13. Memories

J. A. Abraham

Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering
The University of Texas at Austin

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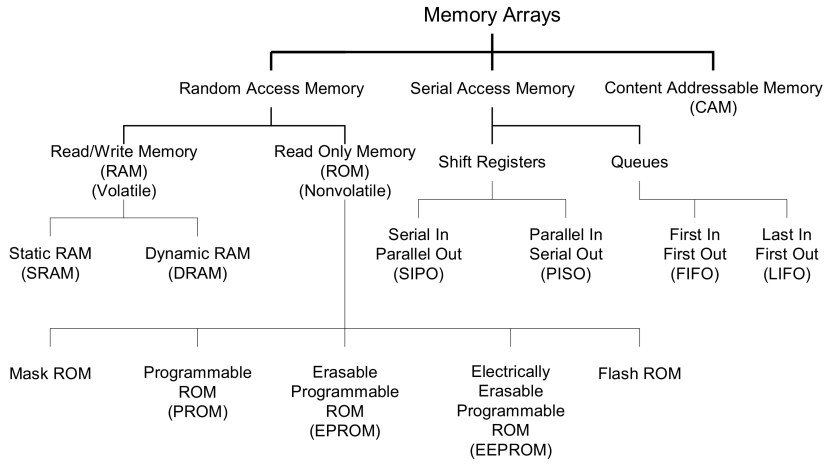
Taxonomy for Memory Arrays



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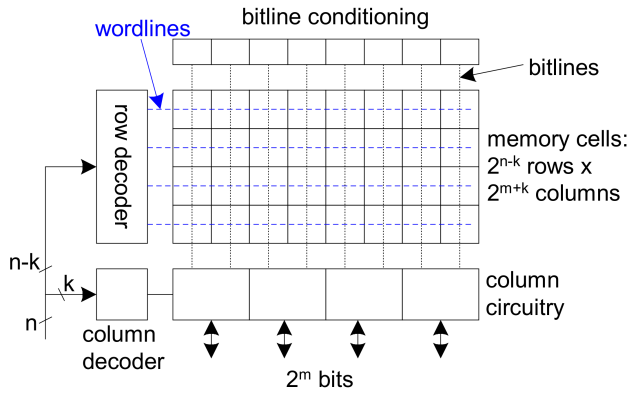
Array Architecture

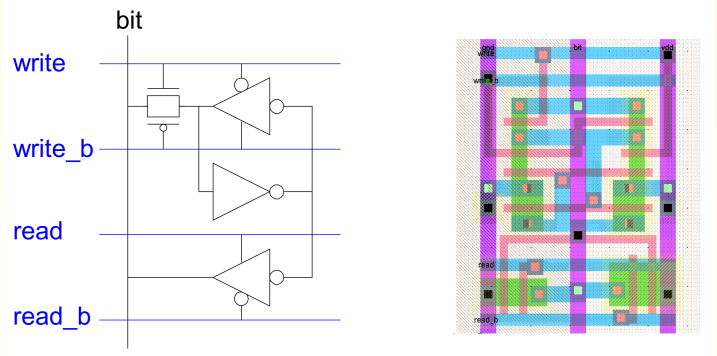
- 2^n words of 2^m bits each
- If $n >> m$, fold by 2k into fewer rows of more columns



- Good regularity easy to design
- Very high density if good cells are used

12-Transistor SRAM Cell

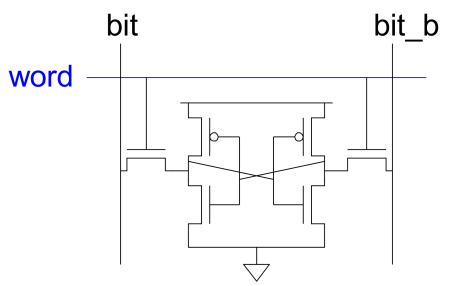
- Basic building block: SRAM Cell
  - Holds one bit of information, like a latch
  - Must be read and written
- 12-transistor (12T) SRAM cell
  - Use a simple latch connected to bitline
  - 46×75 λ unit cell



