

Assignment

To design a Register File (RF) for your microprocessor.

Description

In this CAD assignment, you will design a 16-word, 16-bit RF with 1 write port and two read ports. One of the structures that is central to the datapath is an RF. An RF consists of a set of registers that can be read from or written to. Writing a register requires (i) an address, (ii) the data to be written and (iii) a signal that controls the write timing. Reading an RF can often be controlled by just the address but may include additional logic. The RF for this project is to include an array of flip-flops or latches and properly sized buffers for the associated read/write circuits. Address decode logic is not required in CAD3, but will have to be added to your design when the RF is integrated with the microprocessor control circuitry.

Register Cell

Conventionally, an RF would consist of an array of static RAM cells with read/write circuitry and a sense amplifier. Though this type of implementation yields a fast, compact design, it requires much design effort, especially for the sense amplifiers. In small RFs (few registers), the support circuitry for the SRAMs is used by a small number of registers, making the SRAM-based RF larger than some other types. An alternative approach is to use a latch consistent with your clocking scheme, modified to have two read ports and one write port. One such example is illustrated in Fig. 8.66 and Fig. 9.14 in the Weste text book. This method makes use of pass transistors at the input and the output with the decode control signals driving their gates. Alternatively, tri-state buffers could be used to read the RF, and gated clocks could be used to write them. Another way to implement an RF is with multiplexors, as shown in Figure 1. While this implementation is conceptually simple, routing all of the mux inputs from the array cells to the muxes will create unnecessary routing bottlenecks.

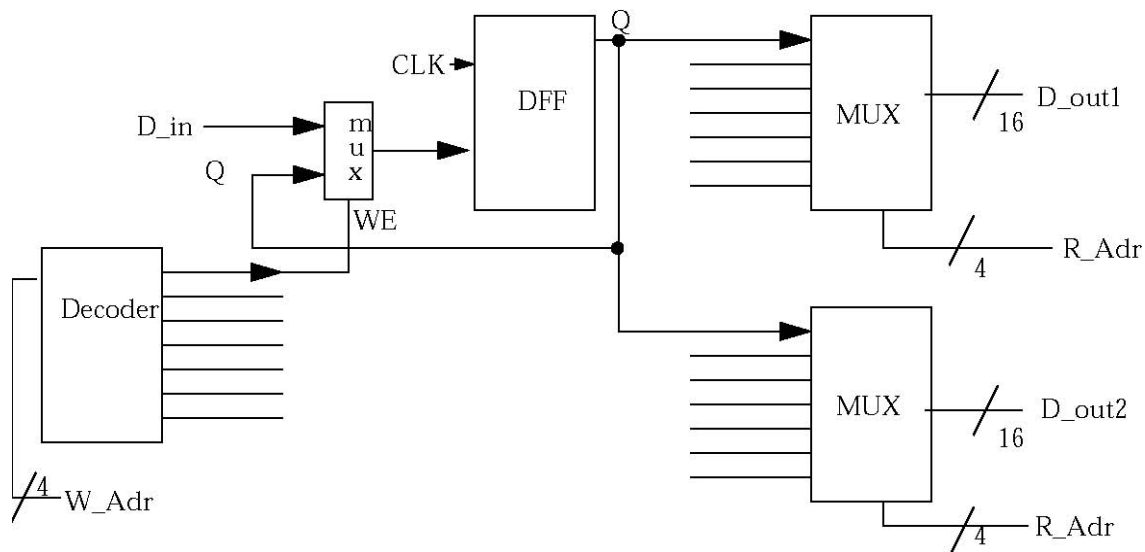


Figure 1: Register File

Drivers and Buffers

Control signals shared by all 16 bits of a register can have large capacitive loading compared to other signals in your design. The data output buses on the RF may also have large loading associated with them. These signals are candidates for transistor sizing on the gates that drive them or possibly even the insertion of buffers. In either case, these design decisions should be based on Eldo simulations.

Bus Strategy

You can use several methods to drive values onto the microcontroller buses. Two common ones that you can use in this class are multiple buses coming out of the RF with a mux to select the proper word. Another possibility is to have tristate drivers on the outputs of each component that can drive the bus. This will require only one bus. Note that true tristate buses require keeper latches if they have active gate inputs connected to them and are allowed to float to intermediate voltages. It is important to decide which strategy you will use. After this assignment, it will be very difficult for you to come back and change the RF.

Procedure

Schematic design

Determine your read/write methodology and select (from among your group's CAD 2 cells) a register or latch which will serve as the basis of your register file array cell. Also determine your group's bussing strategy. You may also design a new register cell if you wish. You will not be responsible to design the decoder for this CAD assignment.

Replicate and connect the register cells suitably on your schematic to form a 16-bit register. Refer to the *Appendix B: Use of Bus Rippers in The Design and Simulation of an Inverter*, to use buses in Design Architect for the 16-bit register. Then replicate your 16-bit register 16 times to form the array.

You will need to design the driver circuits based on the capacitance estimates (see below).

Also, don't forget to put small (10ps) delays in your latch feedbacks.

