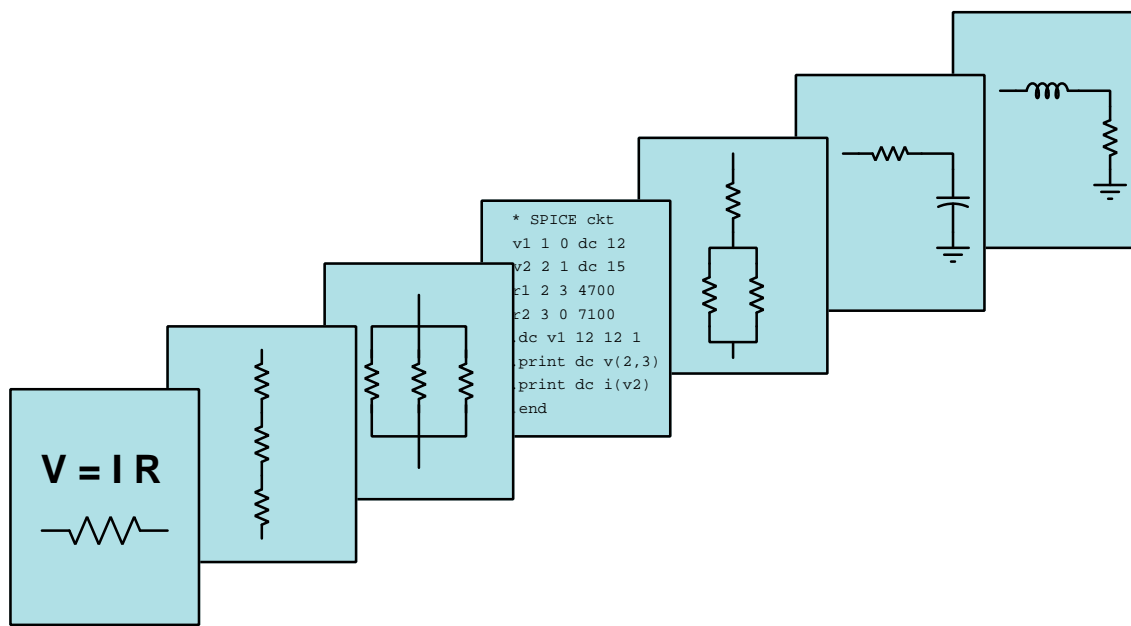


# MODULAR ELECTRONICS LEARNING (MODEL) PROJECT



## RF MEASUREMENTS

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LAST UPDATE = 28 OCTOBER 2020

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Case Tutorial</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1	Example: . . . . .	6
<b>3</b>	<b>Tutorial</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Historical References</b>	<b>9</b>
4.1	??? . . . . .	10
<b>5</b>	<b>Derivations and Technical References</b>	<b>11</b>
5.1	Decibels . . . . .	12
5.2	Smith charts . . . . .	22
5.3	Derivation of ??? . . . . .	30
5.4	??? Reference . . . . .	31
<b>6</b>	<b>Programming References</b>	<b>33</b>
6.1	Programming in C++ . . . . .	34
6.2	Programming in Python . . . . .	38
6.3	Modeling ??? using C++ . . . . .	43
<b>7</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>45</b>
7.1	Conceptual reasoning . . . . .	49
7.1.1	Reading outline and reflections . . . . .	50
7.1.2	Foundational concepts . . . . .	51
7.1.3	First conceptual question . . . . .	52
7.1.4	Second conceptual question . . . . .	52
7.2	Quantitative reasoning . . . . .	53
7.2.1	Miscellaneous physical constants . . . . .	54
7.2.2	Introduction to spreadsheets . . . . .	55
7.2.3	First quantitative problem . . . . .	58
7.2.4	Second quantitative problem . . . . .	58
7.3	Diagnostic reasoning . . . . .	59
7.3.1	First diagnostic scenario . . . . .	59
7.3.2	Second diagnostic scenario . . . . .	60

<i>CONTENTS</i>	1
<b>8 Projects and Experiments</b>	<b>61</b>
8.1 Recommended practices . . . . .	61
8.1.1 Safety first! . . . . .	62
8.1.2 Other helpful tips . . . . .	64
8.1.3 Terminal blocks for circuit construction . . . . .	65
8.1.4 Conducting experiments . . . . .	68
8.1.5 Constructing projects . . . . .	72
8.2 Experiment: (first experiment) . . . . .	73
8.3 Project: (first project) . . . . .	74
<b>A Problem-Solving Strategies</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>B Instructional philosophy</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>C Tools used</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>D Creative Commons License</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>E References</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>F Version history</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>97</b>



## Chapter 1

# Introduction



## 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 very little of theory, 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?

Each of the following examples provides *approximate* results as obtained in real experimental circuits. Be aware that similar circuits you build may behave *similarly* to these, but probably not *exactly* as these due to unavoidable variations in components and connections. Pay especially close attention to example circuits where undesirable effects occur! Recognizing the error(s) in these examples will help you avoid trouble when building and testing real circuits.



## 2.1 Example:

## Chapter 3

## Tutorial



## 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   ???**

???

???

## Chapter 5

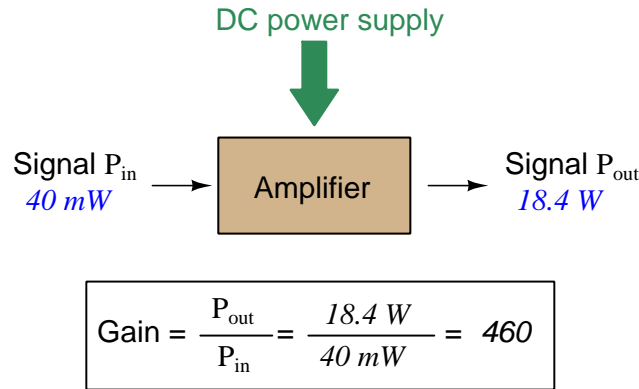
# Derivations and Technical References

This chapter is where you will find mathematical derivations too detailed to include in the tutorial, and/or tables and other technical reference material.

## 5.1 Decibels

One of the mathematical tools popularly used to gauge increases and decreases of electrical power is the *common logarithm*, expressed as a measurement unit called the *decibel*. The basic idea of decibels is to express a ratio of two electrical power quantities in logarithmic terms. Every time you see the unit of “decibel” you can think: *this is an expression of how much greater (or how much smaller) one power is to another*. The only question is which two powers are being compared.

Electronic amplifiers are a type of electrical system where comparisons of power are useful. Students of electronics learn to compare the output power of an amplifier against the input power as a unitless ratio, called a *gain*. Take for example an electronic amplifier with a signal input of 40 milliWatts and a signal output of 18.4 Watts:



An alternative way to express the gain of this amplifier is to do so using the unit of the *Bel*, defined as the common logarithm of the gain ratio:

$$\log \left( \frac{P_{\text{out}}}{P_{\text{in}}} \right) = \log \left( \frac{18.4 \text{ W}}{40 \text{ mW}} \right) = 2.66276 \text{ B}$$

When you see an amplifier gain expressed in the unit of “Bel”, it’s really just a way of saying “The output signal coming from this amplifier is  $x$  powers of ten greater than the input signal.” An amplifier exhibiting a gain of 1 Bel outputs 10 times as much power as the input signal. An amplifier with a gain of 2 Bels boosts the input signal by a factor of 100. The amplifier shown above, with a gain of 2.66276 Bels, boosts the input signal 460-fold.

At some point in technological history it was decided that the “Bel” (B) was too large and cumbersome, and so it became common to express powers in fractions of a Bel instead: the *deci*Bel (1 dB =  $\frac{1}{10}$  of a Bel). Therefore, this is the form of formula you will commonly see for expressing electrical signal power gains or losses:

$$\text{dB} = 10 \log \left( \frac{P_{\text{out}}}{P_{\text{in}}} \right)$$

The gain of our hypothetical electronic amplifier, therefore, would be more commonly expressed as 26.6276 dB rather than 2.66276 B, although either expression is technically valid<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>It is interesting to note that although the “Bel” is a metric unit, it is seldom if ever used without the metric prefix

An operation students often struggle with is converting a decibel figure back into a ratio, since the concept of logarithms seems to be universally perplexing. Here I will demonstrate how to algebraically manipulate the decibel formula to solve for the power ratio given a dB figure.

First, we will begin with the decibel formula as given, solving for a value in decibels given a power ratio:

$$\text{dB} = 10 \log(\text{Ratio})$$

If we wish to solve for the ratio, we must “undo” all the mathematical operations surrounding that variable. One way to determine how to do this is to reverse the order of operations we would follow if we knew the ratio and were solving for the dB value. After calculating the ratio, we would then take the logarithm of that value, and then multiply that logarithm by 10: start with the ratio, then take the logarithm, then multiply last. To un-do these operations and solve for the ratio, we must un-do each of these operations in reverse order. First, we must un-do the multiplication (by dividing by 10):

$$\frac{\text{dB}}{10} = \frac{10 \log(\text{Ratio})}{10}$$

$$\frac{\text{dB}}{10} = \log(\text{Ratio})$$

Next, we must un-do the logarithm function by applying its mathematical inverse to both sides of the formula – making each expression a power of 10:

$$10^{\frac{\text{dB}}{10}} = 10^{\log(\text{Ratio})}$$

$$10^{\frac{\text{dB}}{10}} = \text{Ratio}$$

To test our algebra, we can take the previous decibel value for our hypothetical amplifier and see if this new formula yields the original gain ratio:

$$\text{Ratio} = 10^{\frac{26.6276 \text{ dB}}{10}}$$

$$\text{Ratio} = 10^{2.66276} \text{ B}$$

$$\text{Ratio} = 460$$

Sure enough, we arrive at the correct gain ratio of 460, starting with the decibel gain figure of 26.6276 dB.

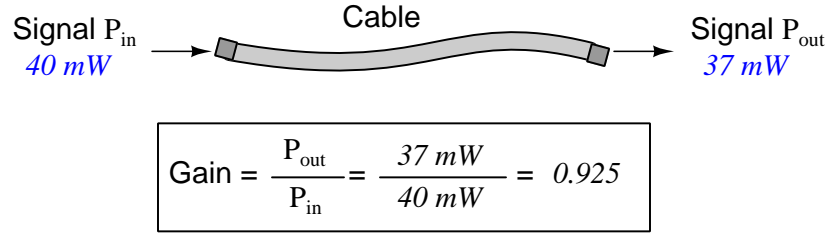
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“deci” ( $\frac{1}{10}$ ). One could express powers in microbels, megabels, or any other metric prefix desired, but it is never done in industry: only the decibel is used.