6-Transistor SRAM Cell

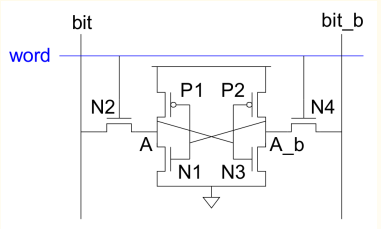
- Cell size accounts for most of array size
  - Reduce cell size at expense of complexity
- 6T SRAM Cell
  - Used in most commercial chips
  - Data stored in cross-coupled inverters

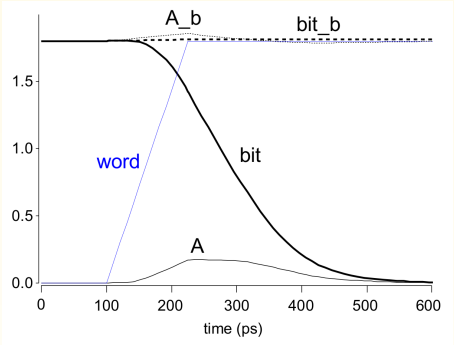
- Read:
  - Precharge bit, bit_b
  - Raise wordline
- Write
  - Drive data onto bit, bit_b
  - Raise wordline



SRAM Read

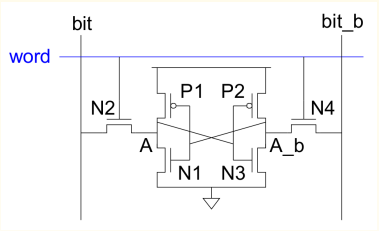
- Precharge both bitlines high
- Then turn on wordline
- One of two bitlines will be pulled down by the cell
- Example: A = 0, A_b = 1
  - Bit discharges, bit_b stays high
  - But A bumps up slightly
- **Read stability**
  - A must not flip
  - N1 >> N2

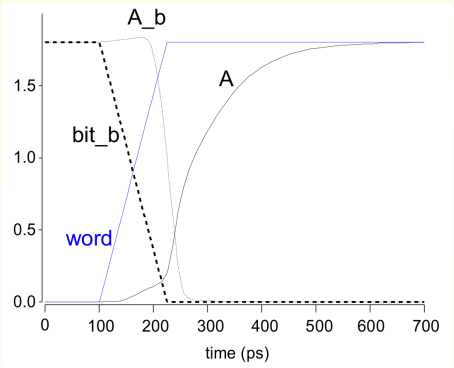




SRAM Write

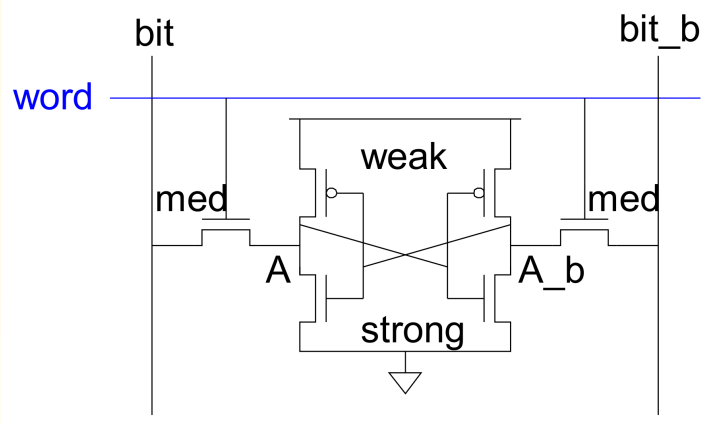
- Drive one bitline high, the other low
- Then turn on wordline
- Bitlines overpower cell with new value
- Example: A = 0, A_b = 1, bit = 1, bit_b = 0
  - Force A_b low, then A rises high
- **Writability**
  - Must overpower feedback inverter
  - N2 >> P1





