COMS31700 Design Verification:

Assertion-based Verification

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(Acknowledgement: Avi Ziv from the IBM Research Labs in Haifa has kindly permitted the re-use of some of his slides.)

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What is an assertion?

- An assertion is a statement that a particular property is required to be true.
  - A property is a Boolean-valued expression, e.g. in SystemVerilog.
- Assertions can be checked either during simulation or using a formal property checker.
- Assertions have been used in SW design for a long time.
  - **`assert()`** function is part of C **`#include <assert.h>`**
  - Used to detect **`NULL`** pointers, out-of-range data, ensure loop invariants, pre- and post-conditions, etc.

Assertions in C code

```
#include <stdio.h>
#include <assert.h>

int mysquare(int n) {
  int s = 0;
  int i = 0;
  int k = 0; /* assertion variable to count the number of times in the loop */

  assert (n >= 0); // Pre-condition to catch invalid input

  assert (s == k*n && i==k); // Invariant to catch mistaken variable initialisation, e.g. i != 0 or s != 0

  while (i < n) {
    s = s + n;
    i = i + 1;
    k = k + 1;
    assert ((s == k*n) && (i==k)); // Invariant to catch errors in the loop computation

  }

  assert (k == n); // Post-condition to catch a mistaken final state of the loop

  assert (s == k*n && i==k); // Invariant to catch errors in the loop computation

  assert (s == n * n); // Check desired post-condition

  return s;
}


int main() {
  int n = -4;
  int square = 0;

  printf("n = %d\n", n);
  square = mysquare(n);
  printf("n^2 = %d\n", square);

  return 0;
}
```

Assertions in C code

```c
1  #include <stdio.h>
2  #include <assert.h>
3
4  int mysquare(int n) {
5    int s = 0;
6    int i = 0;
7    int k = 0; /* assertion variable to count the number of times in the loop */
8
9    assert (n >= 0); // Pre-condition to catch invalid input
10
11   assert (s == k*n && i==k); // Invariant to catch mistaken variable initialisation, e.g. i != 0 or s != 0
12
13   while (i < n) {
14     s = s + n;
15     i = i + 1;
16     k = k + 1;
17     assert ((s == k*n) && (i==k)); // Invariant to catch errors in the loop computation
18
19   }
20
21   assert (k == n); // Post-condition to catch a mistaken final state of the loop
22
23   assert (s == k*n && i==k); // Invariant to catch errors in the loop computation
24
25   assert (s == n * n); // Check desired post-condition
26
27   return s;
28 }
29
30
31 int main() {
32   int n = -4;
33   int square = 0;
34
35   printf("n = %d\n", n);
36   square = mysquare(n);
37   printf("n^2 = %d\n", square);
38
39   return 0;
40 }
```

```
[cskie@it000908:SLIDES$ gcc mysquare.c -o mysquare
[cskie@it000908:SLIDES$ ./mysquare
n = 4
n^2 = 16
[cskie@it000908:SLIDES$ gcc mysquare.c -o mysquare
[cskie@it000908:SLIDES$ ./mysquare
n = -4
Assertion failed: (n >= 0), function mysquare, file mysquare.c, line 9.
Abort trap: 6
[cskie@it000908:SLIDES$ _
```

The Open Verification Language

- Revolution through Foster & Bening's OVL for Verilog in early 2000
  - Clever way of encoding re-usable assertion library originally in Verilog. ☺
  - 33 assertion checkers
  - Language support for: Verilog, VHDL, PSL, SVA
- Assertions have now become very popular for Verification, giving rise to **Assertion-Based Verification** (and also Assertion-Based Design).

assert_never_logic.v

```
// Accellera Standard V2.8.1 Open Verification Library (OVL).
// Accellera Copyright (c) 2005-2014. All rights reserved.

//------------------------------------------------------------------------
// ASSERTION
//------------------------------------------------------------------------
`ifdef OVL_ASSERT_ON

  // 2-STATE
  // =======
  wire fire_2state_1;
  always @(posedge clk) begin
    if (`OVL_RESET_SIGNAL == 1'b0) begin
      // OVL does not fire during reset
    end
    else begin
      if (fire_2state_1) begin
        ovl_error_t(`OVL_FIRE_2STATE,"Test expression is not FALSE");
      end
    end
  end

  assign fire_2state_1 = (test_expr == 1'b1);
```

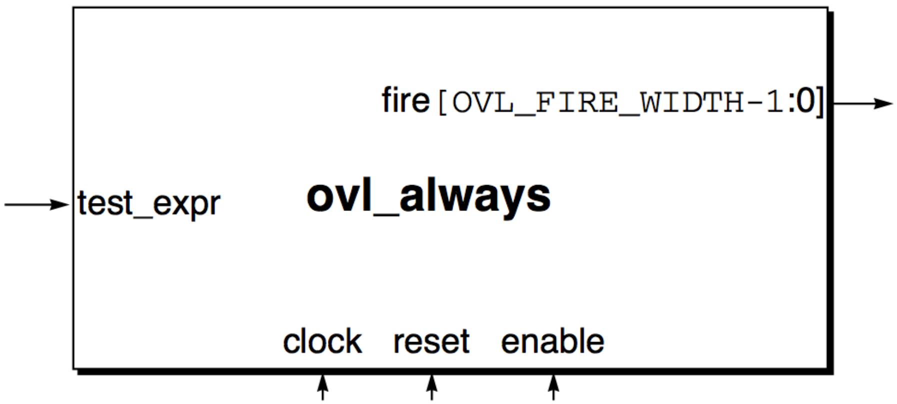
OVL is an Accellera Standard

accellera SYSTEMS INITIATIVE™

http://www.accellera.org/downloads/standards/ovl

ovl_always

Checks that the value of an expression is TRUE.



