

MODULAR ELECTRONICS LEARNING (MODEL) PROJECT



DC-AC POWER CONVERSION

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Recommendations for students

Some electrical power sources naturally output *direct current* (DC), while some loads and other power-handling electrical components only function on *alternating current* (AC). In such cases, a device must go between the DC source and the AC circuit/load to convert DC to AC. These are generally known as DC-AC converters, or specifically *inverters*.

In the early days of electrical power systems, power conversion was performed by rotating machinery: an electric motor with its shaft coupled to an electrical generator. Such *motor-generator* sets used technology available at the time, and were remarkably effective. So long as the power and speeds of the two machines were well-matched, motor-generator sets could be used for almost any type of power conversion: from DC to AC (e.g. DC motor coupled to an AC generator), from AC to DC, from DC to DC at different voltages/currents, and from AC to AC at different voltages/currents and/or frequencies. Of course, these machines were large, heavy, relatively inefficient, and required regular maintenance due to their moving (wearing) components.

The modern counterpart to a motor-generator power conversion set is a solid-state power conversion circuit, of which DC-AC inverters is but one type. This module will focus on the details of solid-state DC-AC power conversion.

Important concepts related to DC-AC power conversion include **AC** versus **DC**, **transformers**, **rectification**, **oscillators**, **MOSFET behavior**, **BJT behavior**, **logic gates**, **thyristor behavior**, **comparators**, **fundamental frequency**, **harmonic frequency**, **superposition** of waveforms, and **pulse-width modulation**.

Here are some good questions to ask of yourself while studying this subject:

- How might an experiment be designed and conducted to prove the existence of harmonic frequencies within a non-sinusoidal waveform? What hypothesis (i.e. prediction) might you pose for that experiment, and what result(s) would either support or disprove that hypothesis?
- How might an experiment be designed and conducted to measure the duty cycle of a pulse waveform? What hypothesis (i.e. prediction) might you pose for that experiment, and what

result(s) would either support or disprove that hypothesis?

- How might an experiment be designed and conducted to measure the energy conversion efficiency of a DC-to-AC converter circuit? What hypothesis (i.e. prediction) might you pose for that experiment, and what result(s) would either support or disprove that hypothesis?
- Why was AC historically preferred over DC for transmission of electrical power?
- What were some legacy methods of converting AC into DC power?
- Why are common *oscillator* circuits unsuitable for power conversion?
- What conditions are necessary to turn on an E-type MOSFET?
- What conditions are necessary to turn on a BJT?
- How does an “H-bridge” circuit act to convert DC into AC?
- What advantages are there to using thyristors instead of transistors for DC-AC conversion?
- What disadvantages are there to using thyristors instead of transistors for DC-AC conversion?
- Why do harmonic frequencies exist in the output of DC-AC converter circuits?
- Why are harmonic frequencies problematic in AC power systems?
- Do rotary converter (motor-generator sets) produce harmonic frequencies like switching circuits do?
- How may sinusoidal waveshapes be “synthesized” using discrete on/off switching devices such as transistors?
- How does an astable multivibrator circuit function?

1.2 Challenging concepts related to DC-AC power conversion

The following list cites concepts related to this module's topic that are easily misunderstood, along with suggestions for properly understanding them:

- **Necessary conditions for BJT operation** – bipolar junction transistors require a base current in the proper direction to inject minority carriers into the base layer (i.e. PNP transistors require hole injection from emitter to base, and so the emitter must be made positive and the base made negative, relative to each other; NPN transistors require electron injection from emitter to base, and so the emitter must be negative and the base positive.), and the collector-to-emitter voltage must be of the correct polarity (i.e. so that collector terminal current goes in the same direction as base terminal current, either *out* or *in*). Both currents join at the emitter terminal, making the emitter current the sum of the base and collector currents.
- **Necessary conditions for FET operation** – field effect transistors work on the principle of a transverse electric field affecting the conductivity of a homogeneously-doped channel. For insulated-gate FETs (i.e. MOSFETs), the electric field exists across a thin layer of dielectric between the gate terminal and the modulated channel. When that applied gate-channel voltage is of such a polarity as to attract majority charge-carriers into the channel (e.g. electrons into an N-type channel, holes into a P-type channel) then the channel becomes more conductive.
- **Hysteresis** – whenever a component or system tends to remain in its last state, we refer to that lagging tendency as *hysteresis*. There are many physical manifestations of hysteresis including *magnetic hysteresis* (where a magnetic material tends to remain magnetized after the magnetizing influence is removed), *thyristor devices* (electronic devices that tend to remain “on” even after the triggering stimulus is removed), and physical mechanisms having *friction* (where the mechanism's position tends to stay put after the influencing force is removed).
- **Forced commutation** – thyristor-based DC-to-AC converters require a means to force “on” thyristors to the “off” state when the time comes to alternate the AC output (every half-cycle). The use of capacitors as energy-storage devices to facilitate this forced commutation is not necessarily easy to understand, but careful step-by-step qualitative analysis (i.e. sketching current directions, voltage polarities, etc) of these circuits at different points in time is helpful.

1.3 Recommendations for instructors

This section lists realistic student learning outcomes supported by the content of the module as well as suggested means of assessing (measuring) student learning. The outcomes state what learners should be able to do, and the assessments are specific challenges to prove students have learned.

- **Outcome** – Demonstrate effective technical reading and writing

Assessment – Students present their outlines of this module’s instructional chapters (e.g. Case Tutorial, Tutorial, Historical References, etc.) ideally as an entry to a larger Journal document chronicling their learning. These outlines should exhibit good-faith effort at summarizing major concepts explained in the text.

Assessment – Students show how quantitative results were obtained by the author in the Tutorial chapter’s examples.

- **Outcome** – Apply the concept of energy efficiency to DC-AC power conversion circuits

Assessment – Calculate DC input power necessary for a converter circuit given energy efficiency and power output parameters; e.g. pose problems in the form of the “Converter efficiency” Quantitative Reasoning question.

- **Outcome** – Identify the function of various components and sections of complex circuits

Assessment – Explain the purpose of individual components within the schematic diagram of a DC-AC converter circuit; e.g. pose problems in the form of the “Bright/Royer self-excited inverter circuits” and “Bright/Royer externally-excited inverter circuits” and “555-based inverter circuit” Conceptual Reasoning questions.

- **Outcome** – Independent research

Assessment – Locate DC-AC converter (“inverter”) datasheets and properly interpret some of the information contained in those documents including maximum continuous power output, maximum peak power output, DC voltage input, efficiency, etc.

Chapter 2

Case Tutorial

The idea behind a *Case Tutorial* is to explore new concepts by way of example. In this chapter you will read less presentation of theory compared to other Tutorial chapters, but by close observation and comparison of the given examples be able to discern patterns and principles much the same way as a scientific experimenter. Hopefully you will find these cases illuminating, and a good supplement to text-based tutorials.

These examples also serve well as challenges following your reading of the other Tutorial(s) in this module – can you explain *why* the circuits behave as they do?

2.1 Example: inverter circuits from the Bright/Royer 1957 patent

Richard Bright and George Royer patented several circuit designs using what was then a new electronic device: the bipolar junction transistor. Their patent (US Patent 2,783,384, “Electrical Inverter Circuits” granted 26 February 1957) shows schematic diagrams for several DC-AC inverters.

Figures 1, 4, and 5 show self-excited¹ inverter circuits where the frequency of the AC output depends largely on the magnitude of the DC source voltage(s). Figures 6, 7, and 8 show externally-excited inverter circuits relying on an independent oscillator to drive the power transistors on and off.

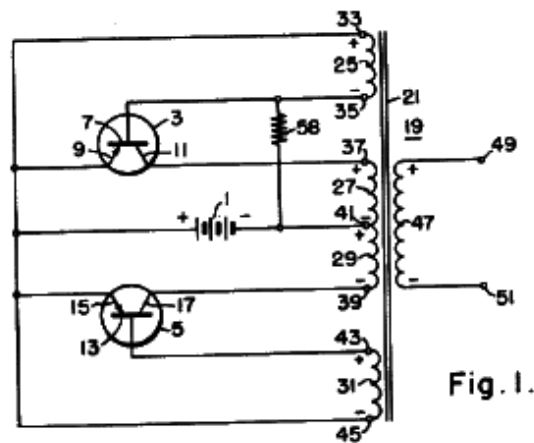
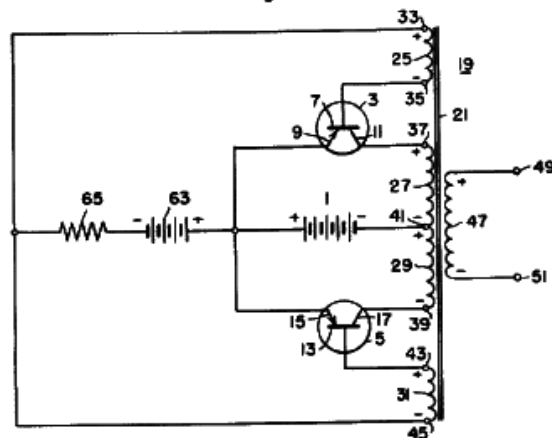


Fig. 4.



¹These circuits are essentially high-powered oscillators, with the transistors performing the dual roles of oscillation and power amplification for the AC load.

Fig. 5.

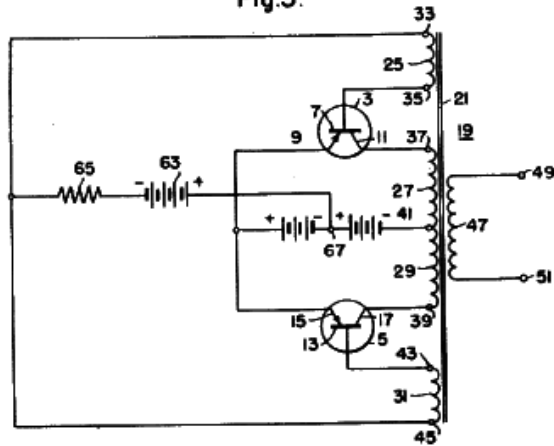


Fig. 6.

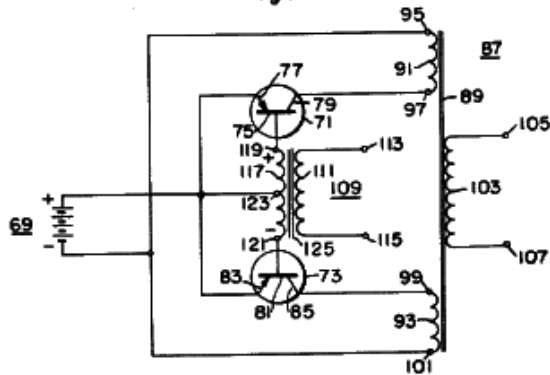


Fig. 7.

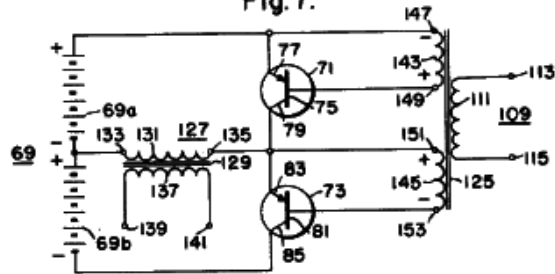
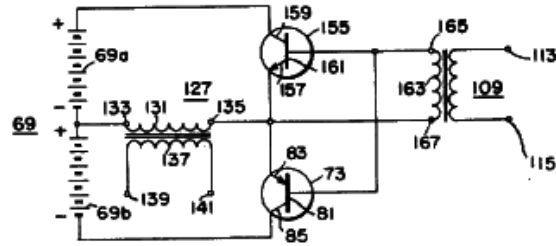
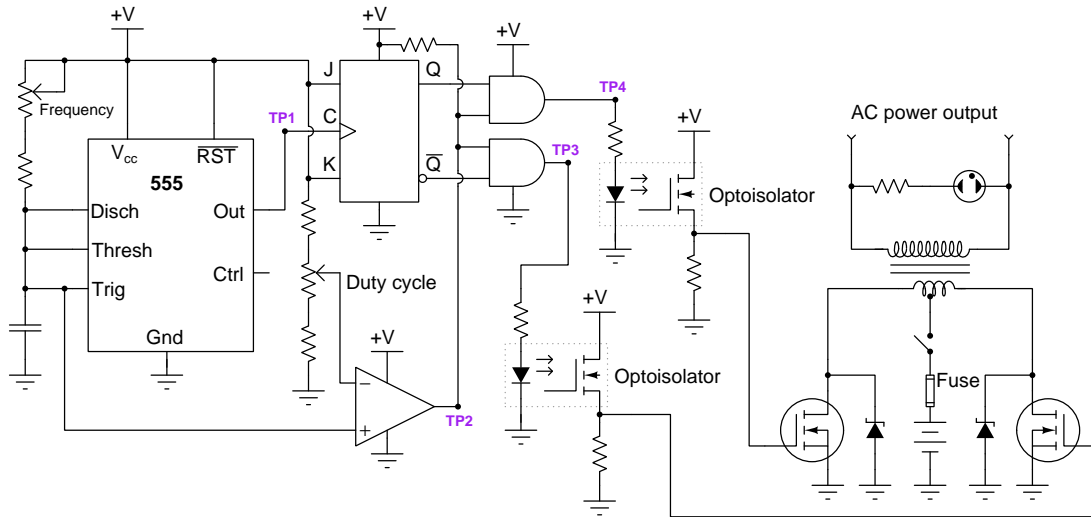


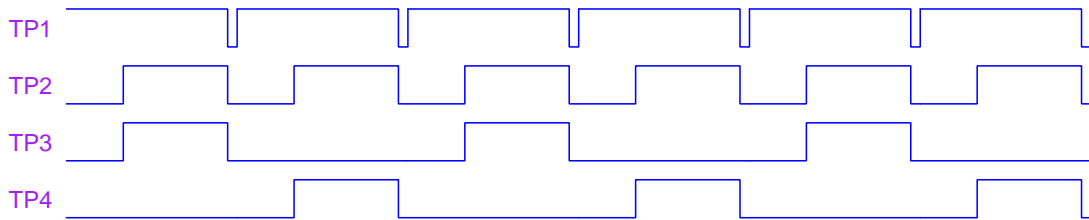
Fig. 8.



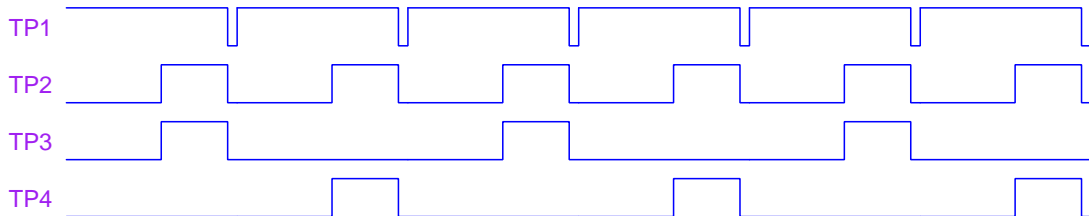
2.2 Example: inverter using a 555 timer



Duty cycle > 50%:

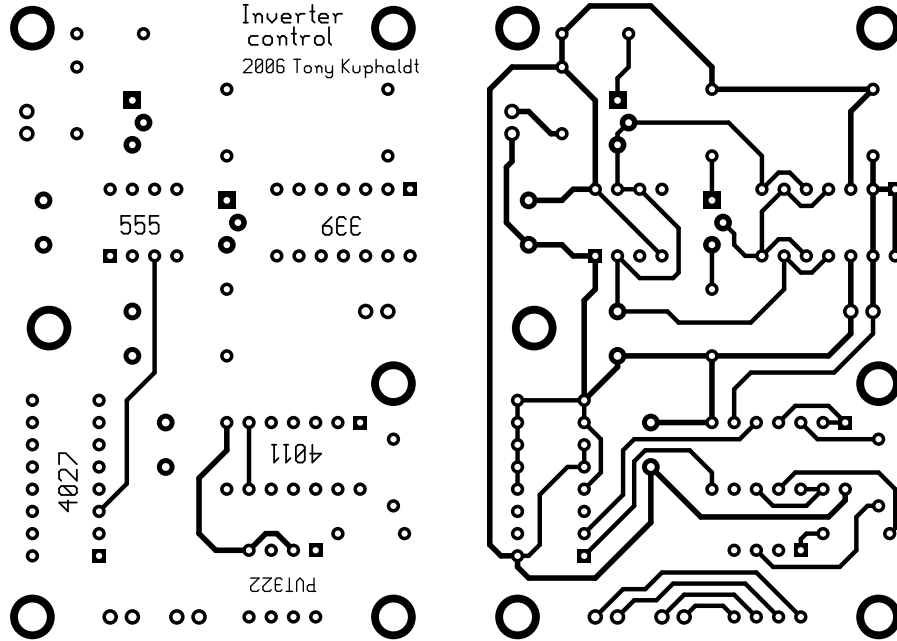


Duty cycle < 50%:

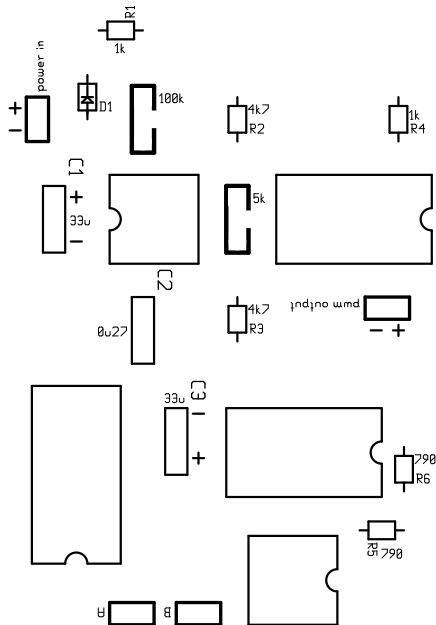


The AC output of this inverter is a “modified sine wave” which is really just a square wave with reduced duty cycle during each half-cycle.

Front-copper and rear-copper PCB layers for the control circuitry shown here:

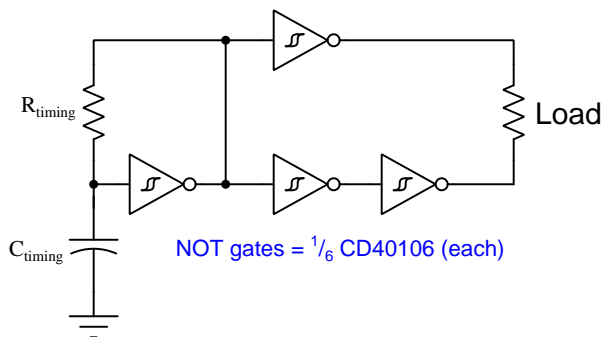


Front-silkscreen layer shown here:



2.3 Example: inverter using NOT gates

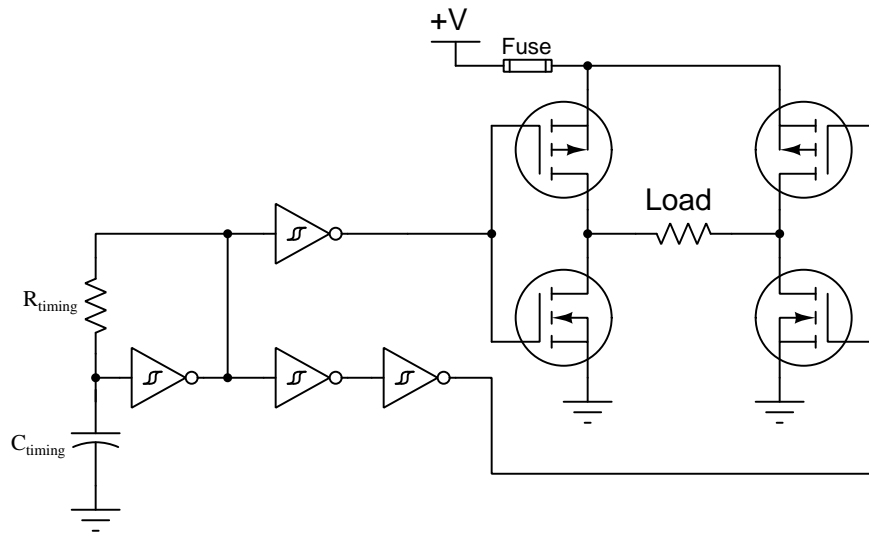
This proof-of-concept inverter uses a Schmitt-trigger NOT gate in conjunction with a resistor and a capacitor to form a simple relaxation oscillator. The remaining NOT gates simply “buffer” the oscillator’s square-wave output signal so that the oscillator does not bear the burden of powering the load, that burden borne by the buffering NOT gates instead:



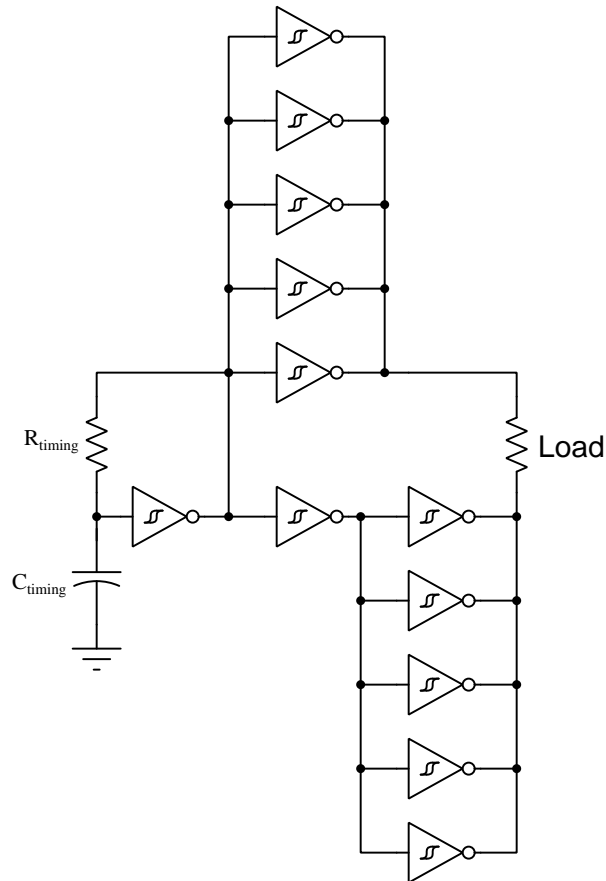
Those buffering NOT gates need not be Schmitt trigger in nature, but since NOT gates usually come in IC packages of six it makes sense to use them anyway rather than to let the other five Schmitt trigger gates in the CD40106 IC go unused.

Frequency is set by the combination of R_{timing} and C_{timing} . Load voltage will truly be alternating (AC) in nature, as one side will be “low” as the other is driven “high”, then those logical states will reverse to reverse the load’s voltage polarity. Load current is limited by the current sourcing and sinking capabilities of the NOT gates, which in the case of the CD40106 is in the order of several milliAmperes.

For higher load current applications, this circuit could be connected to an H-bridge like such:



Another method of achieving more load current is to gang multiple NOT gates together in parallel like so:



Since these typically come packaged six per DIP integrated circuit, it should be easy to gang together at least a few on each side of the load resistor. The example shown here makes full use of the NOT gates contained within two CD40106 ICs, but bear in mind even with all these NOT gates the load current capability will not be nearly as great as if using an H-bridge circuit with power MOSFETs.

Chapter 3

Tutorial

3.1 DC versus AC

Direct current (DC) is electricity with a constant direction and polarity, such as that output by a chemical battery or a solar cell. *Alternating current* (AC) is electricity whose direction and polarity periodically reverse, such as that output by an alternator.

Electric power “grid” networks largely use AC for multiple¹ reasons:

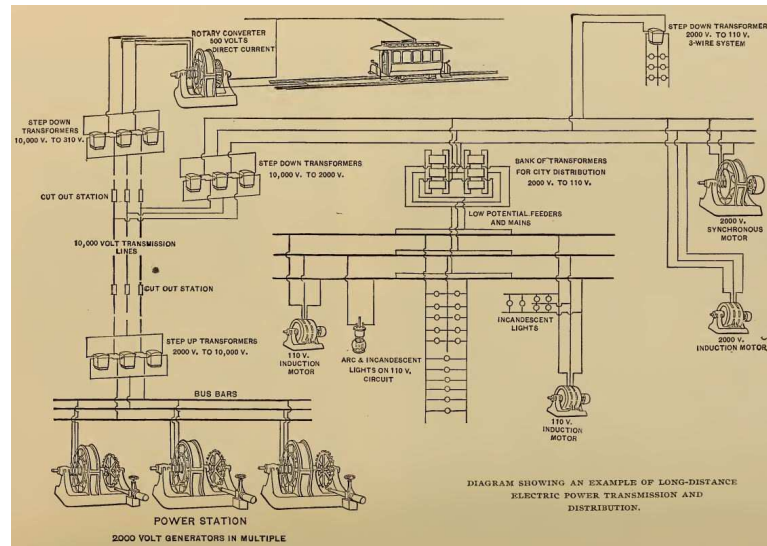
- AC permits the use of *transformers*, which allow us to “step” voltage and current to levels suitable for economic long-distance transmission (high V , low I) as well as points of customer use (low V , high I).
- AC generators and AC motors have no need for sliding-contact electrical terminals as is the case with DC, making them simpler and more reliable.

However, there are some electrical devices that are inherently DC, necessitating conversion either to or from AC when used within an otherwise AC power system. One such device is a photovoltaic solar panel used for generating electricity from sunlight. These panels use PN semiconductor junctions, naturally outputting DC when struck by light. In order to include such panels as sources in an AC power grid, the DC output of each panel must be converted into AC at the proper voltage, frequency, and phase. Another example of an inherently DC electrical source is a chemical battery. If included in an AC power system as an emergency source during power outages, this too requires some means of converting DC into AC suitable for the grid.

The problem of DC-AC conversion is not new, although the solutions have evolved dramatically over the years. In the 19th century, prior to the advent of truly *electronic* devices such as vacuum tubes and semiconductor components such as transistors, the most practical means of DC-AC conversion was to mechanically couple a motor to a generator. A DC motor spinning an AC generator would accomplish DC-AC conversion; an AC motor spinning a DC generator would do the opposite.

¹Some interesting advantages of AC over DC had historical significance, but are not so important now. One example is electrolytic decomposition of early wire insulation, which is a greater problem for DC than for AC due to DC’s constant polarity.

In the following illustration we see a simplified schematic diagram of an electric power system dating from the year 1895². In this diagram we see AC generators driven by water turbines at Niagara Falls, sending electric power to various loads. One of those loads is an electrically-driven streetcar trolley which at the time was only practical to propel using *DC* electric traction motors. A motor-generator device called a *rotary converter* translated the 310 Volt three-phase AC power into 500 Volt DC power for the trolley system:



Of course, this is an example of AC-to-DC conversion rather than DC-to-AC conversion, but the fundamental principle of a motor-generator apparatus works either way.

Converting between DC and AC using rotating machinery is inefficient due to resistive and magnetic³ energy dissipation in the motor/generator mechanisms, and these machines were rather large, heavy, and maintenance-intensive as well. Suffice it to say, electromechanical DC/AC conversion is a dead technology. What has replaced this legacy technology for DC/AC conversion is circuits using transistors and other semiconductor devices to periodically “steer” electric currents in different directions. Converting AC into DC is called *rectification*, and it requires nothing more than *diodes* to construct a rectifier circuit. Converting DC into AC, however, is a much more complicated matter.

²The source for this historical illustration is *Cassier's Magazine*, which was an engineering periodical published in the late 1800's and early 1900's out of London, England. The Smithsonian Institute maintains online archives of *Cassier's* spanning many years, and it is a treasure-trove for those interested in the history of mechanical, electrical, chemical, and civil engineering.

³This mostly takes the form of energy dissipation from magnetic *hysteresis*. As you alternate the magnetic field direction within a ferromagnetic material, the magnetic domains within that material must reverse polarity, and in so doing there is some energy converted into heat. Materials with a narrow B-H curve (i.e. magnetically “soft” materials) exhibit the lowest hysteretic losses, and alloys engineered to optimize that curve have been developed for the purpose of reducing these losses. However, those losses cannot be fully eliminated, which is one reason why rotating electrical machinery and transformers alike cannot be 100% efficient.

3.2 BJT and FET review

In order to properly understand how modern DC-to-AC converter circuits work, we must be familiar with the operation of both bipolar junction transistors (BJTs) and field-effect transistors (FETs).

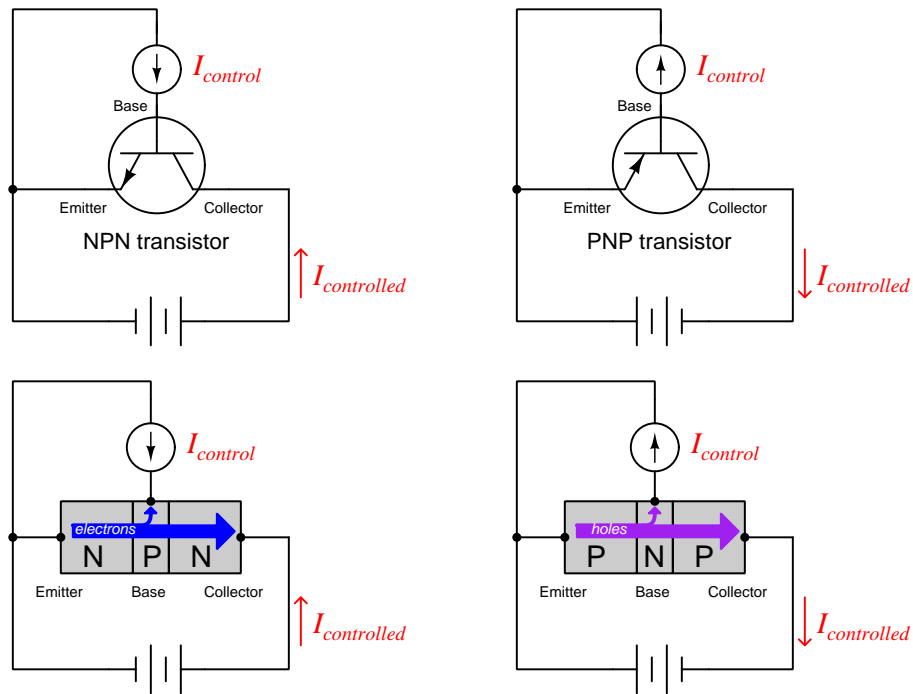
Transistors are semiconductor devices allowing one electrical signal to control another. Specifically, transistors work by allowing a relatively weak electrical signal to control the electrical conductivity of a solid material, and this modulated conductivity permits or denies passage of a much stronger electrical signal. This is the basic principle of *amplification*: where a smaller signal exerts control over a larger signal. Two major types of transistors dominate modern electronic circuits, *bipolar junction transistors* (BJTs) and *field-effect transistors* (FETs). Each has its own unique principle of operation⁴, and although these principles differ markedly, both types of transistors perform similar functions within similar circuits.

Bipolar junction transistors function on the basis of *charge carrier injection*, where a weak electrical signal injects charge carriers into a region of semiconducting material previously lacking plentiful carriers. This injection of foreign charge carriers turns a formerly non-conductive material into a conductive material, allowing the transistor to pass a stronger (i.e. amplified) signal.

Field-effect transistors function on the basis of *channel width modulation*, where the effective width of an electrically conductive channel (i.e. pathway) varies with the application of an electric field from a weak voltage signal. This channel may be “pinched off” or “turned on” by this controlling voltage signal, allowing the transistor to conduct a stronger (i.e. amplified) signal.

⁴Most functional characteristics of transistors may be deduced from a proper understanding of these operating principles. Important behaviors such as the transistor’s default state (i.e. whether or not it conducts current in the absence of a “driving” signal), as well as the necessary drive signal types to turn the transistor on (or off) also logically follow from these principles. When first learning about transistors, try to follow the logic connecting each transistor’s operating principles with its functional characteristics. Avoid making the common mistake of merely committing facts to memory, devoid of understanding.

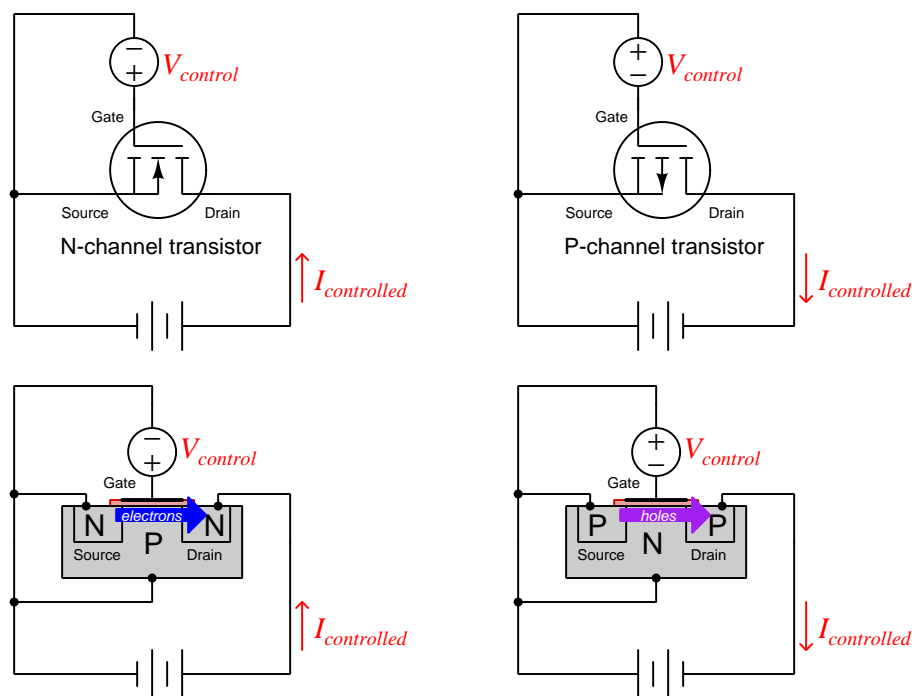
Bipolar junction transistors consist of a three-layer “sandwich” of differently-doped semiconductor materials, denoted either NPN or PNP. These three layers form two dissimilar “PN” junctions, hence the name *bipolar*. The middle layer (called the *base*) acts as a controlled-conductivity bridge between the other two layers (called the *emitter* and *collector*) conducting the controlled current. When unstimulated, base-emitter and base-collector depletion regions together prohibit current between collector and emitter. However, if an external source forward-biases the base-emitter junction to collapse that depletion region, charge carriers will be “emitted” by the emitter into the extremely thin base layer where most of them coast through the other side of the base and become “injected” into the depletion region of the base-collector junction, thus making the transistor conductive from end to end. Bipolar junction transistors are *minority-carrier* devices because the majority-type charge carriers emitted by the emitter layer are “minority” type once they enter the base (e.g. holes emitted from a P-type emitter, being injected in the N-type base).



