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7. Data Coherency

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Lesson Overview

▷ Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

Understanding why the button counter didn't work as expected

- It double counted button presses
- Sometimes it counted 2-4 times per button press
- Rarer observed effects
  - At one point, the counter counted *down*
  - Another time, it skipped 11 numbers at once

Objectives

- Understand data coherency issues
- Understanding bouncing
- Build and verify a button debouncer

Last Lesson

Lesson Overview
▷ Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

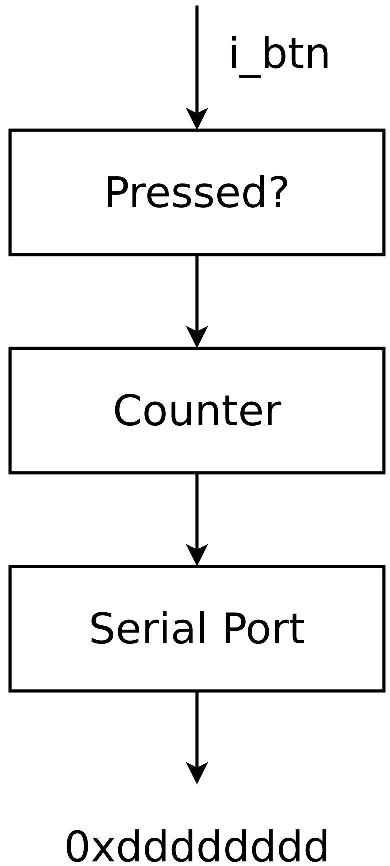
This lesson picks up where the last lesson left off.

- If you didn't build the button counter, or implement it in hardware
  - You missed a valuable lesson
  - Go back and try it
  - Press the button several times, see what happens
- If it didn't work like you expected it should
  - Feel free to start this lesson

Button Press Counter

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
▷ Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

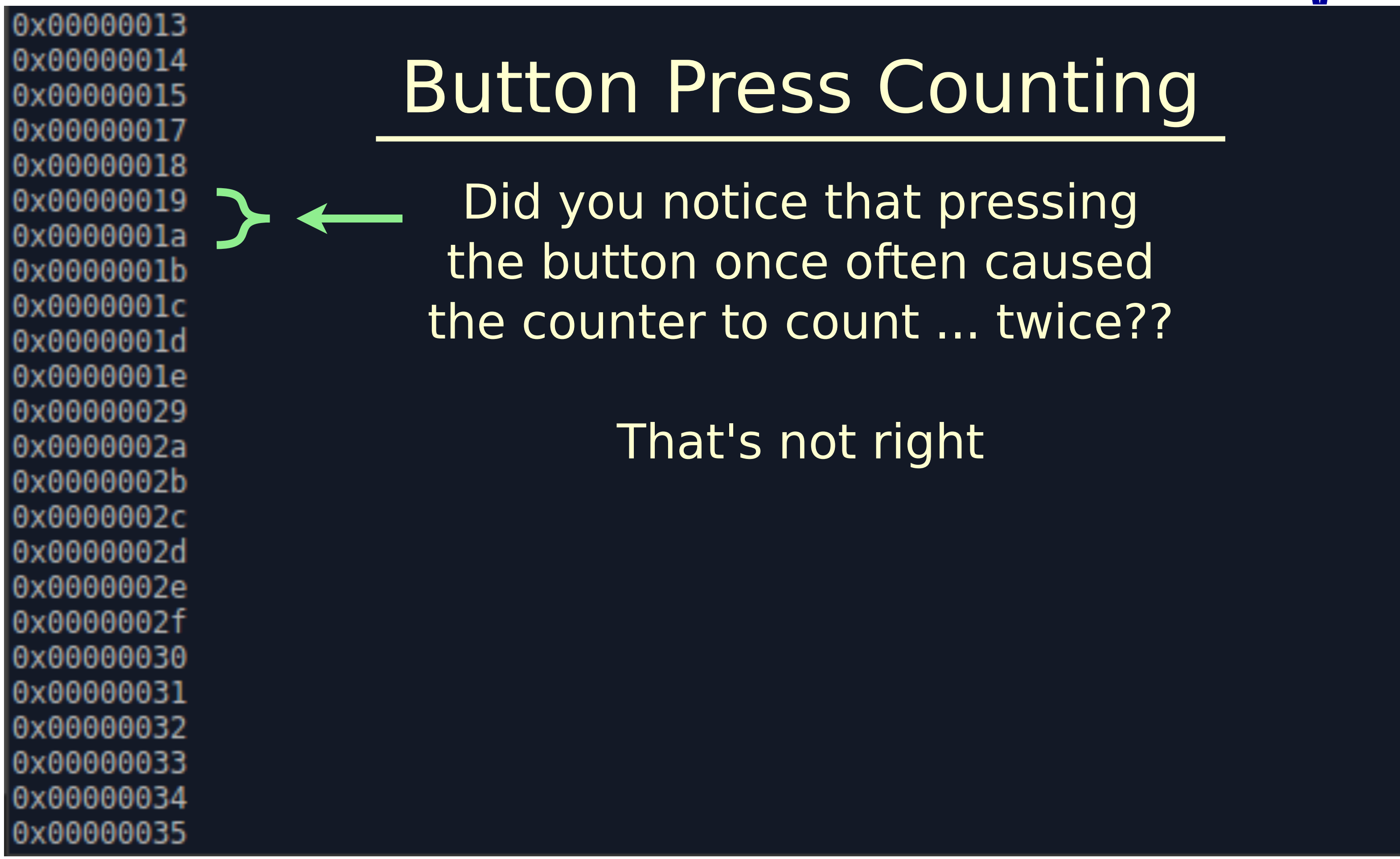
We built a button press counter in the last lesson



1. It detected a button press,
2. Incremented a counter,
3. Sent the value over the serial port as hexadecimal, and was
4. Witnessed at a terminal

An easy way to count button presses, no?

Was this what you expected?



This looks like it could be fixed

Was this what you expected?