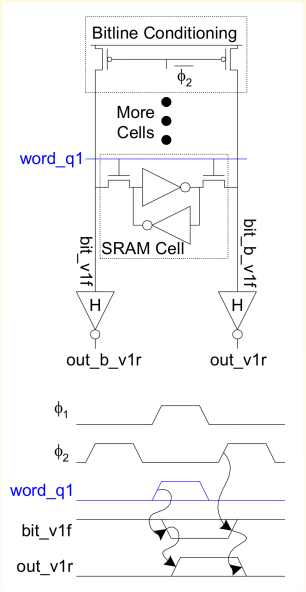
SRAM Sizing

- High bitlines must not overpower inverters during reads
- But low bitlines must write new value into cell

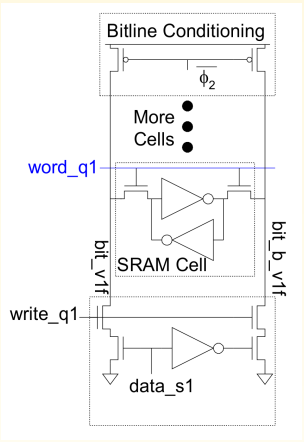


SRAM Column Example

Read

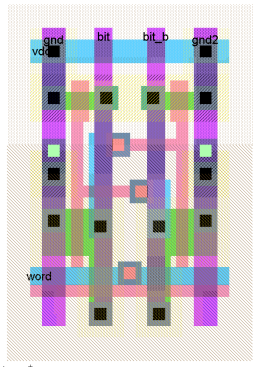


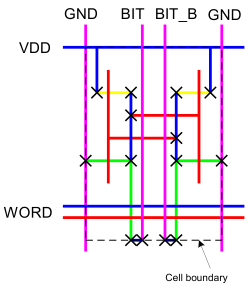
Write

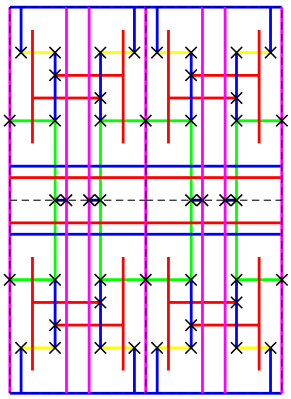


SRAM Layout

- Cell size is critical: $26 \times 45\ \lambda$ (even smaller in industry)
- Tile cells sharing V_{DD}, GND, bitline contacts



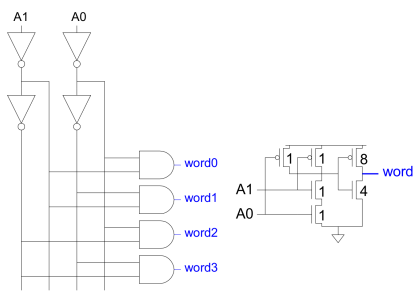




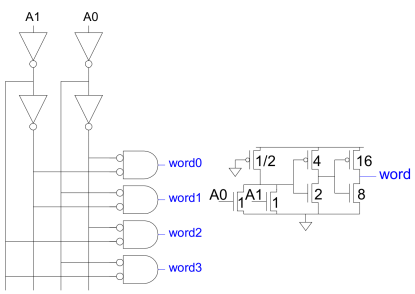
Decoders

- $n : 2^n$ decoder consists of 2^n n-input AND gates
  - One needed for each row of memory
  - Build AND from NAND or NOR gates

