



NR3 - NXP + FreeRTOS + West

FreeRTOS with NXP MCUXpresso

Objectives

- Understand MCUXpresso SDK (MCUXSDK) structure
- Manage multi-repository projects using Zephyr West
- Use Kconfig and prj.conf for configuration
- Create and integrate custom boards
- Extend projects with FreeRTOS
- Get an overview of Cortex-M architecture
 - Discover the concepts of real time multitasking
 - Understand Real Time constraints
 - Understand the FreeRTOS architecture
 - Discover the various FreeRTOS services and APIs
 - Learn how to develop, debug and trace FreeRTOS applications
- Best practices for large MCUXpresso/FreeRTOS projects

Prerequisite

- C Language knowledge (see for example our L2 training course)
- Familiarity with Git and command-line tools

Course environment

- Theoretical course
 - PDF course material (in English)
 - The trainer to answer trainees' questions during the training and provide technical and pedagogical assistance
- Practical activities
 - Practical activities represent from 40% to 50% of course duration
 - Example code, labs and solutions
 - NXP MCUX or simulated IMXRT board using Zazu Simulator

Target Audience

- Any embedded systems engineer or technician with the above prerequisites.

Course Outline

First day

Introduction to MCUXpresso SDK

- SDK structure and components
- Toolchains, CMake and Ninja integration
- Application structure and examples

West Tool

- Overview

- Application components and structure
 - Application
 - Modules
 - West workspace
- Why West? Problems solved
- West as a meta-tool: repository + commands
- Alternatives (git submodules, repo) and limitations
- West
 - West structure
 - Using west
 - West manifest
 - West commands
- West topologies
- Anatomy of west.yml
- Specific commands and common extensions
 - Init, update, list, config
 - Build, debug, attach, flash
 - Other common commands
- Extending West with custom commands

Exercise: Getting started with West and MCUXpresso SDK

Exercise: Create a custom workspace manifest while importing only required projects

Development Environment

- Setting up host tools (Git, Python, CMake, Ninja)
- Integrating LinkServer, Jlink and other debuggers
- Debugging workflow with GDB
- VSCode integration (tasks, debug sessions)
- MCUXpresso for VSCode

Exercise: Build, flash and debug using command line and customize IDE

MCUXpresso Config Tools

- Overview of the configuration tool suite (Pins, Clocks, Peripherals, Device settings)
- How Config Tools integrate with MCUXpresso SDK and West builds
- Generating initialization code (pin_mux.c/h, clock_config.c/h, peripheral setup)
- Using the graphical interface to configure GPIO, UART, and system clocks
- Exporting configuration files and re-integrating them into applications
- Limitations and best practices when combining with Kconfig/prj.conf

Exercise: Customize existing boards

Customization and Extensions

- Custom manifests for minimal projects
- Writing custom West commands
- Modifying in-tree applications (LED blinky)
- Freestanding applications outside the SDK

Exercise: Extend west commands

Exercise: Create a custom freestanding application

Second day

Integration and Analysis

- Adding FreeRTOS using West
- Multicore projects with Sysbuild
- SPDX analysis and compliance check

- Memory footprint and Puncover analysis

Exercise: Extend the workflow with FreeRTOS and advanced tools

Exercise: Using west memory analysis features

Kconfig and Project Configuration

- Configuration phase in West/CMake
- Kconfig framework:
 - Enabling/disabling global features
 - Tuning and conditional compilation
 - Default values and symbol dependencies
- Role of prj.conf and fragments
- Interactive configuration (menuconfig, guiconfig)
- Generated config files: .config, mcux_config.h
- Writing new Kconfig entries (symbols, menus, defaults)
- Limitations and best practices
- MCUXpresso SDK specifics (custom prefixes, no CONFIG_ macros)

Exercise: Customize prj.conf

Exercise: Create and use custom kconfig options

Developing Custom Boards

- Board Architecture Overview
- Structure and components of a board port
- Creating a New Board Definition
- Configuring custom boards
- Board debuggers
- Linker Script
- Integrating the custom Board into the SDK