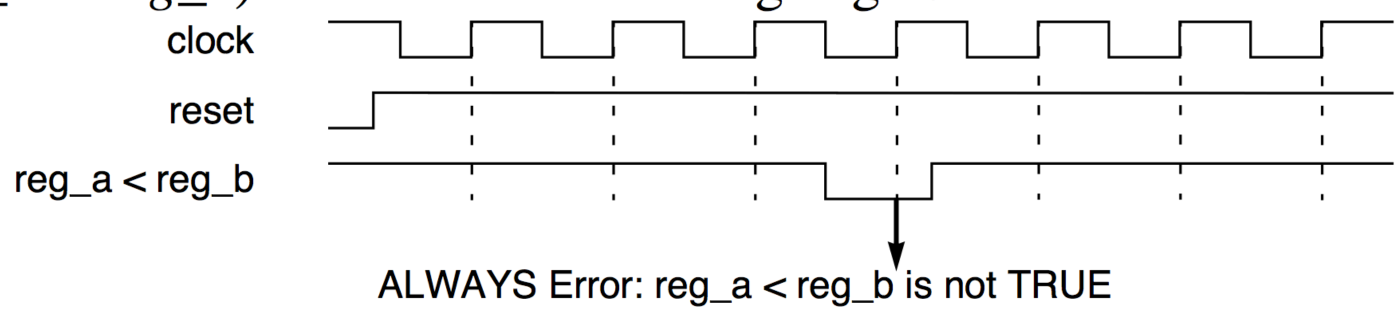
Parameters/Generics:
severity_level
property_type
msg
coverage_level
clock_edge
reset_polarity
gating_type

Class: 1-cycle assertion

Syntax

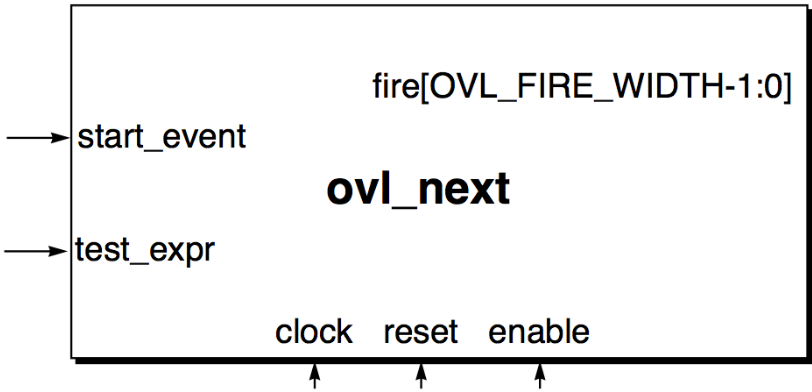
```
ovl_always
      [#(severity_level, property_type, msg, coverage_level, clock_edge,
         reset_polarity, gating_type)]
   instance_name (clock, reset, enable, test_expr, fire);
```

Checks that (*reg_a* < *reg_b*) is TRUE at each rising edge of *clock*.



ovl_next

Checks that the value of an expression is TRUE a specified number of cycles after a start event.



Parameters/Generics:

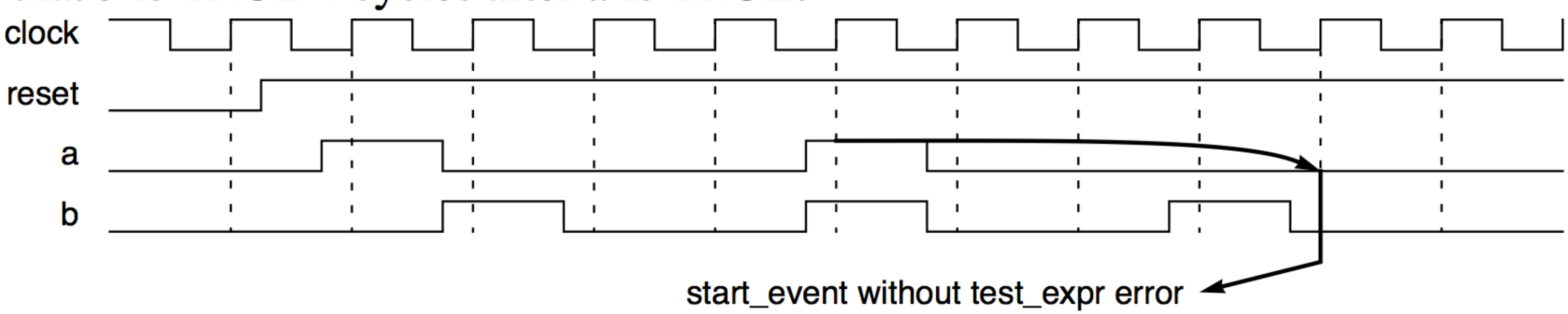
severity_level	*msg*
num_cks	*coverage_level*
check_overlapping	*clock_edge*
check_missing_start	*reset_polarity*
property_type	*gating_type*

Class: *n*-cycle assertion

Syntax

```
ovl_next
      [#(severity_level, num_cks, check_overlapping, check_missing_start,
         property_type, msg, coverage_level, clock_edge, reset_polarity,
         gating_type)]
   instance_name (clock, reset, enable, start_event, test_expr, fire);
```

Checks that *b* is TRUE 4 cycles after *a* is TRUE.