Static CMOS

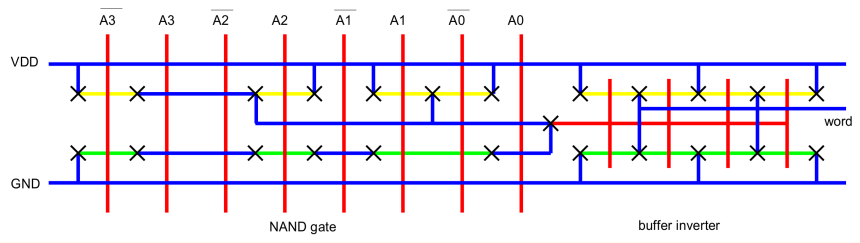


Pseudo-nMOS



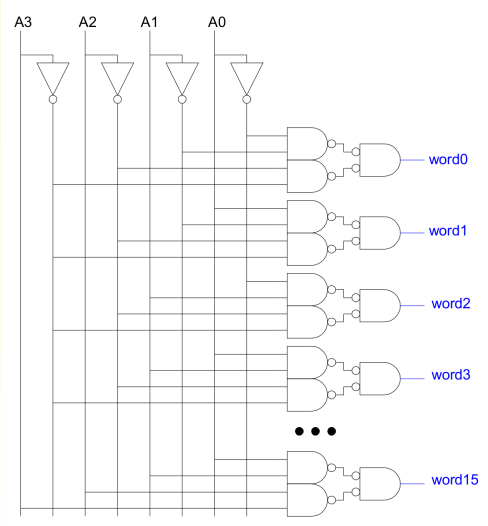
Decoder Layout

- Decoders must be pitch-matched to SRAM cell
  - Requires very skinny gates



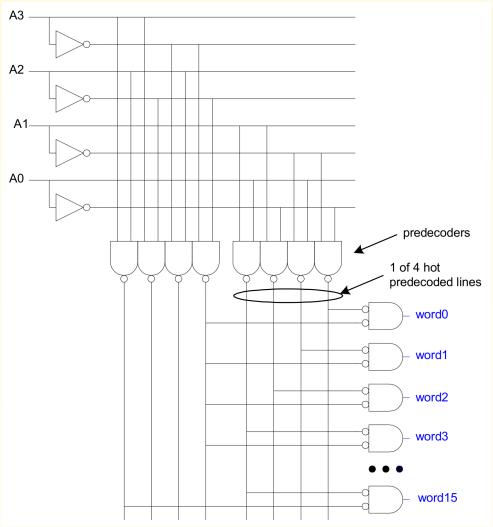
Large Decoders

- For n > 4, NAND gates become slow
  - Break large gates into multiple smaller gates



Pre-Decoding

- Many of the gates are redundant
  - Factor out common gates into predecoder
  - Saves area
  - Same path effort

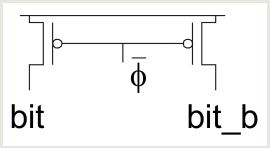


Column Circuitry

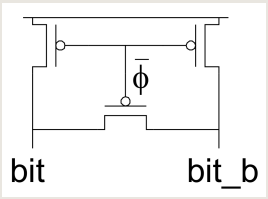
- Some circuitry is required for each column
  - Bitline conditioning
  - Sense amplifiers
  - Column multiplexing

Bitline Conditioning

- Precharge bitlines high before reads



- Equalize bitlines to minimize voltage difference when using sense amplifiers

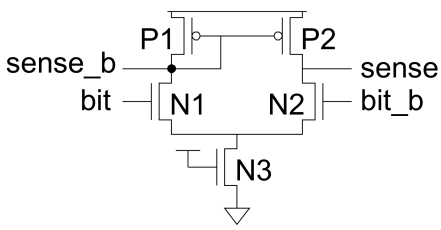


Sense Amplifiers

- Bitlines have many cells attached
  - Example, 32-kbit SRAM has 256 rows x 128 cols
  - 128 cells on each bitline
- $t_{pd} \propto (C/I)\Delta V$
  - Even with shared diffusion contacts, 64C of diffusion capacitance (big C)
  - Discharged slowly through small transistors (small I)
- Sense amplifiers are triggered on a small voltage swing (reduce ΔV)

