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6. Transmitting Data Words

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Lesson Overview



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- Data Transmitter
- Desired Structure
- Counter
- Change Detection
- txdata
- State diagram
- Outgoing Data
- Formal Verification
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- Assertions
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- ncurses
- Verilator data
- Testbench build
- Exercise #2
- Exercise #3
- Conclusion

Debugging is one of the hardest parts of digital logic design

- You can't see what's happening *inside* the FPGA
- LED's are one solution
 - FPGA's operate 50MHz+
 - Your eye operates at $< 60\text{Hz}$
- The serial port can be a second solution

Let's learn to send data through our serial port!

Objectives

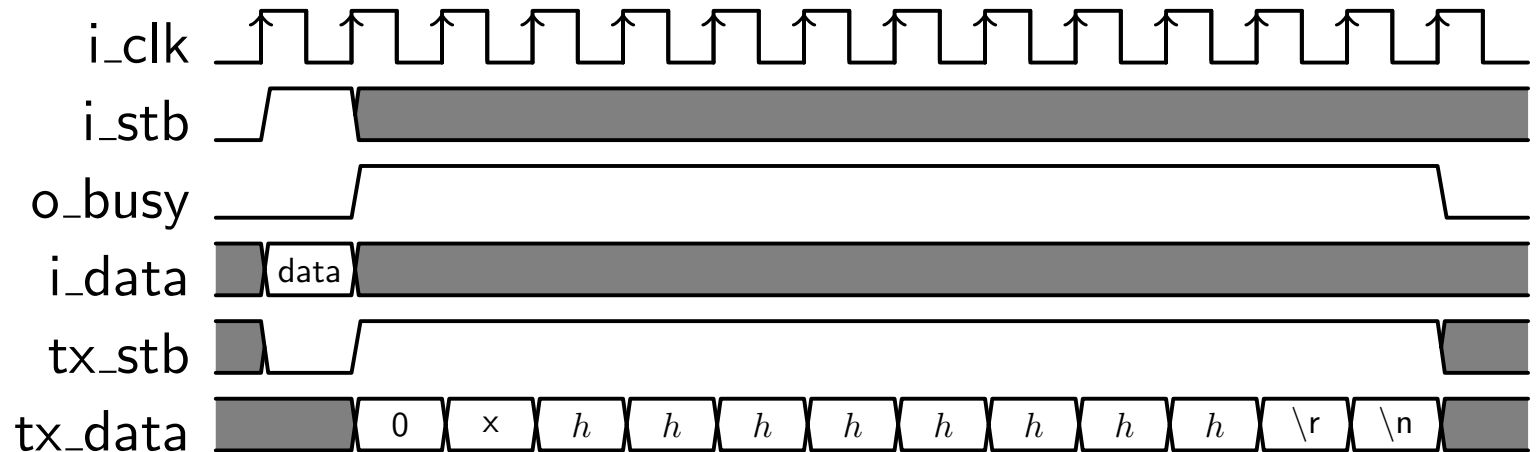
- Transform Hello World into a debugging output
- Learn about formal abstraction
- Experiment with using [ncurses](#) with Verilator
- Extract internal design variables from within Verilator



Data Transmitter



Let's transmit a word of data



Each word will ...

- Start with 0x
- Contain the number sent, but in hexadecimal

this is much easier than doing decimal!