We may also use decibels to express power *losses* in addition to power *gains*. There are many practical applications of this in signaling systems, both electronic and optical. One such application is *filtering*, where a “filter” circuit screens out certain components of the signal while letting others pass through (e.g. the bass or treble control for an audio system). Another application is *attenuation*, where the entirety of a signal is reduced in magnitude (e.g. the volume control for an audio system).

We will explore yet another application of signal power reduction as a case study for decibels: *cable loss*. Cables designed to convey signals over long distances are not perfect conduits of energy, as some of the signal’s energy is inevitably lost along the way. This is true for different types of signals, electrical and optical being two popular examples. In the following illustration we see a signal cable losing power along its length<sup>2</sup>, such that the power out is less than the power in:



$$10 \log \left( \frac{P_{out}}{P_{in}} \right) = 10 \log \left( \frac{37\text{ mW}}{40\text{ mW}} \right) = -0.3386\text{ dB}$$

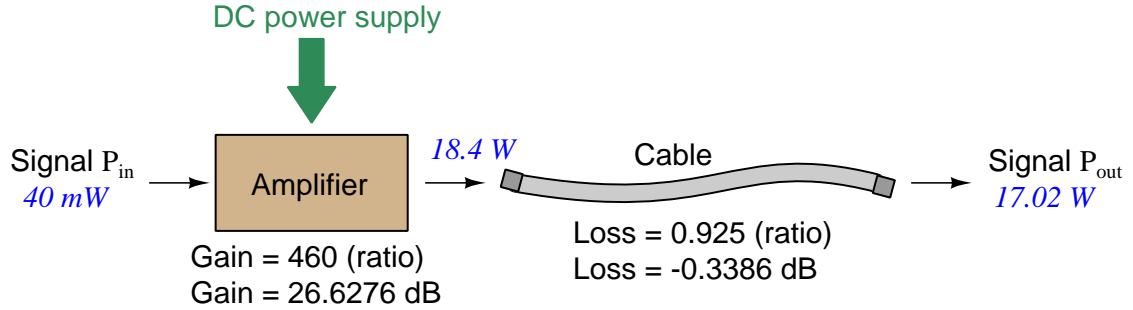
Contrasting this result against the previous result (with the amplifier) we see a very important property of decibel figures: any power *gain* is expressed as a *positive* decibel value, while any power *loss* is expressed as a *negative* decibel value. Any component outputting the exact same power as it takes in will exhibit a “gain” value of 0 dB (equivalent to a gain *ratio* of 1).

Remember that Bels and decibels are nothing more than logarithmic expressions of “greater than” and “less than”. Positive values represent powers that are *greater* while negative values represent powers that are *lesser*. Zero Bel or decibel values represent *no change* (neither gain nor loss) in power.

A couple of simple decibel values are useful to remember for approximations, where you need to quickly estimate decibel values from power ratios (or vice-versa). Each addition or subtraction of 10 dB exactly represents a 10-fold multiplication or division of power ratio: e.g. +20 dB represents a power ratio gain of  $10 \times 10 = 100$ , whereas −30 dB represents a power ratio reduction of  $\frac{1}{10} \times \frac{1}{10} \times \frac{1}{10} = \frac{1}{1000}$ . Each addition or subtraction of 3 dB approximately represents a 2-fold multiplication or division of power ratio: e.g. +6 dB is approximately equal to a power ratio gain of  $2 \times 2 = 4$ , whereas −12 dB is approximately equal to a power ratio reduction of  $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{16}$ . We may combine  $\pm 10$  dB and  $\pm 3$  dB increments to come up with ratios that are products of 10 and 2: e.g. +26 dB is approximately equal to a power ratio gain of  $10 \times 10 \times 2 \times 2 = 400$ .

<sup>2</sup>For high-frequency signals such as those used in radio communications, the dominant mode of energy dissipation is *dielectric heating*, where the AC electric field between the cable conductors excites the molecules of the conductor insulation. This energy loss manifests as heat, which explains why there is less signal energy present at the load end of the cable than is input at the source end of the cable. For DC and low-frequency AC circuits the dominant mode of energy dissipation is cable conductor resistance, which is typically very small.

Observe what happens if we combine a “gain” component with a “loss” component and calculate the overall power out versus power in:



The overall gain of this amplifier and cable system expressed as a ratio is equal to the *product* of the individual component gain/loss ratios. That is, the gain ratio of the amplifier *multiplied* by the loss ratio of the cable yields the overall power ratio for the system:

$$\text{Overall gain} = \frac{17.02 \text{ W}}{40 \text{ mW}} = (460)(0.925) = 425.5$$

The overall gain may be alternatively expressed as a decibel figure, in which case it is equal to the *sum* of the individual component decibel values. That is, the decibel gain of the amplifier *added* to the decibel loss of the cable yields the overall decibel figure for the system:

$$\text{Overall gain} = 10 \log \left( \frac{17.02 \text{ W}}{40 \text{ mW}} \right) = 26.6276 \text{ dB} + (-0.3386 \text{ dB}) = 26.2890 \text{ dB}$$

It is often useful to be able to estimate decibel values from power ratios and vice-versa. If we take the gain ratio of this amplifier and cable system (425.5) and round it down to 400, we may easily express this gain ratio as an expanded product of 10 and 2:

$$425.5 \approx 400 = (10) \times (10) \times (2) \times (2)$$

Knowing that every 10-fold multiplication of power ratio is an addition of +10 dB, and that every 2-fold multiplication of power is an addition of +3 dB, we may express the expanded product as a sum of decibel values:

$$(10) \times (10) \times (2) \times (2) = (10 \text{ dB}) + (10 \text{ dB}) + (3 \text{ dB}) + (3 \text{ dB}) = 26 \text{ dB}$$

Therefore, our power ratio of 425.5 is approximately equal to +26 decibels.

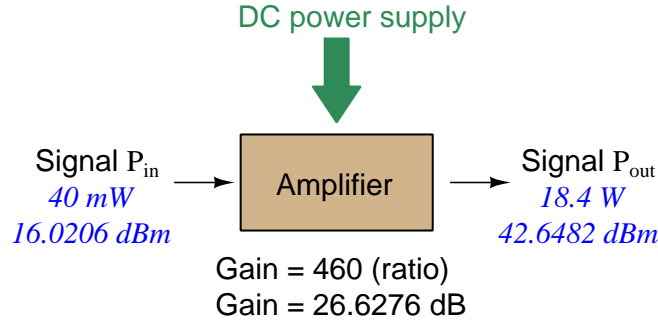
Decibels always represent comparisons of power, but that comparison need not always be  $P_{out}/P_{in}$  for a system component. We may also use decibels to express an amount of power compared to some standard reference. If, for example, we wished to express the input power to our hypothetical amplifier (40 milliWatts) using decibels, we could do so by comparing 40 mW against a standard “reference” power of exactly 1 milliWatt. The resulting decibel figure would be written as “dBm” in honor of the 1 milliWatt reference:

$$P_{in} = 10 \log \left( \frac{40 \text{ mW}}{1 \text{ mW}} \right) = 16.0206 \text{ dBm}$$

The unit of “dBm” literally means the amount of dB “greater than” 1 milliWatt. In this case, our input signal of 40 milliWatts is 16.0206 dB greater than a standard reference power of exactly 1 milliWatt. The output power of that amplifier (18.4 Watts) may be expressed in dBm as well:

$$P_{out} = 10 \log \left( \frac{18.4 \text{ W}}{1 \text{ mW}} \right) = 42.6482 \text{ dBm}$$

A signal power of 18.4 Watts is 42.6482 dB greater than a standard reference power of exactly 1 milliWatt, and so it has a decibel value of 42.6482 dBm.



Notice how the output and input powers expressed in dBm relate to the power gain of the amplifier. Taking the input power and simply *adding* the amplifier’s gain factor yields the amplifier’s output power in dBm:

$$P_{in}(\text{dB}) + P_{gain}(\text{dB}) = P_{out}(\text{dB})$$

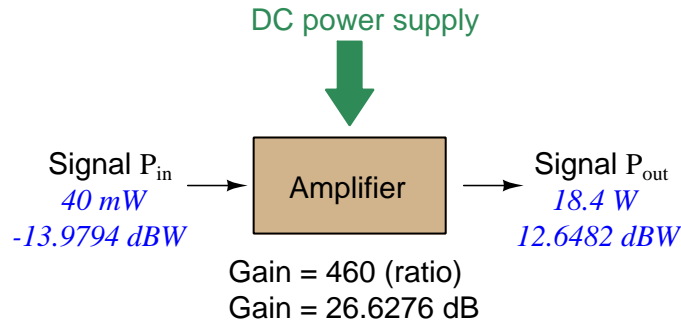
$$16.0206 \text{ dBm} + 26.6276 \text{ dB} = 42.6482 \text{ dBm}$$

An electronic signal that begins 16.0206 dB greater than 1 milliWatt, when boosted by an amplifier gain of 26.6276 dB, will become 42.6482 dB greater than the original reference power of 1 milliWatt.

We may alternatively express all powers in this hypothetical amplifier in reference to a 1-Watt standard power, with the resulting power expressed in units of “dBW” (decibels greater than 1 Watt):

$$P_{in} = 10 \log \left( \frac{40 \text{ mW}}{1 \text{ W}} \right) = -13.9794 \text{ dBW}$$

$$P_{out} = 10 \log \left( \frac{18.4 \text{ W}}{1 \text{ W}} \right) = 12.6482 \text{ dBW}$$



Note how the input power of 40 milliWatts equates to a negative dBW figure because 40 milliWatts is *less* than the 1 Watt reference, and how the output power of 18.4 Watts equates to a positive dBW figure because 18.4 Watts is *more* than the 1 Watt reference. A positive dB figure means “more than” while a negative dB figure means “less than.”

