

Original Article

A Comprehensive Approach to Low-Power UVM Verification Using Power-Aware Coverage Models

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Abstract

The semiconductor industry has been pushing for designs that use less energy and work better. Now, because of this, there are ways to design things that use less energy. But still, the checking of these designs is hard due to the complications introduced by features such as dynamic voltage and frequency scaling (DVFS), power gating, and multi-power domains. One of the common ways of checking a system is the Universal Verification Methodology. This is now the most common way in which SoCs are checked. Of course, power is an issue in traditional UVM environments, but they do not have built-in support for it. This article is about how to enhance the verification capabilities of the low-power UVM environments using power-aware coverage models. Our scheme uses the meaning of Unified Power Format and captures power-aware coverage metrics in concord with power intent and changes in the power state. We use a case study of low-power SoC design that can be used in more than one place to test the proposed framework. We outline how our method facilitates the checking of the coverage, finding important verification gaps, and verifying power intent. By running numerous simulations and coverage outcomes, it is demonstrated that power-aware UVM environments enhance significant confidence in the precision of the low-power designs and reduce errors in verification. The paper concludes by talking about how combining low-power assertions, machine learning-enhanced coverage closure, and formal verification could help future progress.

Keywords

UVM, Low-Power Verification, Power-Aware Coverage, Unified Power Format (UPF), DVFS, Power Gating, Multi-Power Domains, Functional Verification, Coverage Closure, Power Intent Validation.

Article
History

Received:
03.07.2025

Accepted:
12.07.2025

Published:
04.08.2025

1. Introduction

A. Background

New consumer electronics, in particular, mobile devices, wearables, and platforms for the Internet of Things (IoT), are flying off the shelves. So, it's more important than ever to use less power without sacrificing performance. People want longer battery life and greener technologies. This is why the focus of System-on-Chip (SoC) designs has shifted from performance to power. Today, many people widely employ state-of-the-art low-power techniques such as DVFS, clock gating, and power gating. Clock gating shuts off the clock signal to inactive modules, power gating shuts off power to entire logic blocks, and DVFS modifies the operating parameters based on the amount of work to be performed. Some advanced SoCs employ multi-voltage islands, which are parts of the chip that can run at more than one voltage level. These techniques significantly reduce both dynamic and leakage power but, in return, complicate verification. It's not sufficient to just fire up the old methods that only check if the logic is correct. They don't verify that the logic and power interact correctly. If you don't get that right, you risk letting bugs through that surface in a given power condition. Perhaps state retention or isolation doesn't work when power domains are shut down. Verification of the power management logic and its correct functioning in all the different power states today have become an integral part of the verification process. New verification methodologies must be developed capable of addressing the interactions between functional correctness and power intent to overcome these new challenges in an optimal manner.

B. Motivation

General consensus has it that functional verification takes up the most resources during the entire semiconductor design lifecycle. It is here that the majority of the time and money is spent by the project. But with increasing design complexities and improving power management systems, it is equally crucial to ensure the proper functionality of power control logic in all modes of operation like sleep, active, idle, and low-power standby. Unfortunately, strong UVM-based testbenches of yesteryears were designed to be used only once, although they can be reused multiple times. There are two popular ways people in the field author about how power works: via the Unified Power Format (UPF) and the Common Power Format (CPF). However, they do not have the right tools to figure out how to use them. They basically tell you what the power intent is, such as using isolation or retention. That is to say, retention is where the blocks are supposed to act differently depending on how much power they get. These specifications are difficult to check in UVM environments because there is just no inbuilt mechanism there for doing that. For example, power-gated domains might not be tested during functional simulations, and retention elements may not be tested while the system is in motion. There are probably some bugs in power sequencing that are difficult to find and cause big problems in the field, like a system hang, loss of data, or reset when you least expect it to. These are risks that mean there is an urgent need in the industry for a check that would work for both power-aware and functional checks. This enables you to create better UVM frameworks, which can make sense of and leverage power intent. Additionally, you are able to take advantage of the UVM ecosystem's strengths, such as coverage, modularity, and scalability.