The key to turning on a BJT is to forward-bias the base-emitter junction in order to initiate this charge-injection process. Without this injection of charge carriers into the depleted base-collector region, the transistor defaults to its “off” state because there is no continuous region of charge carriers naturally stretching from emitter to collector.

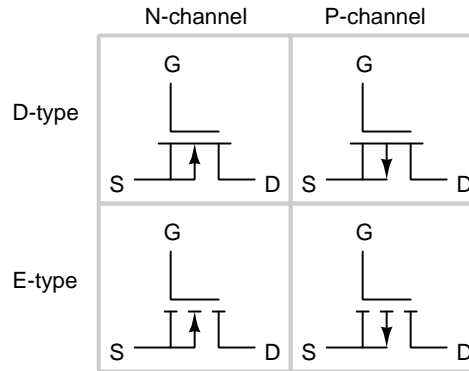
Field-effect transistors consist of a channel formed of one type of semiconductor material (i.e. either P-type or N-type) that is either flanked or interrupted by a region of the opposite doping type. An electric field applied transverse to this channel affects the quantities and types of charge carriers residing within the channel. Like bipolar junction transistors which exist in NPN and PNP forms, field-effect transistors may be manufactured with either N-type channels or P-type channels. However, unlike BJTs, there are several distinct design variations for FETs: *junction* FETs and two different forms of *insulated-gate* FETs (commonly called *MOSFETs* for their metal-oxide-semiconductor construction). For the sake of simplicity, we will show an *enhancement-mode* MOSFET in the following illustration because it behaves most similarly to a BJT.

Instead of emitter, base, and collector terminals, FETs have *source*, *gate*, and *drain* terminals. The controlled current flows between drain and source, while the gate terminal provides a point to apply the controlling voltage signal. Field-effect transistors are *majority-carrier* devices because the charge carriers leaving the source to pass through the channel (e.g. holes through a P-type channel, electrons through an N-type channel) are native to that channel's doping, never traversing a region of opposite doping:

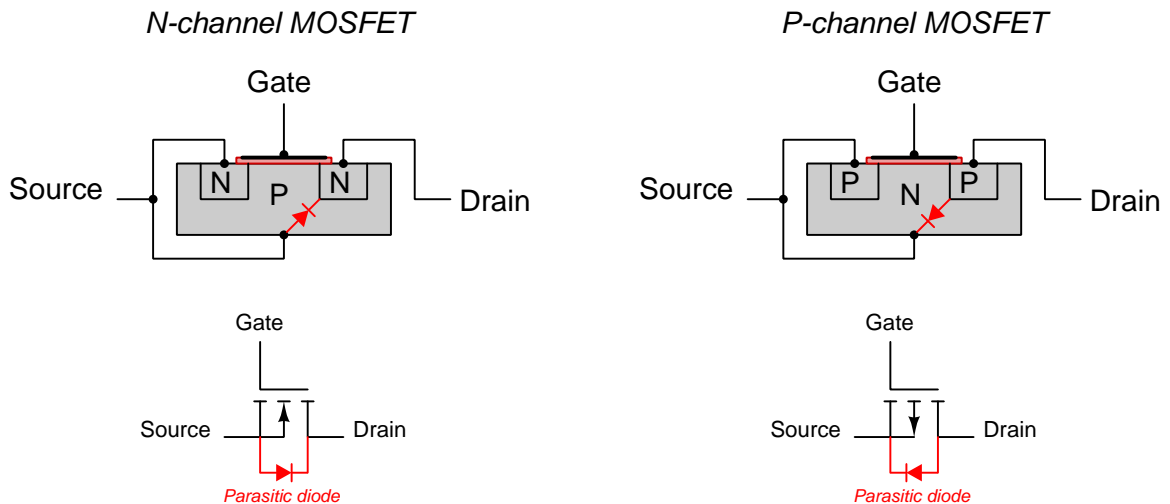


The key to turning on a FET is to electrostatically attract more majority carriers into the channel by giving the gate terminal a polarity opposite the channel type. Reversing this polarity forces the FET to turn off. Different forms of FET (JFET, depletion-mode, enhancement-mode) possess different natural states. JFETs are normally-on devices which may only be turned off (i.e. depleted). D-type MOSFETs are normally-half-on devices which may be turned on more (i.e. enhanced) or turned off more (i.e. depleted). E-type MOSFETs – the type shown above – are normally-off devices which may only be turned on (i.e. enhanced) similar to the behavior of a BJT.

Although the MOSFET is fundamentally a four-terminal device, they are often constructed with the substrate and source terminals connected by wire, which means the controlling voltage must be impressed between the gate and source terminals:



An interesting consequence of this internal connection is that it results in a single PN diode-like parasitic junction connected between the source and drain terminals:



When the source and drain terminals are properly biased⁵, this parasitic diode will be reverse-biased and have no effect on the transistor's operation. However, if source-drain polarity ever reverses, this diode will become forward-biased and short past the transistor's channel!

⁵The arrow inside of a MOSFET symbol actually shows you which way this parasitic diode points! For any PN junction the tip of the arrowhead points toward the "N" side and the wide end of the arrowhead is on the "P" side. Note how the wide end of the N-channel MOSFET's arrow connects to the source terminal, as does the anode of the parasitic diode; likewise the tip of the P-channel MOSFET's arrowhead connects to the source terminal, as does the cathode of the parasitic diode. Your task in deciding how to connect any MOSFET into a circuit is to keep this parasitic diode reverse-biased so that the transistor will not be bypassed by it.

Field-effect transistor (FET) and bipolar junction transistor (BJT) behavior differs in several important ways:

Characteristic	FET	BJT
Charge carrier type	Majority	Minority
Principle of operation	Effective width of a continuous channel modulated by voltage	Charge carriers injected into a depleted region
Drive signal	Voltage only (no DC current)	Voltage and current both necessary
Switching time limit	RC time constant of gate capacitance and drive resistance	Stored charges in base waiting to be swept out
Temperature effect	Greater temperature increases channel resistance	Greater temperature decreases effective resistance
Resting status	Normally-on and normally-off types	Normally-off (only)
Gain	Transconductance $g = \frac{\Delta I_{DS}}{\Delta V_{GS}}$	Beta ratio $\beta = \frac{I_C}{I_B}$
Current regulation	Depletion region “pinch” effect intensifies with increasing V_{DS}	Rate of charge injection into base sets a maximum limit on I_C

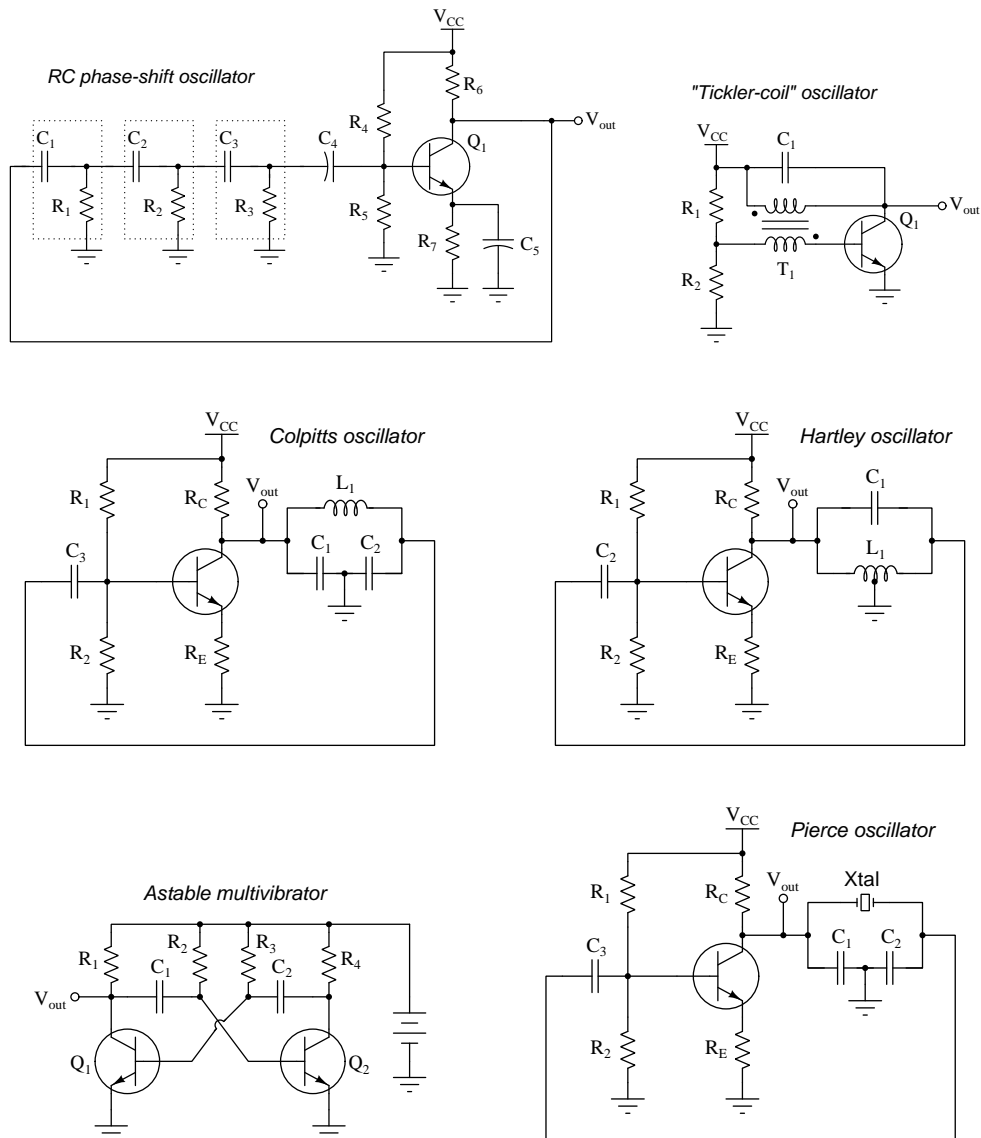
Generally speaking, FETs are capable of switching on and off faster⁶ than BJTs, and FETs generally offer less resistance⁷ to the controlled current when fully turned on than BJTs which means FETs generally have higher current ratings than comparable BJTs. However, comparable BJTs generally have higher voltage ratings than FETs. Perhaps the starkest contrast between the two transistor technologies is their drive requirements: FETs never require a constant current at their gate terminals, whereas BJTs *do* require base current to continuously activate.

⁶The natural resistive-capacitive time delay of an FET’s gate may be minimized through external circuit design, but the stored charge within a BJT’s base region is largely a function of a transistor’s internal construction.

⁷Charge carriers crossing the base-emitter junction of a BJT require an energy investment to do so, and much of this energy later dissipates in the form of heat. No such intrinsic barrier exists within a FET, which means conductance is limited only by charge carrier density and channel area.

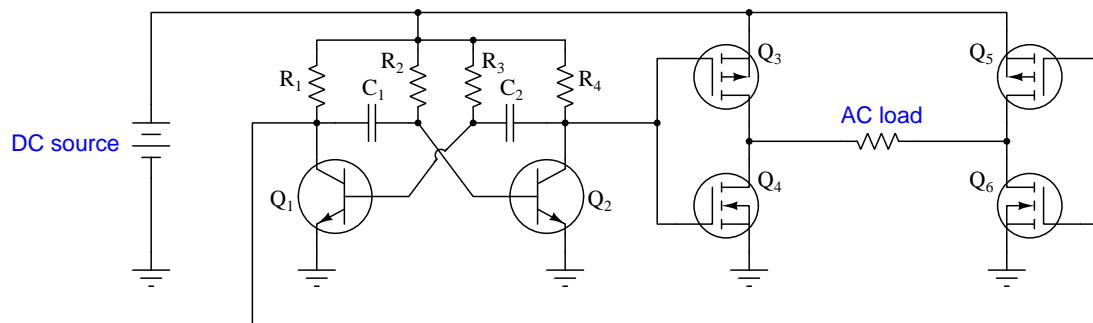
3.3 Oscillator circuits

A class of electronic circuits called *oscillators* converts DC electrical energy into oscillating (AC) signals, but most oscillator designs cannot output enough energy for the types of loads common to electrical power systems. Connecting a heavy load to the V_{out} terminals of an oscillator circuit will likely kill the oscillations, or at least cause the frequency and/or amplitude to shift. Oscillator circuits are therefore better-suited for applications such as audio tone generation, radio wave transmission, and digital clock pulse generators.



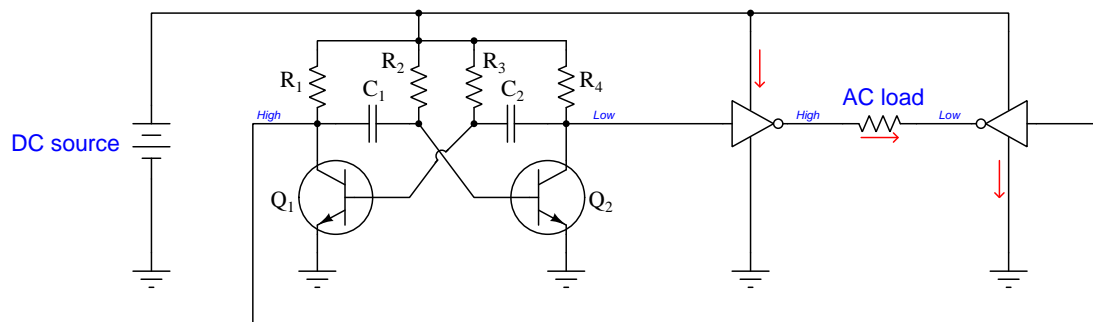
One way to boost the power-handling capability of an oscillator circuit is to connect its output to a set of power transistors. For our example circuits we will use the astable multivibrator oscillator design to send pulse signals triggering dedicated power transistors. The gain of the power transistors effectively shield the oscillator circuit from any effects of load changes, allowing its AC amplitude and frequency to remain unaffected by loading.

One such inverter circuit is shown in the following diagram, the astable multivibrator's dual output signals alternately driving pairs of MOSFET power transistors:

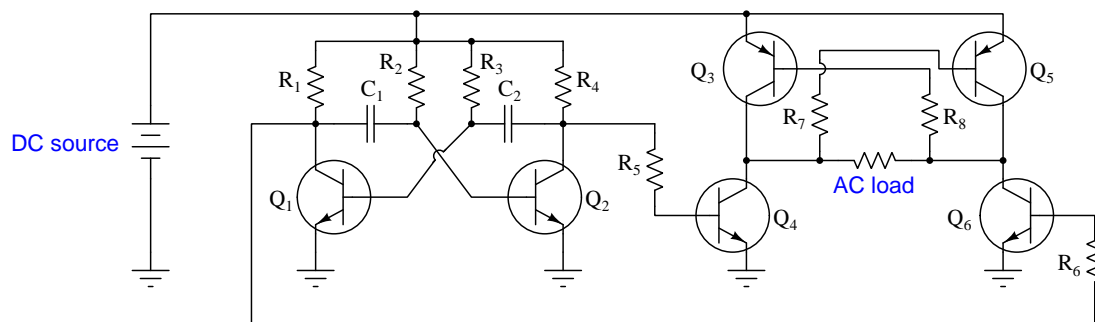


As the multivibrator oscillates, the pulse signals at the collector terminals of Q_1 and Q_2 will be complementary square waves: when V_{CE1} is “high”, V_{CE2} will be “low”, and vice-versa. These alternating pulse signals trigger the MOSFET gates in complementary fashion as well: when V_{CE1} is “high” and V_{CE2} is “low”, MOSFETs Q_3 and Q_6 will be turned on while Q_4 and Q_5 remain off. This sends DC current through the AC load from left to right. That load current direction reverses when the multivibrator enters the second half of its cycle (V_{CE2} “high” and V_{CE1} “low”).

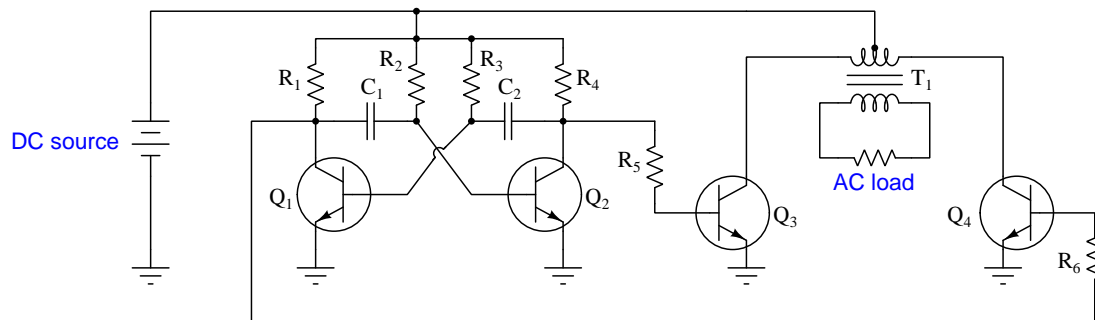
One way to model the MOSFET “H-bridge” network is to consider each totem-pole transistor pair as a heavy-duty version of a CMOS logic inverter (NOT) gate. As the multivibrator drives these two NOT gates, the load experiences true alternating current. This next diagram shows the MOSFET pairs as NOT gates, with “high” and “low” logic levels and current directions shown for the condition where V_{CE1} is in a “high” state:



A bipolar transistor variation on this same *H-bridge* circuit design works by having the multivibrator signals trigger the two sinking (NPN) transistors while the two sourcing (PNP) transistors activate when their respective base terminals find a path to ground through one of the “on” NPN transistors:



Another power-stage design for this inverter circuit replaces two of the power transistors with a transformer having a center-tapped winding:



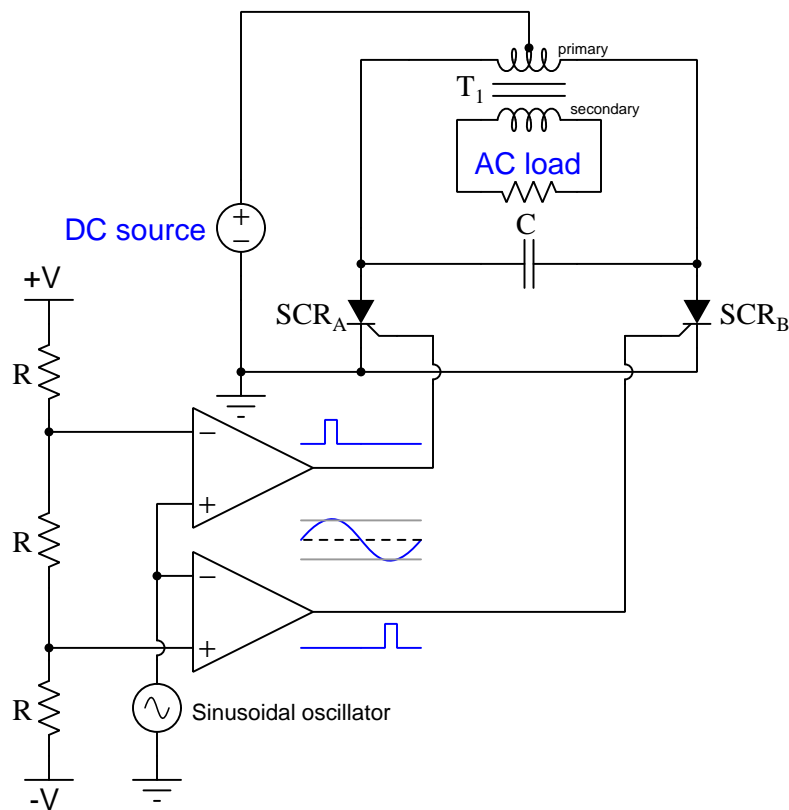
The transformer-based design, while adding bulk and expense to the circuit, enjoys the advantages of electrical isolation⁸ between the AC load and driving circuits as well as the ability to output AC voltages significantly greater than or less than the DC source voltage by exploiting the transformer’s turns ratio.

Other possibilities exist on this same theme. For example, we could replace the astable multivibrator circuit with a more sophisticated oscillator, perhaps one based on operational amplifiers. We may also consider power-switching devices other than BJT or MOSFET transistors. Both changes are evident in the circuit shown next.

⁸For example, with the AC load isolated by the transformer, we have the freedom to ground one terminal of it to form definite “neutral” and “hot” conductors. This is not possible in either MOSFET or BJT “H-bridge” power stages because the connection to circuit ground alternates with each half-cycle.

3.4 Thyristor converters

Silicon-Controlled Rectifiers (SCRs) are a viable alternative to transistors, and with their *thyristor* behavior (internal positive feedback causing them to latch “on” once triggered and latch “off” once current is halted through them), their power dissipation in the “on” state will be less than for most types of transistors. However, SCRs must be *forced* out of conduction because a thyristor does not naturally turn off like a power transistor when their gate signal is removed. A common method of forced thyristor commutation uses the stored energy within a capacitor to force one SCR to commutate when the other is triggered:



A thought experiment reveals how this forced commutation works. Imagine SCR_A conducting and SCR_B non-conducting, energizing *only* the left-half of the transformer winding. In this condition, capacitor C drops the primary winding’s full voltage, positive on right and negative on left. Once the lower comparator generates a “high” pulse signal, SCR_B turns on and causes the capacitor (now acting as a voltage source) to deliver a surge of current from left to right. This surge diverts the primary winding’s current through the capacitor and down to ground through SCR_B while impressing a reverse bias across SCR_A (+ on cathode and – on anode). The surge of current through SCR_B secures it in the “on” state while the reverse bias across SCR_A forces it off. Current through the left-half of the primary winding decays to zero as the capacitor accumulates a voltage (+ on left, – on right), while current begins to flow through the right-half of the primary winding.

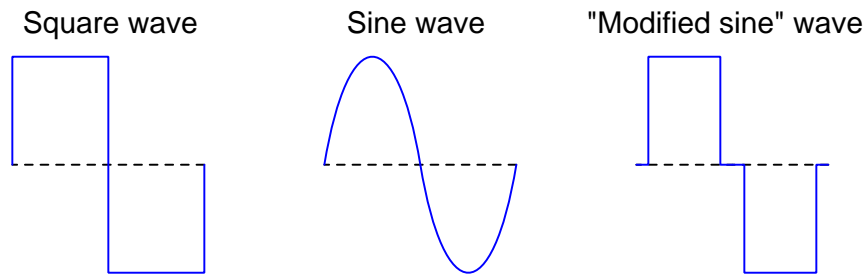
This state persists until the upper comparator triggers SCR_A , at which point the opposite occurs turning SCR_A back on and forcing SCR_B off. At each reversal, the transformer's secondary winding experiences a change in magnetic flux direction, causing the output voltage to alternate polarity. Note how the triggering pulses need only be brief, as the SCRs' latching behavior generates full square-wave AC for the load even if the duty cycle values of these pulses are low.

3.5 Converter output waveforms

So far all the DC-AC converter circuits shown produce square-wave AC output voltage, though this may not be desirable for many types of AC loads. Square waves are rich in *harmonic*⁹ frequencies, and these harmonics often create a range of problems including:

- Excessive coupling of electrical “noise” to adjacent conductors, because the relatively high frequencies of these harmonics constitute high $\frac{dV}{dt}$ voltage rates-of-change and high $\frac{dI}{dt}$ current rates-of-change, resulting in greater noise currents coupled by inter-conductor capacitance and greater noise voltages coupled by mutual inductance (respectively).
- Overheating of transformer cores due to greater levels of *eddy currents* induced in the iron.
- Overheating of AC electric motors due to the “jerking” motion of the rotating magnetic field produced in the motor by square-wave AC.
- Overpowering of AC loads if the square wave has the same peak value as the normal sine wave, given that RMS is equal to peak for a square wave but only equal to $\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}$ peak for a true sine wave.

A compromise solution between square-wave output and true sine-wave output is a *modified-* or *pseudo-*sine wave which is a square-edged pulse waveform having equivalent RMS value to a sine wave of the same peak amplitude:

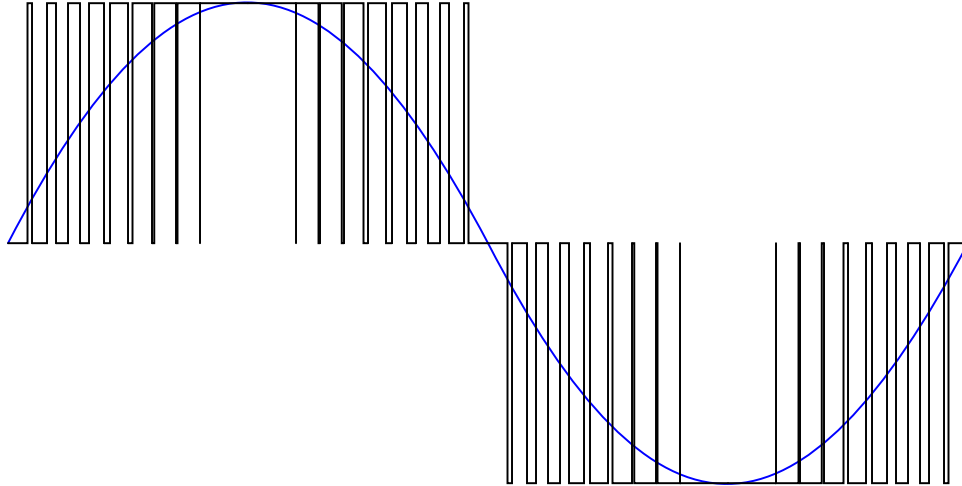


Driving a transistor power stage with a true sine-wave signal is impractical at high power levels because that would result in the power transistors operating in partial-on states rather than fully-on and fully-off where they are most energy-efficient. Therefore, the “modified sine” signal waveshape is a reasonable compromise because it exhibits less harmonic content than a pure square wave but enjoys the same switching efficiency as a square wave. It should be noted, though, that a “modified sine” waveform is not an option for a power stage using thyristors, because of the way we must “commutate” one thyristor by turning the other on: we cannot have both thyristors off at any time. Such square-wave variations require a *transistor*-based output stage.

⁹Any non-sinusoidal waveform is mathematically equivalent to a series of sinusoids at different frequencies, amplitudes, and phase angles. Sinusoidal frequencies that are integer-multiples of the waveform’s fundamental (base) frequency are called *harmonics*. Square waves consist of an infinite series of odd-numbered harmonics.

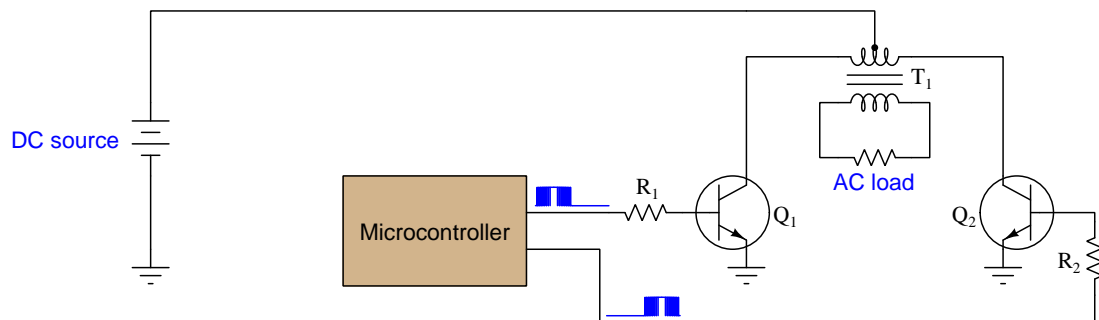
One way to more closely approach the ideal of a sine-wave output from a DC-AC converter circuit is to use *pulse-width modulation*, rapidly turning the power stage transistors on and off in such a way that the average power conveyed to the load follows a sinusoidal curve.

The equivalence between a rapidly-varied pulse-width modulation (PWM) waveform and a sine wave is shown in the following illustration:



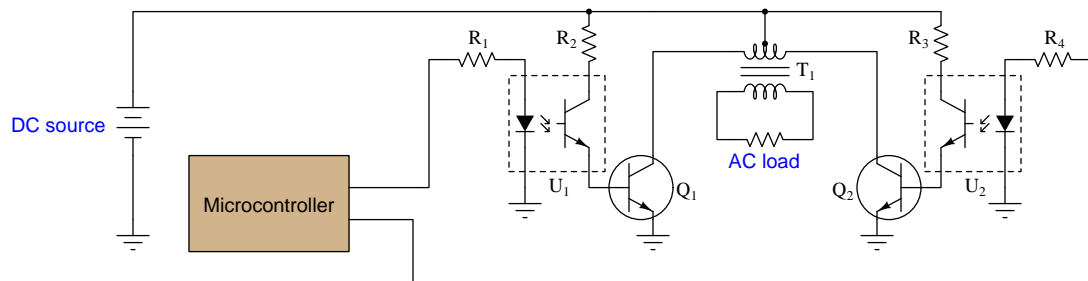
This concept of rapid PWM transistor switching allows the drive to “carve” any arbitrary waveform out of the DC source voltage. Virtually any frequency may be synthesized (up to a maximum limited by the frequency of the PWM pulsing), and any voltage (up to a maximum peak established by the DC source voltage).

Typically we would use a microcontroller or some other programmable digital device to generate the complex PWM patterns necessary to drive the power transistors:



Incorporating PWM into the power transistor drive signals gives us one more useful feature, and that is a means to also control the amplitude of the AC output. Instead of the PWM duty cycle varying from 0% to 100% with every half-cycle of the desired sine waveshape, we may program the microcontroller to vary from 0% to some lesser amount in order to effectively output less than full AC voltage. Control over both the frequency and amplitude of the DC-AC converter's output is very important if we wish to synchronize with an existing AC power grid. Control over both parameters is also important when using such an inverter to drive an AC motor to variable speeds, since we must reduce voltage as we reduce frequency to avoid over-heating the motor at low speeds¹⁰.

An additional feature often seen in power-converter circuitry is *optical isolation* between the signal source (i.e. comparator or microcontroller) and the power-handling components (e.g. transistors). This often takes the form of an *optocoupler* which is a light-emitting diode and photo-sensitive switching component housed in a common integrated circuit (IC) package:



Power transistors Q_1 and Q_2 receive their base current signals through the respective optocoupler transistors, and those transistors in turn are optically triggered by light from the LEDs. This electrically isolates the microcontroller from the power components, which is useful in the event a power transistor were to fail in such a way that it may impose dangerously high voltages to the pins of the microcontroller. In such a fault event, the microcontroller would be spared damage from the power transistor failure.

Some power electronic devices – notably some high-voltage SCRs – may be *directly* triggered by light. Called Light-Activated SCRs (LASCRs), these power devices come equipped with a receiving port designed to interface to a fiber-optic cable, so that pulses of light transmitted through that cable from some controlling device may trigger the SCR while enjoying the full electrical isolation afforded by the non-conducting glass fiber.

¹⁰This concept is known as the Volts-per-Hertz (V/Hz) ratio, and is a standard feature of all variable-frequency AC motor drives (VFDs).

Chapter 4

Historical References

This chapter is where you will find references to historical texts and technologies related to the module's topic.

