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The Express Configuration of Spartan-XL FPGAs

Summary

Express Mode uses an 8-bit wide bus path for fast configuration of Xilinx FPGAs. This application note provides information on how to perform Express configuration specifically for the Spartan™-XL family. The Express mode signals and their associated timing are defined. The steps of Express configuration are described in detail, followed by detailed instructions that show how to implement the configuration circuit.

Introduction

Express mode is a fast means for configuring the 3.3V Spartan-XL family. This mode is able to configure an FPGA quickly, since it uses an 8-bit bus to load one byte of data for every cycle of the configuration clock (CCLK), which is driven from an external source. In Express mode, the FPGA acts as a “slave”. The “master” to which it responds will typically be a processor, CPLD, or some kind of intelligent interface.

Express mode is one of four different ways to configure the 3.3V Spartan-XL family. The other methods are Slave Serial mode, Master Serial mode, and configuration via the JTAG port.

Note that the XC4000XLA family also supports Express mode. However, the 5V Spartan family does not.

When to Use Express Mode

Express mode is the fastest means for configuring the Spartan-XL family and, therefore, should be used whenever the FPGA must go from power-up to user operation in the shortest possible time.

Express mode will configure a Spartan-XL device up to eight times faster than the slave serial, master serial, and JTAG methods, since Express mode transfers one byte of data per cycle compared to one bit per cycle for the other three modes.

The time it takes for the Express configuration of the largest Spartan-XL device available, the XCS40XL, is 387,848 bits divided by eight bits per cycle or 48,481 cycles, significantly less than the 330,696 cycles required for serial configuration. At the maximum allowable clock frequency of 10 MHz, Express configuration takes about 5-6 ms compared to the 30-40 ms required for serial configuration.

Express mode requires an 8-bit bus to carry the configuration data. If there is insufficient bandwidth available (i.e., the bus needs to be free for other tasks at the time of power-up or board initialization), then one of the other three configuration methods, all of which are serial, would be required.

Express Mode Signals

An Express mode implementation can involve as many as 17 lines on the Spartan-XL device including: M1, D0 through D7, CCLK, $\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$, $\overline{\text{INIT}}$, DONE, CS1, DOUT, HDC, and $\overline{\text{LDC}}$ (the last three are not always used). The principal functions of the 17 lines are described in [Table 1](#). Refer to the Spartan and Spartan-XL Families Field Programmable Gata Array Data Sheets for more detailed information. Note: $\overline{\text{PWRDWN}}$ pin should be High ($\overline{\text{PWRDWN}}$ has a default internal pull-up resistor).

Table 1: Signals for Express Configuration⁽¹⁾

Signal	Type	Direction	Description
M1 ⁽²⁾	Mode Selection	Input	Set Low for Express mode.
D0-D7	Data	Input	Write configuration data into the device.
DOUT	Data	Output	Status output which is driven Low after the configuration header has been received. This signal remains Low until the FPGA is filled. This pin connects to the CS1 input of the next FPGA in a daisy-chain, enables loading of configuration data into the next device.
CCLK	Clock	Input	Synchronizes configuration data on the rising edge.
$\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$	Control	Input	A Low pulse on this input signals the FPGA to begin clearing the configuration memory.
$\overline{\text{INIT}}$	Control	Open-drain Bidirectional	A transition from Low-to-High indicates that the configuration memory is clear and ready to receive the bitstream. This signal can be used to delay configuration.
DONE	Status	Open-drain Output	A High output indicates that the configuration process is complete.
HDC	Status	Output	High output throughout configuration, until the I/Os go active.
$\overline{\text{LDC}}$	Status	Output	Low output throughout configuration, until the I/Os go active.
CS1	Control	Input	A High input enables loading of configuration data for an FPGA in a daisy-chain.

Notes:

- Unused I/O pins before and after configuration are 3-stated with internal weak pull-up resistors (20K Ω -100K Ω). After configuration, unused I/O pins are configured as input pins with the I/O weak pull-up resistor network remaining activated.
- M0 is a "Don't Care" for Express mode.

Steps in the Configuration Process

The Express mode consists of four steps:

1. Clearing Configuration Memory
2. Initialization
3. Configuration
4. Start-Up

The following sections will explain how the 17 configuration signals work together to program a Spartan-XL device. Refer to the Spartan and Spartan-XL Families Field Programmable Gata Array Data Sheets for more details.