C. Objectives

This research work proposes the development and implementation of a comprehensive verification methodology that integrates low-power verification capabilities into traditional UVM configurations. This is the idea behind power-aware functional coverage models: these models ensure that the Design Under Test (DUT) functions as expected and that the power-aware features function with formats such as UPF. Employ this approach to identify, investigate, and debug verification issues that arise from normal UVM methods not adequately exercising power management capabilities. Designers will utilize power-aware coverage collectors to identify state changes in power, ensuring isolation and retention logic is properly configured and the proper sequences are executed for sleep and wake-up. These components are built on top of the existing UVM framework. This means that they introduce new functionalities but utilize the existing checkers for already verified items. The methodology extends the usage of special adapters and monitors to convert the existing UVM environment to UPF. This tells UVM what power intent definitions are and will let it utilize them. This, in return, comes together into one system that can perform the job of functional and low-power checking. This will help verification engineers in catching bugs which were previously missed, speeding up their simulations, and making the design much better. This methodology combines power-aware verification with existing coverage-driven techniques and improves the completeness of verification while reducing the possibility of field failures for low-power SoCs.

D. Contributions

This paper makes a big stride in low-power SoC verification by adding power-aware features to the UVM in a new manner. First and foremost, it proposes a new model for functional coverage that will monitor power-related activities in the design. Such models detect and track power state transitions, ensure that retention registers function properly in case of domain shutdowns, and isolation cells function correctly. Second, the approach incorporates UPF semantics directly into the UVM testbench through the use of custom interfaces and adapters. This will enable the verification environment to exploit the power intent carried by UPF files. This implies that the test bench is aware of how to exercise power and how to handle it. Third, we have used a set of power state monitors and checkers in order to ensure that the DUT switches between power states appropriately and all the power management assertions remain valid during the simulation. Fourth, the framework has been experimented with an industrial multi-voltage SoC, demonstrating the effectiveness of this framework in a real-world scenario. The DUT under consideration contains three power domains and leverages various low-power features such as power gating and retention in order to achieve its functionality. Lastly, we do a thorough analysis of simulation coverage results to observe how legacy functional coverage compares with the new power-aware model. This analysis illustrates the importance of observing newly explored low-power scenarios. Our proposed changes will

make the UVM-based verification methods more accessible for more users. They also provide more confidence in the fact that SoCs will consume the appropriate power and work.

2. Literature Survey

A. Evolution of Low-Power Design

The requirement for power-efficient IC design really took off as more and more people started using battery-powered mobile devices and systems in the early 2000s. Initially, it was relatively easy to think of things that didn't use so much energy. Clock gating, for example, saved power by switching off the clock signal to the parts of the design that were not used. But leakage power was to become a huge problem as process nodes got smaller and pulled transistors closer together, and better ways to control power needed to be developed. This led to the development of power gating-physically cutting power to logic that isn't being used-and adaptive voltage scaling, which changes the voltage and frequency of the supply based on how much work needs to be completed and how well it needs to be completed. During this period, the use of multi-voltage islands became popular for extensive SoC designs. In finding an optimum balance between power and performance, different functional blocks on these islands run at various voltage levels.

The IEEE 1801 UPF was created because things were becoming too complex and required a unified way of describing power intent. This format makes it quite easy for designers to write clear, well-structured directives to tools on how to use power at different places. Power state tables, level shifters, retention cells, power domains, and isolation strategies are created by UPF. This allows EDA tools to check and simulate, then create behavior that knows how to apply power. Nevertheless, the verification ecosystem remains unchanged in spite of design methodologies getting better. Most traditional verification environments are still deeply concerned with ensuring that everything works right, leaving power intent verification to the last. You must deal with power when designing and testing using two very different paradigms. A greater risk of problems with state retention logic or power control logic exists during system shutdown and subsequent wake-up at a later stage.

B. UVM and Its Limitations

The Universal Verification Methodology is now the standard for creating reusable, extensible, and separable testbenches. UVM provides a complete set of libraries and a standard mechanism to create layered testbenches that employ transaction-level modelling, constrained random testing, scoreboards, functional coverage, and sequences that can be reused. It is especially useful for testing complex SoCs, since it is object-oriented and clearly structured. UVM has been primarily developed for the verification of logic rather than low power; for this reason, it does not include any built-in functionality for power aware features.