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
▷ What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion


```
0x00000013
0x00000014
0x00000015
0x00000017
0x00000018
0x00000019
0x0000001a
0x0000001b
0x0000001c
0x0000001d
0x0000001e
0x00000029
0x0000002a
0x0000002b
0x0000002c
0x0000002d
0x0000002e
0x0000002f
0x00000030
0x00000031
0x00000032
0x00000033
0x00000034
0x00000035
```

Button Press Counting

Sometimes the counter jumped significantly, instead of counting up by one

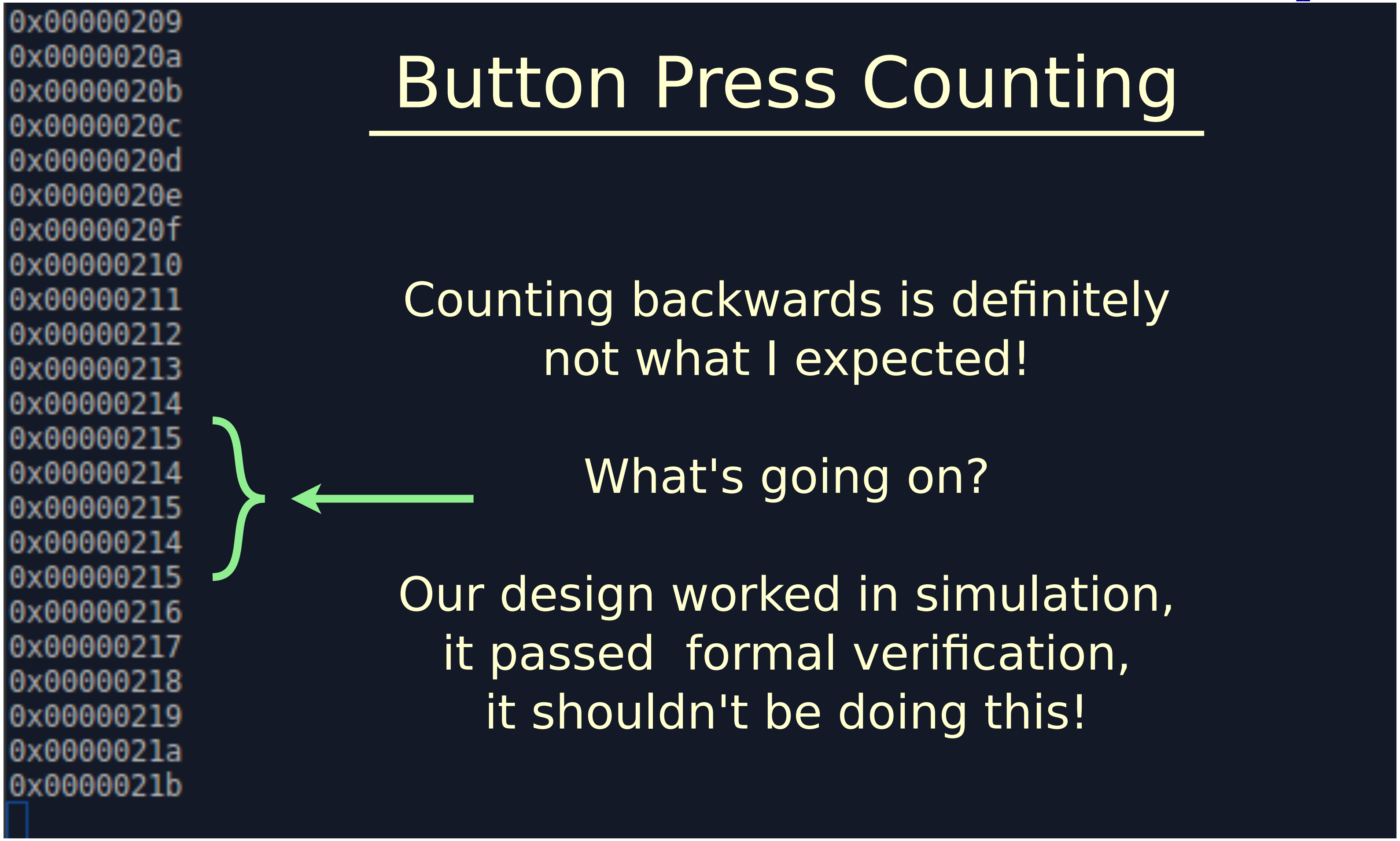
Did you see the jump by 11?

That's not right either

This might take some work to understand

Was this what you expected?

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion



Now I'm really confused! What happened?

Logic takes time

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
▷ Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

To understand what happened, you need to understand that . . .

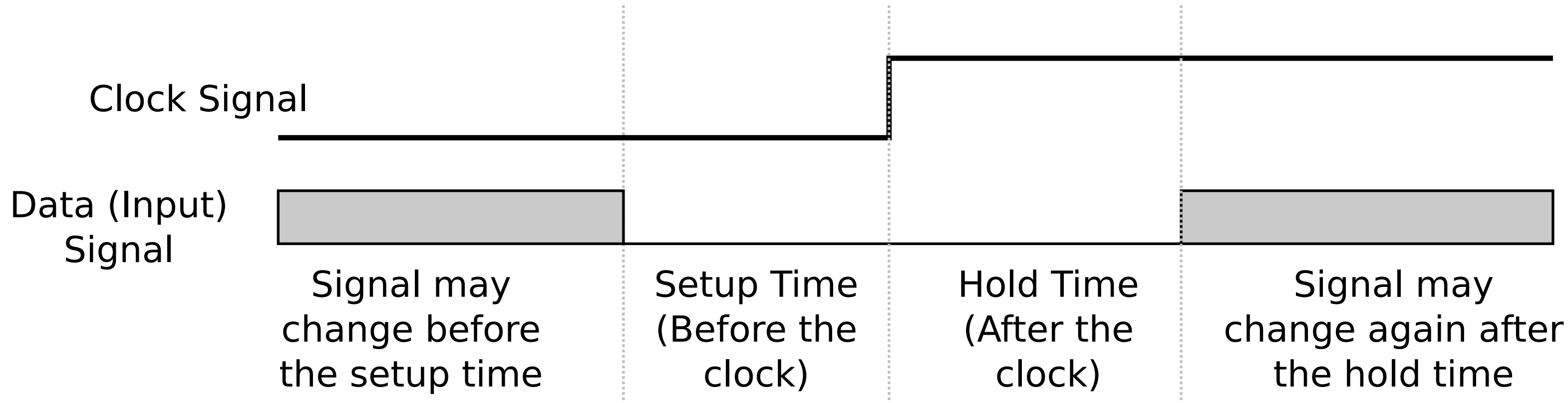
- Logic takes time
- It takes time to go through a logic gate
- It takes time to move about the chip

All this work must be done in time for the next clock

Setup and Hold

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
▷ Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

Flip-Flops (FFs) (a.k.a. registers or **regs**) have two requirements



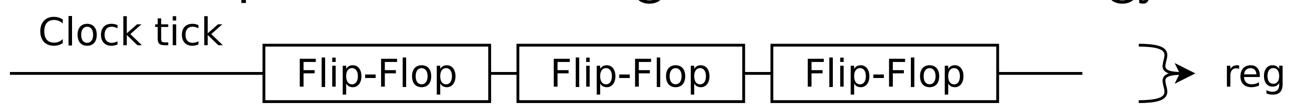
1. The incoming data must be constant for a *setup period* of time before the clock edge
2. It must also be constant for a *hold* time after the clock edge