Clearing Configuration Memory

On power-up, once V_{CC} reaches the Power-On-Reset threshold, the device automatically begins clearing the configuration memory. It is also possible to begin the clearing operation by applying a low-level pulse to the $\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$ input.

Clearing configuration memory by using the $\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$ input makes *reconfiguration* possible at any time during device operation. It is particularly useful when the controller needs to initiate configuration at a specific point in the power-up sequence.

As long as $\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$ is Low, the device continues to cycle through the clearing step, and forces a logic-Low on the $\overline{\text{INIT}}$ output. After each pass through the configuration memory, $\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$ is sampled. If $\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$ is High, then one last clearing pass takes place, which concludes with a Low-to-High transition on $\overline{\text{INIT}}$. The $\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$ pin has a permanent internal weak pull-up resistor. Hold $\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$ Low for at least 300 ns, but not more than 500 μs . If it is necessary to delay configuration for longer than 500 μs , then hold $\overline{\text{INIT}}$ Low using an open-collector (open-drain) driver to delay entry into the configuration step.

Initialization

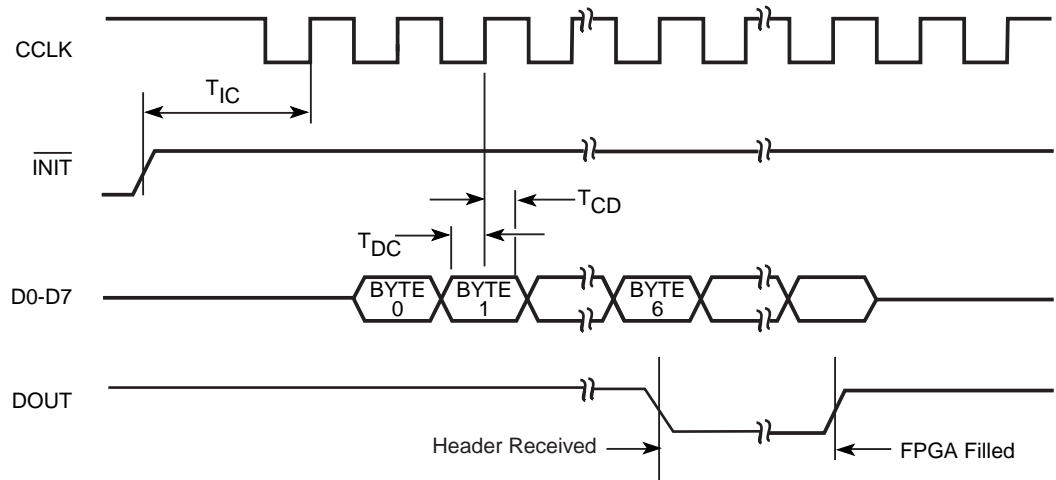
Since $\overline{\text{INIT}}$ is an open-drain output, it requires a pull-up resistor (recommended 4.7 K Ω) to achieve a logic-High. Once $\overline{\text{INIT}}$ has gone High, the internal memory is completely clear. At this point, the device identifies the selected configuration mode by sampling the level on the mode pins, after which it activates the appropriate configuration logic. To select Express mode, the mode select input, M1, is tied directly to ground or to ground through a pull-down resistor of 1 K Ω or less. The other mode select input, M0 is a “don’t care”; it makes no difference whether this pin is High or Low. The device is ready to begin the configuration step.

Configuration

After $\overline{\text{INIT}}$ goes High, it is necessary for the master (i.e., controller) to wait for a period of $T_{\text{IC}} = 5 \mu\text{s}$ before driving the CCLK input on the device. CCLK must be driven from an external source. The clock oscillator internal to the device is not used to transfer data; it is only used during initialization.