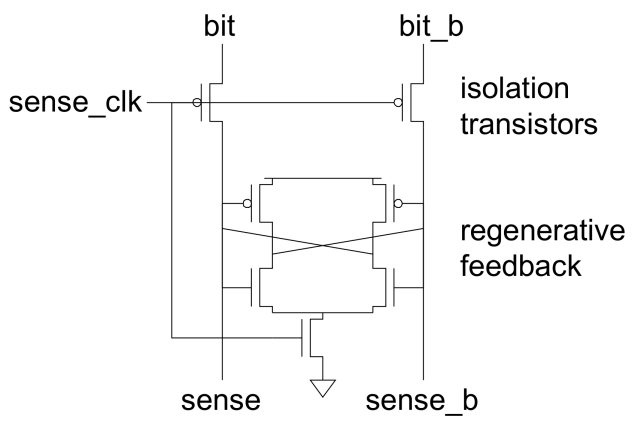
Example: Differential Pair Amplifier

- Differential pair requires no clock
- But always dissipates static power



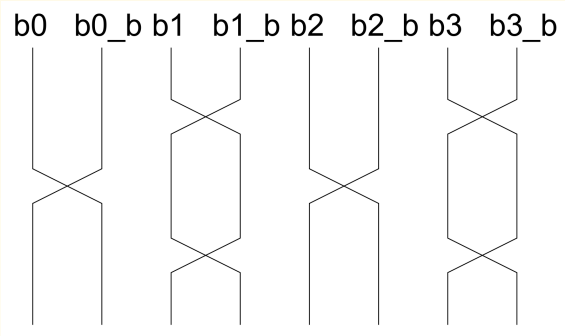
Clocked Sense Amplifier

- Clocked sense amp saves power
- Requires sense_clk after enough bitline swing
- Isolation transistors cut off large bitline capacitance



Twisted Bitlines

- Sense amplifiers also amplify noise
  - Coupling noise is severe in modern processes
  - Try to couple equally onto bit and bit_b
  - Done by twisting bitlines

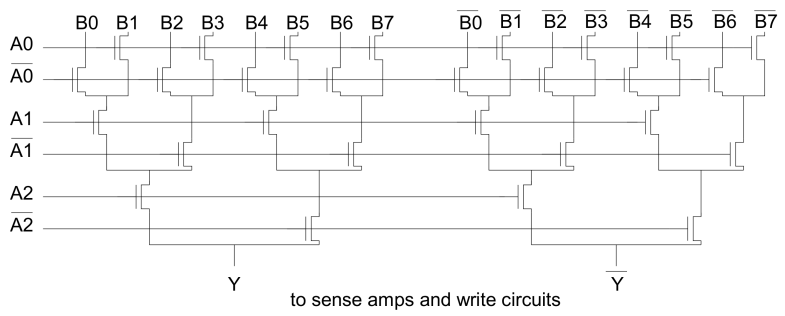


Column Multiplexing

- Recall that array may be folded for good aspect ratio
- Example: 2K word x 16 array folded into 256 rows $\times$ 128 columns
  - Must select 16 output bits from the 128 columns
  - Requires 16 8:1 column multiplexers

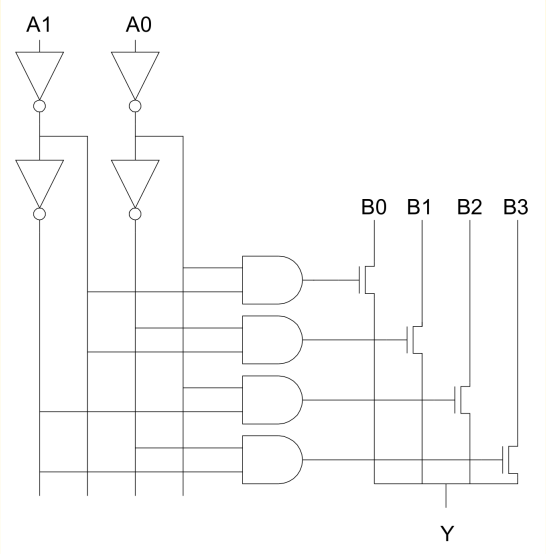
Tree Decoder Multiplexer

- Column MUX can use pass transistors
  - Use nMOS only, precharge outputs
- One design is to use k series transistors for $2^k : 1$ mux
  - No external decoder logic needed