If these criteria are not met, your design will not function as you expect

Caving Analogy

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

I like to explain clocks using caves as an analogy



It starts with the clock, and the FF's set using that clock

Caving Analogy

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
▷ Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

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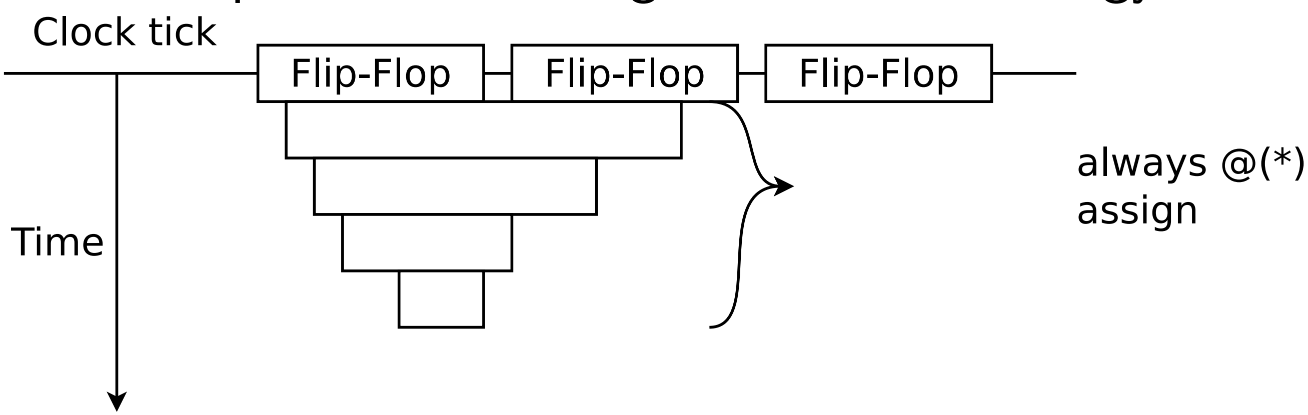

Adding logic creates stalagtites

- Stalagtites are formed from **assign** statements and **always** @(∗) blocks
  - Their timing is derived from the last clock tick

Caving Analogy

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
▷ Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

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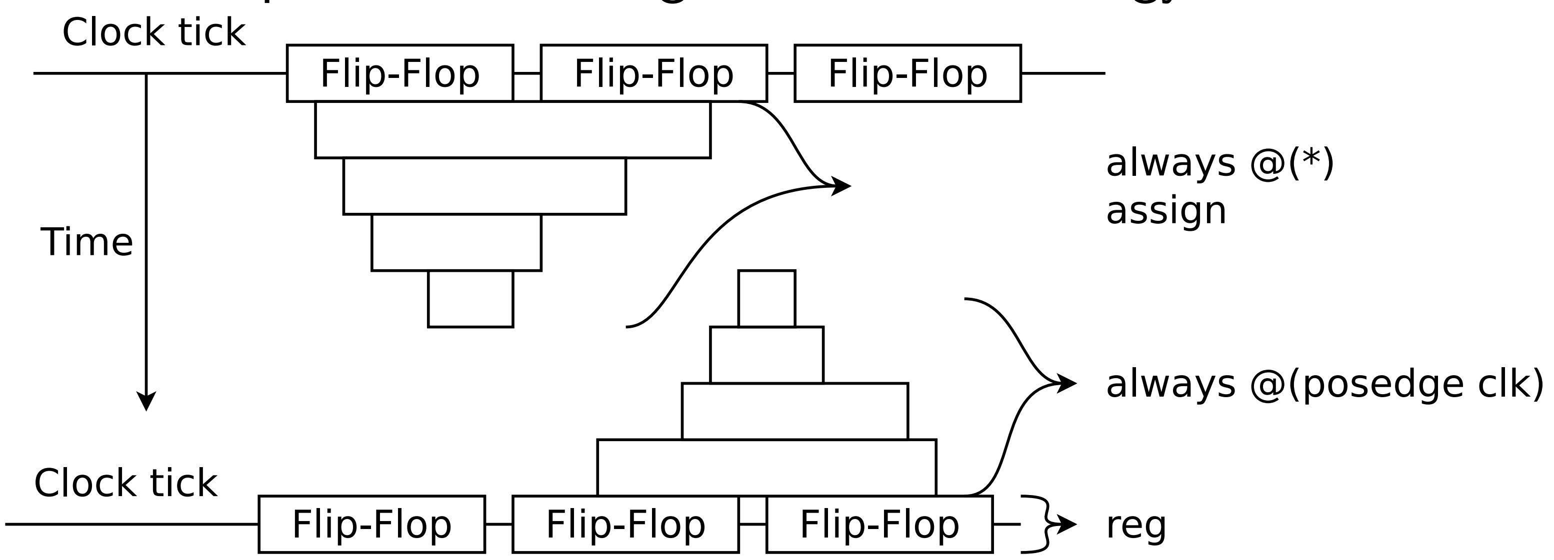

Adding logic creates stalagtites and stalagmites

- Stalagtites are formed from **assign** statements and **always** `@(*)` blocks
- Stalagmites are formed from **always** `@(`**posedge** `i_clk)` blocks
  - Their timing is derived from the next clock tick

Caving Analogy

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
▷ Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

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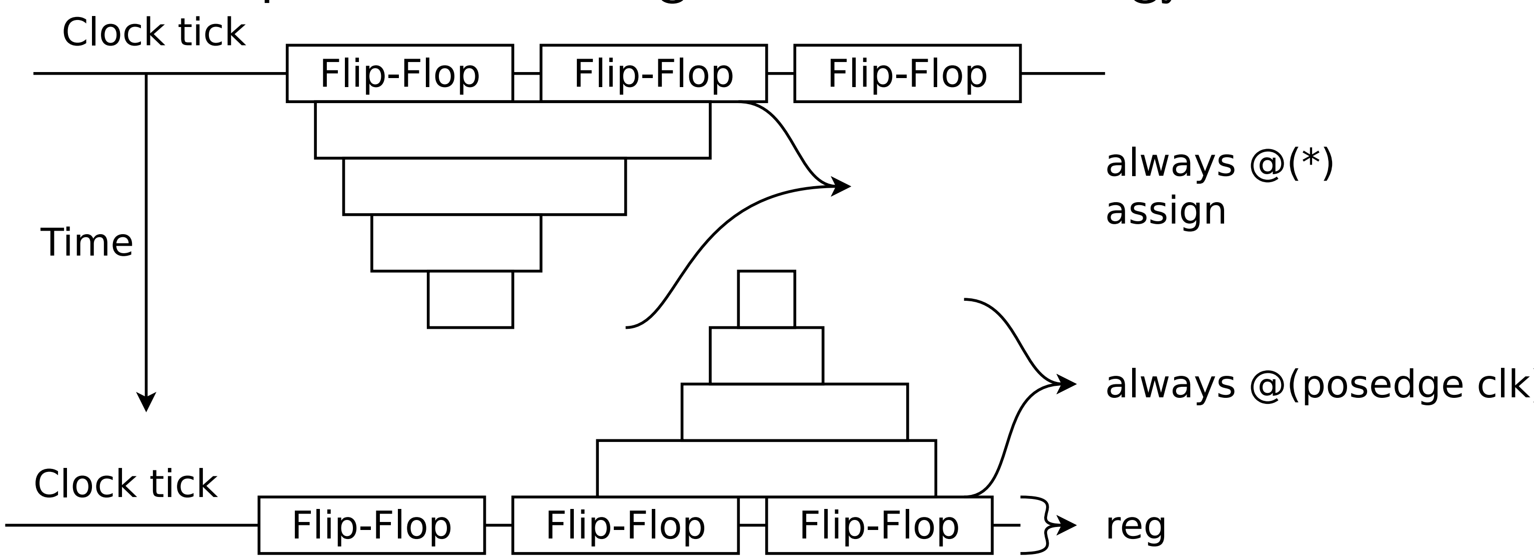