OVL QUICK REFERENCE (www.eda.org/ovl) Last updated: 28th April 2006

TYPE	NAME	PARAMETERS	PORTS	DESCRIPTION
Single-Cycle	**assert_always**	#(severity_level, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **test_expr**)	test_expr must always hold
Two Cycles	**assert_always_on_edge**	#(severity_level, **edge_type**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **sampling_event**, **test_expr**)	test_expr is true immediately following the specified edge (edge_type: 0=no-edge, 1=pos, 2=neg, 3=any)
n-Cycles	**assert_change**	#(severity_level, **width**, **num_cks**, **action_on_new_start**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **start_event**, **test_expr**)	test_expr must change within num_cks of start_event (action_on_new_start: 0=ignore, 1=restart, 2=error)
n-Cycles	**assert_cycle_sequence**	#(severity_level, **num_cks**, **necessary_condition**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **event_sequence**)	if the initial sequence holds, the final sequence must also hold (necessary_condition: 0=trigger-on-most, 1=trigger-on-first, 2=trigger-on-first-unpipelined)
Two Cycles	**assert_decrement**	#(severity_level, **width**, **value**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **test_expr**)	if test_expr changes, it must decrement by the value parameter (modulo 2^width)
Two Cycles	**assert_delta**	#(severity_level, **width**, **min**, **max**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **test_expr**)	if test_expr changes, the delta must be >=min and <=max
Single Cycle	**assert_even_parity**	#(severity_level, **width**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **test_expr**)	test_expr must have an even parity, i.e. an even number of bits asserted
Two Cycles	**assert_fifo_index**	#(severity_level, **depth**, **push_width**, **pop_width**, property_type, msg, coverage_level, **simultaneous_push_pop**)	(clk, reset_n, **push**, **pop**)	FIFO pointers should never overflow or underflow
n-Cycles	**assert_frame**	#(severity_level, **min_cks**, **max_cks**, **action_on_new_start**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **start_event**, **test_expr**)	test_expr must not hold before min_cks cycles, but must hold at least once by max_cks cycles (action_on_new_start: 0=ignore, 1=restart, 2=error)
n-Cycles	**assert_handshake**	#(severity_level, **min_ack_cycle**, **max_ack_cycle**, **req_drop**, **deassert_count**, **max_ack_length**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **req**, **ack**)	req and ack must follow the specified handshaking protocol
Single-Cycle	**assert_implication**	#(severity_level, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **antecedent_expr**, **consequent_expr**)	if antecedent_expr holds then consequent_expr must hold in the same cyle
Two Cycles	**assert_increment**	#(severity_level, **width**, **value**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **test_expr**)	if test_expr changes, it must increment by the value parameter (modulo 2^width)
Single-Cycle	**assert_never**	#(severity_level, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **test_expr**)	test_expr must never hold
Single-Cycle	**assert_never_unknown**	#(severity_level, **width**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **qualifier**, **test_expr**)	test_expr must never be an unknown value, just boolean 0 or 1
Combinatorial	**assert_never_unknown_async**	#(severity_level, **width**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(reset_n, **test_expr**)	test_expr must never go to an unknown value asynchronously, it must remain boolean 0 or 1
n-Cycles	**assert_next**	#(severity_level, **num_cks**, **check_overlapping**, **check_missing_start**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **start_event**, **test_expr**)	test_expr must hold num_cks cycles after start_event holds
Two Cycles	**assert_no_overflow**	#(severity_level, **width**, **min**, **max**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **test_expr**)	if test_expr is at max, in the next cycle test_expr must be >min and <=max
Two Cycles	**assert_no_transition**	#(severity_level, **width**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **test_expr**, **start_state**, **next_state**)	if test_expr==start_state, in the next cycle test_expr must not change to next_state
Two Cycles	**assert_no_underflow**	#(severity_level, **width**, **min**, **max**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **test_expr**)	if test_expr is at min, in the next cycle test_expr must be >=min and <max
Single-Cycle	**assert_odd_parity**	#(severity_level, **width**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **test_expr**)	test_expr must have an odd parity, i.e. an odd number of bits asserted
Single-Cycle	**assert_one_cold**	#(severity_level, **width**, **inactive**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **test_expr**)	test_expr must be one-cold i.e. exactly one bit set low (inactive: 0=also-all-zero, 1=also-all-ones, 2=pure-one-cold)
Single-Cycle	**assert_one_hot**	#(severity_level, **width**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **test_expr**)	test_expr must be one-hot i.e. exactly one bit set high
Combinatorial	**assert_proposition**	#(severity_level, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(reset_n, **test_expr**)	test_expr must hold asynchronously (not just at a clock edge)
Two Cycles	**assert_quiescent_state**	#(severity_level, **width**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **state_expr**, **check_value**, **sample_event**)	state_expr must equal check_value on a rising edge of sample_event (also checked on rising edge of `OVL_END_OF_SIMULATION)
Single-Cycle	**assert_range**	#(severity_level, **width**, **min**, **max**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **test_expr**)	test_expr must be >=min and <=max
n-Cycles	**assert_time**	#(severity_level, **num_cks**, **action_on_new_start**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **start_event**, **test_expr**)	test_expr must hold for num_cks cycles after start_event (action_on_new_start: 0=ignore, 1=restart, 2=error)
Two Cycles	**assert_transition**	#(severity_level, **width**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **test_expr**, **start_state**, **next_state**)	if test_expr changes from start_state, then it can only change to next_state
n-Cycles	**assert_unchange**	#(severity_level, **width**, **num_cks**, **action_on_new_start**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **start_event**, **test_expr**)	test_expr must not change within num_cks of start_event (action_on_new_start: 0=ignore, 1=restart, 2=error)
n-Cycles	**assert_width**	#(severity_level, **min_cks**, **max_cks**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **test_expr**)	test_expr must hold for between min_cks and max_cks cycles
Event-bound	**assert_win_change**	#(severity_level, **width**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **start_event**, **test_expr**, **end_event**)	test_expr must change between start_event and end_event
Event-bound	**assert_window**	#(severity_level, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **start_event**, **test_expr**, **end_event**)	test_expr must hold after the start_event and up to (and including) the end_event
Event-bound	**assert_win_unchange**	#(severity_level, **width**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **start_event**, **test_expr**, **end_event**);	test_expr must not change between start_event and end_event
Single-Cycle	**assert_zero_one_hot**	#(severity_level, **width**, property_type, msg, coverage_level)	(clk, reset_n, **test_expr**)	test_expr must be one-hot or zero, i.e. at most one bit set high