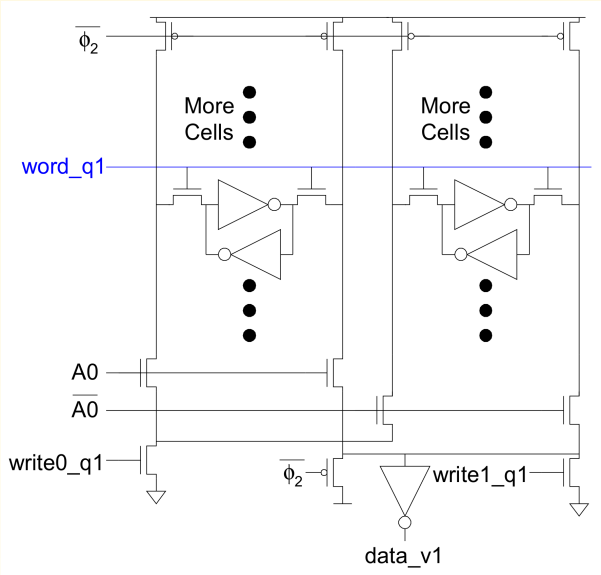


Single Pass-Gate Multiplexer

- Eliminate series transistors with separate decoder



Example:2-Way Muxed SRAM

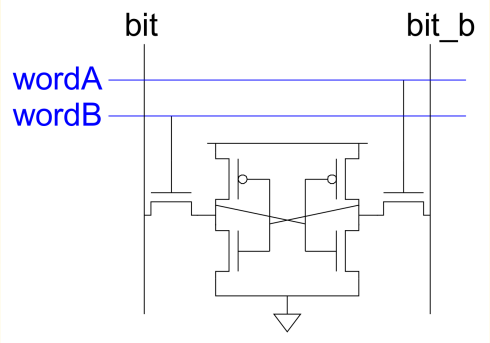


Multiple Ports

- We have considered single-ported SRAM
  - One read or one write on each cycle
- Multiported SRAMs are needed for register files
- Examples:
  - Multicycle MIPS must read two sources or write a result on some cycles
  - Pipelined MIPS must read two sources and write a third result each cycle
  - Superscalar MIPS must read and write many sources and results each cycle

Dual-Ported SRAM

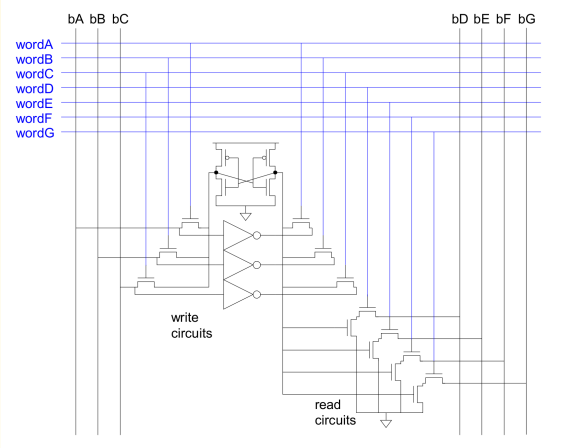
- Simple dual-ported SRAM
  - Two independent single-ended reads
  - Or one differential write



- Do two reads and one write by time multiplexing
  - Read during ph1, write during ph2

Multi-Ported SRAM

- Adding more access transistors hurts read stability
- Multiported SRAM isolates reads from state node
- Single-ended design minimizes number of bitlines

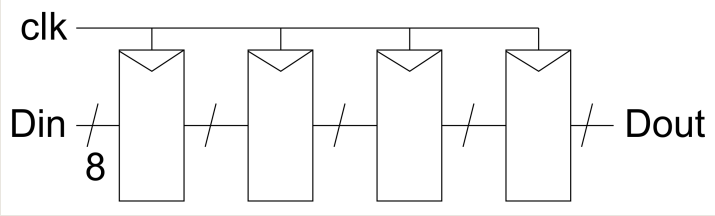


Serial Access Memories

- Serial access memories do not use an address
  - Shift Registers
  - Tapped Delay Lines
  - Serial In Parallel Out (SIPO)
  - Parallel In Serial Out (PISO)
  - Queues (FIFO, LIFO (Stacks))
- Some of these used in circuitry for communications

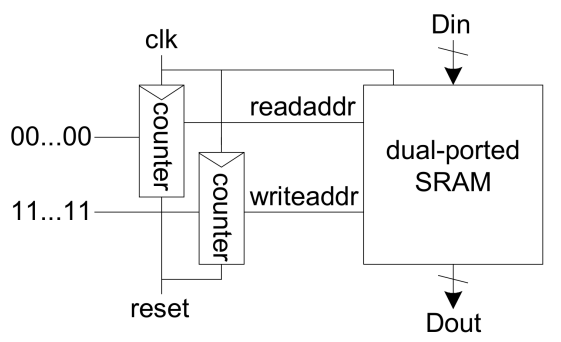
Shift Registers Store and Delay Data

- Simple design: cascade of registers
- Watch your hold times!



