonly available CD4017 is generally used as a synchronous decade counter/divider circuit.