Exercise: Write a custom board

External MCUX Modules

- Why to use modules?
- Module structure
- Out-of-tree module
- Module's YAML
- Module CMakeLists.txt

Exercise: Create a custom library module

Cortex-M resources used by FreeRTOS

- Cortex-M Architecture Overview
 - Two stacks pointers
 - Different Running-modes and Privileged Levels
 - MPU Overview
 - SysTick Timer Description
 - ARMv8-M evolutions
- Exception / Interrupt Mechanism Overview
 - Interrupt entry and return Overview
 - SVC / PendSV / SysTick Interrupt Presentation
- Developing with the IDE

Exercise: Interrupt Management on Cortex-M

Third day

Introduction to Real Time

- Base real time concepts
- The Real Time constraints
- Multi-task and real time

Element of a real time system

- Tasks and Task Descriptors
- Context Switch
- Task Scheduling and Preemption
 - Tick based or tickless scheduling
- Scheduling systems and schedulability proof
- Scheduling through FreeRTOS

Exercise: Implement a Context Switch routine

FreeRTOS Task Management

- The Task life-cycle
- Creating Tasks
- Task Priorities
- Task States
- The idle task
- Delays
- Changing Task Priority
- Deleting Tasks
- Suspending Tasks
- Kernel Structures
- Thread Local Storage
- Kernel Interrupts on Cortex-M
- Scheduling Traces
- Visual trace diagnostics using Tracealyzer

Exercise: Managing tasks

Fourth day

Memory Management in FreeRTOS

- Memory management algorithms
- FreeRTOS-provided memory allocation schemes
 - Allocate-only scheme
 - Best-fit without coalescing
 - Thread-safe default malloc
- Checking remaining free memory
- Adding an application-specific memory allocator
- Memory management errors
- Stack monitoring

Exercise: Enhance the memory manager for memory error detection

Exercise: Detect stack overflow

Resource Management with FreeRTOS

- Critical sections
 - Critical sections

- Suspending (locking) the scheduler
- Mutual Exclusion
 - Spinlocks and interrupt masking
 - Mutex or Semaphore
 - Recursive or not recursive mutexes
 - Priority inversion problem
 - Priority inheritance (the automatic answer)
 - Priority ceiling (the design centric answer)
- Gatekeeper tasks

Exercise: Implement mutual exclusion between two tasks

Synchronization Primitives

- Introduction
 - Waiting and waking up tasks
 - Semaphores
 - Events
 - Mailboxes
- FreeRTOS Binary Semaphores
- FreeRTOS Queue Management
 - Creation
 - Sending on a queue
 - Receiving from a queue
 - Data management
 - Sending compound types
 - Transferring large data
- Queue sets
- Event Groups
- Task Notifications

Exercise: Synchronizing a task with another one through queues

Exercise: Synchronizing a task with another one through binary semaphores

Fifth day

Parallelism Problems Solutions

- Parallel programming problems
 - Uncontrolled parallel access
 - Deadlocks
 - Livelocks
 - Starvation

Exercise: The producer-consumer problem, illustrating (and avoiding) concurrent access problems

Exercise: The philosophers' dinner problem, illustrating (and avoiding) deadlock, livelock and starvation

Exercise: The readers-writer problem, illustrating complex concurrent access solving

Interrupt Management

- Need for interrupts in a real time system
 - Software Interrupt
 - Time Interrupts
 - Device Interrupts
- Level or Edge interrupts
- Hardware and Software acknowledge
- Interrupt vectoring
- Interrupts and scheduling
- Deferred interrupt processing through FreeRTOS
 - Tasks with interrupt synchronization

- Using semaphores within an ISR
- Counting semaphores
- Using queues within an ISR
- FreeRTOS interrupt processing
 - Writing ISRs in C
 - Interrupt safe functions
 - Interrupt nesting

Exercise: Synchronize Interrupts with tasks

Software Timer

- The Timer Daemon Task
- Timer Configuration
- One-shot / Auto-reload Timer
- Software Timer API

Exercise: Use Software Timers