

EE 4755—Digital Design Using Hardware Description Languages

URL: <https://www.ece.lsu.edu/v>

Instructor Information

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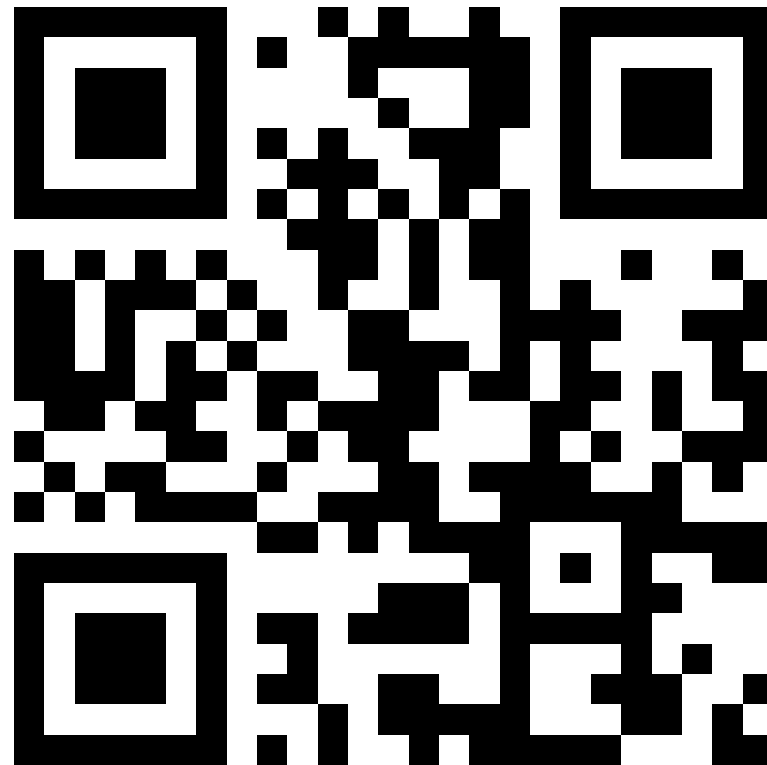
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Tentative office hours: M-F 14:00-15:00 (Fall 2026).

Syllabus URL

The syllabus is available via: <https://www.ece.lsu.edu/koppel/v/v.html>.

For those who prefer QR codes:



Prerequisites

Formal Prerequisite

EE 3755 (Computer Organization).

Informal Prerequisites (What you really need to know.)

C/C++ (The computer language.)

Digital Hardware Design

Logic Gates, Truth Tables, Boolean Algebra.

Multiplexors, Arithmetic Circuits,

Graded Material

Midterm Exam, 40%

Fifty minutes, open notes.

Final Exam, 40%

Yes, it's cumulative.

Homework/Projects, 20%

Written and computer assignments.

Lowest grade or unsubmitted assignment dropped.

Electronic Design Automation (EDA) Overview

EDA Definitions

Electronic Design Automation (EDA):

The use of software to automate electronic (digital and analog) design.

Hardware Description Language:

A language used to describe hardware and to exercise, test, and verify the hardware.

Examples: SystemVerilog, Verilog, VHDL, SystemC.

Hardware Description:

Something written in an HDL with the goal of modeling or fabricating (synthesizing) hardware.

It's analogous to a procedure or program in a conventional language ...

... but nothing like it at all!

Quick Examples of Hardware Descriptions.

For each, will show

A diagram.

The description in SystemVerilog.

The Example Description Items

A Binary Full Adder (BFA)

Adds three 1-bit quantities, **a**, **b**, **ci**, to compute **sum** and **co** (carry out).

Input: three 1-bit quantities, **a**, **b**, **ci**.

Output: one 2-bit quantity with bits **co** (MSB) and **sum** (LSB).

Description of a binary full adder:

Operation: $\{ co, sum \} = a + b + ci$

Example: $\{ 0, 0 \} = 0 + 0 + 0$

Example: $\{ 0, 1 \} = 0 + 0 + 1$

Example: $\{ 1, 0 \} = 1 + 0 + 1$

Example: $\{ 1, 1 \} = 1 + 1 + 1$

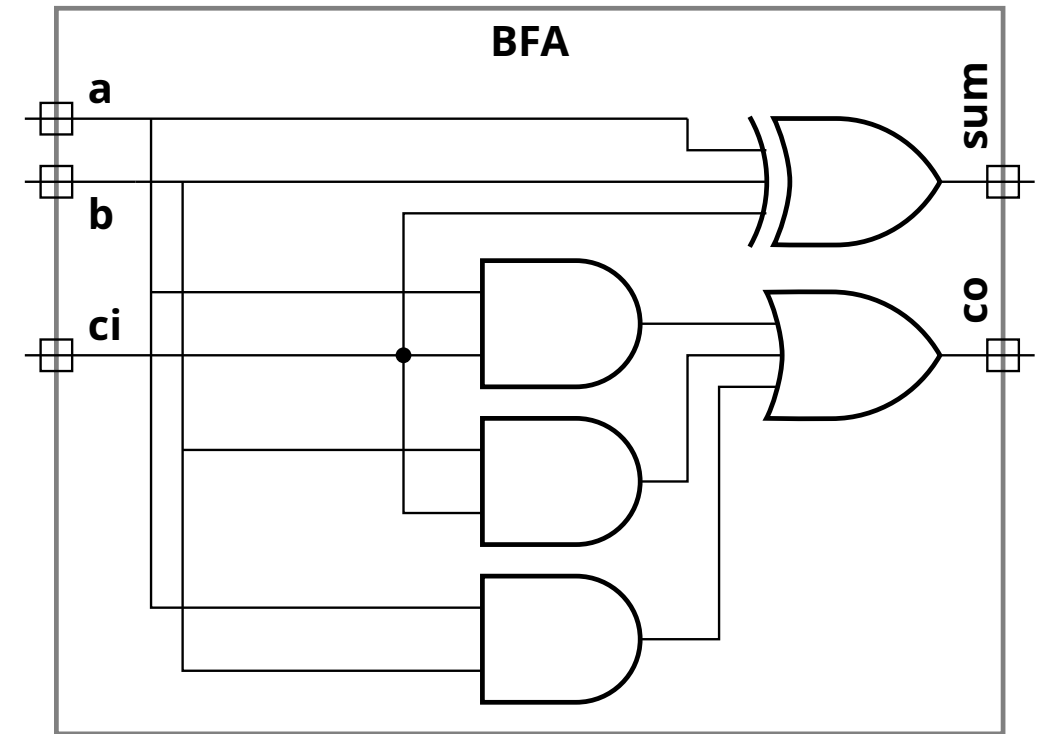
```
module BFA( output uwire sum, co,  
            input uwire a, b, ci );
```

```
    // Note "^" is the exclusive or operator.
```

```
    assign sum = a ^ b ^ ci;
```

```
    assign co = a & b | a & ci | b & ci;
```

```
endmodule
```



A Batcher Odd/Even Merge Module

Used to merge together two sorted sequences.

A component in some advanced hardware designs.

Input: Two n -element, w -bits-per-element, sorted sequences, **a** and **b**.

Output: One $2n$ -element sorted sequence, **x**.

Example: $n = 4$ and $w \geq 6$.

Input: **a** = [6, 9, 20, 33]; **b** = [1, 2, 10, 25];

Output: **x** = [1, 2, 6, 9, 10, 20, 25, 33];

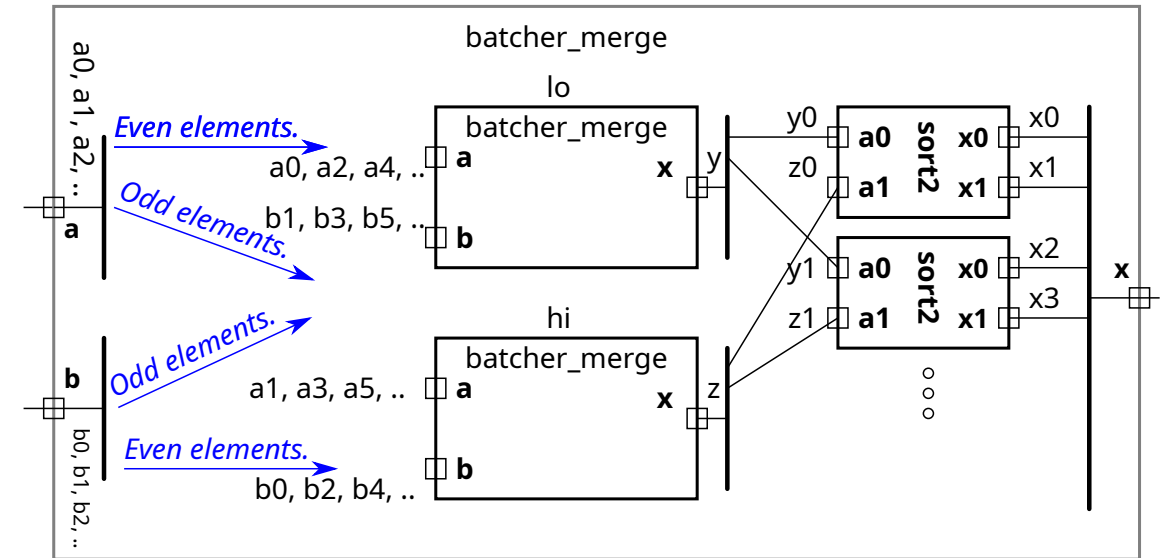
Batcher merger described using 2-input sorting modules.