The configuration data, in the form of bytes, enter the device via D0-D7 pins. The first byte of the header (just after the title declaration) needs to be the first byte received by the FPGA. The most significant bit of each byte must line up with the D0 input on the Spartan-XL device. Similarly, the eighth bit of each byte must line up with the D7 input (i.e., Byte 0 = [D0...D7]). One byte is clocked on the rising edge of CCLK each cycle as shown in [Figure 1](#). The data needs to be set up for a period T_{DC} before the rising edge and held for the period T_{CD} after the rising edge. Numbers for the set up and hold times can be found in the Spartan and Spartan-XL Families Field Programmable Gata Array data sheet. Bytes are loaded until the configuration memory is full, at which point DOUT goes High, marking this the beginning of the Start-Up step.

Express mode only supports non-CRC error checking. The non-CRC error checking tests for a designated end-of-frame field for each frame. Detection of an error results in suspension of data loading before DONE goes High, and then the pulling down of the $\overline{\text{INIT}}$ pin. The user must detect $\overline{\text{INIT}}$ and initialize a new configuration by pulsing the PROGRAM pin Low or cycling V_{CC} .



X6710_m

Figure 1: Loading the Bitstream in Express Mode

Notes:

1. Byte 0, Byte 1 = Dummy Byte; Byte 2 = PREAMBLE 0x F2 (D0-D7); Byte 3, Byte 4, Byte 5 = Dummy Length Count; Byte 6 = Field Check Code 0x D2 (D0-D7); Byte 7 = Start Frame 0x FE (D0-D7).
2. Values for the setup and hold requirements can be found in the Spartan and Spartan-XL Families Field Programmable Gate Array data sheet.

Start-Up

The Start-Up step provides a smooth transition from configuration to user operation. Three major events occur during Start-Up: The DONE output goes High, the I/Os go active, and the GSR (Global Set/Reset) net is released. Start-Up takes place over a period of four cycles labeled C1, C2, C3, and C4. Options in *BitGen*, the bitstream generation program in Xilinx development software, determine which event takes place in which cycle.

The Start-Up sequence discussed in this application note uses CCLK for the purposes of synchronization. This option is known as “CCLK_SYNC”. The customary default *BitGen* settings are the most practical ones, since DONE goes High in C1 (disconnecting the configuration data source to avoid any contention) after which the I/Os go active and the GSR is released in C2 (ensuring stable internal conditions). The CCLK is used to measure out the four start-up cycles. This application note assumes the default options.

In Express mode, full configuration memory is the one condition that determines when the Configuration step is finished. DONE goes High as a result of filling the configuration memory completely. This marks the beginning of the Start-Up step. When DONE fails to go High, this generally indicates a problem with configuration such as the incomplete loading of configuration data.

While a transition from Low-to-High on DONE indicates the completion of the configuration step, the configuration process, as a whole, ends with the last cycle of the Start-Up step, C4. It is important to provide CCLK rising edges for all four start-up cycles. This amounts to clocking the entire configuration file, from the first byte of the header to the last start-up byte.

Like DONE, the HDC and $\overline{\text{LDC}}$ outputs provide status on the device’s progress to user operation. HDC is High during configuration and takes on whatever I/O function is assigned to it at the time when all I/Os go active, in the Start-up step. Similarly, $\overline{\text{LDC}}$ is Low during configuration and takes on its respective I/O function when the I/Os go active as well.

Configuring Multiple Spartan-XL FPGAs

It is possible to configure any number of Spartan-XL devices with a composite configuration data file. The devices are connected to form a “daisy-chain” by connecting the DOUT output of one device to the CS1 input of the next. M1 must be tied Low for all devices so that Express mode is used throughout the chain. The CS1 input of the first (left-most) device in the chain is tied to V_{CC} . The DOUT output of the last (right-most) device in the chain is left open. See [Figure 2](#) for an example of how the devices are connected together. D0-D7 is connected in parallel to all the devices in the daisy chain.

The DONE output of all devices in the chain are tied together, as are the \overline{INIT} outputs. Both these outputs are open-drain; therefore, they need to be attached to V_{CC} in order to obtain a High logic level. A 4.7 K Ω pull-up resistor is recommended.

A device can only accept configuration data if two conditions are met: CS1 is High and the configuration memory is not full. The High level on the first CS1 input ensures that the first device is able to accept data. Once the header has been received (byte 0-byte 6), DOUT of the first device goes LOW, disabling configuration of the rest of devices in the chain. When the configuration memory of the first device is full, its DOUT goes High, enabling the next device in the chain to receive configuration data from the parallel bus.