Your goal as the designer is to make certain that there's extra space between stalagtites and the stalagmites

- This is your margin
- You need this margin for success

Did we guarantee any margin in our button press design?

What happened

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
▷ Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

For reference, here was the basic problematic code:

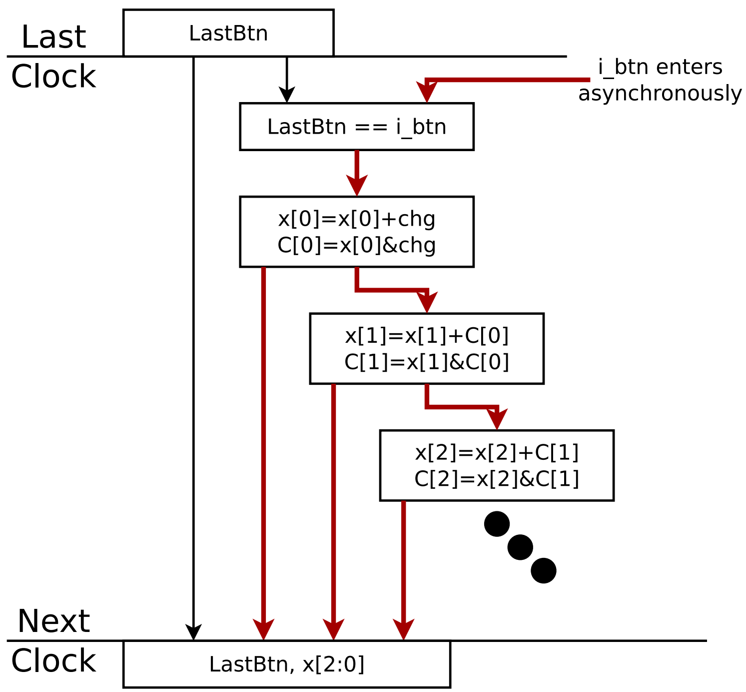
```
initial o_count = 0;
always @(posedge i_clk)
if (i_reset)
        o_count <= 0;
else if ((i_btn)&&(!last_btn))
        o_count <= o_count + 1'b1;
```

See the problem?

No margin

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
▷ No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

In our last design, . . .



- Timing analysis was based upon the time between FFs
- The 32-bit carry chain stretched out the logic
- The high clock rate I used just made this worse

No margin

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
▷ No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

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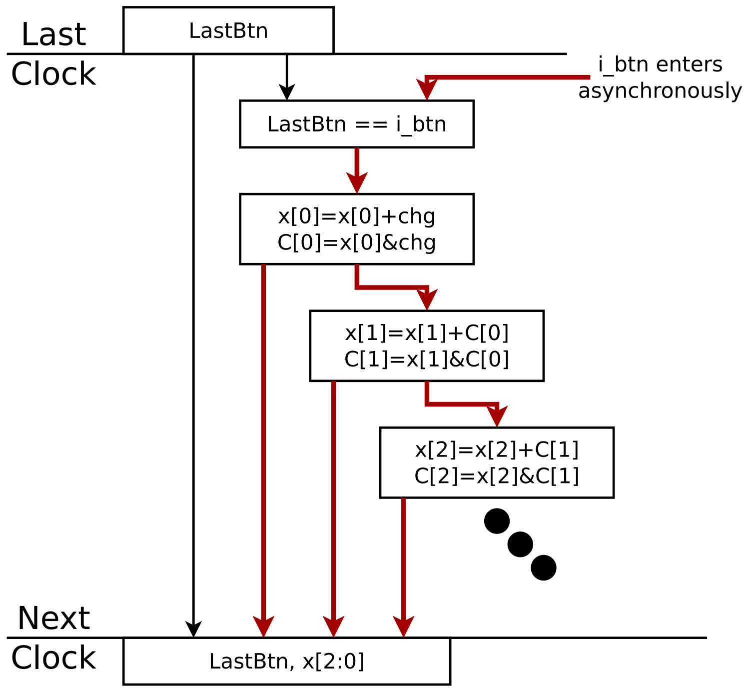
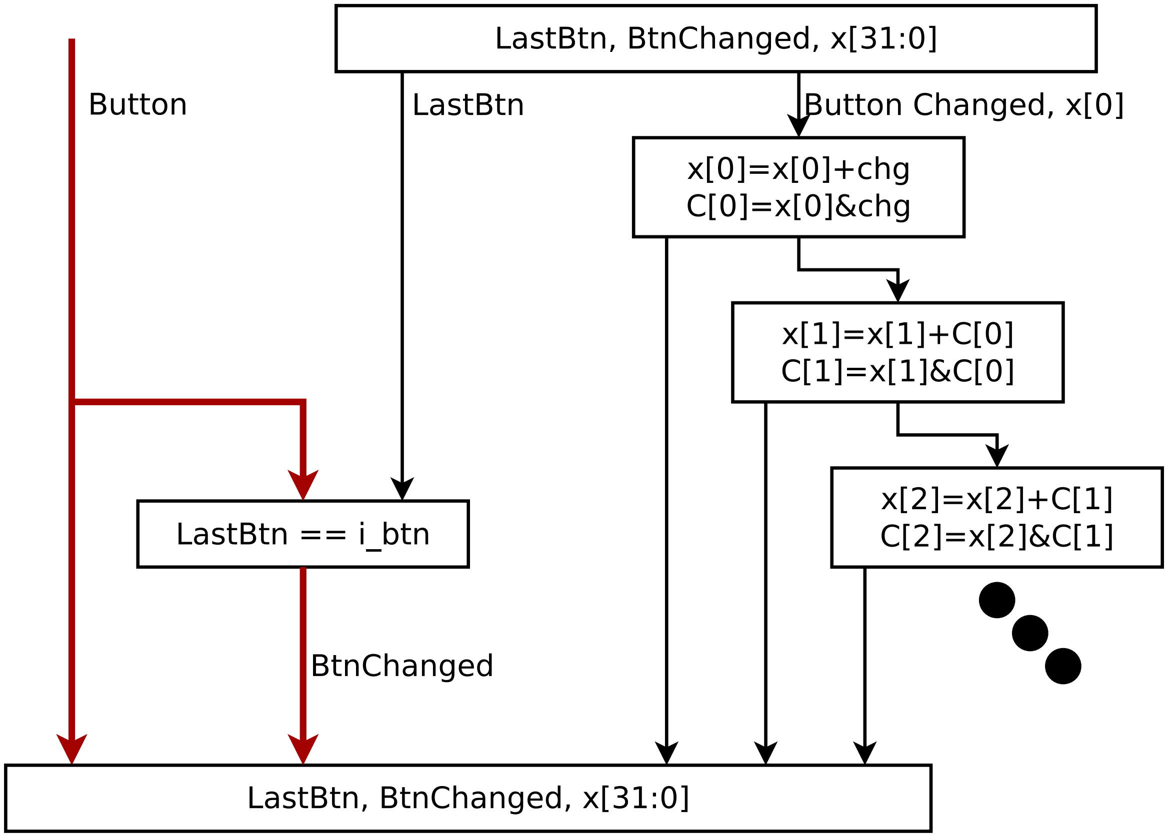