Note also how the output and input powers expressed in dBW still relate to the power gain of the amplifier by simple addition, just as they did when previously expressed in units of dBm. Taking the input power in units of dBW and simply *adding* the amplifier’s gain factor yields the amplifier’s output power in dBW:

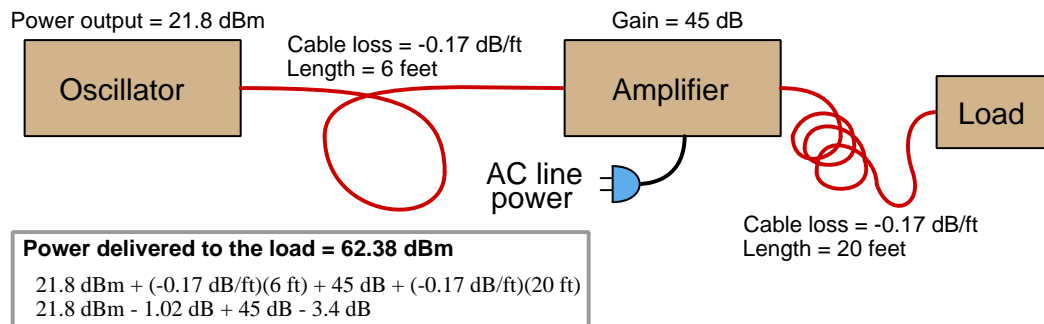
$$P_{in}(\text{dB}) + P_{gain}(\text{dB}) = P_{out}(\text{dB})$$

$$-13.9794 \text{ dBW} + 26.6276 \text{ dB} = 12.6482 \text{ dBW}$$

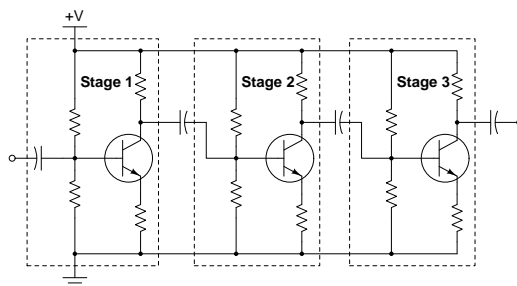
An electronic signal that begins 13.9794 dB less than 1 Watt, when boosted by an amplifier gain of 26.6276 dB, will become 12.6482 dB greater than the original reference power of 1 Watt.

This is one of the major benefits of using decibels to express powers: we may very easily calculate power gains and losses by summing a string of dB figures, each dB figure representing the power gain or power loss of a different system component. Normally, any compounding of *ratios* involves multiplication and/or division of those ratios, but with decibels we may simply add and subtract. One of the interesting mathematical properties of logarithms is that they “transform”<sup>3</sup> one type of problem into a simpler type: in this case, a problem of multiplying ratios into a (simpler) problem of adding decibel figures.

For example, we may express the power dissipated along a cable in terms of decibels per foot; the longer the cable, of course, the more power will be lost this way, all other factors being equal. For example, a radio-frequency signal cable having a loss figure of  $-0.15$  decibels per foot at a signal frequency of 2.4 GHz will suffer  $-15$  dB over 100 feet, and  $-150$  dB over 1000 feet. To illustrate how decibels may be used to calculate power delivered to a load in such a system, accounting for various gains and losses along the way using decibel figures:



A similar application of decibels is found in multi-stage amplifier circuits, where one stage amplifies a signal to be fed into a successive stage to be amplified more. The power gains of these stages, each expressed as a ratio, *multiply* to make the over-all amplifier's power gain (ratio). The power gains of those same stages, each expressed as a decibel figure, *add* to make the over-all amplifier's power gain (dB):



<sup>3</sup>In fact, logarithms are one of the simplest examples of a *transform function*, converting one type of mathematical problem into another type. Other examples of mathematical transform functions used in engineering include the *Fourier transform* (converting a time-domain function into a frequency-domain function) and the *Laplace transform* (converting a differential equation into an algebraic equation).

Another common application of decibels is to express ratios of voltage and/or current rather than power. However, since the unit of the Bel has been defined as an expression of a *power* ratio, we cannot simply substitute  $V$  or  $I$  for  $P$  in any of the formulae we've seen so far.

Suppose an amplifier has a voltage gain of 2 (i.e.  $V_{out}$  is twice as large as  $V_{in}$ ), and we would like to express this gain in decibels. Since decibels are intended to express power gain and not voltage gain, we must figure out how much power gain is equivalent to a voltage gain of two. Obviously, voltage and power are fundamentally different quantities, but if we imagine ourselves connecting a fixed load resistance to the input signal, and then to the output signal, we will realize that load's power dissipation will be more than double when energized by a voltage twice as large. Joule's Law is helpful to determine the exact ratio of power dissipation:

$$P = \frac{V^2}{R}$$

Doubling voltage for any given load resistance results in power *quadrupling* because power is proportional to the square of the voltage applied to a fixed resistance. Using this as the basis for applying decibels to a voltage ratio. Knowing that Joule's Law also declares power is proportional to the square of the current applied to a fixed resistance ( $P = I^2 R$ ) means this same mathematical relationship will apply to current gains and reductions as well as voltage gains and reductions:

$$\text{dB} = 10 \log \left( \frac{P_{out}}{P_{in}} \right) = 10 \log \left( \frac{V_{out}}{V_{in}} \right)^2 = 10 \log \left( \frac{I_{out}}{I_{in}} \right)^2$$

An algebraic identity of logarithms is that the logarithm of any quantity raised to a power is equal to that power multiplied by the logarithm of the quantity. Expressed in general terms:

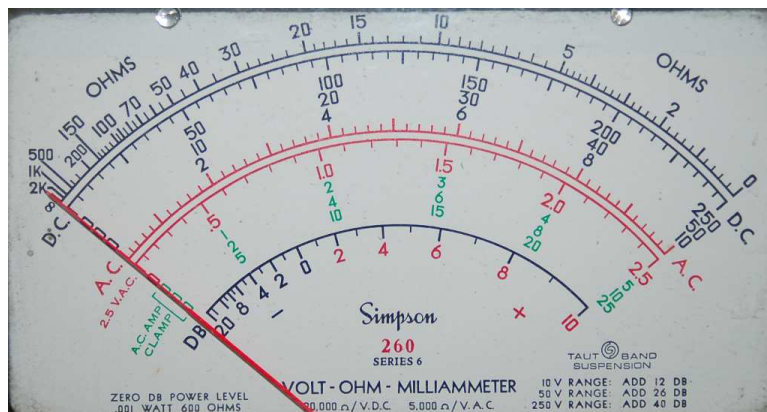
$$\log x^y = y \log x$$

Therefore, we may simplify the decibel formula for voltage gain by removing the "2" power and making it a multiplier:

$$\begin{aligned} 10 \log \left( \frac{V_{out}}{V_{in}} \right)^2 &= (2)(10) \log \left( \frac{V_{out}}{V_{in}} \right) = 20 \log \left( \frac{V_{out}}{V_{in}} \right) \\ 10 \log \left( \frac{I_{out}}{I_{in}} \right)^2 &= (2)(10) \log \left( \frac{I_{out}}{I_{in}} \right) = 20 \log \left( \frac{I_{out}}{I_{in}} \right) \end{aligned}$$

Thus, we may use decibels to express voltage or current ratios if we simply substitute 20 instead of 10 as the multiplier.

We can see the practicality of using decibels to represent something other than electrical *power* by examining this analog meter face, belonging to a Simpson model 260 VOM (Volt-Ohm-Milliammeter). Note the bottom scale on this meter's face, calibrated in decibels (DB):



Pay attention to the note on decibels written in the lower-left corner of the meter face, where 0 dB is defined as 0.001 Watt dissipated by 600 Ohms. The fact that 0 dB is defined as 1 milliWatt means it should (properly) be labeled dBm rather than dB<sup>4</sup>. A load resistance value is necessary as part of this definition for dB because this meter cannot measure power directly but must infer signal power from measurements of AC *voltage*. Without a specific load resistance, there is no clear relation between voltage and power. 600 Ohms is an old telecommunications standard for audio-frequency AC signals, and continues to be used today for voltage-based decibel measurements of audio-frequency AC signals.

The meter as shown is connected to nothing at all, and so registers 0 Volts AC. This, of course, corresponds to zero power, and it has no corresponding decibel value because the logarithm of zero is mathematically *undefined*<sup>5</sup>. Practically, it means  $-\infty$  dB, which is why the needle at the 0 Volt position “falls off” the left-hand end of the dB scale.

Close inspection of the dB scale on this meter face reveals another interesting property of decibels, and that is the *nonlinear* nature of the dB scale. This contrasts starkly against all the voltage and current scales on this meter face which are linear. This nonlinearity is a fundamental property of decibels because it is based on the *logarithm* function which is nonlinear.

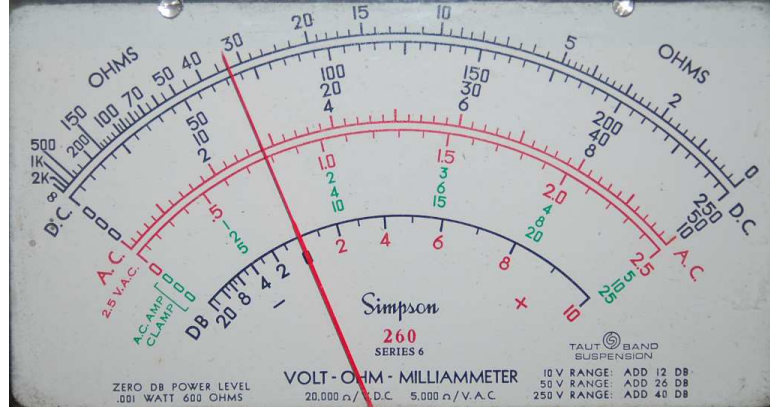
<sup>4</sup>Such mis-labeling is not that uncommon in the profession, the expectation being that the technician or engineer working with the instrument ought to be familiar enough with the concept of decibels to know when dB really means dBm, or dBW, etc.

<sup>5</sup>Your electronic calculator will complain if you attempt to take the logarithm of zero!

