Interfacing a serial EEPROM to a controller can be a confusing task, especially for first time users. Because communication with a parallel memory device is more straightforward, the advantages of serial devices are sometimes overlooked because of the time required to learn a different protocol. In order to minimize this time, Microchip provides many application notes on how to interface a controller to our serial memory products. Since every application is different, questions on different aspects of serial memories still arise. This application note provides answers to some of these commonly asked questions on using serial EEPROMs. This series of questions and answers covers a broad range of topics concerning both 2-wire and 3-wire serial EEPROMS, and covers material and/or circumstances that may not be provided in the data book.

QUESTIONS ON 2-WIRE DEVICES
(24XXXX OR 85XXXX)

Q: What happens if a STOP bit is inadvertently sent to the device in the middle of a page write command?
A: It depends on which device you are using. The older 24Cxx devices will write any fully loaded bytes in the page to the device. For example if the stop bit occurs before all bits are loaded in the 5th byte, then the first 4 bytes will be written and the 5th byte will not. On the 24LCxxB or 24AAxx devices, if the stop bit occurs before all 8 bits in a byte are loaded, then the entire command will abort and no bytes will be written.

Q: What happens if a START bit is inadvertently sent to the device in the middle of a command?
A: It should be noted that the device has control of the SDA line for an acknowledge bit or a read command, it may not be possible to send a start bit.

Q: I'm using an interrupt routine in my controller code that may leave the serial EEPROM in the middle of a read command. When I return from the interrupt, is there any way to reset the part to make sure it is in a known state before I start sending it commands again?
A: If the part was in the process of outputting data, you can always get it back to standby mode by allowing the SDA line to float high and give it 9 clocks. This assures that the device will not receive the acknowledge bit at the end of the current byte and will abort the command and go to standby.

Q: I'm using a 24LCxxB in my application. What happens if the WP line goes from low (unprotected) to high (protected) in the middle of a write command?
A: The state of the WP pin is OR'ed with the write control circuitry inside the device. The state of the pin is not latched at any point of the command to see if the write should be done or not. Therefore, if the WP pin went high before the stop bit was sent to initiate the command, then the array would be protected. If the WP pin went high after the stop bit was sent, then the outcome is unpredictable, because the result would vary according to how far into the command the WP pin went high.

Q: I'm attempting to use a serial EEPROM in an application for the first time, and am having problems getting it to work. I have followed all the timing diagrams in the databook but when I attempt to read data from the device I only read zeros.
A: When a read command is initiated and all the data is zeros, the problem is most likely one of two things:

1. A pull-up resistor on the SDA line is required for the device to operate correctly. Common values are 10K - 20K ohms. If this pull-up is not provided, then the device can only output zeros.

2. The controller is not releasing the bus to the device and is holding it low. Check the controller code and make sure that the SDA line has been set for input during the read command.
Questions and Answers Concerning Serial EEPROMs

Q: I had been using a 24C04A in my application and have switched to the 24LC04B so I can run at a lower voltage. Now the circuit is no longer working correctly. The read seems to work fine but the write seems to not work at all or only intermittently.

A: The problem is probably with the difference in write cycle times between the two devices. The write cycle time for the 24C04A is about 0.5ms per byte, while the cycle time for the 24LC04B is around 2-4ms per byte. Therefore, when you send consecutive write commands using the new device, it is ignoring all commands that occur while it is in the middle of a write cycle.

Q: I'm using a 24LC16B device in my application. Is there any way I can determine when the write cycle is complete instead of waiting the maximum 10ms?

A: Yes, you can determine when the write cycle is complete on any of our 2-wire devices by utilizing a simple technique called “data polling” or “acknowledge polling.” Data polling is done after the stop bit has been sent to the device to initiate a write cycle. You simply send the device a start bit followed by a proper control byte with the R/W bit set low. You then check the status of the acknowledge bit. If the acknowledge bit is high, then the device is still busy writing. You can continue to send the start bit and control byte until the device acknowledges. When the acknowledge bit reads low, then the device has finished the write cycle. You can now send the address and data bytes if you are going to do a write command, or just send the address if you are going to do a read command. Of course you may also send a start bit and begin the next command from scratch.

Q: I'm confused about when the acknowledge bit from the device actually occurs; can you clarify this?

A: The device will attempt to take over the SDA line for the acknowledge bit on the falling edge of the clock for the last bit in the byte. It will then release the SDA line on the falling edge of the clock given for the acknowledge bit. For example, when the control byte is sent to the device, it will take the SDA line low on the falling edge of the clock for the R/W bit. It will then release the SDA line on the next falling edge of the clock (the acknowledge bit). The same sequence occurs for sending the device a byte of data or address.