The line that connects the DONE outputs of all devices will not go High until all the configuration data has been loaded. The assertion of DONE marks the beginning of the Start-Up sequence for all other devices simultaneously.

For a daisy chain, the configuration data for the individual devices need to be combined into a single file. For details, see [Combining Files for a Daisy Chain, page 12](#).

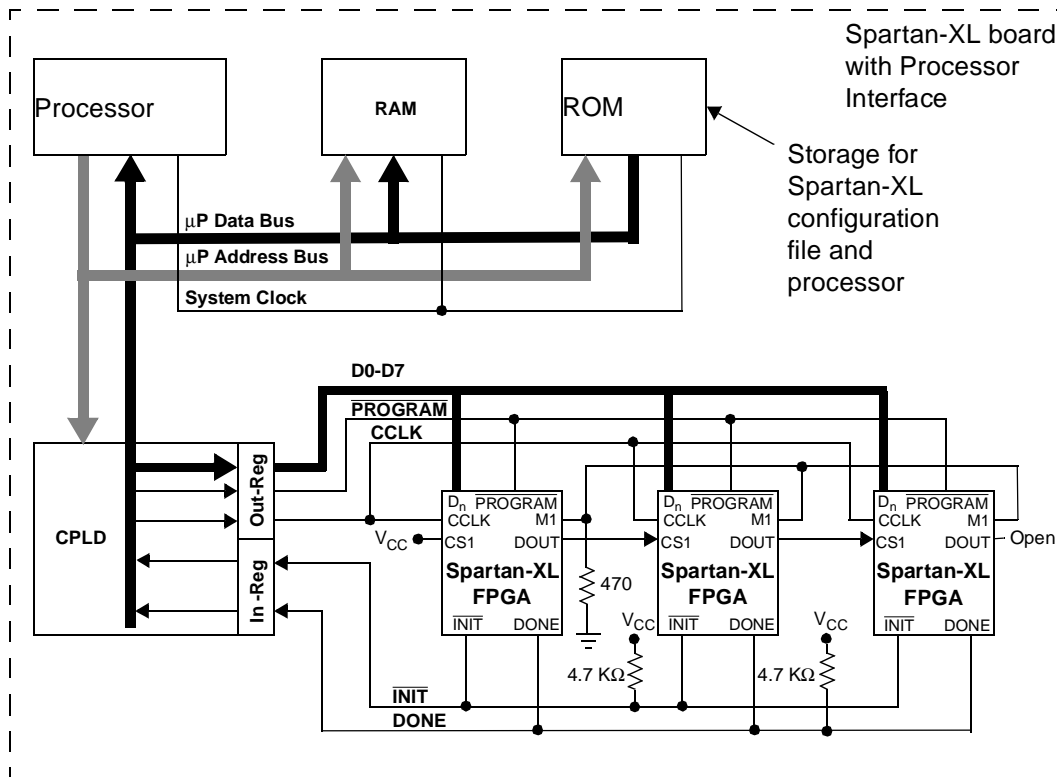
If the same configuration data file is to be loaded into more than one FPGA, then the devices can be connected with their configuration signals in parallel. See the Spartan and Spartan-XL Families Field Programmable Gata Array data sheet for more information on daisy chain and parallel configuration.

The Controller Interface

One common way to implement Express configuration uses a controller to send the configuration data to the Spartan-XL device(s) over the data bus. Aside from the FPGA(s), this application typically uses three resources:

1. ROM to store the configuration data file.
2. A controller for coordinating configuration.
3. A free register (e.g., in a CPLD or an I/O port) can be used as a synchronous interface between the controller and the Spartan-XL device.

See Figure 2 for a schematic diagram of the controller interface.



Notes:

1. The M0 input on the Spartan-XL devices is a “don’t care” and can be left open.

Figure 2: Express Configuration of Spartan-XL FPGAs Using a Controller

Storing the Bitstream

A form of nonvolatile memory, such as ROM, is used to hold the configuration data. The data may be embedded in the processor’s firmware.

As an alternative to the embedded approach, a free portion of ROM can be set aside to store the bitstream in a table that is independent from the firmware. During board initialization, the firmware can then instruct the processor to access the table.

