

Integrated System Architecture

Lab session 3 report - RISC-V special project

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1 Introduction

The aim of this laboratory session is to design a simple RISC-V core implementing the RV32I instruction set in SystemVerilog, which is the basic 32-bit integer-only set of instructions, without multiply and divide. The complete set is shown in figure 1.

Actually, not all the instructions were implemented as the support for an operating system and exception handling is beyond the scope of this experience.

The different formats of the instructions are shown in figure 2, which is useful reference in the rest of this report.

1.1 Pipeline structure

From an architectural point of view, the design is based on the classic RISC 5-stage pipeline, divided as follows:

imm[31:12]					rd	0110111	LUI
imm[31:12]					rd	0010111	AUIPC
imm[20:10:11:19:12]					rd	1101111	JAL
imm[11:0]			rs1	000	rd	1100111	JALR
imm[12:10:5]		rs2	rs1	000	imm[4:1:11]	1100011	BEQ
imm[12:10:5]		rs2	rs1	001	imm[4:1:11]	1100011	BNE
imm[12:10:5]		rs2	rs1	100	imm[4:1:11]	1100011	BLT
imm[12:10:5]		rs2	rs1	101	imm[4:1:11]	1100011	BGE
imm[12:10:5]		rs2	rs1	110	imm[4:1:11]	1100011	BLTU
imm[12:10:5]		rs2	rs1	111	imm[4:1:11]	1100011	BGEU
imm[11:0]			rs1	000	rd	0000011	LB
imm[11:0]			rs1	001	rd	0000011	LH
imm[11:0]			rs1	010	rd	0000011	LW
imm[11:0]			rs1	100	rd	0000011	LBU
imm[11:0]			rs1	101	rd	0000011	LHU
imm[11:5]		rs2	rs1	000	imm[4:0]	0100011	SB
imm[11:5]		rs2	rs1	001	imm[4:0]	0100011	SH
imm[11:5]		rs2	rs1	010	imm[4:0]	0100011	SW
imm[11:0]			rs1	000	rd	0010011	ADDI
imm[11:0]			rs1	010	rd	0010011	SLTI
imm[11:0]			rs1	011	rd	0010011	SLTIU
imm[11:0]			rs1	100	rd	0010011	XORI
imm[11:0]			rs1	110	rd	0010011	ORI
imm[11:0]			rs1	111	rd	0010011	ANDI
0000000		shamt	rs1	001	rd	0010011	SLLI
0000000		shamt	rs1	101	rd	0010011	SRLI
0100000		shamt	rs1	101	rd	0010011	SRAI
0000000		rs2	rs1	000	rd	0110011	ADD
0100000		rs2	rs1	000	rd	0110011	SUB
0000000		rs2	rs1	001	rd	0110011	SLL
0000000		rs2	rs1	010	rd	0110011	SLT
0000000		rs2	rs1	011	rd	0110011	SLTU
0000000		rs2	rs1	100	rd	0110011	XOR
0000000		rs2	rs1	101	rd	0110011	SRL
0100000		rs2	rs1	101	rd	0110011	SRA
0000000		rs2	rs1	110	rd	0110011	OR
0000000		rs2	rs1	111	rd	0110011	AND
0000	pred	succ	00000	000	00000	0001111	FENCE
0000	0000	0000	00000	001	00000	0001111	FENCE.I
000000000000			00000	000	00000	1110011	ECALL
000000000001			00000	000	00000	1110011	EBREAK
csr			rs1	001	rd	1110011	CSR.RW
csr			rs1	010	rd	1110011	CSR.RS
csr			rs1	011	rd	1110011	CSR.RC
csr			zimm	101	rd	1110011	CSR.RWI
csr			zimm	110	rd	1110011	CSR.RSI
csr			zimm	111	rd	1110011	CSR.RCI

Figure 1: RV32I instructions

31	30	25	24	21	20	19	15	14	12	11	8	7	6	0	
funct7				rs2			rs1	funct3	rd			opcode			R-type
imm[11:0]							rs1	funct3	rd			opcode			I-type
imm[11:5]				rs2			rs1	funct3	imm[4:0]			opcode			S-type
imm[12]	imm[10:5]			rs2			rs1	funct3	imm[4:1]	imm[11]	opcode			SB-type	
imm[31:12]									rd			opcode			U-type
imm[20]	imm[10:1]				imm[11]	imm[19:12]			rd			opcode			UJ-type

Figure 2.3: RISC-V base instruction formats showing immediate variants.