Four bits can be encoded at a time

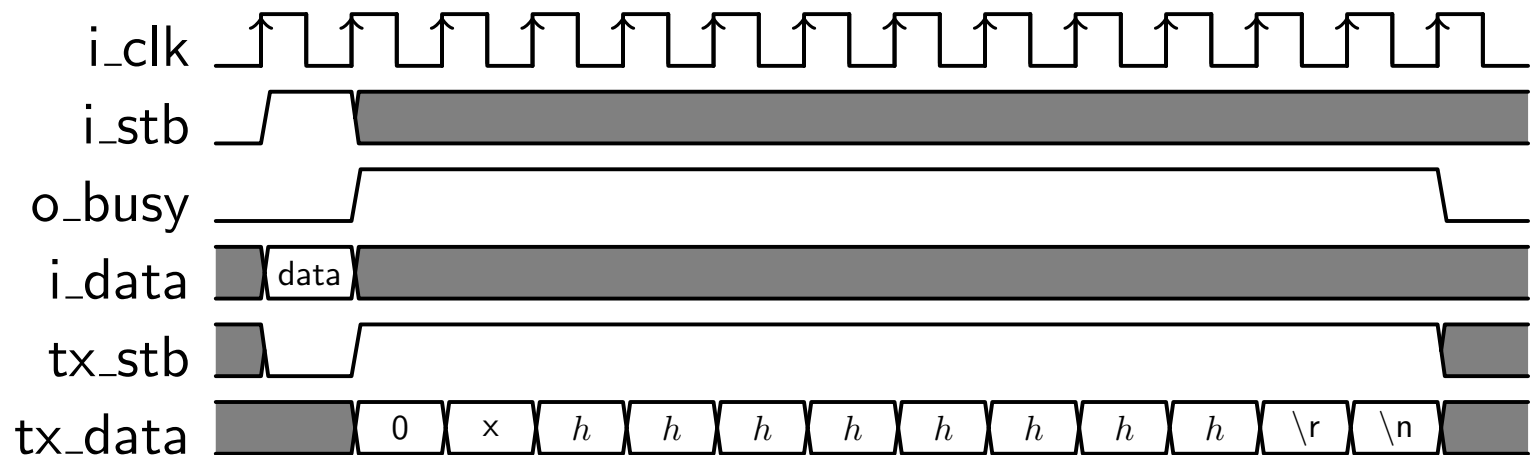
- End with a carriage return / line-feed pair



Data Transmitter



You should know how to build this design already



Remember how we've built state machines before

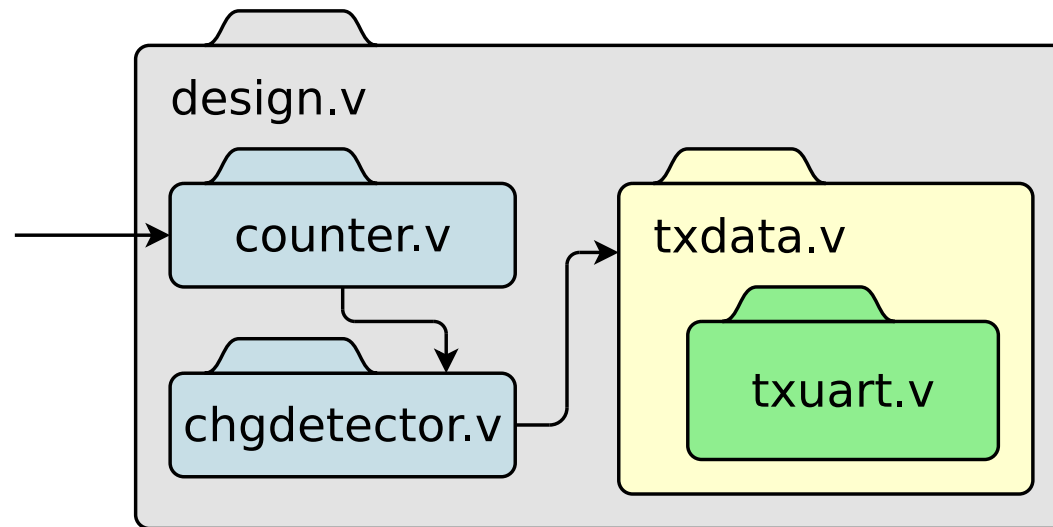
- In this case, you have two triggers
 - One trigger starts the process
 - A busy line from the serial port controls the movement to the next character
- This design will be the focus of this lesson



Desired Structure



Our overall design will look like this:



- Some event will trigger a counter
- A second module will detect that the counter has changed
- Finally we'll output the result
- We'll use `txuart.v` from the last exercise

Let's take a quick look at `counter.v` and `chgdetector.v`



Creating a Counter



You should already know how to make an event counter

```
module counter(i_clk, i_event, o_counter);  
  input    wire    i_clk, i_event;  
  output   reg     [31:0] o_counter;  
  
  initial o_counter = 0;  
  always @(posedge i_clk)  
    if (i_event)  
      o_counter <= o_counter + 1'b1;  
  
endmodule
```

Feel free to add a reset if you would like

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Change Detection



Detecting a change in the counter is also pretty easy

```
module    chgdetector(i_clk, i_data,
                    o_stb, o_data, i_busy);

    // ...
    initial { o_stb, o_data } = 0;
    always @(posedge i_clk)
    if (!o_busy)
    begin
        stb <= 0;
        if (o_data != i_data)
        begin
            o_data <= i_data;
            stb <= 1'b1;
        end
    end
    endmodule
```

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Change Detection



What formal properties might we use here?

