Control Hazards

**Cause** of the hazard:
- evaluation of the branch condition & calculation of the branch target is not completed before the next instruction is fetched
- conflict as to which instruction to fetch next
- called a *delayed branch* if the hazard can’t be eliminated

**Hardware solutions:**
- stall until the result of the condition & target are known (unacceptable delay: no computer does this now)
- assume the branch is not taken
- redesign the pipeline
- dynamic branch prediction

---

The Problem

```
beq $1, $3, target
```

condition is evaluated here

```
next instruction
```

target address is calculated here

these instructions should not be executed if the branch is taken

```next
one after that
```

```target instruction
```

```and a third
```
Just Stall

beq $1, $3, target

Even worse:
beq $1, $3, target

Assume a Branch Outcome

Technique:
• assume the branch will not be taken
• continue fetching sequential instructions
• flush them if the branch is taken after all
• fetch the target instruction

Performance savings
• no cost if the condition is false & branch isn’t taken
  • 40% of conditional branches are not taken
• 3 cycle penalty if the branch is taken

Implementation (for flushing)
• change control signals for EX, MEM & WB stages
  in IF/ID, ID/EX & EX/MEM set pipeline registers to 0
  (similar to what we did for stalling after a load data hazard)
Redesign the Pipeline

Purpose of the redesign:
• determine the branch outcome earlier
• reduce the branch cost of a taken branch

Hardware changes:
• add a target address shifter & adder to ID stage
  ⇒ will know where to branch to in ID stage
• add combinational logic in ID stage to determine the outcome of simple comparisons
  • equal/not equal
  • less than 0
  ⇒ know whether to branch in ID stage
• do the more complicated comparisons in the ALU
  ⇒ know whether to branch in EX stage
• what architectural design principle is being used here?

How did the branch penalty change?

Branch Prediction

Definition:
• Resolve a branch hazard by predicting which path will be taken
• Proceed under that assumption
• Have a mechanism to back out if wrong

Dynamic branch prediction:
• branch prediction implemented in hardware
  (static branch prediction is done by the compiler)
• the prediction changes as program behavior changes
• common algorithm:
  • predict the branch taken if branched the last time
  • predict the branch not-taken if didn’t branch the last time
Branch Prediction Buffer

Branch prediction buffer
- small memory indexed by the lower bits of the address of a branch instruction
- contains a prediction bit/address
- do what the bit says to do
- if the prediction was wrong
  - toggle the bit
  - flush the pipeline
- accessed in IF stage
  - What is the penalty if predict not taken & prediction is correct?
  - What is the penalty if predict taken & prediction is correct?
  - What is the penalty if mispredict?
- branch prediction buffer predicts correctly most of the time

Two-bit Prediction

A single prediction bit does not work well with loops

Two-bit branch prediction for loops
- must be wrong twice to toggle the bit

What pattern is bad for two-bit branch prediction?
Control Hazards, in Summary

Goals of the solutions to eliminate control hazards:

• assume the common-case outcome
• determine the branch outcome & target address earlier so can branch to the target earlier
• predict the branch direction

Control hazards can occur with all transfers of control:

• jumps
• procedure calls
• returns
• as well as taken conditional branches