We did *nothing* to guarantee the button press plus our logic would fit between two clock ticks, with margin left over

More margin

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
▻ No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion



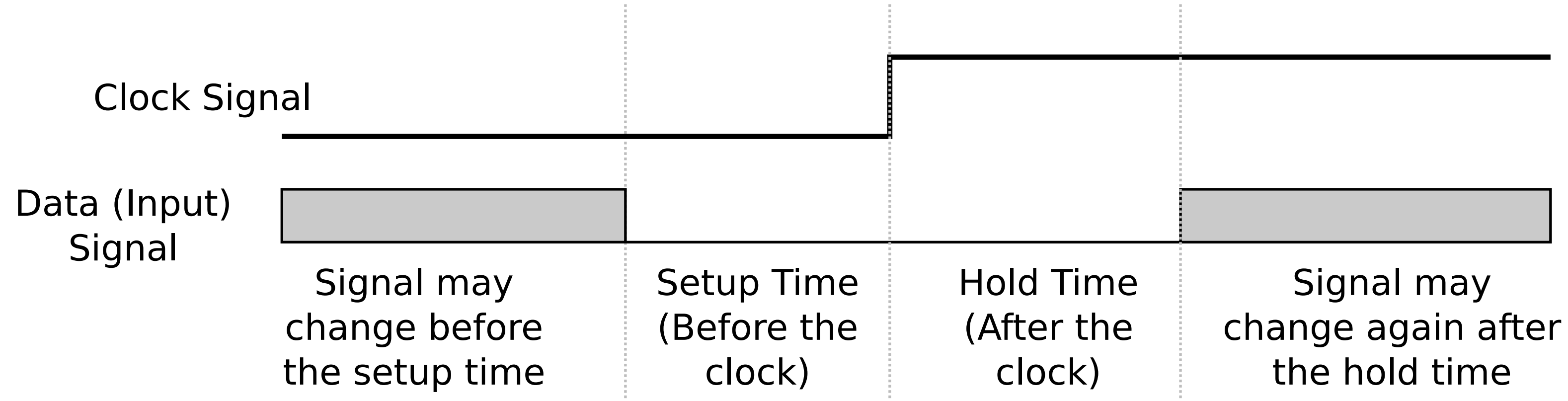
Eliminating almost all of the logic is better

- But still not good enough
- The button input must go directly into an FF

Asynchronous Input

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
▷ Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

If we can't control when the button rises, . . .

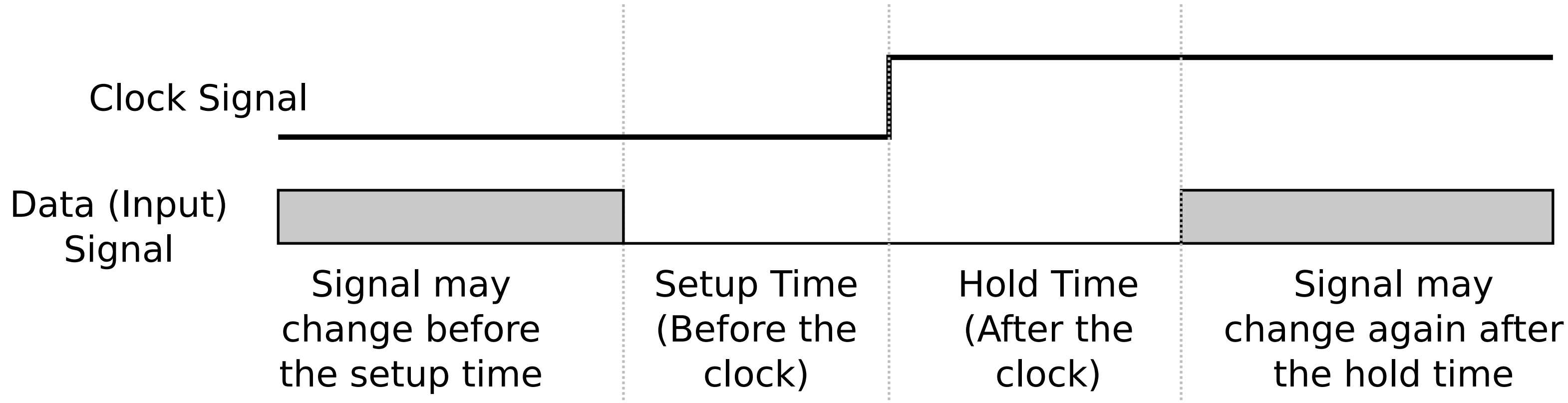


How can we ensure the setup and hold times are met?

Asynchronous Input

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
▷ Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

If we can't control when the button rises, . . .



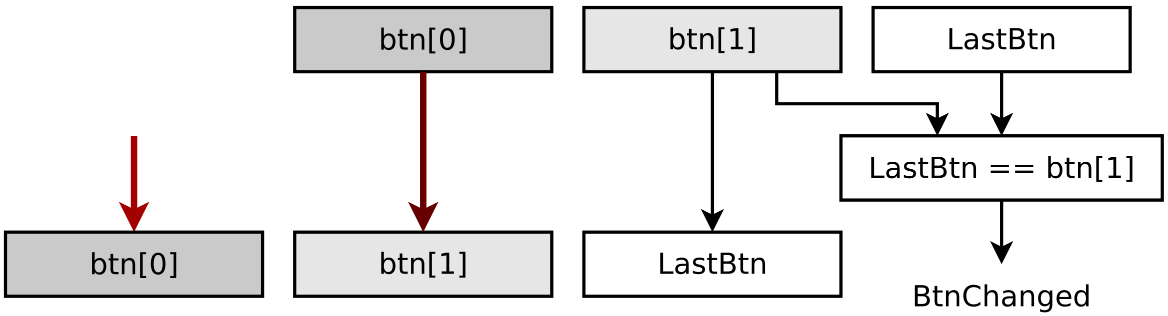
How can we ensure the setup and hold times are met?