- Any output value should remain unchanged until accepted

```
// Remember this property?  
always @(posedge i_clk)  
if ((f_past_valid)  
      &($past(o_stb))&&($past(i_busy)))  
    assert ($stable(o_data));
```




Change Detection



What formal properties might we use here?

- Any output value should remain unchanged until accepted

```
// Remember this property?  
always @(posedge i_clk)  
if ((f_past_valid)  
      &($past(o_stb))&&($past(i_busy)))  
    assert ($stable(o_data));
```

- When o_stb rises, o_data should reflect the input

```
always @(posedge i_clk)  
if ((f_past_valid)&&($rose(o_stb)))  
    assert (o_data == $past(i_data));
```

\$rose(o_stb) is shorthand for (o_stb)&&(!\$past(o_stb))



Change Detection



What formal properties might we use here?

- Any output value should remain unchanged until accepted

```
// Remember this property?  
always @(posedge i_clk)  
if ((f_past_valid)  
      &($past(o_stb))&&($past(i_busy)))  
    assert ($stable(o_data));
```

- When o_stb rises, o_data should reflect the input

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always @(posedge i_clk)  
if ((f_past_valid)&&($rose(o_stb)))  
    assert (o_data == $past(i_data));
```

\$rose(o_stb) is shorthand for (o_stb)&&(!\$past(o_stb))

- Can you think of any other properties we might be missing here?



Our focus: txdata



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This lesson will focus on `txdata.v`

- We've already built `txuart.v`
- You should have no problems designing `counter.v` or `chgdetector.v`

You are encouraged to do so on your own

- If not, you can find `counter.v` and `chgdetector.v` in the course handouts

You should also have a good idea how to start on `txdata.v`.

- It's not all that different from `txuart.v` or `helloworld.v`
- The example in the course handouts is broken



Our focus: txdata



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Here's the port list(s) we'll design to

```
module    txdata(i_clk, i_stb, i_data, o_busy,
                  o_uart_tx);
// ...
    txuart  #(UART_SETUP[23:0]) txuarti(i_clk,
    tx_stb, tx_data, o_uart_tx, tx_busy);
// ...
endmodule
```

- If i_stb is true, we have a new value to send
- i_data will then contain that value
- o_busy means we cannot accept data
- o_uart_tx is the serial port output



Our focus: txdata



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```
module    txdata(i_clk, i_stb, i_data, o_busy,
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// ...
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// ...
endmodule
```