Figure 2: Instruction formats

1. Instruction fetch (IF): the new instruction is read from the instruction memory, pointed by the current Program Counter (PC).
2. Instruction decode (ID): operands are read from the register file (RF), the control unit generates control signals for the following stages, immediate fields are extended on 32 bits and the ALU controls are decoded.
3. Execute (EX): the ALU performs the required operation and the new PC is computed in case of branch or jump.
4. Memory access (DMEM): the data memory is read or written for instructions that require so (load and stores), otherwise data just bypasses this stage.
5. Write back (WB): either the ALU result or the data memory output is written to the destination register, when required.

Pipeline registers separating each stage take the name of the two stages they are in between (e.g. ID/EX). Actually, assuming a synchronous memory interface, two of these registers are in part bypassed by the memory timing, in order to keep the number of stages at five. For more details on this matter, refer to section 4.1.

The following sections describe the different datapath and control blocks and the testing methodology.

2 Datapath

2.1 Register file

The RISC-V register file is composed of 32 registers, each 32-bit wide (for RV32I), called `x0` to `x31`, where `x0` is a special register hardwired to the value 0, which can turn useful for some instructions. Figure 3 shows the top level diagram of the register file structure.

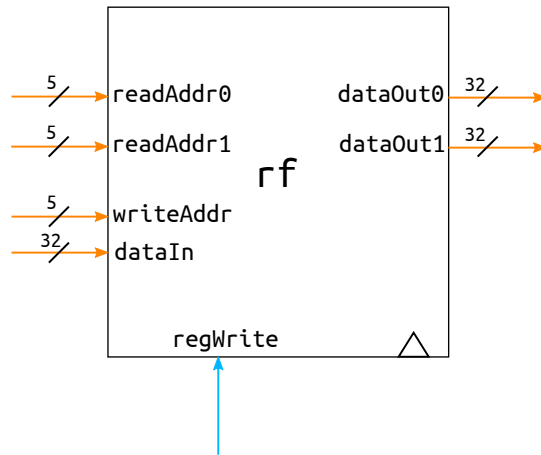


Figure 3: Register file

Writes to the register file are, of course, synchronous and happen on the positive edge of the clock. For a correct write operation, the destination register must be selected using the `writeAddr` port, the input data must be placed on the `dataIn` port and the signal `regWrite` must be asserted. Internally, the register file will enable only the selected register using a decoder.

Reads are instead combinational and can occur on two different registers at a time, thanks to two different read ports. To select the correct output value, a 32-to-1 multiplexer is used on each read port. However, in order to avoid data hazards during the write back stage, the register file also implements bypassing of input data directly to the output if the same register is read and written during the same clock cycle. Figure 4 shows this read selection process (no multiplexer is used to select 0 in case the register being read is `x0` as we can suppose it is hardwired directly at its output).

To better illustrate the behavior of the register file operations, their timing diagram is shown in 5.