- We can't

Asynchronous Input

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

Rule: All asynchronous inputs must go through a 2FF synchronizer



- Inputs must first go directly into a FF
  - No other logic is allowed
  - The output of this FF *may not (yet) be stable*

    Metastability is the name for when a logic value is neither zero or one. It is a rare result of not meeting setup and hold requirements

Asynchronous Input

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
▷ Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

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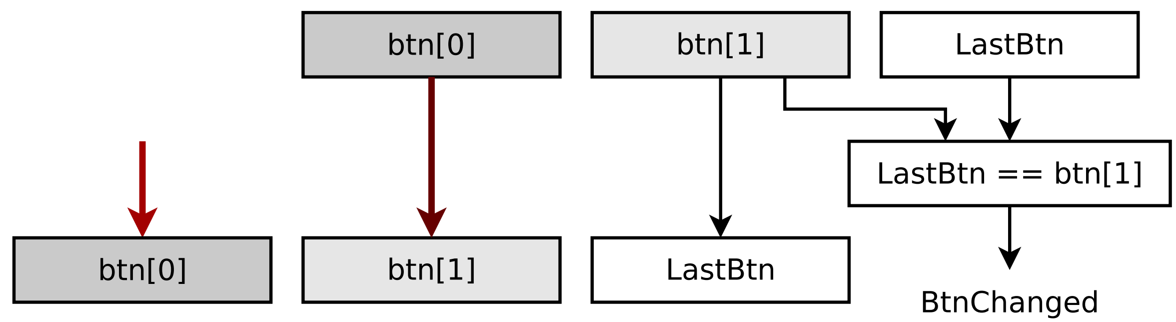
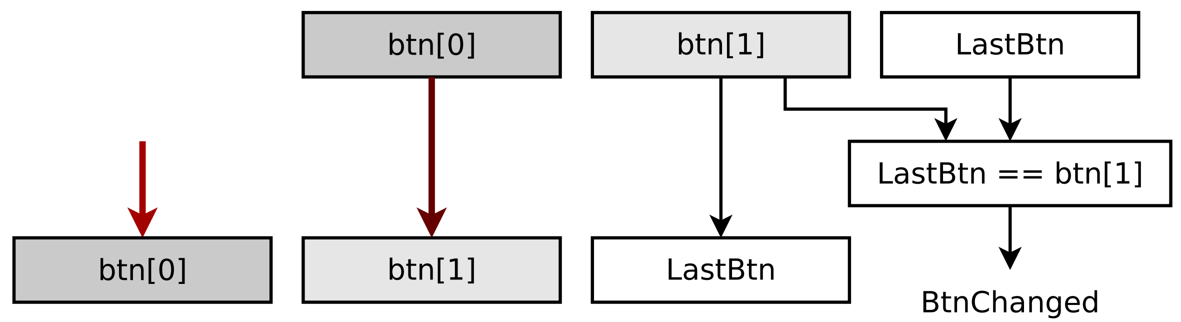


- Inputs must first go directly into a FF
- To deal with the broken setup and hold times, we go directly into a *second flip-flop*
  - This reduces the likelihood of *metastability*

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
▻ Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

Rule: All asynchronous inputs must go through a 2FF synchronizer



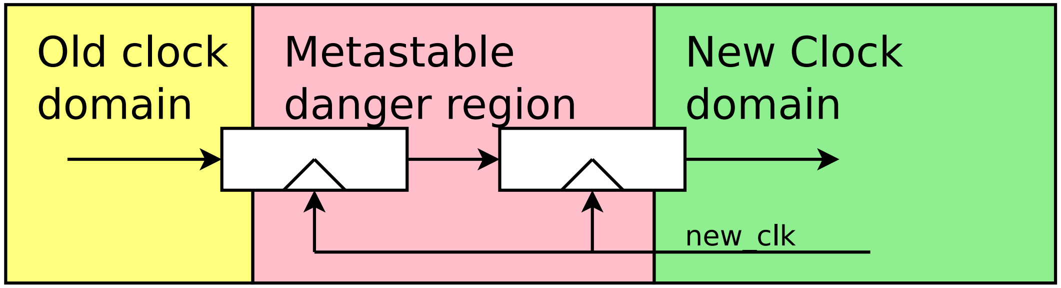
Does this apply to other asynchronous inputs besides buttons?

- *Yes!* If it is not synchronized to your clock, it *must* go through a two flip-flop synchronizer
- Won't this slow signals down? Yes, it will.
  - This is why it is important to provide a clock together with any data signal(s) in low-latency applications

2FF Synchronizer

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
▷ 2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

This is a 2 Flip-Flop (2FF) synchronizer



Synchronizing our button input would look like

```
reg     r_btn, r_aux;

initial { r_btn, r_aux } = 2'b00;
always @(posedge i_clk)
        { r_btn, r_aux } <= { r_aux, i_btn };
```

Bouncing

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
▷ Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

This will fix everything but the double-counts

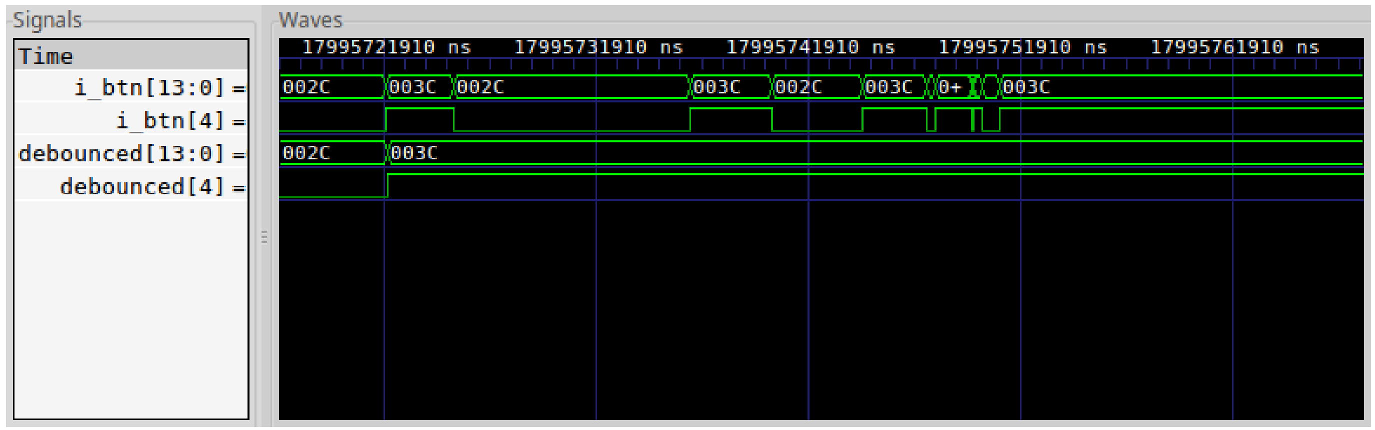
- Often, pressing a button caused the counter to count *twice*
- The counter wouldn't skip, but one button press generated two counts