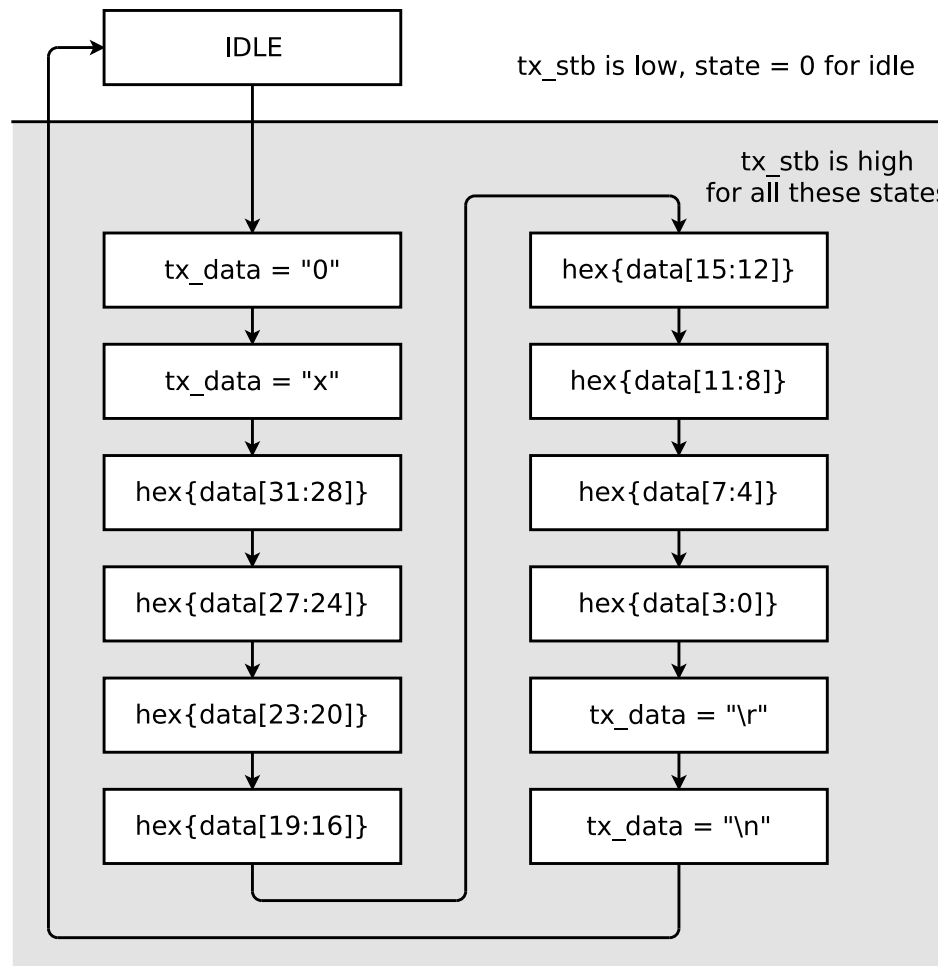
- tx_stb requests data be transmitted
- tx_data is the character to transmit
- tx_busy means the serial port transmitter is busy and cannot accept data