Readers may wonder why historical references might be included in any modern lesson on a subject. Why dwell on old ideas and obsolete technologies? One answer to this question is that the initial discoveries and early applications of scientific principles typically present those principles in forms that are unusually easy to grasp. Anyone who first discovers a new principle must necessarily do so from a perspective of ignorance (i.e. if you truly *discover* something yourself, it means you must have come to that discovery with no prior knowledge of it and no hints from others knowledgeable in it), and in so doing the discoverer lacks any hindsight or advantage that might have otherwise come from a more advanced perspective. Thus, discoverers are forced to think and express themselves in less-advanced terms, and this often makes their explanations more readily accessible to others who, like the discoverer, comes to this idea with no prior knowledge. Furthermore, early discoverers often faced the daunting challenge of explaining their new and complex ideas to a naturally skeptical scientific community, and this pressure incentivized clear and compelling communication. As James Clerk Maxwell eloquently stated in the Preface to his book *A Treatise on Electricity and Magnetism* written in 1873,

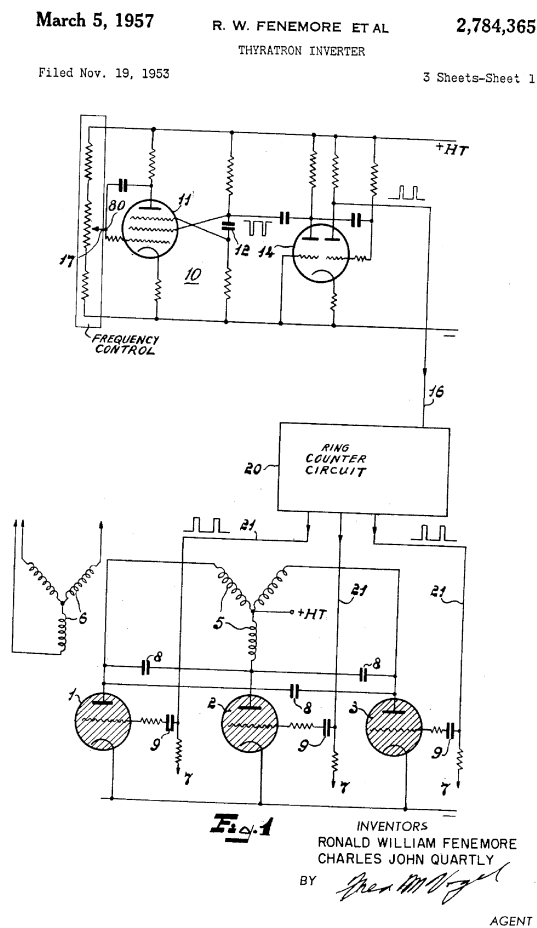
It is of great advantage to the student of any subject to read the original memoirs on that subject, for science is always most completely assimilated when it is in its nascent state . . . [page xi]

Furthermore, grasping the historical context of technological discoveries is important for understanding how science intersects with culture and civilization, which is ever important because new discoveries and new applications of existing discoveries will always continue to impact our lives. One will often find themselves impressed by the ingenuity of previous generations, and by the high degree of refinement to which now-obsolete technologies were once raised. There is much to learn and much inspiration to be drawn from the technological past, and to the inquisitive mind these historical references are treasures waiting to be (re)-discovered.

4.1 Thyratron inverter patent

A predecessor to the solid-state thyristor was the gaseous-tube *thyratron*, similar in construction to a vacuum tube except with a low-pressure gas fill rather than a hard vacuum. The ionization effect of the filling gas provided a similar hysteresis effect for the thyratron tube as the interconnected-transistor structure provides hysteresis for a thyristor: once triggered, a thyratron tube would continue to conduct electricity until something *commutated* it.

The following diagram comes from a United States patent (number 2,784,365 granted 5 March 1957) submitted by inventors Ronald William Fenemore and Charles John Quartly of England, illustrating a circuit designed to invert DC into three-phase AC:



Three thyratron tubes near the bottom of the diagram handle the power switching, each one dedicated to a phase of a Wye-connected transformer primary. The positive pole of the DC supply (+HT) connects to the center of the transformer primary Wye, while the negative pole connects to

the cathodes of all three thyatron tubes. A *ring counter* circuit sends triggering pulses to the grid electrodes of the thyatron tubes, equivalent to the gate terminals of three SCRs.

Like SCRs, thyatrons are impractical to commutate via a negative pulse applied to the gate (grid) terminal, and instead must be commutated by other means. In this case, the conducting tube is commutated by firing another tube, and the key to the success of this scheme is the three capacitors (labeled 8 on the diagram). The inventors describe how this works, which could have easily described how a capacitor-commutated SCR circuit would function if SCRs were invented at the time:

Three capacitors 8 are connected in a ring or delta between the anodes of the thyatrons 1, 2, 3 and operate in such manner as to extinguish automatically one thyatron when the next thyatron is fired. For example, if tube 2 is conducting at a particular instant and tube 3 is then fired by a pulse, the anode of the latter tube will drop in potential due to the current taken. This potential drop will be passed momentarily to the anode of tube 2 and will be sufficient to extinguish tube 2 in the absence of a firing pulse. The anode drop will also be communicated to tube 1, but ineffectively, since tube 1 will already be in the extinguished condition.

Chapter 5

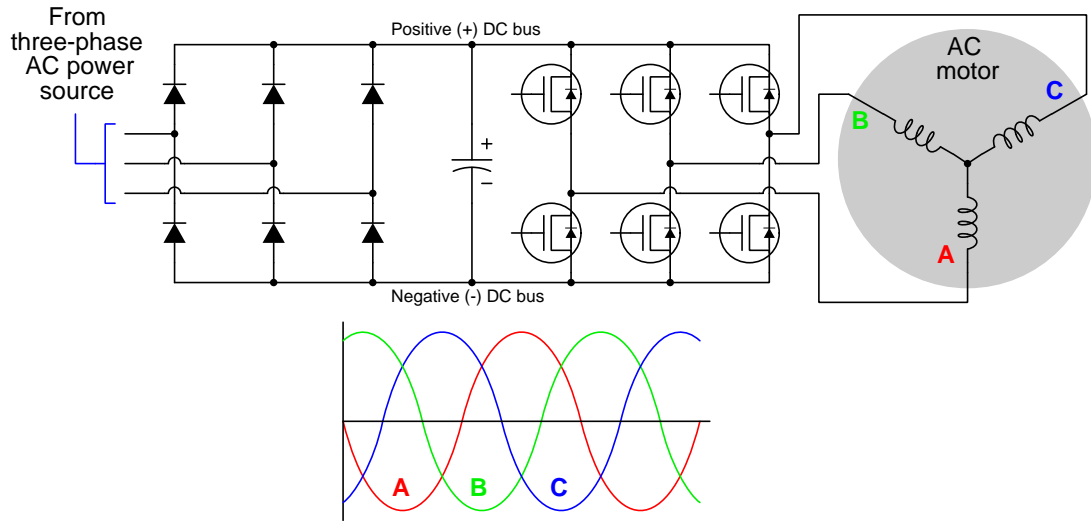
Animations

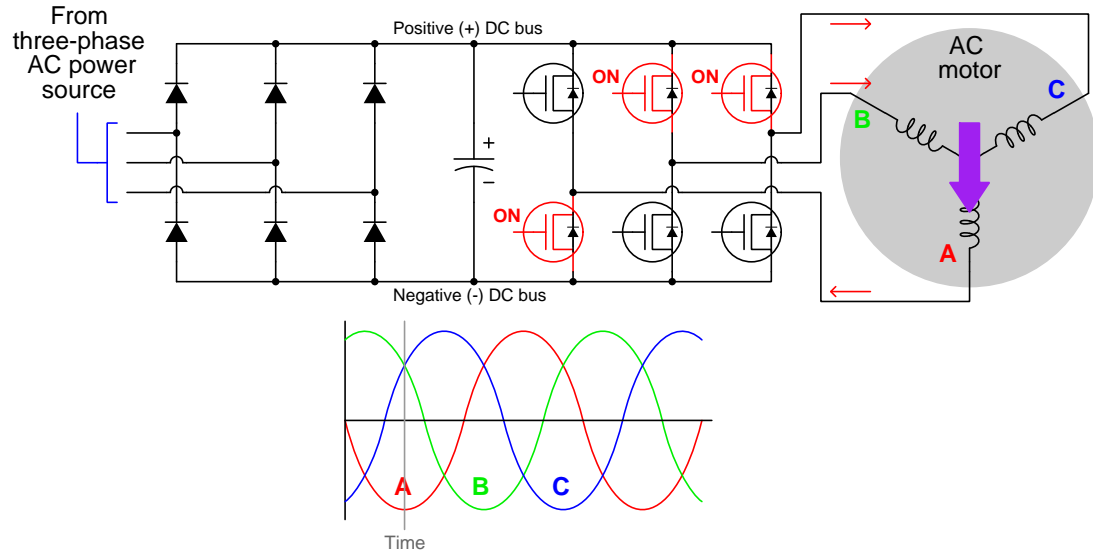
Some concepts are much easier to grasp when seen in *action*. A simple yet effective form of animation suitable to an electronic document such as this is a “flip-book” animation where a set of pages in the document show successive frames of a simple animation. Such “flip-book” animations are designed to be viewed by paging forward (and/or back) with the document-reading software application, watching it frame-by-frame. Unlike video which may be difficult to pause at certain moments, “flip-book” animations lend themselves very well to individual frame viewing.

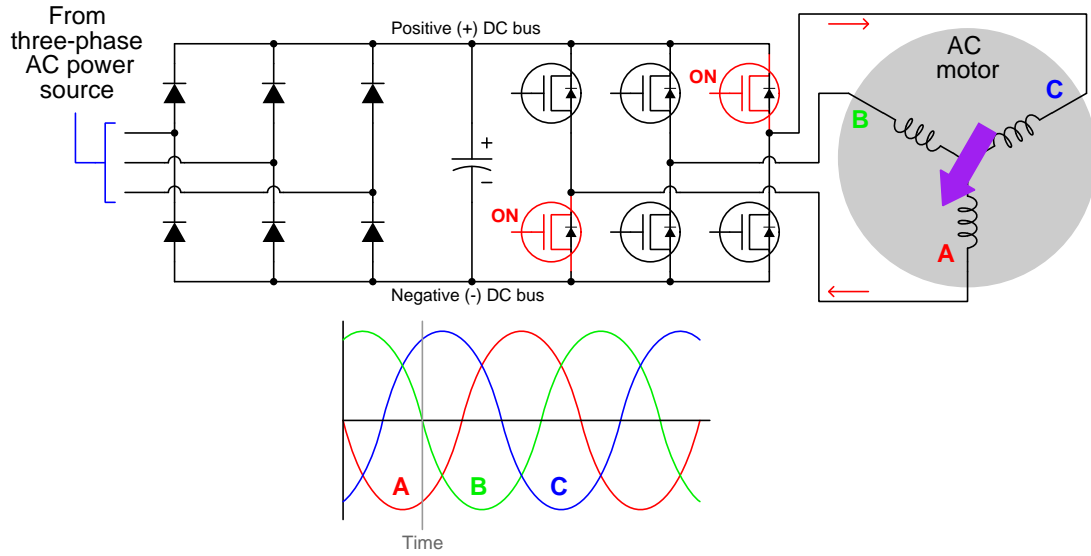
5.1 VFD transistor switching sequence

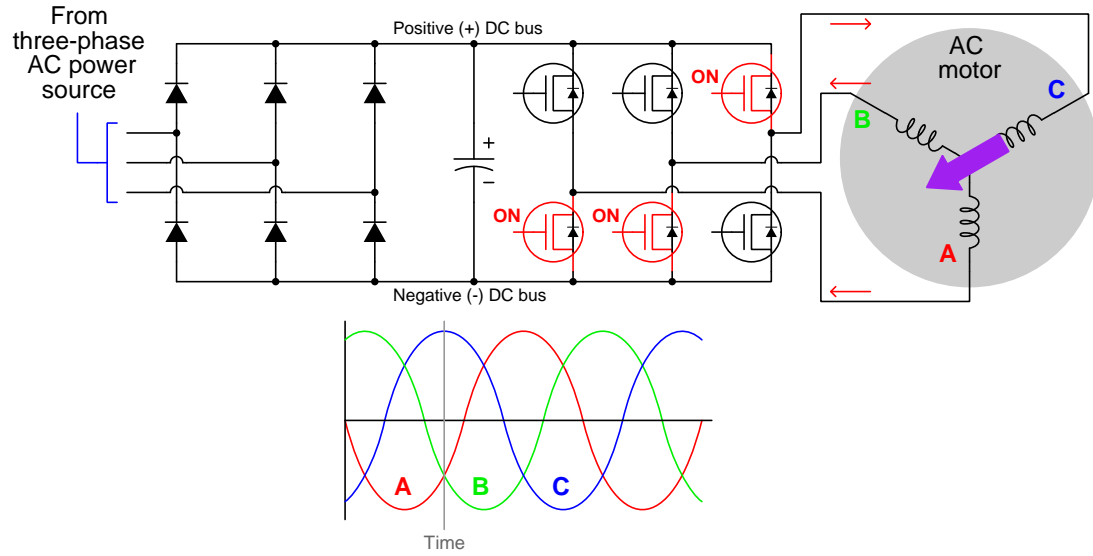
The following animation shows how the “rotating” magnetic field of a three-phase AC induction motor is produced by the interaction of three stator winding sets energized with different phases (A, B, and C) of a three-phase AC power source. A red arrow shows the direction of the *resultant* magnetic field created by the interaction of the three winding sets.

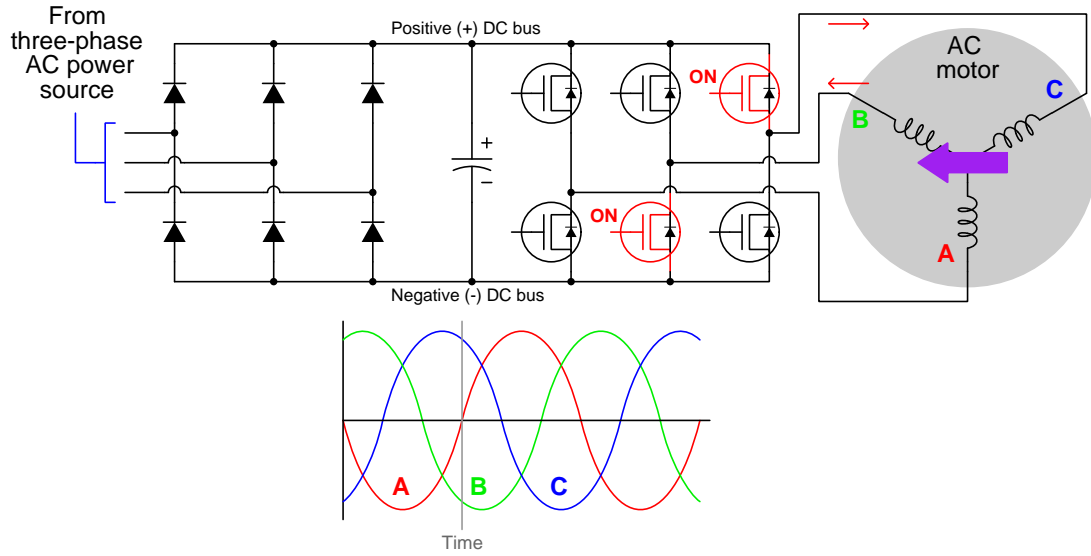
A VFD’s power circuitry consists of a *rectifier* section to convert AC into DC, a *filter* section to “smooth” the DC so that it is more steady than it would be otherwise emerging from the rectifier, and finally an *inverter* section where the filtered DC is converted into three-phase AC at the desired voltage and frequency. In this animation we show the inverter stage’s six transistors turning on and off as necessary to create the rotating magnetic field vector in the motor, but what we do not show is the high-speed pulsing of those transistors within each of their “on” periods necessary to synthesize a *sinusoidal* output current.