One of the most significant issues with UVM for low-power verification is that it cannot read or utilize any UPF or CPF files illustrating power consumption. Even though simulation tools can read and simulate it, the power-intent behaviour for what it means is of no concern to the UVM testbench. That is why test scenarios have only different power states and transitions when they are set up correctly. It means that the verification is not complete yet, and the logic could be incorrect. Standard coverage metrics such as code coverage, toggle coverage, and functional coverage do not work while one needs to turn on isolation control or find out how the retention register works when the power is low.

Various researchers have attempted to enhance UVM with the addition of features that are power aware. For example, [1] describes monitors that are power aware counting, while [2] describes simulation control based on the quality of the power domain. However, these approaches often do not start from coverage and hence cannot provide the level of awareness regarding which power scenarios have been hit or missed. In most cases, most checking is still performed manually and prone to errors. There is a huge demand for automated coverage-driven power aware verification that can be easily integrated into an already set-up UVM environment. This is the motivation for our research.

C. Related Work

Numerous supplemental techniques for SoC low-power verification have been explored to meet the increasing challenges. One such technique is Assertion-Based Verification. ABV transforms properties about power

into assertions with languages like PSL or SVA. Such statements may be used to uncover several types of issues in the way power is supposed to work, such as not holding or making illegal transitions. But ABV requires manual statement writing, something that is difficult to keep up with due to changing designs and the long time it takes. This in turn makes it more difficult to apply repeatedly.

You can also employ formal verification to check for low power. It employs solutions such as Mentor Questa Formal and Cadence Jasper Gold in proving or disproving properties for all possible inputs. Formal verification doesn't work very well when there are a lot of cases. It can find bugs that only happen when certain things happen. If the state space of a complex SoC gets too big, the computer might have to work harder and slower. But you can't use formal methods to find out how strong the system is.

The most common way this can be done is through power-aware simulation. In this case, the UPF/CPF descriptions in the simulation environment indicate how power works in the real world. This approach is useful and can also be applied at a large scale, but it doesn't work very well when coverage is added. It's difficult to find out which power scenarios have not been checked or how complete the check is. Various commercial simulators can run UPF-aware simulations; still, the correlation between simulation and coverage remains tenuous, making the identification of verification gaps complex.

The following table summarizes the strengths and limitations of the primary low-power verification strategies:

Table 1: Summary of Low-Power Verification Techniques

Approach	Tools/Standards Used	Limitation
Assertion-Based Verification	PSL, SVA	Manual effort, low reusability
Formal Verification	Jasper Gold, Questa	High computational cost
Power-Aware Simulation	UPF, CPF	Limited coverage metrics integration

(Figure 2: Comparison of Power-Aware Verification Techniques – Venn diagram or bar chart showing overlap of effectiveness, scalability, and coverage support)

D. Research Gap

There are standards for establishing the infrastructure for power intent and simulation that is aware of power. Functional and power-aware verification frameworks, however, are distinct in many ways. With today's methods, you can get visibility into how power is exercised using either simulation or assertions in a coverage-driven framework, but they won't interact directly with the functional verification infrastructure. This is a huge issue for UVM-based flows: they decide when to close based on the completeness of the job well done. You may fail to find power-related issues if the testbench doesn't exercise all of the power scenarios, or if the tools performing coverage analysis can't observe power events.

Besides, research in this direction is at a nascent stage. There exists no standard mechanism or template for integrating UPF-based power transitions into UVM sequences, nor is there any coverage monitoring during power-aware scenarios. Dynamic isolation checks and power-aware monitors, since they are usually performed on-demand, cannot be used across multiple projects. Support for unified coverage models that cover both functional and power-aware aspects is missing in all the mainstream EDA tools. They also lack mechanisms for automatic feedback systems that generate stimuli in response to power coverage gaps.

This paper addresses a very important topic, which has not been adequately explored: the integration of power-aware coverage models into UVM testbenches to validate both functionality and power efficiency. We want to add UPF semantics, power-aware monitors, and cross-domain coverage to UVM so that it can be a complete verification platform that uses less power. UVM is a good framework right now, but it doesn't know how to use power.