State diagram



We can create a state diagram for this state machine too

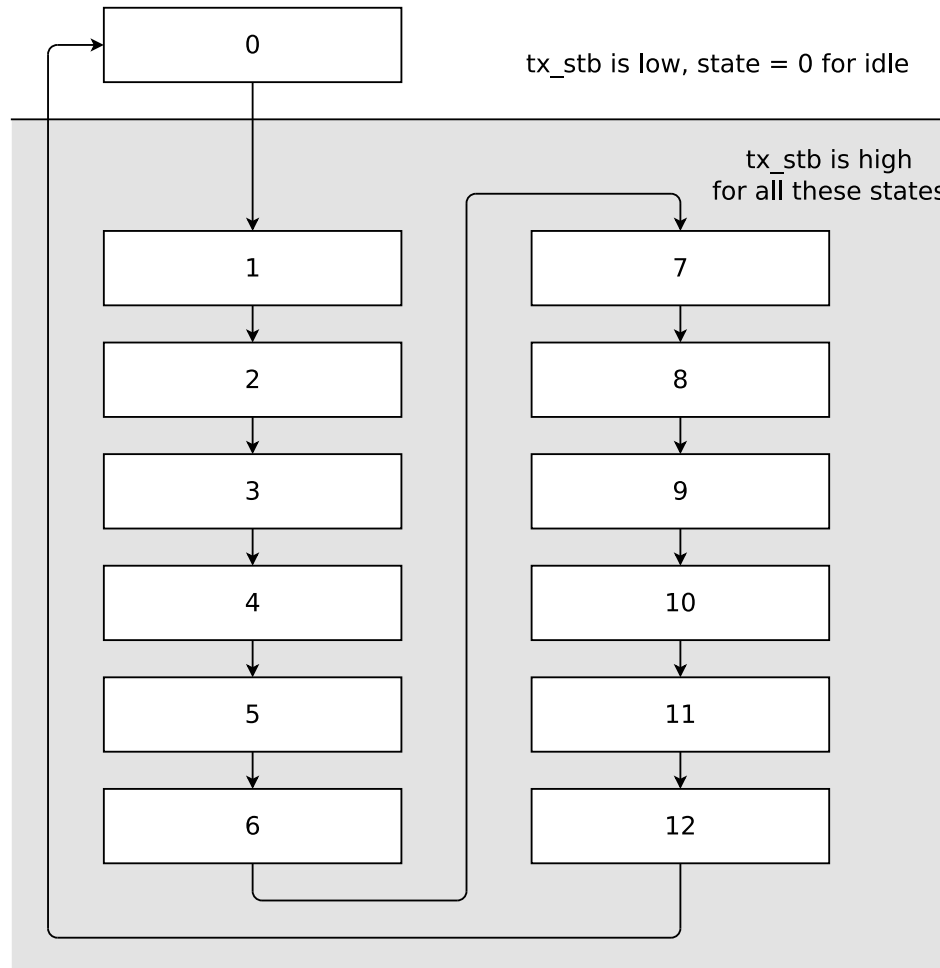




State diagram



We can even annotate this with state ID numbers





State diagram



The state machine should remind you of `helloworld.v`

```
always @(posedge i_clk)
  if (!o_busy)
    begin
      if (i_stb)
        begin
          state <= 1;
          tx_stb <= 1;
        end // else state already == 0
    end else if ((tx_stb)&&(!tx_busy))
    begin
      state <= state + 1;
      if (state >= 4'hd)
        begin
          tx_stb <= 1'b0;
          state <= 0;
        end
    end
  // ...
```

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Outgoing Data



The outgoing data is just a shift register

```
initial sreg = 0;
always @(posedge i_clk)
if (!o_busy) // && (i_stb)
    sreg <= i_data;
else if ((!tx_busy)&&(state > 4'h1))
    // Hold constant until read
    sreg <= { i_data[27:0], 4'h0};
```

Question:

Why aren't we conditioning our load on i_stb as well?



Outgoing Data



The outgoing data is just a shift register

```
initial sreg = 0;
always @(posedge i_clk)
if (!o_busy) // && (i_stb)
    sreg <= i_data;
else if ((!tx_busy)&&(state > 4'h1))
    // Hold constant until read
    sreg <= { i_data[27:0], 4'h0};
```

Question:

Why aren't we conditioning our load on i_stb as well?

Because we don't care what sreg is if !(i_stb)&&(o_busy), so we can eliminate this logic with no effect



Outgoing Data



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Converting to hex is very straight forward

```
always @(posedge i_clk)
case(sreg[31:28])
4'h0: hex <= "0";
4'h1: hex <= "1";
4'h2: hex <= "2";
4'h3: hex <= "3";
// ...
4'h9: hex <= "9";
4'ha: hex <= "a";
4'hb: hex <= "b";
4'hc: hex <= "c";
4'hdc: hex <= "d";
4'he: hex <= "e";
4'hf: hex <= "f";
default: begin end
endcase
```



Outgoing Data



Put together, here's our transmit byte

```
always @(posedge i_clk)
case(state)
if (!tx_busy)
    case(state)
        4'h1: tx_data <= "0"; // These are the
        4'h2: tx_data <= "x"; // values we'll
        4'h3: tx_data <= hex; // want to output
        4'h4: tx_data <= hex; // at each state
        // ...
        4'h9: tx_data <= hex;
        4'ha: tx_data <= hex;
        4'hb: tx_data <= "\r";
        4'hc: tx_data <= "\n";
        default: tx_data <= "Q"; // a bad value
    endcase
```



Simulation



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Let's do simulation *after* formal verification

- It's easier to get a trace from formal
- Formal methods are often done faster
- etc.



Formal Verification



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Our design is getting large

- We've already verified `txuart.v`
- It would be nice not to have to do it again

Let's simplify things instead!

- Let's replace `txuart.v` with something that might act like it
 - It might or might not act like `txuart.v`
 - At the solver's discretion
 - Acting like `txuart.v` must remain a possibility

This is called *abstraction*



Formal Verification



Here's how we'll do it:

```
'ifndef FORMAL
    txuart #(UART_SETUP[23:0]) txuarti(i_clk,
        tx_stb, tx_data, o_uart_tx, tx_busy);
'else
    (* anyseq *) wire serial_busy, serial_out;
    assign o_uart_tx = serial_out;
    assign tx_busy = serial_busy;
```

- (* anyseq *) allows the solver to pick the values of serial_busy and serial_out
- (* anyseq *) values can change from one clock to the next
- They might match what txuart would've done



Formal Verification



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'ifdef FORMAL
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    assign o_uart_tx = serial_out;
    assign tx_busy = serial_busy;
```

- (* anyseq *) allows the solver to pick the values of serial_busy and serial_out
- (* anyseq *) values can change from one clock to the next
- They might match what txuart would've done, or they might not



Formal Verification



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'ifdef FORMAL
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    assign tx_busy = serial_busy;
```