Q: I am using a 24LC101B in my application which has an 8 byte page buffer. What happens if I load more than 8 bytes into the device before giving it the stop bit?

A: For all 24LCxxB products, the 24C04A and the 85C92, the page buffer will wrap around to the beginning of the buffer and begin to overwrite the data that has previously been loaded. For the 24C01A/02A and 85C72/82, the write command will abort if more bytes than the page buffer will hold are loaded.

Q: Can I send a stop bit and a start bit with the same clock pulse?

A: Yes, this is valid as long as setup and hold times for both the start and stop bits are obeyed.

Q: What happens if I give the device a start bit and then a stop bit in the same clock pulse?

A: The 24Cxx devices will ignore the stop bit, the 24LCxxB products will accept the stop bit and go to standby mode.

Q: Does the address pointer get incremented after a current address read command?

A: A current address read command can be halted by sending a stop bit or by sending a high acknowledge bit after the data has been sent by the device. On the 24Cxx devices, ending the read command with a stop bit will increment the address pointer to the next address. Ending the command with a high ack bit will not increment the address. For the 24LCxxB products, ending the command with either the stop bit or the high ack bit will increment the address pointer.

Q: I am using the 24LC16B and want to write to the part using the page write mode. Can I start a page write at any location in the device?

A: You can start a page write at any location in the device, but you need to be aware that the part is arranged in 16-byte pages and you cannot cross a page boundary. If you attempt a page write that goes beyond the end of the current page, data loaded will ‘roll around’ to the beginning of the current page instead of going to the next one. For example; the first page in the device starts at address 0x00 and ends at 0x0F. If you start a page write at address 0x0E, the first byte loaded will be written at address 0x0E, the second at 0x0F and the third byte loaded will roll around to the beginning of the page and be written to address 0x00.
Questions and Answers Concerning Serial EEPROMs

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR 3-WIRE DEVICES (93XXXX)

Q: What would happen if during a write command I inadvertently sent either too many or too few clocks to the device before dropping the CS line?
A: If you send too many clocks to the device and then drop the CS line to initiate the write cycle, the extra clocks will be ignored but the command will execute. If you do not send enough clocks and then drop the CS line, then the command will abort and no write will take place.

Q: I am using a 93LC56 device in my application and am having problems getting it to work correctly. The read sequence seems to work fine but I unable to write any data to the part.
A: A problem such as this is usually caused by either not giving the part the required number of bits for the command before dropping the CS line, or not dropping the CS line at all. The write command will not commence until the CS line is brought low.

Q: I am currently using a 93C46 device and am looking to go to the 93LC46 device so I can run at a lower voltage. What are the main differences between these devices?
A: There are several operational differences between these devices that you should be aware of:

1) The 93LC46 operates in both x8 and x16 modes; the 94C46 is x16 only.
2) The 93LC46 supports the sequential read function; the 93C46 does not.
3) The write cycle on the 94LC46 begins on the falling edge of the CS line; the write cycle for the 93C46 begins on the rising edge of the last clock.

Q: Is the 93LC46 drop-in compatible with the 93C46 or would I be better off using the 93LC46B?
A: The 93LC46 and 93LC46B are the same device with one exception; the ORG pin on the 93LC46B is internally tied so it will only operate in the x16 mode. This allows the user to leave pin 7 floating, just like you would on the 93C46. For this reason, the 93LC46B is a closer match than the 93LC46. Please note the other operational differences described in the previous question.

Q: I am confused as to whether I have to toggle the CS line low in-between every command.
A: Yes, the CS line must go low for at least 250 ns between each command. If you are doing a write command and you bring CS low to activate the data polling mode, you must toggle CS low again after the ready signal has been given by the device before the next start bit can be sent.