Now, we will explore what is necessary to make this meter register 0 dBm (i.e. 1 milliWatt) with an applied AC voltage. 1 milliWatt of power dissipated by 600 Ohms is equivalent to:

$$V = \sqrt{PR} = \sqrt{(0.001)(600)} = 0.7746 \text{ Volts}$$

Setting the VOM to the 2.5 VAC range and applying just enough AC voltage to bring the needle to the 0 dB mark allows us to verify that this is indeed equivalent to just under 0.8 Volts (read on the 2.5 VAC scale):



In the lower-right corner of the meter face we see some notes regarding correction values for decibel measurements when using different AC voltage ranges. The dB scale is read directly when the meter is set on the 2.5 VAC range. When set on the 10 VAC range (i.e. a range *four times* as great), the meter's needle will experience a deflection one-fourth as much as when set to the 2.5 VAC range, and therefore it will point to a lesser (or even negative) value on the dB scale. Converting a voltage ratio of 0.25 into a decibel figure shows us how much less the needle will register on the dB scale when the voltage range is quadrupled:

$$20 \log \left( \frac{2.5}{10} \right) = -12.04 \text{ dB}$$

Therefore, when using the 10 VAC range instead of the 2.5 VAC range, one must add 12 dB to the reading. Likewise, we may prove each of the printed correction factors for the alternative voltage-measurement ranges listed (50 Volt AC range and 250 Volt AC range):

$$20 \log \left( \frac{2.5}{50} \right) = -26.02 \text{ dB}$$

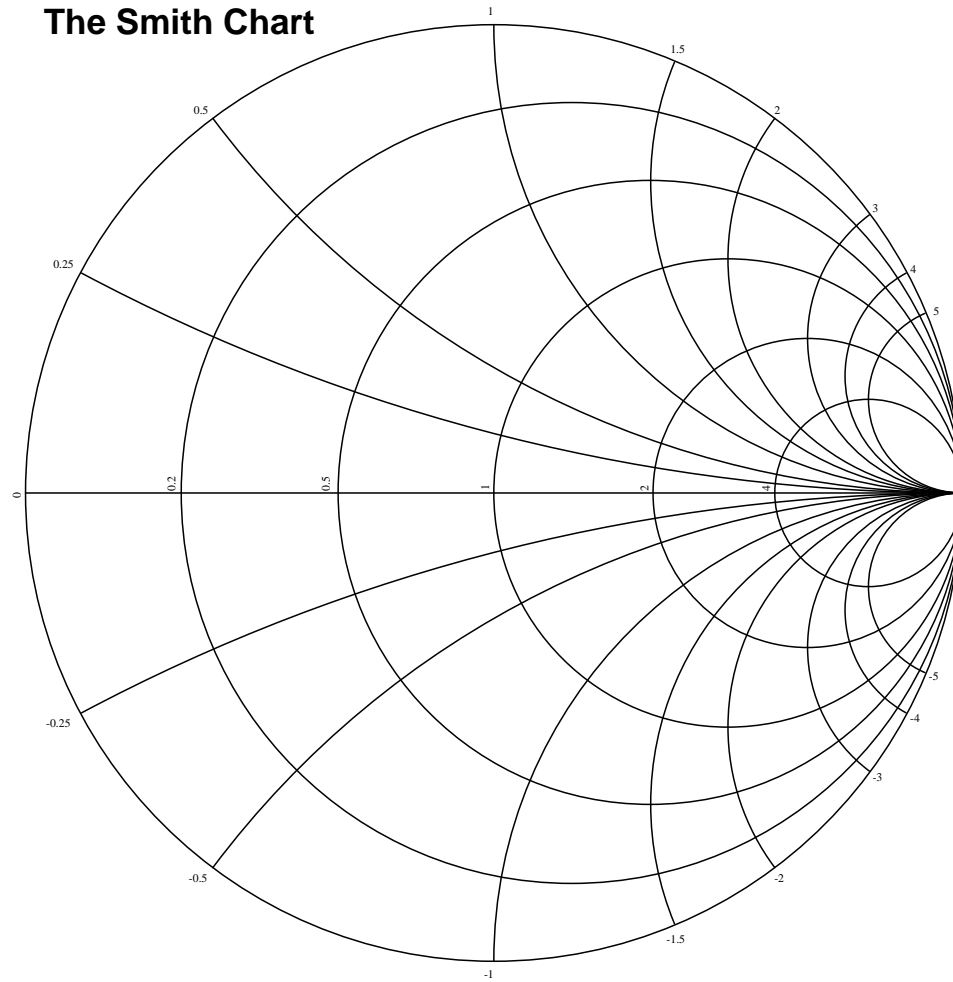
$$20 \log \left( \frac{2.5}{250} \right) = -40.0 \text{ dB}$$



## 5.2 Smith charts

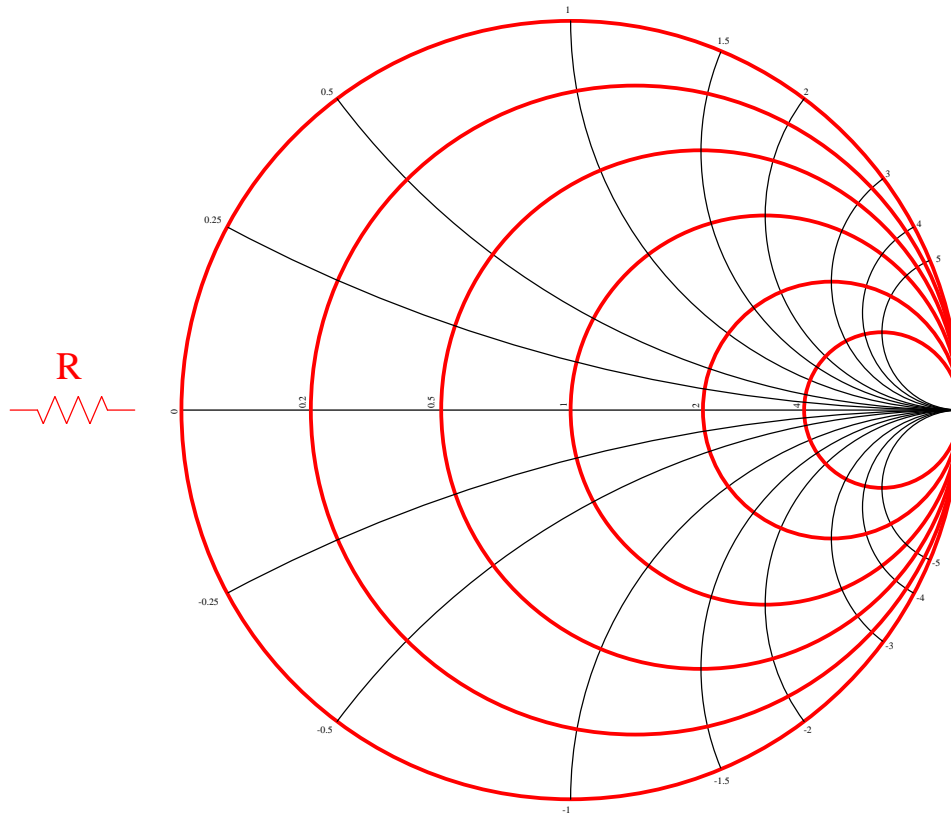
The *Smith chart* is a nomograph<sup>6</sup> useful for transmission line calculations where a mismatched load terminates the line. It is formed by two sets of intersecting circles, one set of circles centered along the horizontal axis representing normalized resistance values (i.e. termination resistance as a ratio of transmission line characteristic impedance) and another set of circles centered along the vertical axis representing normalized reactance values (i.e. termination reactance as a ratio of transmission line characteristic impedance):

**The Smith Chart**

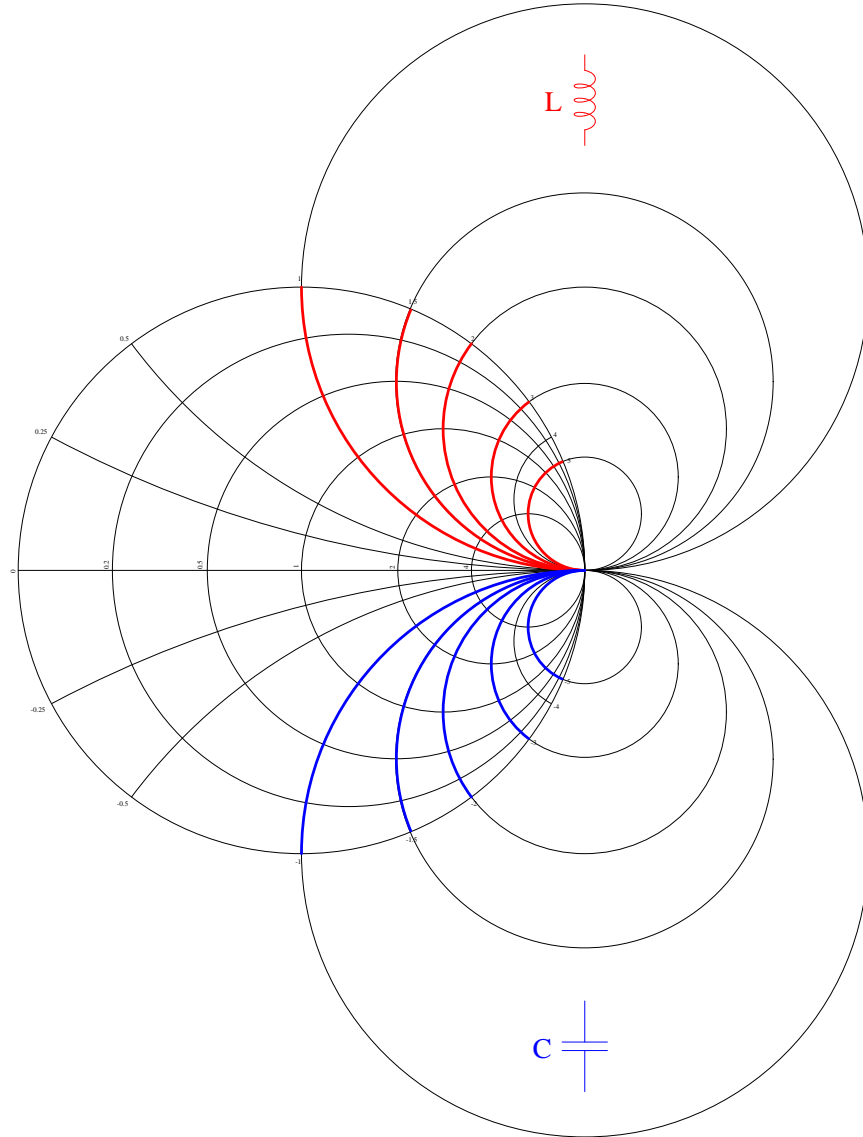


<sup>6</sup>A “nomograph” is any form of graphical calculating aid, where quantities are represented by positions along axes.