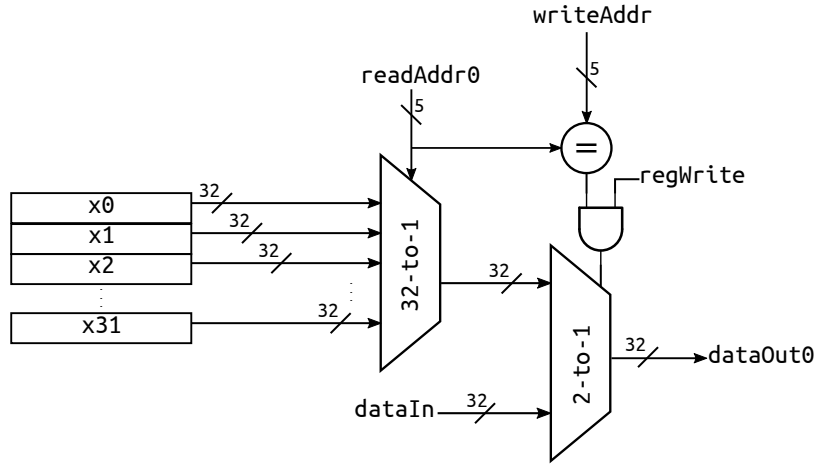


Figure 4: Read operation in the register file

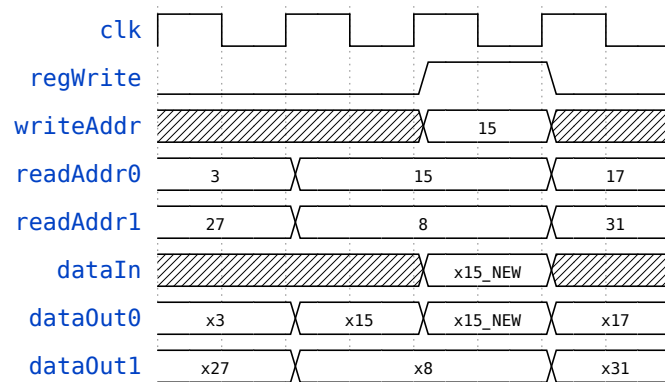


Figure 5: Register file timing

2.2 ALU

The ALU is in charge of performing all operations required by arithmetic and logic instructions, load and store, and branch comparison. Figure 6 shows its top level block diagram, which is simply composed of two inputs and one output on 32 bits, along with a 4-bit control signal to select the desired operation.

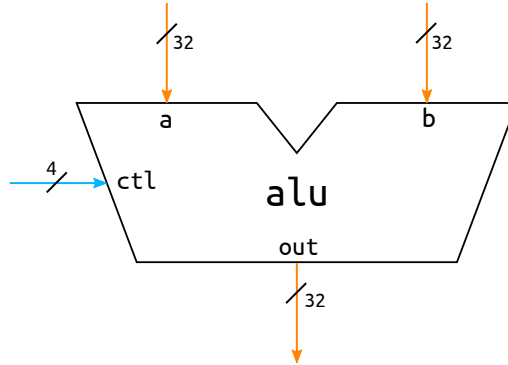


Figure 6: ALU

The complete list of operation that the ALU can perform is the following (in the order in which they are defined on the `ctl` input):

1. Add
2. Subtract
3. AND
4. OR
5. XOR
6. Left shift
7. Right shift
8. Right shift with sign extension
9. Set if equal
10. Set if not equal
11. Set if less than
12. Set if greater or equal than
13. Set if less than unsigned
14. Set if greater or equal than unsigned
15. AUIPC (add current PC and left-shifted immediate)

Note that all operations were described behaviorally as per specifications, in order to be as implementation independent as possible and open to every optimization that a synthesis tool can perform.

All ‘set if *’ operations set the output to the value 1 (0x00000001) if the condition is true, or 0 otherwise. This approach was chosen instead of using flags (such as Carry, Overflow, Negative and so on) to compute conditions as it was deemed simpler to implement and thorough enough, given that there would not have been other uses for the flags.

2.2.1 ALU decoder

The control input of the ALU is generated by a special decoder starting from the opcode, funct3 and funct7 fields of each instruction which requires an ALU operation, as described in figure 7. This block consists only of a series of conditional statements (that can easily be mapped to multiplexers) which select the correct control signal.

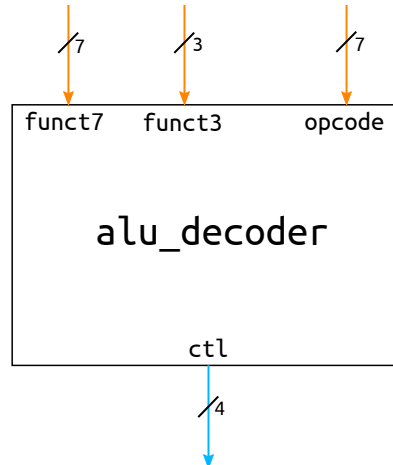


Figure 7: ALU decoder

Another approach would have been to split the control of the ALU into two decoding steps¹, but a preliminary analysis concluded that no practical advantage would be obtained this way. Moreover, only few bits of the input fields are required to make a definite decision on the control output, but in order to keep modularity and continuity in the design, the whole fields are given in the interface of the block.

2.3 Branch and Jump management

A general view of the unit is given in figure 8, along with the significant datapath blocks involved.

2.3.1 Types of instructions

There are two classes of instructions which can lead to a modification of the sequential flow of the program. In the RV32I ISA they are:

1. Branches
2. Jumps

The former is a conditional change of the usual choice of the next address to be put in the PC, whereas the latter is unconditional. The condition, whenever present, is always based on the result of an ALU comparison.