Controlling Configuration

The controller supervises serial configuration by monitoring status signals, issuing control signals, manipulating the bitstream, and providing for synchronization to a clock.

If insufficient continuous processing time is available for configuration, then the task of writing the bitstream may be interrupted so the controller can attend to other tasks, only to be resumed at a later point in time. In this case, the task of writing the bitstream exists as firmware subroutine, to which an interrupt priority can be assigned.

In brief, the \overline{INIT} line can be used to drive the interrupt line on the controller. A suitably low priority level can be assigned to this interrupt to ensure that the controller spends sufficient time servicing its primary tasks. As previously described, the processor initiates Express configuration by toggling PROGRAM Low. Once all the devices are clear, \overline{INIT} goes High, requesting an interrupt of the controller. When the controller has no requests of higher priority than that of the Spartan-XL device, it begins accessing configuration data from memory and writing them to the inputs (D0-D7) byte-by-byte. While the controller will break away from configuration to attend to any higher priority requests, as soon as these are complete, it will

continue with configuration until the DONE signal, monitored at the interface register, goes High.

When using interrupts, it is important to use a unique address for the Spartan-XL device (or daisy chain). This avoids potential address conflicts when switching tasks. See the next section for how this is accomplished.

The Interface Register

A register is used to establish a synchronous interface between the controller and the Spartan-XL device(s). The interface register is composed of two parts: the *output register* and the *input register*, which store the bit values of the configuration signals. In order to support the set of signals commonly used for the Express mode ($\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$, D0-D7 and CCLK, $\overline{\text{INIT}}$ and DONE), the output register must be ten-bits wide for write operations and the input register must be two bits wide for read operation. More bits can be added for other control signals. For example, when using the readback feature, add two bits for the READ_DATA and READ_TRIGGER signals.

The interface register should have a unique address which ensures that the configuration data on the processor's bus goes only to the register and nowhere else. It also ensures that data on the bus intended for other purposes cannot be written to the interface register.

A Practical Example

Let us look at a specific example of a processor configuring Spartan-XL FPGAs in Express mode. **Figure 2** shows a block diagram of a board with a processor. The microprocessor Data Bus and the microprocessor Address Bus permit access to the ROM, RAM, and a CPLD with an interface register. The program for the processor resides in the ROM. On reset or power-up, the processor begins reading its instructions from here.

In addition to whatever primary tasks it may have to perform, the processor serves as the *master* for serial configuration. In this role, the processor accesses the configuration data, formats them, writes them to the inter-face register and, otherwise, coordinates the act of configuration. The three FPGAs serve as *slaves*, so the M1 pin on each is tied Low to select the Express configuration mode. Note that once M1 is Low, M0, the other mode input becomes a "don't care". M0 can be tied either High, Low, or left open.

The configuration data is stored in the ROM. They may be embedded in the processor's program (expressed in assembly or C language) or they may exist as an independent table.

The CPLD contains the interface register that holds the bit values of the configuration signals. This example employs the minimum required number of signals: $\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$, CCLK, D0-D7, $\overline{\text{INIT}}$, and DONE. The interface register consists of two parts, one called *Out-Reg* and the other called *In-Reg*. The processor writes bit values for $\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$, D0-D7, and CCLK into Out-Reg, which, in turn, applies those values to the corresponding inputs of the Spartan-XL device(s). Also, on a regular basis, In-Reg samples $\overline{\text{INIT}}$ and DONE from the device(s) and makes those bit values available on the Data Bus for monitoring by the processor. During Express configuration, the processor takes turns writing *control words* to Out-Reg one instruction cycle and reading *status bits* from In-Reg the next. The 10-bit values contained in the control word provide the logic levels that drive Out-Reg's $\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$, D0-D7 and CCLK signals. The two values in the status bits communicate to the processor the levels of In-Reg's $\overline{\text{INIT}}$ and DONE signals.

A sample sequence of control words and status bits is shown in **Table 2**. Each row in the table shows the bit values in the interface register at a given point in time. This is just one of a number of different possible sequences. The full sequence, from start to finish, passes through the four steps of configuration: Memory Clear, Initialization, Configuration and Start-up. The processor initiates memory clearing by issuing a control word with $\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$ set Low. If $\overline{\text{INIT}}$ is not already Low, it will go Low at this time. During this step, CCLK can be High or Low, so long as there's no rising transition. Dummy bytes occupy the bit positions for D0 through D7. The processor monitors In-Reg until it detects $\overline{\text{INIT}}$ at a High level. At this point, the processor needs to wait 5 μs , during which initialization takes place. With the beginning of the configuration step,

the processor begins to write control words containing “real” data bytes while, at the same time, continues to monitor In-Reg.