PARAMETERS

severity_level

`OVL_FATAL

`OVL_ERROR

`OVL_WARNING

`OVL_INFO

property_type

`OVL_ASSERT

`OVL_ASSUME

`OVL_IGNORE

msg descriptive string

USING OVL

+define+OVL_ASSERT_ON

+define+OVL_MAX_REPORT_ERROR=1

+define+OVL_INIT_MSG

+define+OVL_INIT_COUNT=<tbench>.ovl_init_count

+libext+.v+.vlib

-y <OVL_DIR>/std_ovl

+incdir+<OVL_DIR>/std_ovl

DESIGN ASSERTIONS

Monitors internal signals & Outputs

Examples

* One hot FSM
* Hit default case items
* FIFO / Stack
* Counters (overflow/increment)
* FSM transitions
* X checkers (assert_never_unknown)

INPUT ASSUMPTIONS

Restricts environment

Examples

* One hot inputs
* Range limits e.g. cache sizes
* Stability e.g. cache sizes
* No back-to-back reqs
* Handshaking sequences
* Bus protocol

http://www.accellera.org/downloads/standards/ovl

HW Assertions

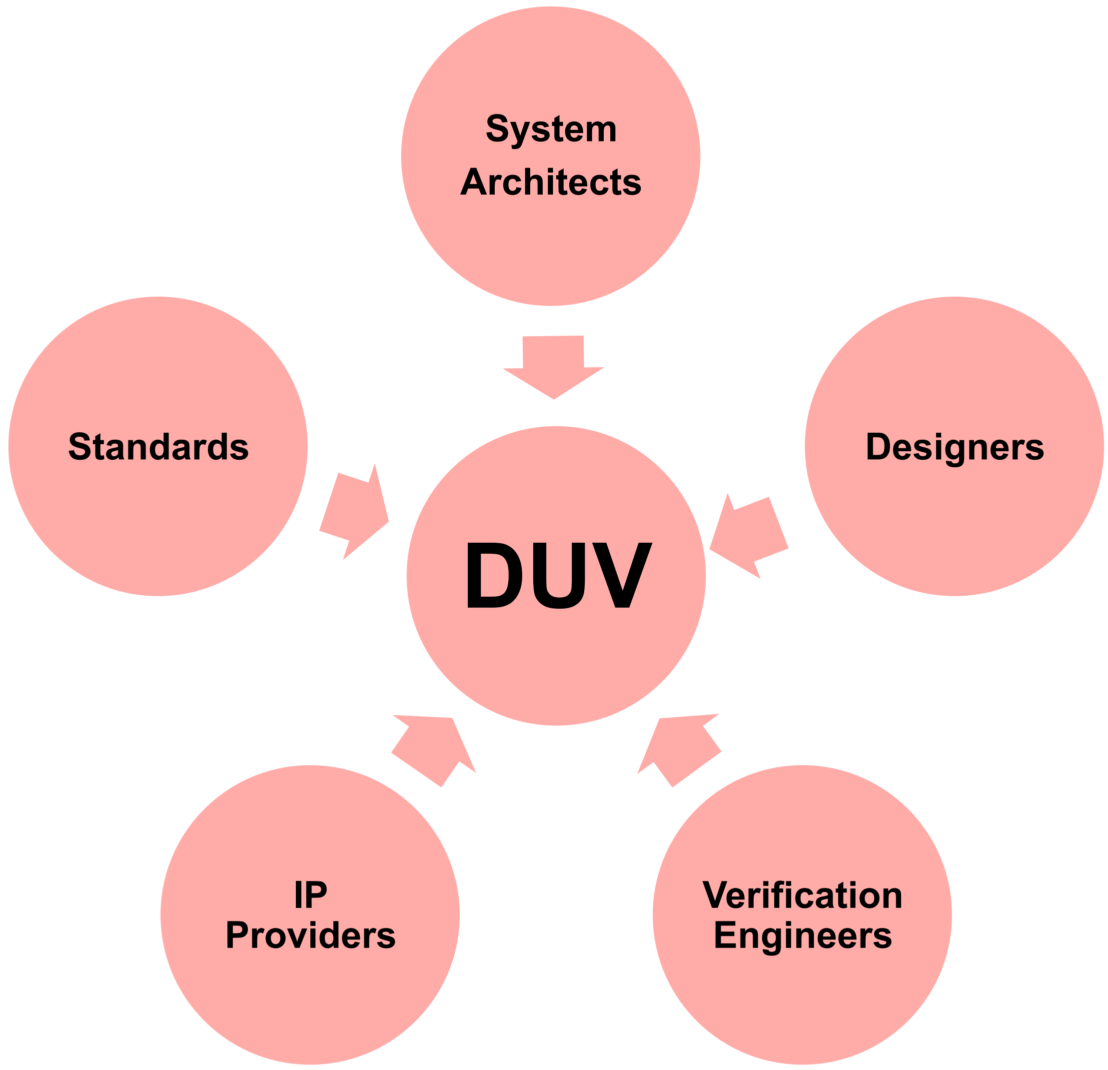
HW assertions:

- combinatorial (i.e. “zero-time”) **conditions** that ensure functional correctness
  - must be valid at all times
    - “This buffer never overflows.”
    - “This register always holds a single-digit value.”
    - “The state machine is one hot.”
    - “There are no x’s on the bus when the data is valid.”

and

- **temporal conditions**
  - to verify sequential functional behaviour over a period of time
    - “The grant signal must be asserted for a single clock cycle.”
    - “A request must always be followed by a grant or an abort within 5 clock cycles.”
  - Temporal assertion languages facilitate specification of temporal properties.
    - System Verilog Assertions (SVA)
    - PSL

Who writes the assertions?



Types of Assertions

Types of Assertions: Implementation Assertions

- Also called "design" assertions.
  - Specified by the designer.
- Encode designer's assumptions.
  - Interface assertions:
    - Catch different interpretations between individual designers.
  - Conditions of design misuse or design faults:
    - detect buffer over/under flow
    - detect buffer read & write at the same time when only one is allowed
- Implementation assertions can detect discrepancies between design assumptions and implementation.
- But implementation assertions won't detect discrepancies between functional intent and design!

(Remember: Verification Independence!)

Types of Assertions: Specification Assertions

- Also called "intent" assertions
  - Often high-level properties.
- Specified by architects, verification engineers, IP providers, standards.
- Encode expectations of the design based on understanding of functional intent.
- Provide a "functional error detection" mechanism.
- Supplement error detection performed by self-checking testbenches.
  - Instead of using (implementing) a monitor and checker, in many cases writing a block-level assertion can be much simpler.

Safety Properties

- Safety: Something bad does not happen
  - The FIFO does not overflow.
  - The system does not allow more than one process to use a shared device simultaneously.
  - Requests are answered within 5 cycles.
- More formally: *A safety property is a property for which any path violating the property has a finite prefix such that every extension of the prefix violates the property.*

[Accellera PSL-1.1 2004]

Safety properties can be falsified by a finite simulation run.

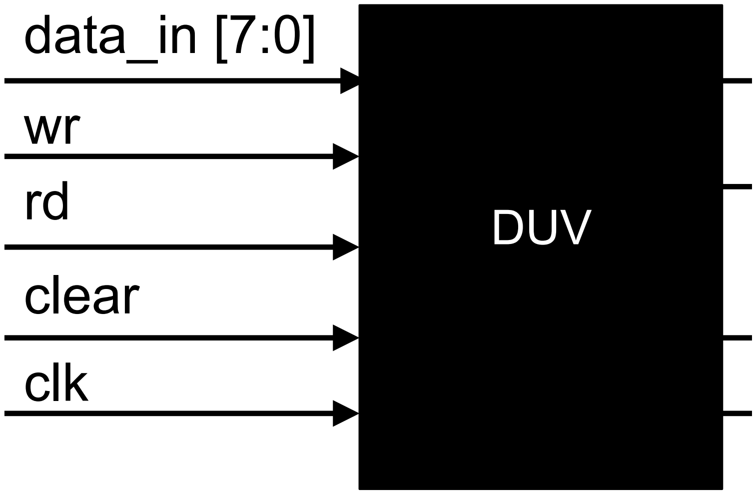
Liveness Properties

- Liveness: Something good eventually happens
  - The system eventually terminates.
  - Every request is eventually acknowledged.
- More formally: *A liveness property is a property for which any finite path can be extended to a path satisfying the property.* *[Foster etal.: Assertion-Based Design. 2nd Edition, Kluwer, 2010.]*

  In theory, liveness properties can only be falsified by an infinite simulation run.
  - Practically, we often assume that the "graceful end-of-test" represents infinite time.
    - If the good thing did not happen after this period, we assume that it will never happen, and thus the property is falsified.