Branch instructions exist in different flavours, depending on which comparison has to be performed between the content of two registers. Here follows a list of all of them:

1. BEQ (branch if equal)
2. BNE (branch if not equal)
3. BLT (branch if less than)
4. BGE (branch if greater or equal than)
5. BLTU (branch if less than unsigned)

¹As suggested in Chapter 4 of D. Patterson, J. Hennessy, *Computer Organization and Design RISC-V Edition*, Morgan Kaufmann, 2017

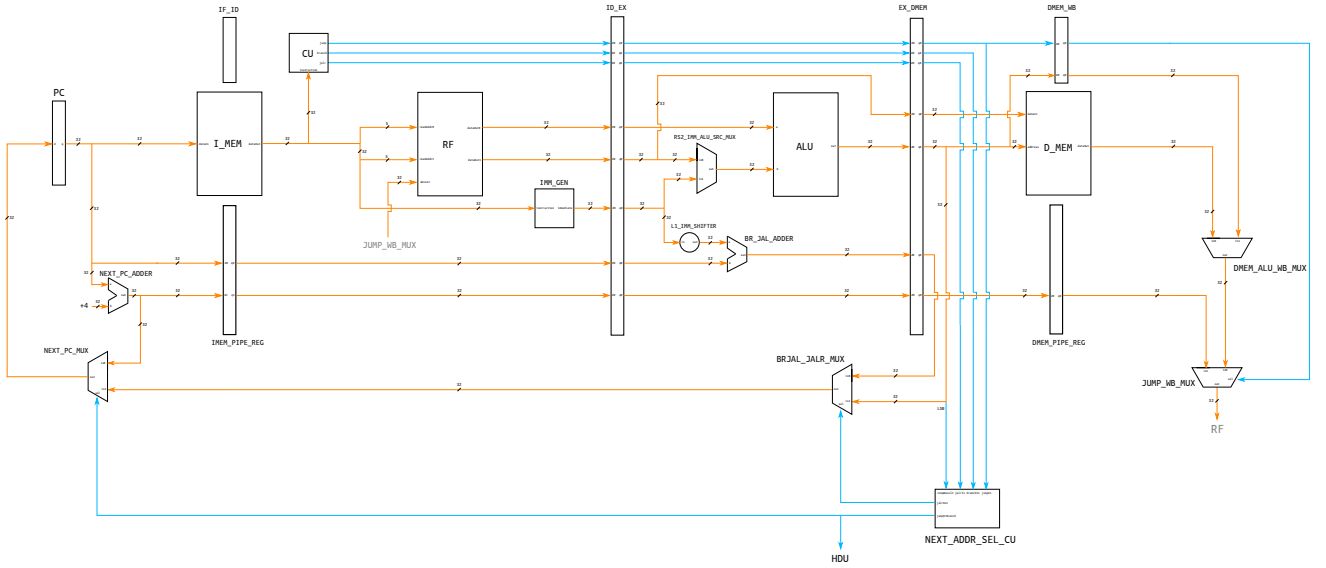


Figure 8: Branch and Jump management HW

6. BGEU (branch if greater or equal unsigned)

All these instructions belong to the B-type ones (figure 2). They have an immediate field split along the word, which indicates an effective immediate divided by two. Indeed, with a RISC-V standard architecture it is possible to address this way an halfword at most, but never the single byte. The effective immediate is calculated with a bit reorganization, a sign extension and a left shift of one position, to reach the final 32-bit width.

The instruction contains also the addresses of two registers, whose content will be compared by the ALU to decide whether to take the branch or not. To distinguish which type of comparison is needed, it is necessary to know the instruction field `funct3`.

Jump instructions can be of two types, each bringing to a different hardware path for the data:

1. JAL
2. JALR

JAL is a J-type instruction, whereas **JALR** is an I-type one. This difference is reflected on the hardware implementation, more on this later. A jump instruction is unconditional, but still need for an address computation. This operation is different for the two instructions: for JAL it is sufficient to use the same hardware used for branch address computation, whereas JALR requires the non shifted immediate to be added to the content of a register (the next address is not derived by the current one).

2.3.2 Instruction execution

Since no **BPU** (**B**ran**P**rediction **U**nit) is present in the design, a "branch not taken" assumption is always made when the content of the PC is updated and the decoded instruction is a branch. The simplest way to manage a branch is to delay the decision until the execution stage, waiting for the ALU to do the comparison. The effective decision is then taken in the DMEM stage, not to exacerbate a path which can be critical by itself. Also the calculation of the next address, which involves the immediate and the program counter, is performed in the execution stage.

A possible improvement could be to anticipate the comparison and the next address calculation in the decoding stage, but to keep the design simple the first solution was chosen, as this would imply additional hardware. This is compliant with the calculation of the address for a JAL instruction. It is worth to mention that the absence of a condition to be verified is enough to simplify the anticipation of the address calculation and bring it in the decode stage. However this solution would increase the number of resources if the other branch/jump instructions are still executed in an another stage.