Finally, the Start-up step readies the Spartan-XL device for user operation over a series of four CCLK cycles according to the customary default settings in *Bitgen* (see **Start-Up, page 4**): In C1, DONE goes High. In C2, the I/Os become active. In C3, the GSR net is released. In C4, user operation begins. It is important that a rising transition on CCLK be provided for C1, C2, C3, and C4. The data clocked during the start-up cycles are dummy bytes.

Table 2: State Sequence for the Interface Register

Configuration Step	Contents of Interface Register				
	Control Word in Out-Reg			Status Nibble in In-Reg	
	PROGRAM	CCLK	D0-D7	INIT	DONE
Memory Clear	1	NRT ⁽¹⁾	X ⁽²⁾	0 ⁽³⁾	0 ⁽⁴⁾
	0	NRT	X ⁽²⁾	0	0 ⁽⁴⁾
	INIT goes Low (if not already Low).				
	1	NRT	X ⁽²⁾	0	0
Initialization	1	NRT	X ⁽²⁾	1	0
	Wait for T _{IC} = 5 μs after INIT goes High				
	1	0	X ⁽²⁾	1	0
	1	1	X ⁽²⁾	1	0
Configuration ⁽⁵⁾	1	0	B ₀	1	0
	1	1	B ₀	1	0
	1	0	B ₁	1	0
	1	1	B ₁	1	0
	1	0	B ₂	1	0
	1	1	B ₂	1	0
	Continue writing bytes.				
	1	0	B _n	1	0
	1	1	B _n	1	0
	When the configuration memory is full, then the Start-Up step begins.				

Table 2: State Sequence for the Interface Register (Continued)

Configuration Step	Contents of Interface Register				
	Control Word in Out-Reg			Status Nibble in In-Reg	
	$\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$	CCLK	D0-D7	$\overline{\text{INIT}}$	DONE
Start-Up ⁽⁶⁾	1	0	X ⁽²⁾	1	0
	1	1 (C1)	X ⁽²⁾	1	0
	DONE goes High.				
	1	0	X ⁽²⁾	1	1
	1	1 (C2)	X ⁽²⁾	1	1
	I/Os become active.				
	1	0	X ⁽²⁾	1	1
	1	1 (C3)	X ⁽²⁾	1	1
	GSR is released.				
	1	0	X ⁽²⁾	1	1
	1	1 (C4)	X ⁽²⁾	1	1
	Begin User Operation				

Notes:

1. NRT means No Rising Transition.
2. X is a “don’t care” byte.
3. The level shown is for configuration after power up. For configuration during operation, prior to driving $\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$ Low, $\overline{\text{INIT}}$ may be an active I/O, in which case, it will be at a High or a Low. Driving $\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$ Low will also drive $\overline{\text{INIT}}$ Low.
4. The level shown is for configuration after power up. For configuration in mid-operation, prior to driving $\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$ Low, DONE will be High.
5. B_i represents the sequence of configuration data bytes i = 1 through n, where B₁ is the first byte of the header and B_n is the last byte for extending write cycles.
6. This example shows the Start-up events ordered according to the default settings in Bitgen when CCLK is used to synchronize the Start-Up sequence.

Before the processor can send the configuration data file to the Spartan-XL devices, it is necessary to format them into control words. The processor can accomplish this real-time by reading a byte of configuration data from ROM and positioning it within the control word so that it lines up with D0-D7 bits of the interface register. The processor also needs to provide the appropriate logic levels for the $\overline{\text{PROGRAM}}$ and CCLK bit positions in the control word.