This is due to button *bouncing*

Bouncing

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
▷ Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

A trace from within our design might look like this



Look at the trace for `i_btn`[4]

- Notice how the button toggles, or "bounces" before it settles
- This is common
- It is caused by
  - Increased capacitance as the contacts come closer
  - A voltage slowly crossing through the threshold region

Bouncing

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
▷ Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

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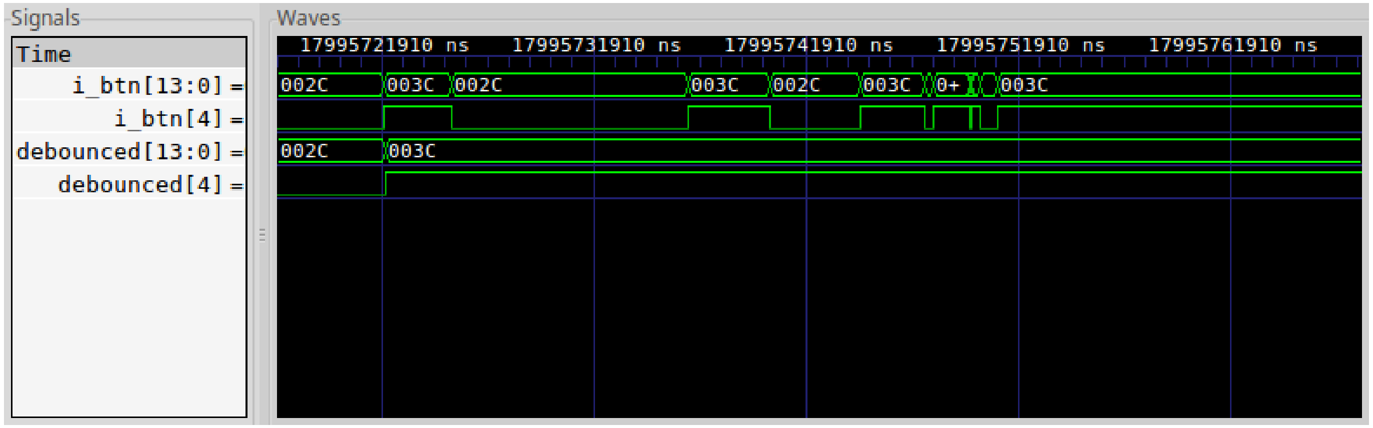
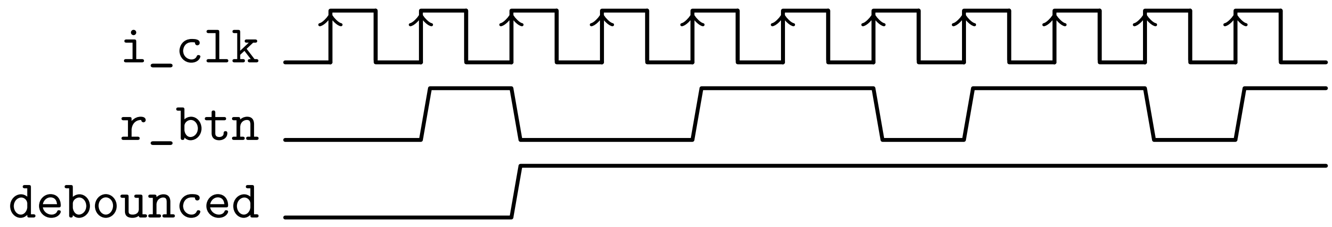


Look at the trace for `i_btn`[4]

- We'll need to simplify this "bouncing" trace
- This is called *debouncing*
- Our goal will be to produce a trace like `debounced`[4]

Our goal:



- Create an output that changes when the button changes
- Not when the button bounces

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
▷ Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

Debouncing

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
▷ Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

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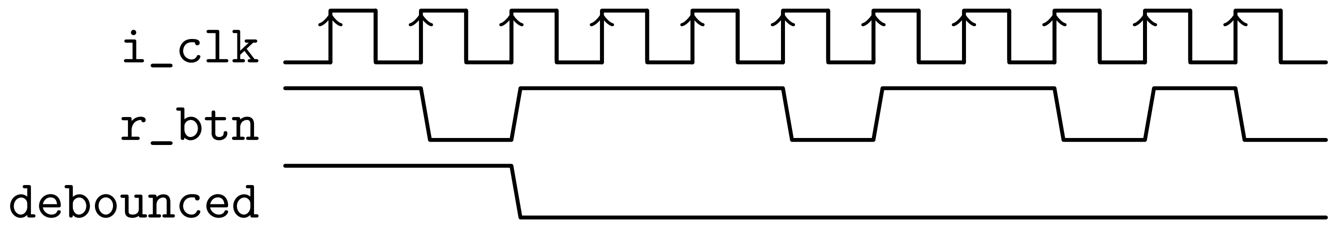

This applies both to the button press as well as to its release

Debouncing

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
▷ Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