Author: Bruce Negley
Memory Products Division
Questions and Answers Concerning Serial EEPROMs

NOTES:
AMERICAS
Corporate Office
Microchip Technology Inc.
2355 West Chandler Blvd.
Chandler, AZ 85224-6189
Tel: 480-786-7200 Fax: 480-786-7277
Technical Support: 480-786-7627
Web Address: http://www.microchip.com

Atlanta
Microchip Technology Inc.
500 Sugar Mill Road, Suite 200B
Atlanta, GA 30350
Tel: 770-640-0034 Fax: 770-640-0307

Boston
Microchip Technology Inc.
5 Mount Royal Avenue
Marlborough, MA 01752
Tel: 508-480-9990 Fax: 508-480-8575

Chicago
Microchip Technology Inc.
333 Pierce Road, Suite 180
Itasca, IL 60143
Tel: 630-285-0071 Fax: 630-285-0075

Dallas
Microchip Technology Inc.
4570 Westgrove Drive, Suite 160
Addison, TX 75248
Tel: 972-818-7423 Fax: 972-818-2924

Detroit
Microchip Technology Inc.
Two Prestige Place, Suite 150
Miamisburg, OH 45342
Tel: 937-291-1654 Fax: 937-291-9175

Los Angeles
Microchip Technology Inc.
18201 Von Karman, Suite 1090
Irvine, CA 92612
Tel: 949-263-1888 Fax: 949-263-1338

New York
Microchip Technology Inc.
150 Motor Parkway, Suite 202
Hauppauge, NY 11788
Tel: 631-273-5305 Fax: 631-273-5335

San Jose
Microchip Technology Inc.
2107 North First Street, Suite 590
San Jose, CA 95131
Tel: 408-436-7950 Fax: 408-436-7955

AMERICAS (continued)

Toronto
Microchip Technology Inc.
5925 Airport Road, Suite 200
Mississauga, Ontario L4V 1W1, Canada
Tel: 905-405-6279 Fax: 905-405-6253

Hong Kong
Microchip Technology Asia Pacific
Unit 2101, Tower 2
Metrolaza
233 Hing Fong Road
Kwi Fong, N.T., Hong Kong
Tel: 852-2-401-1200 Fax: 852-2-401-3431

Beijing
Microchip Technology, Beijing
Unit 915, 6 ChaoyangmenBei Dajie
Dong Erhuan Road, Dongcheng District
New China Hong Kong Manhattan Building
Beijing 100027 PRC
Tel: 86-10-85282100 Fax: 86-10-85282104

India
Microchip Technology Inc.
India Liaison Office
No. 6, Legacy, Convent Road
Bangalore 560 025, India
Tel: 91-80-229-0061 Fax: 91-80-229-0062

Japan
Microchip Technology Intl. Inc.
Benex S-1 6F
3-18-20, Shinjyokohama
Kohoku-Ku, Yokohama-shi
Rm 206, 1F, Multihall Bldg.,
Tel: 81-45-471-6166 Fax: 81-45-471-6122

Korea
Microchip Technology Korea
168-1, Youngbo Bldg. 3 Floor
Samsung-Dong, Kangnam-Ku,
Tel: 82-2-554-7200 Fax: 82-2-558-5934

ASIA/PACIFIC

Shanghai
Microchip Technology
RM 406 Shanghai Golden Bridge Bldg.
2077 Yan’an Road West, Hong Qiao District
Shanghai, PRC 2000335
Tel: 86-21-6275-5700 Fax: 86 21-6275-5060

ASIA/PACIFIC (continued)

Singapore
Microchip Technology Singapore Pte Ltd.
200 Middle Road
#07-02 Prime Centre
Singapore 188980
Tel: 65-334-8870 Fax: 65-334-8850

Taiwan, R.O.C
Microchip Technology Taiwan
10F-1C 207
Tung Hua North Road
Taipei, Taiwan, ROC
Tel: 886-2-2717-7175 Fax: 886-2-2545-0139

EUROPE

United Kingdom
Arizona Microchip Technology Ltd.
505 Eskdale Road
Winnersh Triangle
Wokingham
Berkshire, England RG41 5TU
Tel: 44 118 921 5858 Fax: 44 118 921-5835

Denmark
Microchip Technology Denmark ApS
Regus Business Centre
Lauthrup Holj 1-3
Ballerup DK-2750 Denmark
Tel: 45 4420 9895 Fax: 45 4420 9910

France
Arizona Microchip Technology SARL
Parc d’Activite du Moulin de Massy
43 Rue du Saule Trapu
Batiment A - 1er Etage
91300 Massy, France
Tel: 33 1-69-53-63-20 Fax: 33 1-69-30-90-79

Germany
Arizona Microchip Technology GmbH
Gustav-Heinemann-Ring 125
D-81739 München, Germany
Tel: 49-89-627-144 0 Fax: 49-89-627-144-44

Italy
Arizona Microchip Technology SRL
Centro Direzionale Colleoni
Palazzo Taurus 1 V. Le Colleoni 1
20041 Agrate Brianza
Milan, Italy
Tel: 39-039-65791-1 Fax: 39-039-6899883

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