Speedpath Schematic

Create a special schematic for the purpose of sizing devices prior to starting layout. Since it can be difficult to resize devices after layout is complete, it makes sense (particularly in the custom design of array structures like memories or RF's) to enter a simple, representative schematic containing the basic master-slave latches, control signal buffers and estimated parasitic capacitances. For example, let's say your design uses a full-CMOS transmission gate for driving an output bus. One bit of that bus will therefore have 16 full-CMOS transmission gates (one for each register), parasitic routing capacitance as well as any additional loading outside of the register file itself. The source/drain loading due to the transmission gates can be modeled easily with "dummy" transistors -transistors with gate and source tied to vdd (pMOS) or gnd (nMOS) and drain tied to the output node. Transistor gate loading can be modeled similarly by tying source/drain to vdd or gnd and connecting the gate of the "dummy" device to the node in question. Ballpark capacitance estimates for minimum width routes in this technology are: poly - 0.033fF/lambda, metal1 - 0.025fF/lambda, metal2 -0.027fF/lambda, metal3 -0.018fF/lambda, metal4 - 0.014fF/lambda, metal5 - 0.009fF/lambda. These values don't account for any sidewall coupling capacitance. If you wish to get more detailed estimates, you can generate a simple layout of a route (or routes), label them and run PEX. The report will give the capacitance including any sidewall coupling capacitance, if applicable. Once you have an estimate for the routing capacitance, use the IDEAL capacitor (CAP) symbol in the capacitor area of the Device Library:

Libraries->Device Library

You should use this modeling technique for any nodes that look like they will be heavily loaded in terms of routing length and the number of attached transistors. Capacitance of other nodes (e.g. internal latch nodes) will be dominated by transistor loading which is already accounted for by the transistor model. With this schematic in place, you can run Eldo to intelligently size devices in your control signal buffers and devices along your output path. As for target delays, the requirements will vary depending on your group's application. In one clock cycle, your controller will have to decode the instruction word, assert read signals to the RF, the RF will provide operands to the ALU, the ALU will perform an operation and have data ready for writing back to the RF by the end of the cycle. This is the leading candidate for the critical path in these designs. Sometimes memory accesses are the critical path. 40MHz (25ns period) is a relatively easy target frequency to meet with this technology. 200MHz (5ns period) is about the maximum. An RF with 2.5ns access would be fine for a 25ns period but clearly inadequate for a 5ns period.

Modelsim

Run Modelsim on the RF and verify that it functions as expected by running a few test sequences. For example, write to each location then read from each location.

Layout

Since the RF is one of the key modules of your datapath, care is needed to minimize the parasitic capacitances on critical signal nets, as this directly affects the performance of your microprocessor. Keeping the structure dense and compact while avoiding long interconnects is a prime goal. Mirroring a cell and thereby sharing wells and the supply lines is one of the most frequently used strategies. You should design the floor-plan and routing strategy before you start on your layout. Power lines in the cells should be dimensioned so that they can carry the current required by the row of connected cells. A good ballpark figure for this process is to keep average current densities below 1 milliamp/micron of metal width. Use hierarchy effectively to build up your register file layout.

Design Verification

You may end up spending a lot of time on verification if you have errors. The best way to avoid this is to check the design thoroughly as you go along. It is much better to spend 5 minutes in checking the circuit, than to waste 30 minutes debugging it later. Run DRC, LVS and PEX on the entire register file. Extract the parasitics and back-annotate those as you did in CAD 2.

Delay Estimation

Now that your layout is complete and PEX has been run, you can add any additional capacitance for loading outside of the RF and derive more realistic delay estimates. There are two ways to do this. You could reuse your speedpath schematic or simply run Eldo on the entire RF. If you re-use your speedpath schematic, you will have to get "real" capacitance information from your backannotation and place or update capacitors in your speedpath. If you run Eldo on the entire RF, force inputs such that only one location is being read. Note that the worst-case is when one register is read out onto both output buses simultaneously (e.g. ADD r0,r0 would trigger this path).

Add rise/fall delays to your digital models

Depending on your read/write scheme, you could change the rise/fall delays either in the 1-bit cell or in the 16-bit cell. Note that there are two different situations can lead to output switching: 1) register data is stable and read signal fires, 2) read signal is on and register data changes. Be sure to model both situations. Re-simulate your RF with the proper delays in Modelsim.

Comments

- Since you are working in groups now, you only need to submit one copy of the required register file for grading.
- Try to think about the routing strategy in advance ---how, and where to use metal1, metal2, metal3,etc. It's ok to occasionally use metal2,metal3 in your leaf cell (lowest-level) layout but limit their use as much as is reasonable and try to stick to preferred routing directions.
- Plan your team's time in advance. Meet early, decide on the basic circuit to implement and decide who will do what and when. Don't wait until a few days before the deadline to start. Get started right away.
- While you are working on CAD 3, think about several other modules on the datapath. How are they going to integrate with your RF? How are your busses going to run through your datapath? The more resources you have for routing data signals over the RF, the more flexibility you will have in CAD7 when placing and routing the datapath components together. Making your data outputs and data input easily accessible from top AND bottom of the RF will be helpful.
- Shoot for a compact layout. Success in this area will depend almost entirely on the layout of the array cell which will be replicated 256 times. Remember bit-slice target of 75-100 lambda.

Requirements

- You should have the following in your groups **cad3** directory:
- Schematic of the entire register file, including the drivers/buffers (with delays attached appropriately for your read/write scheme).
 - Wave .jpgs and Eldo config files showing how you calculated delays (data changing from 1->0 and from 0 ->1).
 - Modelsim .wlf's and do-files showing reading and writing of a register (with delays added).
 - Layout of the Register file.
 - DRC report from ICrules.
 - LVS report from ICtrace(M).
 - PEX reports from ICextract(M).
 - README file. This file should be a report documenting your work for CAD 3. This should discuss the considerations that went into the choice of your RF design and the floor planning of the RF. You should also discuss the development of your speed-path schematic. Any other comments that you feel are relevant should be included.