The resistance circles of a Smith chart lie along the horizontal axis and intersect at the far-right end of that axis, each one having a radius proportional to  $\frac{1}{R+1}$  where  $R$  is the *normalized* resistance of the terminating impedance (i.e. the terminating impedance's resistance value divided by the transmission line's characteristic impedance value of  $50\ \Omega$ ):

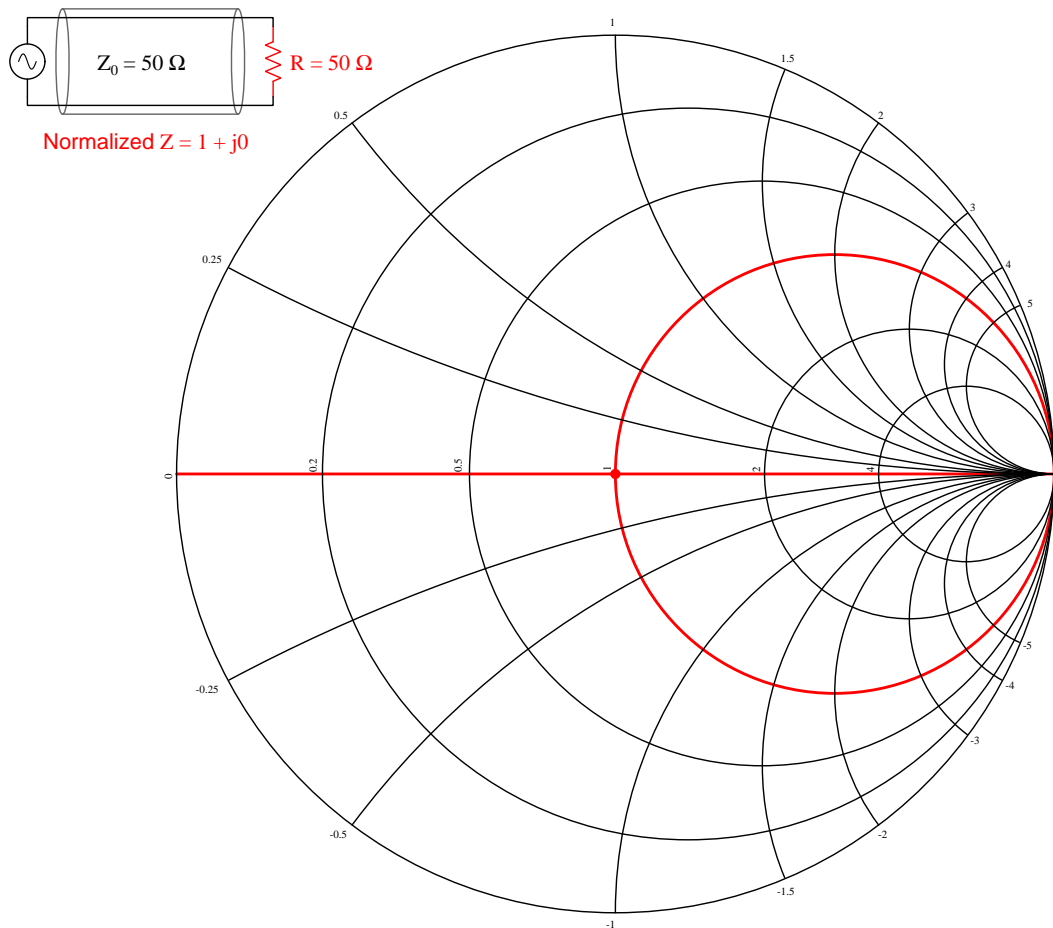


The reactance circles of a Smith chart lie along the vertical axis and intersect at the far-right end of the horizontal axis, each one having a radius proportional to  $\frac{1}{X}$  where  $X$  is the *normalized* reactance of the terminating impedance (i.e. the terminating impedance's reactance value divided by the transmission line's characteristic impedance value of  $50\ \Omega$ ):



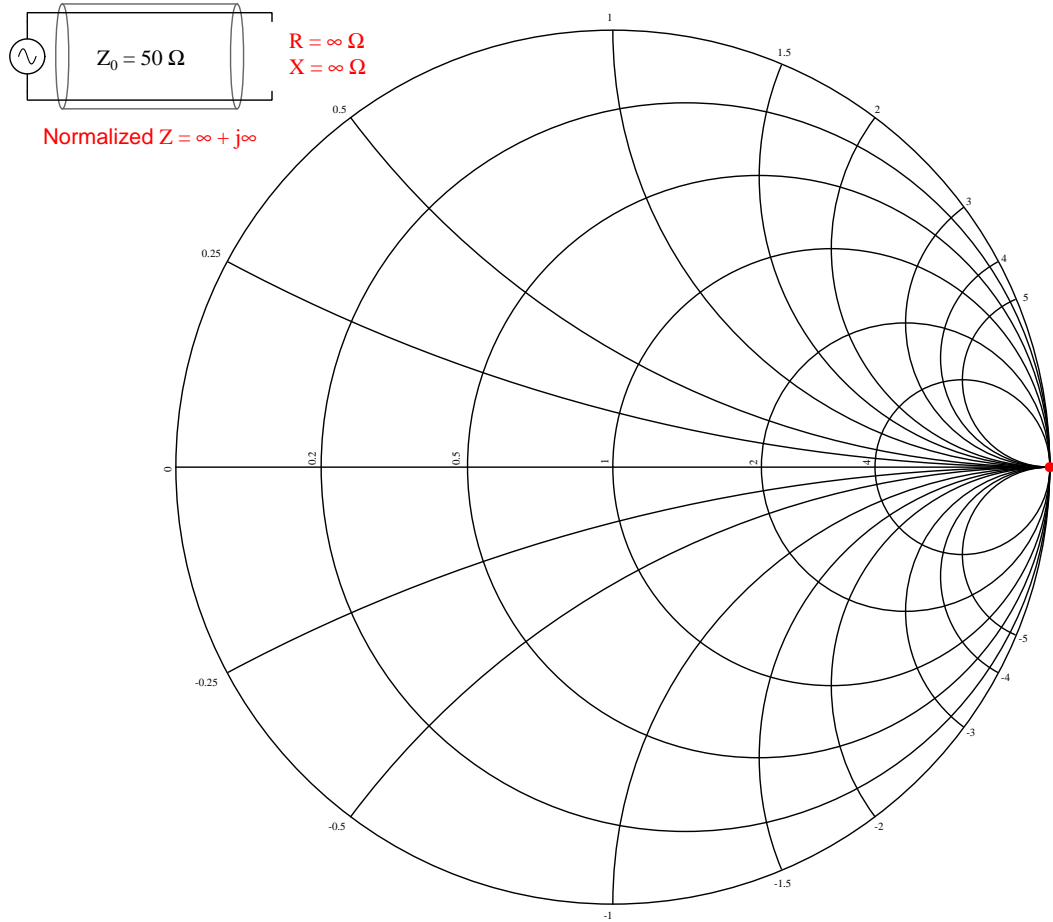
Inductive reactance values are positive (above the horizontal axis) while capacitive reactance values are negative (below the horizontal axis).

If the transmission line is perfectly terminated, in this case the  $50\ \Omega$  line being terminated by a  $50\ \Omega$  resistance, the normalized value of this terminating impedance will be  $1 + j0$  which places it at the exact center of the Smith chart:



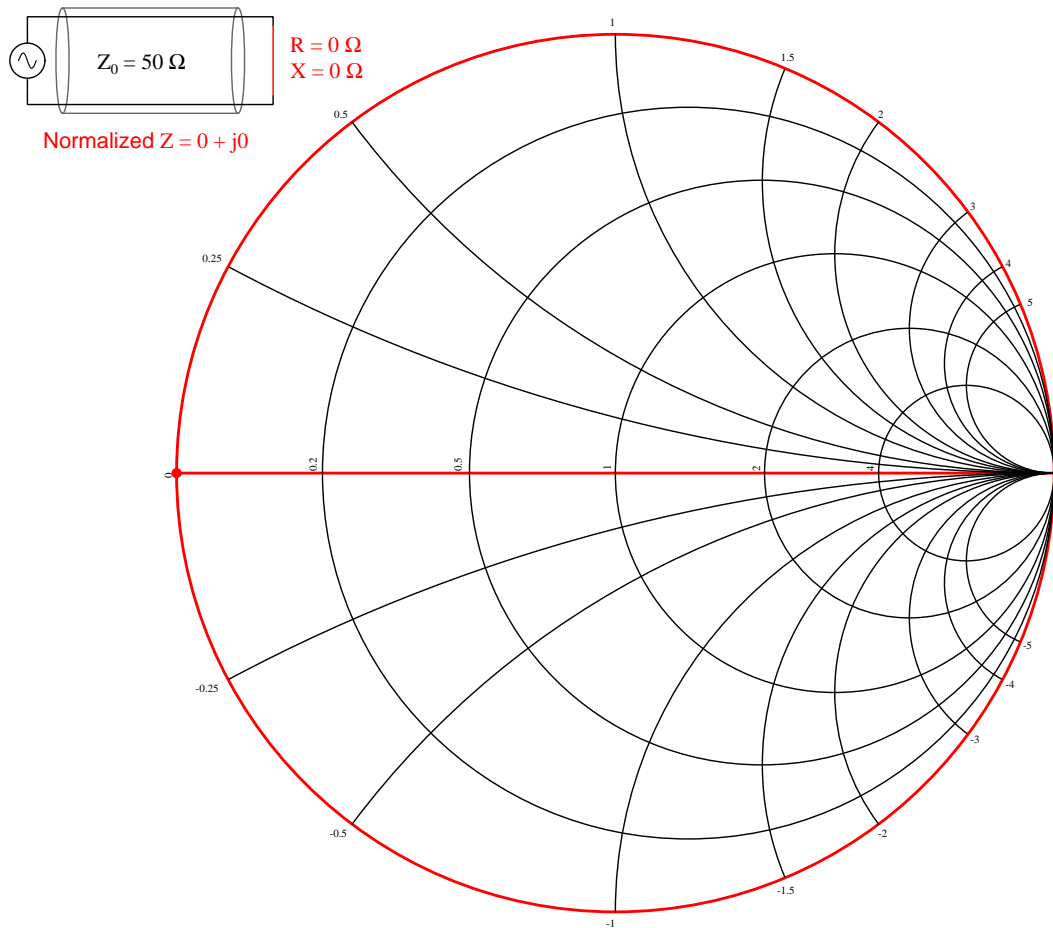
This is the point marked by the intersection of the “1” resistance circle and the “0” reactance circle (i.e. a “circle” with an infinite radius which is really a straight line overlapping the horizontal axis).