A JALR instruction behaves in a slightly different way: the address calculation is performed by the ALU, because the immediate is added to the content of a register.

A branch instruction has no side effects once it has been executed. On the contrary, a jump instruction leaves inside the pipeline the next instruction address to be saved in a destination register. This is not a issue though, because it is possible to see that even without forwarding units no data hazards can arise. If the pipeline was longer, maybe the forwarding unit would be the only thing to have the day saved (the design has it, though).

2.3.3 Effective calculation

The address calculation in case of branches/jumps is performed in the execution stage and it depends on the type of instruction:

- Branch/JAL: it is based on the "current" PC value (e.g. current for the instruction in that stage). The immediate is sign extended, one position left shifted and added to the PC value (percolated through the pipeline until there) by means of another adder. In the meantime, if the instruction is a JAL, the address of the next instruction goes on through the stages.
- JALR: it involves a sum between an immediate and the content of a register. The ALU performs this operation without shifting the immediate. When the result has to be used, the LSB is substituted with a zero. Even in this case, the address of the next instruction follows its path towards the write-back stage.

2.3.4 Next address selection CU

To control the multiplexers for the next address selection, there's the need for knowing:

1. Whether the instruction in the DMEM stage is a branch or a jump.
2. Which is between the two.
3. The result of the comparison.
4. If the instruction is a JALR.

The main CU generates two signals **branch** and **jump** which percolate along the pipeline, to allow the "Next address selection CU" to solve the first two points. The result of a comparison is simply the LSB of the ALU result. The main CU thus has to generate another signal **jalr** to indicate a JALR instruction.

The **jump** control signal is used also in the write-back stage, to select the right input for the register file. If a jump is performed, the data to be written in the destination register is the "next" address after the jump instruction.

In any case, the IMEM pipe register, together with IF/ID, ID/EX and EX/DMEM ones, have to be flushed. This brings to a performance loss of 4 instructions for each taken branch or executed jump.

For details about the **NEXT_ADDR_SEL_CU**, refer to figure 9 and 10.

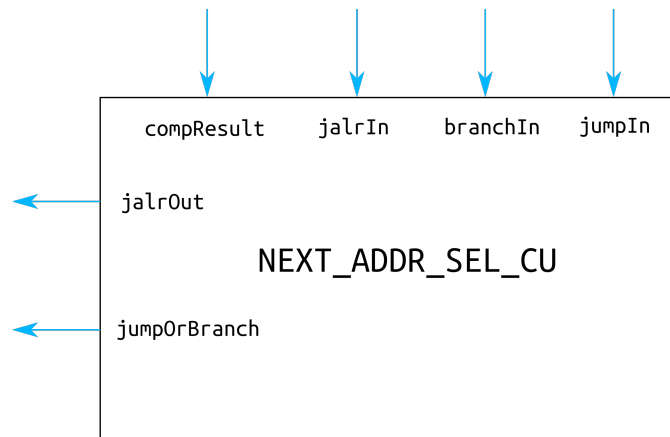


Figure 9: Next address selection CU, for jumps and branch management

NEXT_ADDR_SEL_CU internal logic

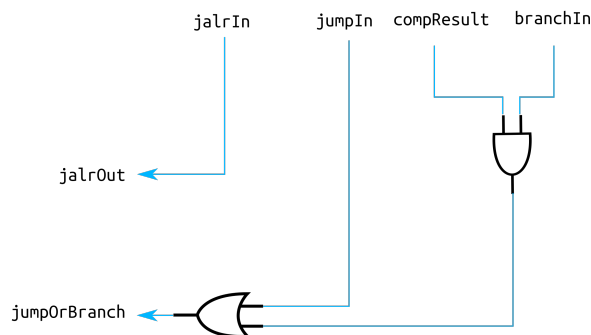


Figure 10: Next address selection CU internal logic

2.3.5 Next address generation

The next address is chosen by means of two multiplexers:

- **BRJAL_JALR_MUX** takes in input the result of the ALU with the LSB masked and the output of the additional adder of the execution stage. These two inputs come from the EX/DMEM pipe register.
- **NEXT_PC_MUX** takes in input the output of **BRJAL_JALR_MUX** and the current $PC + 4$

3 Control

3.1 Forwarding Unit (FWU)

Forwarding allows to avoid stalling the pipeline when a data hazard occurs between two subsequent instructions, if the needed data is already available in a following pipe stage. In this five stage pipeline results are written to the destination register during the write back stage, three clock cycles after the operand read in the decode stage. This means that, if an instruction modifies a certain register, only instructions starting from the third after the original would read the correct new data, or equivalently that up to two bubble should be inserted in case of a data hazard.