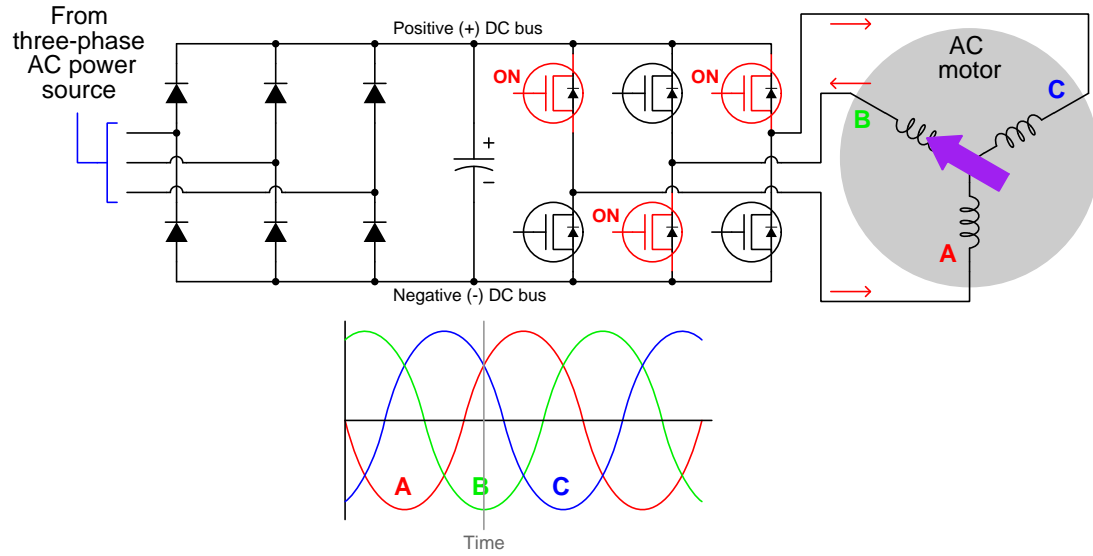


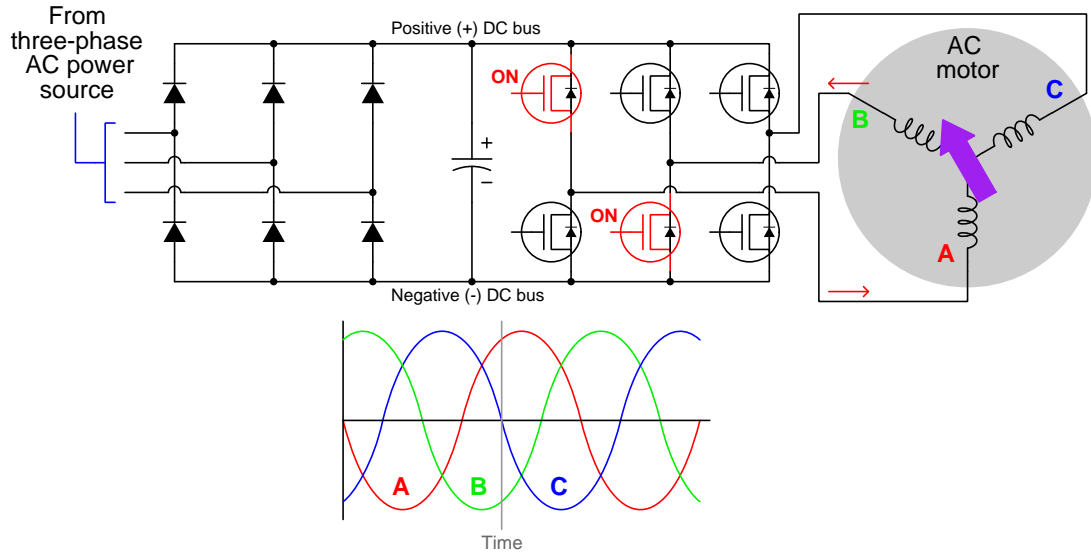


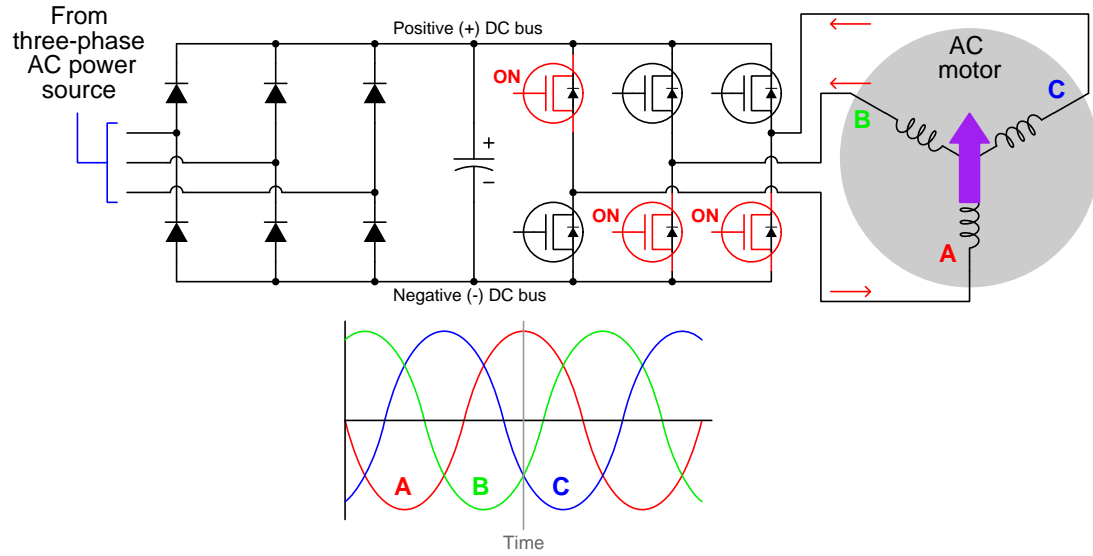


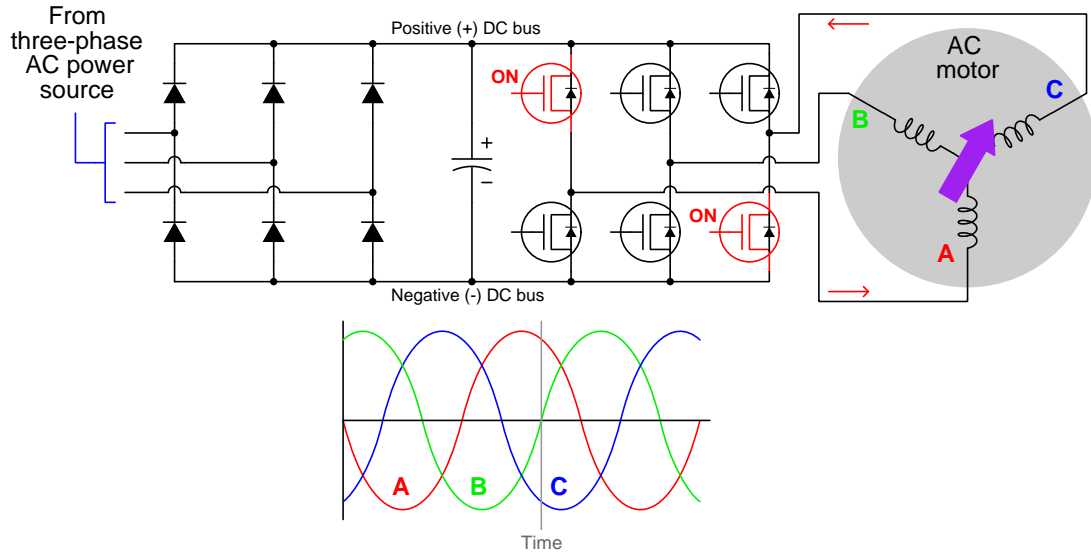


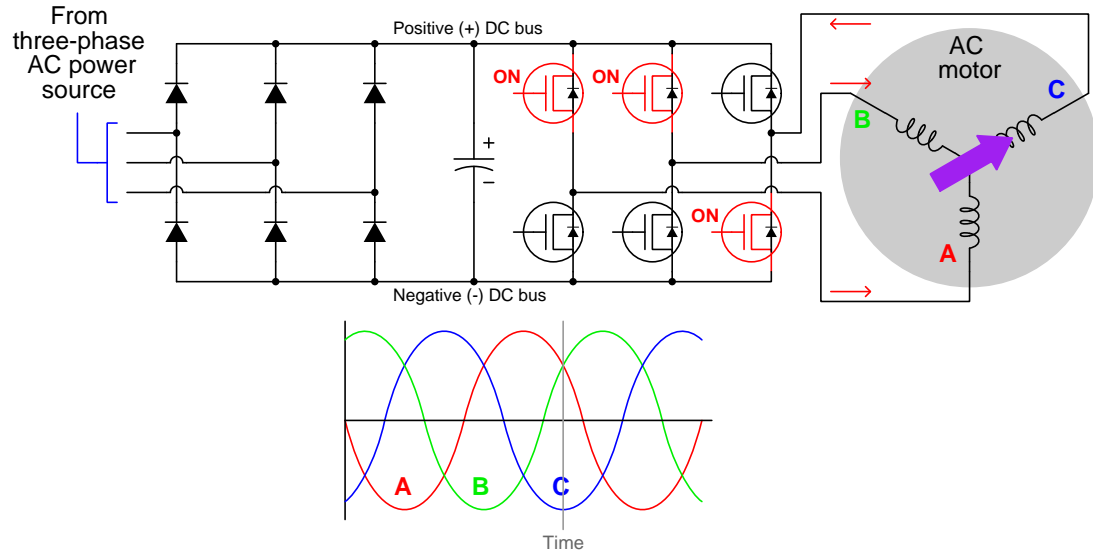


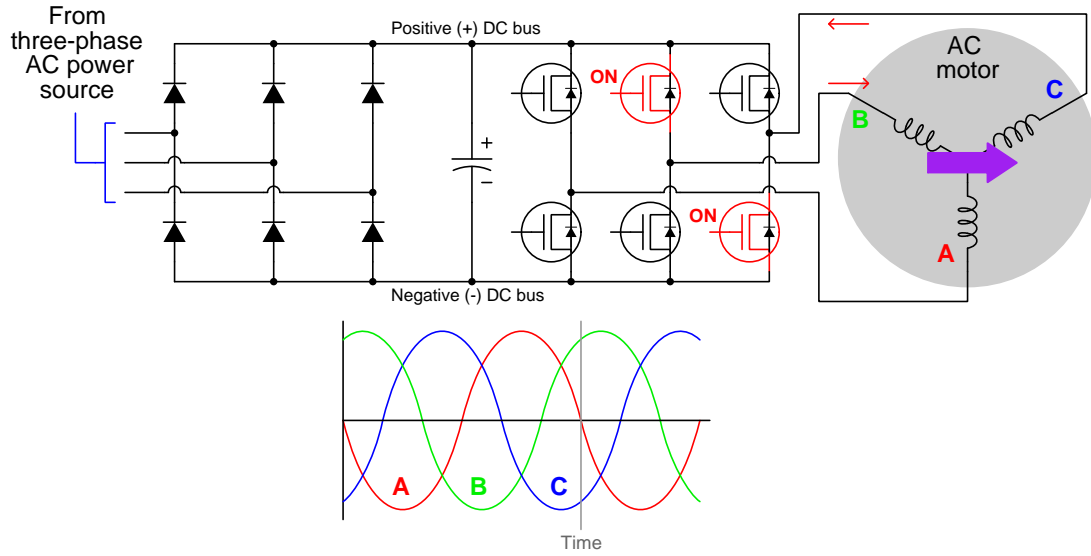


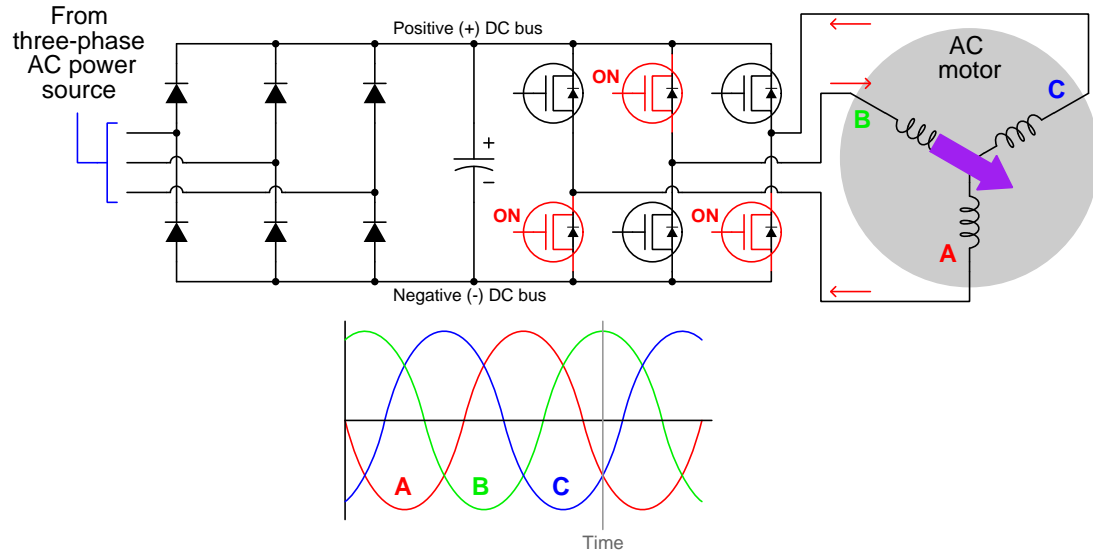


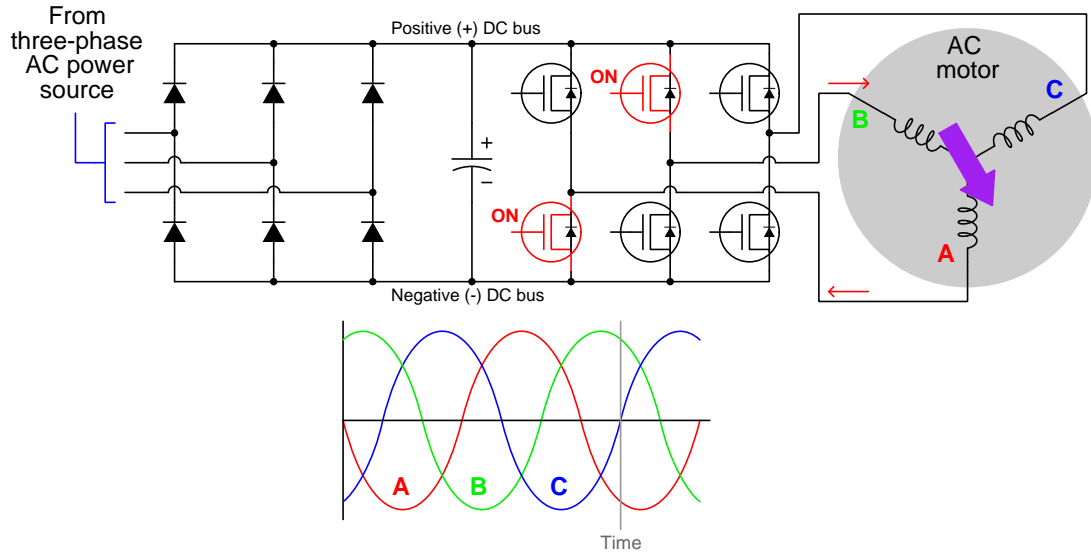


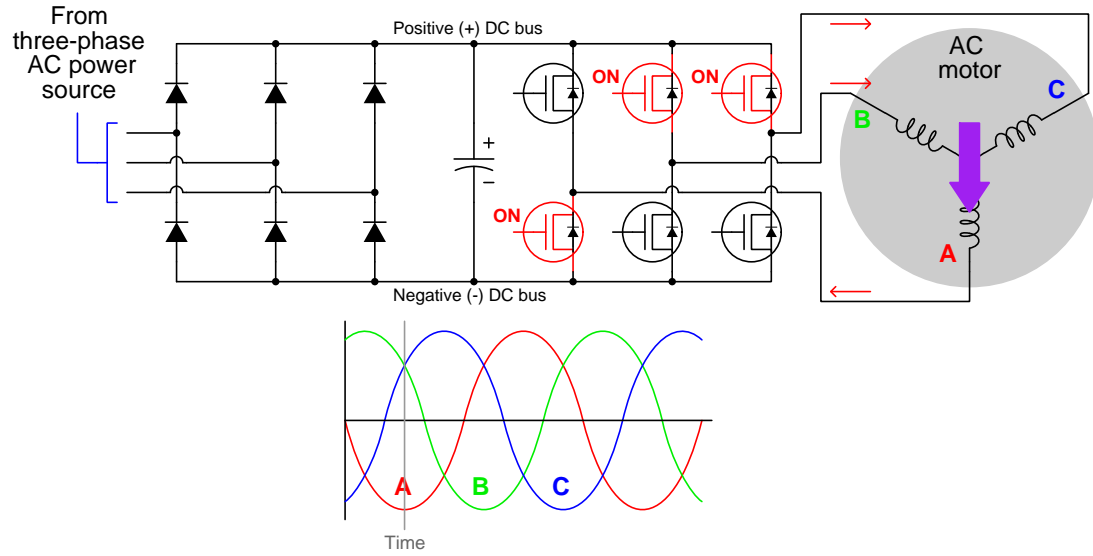


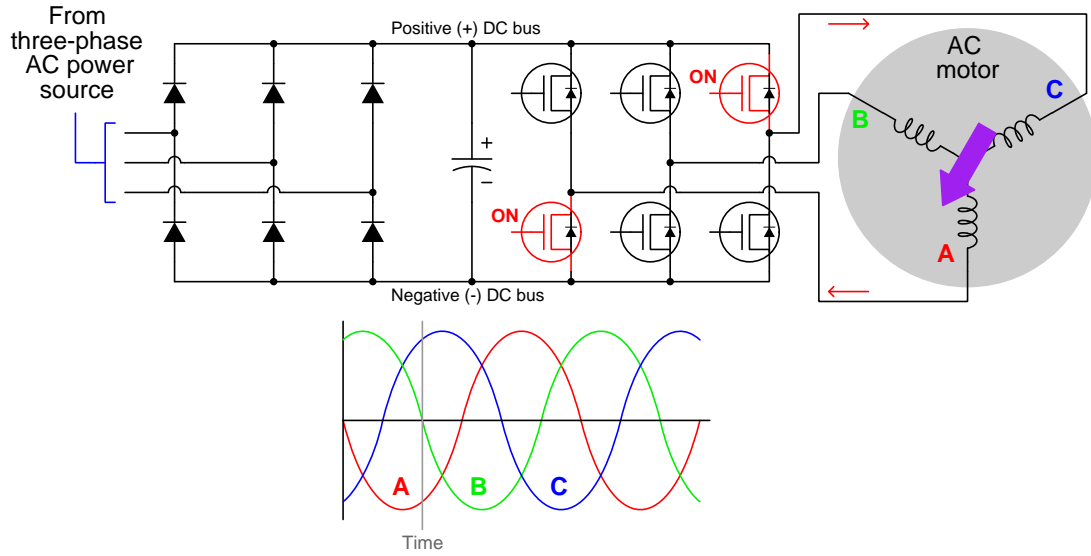


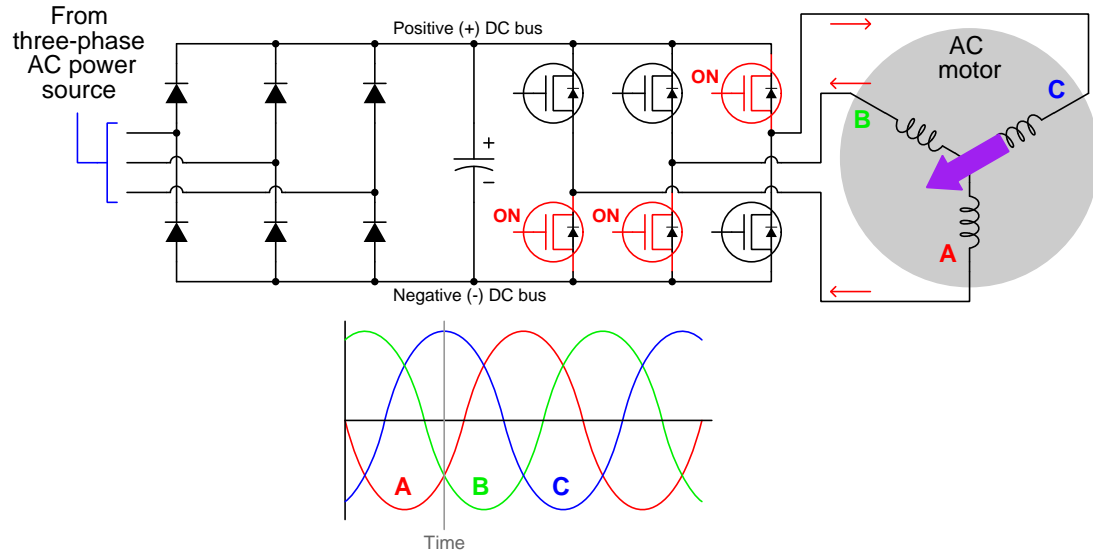


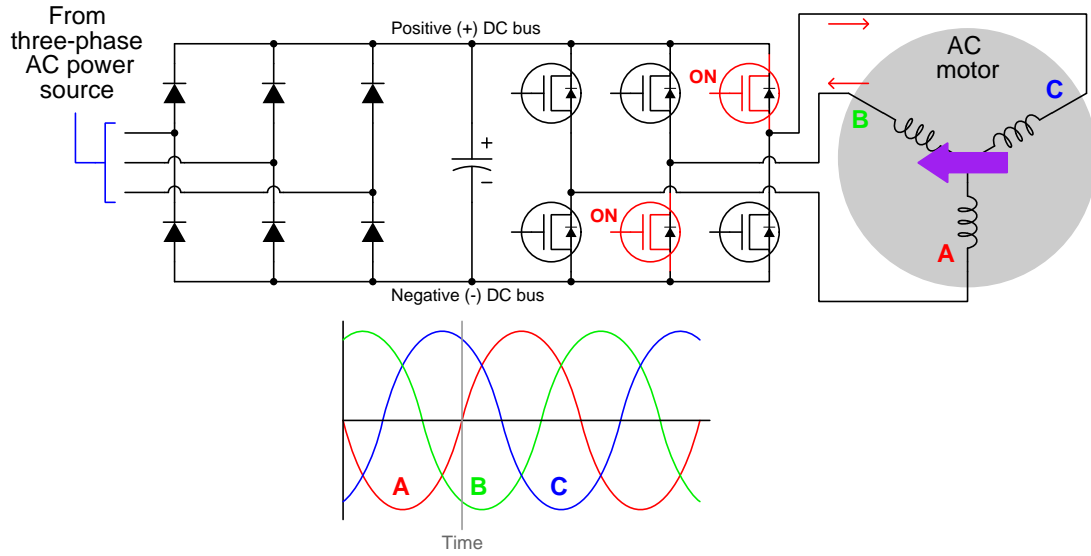


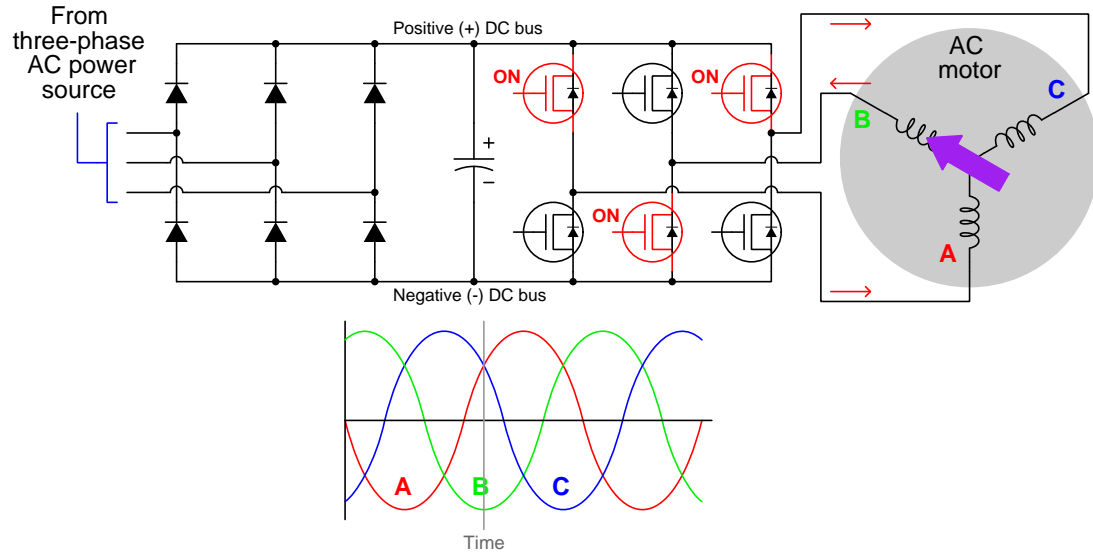


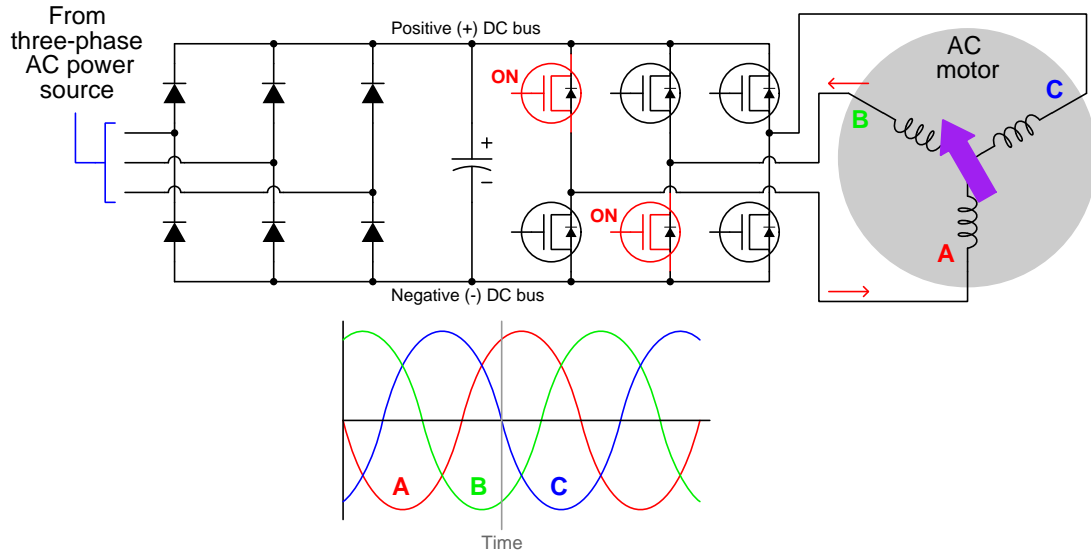


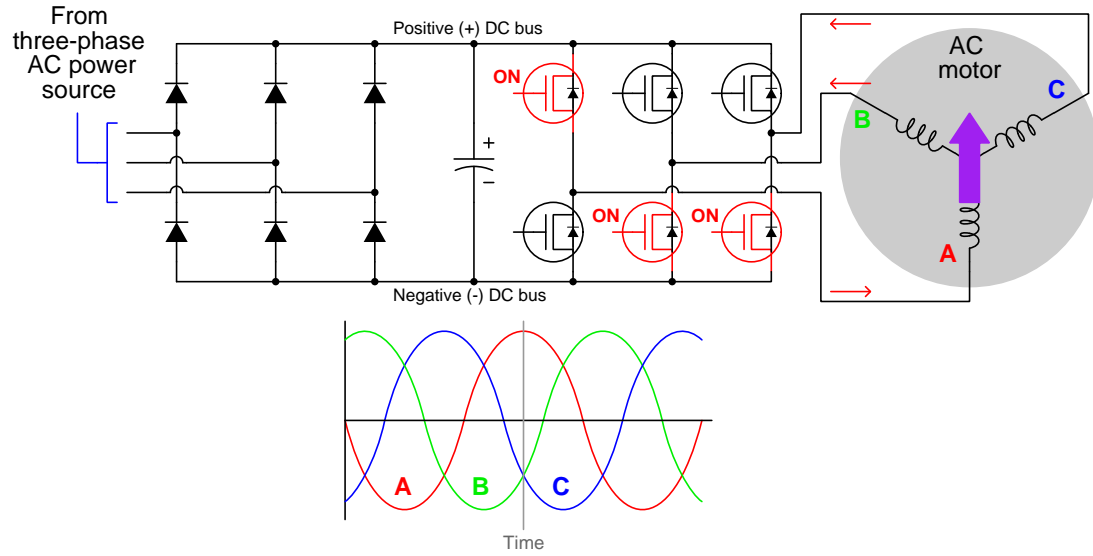


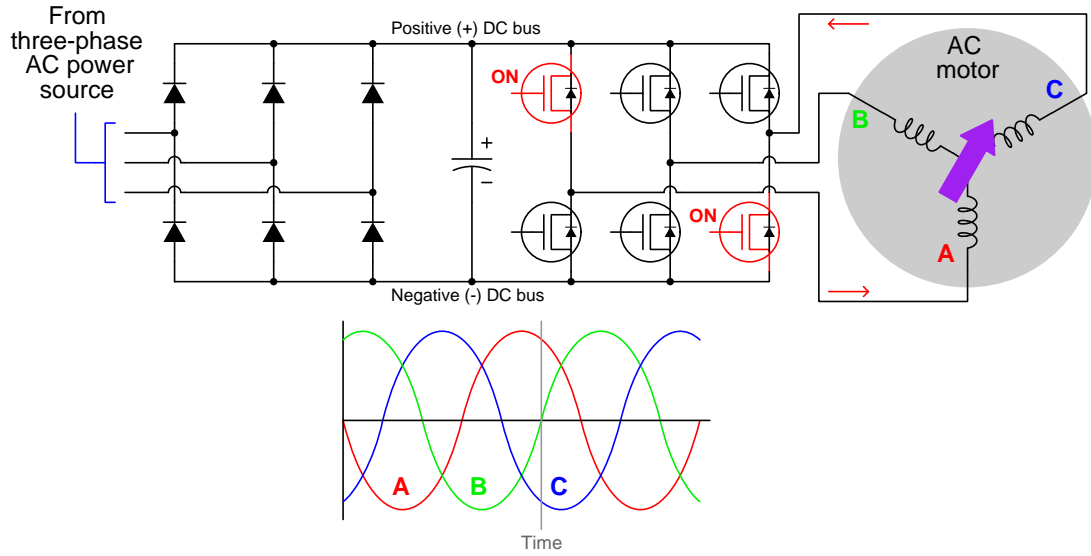


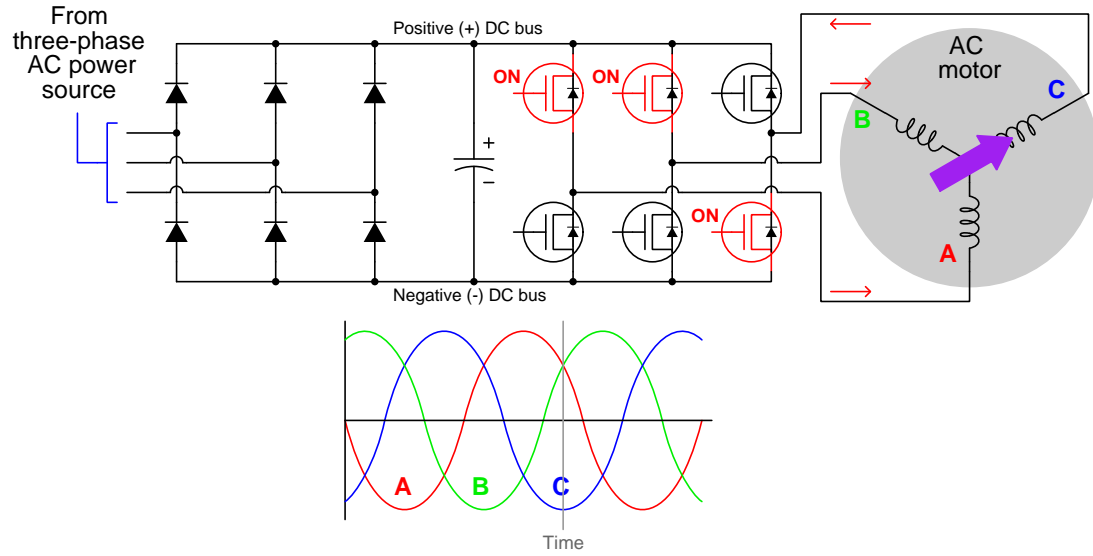


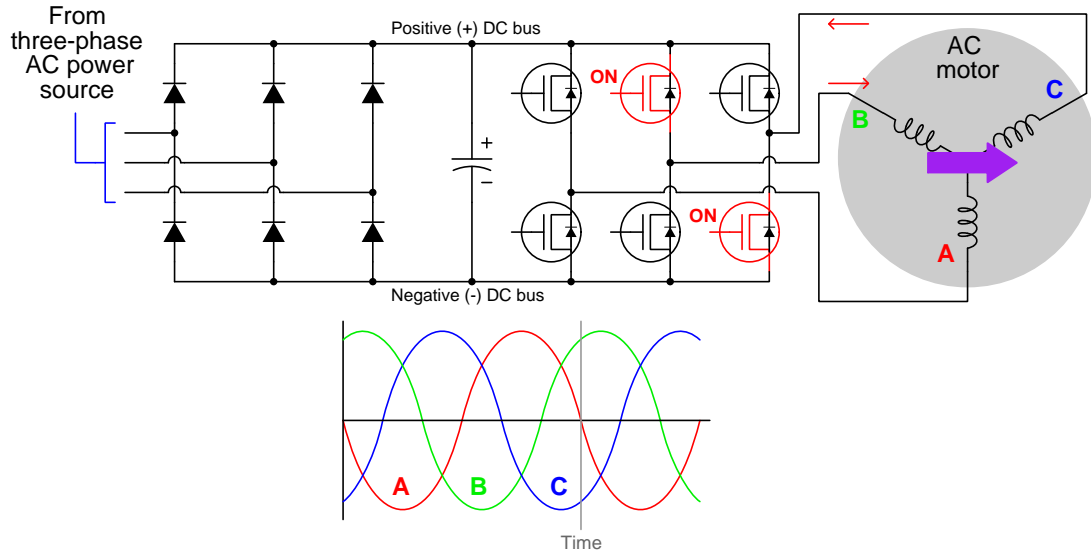


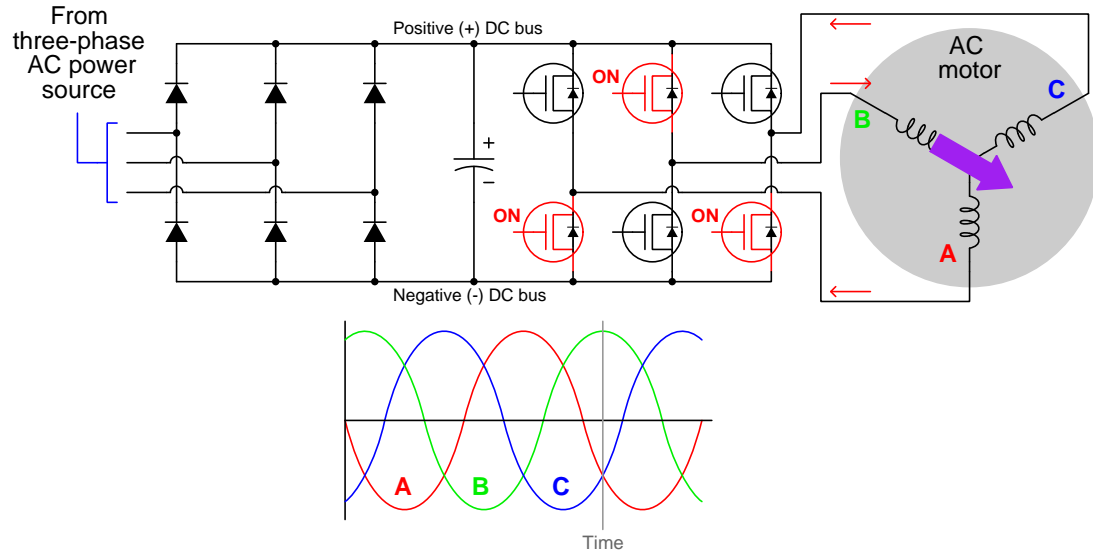


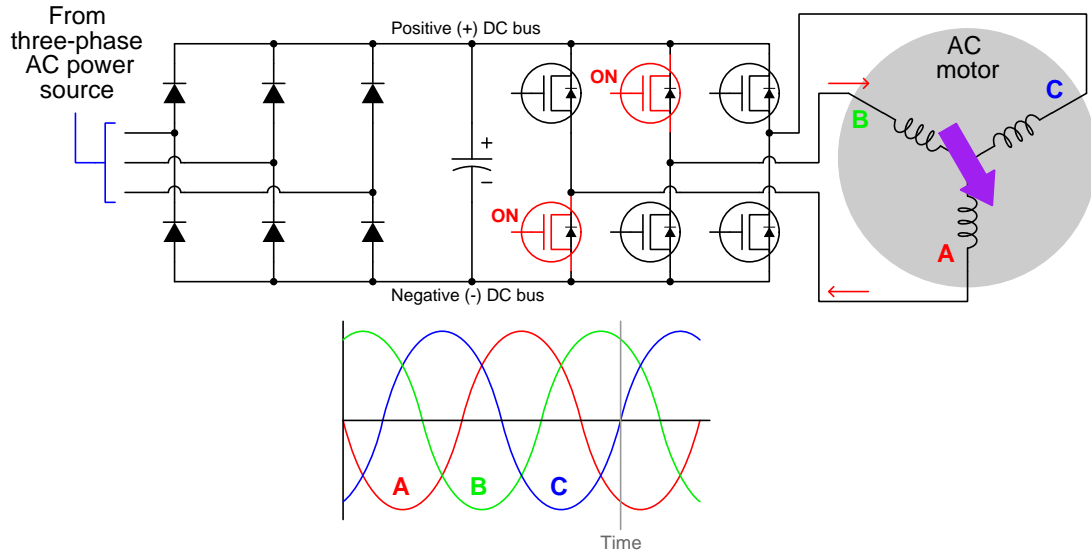


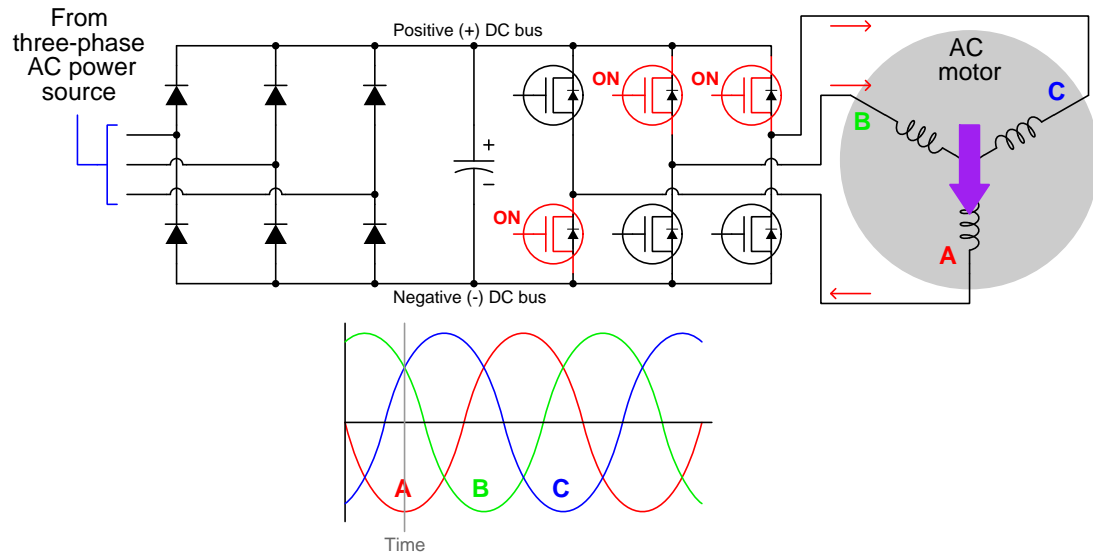






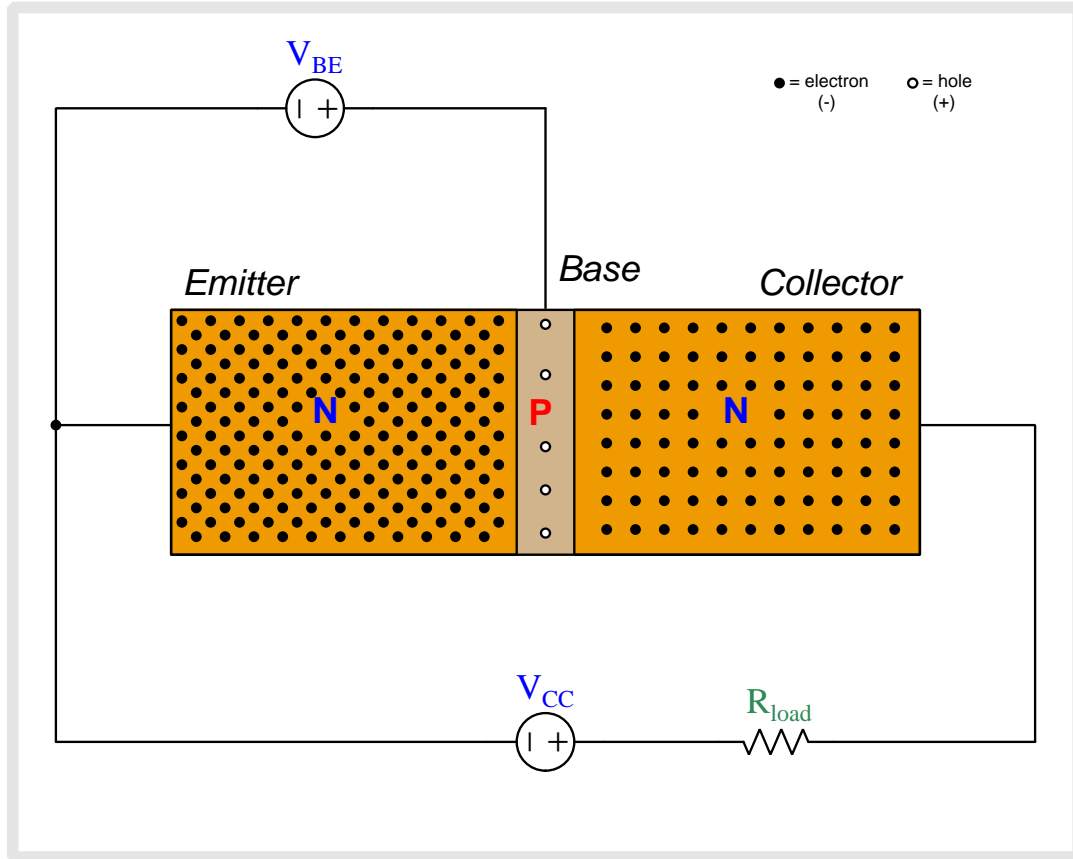






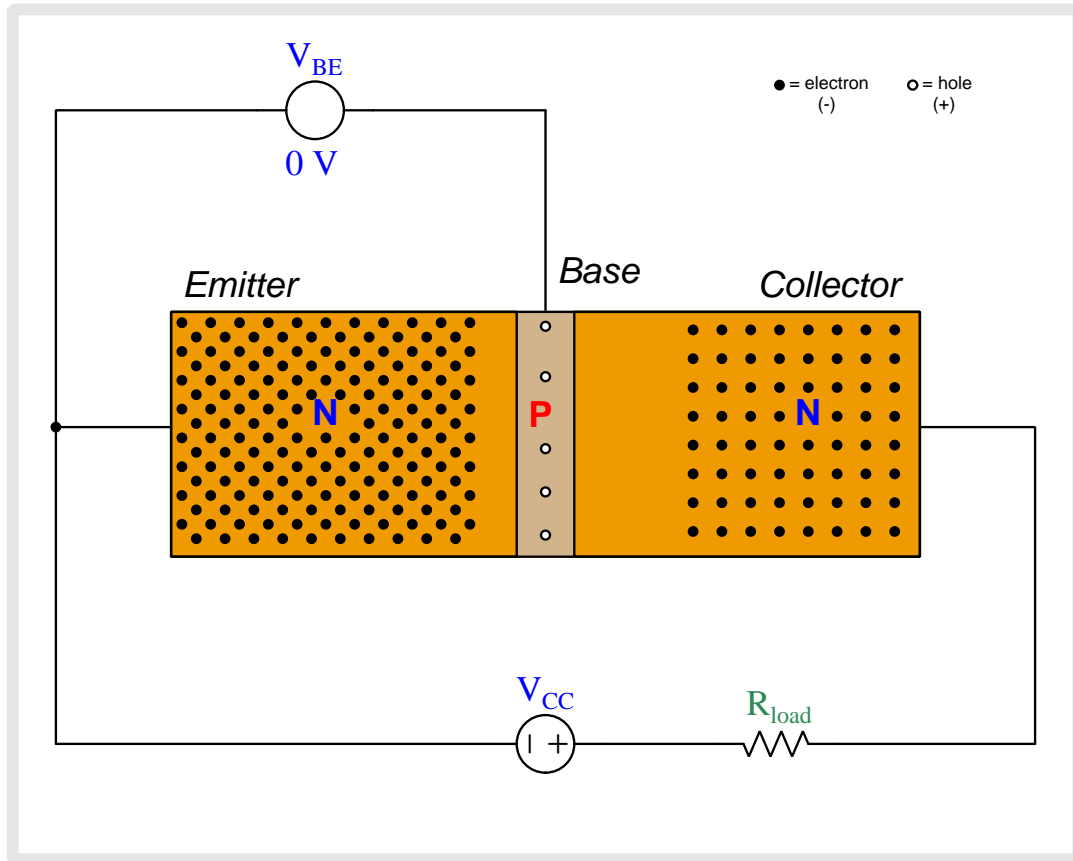
5.2 Animation of an NPN BJT turning on

Bipolar junction transistors are naturally “off” devices, having no continuous channel of conductive semiconductor material joining emitter and collector terminals. Instead the NPN or PNP sandwich interrupts that path with two series-opposed PN junctions. However, when the base-emitter PN junction is forward-biased by an external source, majority charge carriers from the emitter region are drawn into the thin and lightly-doped base region where some of them travel out the base but most carry past into the depletion region of the base-collector PN junction to be swept into the collector region. For an NPN transistor this means electrons from the N-type emitter region will be injected into the P-type base region (as “minority” type carriers there) before most of them get swept into the N-type collector region.

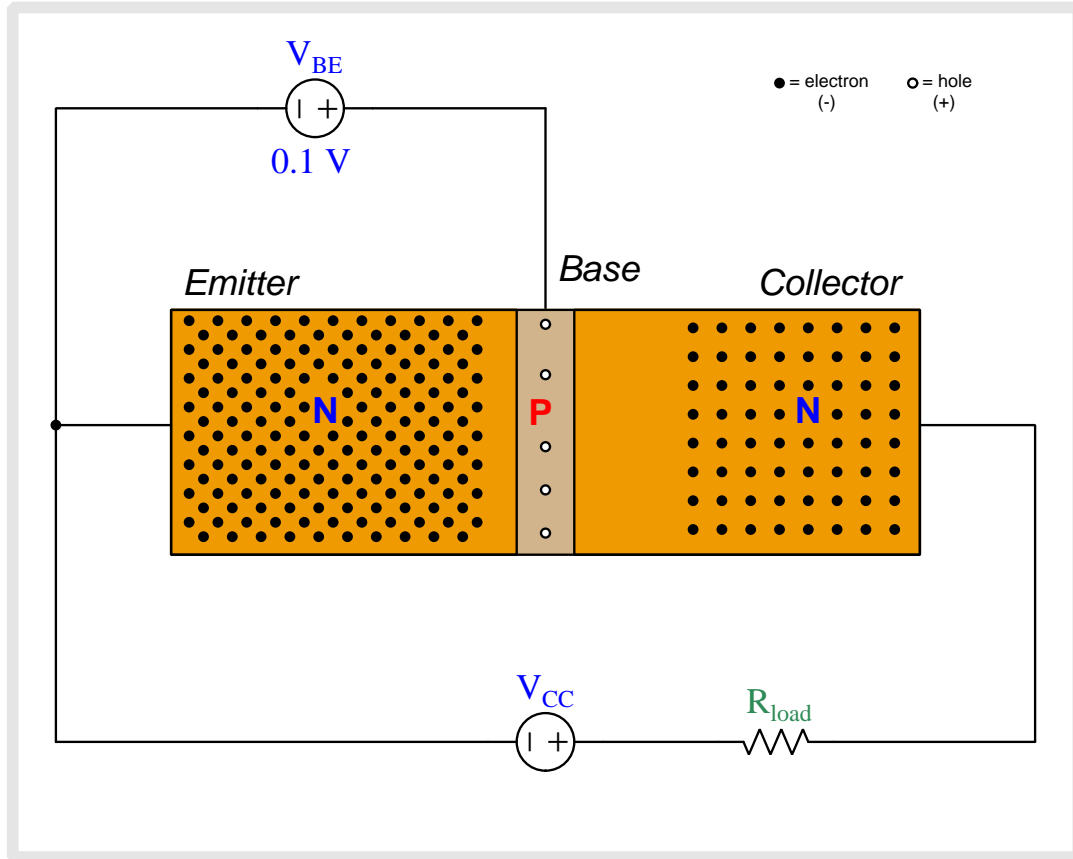


Above we see an NPN bipolar junction transistor connected to two sources. V_{BE} applies a controlling voltage between the base and emitter. V_{CC} is the voltage source which will drive current through the load resistor once the transistor begins to conduct.

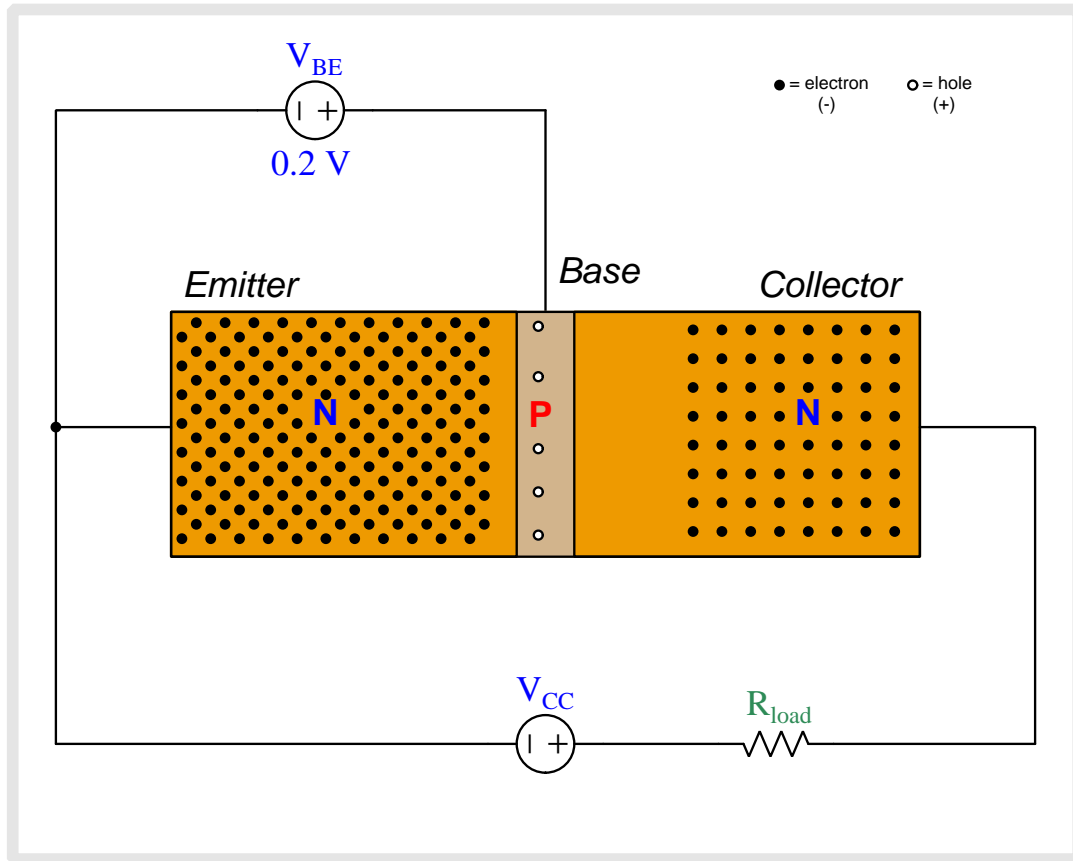
The N-doped emitter region is heavily doped and therefore contains many free electrons (negatively-charged) as mobile charge carriers. The collector region is also doped as an N-type semiconductor but the dopant concentration is less than that of the emitter. The P-doped base region is the least-doped of them all with just a few holes (positively-charged) as mobile charge carriers. Note that when load current begins to flow, its direction will be shown in *conventional flow notation* which is the same direction in which holes move but is opposite to the direction free electrons move.