- (* anyseq *) allows the solver to pick the values of serial_busy and serial_out
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- They might match what txuart would've done, or they might not
- If our design passes *in spite of what this abstract txuart does*



Formal Verification



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'ifndef FORMAL
    txuart  #(UART_SETUP[23:0])  txuarti(i_clk,
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    (* anyseq *) wire serial_busy, serial_out;
    assign o_uart_tx = serial_out;
    assign tx_busy = serial_busy;
```

- (* anyseq *) allows the solver to pick the values of serial_busy and serial_out
- (* anyseq *) values can change from one clock to the next
- They might match what txuart would've done, or they might not
- If our design passes *in spite of what this abstract txuart does*, then it will pass if txuart acts like it should



Formal Verification



We'll insist that our abstract UART is busy following any request

```
reg      [1:0]    f_minbusy;

initial  f_minbusy = 0;
always  @(posedge i_clk)
if ((tx_stb)&&(!tx_busy))
    f_minbusy <= 2'b01;
else if (f_minbusy != 2'b00)
    f_minbusy <= f_minbusy + 1'b1;

always  @(*)
if (f_minbusy != 0)
    assume(tx_busy);
```

An assumption make sense, since these (* [anyseq](#) *) values are acting like inputs to our design



Formal Verification



We'll also insist it doesn't become busy on its own

```
initial assume(!tx_busy); // Starts idle
always @(posedge i_clk)
if ($past(i_reset)) // Becomes idle after reset
    assume(!tx_busy);
else if (($past(tx_stb))&&(!$past(tx_busy)))
    // Must become busy after a new request
    assume(tx_busy);
else if (!$past(tx_busy))
    // Otherwise, it cannot become busy
    // without a request
    assume(!tx_busy);
```

Now we can build a proof without re-verifying txuart.v!



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Let's see if this design works:

```
// Don't forget to set the mode to cover  
// in your SBY file!  
always @(posedge i_clk)  
if (f_past_valid)  
    cover ( $fell ( o_busy ) );
```

This would yield a trace with a reset

- It works, but it's not very informative



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What if we except the reset?

```
// Don't forget to set the mode to cover  
// in your SBY file!  
always @(posedge i_clk)  
if ((f_past_valid)&&(!$past(i_reset)))  
    cover( $fell(o_busy));
```

A trace that yields all zeros is boring

- It works, but it's not very informative



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What if we look for 0x12345678\r\n?

```
reg f_seen_data;
initial f_seen_data = 0;
always @(posedge i_clk)
if (i_reset)
    f_seen_data <= 1'b0;
else if ((i_stb)&&(!o_busy)
        &&(i_data == 32'h12345678))
    f_seen_data <= 1'b1;

always @(posedge i_clk)
if ((f_past_valid)&&(!$past(i_reset))
    &&(f_seen_data))
    cover ($fell(o_busy));
```

Check out the trace.



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What if we look for 0x12345678\r\n?

```
reg f_seen_data;
initial f_seen_data = 0;
always @(posedge i_clk)
if (i_reset)
    f_seen_data <= 1'b0;
else if ((i_stb)&&(!o_busy)
        &&(i_data == 32'h12345678))
    f_seen_data <= 1'b1;

always @(posedge i_clk)
if ((f_past_valid)&&(!$past(i_reset))
    &&(f_seen_data))
    cover ($fell(o_busy));
```

Check out the trace. Does your design work?



What if we look for 0x12345678\r\n?

```
reg      f_seen_data;  
initial f_seen_data = 0;  
always @(posedge i_clk)  
if (i_reset)  
    f_seen_data <= 1'b0;  
else if ((i_stb)&&(!o_busy)  
        &&(i_data == 32'h12345678))  
    f_seen_data <= 1'b1;
```

Caution: It's a snare to use something like `f_seen_data` outside of a cover context

- We aren't doing directed simulation
- The great power of formal is that it applies to *all inputs*
- We're just picking an interesting input for a trace



Assertions



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Now, what assertions would be appropriate?

- We can assert state is legal
- That `tx_stb != (state == 0)`
- Can we assert that the first data output is a "0"?
- That the second output is a "1"?

Your turn: what would make the most sense here?



Sequence



Yes, we can assert a sequence takes place!