Description of a Batcher Odd/Even merge module:

```

module batcher_merge #( int n = 4, int w = 8 )
( output uwire [w-1:0] x[2*n],
  input uwire [w-1:0] a[n], b[n] );
uwire [w-1:0] xlo[n], xhi[n];
if ( n == 1 ) begin
  assign xlo[0] = a[0], xhi[0] = b[0];
end else begin
  localparam int nh = n/2;
  uwire [w-1:0] ae[nh], ao[nh], be[nh], bo[nh];
  for ( genvar i=0; i<nh; i++ )
    assign ae[i] = a[2*i], ao[i] = a[2*i+1], be[i] = b[2*i], bo[i] = b[2*i+1],
    batcher_merge #(nh,w) mlo( xlo, ae, bo );
    batcher_merge #(nh,w) mhi( xhi, ao, be );
  end
  for ( genvar i=0; i<n; i++ )
    sort2 #(w) s2( x[2*i], x[2*i+1], xlo[i], xhi[i] );
endmodule

```



Quick Examples' Takeaways

A reminder (or first impression) of what a Verilog module looks like.

Correspondence between a digital logic diagram and a Verilog description.

Ability to compactly describe moderate-complexity designs such as the Batchner Odd/Even Merge module.

More Definitions

Simulation:

Execution of some code which determines the state of some modeled system over time.

Most HDLs are both simulation languages and structural description languages.

Design Target:

The technology in which a design is to be implemented.

The design target is often some type of FPGA or ASIC (application-specific IC).

Synthesis [of a hardware description]:

Conversion of the HDL description into an FPGA, ASIC, etc.

Synthesis is a multi-step process, steps include *inference* [of logic from procedural code], *placement*, and *routing*.

Usage of Terminology

“I wrote a *hardware description* of my new machine learning accelerator in the *SystemVerilog hardware description language*. I then *simulated* it using the *electronic design automation tools* provided by Cadence, and it worked the first time! [Don’t believe him.] Then, for a *design target* I chose an ASIC from a silicon foundry that my friend works at. She gave me a 70% discount. [Probably exaggerated.] I performed *synthesis* of my hardware description, some post-synthesis simulation to verify the timing of my design, and finally proceeded to *tape-out*. I sent the resulting design files to the foundry and got my chips back in two months.”

Electronic Design Automation (EDA) (Longer Definition)

Electronic design in which

a hardware *description* is written in a *hardware description language*

possibly consisting of components from a vendor's *IP library*

the functionality of the description is *verified* by *simulation*

the formal correctness, testability, and compliance of a description is *evaluated* by software

and the description is *converted* to a manufactureable form using *synthesis tools*.

Hardware Description Languages

Hardware Description Language:

A language used for describing the structure of hardware and how the hardware should behave. Examples include SystemVerilog and VHDL.

Kinds of Digital Hardware Built Using HDL's:

Anything worth selling.

Some Popular Hardware Description Languages

Verilog and *SystemVerilog*

(Verilog was replaced by SystemVerilog in 2009.)

C-Like and C++-Like Syntax

Originated in industry in 1984, now IEEE standard.

VHDL

Ada-Like Syntax

Originated as a DoD project, now an IEEE standard.

SystemC

A C++ Class Library. Descriptions are exactly C++ syntax.

Often used with *high-level synthesis* tools.

History of Verilog and SystemVerilog

Verilog developed by *Gateway Design Automation* in 1984, later bought by *Cadence*.

Became an IEEE standard 1995: *IEEE 1364-1995*.

Major update in 2001: *IEEE 1364-2001*.

Minor update in 2005.

Also in 2005, related language *SystemVerilog* was standardized as *IEEE 1800-2005*.

In 2009 Verilog and SystemVerilog merged: *IEEE 1800-2009*.

Minor updates in 2013, 2017, 2023: *IEEE 1800-2012*, *IEEE 1800-2017*, *IEEE 1800-2023*.

VHSIC Hardware Description Language (VHDL)

Ada-like syntax. (Ada is a DoD-developed language for large embedded systems.)