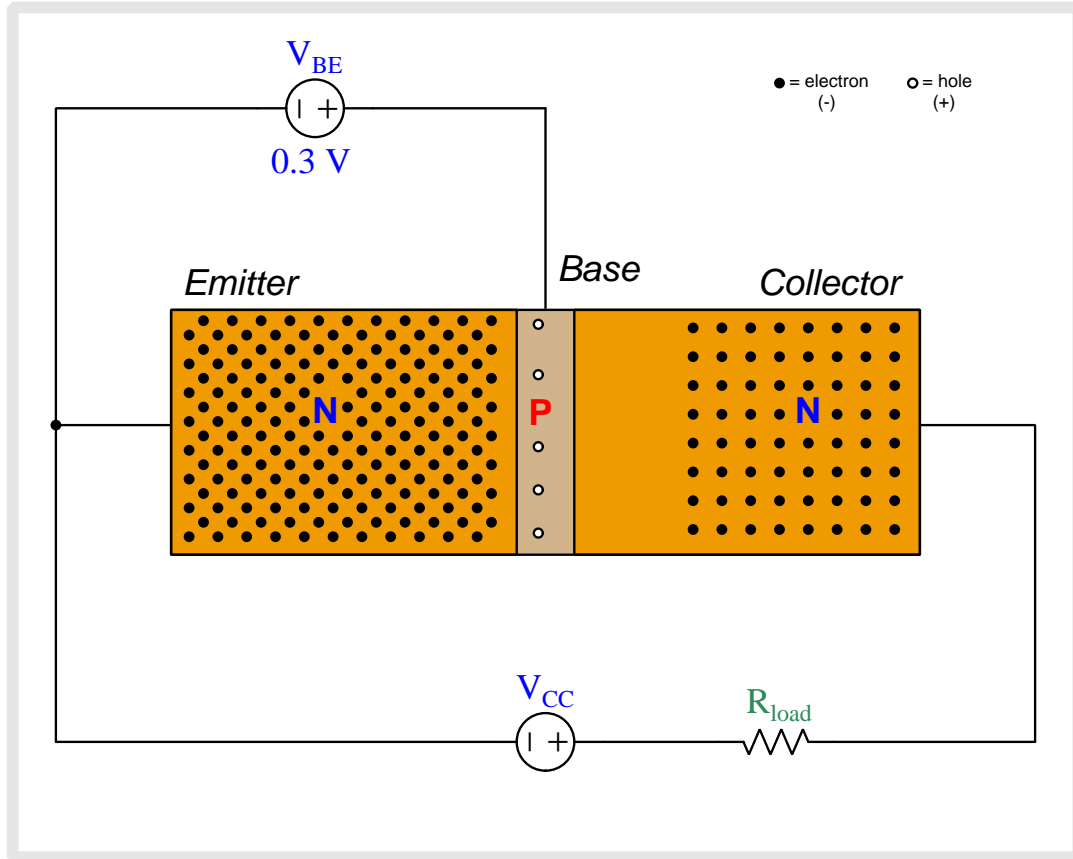
Note the depletion regions shown as areas with no free charge carriers, the base-collector depletion region being wider than the base-emitter depletion region due to the applied reverse-bias potential of V_{CC} .



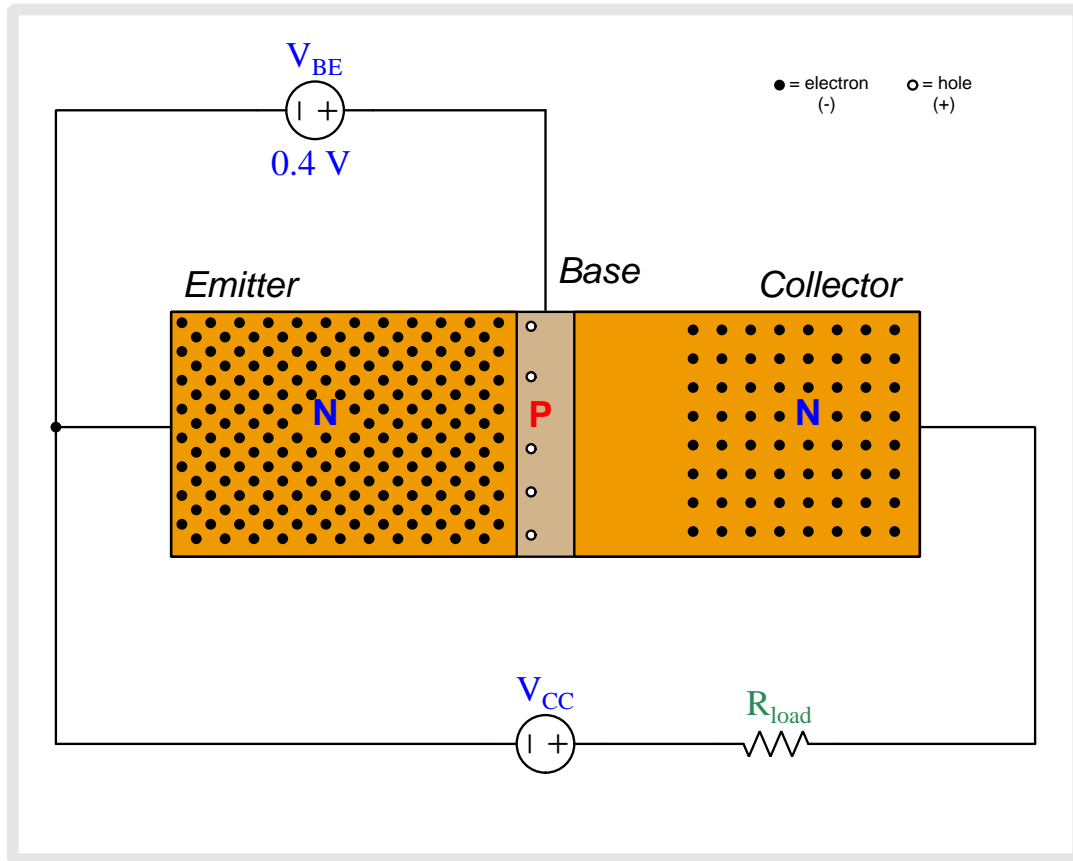
As we begin to apply a base-to-emitter voltage with the base positive and emitter negative, that applied potential difference drives the emitter and base regions' respective charge carriers toward each other, collapsing the base-emitter depletion region.



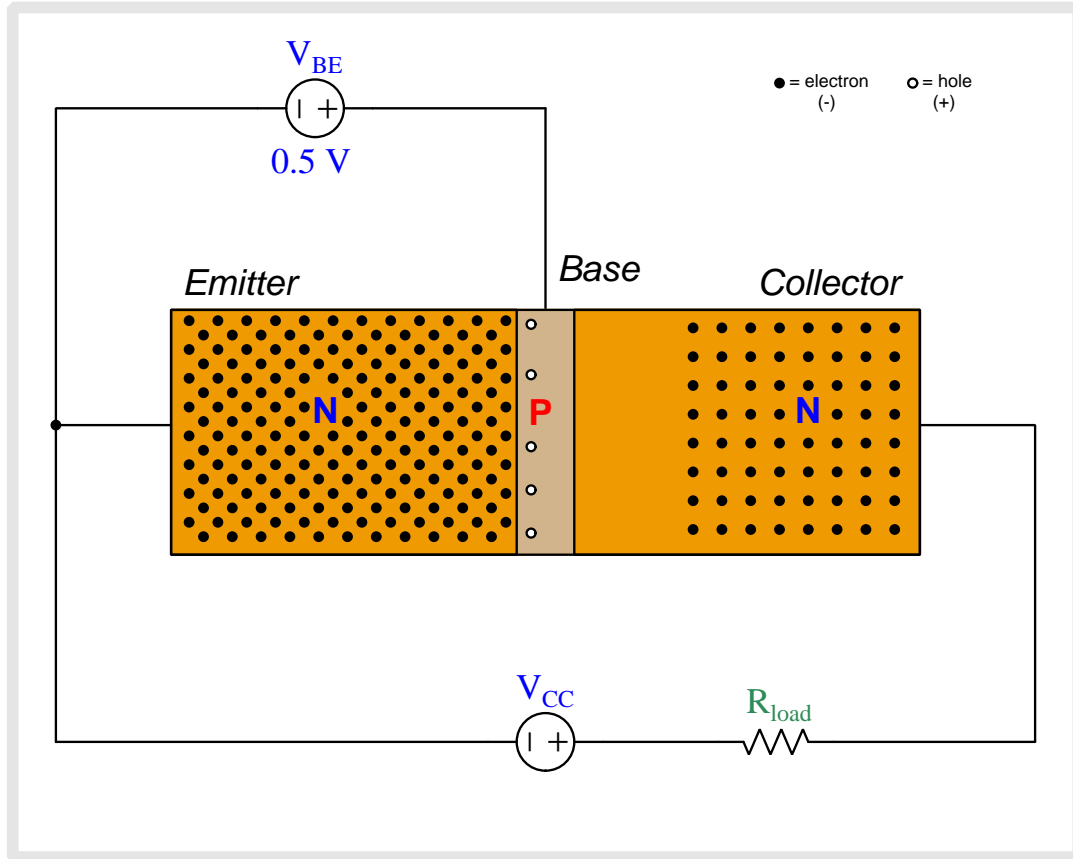
As we begin to apply a base-to-emitter voltage with the base positive and emitter negative, that applied potential difference drives the emitter and base regions' respective charge carriers toward each other, collapsing the base-emitter depletion region.



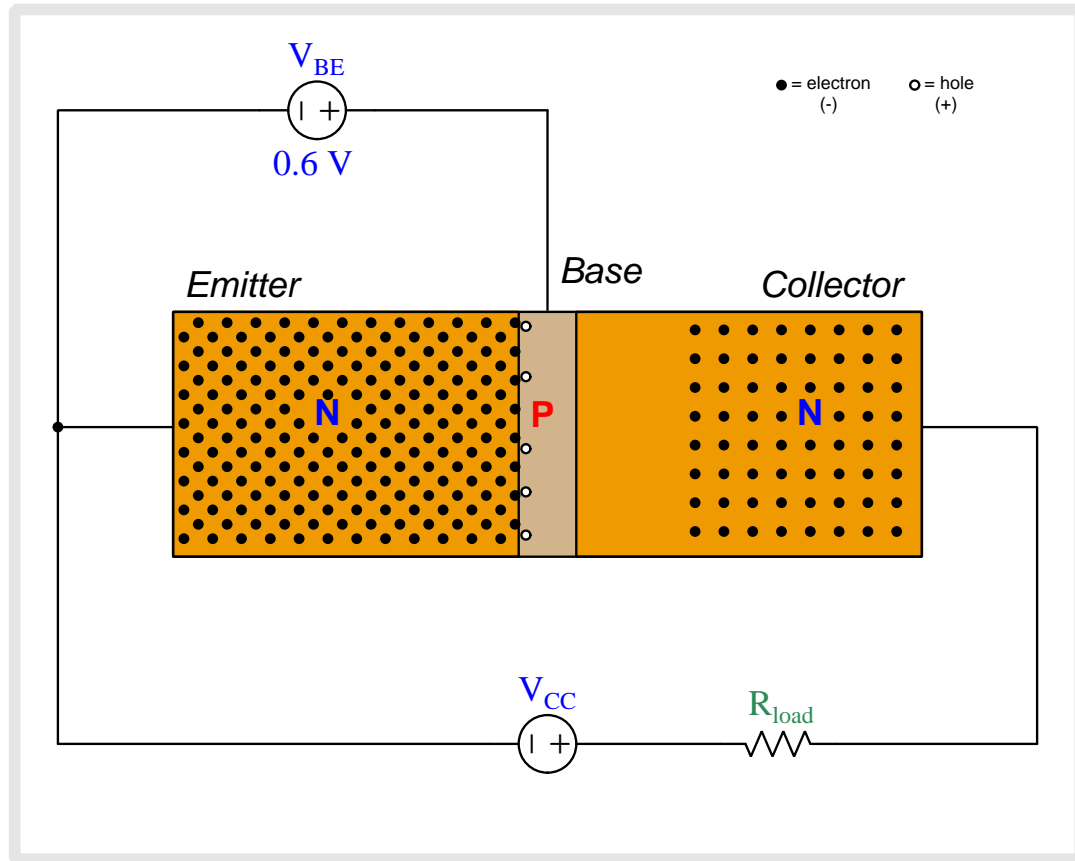
As we begin to apply a base-to-emitter voltage with the base positive and emitter negative, that applied potential difference drives the emitter and base regions' respective charge carriers toward each other, collapsing the base-emitter depletion region.



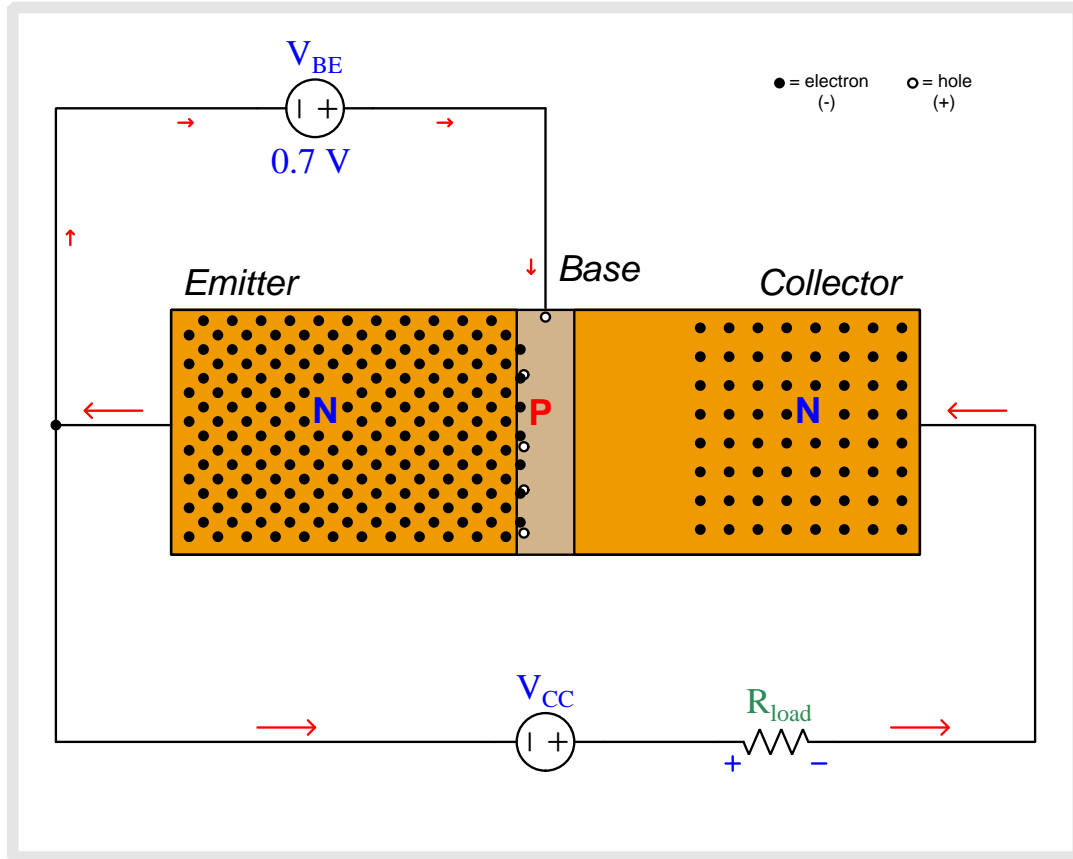
As we begin to apply a base-to-emitter voltage with the base positive and emitter negative, that applied potential difference drives the emitter and base regions' respective charge carriers toward each other, collapsing the base-emitter depletion region.



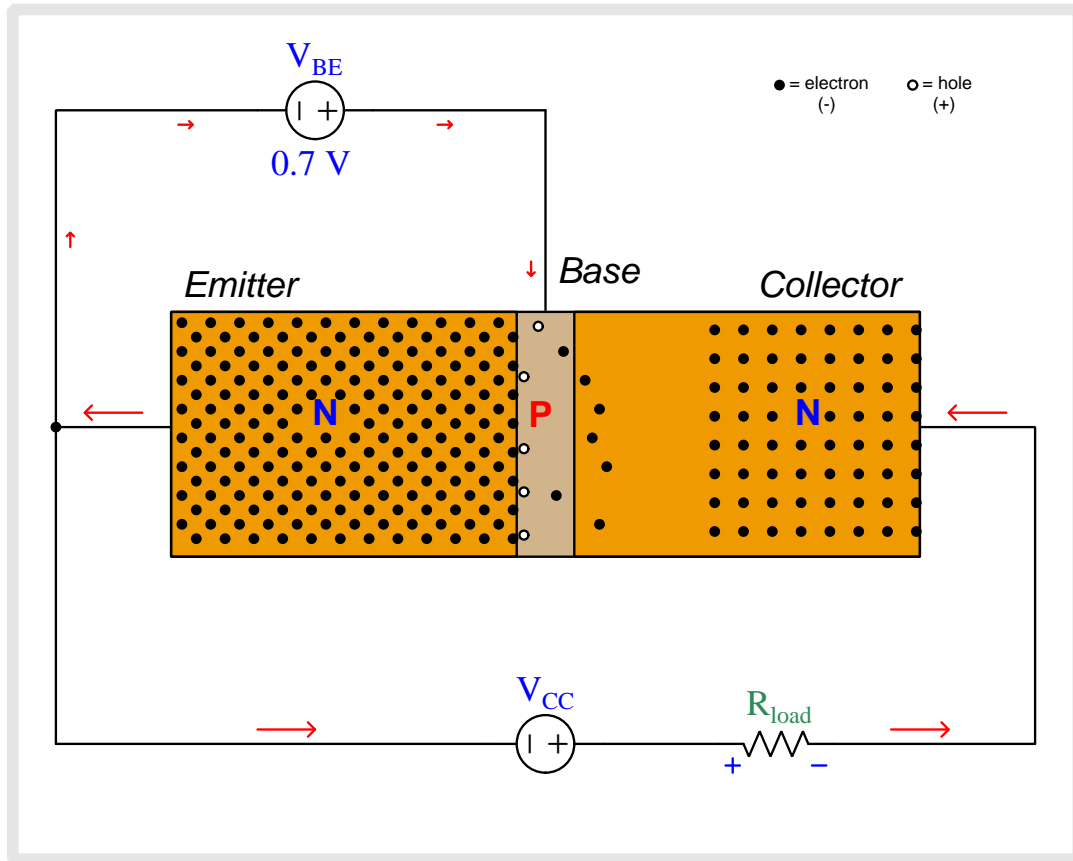
As we begin to apply a base-to-emitter voltage with the base positive and emitter negative, that applied potential difference drives the emitter and base regions' respective charge carriers toward each other, collapsing the base-emitter depletion region.



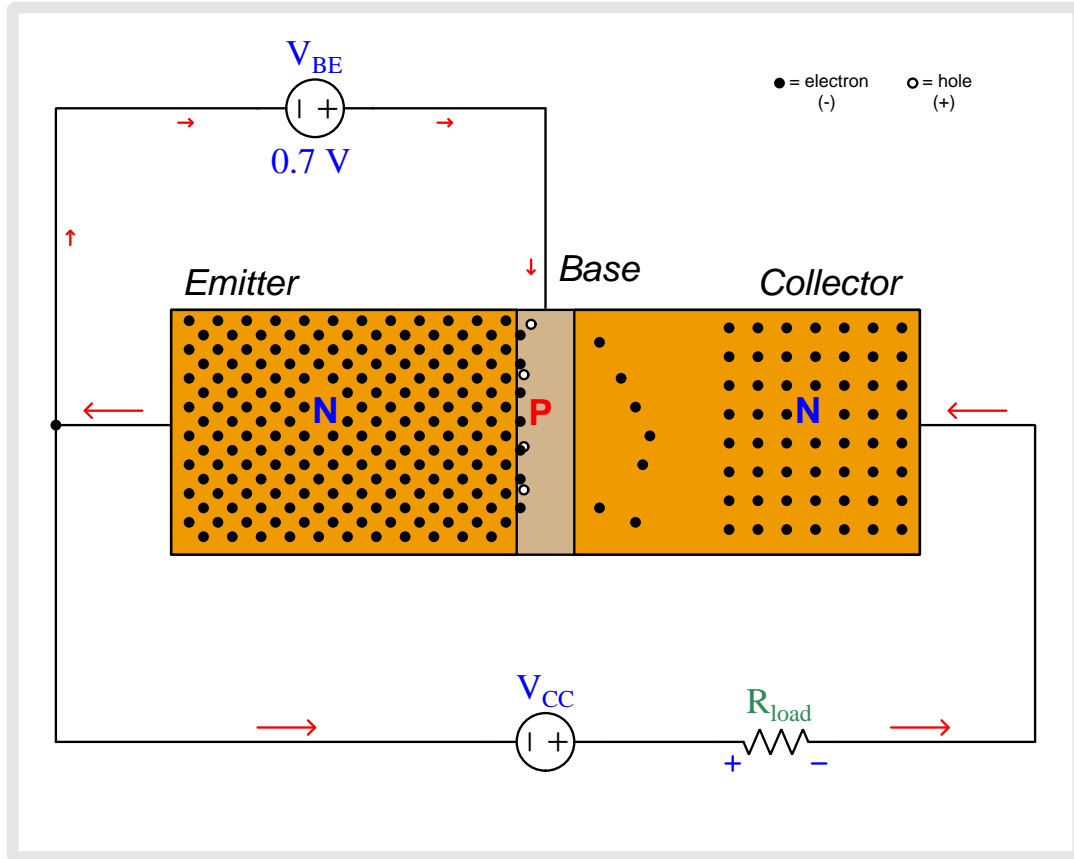
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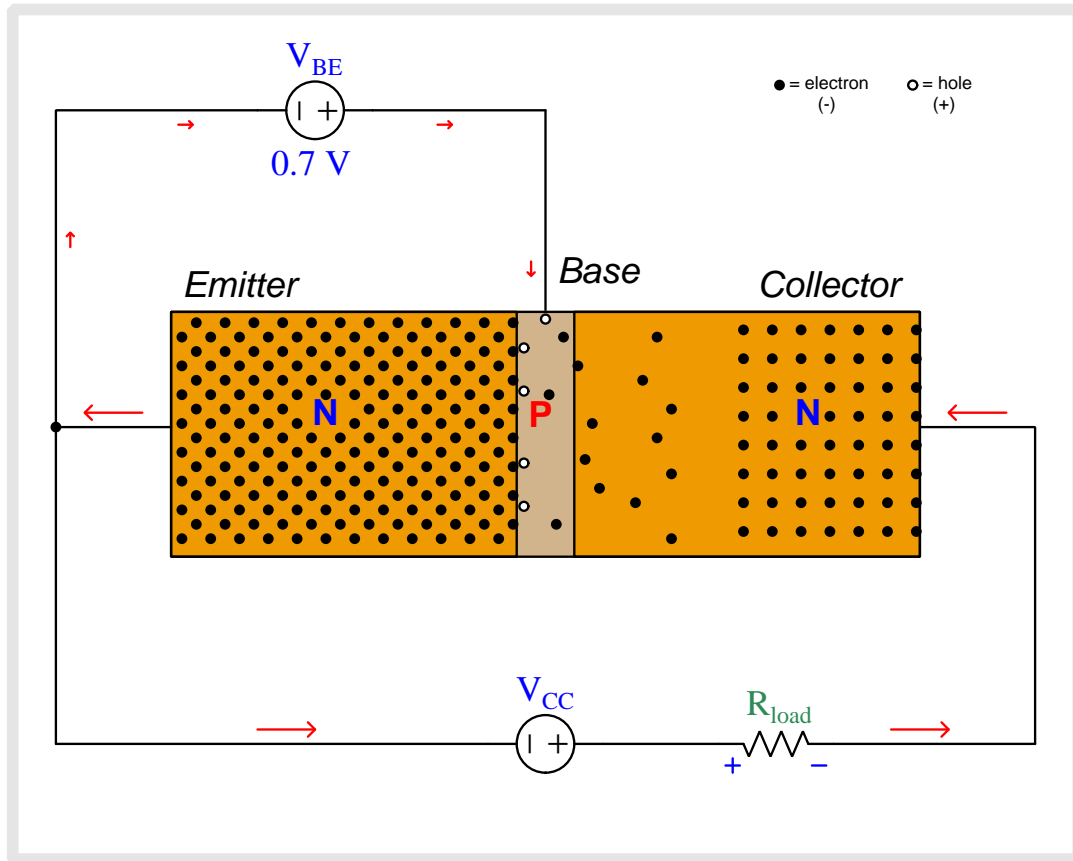
Now there is enough base-to-emitter voltage to fully collapse the base-emitter depletion region which allows base current to flow through the V_{BE} source. New holes enter into the base region from the base terminal to replenish any holes that have combined with electrons from the emitter region. Most of the emitter-injected electrons do *not* combine with holes, though, because the lightly-doped base region provides few holes to combine with. Therefore, most of the electrons injected into the base region from the emitter region begin to drift toward the collector.



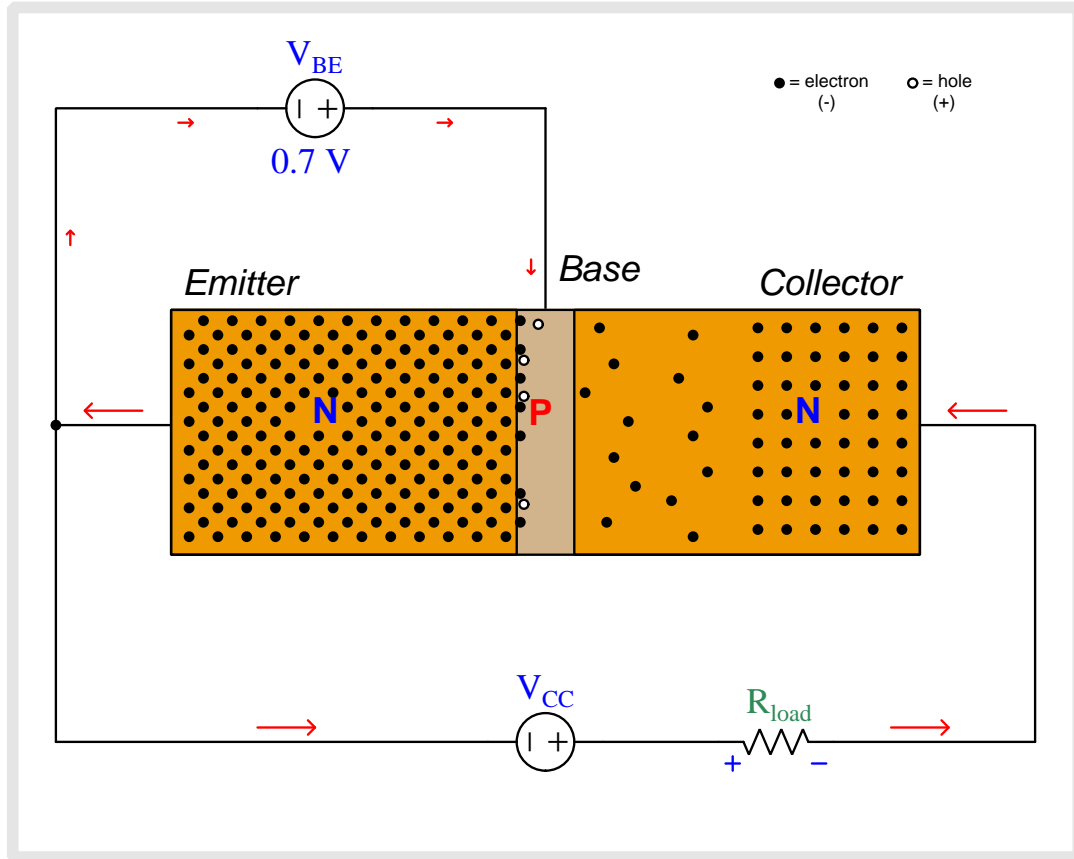
The electric field imposed by V_{CC} across the base-collector PN junction quickly “sweeps” electrons toward the collector terminal, constituting current through the load resistor.