```
reg      [12:0]  f_p1reg; // First property

initial f_p1reg = 0;
always @(posedge i_clk)
if (i_reset)
    f_p1reg <= 0;
else if ((i_stb)&&(!o_busy))
begin
    f_p1reg <= 1;
    assert(f_p1reg == 0);
end else if (!tx_busy)
    f_p1reg <= { f_p1reg[11:0], 1'b0 };
```

`f_p1reg[x]` will now be true for stage `x` of any output sequence



Sequence



Now we can make assertions about the different states in our sequence

```
always @(posedge i_clk)
if ((!tx_busy) || (f_minbusy == 0))
begin
    // If the serial port is ready for
    // the next character, or while we are
    // waiting for the next character, ...
    if (f_p1reg[0])
        assert((tx_data == "0")
                &&(state == 1));

    if (f_p1reg[1])
        assert((tx_data == "x")
                &&(state == 2));

    // etc.
end
```

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Concurrent Assertions



Full System Verilog support would make this easier

```
sequence SEND ( A , B );  
            ( tx_stb ) && ( state == A ) && ( tx_data == B )  
            throughout  
            ( tx_busy ) [*0:$] ##1 ( ! tx_busy )  
endsequence
```

This defines a sequence where

- (tx_stb)&&... must be true
- while tx_busy is true, and then
- until (and including) the clock where tx_busy is false



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Full System Verilog support would make this easier

```
sequence SEND ( A , B );  
    // ....
```

We could then string these sequences together in a **property** that could be asserted

```
assert property (@(posedge i_clk))  
    disable iff (i_reset)  
    (i_stb)&&(!o_busy)  
    |=> SEND ( 1 , " 0" ) // First state  
    ##1 SEND ( 2 , " x" ) // Second, etc  
    // ...
```

- $A \mid=> B$ means if A, then B is asserted true on the next clock
- ##1 here means one clock later



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```
sequence SEND ( A , B );  
        //  ....
```

We could then string these sequences together in a **property** that could be asserted

```
assert property (@(posedge i_clk))  
    disable iff (i_reset)  
    (i_stb)&&(!o_busy)  
    |=> SEND (1 , "0" ) // First state  
    ##1 SEND (2 , "x" ) // Second, etc  
    //  ...
```

*SymbiYosys support for **sequences** requires a license*



Exercise #1



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Your turn!

Take a moment now to . . .

- Create your txdata.v, or
- Download my broken one, and then
- Formally verify it
 - Add such assertions as you deem fit
 - Make sure you get a trace showing it working

Does your design work?



Simulation



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Let's move on to simulation

- Let's use the simulator to count key presses
- **ncurses** + Verilator offers a quick debugging environment
 - Every time a key is pressed, output a new count value
 - We'll use **getch()** to get key presses immediately

You may need to download and install ncurses-dev

- We'll adjust `uartsim()` to print to the screen
- You can also examine internal register values with Verilator
 - While the design is running

Let's look at how we'd do these things



`ncurses` is an old-fashioned text library

- It allows us easy access to key press information
- We can write to various locations of the screen
- etc.
- The `original ZipCPU debugger was written with ncurses`

We'll only scratch the surface here



Starting `ncurses` requires some boilerplate

```
#include <ncurses>
// ...
int main(int argc, char **argv) {
    // ...
    initscr();
    raw();
    noecho();
    keypad(stdscr, true);
    halfdelay(1);
```

- This initializes the curses environment
- Turns off line handling and echo
- Decodes special keys (like escape) for us
- **halfdelay**(1) – Doesn't wait for keypresses



Our inner loop will start by checking for keypresses

```
do {  
    done = false;  
    tb->m_core->i_event = 0;  
    // Ket a keypress  
    chv = getch();  
    if (chv == KEY_ESCAPE)  
        // Exit on escape  
        done = true;  
    else if (chv != ERR)  
        // Key was pressed  
        tb->m_core->i_event = 1;  
  
    tb->tick();  
    (*uart)(tb->m_core->o_uart_tx);  
} while (!done);
```



We can speed this up too:

```
do {  
    // ...  
    for (int k=0; k<1000; k++) {  
        tb->tick();  
        (*uart)(tb->m_core->o_uart_tx);  
        tb->m_core->i_event = 0;  
    }  
} while (!done);
```

