Using Verilog for Testbenches

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What Will We Learn?

- How to simulate your circuit
- Applying inputs
- Seeing if the circuit does the correct thing
How Do You Know That A Circuit Works?

- You have written the Verilog code of a circuit
  - Does it work correctly?
  - Even if the syntax is correct, it might do what you want?
  - What exactly it is that you want anyway?

- Trial and error can be costly
  - You need to ‘test’ your circuit in advance

- In modern digital designs, functional verification is the most time consuming design stage.
The Idea Behind A Testbench

- Using a computer simulator to test your circuit
  - You instantiate your design
  - Supply the circuit with some inputs
  - See what it does
  - Does it return the “correct” outputs?
Testbenches

- HDL code written to test another HDL module, the *device under test* (dut), also called the *unit under test* (uut)

- Not synthesizeable

- Types of testbenches:
  - Simple testbench
  - Self-checking testbench
  - Self-checking testbench with testvectors
Example

- Write Verilog code to implement the following function in hardware:

  \[ y = (\overline{b} \cdot \overline{c}) + (a \cdot \overline{b}) \]

- Name the module sillyfunction
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- Write Verilog code to implement the following function in hardware:

  \[ y = (\overline{b \cdot c}) + (a \cdot \overline{b}) \]

- Name the module sillyfunction

module sillyfunction(input a, b, c, 
                    output y);

    assign y = \overline{b} & \overline{c} | a & \overline{b};
endmodule
Simple Testbench

module testbench1(); // Testbench has no inputs, outputs
    reg a, b, c; // Will be assigned in initial block
    wire y;

    // instantiate device under test
    sillyfunction dut (.a(a), .b(b), .c(c), .y(y) );

    // apply inputs one at a time
    initial begin // sequential block
        a = 0; b = 0; c = 0; #10; // apply inputs, wait 10ns
        c = 1; #10; // apply inputs, wait 10ns
        b = 1; c = 0; #10; // etc .. etc..
        c = 1; #10;
        a = 1; b = 0; c = 0; #10;
    end
endmodule
Simple Testbench

- Simple testbench instantiates the design under test
- It applies a series of inputs
- The outputs have to be observed and compared using a simulator program.
  - This type of testbench does not help with the outputs

- initial statement is similar to always, it just starts once at the beginning, and does not repeat.
- The statements have to be blocking.
Self-checking Testbench

module testbench2();
    reg a, b, c;
    wire y;

    // instantiate device under test
    sillyfunction dut(.a(a), .b(b), .c(c), .y(y));

    // apply inputs one at a time
    initial begin
        a = 0; b = 0; c = 0; #10; // apply input, wait
        if (y !== 1) $display("000 failed."); // check
        c = 1; #10; // apply input, wait
        if (y !== 0) $display("001 failed."); // check
        b = 1; c = 0; #10; // etc.. etc..
        if (y !== 0) $display("010 failed."); // check
    end
endmodule
Self-checking Testbench

- Better than simple testbench
- This testbench also includes a statement to check the current state
- `$display` will write a message in the simulator
- This is a lot of work
  - Imagine a 32-bit processor executing a program (thousands of clock cycles)
- You make the same amount of mistakes when writing testbenches as you do writing actual code
Testbench with Testvectors

- The more elaborate testbench

- Write testvector file: inputs and expected outputs
  - Usually can use a high-level model (golden model) to produce the ‘correct’ input output vectors

- Testbench:
  - Generate clock for assigning inputs, reading outputs
  - Read testvectors file into array
  - Assign inputs, get expected outputs from DUT
  - Compare outputs to expected outputs and report errors
A testbench clock is used to synchronize I/O
- The same clock can be used for the DUT clock

Inputs are applied following a hold margin

Outputs are sampled before the next clock edge
- The example in book uses the falling clock edge to sample
Testvectors File

- We need to generate a testvector file (somehow)

- File: example.tv – contains vectors of abc_yexpected

  000_1
  001_0
  010_0
  011_0
  100_1
  101_1
  110_0
  111_0
module testbench3();

    reg clk, reset; // clock and reset are internal
    reg a, b, c, yexpected; // values from testvectors
    wire y; // output of circuit
    reg [31:0] vectornum, errors; // bookkeeping variables
    reg [3:0] testvectors[10000:0]; // array of testvectors

    // instantiate device under test
    sillyfunction dut(.a(a), .b(b), .c(c), .y(y));

    // generate clock
    always // no sensitivity list, so it always executes
        begin
            clk = 1; #5; clk = 0; #5; // 10ns period
        end
// at start of test, load vectors
// and pulse reset

initial // Will execute at the beginning once
begin
  $readmemb("example.tv", testvectors); // Read vectors
  vectornum = 0; errors = 0; // Initialize
  reset = 1; #27; reset = 0; // Apply reset wait
end

// Note: $readmemh reads testvector files written in
// hexadecimal
3. Assign Inputs and Expected Outputs

// apply test vectors on rising edge of clk
always @(posedge clk)
begin
    #1; {a, b, c, yexpected} = testvectors[vectornum];
end

- Apply inputs with some delay (1ns) AFTER clock
- This is important
  - Inputs should not change at the same time with clock
- Ideal circuits (HDL code) are immune, but real circuits (netlists) may suffer from hold violations.
4. Compare Outputs with Expected Outputs

// check results on falling edge of clk
always @(negedge clk)
  if (~reset) // skip during reset
    begin
      if (y !== yexpected)
        begin
          $display("Error: inputs = %b", {a, b, c});
          $display(" outputs = %b (%b exp)",y,yexpected);
          errors = errors + 1;
        end
    end
// Note: to print in hexadecimal, use %h. For example,
// $display("Error: inputs = %h", {a, b, c});
4. Compare Outputs with Expected Outputs

```vhdl
// increment array index and read next testvector
vectornum = vectornum + 1;
if (testvectors[vectornum] === 4'bx)
begin
    $display("%d tests completed with %d errors", vectornum, errors);
    $finish;              // End simulation
end
endmodule

// Note: === and !== can compare values that are
// x or z.
```
Golden Models

- A golden model represents the ideal behavior of your circuit.
  - Still it has to be developed
  - It is difficult to get it right (bugs in the golden model!)
  - Can be done in C, Perl, Python, Matlab or even in Verilog

- The behavior of the circuit is compared against this golden model.
  - Allows automated systems (very important)
Why is Verification difficult?

- **How long would it take to test a 32-bit adder?**
  - In such an adder there are 64 inputs = $2^{64}$ possible inputs
  - That makes around $1.85 \times 10^{19}$ possibilities
  - If you test one input in 1ns, you can test $10^9$ inputs per second
    - or $8.64 \times 10^{14}$ inputs per day
    - or $3.15 \times 10^{17}$ inputs per year
  - We would still need **58.5 years** to test all possibilities

- **Brute force testing is not feasible for all circuits, we need alternatives**
  - Formal verification methods
  - Choosing ‘critical cases’
  - Not an easy task
What did we learn?

- **Verilog has other uses than modeling hardware**
  - It can be used for creating testbenches

- **Three main classes of testbenches**
  - Applying only inputs, manual observation (**not a good idea**)
  - Applying and checking results with inline code (**cumbersome**)
  - Using testvector files (**good for automatization**)

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