The limiting cases of an open-terminated transmission line is represented by a point with infinite resistance and reactance, located at the far-right end of the horizontal axis:



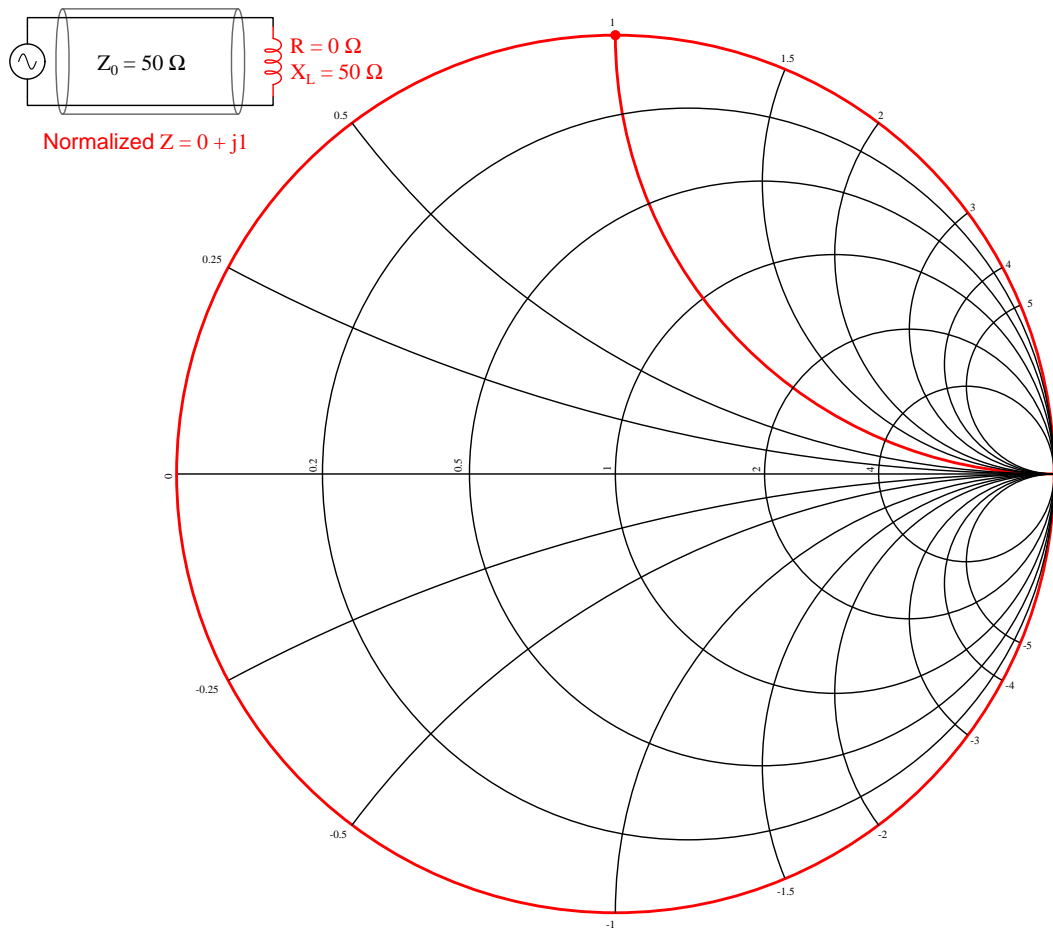
This is the point marked by the intersection of a zero-radius resistance circle and a zero-radius reactance circle.

The limiting cases of a short-terminated transmission line is represented by a point with zero resistance and reactance, located at the far-left of the horizontal axis:

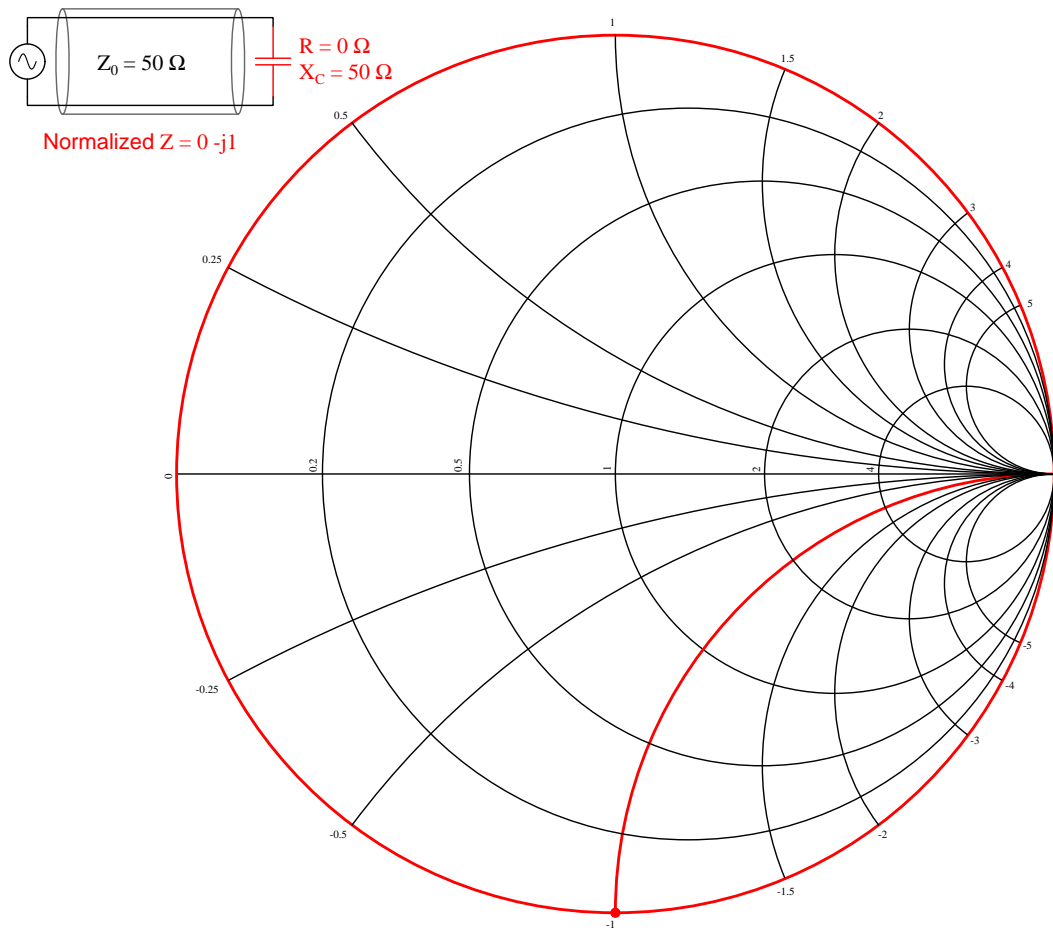


This is the point marked by the intersection of a full-radius resistance circle and a reactance circle having an infinite radius (i.e. a “circle” which is really a straight line overlapping the horizontal axis).

The upper half of the Smith chart is where all the inductive curves reside, which means if we terminate the  $50\ \Omega$  transmission line with a pure inductance of  $50\ \Omega$  the location will be where the  $+1$  reactance circle intersects with the  $0$  resistance circle:



The lower half of the Smith chart is where all the capacitive curves reside, which means if we terminate the  $50\ \Omega$  transmission line with a pure capacitance of  $50\ \Omega$  the location will be where the  $-1$  reactance circle intersects with the  $0$  resistance circle:





### 5.3 Derivation of ???

## 5.4 ??? Reference



## Chapter 6

# Programming References

A powerful tool for mathematical modeling is text-based *computer programming*. This is where you type coded commands in text form which the computer is able to interpret. Many different text-based languages exist for this purpose, but we will focus here on just two of them, *C++* and *Python*.

## 6.1 Programming in C++

One of the more popular text-based computer programming languages is called *C++*. This is a *compiled* language, which means you must create a plain-text file containing C++ code using a program called a *text editor*, then execute a software application called a *compiler* to translate your “source code” into instructions directly understandable to the computer. Here is an example of “source code” for a very simple C++ program intended to perform some basic arithmetic operations and print the results to the computer’s console:

```
#include <iostream>
using namespace std;

int main (void)
{
    float x, y;

    x = 200;
    y = -560.5;

    cout << "This simple program performs basic arithmetic on" << endl;
    cout << "the two numbers " << x << " and " << y << " and then" << endl;
    cout << "displays the results on the computer's console." << endl;

    cout << endl;

    cout << "Sum = " << x + y << endl;
    cout << "Difference = " << x - y << endl;
    cout << "Product = " << x * y << endl;
    cout << "Quotient of " << x / y << endl;

    return 0;
}
```

Computer languages such as C++ are designed to make sense when read by human programmers. The general order of execution is left-to-right, top-to-bottom just the same as reading any text document written in English. Blank lines, indentation, and other “whitespace” is largely irrelevant in C++ code, and is included only to make the code more pleasing<sup>1</sup> to view.

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<sup>1</sup>Although not included in this example, *comments* preceded by double-forward slash characters (*//*) may be added to source code as well to provide explanations of what the code is supposed to do, for the benefit of anyone reading it. The compiler application will ignore all comments.