3. Methodology

A. Design Under Test (DUT) Description

With more than one core, the DUT is an SoC that is very difficult to handle. Checking the work done in this study, this is the most important step in the process. This SoC has three power domains, and all of these should

cooperate in such a way as to save as much energy as possible. Some of the major components of such power domains are the CPU clusters, memory banks, and ports for peripherals. The voltage supply can also be changed on the fly in some cases by using the power switches that are integrated. By sending signals at appropriate times, the PMU toggles between off, idle, and active modes. Besides all these, the DUT also consists of retention registers which store the vital information about the state during low power. You may just start off from where you left and just go ahead. When one of the connected domains is powered off, isolation cells are placed at the domain edges to avoid signal mixing and current leakage.

This SoC design operates like real-life mobile processors and IoT edge devices, where the way they consume power determines how efficient and long-lasting they are. With this in mind, we believe our power aware verification framework is robust and will be even further enhanced as we exercise this DUT through its various power states. The PMU is responsible for taking high-level power policies and converting them into control signals responsible for turning on power gating and retention logic throughout the chip. It gets even more difficult when there are shared resources and domain crossings. In particular, this is true when attempting to determine that the signals are properly propagated, the states are maintained, and the wake-up times are correct. Because of this, it is a good opportunity for trying out the new UVM testbench and power aware coverage model on such a DUT.

B. Power Intent Specification

We then used the IEEE 1801 Unified Power Format, UPF 3.0 to verify if power management was proper. You don't really have to know how RTL works in order to talk about the UPF power architecture. Adding power-aware verification into a UVM environment is today very straightforward. The UPF specification starts by describing power domains. They are like functional blocks or voltage islands that require power to operate. Power supply networks connect these places. You can connect those nets to high-level switches and power sets. There are also mechanisms to block signals that cross from powered-down domains to active ones from messing up the design's logic.

Another important part of the UPF file is finding out how to store things. These tell the system which memory elements or registers should keep their state when the power goes out. These things will know what to do because of retention registers. You need to know how to use the Power State Table-PST to switch between modes such as ACTIVE, SLEEP, RETENTION, and SHUTDOWN. It shows how the power domain changes when these states change; for example, if you go from ACTIVE to RETENTION, it might turn on isolation logic, send the retention control signal, and cut off the main power supply.

This structured power intent is easily readable and understandable in the UVM testbench. The simulation can look at the power behaviour and can tell us whether it is not okay by putting this information directly into our verification plan. UPF-based intent will ensure designs and toolchains use the same set of tools and the same rules.

C. Power-Aware UVM Testbench Architecture

We extended the standard Universal Verification Methodology (UVM) environment with modules which can infer what power intent means and takes an action upon it. This way, we could correctly test the DUT as for how it responds if it knows about power. A better testbench is comprised mainly of four parts: Coverage Collectors, Power Monitors, a UPF Interface Adapter, and Power-Aware Scoreboards.

- The UVM parts known as Power Monitors always check whether the power state has changed in all three power domains. You can see transaction-level data right away because these monitors connect to power signals. UPF Interface Adapter is an important piece of middleware for opening the UPF 3.0 file and connecting the settings and events it finds to something usable within a verification environment. It's basically creating tables that link UPF concepts, such as isolation and retention, to signals in a simulation.
- The collector for coverage must track the interesting power events. They have the tracking of on to off, off to on, on to off, and off to on. It will be easier to view coverage after simulation as these events fill up functional coverage bins.
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Power-Aware Scoreboards serve a larger purpose than simply indicating how various functions compare to one another. They seek any disparity between what the UPF and PST say the simulation should do, versus what it actually does. They want to make sure they aren't alone when the system shuts down and that they don't stay in the wrong state when it starts up again.