Forwarding simply bypasses data to the beginning of the execution stage (i.e. at the ALU inputs) if the required results are already present at the ALU output or in the following memory access stage.

To do so, the logic performs some checks:

- Check that the earlier in the pipe actually modifies some register (**regWrite** is asserted) and that the address does not point to register **x0**.
- Compare the destination register in the EX/MEM stage with both source register in the ID/EX stage and, if there is a match, drives the selection signal of the corresponding ALU input multiplexer to select the previous ALU output (**fwdA/fwdB** = 10).
- Otherwise, compare the destination register in the MEM/WB stage with both source register in the ID/EX stage and, if there is a match, drives the selection signal of the corresponding ALU input multiplexer to select the result currently in the memory access stage (**fwdA/fwdB** = 01).

Note that, according to the list above, forwarding gives precedence to data present in the EX/MEM stage over the MEM/WB stage if the same register is present in both, as the former contains the latest result.

3.1.1 Load/store forwarding

The designed forwarding unit handles also the another special case of data hazard that occurs when a load is followed immediately by a store to the same memory location, such as in memory to memory copies.

In this case the FWU checks that the two involved instructions are actually a load (**memToReg** asserted in the MEM/WB stage) and a store (**memWrite** asserted in the EX/MEM stage) and that the destination and source registers are the same, and if that is the case drives the control of the multiplexer selecting the memory data input to choose the memory output.

Figure 11 shows the complete FWU with all inputs on which decisions are taken and the three multiplexer control outputs.

3.2 Hazard Detection Unit (HDU)

When data cannot be forwarded, then the pipeline must be inevitably stalled by preventing the fetch of a new instruction and inserting a bubble. Specifically, this happens when a data hazard occurs between a load (**memRead** asserted in the decode stage) and another using instruction (unless it is a store, for which forwarding accounts).

Moreover, when a branch is taken or an unconditional jump occurs, a similar action of flushing the entire pipeline to get rid of invalid instructions already in execution must be taken.

Both these occurrences are handled by the Hazard Detection Unit (figure 12), that according to the aforementioned checks, outputs three signals:

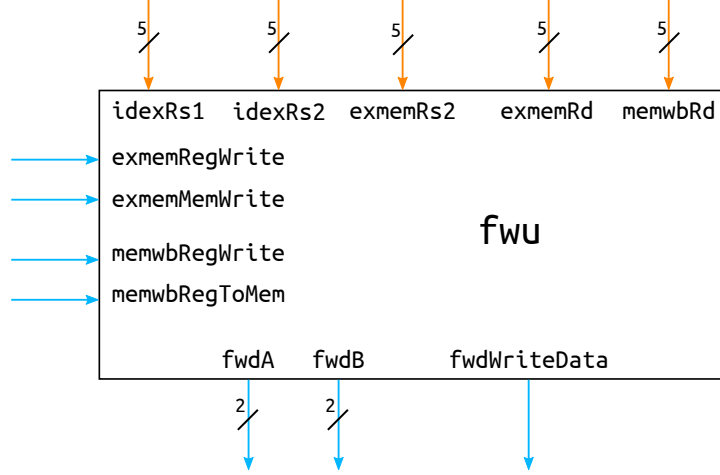


Figure 11: Forwarding Unit

- **stall_n**: active low, is connected to the enable of the Program Counter and the IF/ID pipe register to prevent them from changing in the event of a stall.
- **flushIdEx**: to drive the multiplexer inserting the NOP in the ID/EX register, that will propagate to the rest of the pipeline, in case of a stall or a jump.
- **flushIfIdExMem**: to drive the multiplexer inserting the NOP in the IF/ID and EX/MEM registers in case of jump.