Let's examine the C++ source code to explain what it means:

- `#include <iostream>` and `using namespace std;` are set-up instructions to the compiler giving it some context in which to interpret your code. The code specific to your task is located between the brace symbols (`{` and `}`, often referred to as “curly-braces”).
- `int main (void)` labels the “Main” function for the computer: the instructions within this function (lying between the `{` and `}` symbols) it will be commanded to execute. Every complete C++ program contains a `main` function at minimum, and often additional functions as well, but the `main` function is where execution always begins. The `int` declares this function will return an *integer* number value when complete, which helps to explain the purpose of the `return 0;` statement at the end of the `main` function: providing a numerical value of zero at the program's completion as promised by `int`. This returned value is rather incidental to our purpose here, but it is fairly standard practice in C++ programming.
- Grouping symbols such as parentheses and braces abound in C, C++, and other languages (e.g. Java). Parentheses typically group data to be processed by a function, called *arguments* to that function. Braces surround lines of executable code belonging to a particular function.
- The `float` declaration reserves places in the computer's memory for two *floating-point* variables, in this case the variables' names being `x` and `y`. In most text-based programming languages, variables may be named by single letters or by combinations of letters (e.g. `xyz` would be a single variable).
- The next two lines assign numerical values to the two variables. Note how each line terminates with a semicolon character (`;`) and how this pattern holds true for most of the lines in this program. In C++ semicolons are analogous to periods at the ends of English sentences. This demarcation of each line's end is necessary because C++ ignores whitespace on the page and doesn't “know” otherwise where one line ends and another begins.
- All the other instructions take the form of a `cout` command which prints characters to the “standard output” stream of the computer, which in this case will be text displayed on the console. The double-less-than symbols (`<<`) show data being sent *toward* the `cout` command. Note how verbatim text is enclosed in quotation marks, while variables such as `x` or mathematical expressions such as `x - y` are not enclosed in quotations because we want the computer to display the numerical values represented, not the literal text.
- Standard arithmetic operations (add, subtract, multiply, divide) are represented as `+`, `-`, `*`, and `/`, respectively.
- The `endl` found at the end of every `cout` statement marks the end of a line of text printed to the computer's console display. If not for these `endl` inclusions, the displayed text would resemble a run-on sentence rather than a paragraph. Note the `cout << endl;` line, which does nothing but create a blank line on the screen, for no reason other than esthetics.

After saving this *source code* text to a file with its own name (e.g. `myprogram.cpp`), you would then *compile* the source code into an *executable* file which the computer may then run. If you are using a console-based compiler such as *GCC* (very popular within variants of the Unix operating system<sup>2</sup>, such as Linux and Apple’s OS X), you would type the following command and press the Enter key:

```
g++ -o myprogram.exe myprogram.cpp
```

This command instructs the *GCC* compiler to take your source code (`myprogram.cpp`) and create with it an executable file named `myprogram.exe`. Simply typing `./myprogram.exe` at the command-line will then execute your program:

```
./myprogram.exe
```

If you are using a graphic-based C++ development system such as Microsoft Visual Studio<sup>3</sup>, you may simply create a new console application “project” using this software, then paste or type your code into the example template appearing in the editor window, and finally run your application to test its output.

As this program runs, it displays the following text to the console:

```
This simple program performs basic arithmetic on  
the two numbers 200 and -560.5 and then  
displays the results on the computer’s console.
```

```
Sum = -360.5  
Difference = 760.5  
Product = -112100  
Quotient of -0.356824
```

As crude as this example program is, it serves the purpose of showing how easy it is to write and execute simple programs in a computer using the C++ language. As you encounter C++ example programs (shown as source code) in any of these modules, feel free to directly copy-and-paste the source code text into a text editor’s screen, then follow the rest of the instructions given here (i.e. save to a file, compile, and finally run your program). You will find that it is generally easier to

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<sup>2</sup>A very functional option for users of Microsoft Windows is called *Cygwin*, which provides a Unix-like console environment complete with all the customary utility applications such as *GCC*!

<sup>3</sup>Using Microsoft Visual Studio community version 2017 at the time of this writing to test this example, here are the steps I needed to follow in order to successfully compile and run a simple program such as this: (1) Start up Visual Studio and select the option to create a New Project; (2) Select the Windows Console Application template, as this will perform necessary set-up steps to generate a console-based program which will save you time and effort as well as avoid simple errors of omission; (3) When the editing screen appears, type or paste the C++ code within the `main()` function provided in the template, deleting the “Hello World” `cout` line that came with the template; (4) Type or paste any preprocessor directives (e.g. `#include` statements, `namespace` statements) necessary for your code that did not come with the template; (5) Lastly, under the Debug drop-down menu choose either Start Debugging (F5 hot-key) or Start Without Debugging (Ctrl-F5 hotkeys) to compile (“Build”) and run your new program. Upon execution a console window will appear showing the output of your program.

learn computer programming by closely examining others' example programs and modifying them than it is to write your own programs starting from a blank screen.



## 6.2 Programming in Python

Another text-based computer programming language called *Python* allows you to type instructions at a terminal prompt and receive immediate results without having to compile that code. This is because Python is an *interpreted* language: a software application called an *interpreter* reads your source code, translates it into computer-understandable instructions, and then executes those instructions in one step.

The following shows what happens on my personal computer when I start up the Python interpreter on my personal computer, by typing `python3`<sup>4</sup> and pressing the Enter key:

```
Python 3.7.2 (default, Feb 19 2019, 18:15:18)
[GCC 4.1.2] on linux
Type "help", "copyright", "credits" or "license" for more information.
>>>
```

The `>>>` symbols represent the prompt within the Python interpreter “shell”, signifying readiness to accept Python commands entered by the user.

Shown here is an example of the same arithmetic operations performed on the same quantities, using a Python interpreter. All lines shown preceded by the `>>>` prompt are entries typed by the human programmer, and all lines shown without the `>>>` prompt are responses from the Python interpreter software:

```
>>> x = 200
>>> y = -560.5
>>> x + y
-360.5
>>> x - y
760.5
>>> x * y
-112100.0
>>> x / y
-0.35682426404995538
>>> quit()
```

---

<sup>4</sup>Using version 3 of Python, which is the latest at the time of this writing.

More advanced mathematical functions are accessible in Python by first entering the line `from math import *` which “imports” these functions from Python’s math *library* (with functions identical to those available for the C programming language, and included on any computer with Python installed). Some examples show some of these functions in use, demonstrating how the Python interpreter may be used as a scientific calculator:

```
>>> from math import *
>>> sin(30.0)
-0.98803162409286183
>>> sin(radians(30.0))
0.49999999999999994
>>> pow(2.0, 5.0)
32.0
>>> log10(10000.0)
4.0
>>> e
2.7182818284590451
>>> pi
3.1415926535897931
>>> log(pow(e,6.0))
6.0
>>> asin(0.7071068)
0.78539819000368838
>>> degrees(asin(0.7071068))
45.000001524425265
>>> quit()
```

Note how trigonometric functions assume angles expressed in *radians* rather than *degrees*, and how Python provides convenient functions for translating between the two. Logarithms assume a base of  $e$  unless otherwise stated (e.g. the `log10` function for common logarithms).

The interpreted (versus compiled) nature of Python, as well as its relatively simple syntax, makes it a good choice as a person’s first programming language. For complex applications, interpreted languages such as Python execute slower than compiled languages such as C++, but for the very simple examples used in these learning modules speed is not a concern.

Another Python math library is `cmath`, giving Python the ability to perform arithmetic on complex numbers. This is very useful for AC circuit analysis using *phasors*<sup>5</sup> as shown in the following example. Here we see Python’s interpreter used as a scientific calculator to show series and parallel impedances of a resistor, capacitor, and inductor in a 60 Hz AC circuit:

```
>>> from math import *
>>> from cmath import *
>>> r = complex(400,0)
>>> f = 60.0
>>> xc = 1/(2 * pi * f * 4.7e-6)
>>> zc = complex(0,-xc)
>>> xl = 2 * pi * f * 1.0
>>> zl = complex(0,xl)
>>> r + zc + zl
(400-187.38811239154882j)
>>> 1/(1/r + 1/zc + 1/zl)
(355.837695813625+125.35793777619385j)
>>> polar(r + zc + zl)
(441.717448903332, -0.4381072059213295)
>>> abs(r + zc + zl)
441.717448903332
>>> phase(r + zc + zl)
-0.4381072059213295
>>> degrees(phase(r + zc + zl))
-25.10169387356105
```

When entering a value in rectangular form, we use the `complex()` function where the arguments are the real and imaginary quantities, respectively. If we had opted to enter the impedance values in polar form, we would have used the `rect()` function where the first argument is the magnitude and the second argument is the angle in radians. For example, we could have set the capacitor’s impedance (`zc`) as  $X_C \angle -90^\circ$  with the command `zc = rect(xc,radians(-90))` rather than with the command `zc = complex(0,-xc)` and it would have worked the same.

Note how Python defaults to rectangular form for complex quantities. Here we defined a 400 Ohm resistance as a complex value in rectangular form ( $400 + j0 \Omega$ ), then computed capacitive and inductive reactances at 60 Hz and defined each of those as complex (phasor) values ( $0 - jX_C \Omega$  and  $0 + jX_L \Omega$ , respectively). After that we computed total impedance in series, then total impedance in parallel. Polar-form representation was then shown for the series impedance ( $441.717 \Omega \angle -25.102^\circ$ ). Note the use of different functions to show the polar-form series impedance value: `polar()` takes the complex quantity and returns its polar magnitude and phase angle in *radians*; `abs()` returns just the polar magnitude; `phase()` returns just the polar angle, once again in radians. To find the polar phase angle in degrees, we nest the `degrees()` and `phase()` functions together.

The utility of Python’s interpreter environment as a scientific calculator should be clear from these examples. Not only does it offer a powerful array of mathematical functions, but also unlimited

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<sup>5</sup>A “phasor” is a voltage, current, or impedance represented as a complex number, either in rectangular or polar form.

assignment of variables as well as a convenient text record<sup>6</sup> of all calculations performed which may be easily copied and pasted into a text document for archival.

It is also possible to save a set of Python commands to a text file using a text editor application, and then instruct the Python interpreter to execute it at once rather than having to type it line-by-line in the interpreter's shell. For example, consider the following Python program, saved under the filename `myprogram.py`:

```
x = 200
y = -560.5

print("Sum")
print(x + y)

print("Difference")
print(x - y)

print("Product")
print(x * y)

print("Quotient")
print(x / y)
```

As with C++, the interpreter will read this source code from left-to-right, top-to-bottom, just the same as you or I would read a document written in English. Interestingly, whitespace *is* significant in the Python language (unlike C++), but this simple example program makes no use of that.

To execute this Python program, I would need to type `python myprogram.py` and then press the Enter key at my computer console's prompt, at which point it would display the following result:

```
Sum
-360.5
Difference
760.5
Product
-112100.0
Quotient
-0.35682426405
```

As you can see, syntax within the Python programming language is simpler than C++, which is one reason why it is often a preferred language for beginning programmers.

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<sup>6</sup>Like many command-line computing environments, Python's interpreter supports "up-arrow" recall of previous entries. This allows quick recall of previously typed commands for editing and re-evaluation.