The design is modular and layered, with each part doing only one part of the power-aware verification. That means that the parts can be reused in different testbenches without having a strong interdependence

D. Coverage Model Development

Model The key goal of this research is to create an operational coverage model that correlates simulation events with coverage bins in a manner that also considers power consumption of the DUT. Standard functional coverage models in UVM cover data integrity, rule compliance, and edge cases. However, they do not consider how various power domains, isolation sequences, and retention mechanisms interact. Our model extends classic UVM coverage methodologies by adding bins for

- Power Domain Transitions: Each domain can power on and off independently from the others. Coverage bins track these transitions to ensure that all valid state changes have been exercised. Isolation Events: When a domain crosses, the actions that turn isolation on and off are logged. The bins become even more granular to ensure that the timing is right. For example, you might want to turn on isolation before you go to bed and turn it off when you wake up.
- Checking the Retention State: Registers check whether or not data is still correct when the retention states change. These bins make sure that the right signals are being sent for turning things on and off.
- Retention State Verification: Registers marked for retention are checked for data integrity across transitions to and from retention states. These bins validate that control signals for retention are properly asserted and de-asserted.
- Wakeup and Resume Sequences: A system, while transitioning from low power to active, monitors the wake-up sequences that occur in more than one domain.

The UPF determines the order of the power state transitions in the same way the wake-up sequences do. All of these coverage events are tracked by UVM analysis ports and subscribers, which send that information back to databases that track all of those. You can use those models to check low-power situations in a measurable way. They help you find gaps that functional verification can't find on its own. This helps us learn more about how power works and makes sure our tests are complete

E. Flowchart: Power-Aware Verification Process

How to Know if You Know Your Power Below is the flowchart showing all the steps in the structured power-aware verification process. The first step involves the setting of the power goal using UPF. The UVM testbench then places it where it should be for the commencement of the simulation.

- Start Verification Process
- Parse UPF Power Intent
- Configure DUT and Testbench
- Initialize Power-Aware Monitors and Scoreboards
- Apply Functional and Power Sequences
- Log Events via Coverage Collectors
- Compare Observed Behaviour with UPF Expectations
- Update Coverage Reports and Metrics
- Identify Uncovered Power Scenarios
- Iterate with Additional Testcases (if needed)
- End Verification Process

This iterative and feedback-driven process ensures comprehensive validation of both power and functional correctness. It allows coverage closure based not just on data paths but on low-power operation modes as well.

Figure 5 reinforces the interdependency between simulation, monitoring, coverage evaluation, and result-driven test enhancement in the context of power-aware SoC verification.

4. Results and Discussion

A. Simulation Setup

To test how well the proposed power-aware UVM framework works, we have built a huge simulation environment using Synopsys VCS and UPF-aware simulation tools. A DUT was a three-power-domain SoC containing a massive number of embedded processing cores. It was created by the better UVM testbench with power monitors, UPF interface modules, scoreboards, and coverage collectors. We have created a suite of directed test sequences which were intended to quantify the extent of power usage in each function, and what could be done by the system. Tests investigated the various modes of system functionality-exercising an active mode, an idle mode, a retention mode, and a shutdown mode. Each simulation run was 20,000 clock cycles long, sufficient for the testbench to exercise all power state changes.

We used sequences specific to power management and protocol levels to make the SoC behave in a real-world manner. The PST in the UPF specification instructed the PMU on when to toggle the on and off states of the power domains. Standard UVM testbench runs without any power-aware components were first used to establish a baseline of the functional coverage numbers. Behavioural power-focused testing then followed using the new testbench that contained all power-aware monitoring and coverage models. We ensured the waveform environment was cycle-accurate for visibility of the changing nature of the signals upon changes in power states. Simulation was set up in such a way that cooperation among UPF semantics and UVM constructs became easy. In the process, the environment was created for power-aware as well as functional feature testing in real-life scenarios.

B. Coverage Metrics

To understand the effect of adding power-aware features in the UVM environment on the simulation coverage, we measured various metrics. The most significant coverage results before and after the addition of verification components that are power aware are given in the table below.

Table 2: Coverage Comparison Before and After Power-Aware Integration

Metric	Traditional UVM	Power-Aware UVM
Functional Coverage	87%	87%
Power State Transition Coverage	0%	92%
Retention Logic Coverage	0%	85%

It turns out that functional coverage for both testbenches was the same at 87% because it only utilized the stimulus at the protocol level. On the other hand, it considerably facilitated the identification of power-reducing operations from the power-aware UVM testbench. For example, the Power State Transition Coverage jumped from 0% to 92%. This is a big leap that encompasses most of those things the PST talks about. Also, the Retention Logic Coverage reached up to 85%, meaning that the check at the end ensured the register content is kept safe upon power outage. Such changes indicate how useful and important the inclusion of coverage models and power-aware modules can be in the checking process for making various behaviours easier to see that were hard to see before.