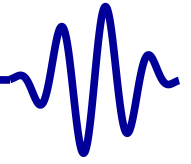
- getch() waits $1/10^{th}$ of a second for a keypress
 - This is because we called **halfdelay**(1);
- This will run 1000 simulation ticks per getch() call



We can also count given keypresses

```
do {  
    // ...  
    for (int k=0; k<1000; k++) {  
        tb->tick();  
        (*uart)(tb->m_core->o_uart_tx);  
        keypresses  
            += tb->m_core->i_event;  
        tb->m_core->i_event = 0;  
    }  
} while (!done);
```

We'll print this number out before we are done



We'll also need to replace the `putchar()` in `uartsim.cpp`

- `ncurses` requires we use `addch()`

```
// if character received  
if (m_rx_data != '\r')  
    addch(m_rx_data);
```

- No flush is necessary, `getch()` handles that
- `'\r'` would clear our line, so we keep from printing it



endwin() ends the **ncurses** environment

```
endwin ();
```

```
printf("\n\nSimulation complete\n");
```

```
printf("%4d key presses sent\n", keypresses);
```

This is nice, but

- wouldn't you also like a summary of keypresses the design counted?



Verilator data



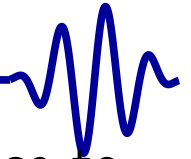
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Verilator maintains your entire design in a C++ object

- With a little work, we can find our variables
- A quick grep through `Vthedesign.h` reveals ...
- **`v__DOT__counterv`** contains our counter's value
 - I use an older version of Verilator
 - Modern versions place this in **`thedesign__DOT__counterv`**
 - Supporting both requires a little work
- You can often find other values like this
 - Grep on your variables name
 - Be aware, Verilator will pick which of many names to give a value
 - Output wires may go by the name of their parent's value



Verilator data



This little adjustment will allow us to simplify the reference to our counter

```
#ifdef OLD_VERILATOR
#define VVAR(X) v__DOT_ ## A
#else
#define VVAR(X) thedesign__DOT_ ## A
#endif

#define counterv VVAR(_counterv)
```

- If **OLD_VERILATOR** is defined (my old version)
 - **counterv** evaluates to **v__DOT__counterv**
- Otherwise **counterv** is replaced by
 - **thedesign__DOT__counterv**



Verilator data



We can now output our current counter

```
endwin();  
  
printf("\n\nSimulation complete\n");  
printf("%4d_key_presses_sent\n",  
        keypresses);  
printf("%4d_key_presses_registered\n",  
        tb->m_core->counterv);
```

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Testbench build



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Two changes are required to our build script

- If you want to define **NEW_VERILATOR** or **OLD_VERILATOR** . . .
 - You'll need to do some processing on Verilator's version
 - The `vversion.sh` file does this, returning either **-DOLD_VERILATOR** or **-DNEW_VERILATOR**
 - We can use this output in our `g++` command line
 - Alternatively, you can just adjust the file for your version
- We need to reference `-lncurses` in our Makefile when building our executable



Exercise #2



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Your turn!

Build and experiment with the simulation

- Using your `txdata.v`
- **main()** is found in `thedesign_tb.cpp` in the handouts
- Experiment with ...
 - Adjusting the number of **tb->tick()** calls between calls to **getch()**
 - Does this speed up or slow down your design?
 - Are all of your keypresses recognized?
 - What happens when you press the key while the design is busy?



Exercise #3



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Only now is it time to test this in hardware

- You'll need to test for button changes

```
always @( posedge i_clk )  
        last_btn <= i_btn;  
  
assign w_event = (i_btn)&&(!last_btn);
```

- Does it work?
 - Does it count once per keypress?
 - Does the counter look reasonable?

My implementation experienced several anomalies.

- We'll discuss those in the next lesson



Conclusion



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What did we learn this lesson?

- How to formally verify a part of a design, and not just the leaf modules
- Creating interesting traces with cover
- Subtle timing differences can be annoying
- How to use Verilator with [ncurses](#)
- Extracting an internal design value from within a Verilator simulation

We learned how to get information back out from within the hardware

- We'll discuss the hazards of asynchronous inputs more in the next lesson