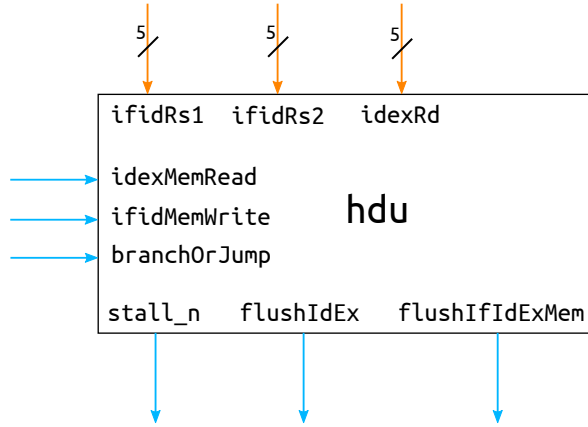


Figure 12: Hazard Detection Unit

A summary of the possible cases when this can occur is reported in table 1:

	stall_N	flush_IdEx	flush_IfId_ExDmem
No Hazard	0	0	0
Control Hazard	0	1	1
Data Hazard	1	1	0

Table 1: HDU output

3.2.1 Inserting a NOP

The NOP instruction is not present in the RISC-V ISA. It is possible to emulate it though, using an `ADDI x0 x0 0`. This instruction does nothing, because the register x0 is hardwired to value 0. The instruction NOP belongs to the set of pseudo-assembly instructions: they are translated in RISC-V language on the fly by the assembler, and they exist for programmers ease only.

For an effective NOP insertion in the IF/ID stage there is the need for a sequential control of the multiplexer which drive the source of the RF. There is no way of doing it before the pipe register, unless a NOP instruction is already present somewhere in memory.

In figure 13 a high level datapath for hazard management is depicted. Moreover, a timing diagram to show how instructions are flushed is shown in figure 14. The three instructions which follow a jump or a taken branch are discarded.