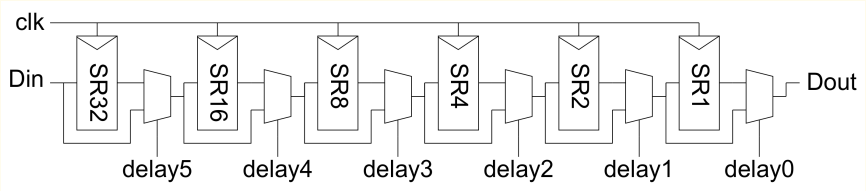
Denser Shift Registers

- Flip-flops are not very area-efficient
- For large shift registers, keep data in SRAM instead
- Move R/W pointers to RAM rather than data
  - Initialize read address to first entry, write to last
  - Increment address on each cycle



Tapped Delay Line

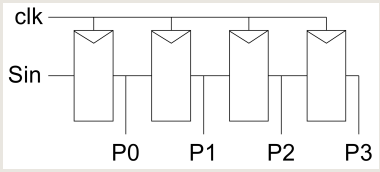
- Shifter register with a programmable number of stages
- Set number of stages with delay controls to mux
  - Example, 0 – 63 stages of delay



Serial/Parallel Conversion

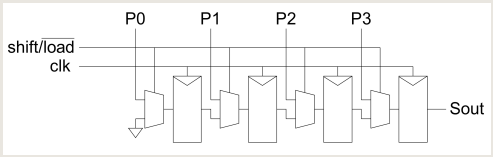
Serial In Parallel Out

- 1-bit shift register reads in serial data
  - After N steps, presents N-bit parallel output



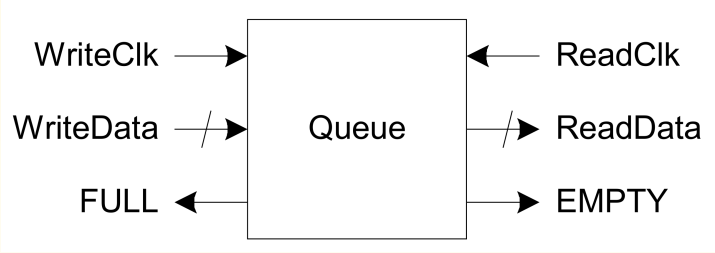
Parallel In Serial Out

- Load all N bits in parallel when shift = 0
  - Then shift one bit out per cycle



Queues

- Queues allow data to be read and written at different rates
- Read, Write each use their own clock, data
- Queue indicates whether it is full or empty
- Build with SRAM and read/write counters (pointer

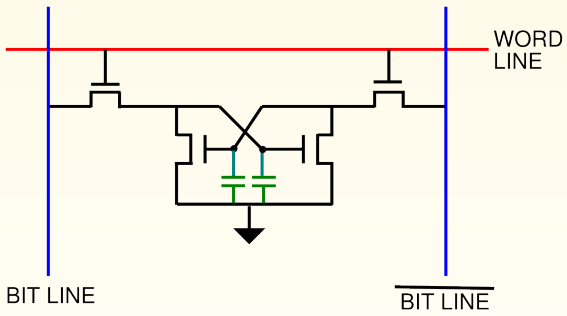


FIFO, LIFO Queues

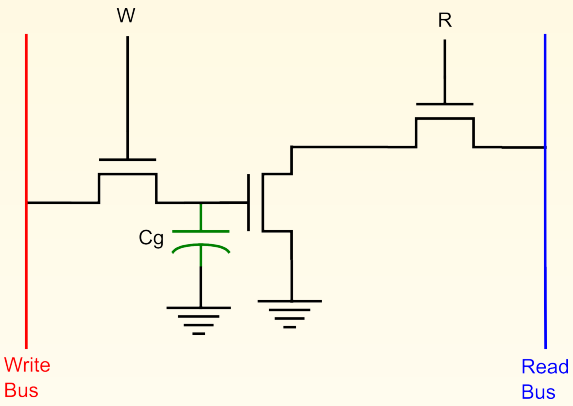
- First In First Out (FIFO)
  - Initialize read and write pointers to first element
  - Queue is EMPTY
  - On write, increment write pointer
  - If write almost catches read, Queue is FULL
  - On read, increment read pointer
- Last In First Out (FIFO)
  - Also called a stack
  - Use a single stack pointer for read and write