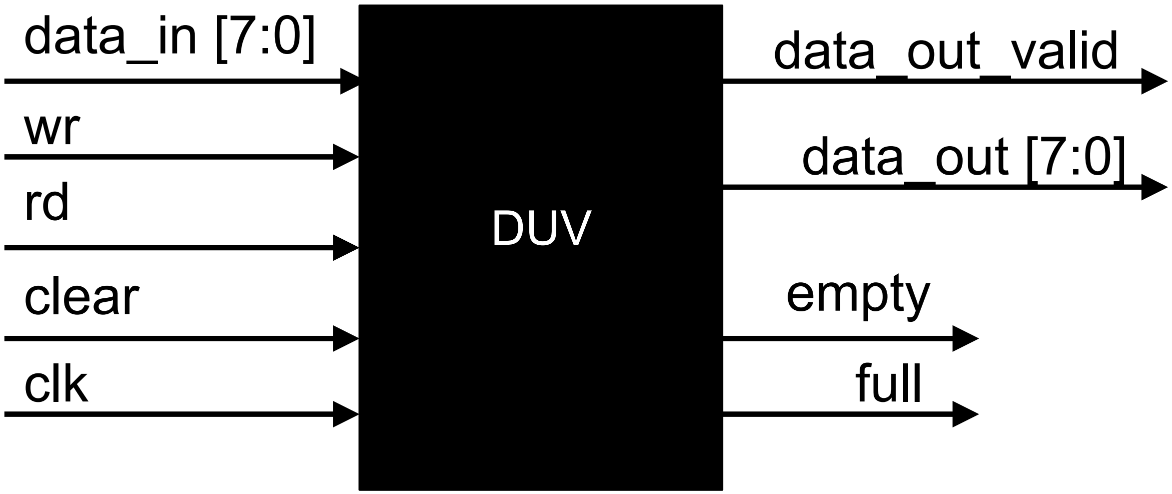
Example FIFO DUV

Example DUV Specification - Inputs



- Inputs:
  - wr indicates valid data is driven on the data_in bus
  - data_in is the data to be pushed into the DUV
  - rd pops the next data item from the DUV in the next cycle
  - clear resets the DUV

Example DUV Specification - Outputs



- Outputs:
  - data_out_valid indicates that valid data is driven on the data_out bus
  - data_out is the data item requested from the DUV
  - empty indicates that the DUV is empty
  - full indicates that the DUV is full

DUV Specification

- High-Level functional specification of DUV
  - The design is a FIFO.
  - Reading and writing can be done in the same cycle.
  - Data becomes valid for reading one cycle after it is written.
  - No data is returned for a read when the DUV is empty.
  - Clearing takes one cycle.
  - During clearing read and write are disabled.
  - Inputs arriving during a clear are ignored.
  - The FIFO is 8 entries deep.

Identifying Properties for the FIFO block

An invariant property.

Black box view:

- Empty and full are never asserted together.
- After clear the FIFO is empty.
- After writing 8 data items the FIFO is full.
- Data items are moving through the FIFO unchanged in terms of data content and in terms of data order.
- No data is duplicated.
- No data is lost.
- data_out_valid only for valid data, i.e. no x's in data.

Identifying Properties for the FIFO block

White box view:

- The value range of the read and write pointers is between 0 and 7.
- The data_counter ranges from 0 to 8.
- The data in the FIFO is not changed during a clear.
- For each valid read the read pointer is incremented.
- For each valid write the write pointer is incremented.
- Data is written only to the slot indicated by nxt_wr.
- Data is read only from the slot indicated by nxt_rd.
- When reading and writing in the same cycle the data_counter remains unchanged.
  - What about a RW from an empty/full FIFO?

Property Formalization

- Property Formalization Languages
  - Most commonly used languages:
    - **SVA** and
    - PSL [IEEE – 1850]
  - Assertions can be combinatorial

```
property mutex;
 { !(empty && full) }
end property
```

Boolean expression

  - or temporal

```
property req_followed_by_ack;
   @(posedge clk){ $rose (req) |=> ##[0:1] ack }
end property
```

Temporal expression in form of an implication

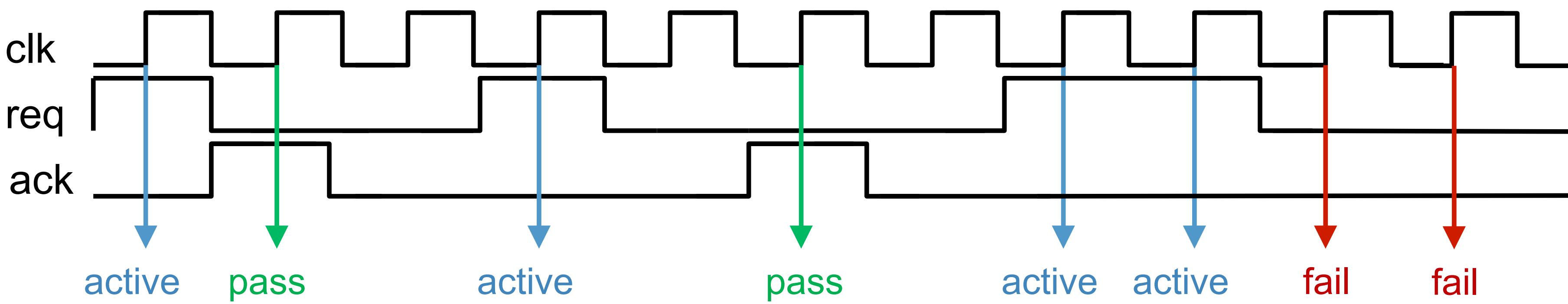
pre-condition (antecedent)

main condition (consequent)

How Assertions work during Simulation

- Temporal properties can be in one of 4 states during simulation:
  - inactive (no match), active, pass or fail

```
property req_followed_by_ack;
    @(posedge clk){ $rose (req) |=> ##[0:1] ack }
end property
p_req_ack: assert property req_followed_by_ack;
```



Introduction to Writing Properties using SVA

To formalize basic properties using SVA we need to learn about:

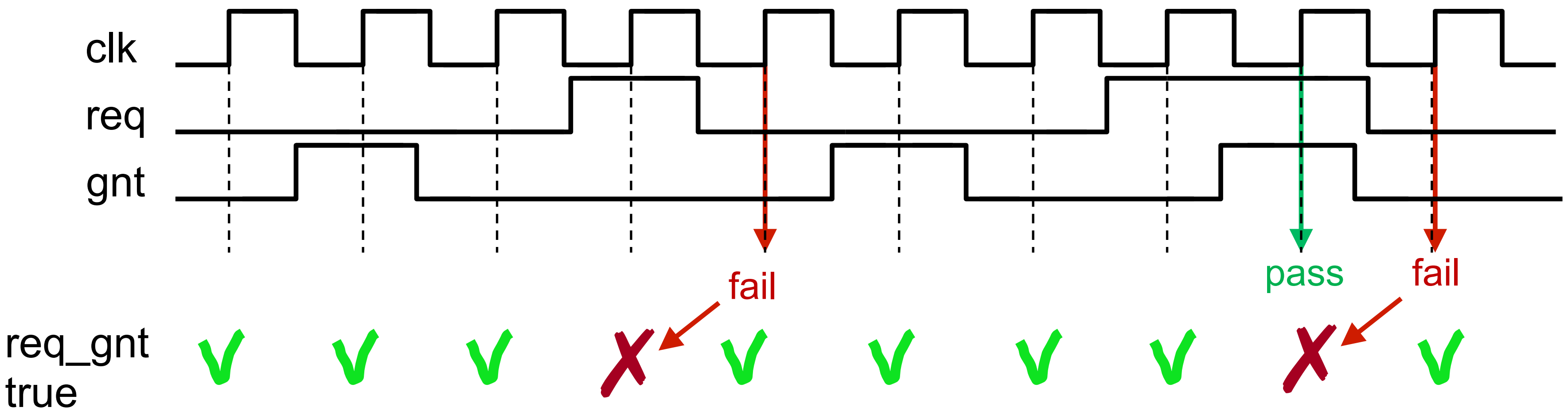
- Implications
- Sequences
  - Cycle delay and repetition
- `$rose`, `$fell`, `$past`, `$stable`

Implications

- Properties typically take the form of an implication.
- SVA has two implication operators:
- `|=>` represents logical implication
  - `A|=>B` is equivalent to `(not A) or B`, where `B` is sampled one cycle after `A`.

non-overlapping implication

```
req_gnt: assert property ( req |=> gnt );
```



Implications

- SVA has another implication operator:
- `|->` represents logical implication
  - `A|->B` is equivalent to `(not A) or B`,

    where `B` is sampled **in the same cycle as** `A`.

```
req_gnt_v1: assert property ( req |=> gnt );
```

```
req_gnt_v2: assert property ( req |-> ##1 gnt );
```

The overlapping implication operator |-> specifies behaviour in the same clock cycle as the one in which the LHS is evaluated.

Delay operator ##N delays by N cycles, where N is a positive integer including 0.

Both properties above are specifying the same functional behaviour.

Sequences

- Useful to specify complex temporal relationships.
- Constructing sequences:
  - A Boolean expression is the simplest sequence.
  - `##` concatenates two sequences.
  - `##N` cycle delay operator - advances time by `N` clock cycles.
    - `a ##3 b` b is true 3 clock cycles after a
  - `##[N:M]` specifies a range.
    - `a ##[0:3] b` b is true 0,1,2 or 3 clock cycles after a
  - `[*N]` consecutive repetition operator
    - A sequence or expression that is consecutively repeated with one cycle delay between each repetition.
    - `a [*2]` exactly two repetitions of a in consecutive clock cycles
  - `[*N:M]` consecutive repetition with a specified range
    - `a[*1:3]` covers `a`, `a ##1 a` or `a ##1 a ##1 a`

Useful SystemVerilog Functions for Property Specification

- `$rose` and `$fell`
  - Compares value of its operand in the current cycle with the value this operand had in the previous cycle.
- `$rose`
  - Detects a transition to `1 (true)`
- `$fell`
  - Detects a transition to `0 (false)`
- Example:

```
assert property ( $rose(req) |=> $rose(gnt) );
```

Useful SystemVerilog Functions for Property Specification

- `$past(expr)`
  - Returns the value of `expr` in the previous cycle.
    - Example:

```
assert property ( gnt |-> $past(req) );
```

- `$past(expr, N)`
  - Returns the value of `expr N` cycles ago.
- `$stable(expr)`
  - Returns true when the previous value of `expr` is the same as the current value of `expr`.
  - Represents: `$past(expr) == expr`

Property Formalization

Formalization of key DUV Assertions

- System Verilog Assertion for:
  - Empty and full are never asserted together.

Is this a safety or a liveness property? Why?

```
property not_empty_and_full;
@(posedge clk) !(empty && full);
endproperty
mutex : assert property (not_empty_and_full);
```

This label is useful for debug.

Formalization of key DUV Assertions

- System Verilog Assertion for:
  - Empty and full are never asserted together.

This is a safety property!

```
property not_empty_and_full;
@(posedge clk) $onehot0({empty,full});
endproperty
mutex : assert property (not_empty_and_full);
```

Alternative encoding: `$onehot0` returns true when zero or one bit of a multi-bit expression is high.