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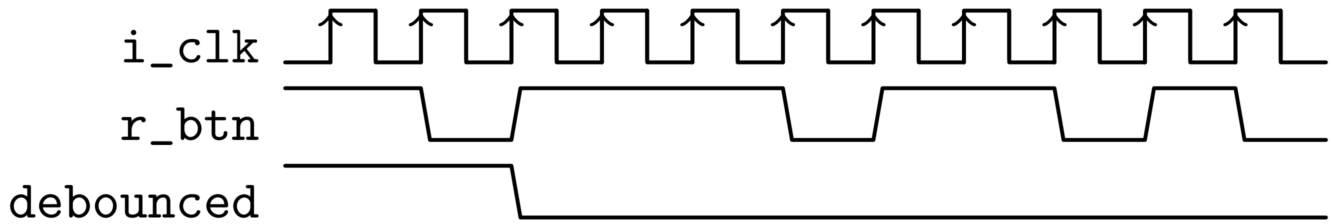
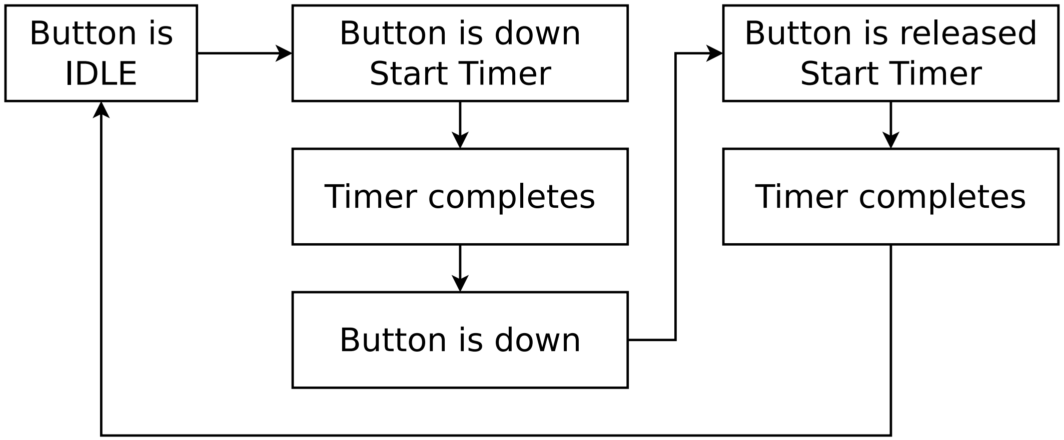


This applies both to the button press as well as to its release
A state diagram might make more sense of what we need to do

Debouncing FSM

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
▻ FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

Debouncing requires a timer



We'll respond to the button any time the timer is idle

- This should be starting to look familiar

Timer

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
▷ Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

1. The 2FF Synchronizer

```
initial { r_btn, r_aux } = 0;
always @(posedge i_clk)
        { r_btn, r_aux } <= { r_aux, i_btn };
```

Timer

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
▷ Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

1. The 2FF Synchronizer
2. The count-down timer

```
initial timer = 0;
always @(posedge i_clk)
if (timer != 0)
        timer <= timer - 1;
else if (r_btn != o_debounced)
        timer <= TIME_PERIOD-1;
```

3. The output

```
always @(posedge i_clk)
if (timer == 0)
        o_debounced <= r_btn;
```

Timer

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
▷ Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

1. The 2FF Synchronizer
2. The count-down timer
3. The output

```
always @(posedge i_clk)
if (timer == 0)
        o_debounced <= r_btn;
```

This looks simple enough. Now, how to verify it?

Simulation

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
▷ Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

The problem is that our simulated button never bounced

- If we can simulate a button bouncing, we'll can gain some confidence that this will work
- Perhaps if we toggled randomly for two timer periods
- Then settled for two periods
- We might have something to comment on?

Co-Simulation

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
▷ Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

A button co-simulator should . . .

- Be able to be pressed

```
class BUTTONSIM {
        // ...
        void press(void);
```

- Be able to be released

```
        void release(void);
```

- Bounce following any press or release

```
        int operator()(void);
}
```

Let's build out these methods

Co-Simulation

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
▷ Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

Our button class will have two state variables and a constant

```
#define TIME_PERIOD  500000 // 1/2 ms at 10ns
class    BUTTONSIM {
         int      m_state, m_timeout;
public:
         BUTTONSIM(void) {
                  // Start with the button up
                  m_state = 0; // Not pressed
                  //
                  // And begin stable, i.e.
                  m_timeout=0;
         } // ...
```

- `m_state` is the current state of the button
- `m_timeout` is a count-down timer. When it reaches zero, our button's value will be stable

Sim Press

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
▷ Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

When a button is pressed, we'll change the state and set a timer

```
class BUTTONSIM {
        // ...
        void    press(void) {
                m_state = 1; // i.e. down
                m_timeout = TIME_PERIOD;
        }
```

The timer will tell us when to stop bouncing

Sim Release

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
▷ Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

Button release is nearly identical

```
class BUTTONSIM {
        // ...
        void    release(void) {
                m_state = 0; // i.e. released
                m_timeout = TIME_PERIOD;
        }
```

Sim Release

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
▻ Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

We can also support a test to see if the button is pressed

```
class BUTTONSIM {
        // ...
        bool    pressed(void) {
                return m_state;
        }
```

Co-Simulation

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
▷ Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

Now, let's make our button bounce

```
int     BUTTONSIM::operator()(void) {
        if (m_timeout > 0)
                m_timeout--;
        if (m_timeout == TIME_PERIOD-1) {
                // Return any new button
                // state accurately and
                // immediately
                return m_state;
        } else if (m_timeout > 0) {
                // Until we become stable
                // Bounce!
                return rand()&1;
        }
        // Else the button has settled
        return m_state;
}
```

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
▻ Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

Adding this to our simulation requires

- Declaring our button

```
BUTTONSIM      *btn;
// ...
btn = new BUTTONSIM();
```

Simulation

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
▷ Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

Adding this to our simulation requires

- Declaring our button
- Adjusting our button press scheme

```
do {
        int     chv;

        chv = getch();
        if (chv == 'r')
                btn->release();
        else if ((chv != ERR)
                  &&(!btn->pressed())) {
                keypresses++;
                btn->press();
        }
        // ...
} while(!done);
```

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
▷ Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

Adding this to our simulation requires

- Declaring our button
- Adjusting our button press scheme
- Adding it to our list of co-sim calls

```
for(int k=0; k<1000; k++) {
        // Advance the Verilator logic
        tb->tick();
        // Serial-port Co-sim
        (*uart)(tb->m_core->o_uart_tx);
        // Button co-sim
        m_core->i_btn = (*btn)();
}
```

Exercise

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
▷ Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

Your turn!
Build and experiment with the simulation

- Create a trace showing the button bouncing
- Make your Verilog timeout longer than the C++ `TIME_PERIOD`.

Exercise

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
▻ Exercise
Formal Methods
Conclusion

Now build this on your hardware. Does it work?

- Do you ever get multiple counts for a single press?
- Does the counter ever jump?

Formal Methods

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
▷ Formal Methods
Conclusion

We haven't discussed formal methods this lesson

- It can still be verified, although there's not much there
- What formal properties might you include to verify this design?

Conclusion

Lesson Overview
Last Lesson
Review
What happened?
Logic takes time
Setup and Hold
Caving Analogy
No margin
No margin
Asynchronous Input
2FF Sync
Bouncing
Debouncing
FSM
Timer
Simulation
Co-Simulation
Co-Simulation
Exercise
Formal Methods
▻ Conclusion

What did we learn this lesson?

- *Always* send asynchronous inputs through a 2FF synchronizer before using them
  - Failing to do this can result in some inexplicable behavior
  - Simulation and synthesis might not match
- Buttons *bounce*!
  - A basic debouncing circuit is another FSM
  - This time with a counter within it