4-Transistor Dynamic RAM Cell

- Remove the two p-channel transistors from the static RAM cell to get a four-transistor dynamic RAM cell
- Data stored as charge on gate capacitors (complementary nodes)
- Data must be refreshed regularly
- Dynamic cells must be designed very carefully

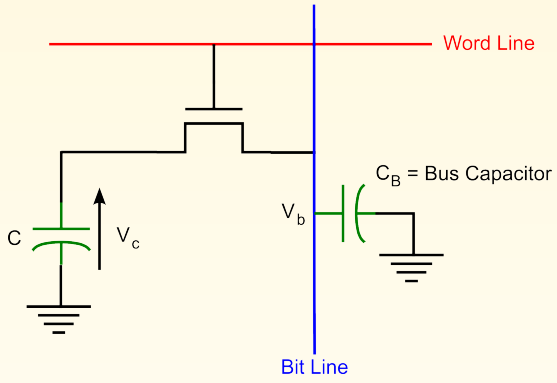


3-Transistor Dynamic RAM Cell



- Data stored on the gate of a transistor
- Need two additional transistors, one for write and the other for read control

1-Transistor Dynamic RAM Cell

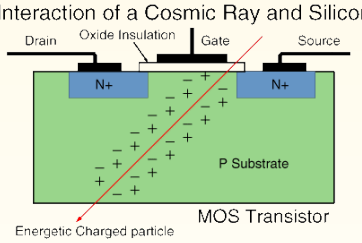


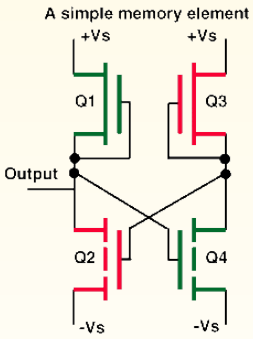
- Cannot get any smaller than this: data stored on a (trench) capacitor C, need a transistor to control data
- Bit line normally precharged to $1/2$ VDD (need a well-designed sense amplifier)
- Value of capacitances must be chosen very carefully; voltages on stored bit and bit-line affected by charge sharing

Single-Event Upsets

- High-energy particle produces electron-hole pairs in substrate; when collected at source and drain, will cause current pulse
  - Cosmic Radiation
- A "bit-flip" can occur in the memory cell due to the charge generated by the particle – called a "single-event upset"
- Seen in spacecraft electronics in the past, now in computers on the ground

Source: Aerospace Corporation
Interaction of a Cosmic Ray and Silicon





Embedded Memory IP

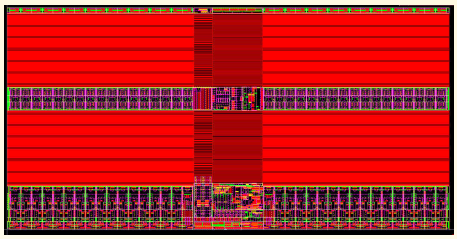
Example, from ARM

- Single Port SRAM
- Dual Port SRAM
- Single Port Register file
- Two Port Register file
- Via and Diffusion Programmable ROM

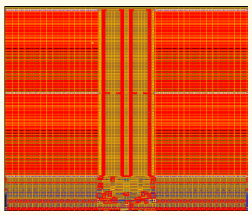
Memory Compilers

- Automatically generate memory structures
- High density, high speed and low power SRAMs
- Over 15 different foundries and 65 process variants from 28nm to 250nm

ARM Embedded Memory IP



SRAM IP



Register File IP

Source: ARM (http://www.arm.com/products/physical-IP/)