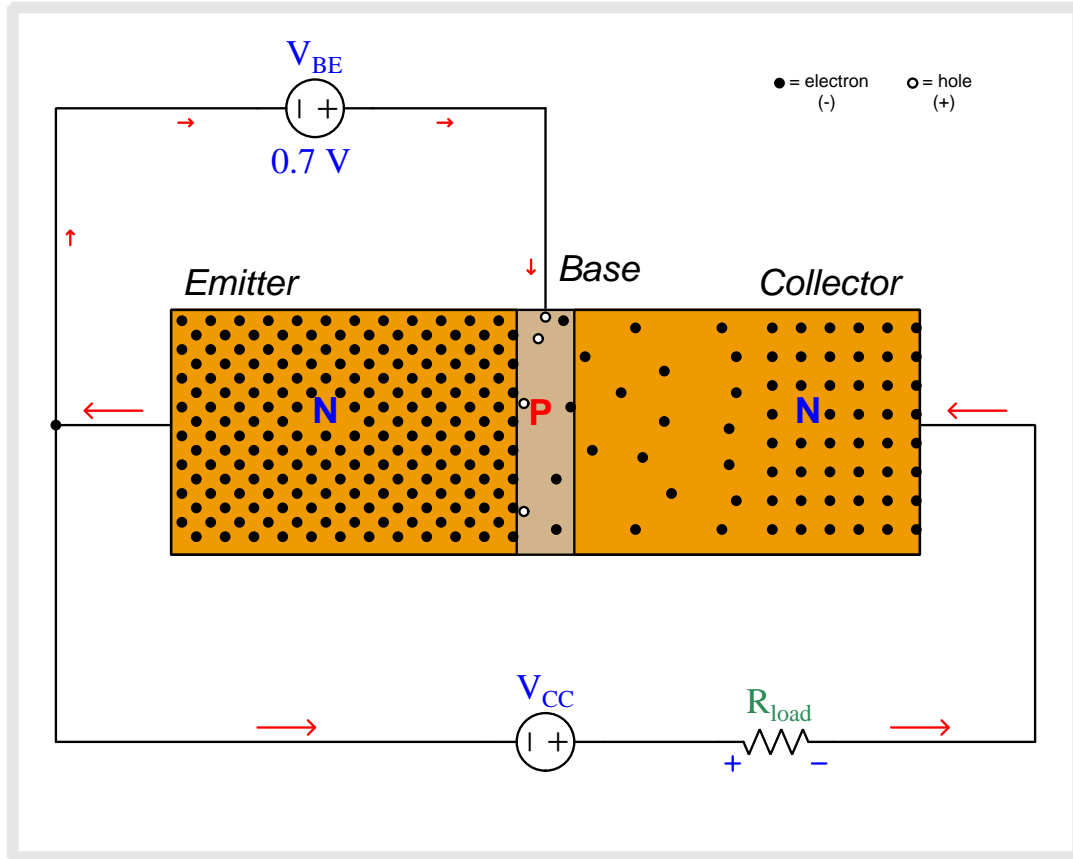
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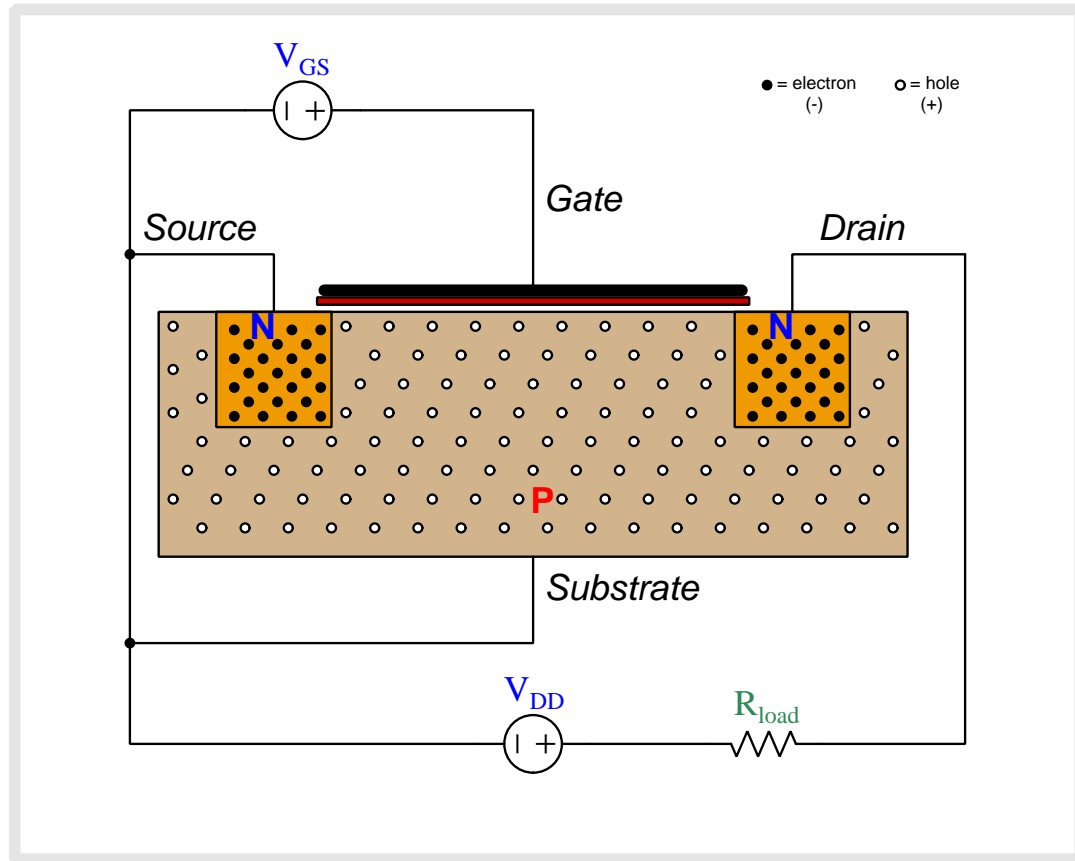
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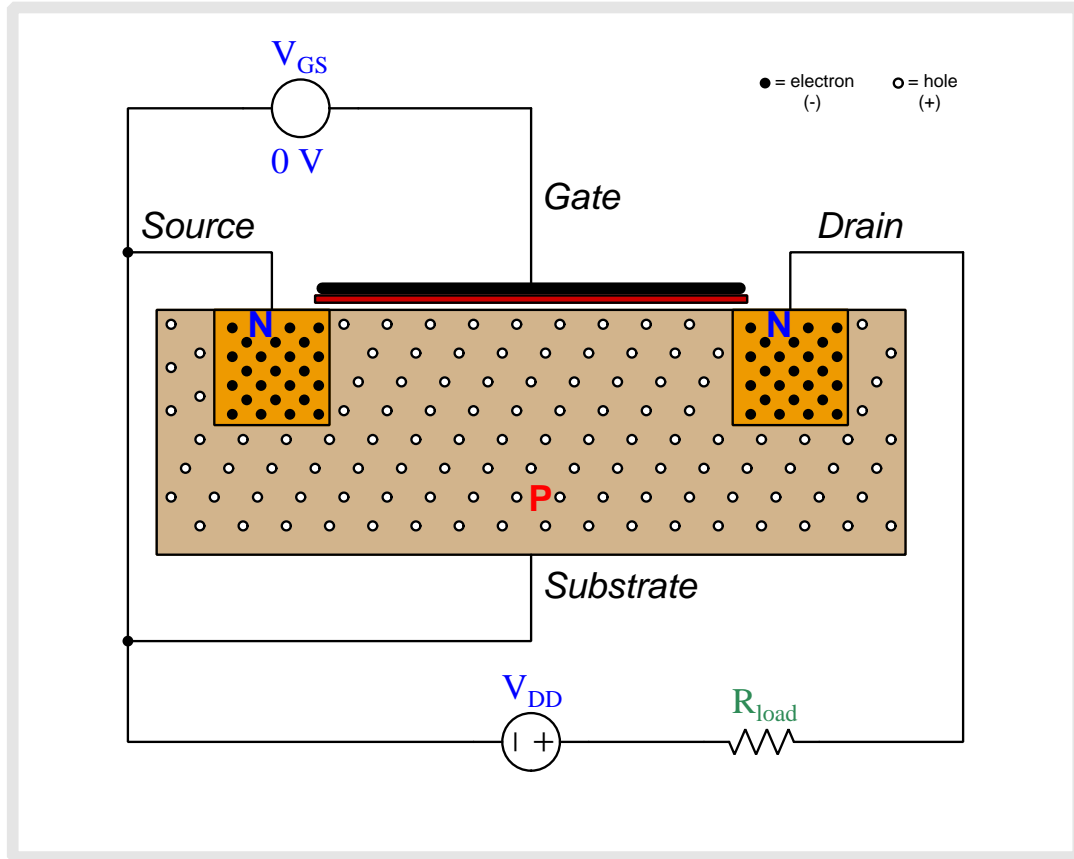
5.3 Animation of an E-type MOSFET turning on

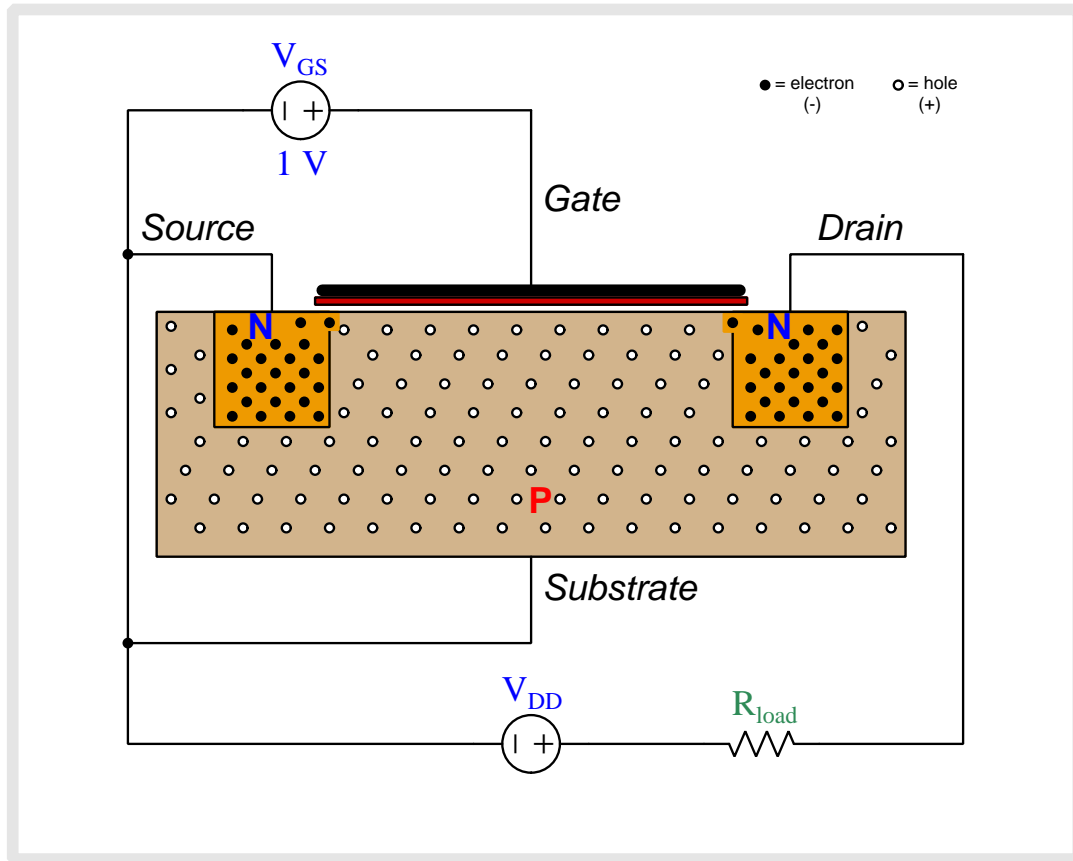
Enhancement-type (E-type) MOSFET transistors are naturally “off” devices, having no continuous channel of conductive semiconductor material joining source and drain by default the way D-type MOSFETs do. Instead the substrate semiconductor material, which is doped oppositely of the source and drain regions, interrupts that path with two series-opposed PN junctions. However, when a transverse electric field is applied between gate and substrate by an external voltage source, the surface-layer of the substrate in direct contact with the insulating metal-oxide layer converts to the opposite type of semiconductor. For an N-channel MOSFET with N-doped source and drain regions and with P-doped substrate, this means the surface of the P-doped substrate just beneath the gate effectively turns into N-type by the force of the electric field drawing free electrons from source and drain (and a few minority electrons existing within the substrate) to that surface region to form a thin film of free electrons capable of supporting source-drain conduction.



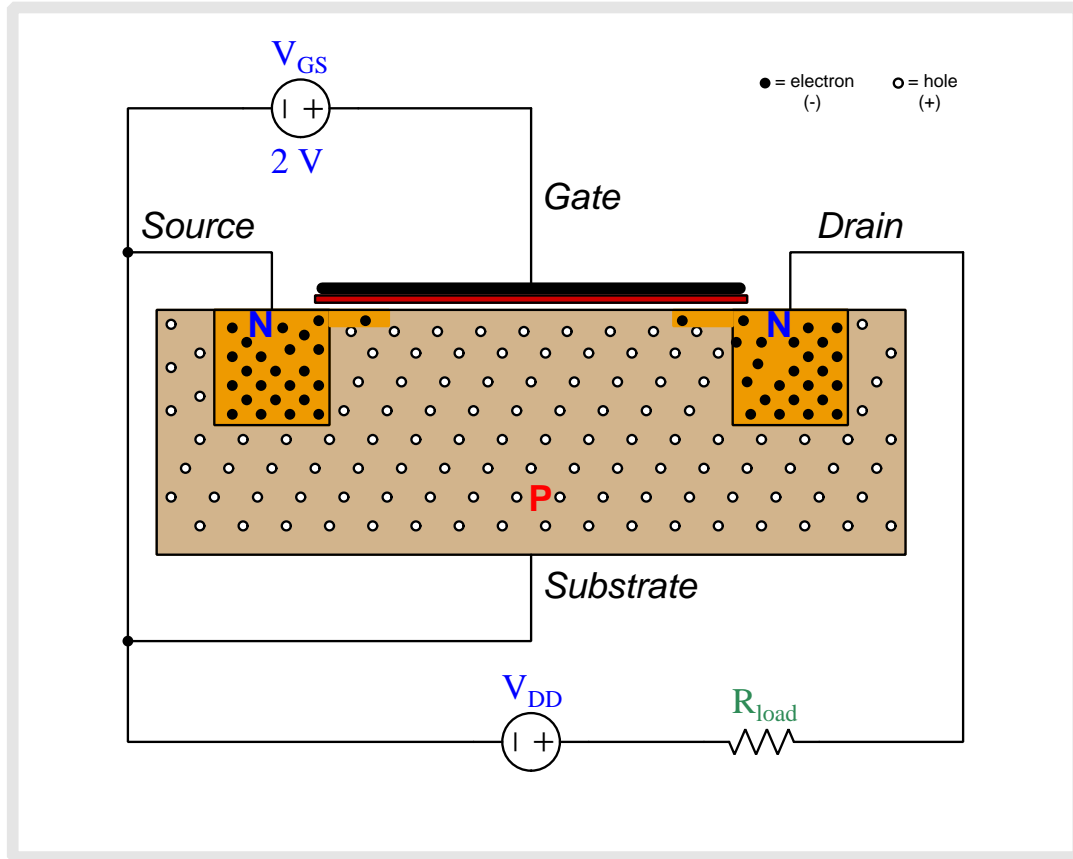
Above we see an N-channel, E-type MOSFET connected to two sources. V_{GS} applies a controlling voltage between the gate and the substrate, with the substrate connected to the source terminal to be one and the same. V_{DD} is the voltage source which will drive current through the load resistor once the transistor begins to conduct.

The N-doped source and drain regions have numerous free electrons (negatively-charged) as mobile charge carriers, while the P-doped substrate has holes (positively-charged). Note that when load current begins to flow, its direction will be shown in *conventional flow notation* which is the same direction in which holes move but is opposite to the direction free electrons move.

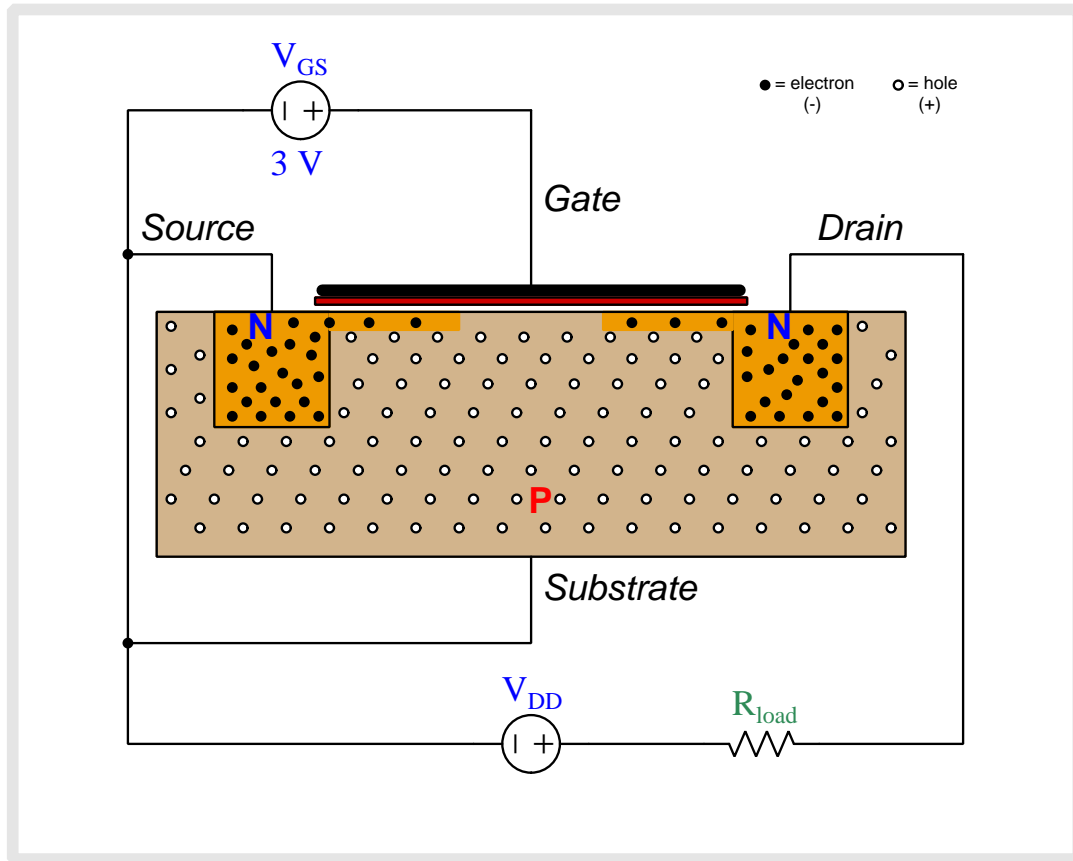




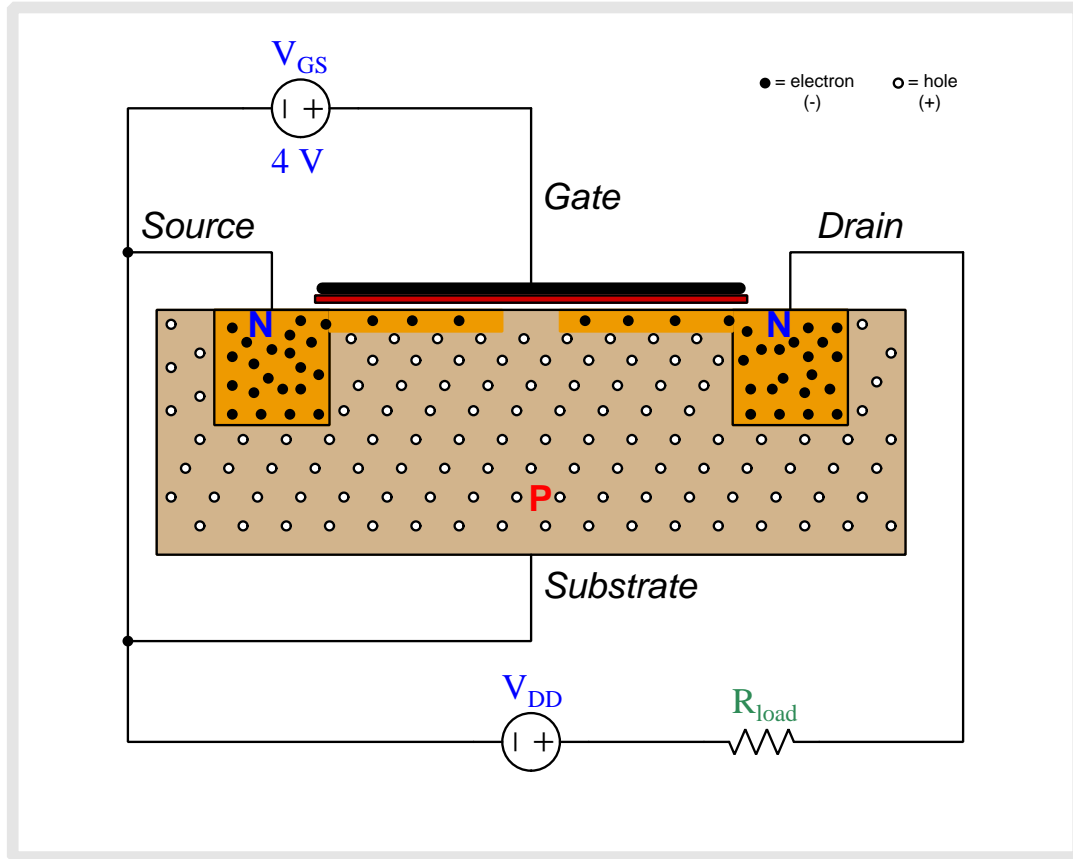
As we begin to apply a gate-to-substrate voltage with the gate positive and substrate negative, negatively-charged free electrons from the source and drain regions are attracted toward the metal gate while positively-charged holes in the substrate are repelled from the gate and driven downward.



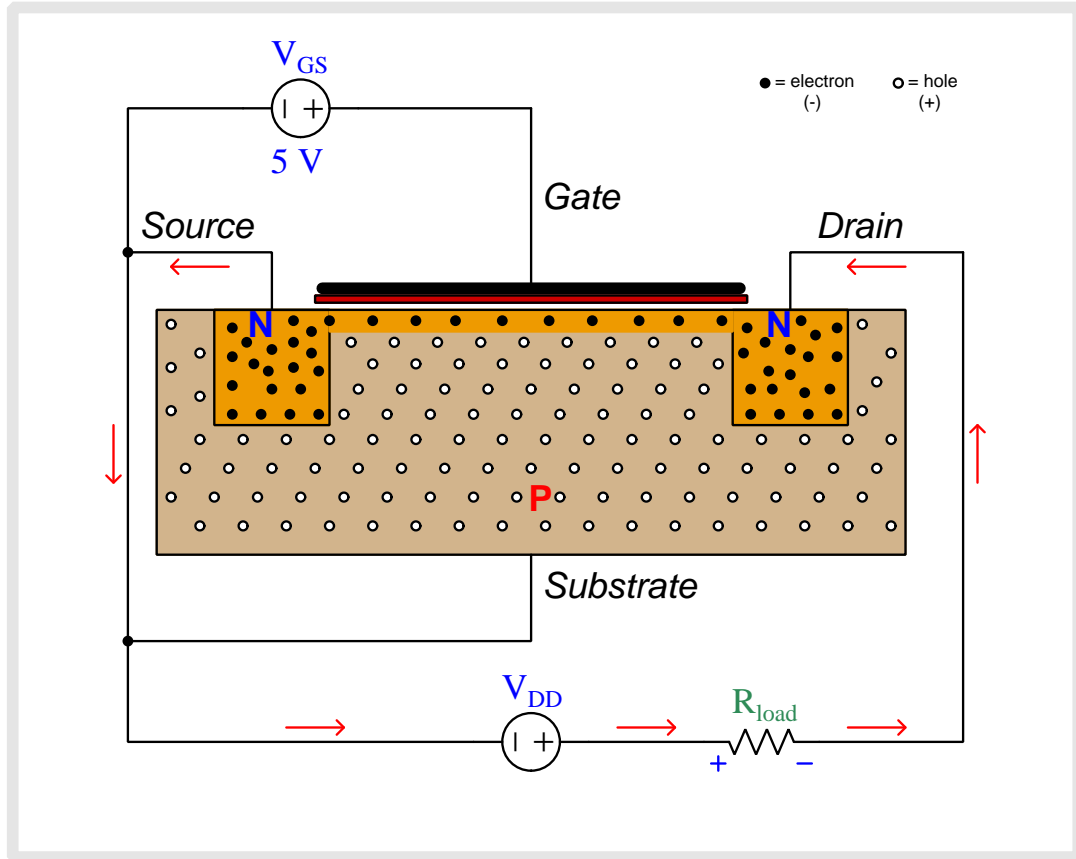
As this V_{GS} voltage increases, a thin film of free electrons begins to form beneath the gate, effectively turning what used to be P-type semiconductor material into N-type. This is called an *inversion layer*.



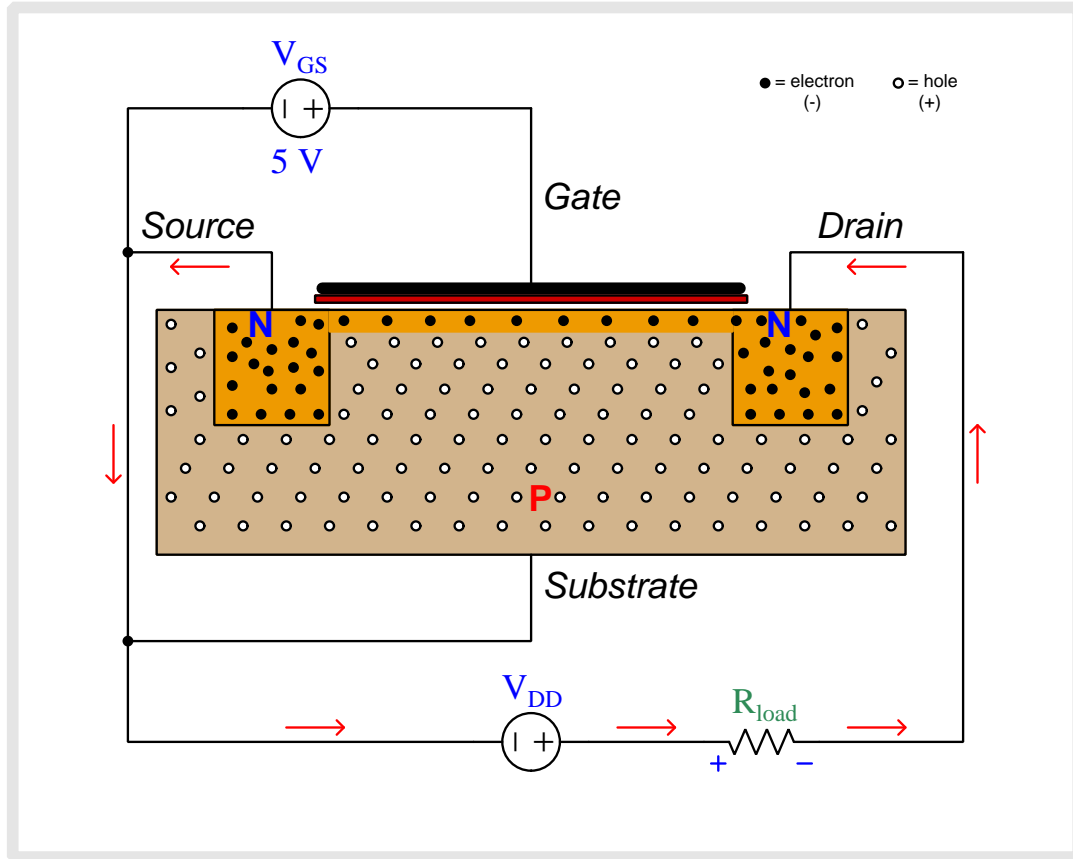
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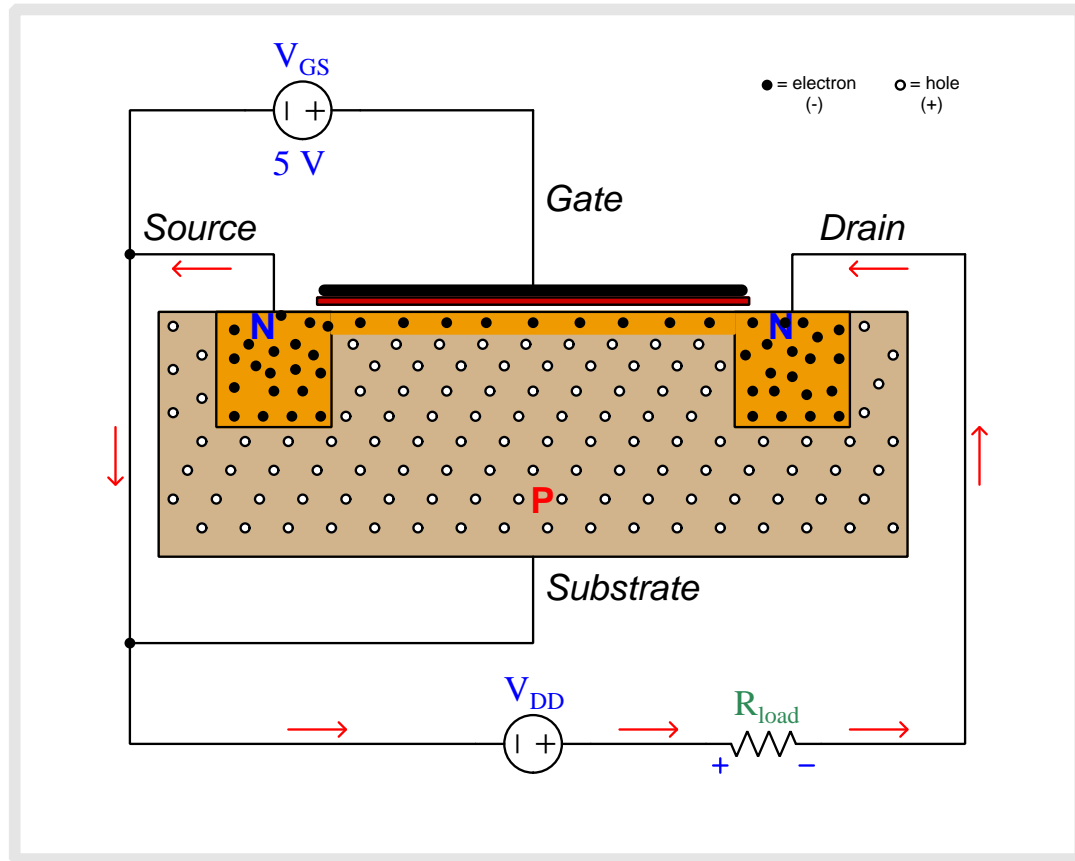
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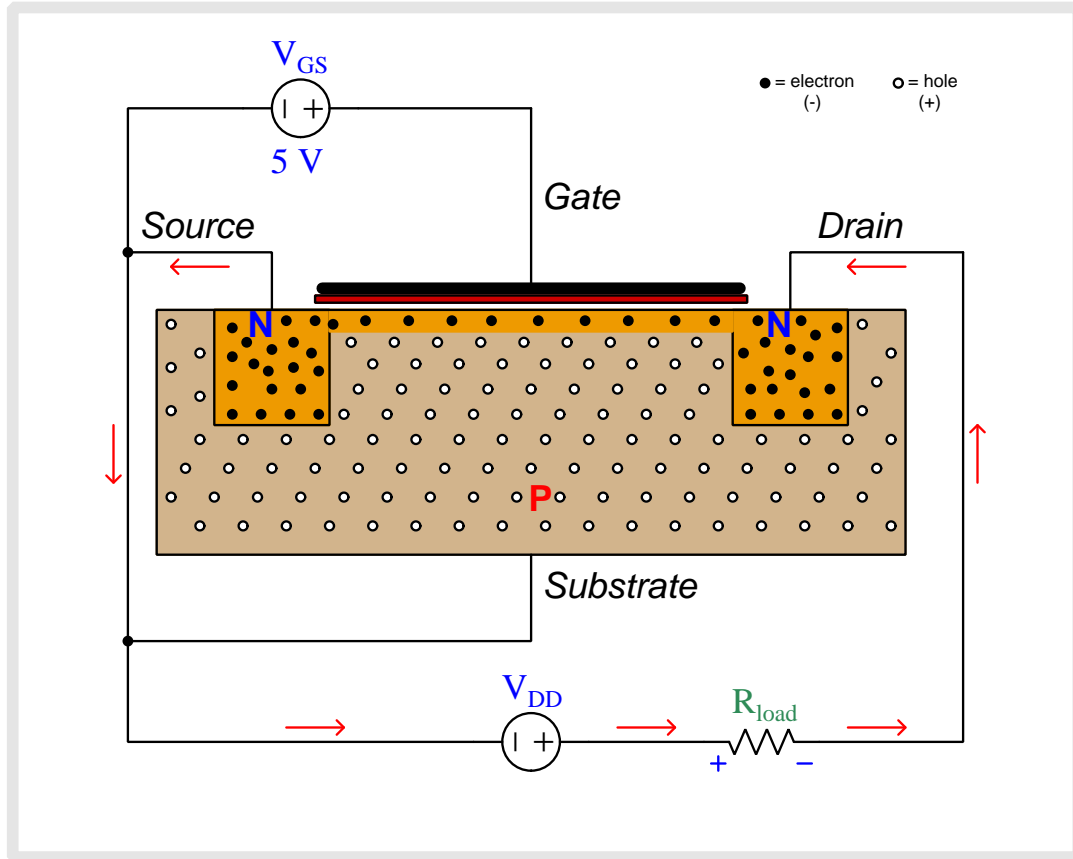
Once V_{GS} reaches the threshold or “turn-on” level, this inversion layer completely connects drain and source to form a new N-type channel permitting conduction between source and drain. The V_{DD} source is now able to promote a current through the MOSFET.



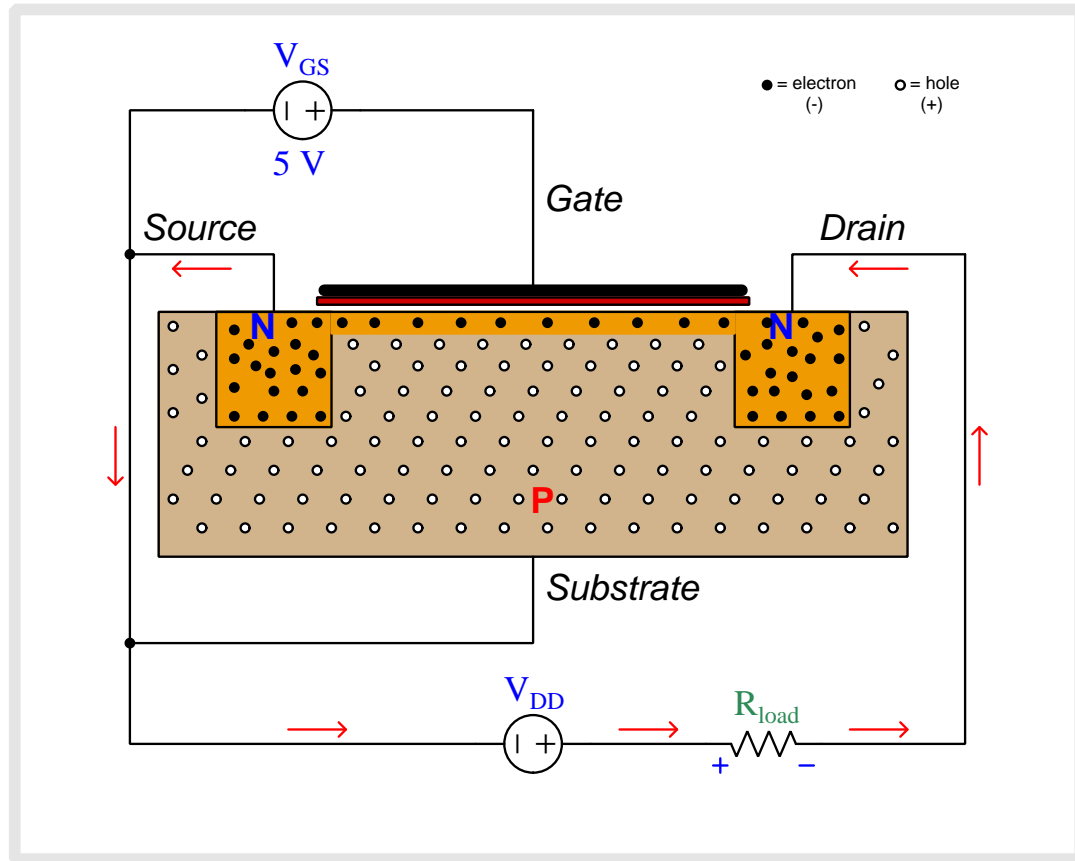
Note how the mobile charge carriers within the inversion layer are electrons, which flow opposite the direction of “conventional flow” as notated by the red arrows. Notice also how new electrons enter the inversion layer from the source region of the MOSFET, which is why that region is so-named (because that is the “source” of fresh charge carriers entering the inversion layer).