Formalization of key DUV Assertions

- System Verilog Assertion for:
  - After clear the FIFO is empty.

```
property empty_after_clear;
@(posedge clk) (clear |-> empty);
endproperty
a_empty_after_clear : assert property (empty_after_clear);
```

Beware of property bugs! Know your operators:

- `seq1 |-> seq2`, `seq2` starts in last cycle of `seq1` (overlap)
- `seq1 |=> seq2`, `seq2` starts in first cycle after `seq1`

We need: `@(posedge clk) (clear |=> empty);`

Formalization of key DUV Assertions

- System Verilog Assertion for:
  - On empty after one write the FIFO is no longer empty.

```
property not_empty_after_write_on_empty;
@ (posedge clk) (empty && wr |=> !empty);
endproperty
a_not_empty_after_write_on_empty : assert property
   (not_empty_after_write_on_empty);
```

Assertions can be monitored during simulation.

Assertions can also be used for formal property checking.

Challenge:
There are many more interesting assertions.

Corner Case Properties

- **FIFO empty:** When the FIFO is empty and there is a write at the same time as a read (from empty), then the read should be ignored.

```
property empty_write_ignore_read;
@(posedge clk)(empty && wr && rd |=>
                    data_counter == $past(data_counter)+1);
endproperty
a_cc1 : assert property (empty_write_ignore_read);
```

- **FIFO full:** When the FIFO is full and there is a read at the same time as a write, then the write (to full) should be ignored.

```
property full_read_ignore_write
@ (posedge clk) {full && rd && wr |=>
                    data_counter == $past(data_counter)-1};
endproperty
a_cc2: assert property (full_read_ignore_write);
```

All my assertions pass – what does this mean?

- Remember, simulation can only show the presence of bugs, but never prove their absence!
- An assertion has never "fired" - what does this mean?
  - Does not necessarily mean that it can't be violated!
    - **Unless simulation is exhaustive...,**
      which in practice it never will be.
  - It might not have fired **because it was never active.**
  - Most assertions have the form of **implications**.
  - Implications are satisfied when the antecedent is false!
    - These are **vacuous** passes.
    - **We need to know how often the property passes non-vacuously!**
- How do you know your assertions are correctly expressing what you intended?

Assertion Coverage

- Measures how often an assertion condition has been evaluated.
  - Many simulators count only **non-vacuous** passes.
  - Option to add assertion coverage points using:

```
assert property ( (sel1 || sel2) |=> ack );
cover property  ( sel1 || sel2 );
```

  - Coverage can also be collected on sub-expressions:

```
cover property ( sel1 );
cover property ( sel2 );
```

Overcoming the Observability Problem

- If a design property is violated during simulation, then the DUV fails to operate according to the original design intent.

BUT:

- Symptoms of low-level bugs are often not easy to observe/detect.
- Activation of a faulty statement may not be enough for the bug to propagate to an observable output.

Assertion-Based Verification:

- During simulation, assertions are continuously monitored.
- The assertion immediately fires when it is violated and in the area of the design where it occurs.
- Debugging and fixing an assertion failure is much more efficient than tracing back the cause of a failure.

Costs and benefits of ABV

- Costs include:
  - Simulation speed
  - Writing the assertions
  - Maintaining the assertions
- Benefits include:
  - Explicit expression of designer intent and specification requirements
    - Specification errors can be identified earlier
    - Design intent is captured more formally
  - Enables finding more bugs faster
  - Improved localisation of errors for debug
  - Promote measurement of functional coverage
  - Improved qualification of test suite based on assertion coverage
  - Facilitate uptake of formal verification tools
  - Re-use of formal properties throughout design life cycle

Intellectual step of property capture forces you to think earlier!

Do assertions really work?

- **Assertions are able to detect a significant percentage of design failures:** [Foster etal.: Assertion-Based Design. 2nd Edition, Kluwer, 2010.]

  - **34%** of all bugs were found by assertions on DEC Alpha 21164 project [Kantrowitz and Noack 1996]
  - **17%** of all bugs were found by assertions on Cyrix M3(p1) project [Krolnik 1998]
  - **25%** of all bugs were found by assertions on DEC Alpha 21264 project - The DEC 21264 Microprocessor [Taylor et al. 1998]
  - **25%** of all bugs were found by assertions on Cyrix M3(p2) project [Krolnik 1999]
  - **85%** of all bugs were found using OVL assertions on HP [Foster and Coelho 2001]

- **Assertions should be an integral part of a verification methodology.**

ABV Methodology

- Use assertions as a method of documenting the exact intent of the specification, high-level design, and implementation
- Include assertions as part of the design review to ensure that the intent is correctly understood and implemented
- Write design assertions when writing the RTL code
  - The benefits of adding assertions at later stage are much lower
- Assertions should be added whenever new functionality is added to the design to assert correctness
- Keep properties and sequences **simple**
  - Build complex assertions out of simple, short assertions/ sequences

Summary

In ABV we have covered:

- What is an assertion?
- Use and types of assertions
- Safety and Liveness properties
- Introduction to basics of SVA as a property formalization language
- Importance of Assertion Coverage
- Costs vs benefits of using assertions

Revision: Use of Assertions

- Properties describe facts about a design.
- Properties can be used to write
  - Statements about the expected behaviour of the design and its interfaces
    - Combinatorial and sequential
    - (Can be used for simulation-based or for formal verification.)
  - Checkers that are active during simulation
    - e.g. protocol checkers
  - Constraints that define legal stimulus for simulation
  - Assumptions made for formal verification
  - Functional coverage points

- Remember to re-use existing assertions, property libraries or checks embedded in VIP.