The bit values for all ten signals need to be chosen in compliance with the protocol summarized in **Steps in the Configuration Process, page 2** as well as the timing requirements described in the Spartan and Spartan-XL Families Field Programmable Gata Array Data Sheets. For example, note in **Table 2** that during the configuration step, each data byte is repeated for two consecutive writes to Out-Reg CCLK is Low for the first occurrence, High for the second. This ensures that the setup times for D0-D7 with respect to CCLK are met. Note that the hold time for D0-D7 with respect to CCLK is "0" for the Spartan-XL family. Thus, it is unnecessary to continue holding the byte for a third control word.

It is important that the order of the control words, as written to the Out-Reg, preserve the byte order of the original configuration file. The first byte of the header (just after the title declaration) needs to be the first byte received by the FPGA. The first bit of each byte must line up with the D0 input on the Spartan-XL device. Similarly, the eighth bit of each byte must line up with the D7 input (i.e., Byte 0 = [D0..D7]).

Figure 2 shows three Spartan-XL devices connected in a daisy chain, though any number of Xilinx FPGAs can easily be accommodated in such a loop. See **Configuring Multiple Spartan-XL FPGAs**, page 5 for an explanation of how the daisy chain signals work.

The Configuration Data File

Express mode requires a special bitstream file that is not compatible with any of the other configuration modes. This file is created by specifying the following *BitGen* options in the Xilinx development software.

The following command produces a configuration file for Express mode:

```
bitgen -g ExpressMode:Enable -g CRC:Disable -b filename
```

The “bitgen” command runs a program that produces configuration files. A -g option followed by “ExpressMode:Enable” instructs *BitGen* to produce an Express configuration file.

Since Express mode does not support error detection using CRC, it is necessary to disable this feature with the text: “-g CRC:Disable”.

The data contained in the Express configuration file can be represented in a number of different forms, including the rawbits file (.RBT), the hex file (.HEX), the bit (.BIT) file. Table 3 summarizes the distinguishing characteristics of these files. The default format for the command line shown is the binary (.BIT) file. Other options can be added to the command line to produce additional files in other formats. For example, the -b option specifies a rawbits file. The “filename” is the name of the .ncd file (i.e., the file that describes the mapped, placed and routed design).

Note: For bitgen command line options, type `bitgen -help spartanxl` at the command line or refer to the "Development System Reference Guide," Chapter 16.

Table 3: Configuration Data Files

File Format	File Extension	Title Declaration	Description
Rawbits	.RBT	Yes	Bitstream is coded in ASCII, one byte for each configuration data bit
Hex	.HEX	No	Each group of four consecutive configuration data bits is represented as one Hex digit (i.e., 0 through F) which, in turn, is coded as one ASCII byte
Binary	.BIT	Yes	Bitstream is coded in binary, one configuration bit after the next

The Anatomy of a Configuration File

A distinct benefit of the rawbits format is that the binary data can be easily viewed using a common text editor. Figure 3 shows the internal organization of an Express configuration file in the rawbits format. The same internal organization applies to Bit and Hex files as well, except that the latter does not have a title declaration. At the top of the file is a title declaration, which provides information about the configuration data such as:

- Configuration data file format
- Version of Xilinx development system in use
- The name of the design
- The target device
- The date the file was created
- The number of bits of actual configuration data

The title declaration is never loaded into the FPGA, only the header and the data frames that follow enter the device during configuration.

Following the title declaration, the actual bitstream begins with a header, which consists the following parts:

- Two dummy bytes, all ones
- A preamble code of **11110010** (shown in bold) (D0-D7)
- A dummy length count consisting of 24 bits
- A field check code of **11010010** (shown in bold) (D0-D7)