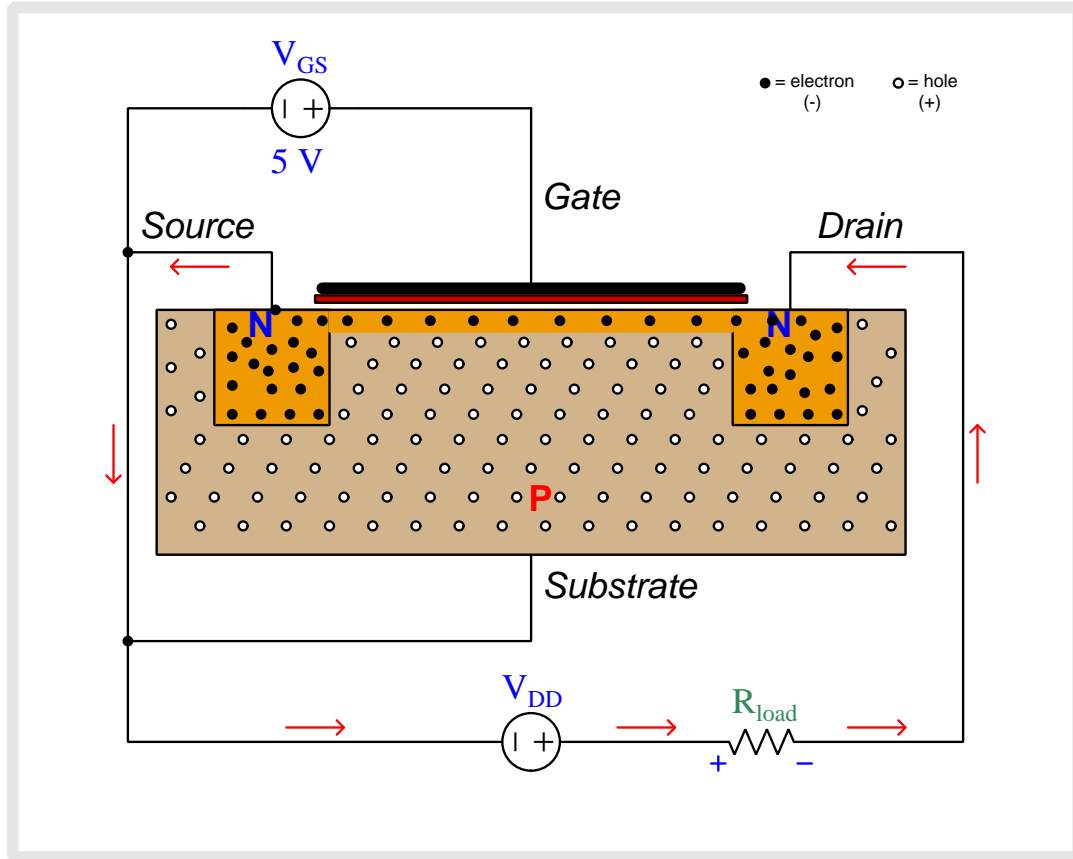
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Chapter 6

Questions

This learning module, along with all others in the ModEL collection, is designed to be used in an inverted instructional environment where students independently read¹ the tutorials and attempt to answer questions on their own *prior* to the instructor's interaction with them. In place of lecture², the instructor engages with students in Socratic-style dialogue, probing and challenging their understanding of the subject matter through inquiry.

Answers are not provided for questions within this chapter, and this is by design. Solved problems may be found in the Tutorial and Derivation chapters, instead. The goal here is *independence*, and this requires students to be challenged in ways where others cannot think for them. Remember that you always have the tools of *experimentation* and *computer simulation* (e.g. SPICE) to explore concepts!

The following lists contain ideas for Socratic-style questions and challenges. Upon inspection, one will notice a strong theme of *metacognition* within these statements: they are designed to foster a regular habit of examining one's own thoughts as a means toward clearer thinking. As such these sample questions are useful both for instructor-led discussions as well as for self-study.

¹Technical reading is an essential academic skill for any technical practitioner to possess for the simple reason that the most comprehensive, accurate, and useful information to be found for developing technical competence is in textual form. Technical careers in general are characterized by the need for continuous learning to remain current with standards and technology, and therefore any technical practitioner who cannot read well is handicapped in their professional development. An excellent resource for educators on improving students' reading prowess through intentional effort and strategy is the book *Reading For Understanding – How Reading Apprenticeship Improves Disciplinary Learning in Secondary and College Classrooms* by Ruth Schoenbach, Cynthia Greenleaf, and Lynn Murphy.

²Lecture is popular as a teaching method because it is easy to implement: any reasonably articulate subject matter expert can talk to students, even with little preparation. However, it is also quite problematic. A good lecture always makes complicated concepts seem easier than they are, which is bad for students because it instills a false sense of confidence in their own understanding; reading and re-articulation requires more cognitive effort and serves to verify comprehension. A culture of teaching-by-lecture fosters a debilitating dependence upon direct personal instruction, whereas the challenges of modern life demand independent and critical thought made possible only by gathering information and perspectives from afar. Information presented in a lecture is ephemeral, easily lost to failures of memory and dictation; text is forever, and may be referenced at any time.

GENERAL CHALLENGES FOLLOWING TUTORIAL READING

- Summarize as much of the text as you can in one paragraph of your own words. A helpful strategy is to explain ideas as you would for an intelligent child: as simple as you can without compromising too much accuracy.
- Simplify a particular section of the text, for example a paragraph or even a single sentence, so as to capture the same fundamental idea in fewer words.
- Where did the text make the most sense to you? What was it about the text's presentation that made it clear?
- Identify where it might be easy for someone to misunderstand the text, and explain why you think it could be confusing.
- Identify any new concept(s) presented in the text, and explain in your own words.
- Identify any familiar concept(s) such as physical laws or principles applied or referenced in the text.
- Devise a proof of concept experiment demonstrating an important principle, physical law, or technical innovation represented in the text.
- Devise an experiment to disprove a plausible misconception.
- Did the text reveal any misconceptions you might have harbored? If so, describe the misconception(s) and the reason(s) why you now know them to be incorrect.
- Describe any useful problem-solving strategies applied in the text.
- Devise a question of your own to challenge a reader's comprehension of the text.

GENERAL FOLLOW-UP CHALLENGES FOR ASSIGNED PROBLEMS

- Identify where any fundamental laws or principles apply to the solution of this problem, especially before applying any mathematical techniques.
- Devise a thought experiment to explore the characteristics of the problem scenario, applying known laws and principles to mentally model its behavior.
- Describe in detail your own strategy for solving this problem. How did you identify and organized the given information? Did you sketch any diagrams to help frame the problem?
- Is there more than one way to solve this problem? Which method seems best to you?
- Show the work you did in solving this problem, even if the solution is incomplete or incorrect.
- What would you say was the most challenging part of this problem, and why was it so?
- Was any important information missing from the problem which you had to research or recall?
- Was there any extraneous information presented within this problem? If so, what was it and why did it not matter?
- Examine someone else's solution to identify where they applied fundamental laws or principles.
- Simplify the problem from its given form and show how to solve this simpler version of it. Examples include eliminating certain variables or conditions, altering values to simpler (usually whole) numbers, applying a limiting case (i.e. altering a variable to some extreme or ultimate value).
- For quantitative problems, identify the real-world meaning of all intermediate calculations: their units of measurement, where they fit into the scenario at hand. Annotate any diagrams or illustrations with these calculated values.
- For quantitative problems, try approaching it qualitatively instead, thinking in terms of “increase” and “decrease” rather than definite values.
- For qualitative problems, try approaching it quantitatively instead, proposing simple numerical values for the variables.
- Were there any assumptions you made while solving this problem? Would your solution change if one of those assumptions were altered?
- Identify where it would be easy for someone to go astray in attempting to solve this problem.
- Formulate your own problem based on what you learned solving this one.

GENERAL FOLLOW-UP CHALLENGES FOR EXPERIMENTS OR PROJECTS

- In what way(s) was this experiment or project easy to complete?
- Identify some of the challenges you faced in completing this experiment or project.

- Show how thorough documentation assisted in the completion of this experiment or project.
- Which fundamental laws or principles are key to this system's function?
- Identify any way(s) in which one might obtain false or otherwise misleading measurements from test equipment in this system.
- What will happen if (component X) fails (open/shorted/etc.)?
- What would have to occur to make this system unsafe?

6.1 Conceptual reasoning

These questions are designed to stimulate your analytic and synthetic thinking³. In a Socratic discussion with your instructor, the goal is for these questions to prompt an extended dialogue where assumptions are revealed, conclusions are tested, and understanding is sharpened. Your instructor may also pose additional questions based on those assigned, in order to further probe and refine your conceptual understanding.

Questions that follow are presented to challenge and probe your understanding of various concepts presented in the tutorial. These questions are intended to serve as a guide for the Socratic dialogue between yourself and the instructor. Your instructor's task is to ensure you have a sound grasp of these concepts, and the questions contained in this document are merely a means to this end. Your instructor may, at his or her discretion, alter or substitute questions for the benefit of tailoring the discussion to each student's needs. The only absolute requirement is that each student is challenged and assessed at a level equal to or greater than that represented by the documented questions.

It is far more important that you convey your *reasoning* than it is to simply convey a correct answer. For this reason, you should refrain from researching other information sources to answer questions. What matters here is that *you* are doing the thinking. If the answer is incorrect, your instructor will work with you to correct it through proper reasoning. A correct answer without an adequate explanation of how you derived that answer is unacceptable, as it does not aid the learning or assessment process.

You will note a conspicuous lack of answers given for these conceptual questions. Unlike standard textbooks where answers to every other question are given somewhere toward the back of the book, here in these learning modules students must rely on other means to check their work. The best way by far is to debate the answers with fellow students and also with the instructor during the Socratic dialogue sessions intended to be used with these learning modules. Reasoning through challenging questions with other people is an excellent tool for developing strong reasoning skills.

Another means of checking your conceptual answers, where applicable, is to use circuit simulation software to explore the effects of changes made to circuits. For example, if one of these conceptual questions challenges you to predict the effects of altering some component parameter in a circuit, you may check the validity of your work by simulating that same parameter change within software and seeing if the results agree.

³*Analytical* thinking involves the “disassembly” of an idea into its constituent parts, analogous to dissection. *Synthetic* thinking involves the “assembly” of a new idea comprised of multiple concepts, analogous to construction. Both activities are high-level cognitive skills, extremely important for effective problem-solving, necessitating frequent challenge and regular practice to fully develop.

6.1.1 Reading outline and reflections

“Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man” – Francis Bacon

Francis Bacon’s advice is a blueprint for effective education: reading provides the learner with knowledge, writing focuses the learner’s thoughts, and critical dialogue equips the learner to confidently communicate and apply their learning. Independent acquisition and application of knowledge is a powerful skill, well worth the effort to cultivate. To this end, students should read these educational resources closely, journal their own reflections on the reading, and discuss in detail their findings with classmates and instructor(s). You should be able to do all of the following after reading any instructional text:

☑ Briefly **SUMMARIZE THE TEXT** in the form of a journal entry documenting your learning as you progress through the course of study. Share this summary in dialogue with your classmates and instructor. Journaling is an excellent self-test of thorough reading because you cannot clearly express what you have not read or did not comprehend.

☑ Demonstrate **ACTIVE READING STRATEGIES**, including verbalizing your impressions as you read, simplifying long passages to convey the same ideas using fewer words, annotating text and illustrations with your own interpretations, working through mathematical examples shown in the text, cross-referencing passages with relevant illustrations and/or other passages, identifying problem-solving strategies applied by the author, etc. Technical reading is a special case of problem-solving, and so these strategies work precisely because they help solve any problem: paying attention to your own thoughts (metacognition), eliminating unnecessary complexities, identifying what makes sense, paying close attention to details, drawing connections between separated facts, and noting the successful strategies of others.

☑ Identify **IMPORTANT THEMES**, especially **GENERAL LAWS** and **PRINCIPLES**, expounded in the text and express them in the simplest of terms as though you were teaching an intelligent child. This emphasizes connections between related topics and develops your ability to communicate complex ideas to anyone.

☑ Form **YOUR OWN QUESTIONS** based on the reading, and then pose them to your instructor and classmates for their consideration. Anticipate both correct and incorrect answers, the incorrect answer(s) assuming one or more plausible misconceptions. This helps you view the subject from different perspectives to grasp it more fully.

☑ Devise **EXPERIMENTS** to test claims presented in the reading, or to disprove misconceptions. Predict possible outcomes of these experiments, and evaluate their meanings: what result(s) would confirm, and what would constitute disproof? Running mental simulations and evaluating results is essential to scientific and diagnostic reasoning.

☑ Specifically identify any points you found **CONFUSING**. The reason for doing this is to help diagnose misconceptions and overcome barriers to learning.

6.1.2 Foundational concepts

Correct analysis and diagnosis of electric circuits begins with a proper understanding of some basic concepts. The following is a list of some important concepts referenced in this module's full tutorial. Define each of them in your own words, and be prepared to illustrate each of these concepts with a description of a practical example and/or a live demonstration.

Energy

Thought experiments as a problem-solving strategy

Direct Current (DC)

Alternating Current (AC)

Frequency

Electrical source

Electrical load

Energy conversion

Rectification

Diode

Amplification

Multivibrator

BJT principles

FET principles

Bridge network

Logic state

NOT function

Transformer

Hysteresis

Positive feedback

Capacitance

Inductance

Commutation

Thyristor

Comparator

Periodic

Fundamental frequency

Harmonic frequency

Sinusoidal decomposition (i.e. Fourier's Theorem)

Inverter

Pulse-Width Modulation (PWM)

Duty cycle

V/F ratio

Noise

Capacitive coupling

Inductive coupling

6.1.3 Bright/Royer self-excited inverter circuits

Examine the schematic diagrams of Figures 1, 4, and 5 in the “Example: inverter circuits from the Bright/Royer 1957 patent” section of the *Case Tutorial* chapter of this module and answer the following questions:

- Identify the DC power source(s)
- Identify any DC bias source(s), if any
- Identify how the circuit begins to oscillate
- Trace all circuit currents when the upper transistor is conducting
- Trace all circuit currents when the lower transistor is conducting

Challenges

- Identify transformer “dot” polarity mark placement to make the upper AC output terminal positive and the lower AC output terminal negative when the upper transistor is conducting.
- Identify what would have to be altered to make each of these circuits function properly using the opposite type of bipolar junction transistor.
- Are these circuits wired to give the transistors positive feedback, or negative feedback?

6.1.4 Bright/Royer externally-excited inverter circuits

Examine the schematic diagrams of Figures 6, 7, and 8 in the “Example: inverter circuits from the Bright/Royer 1957 patent” section of the *Case Tutorial* chapter of this module and answer the following questions:

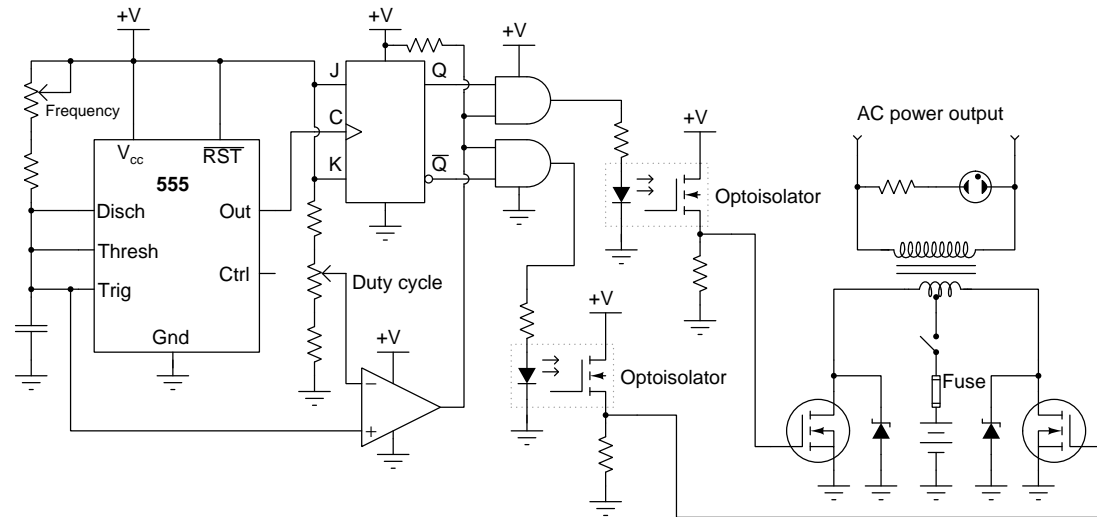
- Identify the DC power source(s)
- Identify the AC output transformer
- Annotate the diagram to show where the AC load would connect to this circuit
- Identify the excitation input transformer
- Annotate the diagram to show where the AC signal (excitation) source would connect to this circuit
- Trace all circuit currents when the upper transistor is conducting
- Trace all circuit currents when the lower transistor is conducting

Challenges

- Identify what would have to be altered to make each of these circuits function properly using the opposite type of bipolar junction transistor.
- Explain why no feedback is necessary for the power transistors in any of these circuits.

6.1.5 555-based inverter circuit

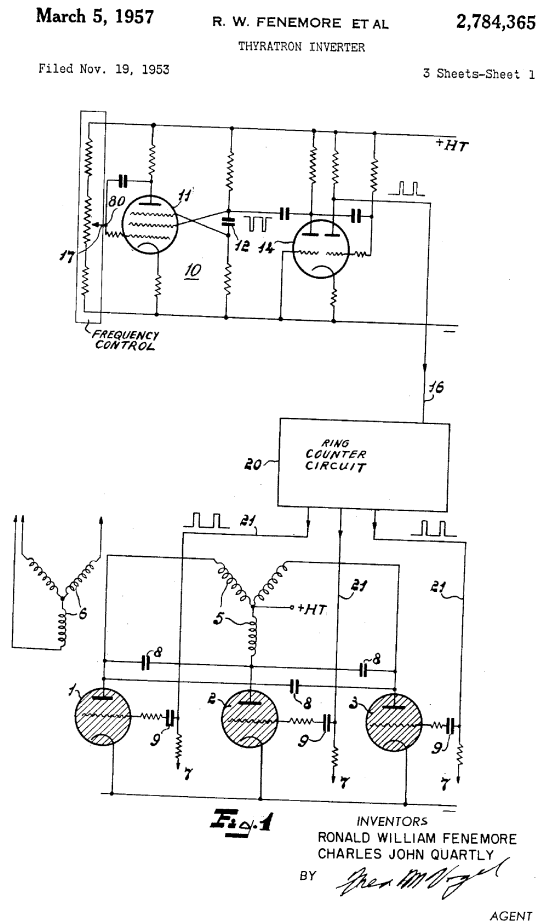
Examine the schematic diagram for the following DC-AC inverter circuit and explain how it functions:



- Identify the effect on the AC output voltage if the duty cycle wiper moves up.

6.1.6 Early three-phase inverter design

The following diagram comes from a United States patent (number 2,784,365 granted 5 March 1957) submitted by inventors Ronald William Fenemore and Charles John Quartly of England, illustrating a circuit designed to invert DC into three-phase AC. This design uses *thyatron* gas tubes (components 1, 2, and 3 in the schematic) which function similar to SCRs:



Study this diagram, then answer the following questions:

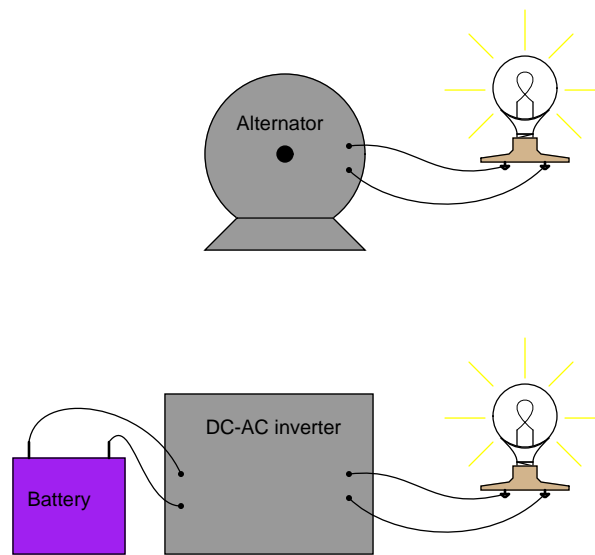
- Where should the three-phase load connect to this inverter circuit?
- How is proper three-phase sequencing ensured, so that there is a definite phase rotation in the power delivered to the load?
- Explain how you would design/build a “Ring Counter Circuit” for an inverter circuit such as this.

Challenges

- What is the purpose of the three capacitors labeled (8) in this circuit?

6.1.7 Voltmeter discrepancy

An electromechanical alternator (AC generator) and a DC-AC inverter both output the same RMS voltage, and deliver the same amount of electrical power to two identical loads:



When the AC load voltage is measured in these two circuits using a True-RMS digital multimeter, they read as equal amounts of voltage. However, when measured by an analog voltmeter the inverter's output voltage is slightly greater than the alternator's output voltage. Explain this discrepancy in measurements.

Can you think of any test we might perform on these two circuits that would shed more light on this problem?

Challenges

- Explain what *crest factor* means for an AC waveform.
- Explain what *form factor* means for an AC waveform.

6.2 Quantitative reasoning

These questions are designed to stimulate your computational thinking. In a Socratic discussion with your instructor, the goal is for these questions to reveal your mathematical approach(es) to problem-solving so that good technique and sound reasoning may be reinforced. Your instructor may also pose additional questions based on those assigned, in order to observe your problem-solving firsthand.

Mental arithmetic and estimations are strongly encouraged for all calculations, because without these abilities you will be unable to readily detect errors caused by calculator misuse (e.g. keystroke errors).

You will note a conspicuous lack of answers given for these quantitative questions. Unlike standard textbooks where answers to every other question are given somewhere toward the back of the book, here in these learning modules students must rely on other means to check their work. My advice is to use circuit simulation software such as SPICE to check the correctness of quantitative answers. Refer to those learning modules within this collection focusing on SPICE to see worked examples which you may use directly as practice problems for your own study, and/or as templates you may modify to run your own analyses and generate your own practice problems.

Completely worked example problems found in the Tutorial may also serve as “test cases⁴” for gaining proficiency in the use of circuit simulation software, and then once that proficiency is gained you will never need to rely⁵ on an answer key!

⁴In other words, set up the circuit simulation software to analyze the same circuit examples found in the Tutorial. If the simulated results match the answers shown in the Tutorial, it confirms the simulation has properly run. If the simulated results disagree with the Tutorial’s answers, something has been set up incorrectly in the simulation software. Using every Tutorial as practice in this way will quickly develop proficiency in the use of circuit simulation software.

⁵This approach is perfectly in keeping with the instructional philosophy of these learning modules: *teaching students to be self-sufficient thinkers*. Answer keys can be useful, but it is even more useful to your long-term success to have a set of tools on hand for checking your own work, because once you have left school and are on your own, there will no longer be “answer keys” available for the problems you will have to solve.

6.2.1 Miscellaneous physical constants

Note: constants shown in **bold** type are *exact*, not approximations. Values inside of parentheses show one standard deviation (σ) of uncertainty in the final digits: for example, the magnetic permeability of free space value given as $1.25663706212(19) \times 10^{-6}$ H/m represents a center value (i.e. the location parameter) of $1.25663706212 \times 10^{-6}$ Henrys per meter with one standard deviation of uncertainty equal to $0.0000000000019 \times 10^{-6}$ Henrys per meter.

Avogadro's number (N_A) = **6.02214076** $\times 10^{23}$ **per mole** (mol⁻¹)

Boltzmann's constant (k) = **1.380649** $\times 10^{-23}$ **Joules per Kelvin** (J/K)

Electronic charge (e) = **1.602176634** $\times 10^{-19}$ **Coulomb** (C)

Faraday constant (F) = **96,485.33212...** $\times 10^4$ **Coulombs per mole** (C/mol)

Magnetic permeability of free space (μ_0) = $1.25663706212(19) \times 10^{-6}$ Henrys per meter (H/m)

Electric permittivity of free space (ϵ_0) = $8.8541878128(13) \times 10^{-12}$ Farads per meter (F/m)

Characteristic impedance of free space (Z_0) = $376.730313668(57)$ Ohms (Ω)

Gravitational constant (G) = $6.67430(15) \times 10^{-11}$ cubic meters per kilogram-seconds squared (m³/kg-s²)

Molar gas constant (R) = **8.314462618...** **Joules per mole-Kelvin** (J/mol-K) = 0.08205746(14) liters-atmospheres per mole-Kelvin

Planck constant (h) = **6.62607015** $\times 10^{-34}$ **joule-seconds** (J-s)

Stefan-Boltzmann constant (σ) = **5.670374419...** $\times 10^{-8}$ **Watts per square meter-Kelvin⁴** (W/m²·K⁴)

Speed of light in a vacuum (c) = **299,792,458 meters per second** (m/s) = 186282.4 miles per second (mi/s)

Note: All constants taken from NIST data "Fundamental Physical Constants – Complete Listing", from <http://physics.nist.gov/constants>, National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), 2018 CODATA Adjustment.

6.2.2 Introduction to spreadsheets

A powerful computational tool you are encouraged to use in your work is a *spreadsheet*. Available on most personal computers (e.g. Microsoft Excel), *spreadsheet* software performs numerical calculations based on number values and formulae entered into cells of a grid. This grid is typically arranged as lettered columns and numbered rows, with each cell of the grid identified by its column/row coordinates (e.g. cell B3, cell A8). Each cell may contain a string of text, a number value, or a mathematical formula. The spreadsheet automatically updates the results of all mathematical formulae whenever the entered number values are changed. This means it is possible to set up a spreadsheet to perform a series of calculations on entered data, and those calculations will be re-done by the computer any time the data points are edited in any way.

For example, the following spreadsheet calculates average speed based on entered values of distance traveled and time elapsed:

	A	B	C	D
1	Distance traveled	46.9	Kilometers	
2	Time elapsed	1.18	Hours	
3	Average speed	= B1 / B2	km/h	
4				
5				

Text labels contained in cells A1 through A3 and cells C1 through C3 exist solely for readability and are not involved in any calculations. Cell B1 contains a sample distance value while cell B2 contains a sample time value. The formula for computing speed is contained in cell B3. Note how this formula begins with an “equals” symbol (=), references the values for distance and speed by lettered column and numbered row coordinates (B1 and B2), and uses a forward slash symbol for division (/). The coordinates B1 and B2 function as *variables*⁶ would in an algebraic formula.

When this spreadsheet is executed, the numerical value 39.74576 will appear in cell B3 rather than the formula = B1 / B2, because 39.74576 is the computed speed value given 46.9 kilometers traveled over a period of 1.18 hours. If a different numerical value for distance is entered into cell B1 or a different value for time is entered into cell B2, cell B3’s value will automatically update. All you need to do is set up the given values and any formulae into the spreadsheet, and the computer will do all the calculations for you.

Cell B3 may be referenced by other formulae in the spreadsheet if desired, since it is a variable just like the given values contained in B1 and B2. This means it is possible to set up an entire chain of calculations, one dependent on the result of another, in order to arrive at a final value. The arrangement of the given data and formulae need not follow any pattern on the grid, which means you may place them anywhere.

⁶Spreadsheets may also provide means to attach text labels to cells for use as variable names (Microsoft Excel simply calls these labels “names”), but for simple spreadsheets such as those shown here it’s usually easier just to use the standard coordinate naming for each cell.

Common⁷ arithmetic operations available for your use in a spreadsheet include the following:

- Addition (+)
- Subtraction (-)
- Multiplication (*)
- Division (/)
- Powers (^)
- Square roots (sqrt())
- Logarithms (ln() , log10())

Parentheses may be used to ensure⁸ proper order of operations within a complex formula. Consider this example of a spreadsheet implementing the *quadratic formula*, used to solve for roots of a polynomial expression in the form of $ax^2 + bx + c$:

$$x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$$

	A	B
1	x_1	= (-B4 + sqrt((B4^2) - (4*B3*B5))) / (2*B3)
2	x_2	= (-B4 - sqrt((B4^2) - (4*B3*B5))) / (2*B3)
3	a =	9
4	b =	5
5	c =	-2

This example is configured to compute roots⁹ of the polynomial $9x^2 + 5x - 2$ because the values of 9, 5, and -2 have been inserted into cells B3, B4, and B5, respectively. Once this spreadsheet has been built, though, it may be used to calculate the roots of *any* second-degree polynomial expression simply by entering the new a , b , and c coefficients into cells B3 through B5. The numerical values appearing in cells B1 and B2 will be automatically updated by the computer immediately following any changes made to the coefficients.

⁷Modern spreadsheet software offers a bewildering array of mathematical functions you may use in your computations. I recommend you consult the documentation for your particular spreadsheet for information on operations other than those listed here.

⁸Spreadsheet programs, like text-based programming languages, are designed to follow standard order of operations by default. However, my personal preference is to use parentheses even where strictly unnecessary just to make it clear to any other person viewing the formula what the intended order of operations is.

⁹Reviewing some algebra here, a *root* is a value for x that yields an overall value of zero for the polynomial. For this polynomial ($9x^2 + 5x - 2$) the two roots happen to be $x = 0.269381$ and $x = -0.82494$, with these values displayed in cells B1 and B2, respectively upon execution of the spreadsheet.

Alternatively, one could break up the long quadratic formula into smaller pieces like this:

$$y = \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac} \quad z = 2a$$

$$x = \frac{-b \pm y}{z}$$

	A	B	C
1	x_1	= (-B4 + C1) / C2	= sqrt((B4^2) - (4*B3*B5))
2	x_2	= (-B4 - C1) / C2	= 2*B3
3	a =	9	
4	b =	5	
5	c =	-2	

Note how the square-root term (y) is calculated in cell C1, and the denominator term (z) in cell C2. This makes the two final formulae (in cells B1 and B2) simpler to interpret. The positioning of all these cells on the grid is completely arbitrary¹⁰ – all that matters is that they properly reference each other in the formulae.

Spreadsheets are particularly useful for situations where the same set of calculations representing a circuit or other system must be repeated for different initial conditions. The power of a spreadsheet is that it automates what would otherwise be a tedious set of calculations. One specific application of this is to simulate the effects of various components within a circuit failing with abnormal values (e.g. a shorted resistor simulated by making its value nearly zero; an open resistor simulated by making its value extremely large). Another application is analyzing the behavior of a circuit design given new components that are out of specification, and/or aging components experiencing drift over time.

¹⁰My personal preference is to locate all the “given” data in the upper-left cells of the spreadsheet grid (each data point flanked by a sensible name in the cell to the left and units of measurement in the cell to the right as illustrated in the first distance/time spreadsheet example), sometimes coloring them in order to clearly distinguish which cells contain entered data versus which cells contain computed results from formulae. I like to place all formulae in cells below the given data, and try to arrange them in logical order so that anyone examining my spreadsheet will be able to figure out *how* I constructed a solution. This is a general principle I believe all computer programmers should follow: *document and arrange your code to make it easy for other people to learn from it.*

6.2.3 Converter efficiency

Suppose a DC-AC inverter has a conversion efficiency of 85%. Calculate the input (DC) power to this inverter as well as its thermal power dissipation, as it continuously delivers 1200 Watts to a load.

Also, sketch a simple block diagram showing all the power inputs and outputs (shown as arrows) for the converter circuit.

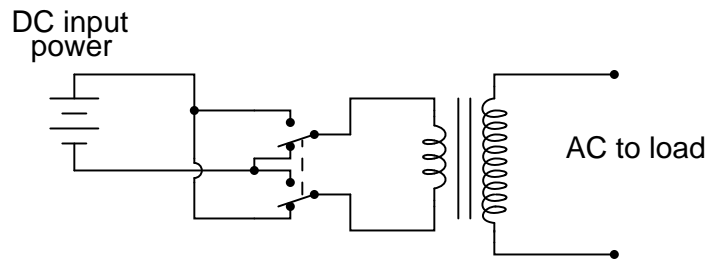
If this same DC-AC converter happens to draw 850 Watts from a source while operating at 82% efficiency, how much power will it be delivering to a load, and how much power will it dissipate in the form of heat?

Challenges

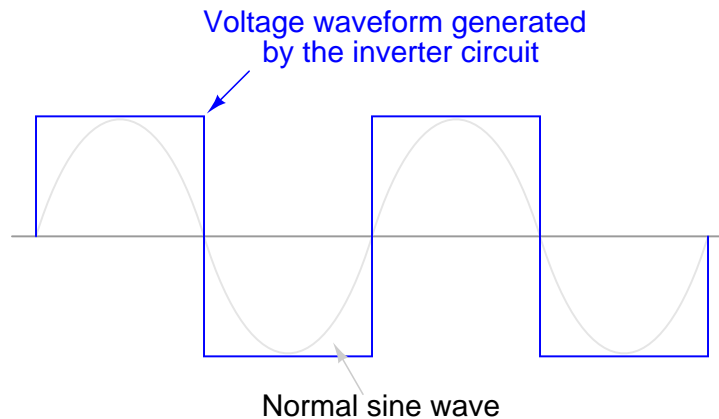
- Explain how the *Conservation of Energy* relates to this problem.
- Identify practical ways to maximize the efficiency of any solid-state power converter circuit.