Developed as part of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) VHSIC program in 1983

Became IEEE standard 1076 in 1987.

Some believe that VHDL is harder to learn than Verilog.

At most one or two lectures on VHDL.

Verilog vs. VHDL

There is an advocate community for each language.

Good News: Many tools support both.

That said, SystemVerilog covered in this course.

Material and Tools in This Course

Topics Covered in This Course

- Coding in SystemVerilog.
- Writing descriptions of common digital devices.
- Using simulation, waveform viewers and similar tools.
- Estimation of cost and delay.
- Writing testbench code.
- Relationship between HDL and synthesized hardware.
- Using synthesis tools.

Material and Tools in This Course » Tools Used in This Course » Tools and Tool Vendors

Tools Used in This Course

Tools and Tool Vendors

EDA (Electronic Design Automation) Tools

Programs to support design automation.

These include SystemVerilog simulators, synthesis programs, design rule checkers, etc., etc., etc.

Major EDA Vendors

- Synopsis
- **Cadence Design Systems**
- Mentor Graphics

Course Will Use Products of Cadence Design Systems

ECE is a member of Cadence's University Software Program.

Software would normally cost well over 100 k\$...

... which helps explain why you can't have your own copies (unless you're rich).

For Simulation: *Cadence Xcelium Simulator* Package

A collection of programs including:

- *xmvlog* – Verilog simulator.
- *simvision* – Waveform viewer (to view sim results).
- *xrun* – Convenient front end to other programs.

Material and Tools in This Course ≫ Tools Used in This Course ≫ Synthesis Tools

For Synthesis: *Genus Synthesis*

- *genus* – Front end for synthesis tools.

Design Capture

Design Capture:

Entering a design in electronic form.

Start: Idea in engineer's head, scribbles on back of envelope.

Finish: Design in electronic form readable by some EDA tools.

Design Capture Methods

- Schematic Capture

Enter design using GUI (graphical user interface) schematic editor.

Fun and easy for beginners but tedious for all but small designs.

- Finite-State Machine Editors

Programs meant for designing FSM, to be part of larger design.

- Hardware Description Languages

Like any programming language ...

... design entered using standard or specialized text editor.

Synthesis Design Targets

Design Target:

The type of device to be manufactured or programmed. Synthesis programs generate output for a particular design target.

Design Targets

- *Application-Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC)*

A fully custom chip.

Usually the fastest design target, can have the most components.

- *Field-Programmable Gate Array (FPGA)*

A chip full of logic whose connection and function can be programmed and later re-programmed.

Many FPGA vendors provide EDA tools for their products.

- *Programmable Logic Array (PLA)*

Chip that can be programmed (once) to implement a logic function.

Usually programmed at the factory.

PLAs might be used in prototypes or when only a few parts are needed.

- *Gate Array*

A chip full of gates manufactured in two steps:

First generic layers containing gates are fabricated ...

... but gates are not connected to each other.

Later, metal layers connecting gates are added.

Synthesis Design Targets $\gg$ Gate Arrays

Designer using gate arrays specifies only metal layer.

Since gates fabricated in advance time is saved.

Synthesis $\gg$ Start With

Synthesis

Goal: Convert an HDL description into working hardware.

Start With:

Behavioral or Structural Description

Functionality has been verified by simulation.

Behavioral description (if used) follows synthesizability rules specified for synthesis program.

Choice of Design Target

Type of target: FPGA, ASIC, etc.

Manufacturer and family.

Major Synthesis Steps (Summary)

Synthesis of technology-independent gate-level description.

Map gates and modules to technology-specific versions.

Place and route.

Major Synthesis Steps (Details)

Synthesis of *technology-independent* gate-level description.

Synthesis program infers registers and minimizes logic.

Registers aren't explicitly declared (even though it will appear otherwise) ...
... so synthesis program must determine (infer) where they are needed.

Because (most) synthesis programs minimize combinational logic ...
... descriptions should be written for clarity.

Output of this step is purely structural code ...
... consisting of gates and standard modules (*e.g.*, for arithmetic), and library modules.

Based on output, designer might tweak design or give hints to synthesis program.

Place and Route

Placement is the determination of the physical location of a part.

Routing is the determination of paths for wires interconnecting parts.

Output of place-and-route step:

Timing information (since technology and wire lengths are known) which may be ...
... *backannotated* (written into) the original behavioral description.

Behavioral descriptions re-simulated to see if they meet timing criteria.

For FPGAs, code to program the devices.

For ASICs and gate arrays, ...

... a design database to *tape-out* and send to a fab.

Fabrication facilities apply additional steps, not covered here.