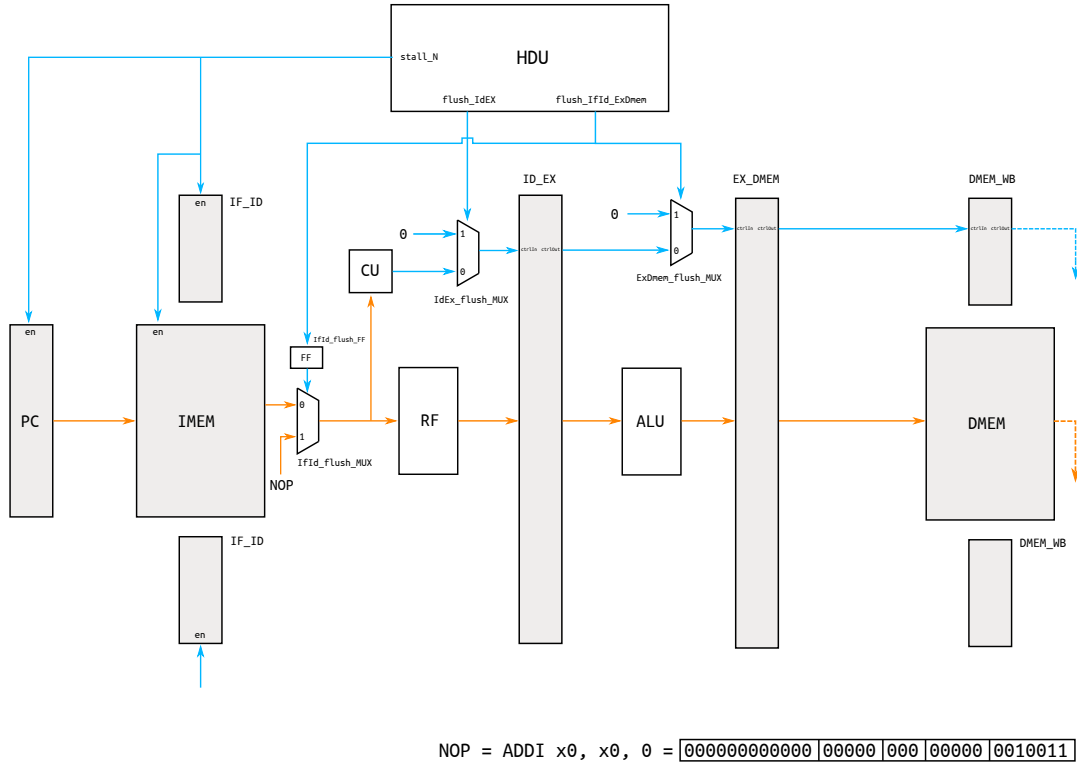


Figure 13: Hazard management HW

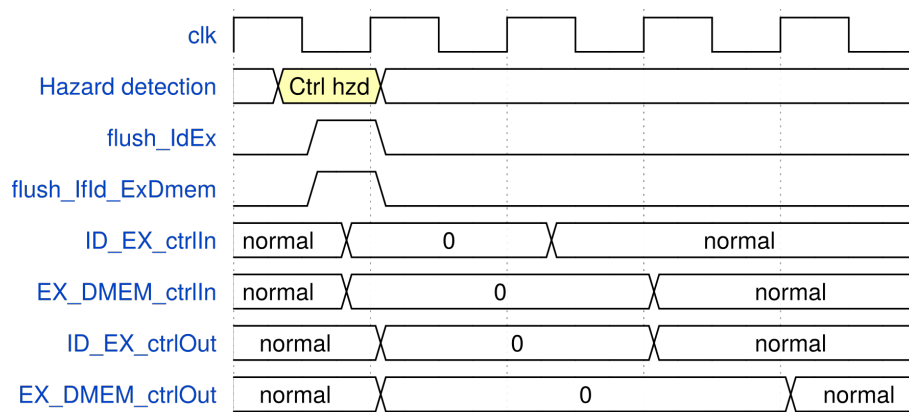


Figure 14: Hazard management timing

3.3 Control Unit (CU)

4 Testbench

4.1 Memory

Some kind of memory model is needed in order to perform a full simulation of the processor core. Given that the design of a full fledged memory subsystem is beyond the scope of this experience, we resorted to a simple behavioral model of a synchronous memory.

This model is only intended for simulation purposes and does not map a real memory chip on its own, but emulates the function of a more complex memory controller able to select individual bytes among a 32-bit word both in read and in write operations.

Figure 15 shows the interface of this block, where the **address** is left parametric, as it can differ between instructions and data memory. Note that compliant to the RISC-V byte addressing specification, each address represents a single byte, even if the data width is always 32 bits, which is the width of the data bus of the architecture. The data width for load and stores is selected by the **addrUnit** signal, according to the following encoding:

- 00: byte
- 01: halfword (16 bits)
- 10: word (32 bits)

Independently of the data width chosen, the correct output is always provided within a single clock cycle. If this behavior was to be replicated on a real byte-addressed memory chip, it would take (at most) four read operations and a clock four times faster.

Read and write operations are handled by the couple of control signals **memRead** and **memWrite**, of which only one should be asserted at each clock cycle to perform the desired action. Both signals active represent an forbidden condition and should be avoided by the whatever is in charge of controlling the memory.

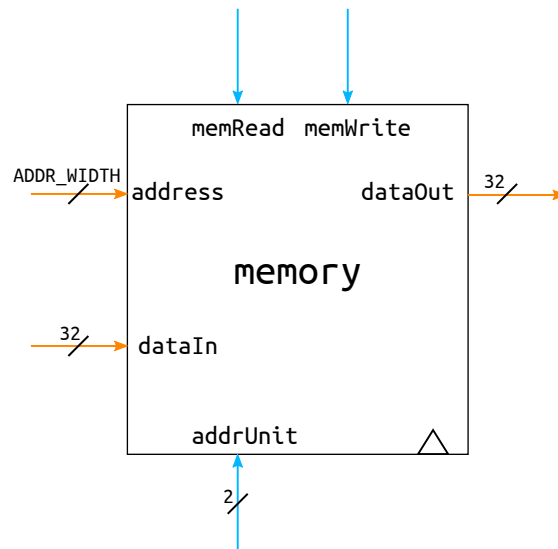


Figure 15: Memory

Figure 16 shows the usual timing diagram of this fully synchronous memory, according to which both reads and writes take place at the next clock cycle after the proper control signals are asserted.

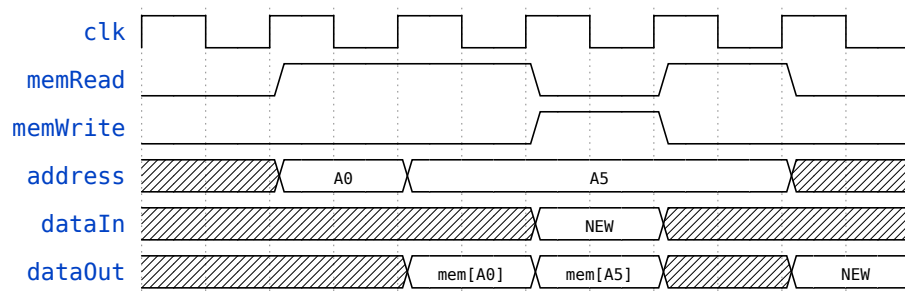


Figure 16: Memory timing diagram