6.2.4 Modified duty cycle

Electronic power conversion circuits known as *inverters* convert DC into AC by using transistor switching elements to periodically reverse the polarity of the DC voltage. Usually, inverters also increase the voltage level of the input power by applying the switched-DC voltage to the primary winding of a step-up transformer. You may think of an inverter's switching electronics as akin to double-pole, double-throw switch being flipped back and forth many times per second:

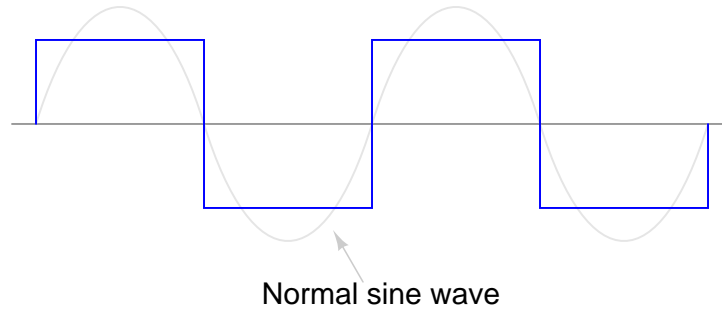


The first commercially available inverters produced simple square-wave output:

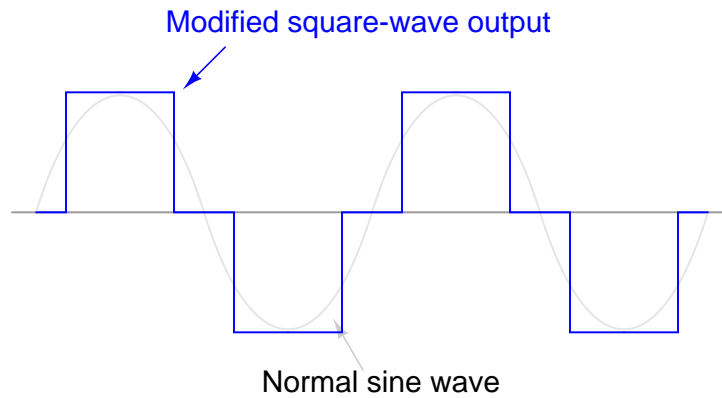


However, this caused problems for most power transformers designed to operate on sine-wave AC power. When powered by the square-wave output of such an inverter, most transformers would *saturate* due to excessive magnetic flux accumulating in the core at certain points of the waveform's cycle. To describe this in the simplest terms, a square wave possesses a greater *volt-second product* than a sine wave with the same peak amplitude and fundamental frequency.

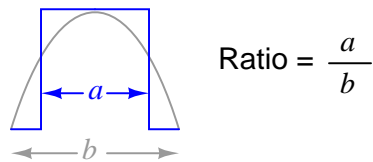
This problem could be avoided by decreasing the peak voltage of the square wave, but then some types of powered equipment would experience difficulty due to insufficient (maximum) voltage:



A workable solution to this dilemma turned out to be a modified duty cycle for the square wave:



Calculate the fraction of the half-cycle for which this modified wave is “on” in order to have the same volt-second product as a sine wave for one-half cycle (from 0 to π radians):



Hint: it is a matter of calculating the respective *areas* underneath each waveform in the half-cycle domain.

Challenges

- Design a circuit that would produce this waveform.

6.3 Diagnostic reasoning

These questions are designed to stimulate your deductive and inductive thinking, where you must apply general principles to specific scenarios (deductive) and also derive conclusions about the failed circuit from specific details (inductive). In a Socratic discussion with your instructor, the goal is for these questions to reinforce your recall and use of general circuit principles and also challenge your ability to integrate multiple symptoms into a sensible explanation of what's wrong in a circuit. Your instructor may also pose additional questions based on those assigned, in order to further challenge and sharpen your diagnostic abilities.

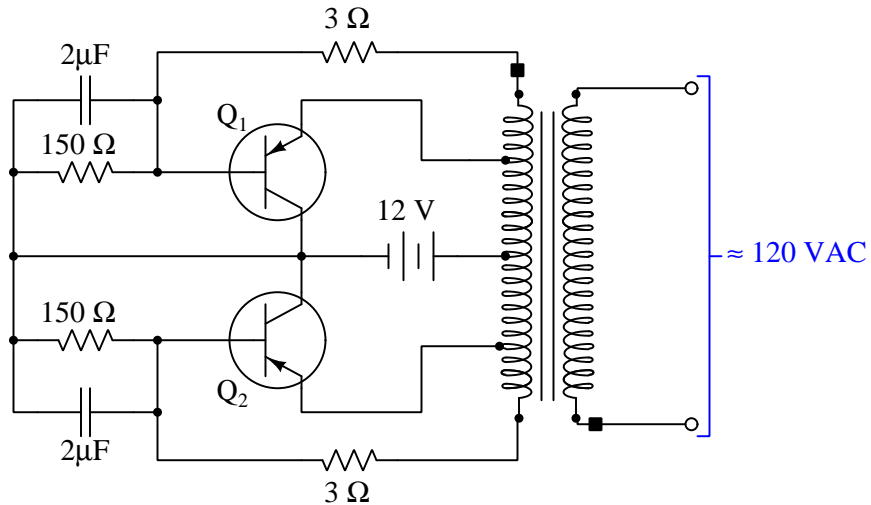
As always, your goal is to fully *explain* your analysis of each problem. Simply obtaining a correct answer is not good enough – you must also demonstrate sound reasoning in order to successfully complete the assignment. Your instructor's responsibility is to probe and challenge your understanding of the relevant principles and analytical processes in order to ensure you have a strong foundation upon which to build further understanding.

You will note a conspicuous lack of answers given for these diagnostic questions. Unlike standard textbooks where answers to every other question are given somewhere toward the back of the book, here in these learning modules students must rely on other means to check their work. The best way by far is to debate the answers with fellow students and also with the instructor during the Socratic dialogue sessions intended to be used with these learning modules. Reasoning through challenging questions with other people is an excellent tool for developing strong reasoning skills.

Another means of checking your diagnostic answers, where applicable, is to use circuit simulation software to explore the effects of faults placed in circuits. For example, if one of these diagnostic questions requires that you predict the effect of an open or a short in a circuit, you may check the validity of your work by simulating that same fault (substituting a very high resistance in place of that component for an open, and substituting a very low resistance for a short) within software and seeing if the results agree.

6.3.1 Tracing fault current

Suppose transistor Q_1 has failed shorted between its collector and emitter terminals in this DC-AC inverter circuit. Trace the direction of the fault current when the DC power is first applied, and also determine the polarity of the output voltage during that initial power-up period:

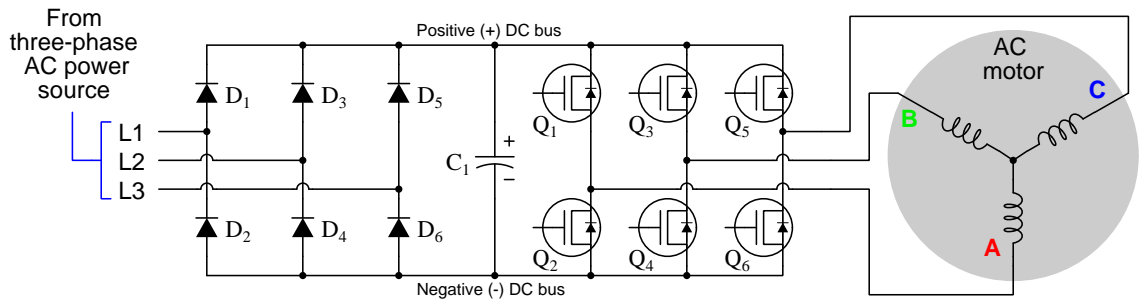


Challenges

- What do the solid-colored square symbols represent by each of the transformer windings?
- Re-design this circuit to include some overcurrent protection against faults such as this.

6.3.2 Faults in a VFD circuit

The following schematic diagram shows the power components for a *VFD*, a special-purpose converter circuit designed to take AC power at a fixed frequency and fixed voltage and convert it into AC power at variable frequency and variable voltage. All control circuitry (e.g. the circuits generating the pulse signals to send to the transistor gates) has been omitted for simplicity:



- Identify the effect(s) of diode D_3 failing open
- Identify the effect(s) of diode D_4 failing shorted
- How many diodes could fail open and still allow the motor to run at all?
- Identify the effect(s) of transistor Q_5 failing open
- Identify the effect(s) of transistor Q_1 failing shorted

Challenges

- Explain the operating principle of a VFD: what must be done to alter the rotational speed of a three-phase AC induction motor?
- What type of transistor would you recommend for this application, and why?

Appendix A

Problem-Solving Strategies

The ability to solve complex problems is arguably one of the most valuable skills one can possess, and this skill is particularly important in any science-based discipline.

- Study principles, not procedures. Don't be satisfied with merely knowing how to compute solutions – learn *why* those solutions work.
- Identify what it is you need to solve, identify all relevant data, identify all units of measurement, identify any general principles or formulae linking the given information to the solution, and then identify any “missing pieces” to a solution. Annotate all diagrams with this data.
- Sketch a diagram to help visualize the problem. When building a real system, always devise a plan for that system and analyze its function *before* constructing it.
- Follow the units of measurement and meaning of every calculation. If you are ever performing mathematical calculations as part of a problem-solving procedure, and you find yourself unable to apply each and every intermediate result to some aspect of the problem, it means you don't understand what you are doing. Properly done, every mathematical result should have practical meaning for the problem, and not just be an abstract number. You should be able to identify the proper units of measurement for each and every calculated result, and show where that result fits into the problem.
- Perform “thought experiments” to explore the effects of different conditions for theoretical problems. When troubleshooting real systems, perform *diagnostic tests* rather than visually inspecting for faults, the best diagnostic test being the one giving you the most information about the nature and/or location of the fault with the fewest steps.
- Simplify the problem until the solution becomes obvious, and then use that obvious case as a model to follow in solving the more complex version of the problem.
- Check for exceptions to see if your solution is incorrect or incomplete. A good solution will work for *all* known conditions and criteria. A good example of this is the process of testing scientific hypotheses: the task of a scientist is not to find support for a new idea, but rather to *challenge* that new idea to see if it holds up under a battery of tests. The philosophical

principle of *reductio ad absurdum* (i.e. disproving a general idea by finding a specific case where it fails) is useful here.

- Work “backward” from a hypothetical solution to a new set of given conditions.
- Add quantities to problems that are qualitative in nature, because sometimes a little math helps illuminate the scenario.
- Sketch graphs illustrating how variables relate to each other. These may be quantitative (i.e. with realistic number values) or qualitative (i.e. simply showing increases and decreases).
- Treat quantitative problems as qualitative in order to discern the relative magnitudes and/or directions of change of the relevant variables. For example, try determining what happens if a certain variable were to increase or decrease before attempting to precisely calculate quantities: how will each of the dependent variables respond, by increasing, decreasing, or remaining the same as before?
- Consider limiting cases. This works especially well for qualitative problems where you need to determine which direction a variable will change. Take the given condition and magnify that condition to an extreme degree as a way of simplifying the direction of the system’s response.
- Check your work. This means regularly testing your conclusions to see if they make sense. This does *not* mean repeating the same steps originally used to obtain the conclusion(s), but rather to use some other means to check validity. Simply repeating procedures often leads to *repeating the same errors* if any were made, which is why alternative paths are better.

Appendix B

Instructional philosophy

“The unexamined circuit is not worth energizing” – Socrates (if he had taught electricity)

These learning modules, although useful for self-study, were designed to be used in a formal learning environment where a subject-matter expert challenges students to digest the content and exercise their critical thinking abilities in the answering of questions and in the construction and testing of working circuits.

The following principles inform the instructional and assessment philosophies embodied in these learning modules:

- The first goal of education is to enhance clear and independent thought, in order that every student reach their fullest potential in a highly complex and inter-dependent world. Robust reasoning is *always* more important than particulars of any subject matter, because its application is universal.
- Literacy is fundamental to independent learning and thought because text continues to be the most efficient way to communicate complex ideas over space and time. Those who cannot read with ease are limited in their ability to acquire knowledge and perspective.
- Articulate communication is fundamental to work that is complex and interdisciplinary.
- Faulty assumptions and poor reasoning are best corrected through challenge, not presentation. The rhetorical technique of *reductio ad absurdum* (disproving an assertion by exposing an absurdity) works well to discipline student’s minds, not only to correct the problem at hand but also to learn how to detect and correct future errors.
- Important principles should be repeatedly explored and widely applied throughout a course of study, not only to reinforce their importance and help ensure their mastery, but also to showcase the interconnectedness and utility of knowledge.

These learning modules were expressly designed to be used in an “inverted” teaching environment¹ where students first read the introductory and tutorial chapters on their own, then individually attempt to answer the questions and construct working circuits according to the experiment and project guidelines. The instructor never lectures, but instead meets regularly with each individual student to review their progress, answer questions, identify misconceptions, and challenge the student to new depths of understanding through further questioning. Regular meetings between instructor and student should resemble a Socratic² dialogue, where questions serve as scalpels to dissect topics and expose assumptions. The student passes each module only after consistently demonstrating their ability to logically analyze and correctly apply all major concepts in each question or project/experiment. The instructor must be vigilant in probing each student’s understanding to ensure they are truly *reasoning* and not just *memorizing*. This is why “Challenge” points appear throughout, as prompts for students to think deeper about topics and as starting points for instructor queries. Sometimes these challenge points require additional knowledge that hasn’t been covered in the series to answer in full. This is okay, as the major purpose of the Challenges is to stimulate analysis and synthesis on the part of each student.

The instructor must possess enough mastery of the subject matter and awareness of students’ reasoning to generate their own follow-up questions to practically any student response. Even completely correct answers given by the student should be challenged by the instructor for the purpose of having students practice articulating their thoughts and defending their reasoning. Conceptual errors committed by the student should be exposed and corrected not by direct instruction, but rather by reducing the errors to an absurdity³ through well-chosen questions and thought experiments posed by the instructor. Becoming proficient at this style of instruction requires time and dedication, but the positive effects on critical thinking for both student and instructor are spectacular.

An inspection of these learning modules reveals certain unique characteristics. One of these is a bias toward thorough explanations in the tutorial chapters. Without a live instructor to explain concepts and applications to students, the text itself must fulfill this role. This philosophy results in lengthier explanations than what you might typically find in a textbook, each step of the reasoning process fully explained, including footnotes addressing common questions and concerns students raise while learning these concepts. Each tutorial seeks to not only explain each major concept in sufficient detail, but also to explain the logic of each concept and how each may be developed

¹In a traditional teaching environment, students first encounter new information via *lecture* from an expert, and then independently apply that information via *homework*. In an “inverted” course of study, students first encounter new information via *homework*, and then independently apply that information under the scrutiny of an expert. The expert’s role in lecture is to simply *explain*, but the expert’s role in an inverted session is to *challenge*, *critique*, and if necessary *explain* where gaps in understanding still exist.

²Socrates is a figure in ancient Greek philosophy famous for his unflinching style of questioning. Although he authored no texts, he appears as a character in Plato’s many writings. The essence of Socratic philosophy is to leave no question unexamined and no point of view unchallenged. While purists may argue a topic such as electric circuits is too narrow for a true Socratic-style dialogue, I would argue that the essential thought processes involved with scientific reasoning on *any* topic are not far removed from the Socratic ideal, and that students of electricity and electronics would do very well to challenge assumptions, pose thought experiments, identify fallacies, and otherwise employ the arsenal of critical thinking skills modeled by Socrates.

³This rhetorical technique is known by the Latin phrase *reductio ad absurdum*. The concept is to expose errors by counter-example, since only one solid counter-example is necessary to disprove a universal claim. As an example of this, consider the common misconception among beginning students of electricity that voltage cannot exist without current. One way to apply *reductio ad absurdum* to this statement is to ask how much current passes through a fully-charged battery connected to nothing (i.e. a clear example of voltage existing without current).

from “first principles”. Again, this reflects the goal of developing clear and independent thought in students’ minds, by showing how clear and logical thought was used to forge each concept. Students benefit from witnessing a model of clear thinking in action, and these tutorials strive to be just that.

Another characteristic of these learning modules is a lack of step-by-step instructions in the Project and Experiment chapters. Unlike many modern workbooks and laboratory guides where step-by-step instructions are prescribed for each experiment, these modules take the approach that students must learn to closely read the tutorials and apply their own reasoning to identify the appropriate experimental steps. Sometimes these steps are plainly declared in the text, just not as a set of enumerated points. At other times certain steps are implied, an example being assumed competence in test equipment use where the student should not need to be told *again* how to use their multimeter because that was thoroughly explained in previous lessons. In some circumstances no steps are given at all, leaving the entire procedure up to the student.

This lack of prescription is not a flaw, but rather a feature. Close reading and clear thinking are foundational principles of this learning series, and in keeping with this philosophy all activities are designed to *require* those behaviors. Some students may find the lack of prescription frustrating, because it demands more from them than what their previous educational experiences required. This frustration should be interpreted as an unfamiliarity with autonomous thinking, a problem which must be corrected if the student is ever to become a self-directed learner and effective problem-solver. Ultimately, the need for students to read closely and think clearly is more important both in the near-term and far-term than any specific facet of the subject matter at hand. If a student takes longer than expected to complete a module because they are forced to outline, digest, and reason on their own, so be it. The future gains enjoyed by developing this mental discipline will be well worth the additional effort and delay.

Another feature of these learning modules is that they do not treat topics in isolation. Rather, important concepts are introduced early in the series, and appear repeatedly as stepping-stones toward other concepts in subsequent modules. This helps to avoid the “compartmentalization” of knowledge, demonstrating the inter-connectedness of concepts and simultaneously reinforcing them. Each module is fairly complete in itself, reserving the beginning of its tutorial to a review of foundational concepts.

This methodology of assigning text-based modules to students for digestion and then using Socratic dialogue to assess progress and hone students’ thinking was developed over a period of several years by the author with his Electronics and Instrumentation students at the two-year college level. While decidedly unconventional and sometimes even unsettling for students accustomed to a more passive lecture environment, this instructional philosophy has proven its ability to convey conceptual mastery, foster careful analysis, and enhance employability so much better than lecture that the author refuses to ever teach by lecture again.

Problems which often go undiagnosed in a lecture environment are laid bare in this “inverted” format where students must articulate and logically defend their reasoning. This, too, may be unsettling for students accustomed to lecture sessions where the instructor cannot tell for sure who comprehends and who does not, and this vulnerability necessitates sensitivity on the part of the “inverted” session instructor in order that students never feel discouraged by having their errors exposed. *Everyone* makes mistakes from time to time, and learning is a lifelong process! Part of the instructor’s job is to build a culture of learning among the students where errors are not seen as shameful, but rather as opportunities for progress.

To this end, instructors managing courses based on these modules should adhere to the following principles:

- Student questions are always welcome and demand thorough, honest answers. The only type of question an instructor should refuse to answer is one the student should be able to easily answer on their own. Remember, *the fundamental goal of education is for each student to learn to think clearly and independently*. This requires hard work on the part of the student, which no instructor should ever circumvent. Anything done to bypass the student's responsibility to do that hard work ultimately limits that student's potential and thereby does real harm.
- It is not only permissible, but encouraged, to answer a student's question by asking questions in return, these follow-up questions designed to guide the student to reach a correct answer through their own reasoning.
- All student answers demand to be challenged by the instructor and/or by other students. This includes both correct and incorrect answers – the goal is to practice the articulation and defense of one's own reasoning.
- No reading assignment is deemed complete unless and until the student demonstrates their ability to accurately summarize the major points in their own terms. Recitation of the original text is unacceptable. This is why every module contains an "Outline and reflections" question as well as a "Foundational concepts" question in the Conceptual reasoning section, to prompt reflective reading.
- No assigned question is deemed answered unless and until the student demonstrates their ability to consistently and correctly apply the concepts to *variations* of that question. This is why module questions typically contain multiple "Challenges" suggesting different applications of the concept(s) as well as variations on the same theme(s). Instructors are encouraged to devise as many of their own "Challenges" as they are able, in order to have a multitude of ways ready to probe students' understanding.
- No assigned experiment or project is deemed complete unless and until the student demonstrates the task in action. If this cannot be done "live" before the instructor, video-recordings showing the demonstration are acceptable. All relevant safety precautions must be followed, all test equipment must be used correctly, and the student must be able to properly explain all results. The student must also successfully answer all Challenges presented by the instructor for that experiment or project.

Students learning from these modules would do well to abide by the following principles:

- No text should be considered fully and adequately read unless and until you can express every idea *in your own words, using your own examples*.
- You should always articulate your thoughts as you read the text, noting points of agreement, confusion, and epiphanies. Feel free to print the text on paper and then write your notes in the margins. Alternatively, keep a journal for your own reflections as you read. This is truly a helpful tool when digesting complicated concepts.
- Never take the easy path of highlighting or underlining important text. Instead, *summarize* and/or *comment* on the text using your own words. This actively engages your mind, allowing you to more clearly perceive points of confusion or misunderstanding on your own.
- A very helpful strategy when learning new concepts is to place yourself in the role of a teacher, if only as a mental exercise. Either explain what you have recently learned to someone else, or at least *imagine* yourself explaining what you have learned to someone else. The simple act of having to articulate new knowledge and skill forces you to take on a different perspective, and will help reveal weaknesses in your understanding.
- Perform each and every mathematical calculation and thought experiment shown in the text on your own, referring back to the text to see that your results agree. This may seem trivial and unnecessary, but it is critically important to ensuring you actually understand what is presented, especially when the concepts at hand are complicated and easy to misunderstand. Apply this same strategy to become proficient in the use of *circuit simulation software*, checking to see if your simulated results agree with the results shown in the text.
- Above all, recognize that learning is hard work, and that a certain level of frustration is unavoidable. There are times when you will struggle to grasp some of these concepts, and that struggle is a natural thing. Take heart that it will yield with persistent and varied⁴ effort, and never give up!

Students interested in using these modules for self-study will also find them beneficial, although the onus of responsibility for thoroughly reading and answering questions will of course lie with that individual alone. If a qualified instructor is not available to challenge students, a workable alternative is for students to form study groups where they challenge⁵ one another.

To high standards of education,

Tony R. Kuphaldt

⁴As the old saying goes, “Insanity is trying the same thing over and over again, expecting different results.” If you find yourself stumped by something in the text, you should attempt a different approach. Alter the thought experiment, change the mathematical parameters, do whatever you can to see the problem in a slightly different light, and then the solution will often present itself more readily.

⁵Avoid the temptation to simply share answers with study partners, as this is really counter-productive to learning. Always bear in mind that the answer to any question is far less important in the long run than the method(s) used to obtain that answer. The goal of education is to empower one’s life through the improvement of clear and independent thought, literacy, expression, and various practical skills.

Appendix C

Tools used

I am indebted to the developers of many open-source software applications in the creation of these learning modules. The following is a list of these applications with some commentary on each.

You will notice a theme common to many of these applications: a bias toward *code*. Although I am by no means an expert programmer in any computer language, I understand and appreciate the flexibility offered by code-based applications where the user (you) enters commands into a plain ASCII text file, which the software then reads and processes to create the final output. Code-based computer applications are by their very nature *extensible*, while WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) applications are generally limited to whatever user interface the developer makes for you.

The GNU/Linux computer operating system

There is so much to be said about Linus Torvalds' **Linux** and Richard Stallman's **GNU** project. First, to credit just these two individuals is to fail to do justice to the *mob* of passionate volunteers who contributed to make this amazing software a reality. I first learned of **Linux** back in 1996, and have been using this operating system on my personal computers almost exclusively since then. It is *free*, it is completely *configurable*, and it permits the continued use of highly efficient **Unix** applications and scripting languages (e.g. shell scripts, Makefiles, **sed**, **awk**) developed over many decades. **Linux** not only provided me with a powerful computing platform, but its open design served to inspire my life's work of creating open-source educational resources.

Bram Moolenaar's Vim text editor

Writing code for any code-based computer application requires a *text editor*, which may be thought of as a word processor strictly limited to outputting plain-ASCII text files. Many good text editors exist, and one's choice of text editor seems to be a deeply personal matter within the programming world. I prefer **Vim** because it operates very similarly to **vi** which is ubiquitous on **Unix/Linux** operating systems, and because it may be entirely operated via keyboard (i.e. no mouse required) which makes it fast to use.

Donald Knuth's \TeX typesetting system

Developed in the late 1970's and early 1980's by computer scientist extraordinaire Donald Knuth to typeset his multi-volume magnum opus *The Art of Computer Programming*, this software allows the production of formatted text for screen-viewing or paper printing, all by writing plain-text code to describe how the formatted text is supposed to appear. \TeX is not just a markup language for documents, but it is also a Turing-complete programming language in and of itself, allowing useful algorithms to be created to control the production of documents. Simply put, *\TeX is a programmer's approach to word processing*. Since \TeX is controlled by code written in a plain-text file, this means anyone may read that plain-text file to see exactly how the document was created. This openness afforded by the code-based nature of \TeX makes it relatively easy to learn how other people have created their own \TeX documents. By contrast, examining a beautiful document created in a conventional WYSIWYG word processor such as Microsoft **Word** suggests nothing to the reader about *how* that document was created, or what the user might do to create something similar. As Mr. Knuth himself once quipped, conventional word processing applications should be called WYSIAYG (What You See Is *All* You Get).

Leslie Lamport's \LaTeX extensions to \TeX

Like all true programming languages, \TeX is inherently extensible. So, years after the release of \TeX to the public, Leslie Lamport decided to create a massive extension allowing easier compilation of book-length documents. The result was \LaTeX , which is the markup language used to create all ModEL module documents. You could say that \TeX is to \LaTeX as **C** is to **C++**. This means it is permissible to use any and all \TeX commands within \LaTeX source code, and it all still works. Some of the features offered by \LaTeX that would be challenging to implement in \TeX include automatic index and table-of-content creation.

Tim Edwards' **Xcircuit** drafting program

This wonderful program is what I use to create all the schematic diagrams and illustrations (but not photographic images or mathematical plots) throughout the ModEL project. It natively outputs PostScript format which is a true vector graphic format (this is why the images do not pixellate when you zoom in for a closer view), and it is so simple to use that I have never had to read the manual! Object libraries are easy to create for **Xcircuit**, being plain-text files using PostScript programming conventions. Over the years I have collected a large set of object libraries useful for drawing electrical and electronic schematics, pictorial diagrams, and other technical illustrations.

Gimp graphic image manipulation program

Essentially an open-source clone of Adobe's `PhotoShop`, I use `Gimp` to resize, crop, and convert file formats for all of the photographic images appearing in the `MODEL` modules. Although `Gimp` does offer its own scripting language (called `Script-Fu`), I have never had occasion to use it. Thus, my utilization of `Gimp` to merely crop, resize, and convert graphic images is akin to using a sword to slice bread.

SPICE circuit simulation program

`SPICE` is to circuit analysis as `TEX` is to document creation: it is a form of markup language designed to describe a certain object to be processed in plain-ASCII text. When the plain-text “source file” is compiled by the software, it outputs the final result. More modern circuit analysis tools certainly exist, but I prefer `SPICE` for the following reasons: it is *free*, it is *fast*, it is *reliable*, and it is a fantastic tool for *teaching* students of electricity and electronics how to write simple code. I happen to use rather old versions of `SPICE`, version 2g6 being my “go to” application when I only require text-based output. `NGSPICE` (version 26), which is based on Berkeley `SPICE` version 3f5, is used when I require graphical output for such things as time-domain waveforms and Bode plots. In all `SPICE` example netlists I strive to use coding conventions compatible with all `SPICE` versions.

Andrew D. Hwang's ePiX mathematical visualization programming library

This amazing project is a `C++` library you may link to any `C/C++` code for the purpose of generating PostScript graphic images of mathematical functions. As a completely free and open-source project, it does all the plotting I would otherwise use a Computer Algebra System (CAS) such as `Mathematica` or `Maple` to do. It should be said that `ePiX` is *not* a Computer Algebra System like `Mathematica` or `Maple`, but merely a mathematical *visualization* tool. In other words, it won't determine integrals for you (you'll have to implement that in your own `C/C++` code!), but it can graph the results, and it does so beautifully. What I really admire about `ePiX` is that it is a `C++` programming library, which means it builds on the existing power and toolset available with that programming language. Mr. Hwang could have probably developed his own stand-alone application for mathematical plotting, but by creating a `C++` library to do the same thing he accomplished something much greater.

gnuplot mathematical visualization software

Another open-source tool for mathematical visualization is `gnuplot`. Interestingly, this tool is *not* part of Richard Stallman’s GNU project, its name being a coincidence. For this reason the authors prefer “gnu” *not* be capitalized at all to avoid confusion. This is a much “lighter-weight” alternative to a spreadsheet for plotting tabular data, and the fact that it easily outputs directly to an X11 console or a file in a number of different graphical formats (including PostScript) is very helpful. I typically set my `gnuplot` output format to default (X11 on my Linux PC) for quick viewing while I’m developing a visualization, then switch to PostScript file export once the visual is ready to include in the document(s) I’m writing. As with my use of `Gimp` to do rudimentary image editing, my use of `gnuplot` only scratches the surface of its capabilities, but the important points are that it’s *free* and that it *works well*.

Python programming language

Both Python and C++ find extensive use in these modules as instructional aids and exercises, but I’m listing Python here as a *tool* for myself because I use it almost daily as a *calculator*. If you open a Python interpreter console and type `from math import *` you can type mathematical expressions and have it return results just as you would on a hand calculator. Complex-number (i.e. *phasor*) arithmetic is similarly supported if you include the complex-math library (`from cmath import *`). Examples of this are shown in the Programming References chapter (if included) in each module. Of course, being a fully-featured programming language, Python also supports conditionals, loops, and other structures useful for calculation of quantities. Also, running in a console environment where all entries and returned values show as text in a chronologically-ordered list makes it easy to copy-and-paste those calculations to document exactly how they were performed.

Appendix D

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Appendix E

References

Bright, Richard L. and Royer, George H. *US Patent 2,783,384*, “Electrical Inverter Circuits”, application 6 April 1954, patent granted 26 February 1957.

Appendix F

Version history

This is a list showing all significant additions, corrections, and other edits made to this learning module. Each entry is referenced by calendar date in reverse chronological order (newest version first), which appears on the front cover of every learning module for easy reference. Any contributors to this open-source document are listed here as well.

4 November 2024 – added two new animations to the module: one showing a BJT turning on and the other showing an E-type MOSFET turning on.

25 October 2024 – divided the Introduction chapter into sections, one with recommendations for students, one with a listing of challenging concepts, and one with recommendations for instructors.

4 April 2024 – minor grammatical correction to the Tutorial chapter regarding thyristor forced commutation.

6 November 2023 – clarified which Case Tutorial section to reference in the “Bright/Royer externally-excited inverter circuits” Conceptual Reasoning question.

24 April 2023 – added a new Case Tutorial section showing a proof-of-concept DC-AC inverter circuit using Schmitt-trigger NOT gates.

10 April 2023 – corrected minor typo in “Voltmeter discrepancy” Conceptual Reasoning question.

28 November 2022 – placed questions at the top of the itemized list in the Introduction chapter prompting students to devise experiments related to the tutorial content.

8 November 2021 – fixed an error in the “Tracing fault current” Diagnostic Reasoning question, a mismatch between the fault scenario proposed to the student in the question and the answer shown to the instructor. It was easier to change the question than to change the answer, so now it asks what happens if Q_1 fails shorted (instead of Q_2).

13 May 2021 – divided the Tutorial into sections. Also added review_10.latex to the Tutorial to give students a refresher on transistor operation.

9 May 2021 – commented out or deleted empty chapters.

18 April 2021 – changed all lower-case Greek letter “phi” symbols (ϕ) to upper-case (Φ).

6 April 2021 – added a Case Tutorial section showing a sine-wave inverter based on the Texas Instruments MSP430 microcontroller.

5 April 2021 – minor edits to the “Bright/Royer externally-excited inverter circuits” Conceptual Reasoning question.

1 April 2021 – minor edits to the Tutorial regarding “soft” magnetic materials, and also to some of the questions.

27 March 2021 – minor edits to the Tutorial regarding optical isolation, to eliminate any implication that this hardware technique might be limited to PWM applications.

11 November 2020 – added instructor notes to the “Example: inverter circuits from the Bright/Royer 1957 patent” Case Tutorial section describing in detail how the self-oscillating circuits work.

9 November 2020 – clarified the “Bright/Royer self-excited inverter circuits” Conceptual question, where it was assumed there was only one section in the Case Tutorial chapter. Also, added some instructor comments to that Case Tutorial section, and a Challenge question to the “Early three-phase inverter design” Conceptual question.

7-8 November 2020 – added labels to several components in several schematic diagrams that were unlabeled. Also added resistors to image_4611.eps that serve to limit base current through the power transistors.

5 November 2020 – minor edits to the Tutorial and to the Introduction, and some Challenge questions added. Also fixed typographical error identified by Ty Weich. Lastly, corrected a major error in the MOSFET H-bridge circuit diagram where I had the wrong transistor channel-types on the high and low sides of the H-bridge.

2 November 2020 – added mention of optoisolators to Tutorial. Also, added a Case Tutorial section showing the 555-based inverter circuit I designed in 2006.

13 October 2020 – significantly edited the Introduction chapter to make it more suitable as a pre-study guide and to provide cues useful to instructors leading “inverted” teaching sessions.

8-9 July 2020 – added content to Tutorial.

7 July 2020 – document first created.

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