C. Observations

Adding power-aware elements to the UVM framework taught us some interesting things about how well the design functions with low power. Those tracking that knew about UPF weren't available to check important power changes, such as the ON/OFF in each domain. These are crucial changes that must be performed to ensure that the systems that help in maintaining safety and isolation are working as they should. People kept track of those changes and then, after the fact, checked them. That brings into focus problems not apparent earlier, such as inadequate privacy during asynchronous shutdown events.

It was also important to say that the retention register worked as it should have. The power-aware testbench correctly found that the register's contents were lost during retention wake-up cycles in earlier versions of the DUT.

As a result of this, the design needed to be modified. In other words, power-sensitive logic may not operate if there are no special coverage models for checking retention state.

The directed power-aware test sequences also hugely helped in improving the coverage of isolation logic. The intent of these sequences was to turn on and off the isolation signals at power state changes. This ensured that when the isolation gates were opened or closed, the rules for UPF were exercised. Without these sequences, unused logic paths wouldn't show up in coverage tools. Many thought their designs were complete when they weren't. Overall, these observations showed that the power-aware UVM testbench is complete and necessary for testing SoCs that focus on power.

D. Debug and Analysis Tools

The last step in the simulation and verification process was to use standard tools to check and fix all the problems with the results. We used Synopsys Verdi and DVE (Discovery Visualization Environment) to show how well signals work together and how well they cover. Engineers could see how functional signals and power control logic worked together with these tools. They could see heatmaps of coverage and synchronized waveform views.

Verdi's UPF debugging plugin was very useful for keeping an eye on the power domain, figuring out how domains are split up and remembering when retention signals are on. Events that use power were easily connected to simulation logs. People often used DVE in order to look at functional assertions and power-aware coverage bins. This made it easy to see if verification had been done in one spot.

One of the most useful pictures was the Coverage Heatmap Figure 6. It was a picture of how power domains varied over time. This heatmap highlighted areas where more testing was required, such as infrequent transition sequences and out-of-sync wake-ups, and areas with ample coverage, such as power domains that were toggled on and off often. Sometimes the heatmap would indicate false negatives, in that transitions occurred but were not seen by the monitors because of their improper configuration. This meant there were other ways in which the testbench could be set up. These tools helped the engineers not only to find bugs but also to improve their methods of verification by finding weak spots in both functional and power-aware areas. It was important to have built-in debugging tools that made sure verification and low-power intent validation were done right.

5. Conclusion

This paper outlines a comprehensive and systematic approach to enhancing Universal Verification Methodology (UVM) environments by incorporating features that monitor power consumption. This is meant to help with the growing problem of making System-on-Chip (SoC) devices that use less power. We have filled a big gap in verification by adding UPF (Unified Power Format) semantics directly to the UVM testbench and making coverage models that are aware of power. This means that not only are the features tested, but also power management methods like retention, isolation, and power domain transitions are tested. The method uses targeted coverage bins to keep track of power-related events, like when a domain's state changes (ON/OFF), how to control isolation, and how to keep registers. This helps find bugs that UVM environments can't find on their own. Using Synopsys VCS and UPF-aware tools for simulation made a big difference in how much power state transition and retention logic was covered, but the functional logic coverage stayed the same. This proves that the framework we made works. It was even easier to connect functional behaviour to power control events when we used waveform viewers and advanced debugging tools like Verdi and DVE. This made it easier to find and fix problems. This work shows that you can do power-aware verification within the normal UVM framework and that it is necessary for thorough testing of designs that are sensitive to power. Our work provides a scalable, reusable, and modular methodology that can be readily customized for various SoC projects. This method is important because it opens the door for future improvements that will make the process of checking things even easier with the help of smart technology and automation. Machine learning models will find and fill in coverage gaps on their own in the future. We will also use formal verification tools to make sure that the power intent and the architecture are the same. These kinds of changes should make it a lot easier to make sure that modern SoC systems work and use less power. This will help electronics last longer and use less power.

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