Following the header is the first data frame, which, like all data frames, begins with the start field **11111111** (shown in bold). Each data frame ends with the eight-bit constant field check code (**11010010**, shown in bold), followed by five bytes of extended write cycles. (The second of these is a repeat of the field check code, the other four consist of all ones.) Unlike the configuration file for the other modes, there is no post-amble code to terminate the configuration file for Express mode. The file ends with six or more dummy bytes, all ones. The first and second of these six are fill bytes. The third, fourth, fifth and sixth bytes correspond to the Start-Up cycles C1, C2, C3, and C4 (See [Table 2](#)). If D0-D7 are outputs during user operation, be sure to avoid any possible contention by disabling the configuration source before the I/Os go active (i.e., before C2), by setting DONE active: C1 (default) in the bitgen option.

```
Xilinx ASCII Bitstream
Created by Bitstream M1.5.25
Design name: s30xl.ncd
Architecture:Spartan-XL
Part:          s40xlPQ208
Date:         Wed Nov 11 11:37:02 1998
Bits:        387848
111111111111111111110010000000101111010110000000111010010111111110
111001111111111101111111111111111001100111111111101100110111111
11110011101111110111011111111111011011111111111100110011111111
1101100110111111111001110111111011011111111110110111011111111
110011001111111110110011011111111100111011111101101111111111
111011101111111110011001111111111011001101111111101001011111111
11010010111111111111111111111111
.
.
.
11111111111001111111111101111111111111111001101111111111011001
101111111111001110111111011011111111100110111111111111001100
111111111011001101111111110011101111110110111111111101101110
111111111001100111111111011001101111111110011101111110110111
1111111111011101111111110011001111111110110011011111111010010
111111111101001011111111111111111111111111111111111111111111
111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111111
```

Figure 3: Spartan-XL Express Configuration File

The Rawbits File

Before the rawbits configuration data can be written to the device, it is necessary to first strip off the title declaration, then, convert the header and data frames from ASCII to binary. Then the binary version is segmented into bytes, starting with the first eight bits of the header and ending with the last eight bits for extending write cycles. An on-board controller can accomplish this processing.

As mentioned earlier, the rawbits file can be displayed using a text editor, though this advantage is offset by high storage requirements. A rawbits file requires eight times the space of its binary version and can be created by *BitGen*.

The Hex File

The hex file is created by the Xilinx PROM File Formatter. It has an advantage over the rawbits file in that, with each ASCII character representing four bits of binary data (one hex digit), it requires one fourth of the storage space for the rawbits version. On the other hand, the hex file requires more processing to convert it into the binary that is used to configure the device. Before loading the file into a Spartan-XL device, it is necessary to first convert ASCII to hex (i.e., each ASCII byte becomes a single hex digit), and then from hex to binary (i.e., each hex digit becomes a nibble of binary). The Hex file does not have a text title declaration, so nothing needs to be stripped away from the file. It is important to note that Xilinx tools produce byte swapped data by default when creating a hex file.

The Binary File

A binary format has two benefits over the other two file types. First, it is the most compact of all, taking up half the storage space of a hex file and one eighth the space of a rawbits file. As a result, the format is ideal for storage on board. Second, once in binary form, the header and data frames require no further translation and can be written directly to the device.

Because of the difficulty in identifying and removing the title declaration, the binary (.bit) file created by *BitGen* is not recommended for direct use. Instead, one should use *BitGen* to create a bit file, which, in turn, is converted to hex by the PROM File Formatter. The header can then be removed.

Combining Files for a Daisy Chain

The integrated bitstream used for configuring a Spartan-XL daisy chain is a simple concatenation of the configuration files for the individual devices. The PROM File Formatter must be used to join the files. This program will combine the binary (.bit) files from each device into a single HEX file. PROM File Formatter takes the binary files for the different devices, and merges the data frames.

Verifying Configuration

The successful loading of the bitstream into the device can be verified by reading back the configuration data in serial. This is accomplished by instantiating a readback symbol into the Spartan-XL design. However, readback of Spartan-XL Express mode bitstreams result in data that does not match the original Express bitstream. Therefore, you will have to develop your own verification algorithms. Refer to the Spartan and Spartan-XL Families Field Programmable Gate Array data sheet for directions on how to use the Readback feature. See also Configuration Problem Solver at www.support.xilinx.com.

Bibliography/ References

The Xilinx Spartan and Spartan-XL Families Field Programmable Gate Array data sheet (www.support.xilinx.com/partinfo/ds060.pdf)

The Xilinx Programmable Logic Data Book (www.support.xilinx.com/partinfo/databook.htm)

XAPP088: I/O characteristics of the Spartan-XL FPGAs (www.support.xilinx.com/xapp/xapp088.pdf)

Revision History

The following table shows the revision history for this document.

Date	Version	Revision
11/13/98	1.0	Initial Xilinx release.
12/22/00	2.0	Updated format, introduction, setup-board considerations, generating bitstream, programming the device, added power-up configuration sequence.
04/20/01	3.0	Updated application note for Spartan devices.