If you are interested in learning more about computer programming in *any* language, you will find a wide variety of books and free tutorials available on those subjects. Otherwise, feel free to learn by the examples presented in these modules.

## 6.3 Modeling ??? using C++



## Chapter 7

# 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 read<sup>1</sup> the tutorials and attempt to answer questions on their own *prior* to the instructor's interaction with them. In place of lecture<sup>2</sup>, 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.

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<sup>1</sup>Technical 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.

<sup>2</sup>Lecture 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?

## 7.1 Conceptual reasoning

These questions are designed to stimulate your analytic and synthetic thinking<sup>3</sup>. 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.

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<sup>3</sup>*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.

### 7.1.1 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, write their own outline and 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 **OUTLINE THE TEXT**, as though you were writing a detailed Table of Contents. Feel free to rearrange the order if it makes more sense that way. Prepare to articulate these points in detail and to answer questions from your classmates and instructor. Outlining is a good self-test of thorough reading because you cannot outline what you have not read or do 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.

### 7.1.2 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

Conservation of Energy

Simplification as a problem-solving strategy

Thought experiments as a problem-solving strategy

Limiting cases as a problem-solving strategy

Annotating diagrams as a problem-solving strategy

Interpreting intermediate results as a problem-solving strategy

Graphing as a problem-solving strategy

Converting a qualitative problem into a quantitative problem

Converting a quantitative problem into a qualitative problem

Working “backwards” to validate calculated results

*Reductio ad absurdum*

Re-drawing schematics as a problem-solving strategy

Cut-and-try problem-solving strategy

Algebraic substitution

???

### 7.1.3 First conceptual question

Challenges

- ???.
- ???.
- ???.

### 7.1.4 Second conceptual question

Challenges

- ???.
- ???.
- ???.

## 7.2 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 cases<sup>4</sup>” for gaining proficiency in the use of circuit simulation software, and then once that proficiency is gained you will never need to rely<sup>5</sup> on an answer key!

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<sup>4</sup>In 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.

<sup>5</sup>This 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.



### 7.2.1 Miscellaneous physical constants

Note: constants shown in **bold** type are *exact*, not approximations. Values inside of parentheses show one standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ) of uncertainty in the final digits: for example, Avogadro's number given as  $6.02214179(30) \times 10^{23}$  means the center value ( $6.02214179 \times 10^{23}$ ) plus or minus  $0.00000030 \times 10^{23}$ .

Avogadro's number ( $N_A$ ) =  $6.02214179(30) \times 10^{23}$  per mole ( $\text{mol}^{-1}$ )

Boltzmann's constant ( $k$ ) =  $1.3806504(24) \times 10^{-23}$  Joules per Kelvin (J/K)

Electronic charge ( $e$ ) =  $1.602176487(40) \times 10^{-19}$  Coulomb (C)

Faraday constant ( $F$ ) =  $9.64853399(24) \times 10^4$  Coulombs per mole (C/mol)

Permeability of free space ( $\mu_0$ ) =  $1.25663706212(19) \times 10^{-6}$  Henrys per meter (H/m)

Gravitational constant ( $G$ ) =  $6.67428(67) \times 10^{-11}$  cubic meters per kilogram-seconds squared ( $\text{m}^3/\text{kg}\cdot\text{s}^2$ )

Molar gas constant ( $R$ ) =  $8.314472(15)$  Joules per mole-Kelvin (J/mol-K) =  $0.08205746(14)$  liters-atmospheres per mole-Kelvin

Planck constant ( $h$ ) =  $6.62606896(33) \times 10^{-34}$  joule-seconds (J-s)

Stefan-Boltzmann constant ( $\sigma$ ) =  $5.670400(40) \times 10^{-8}$  Watts per square meter-Kelvin<sup>4</sup> ( $\text{W}/\text{m}^2\cdot\text{K}^4$ )

Speed of light in a vacuum ( $c$ ) = **299792458 meters per second** (m/s) = 186282.4 miles per second (mi/s)

Note: All constants taken from NIST data "Fundamental Physical Constants – Extensive Listing", from <http://physics.nist.gov/constants>, National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), 2006; with the exception of the permeability of free space which was taken from NIST's 2018 CODATA recommended values database.

### 7.2.2 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*<sup>6</sup> 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.

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<sup>6</sup>Spreadsheets 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.

Common<sup>7</sup> 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 ensure<sup>8</sup> 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 roots<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup>Modern 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.

<sup>8</sup>Spreadsheet 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.

<sup>9</sup>Reviewing 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
<b>1</b>	x_1	= (-B4 + C1) / C2	= sqrt ( (B4^2) - (4*B3*B5) )
<b>2</b>	x_2	= (-B4 - C1) / C2	= 2*B3
<b>3</b>	a =	9	
<b>4</b>	b =	5	
<b>5</b>	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 arbitrary<sup>10</sup> – 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.

<sup>10</sup>My 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.*

### 7.2.3 First quantitative problem

Challenges
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- ???.
- ???.
- ???.

### 7.2.4 Second quantitative problem

Challenges
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- ???.
- ???.
- ???.

## 7.3 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.

### 7.3.1 First diagnostic scenario

Challenges
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- ???.
- ???.
- ???.

### 7.3.2 Second diagnostic scenario

Challenges
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- ???.
- ???.
- ???.

## Chapter 8

# Projects and Experiments

The following project and experiment descriptions outline things you can build to help you understand circuits. With any real-world project or experiment there exists the potential for physical harm. *Electricity can be very dangerous in certain circumstances, and you should follow proper safety precautions at all times!*

### 8.1 Recommended practices

This section outlines some recommended practices for all circuits you design and construct.



### 8.1.1 Safety first!

Electricity, when passed through the human body, causes uncomfortable sensations and in large enough measures<sup>1</sup> will cause muscles to involuntarily contract. The overriding of your nervous system by the passage of electrical current through your body is particularly dangerous in regard to your heart, which is a vital muscle. Very large amounts of current can produce serious internal burns in addition to all the other effects.

Cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is the standard first-aid for any victim of electrical shock. This is a very good skill to acquire if you intend to work with others on dangerous electrical circuits. You should never perform tests or work on such circuits unless someone else is present who is proficient in CPR.

As a general rule, any voltage in excess of 30 Volts poses a definitive electric shock hazard, because beyond this level human skin does not have enough resistance to safely limit current through the body. “Live” work of any kind with circuits over 30 volts should be avoided, and if unavoidable should only be done using electrically insulated tools and other protective equipment (e.g. insulating shoes and gloves). If you are unsure of the hazards, or feel unsafe at any time, stop all work and distance yourself from the circuit!

A policy I strongly recommend for students learning about electricity is to *never come into electrical contact*<sup>2</sup> with an energized conductor, no matter what the circuit’s voltage<sup>3</sup> level! Enforcing this policy may seem ridiculous when the circuit in question is powered by a single battery smaller than the palm of your hand, but it is precisely this instilled habit which will save a person from bodily harm when working with more dangerous circuits. Experience has taught me that students who learn early on to be careless with safe circuits have a tendency to be careless later with dangerous circuits!

In addition to the electrical hazards of shock and burns, the construction of projects and running of experiments often poses other hazards such as working with hand and power tools, potential

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<sup>1</sup>Professor Charles Dalziel published a research paper in 1961 called “The Deleterious Effects of Electric Shock” detailing the results of electric shock experiments with both human and animal subjects. The threshold of perception for human subjects holding a conductor in their hand was in the range of 1 milliamperes of current (less than this for alternating current, and generally less for female subjects than for male). Loss of muscular control was exhibited by half of Dalziel’s subjects at less than 10 milliamperes alternating current. Extreme pain, difficulty breathing, and loss of all muscular control occurred for over 99% of his subjects at direct currents less than 100 milliamperes and alternating currents less than 30 milliamperes. In summary, it doesn’t require much electric current to induce painful and even life-threatening effects in the human body! Your first and best protection against electric shock is maintaining an insulating barrier between your body and the circuit in question, such that current from that circuit will be unable to flow through your body.

<sup>2</sup>By “electrical contact” I mean either directly touching an energized conductor with any part of your body, or indirectly touching it through a conductive tool. The only physical contact you should ever make with an energized conductor is via an electrically insulated tool, for example a screwdriver with an electrically insulated handle, or an insulated test probe for some instrument.

<sup>3</sup>Another reason for consistently enforcing this policy, even on low-voltage circuits, is due to the dangers that even some low-voltage circuits harbor. A single 12 Volt automobile battery, for example, can cause a surprising amount of damage if short-circuited simply due to the high current levels (i.e. very low internal resistance) it is capable of, even though the voltage level is too low to cause a shock through the skin. Mechanics wearing metal rings, for example, are at risk from severe burns if their rings happen to short-circuit such a battery! Furthermore, even when working on circuits that are simply too low-power (low voltage and low current) to cause any bodily harm, touching them while energized can pose a threat to the circuit components themselves. In summary, it generally wise (and *always* a good habit to build) to “power down” *any* circuit before making contact between it and your body.

contact with high temperatures, potential chemical exposure, etc. You should never proceed with a project or experiment if you are unaware of proper tool use or lack basic protective measures (e.g. personal protective equipment such as safety glasses) against such hazards.

Some other safety-related practices should be followed as well:

- All power conductors extending outward from the project must be *firmly* strain-relieved (e.g. “cord grips” used on line power cords), so that an accidental tug or drop will not compromise circuit integrity.
- All electrical connections must be sound and appropriately made (e.g. soldered wire joints rather than twisted-and-taped; terminal blocks rather than solderless breadboards for high-current or high-voltage circuits). Use “touch-safe” terminal connections with recessed metal parts to minimize risk of accidental contact.
- Always provide overcurrent protection in any circuit you build. *Always*. This may be in the form of a fuse, a circuit breaker, and/or an electronically current-limited power supply.
- Always ensure circuit conductors are rated for more current than the overcurrent protection limit. *Always*. A fuse does no good if the wire or printed circuit board trace will “blow” before it does!
- Always bond metal enclosures to Earth ground for any line-powered circuit. *Always*. Ensuring an equipotential state between the enclosure and Earth by making the enclosure electrically common with Earth ground ensures no electric shock can occur simply by one’s body bridging between the Earth and the enclosure.
- Avoid building a high-energy circuit when a low-energy circuit will suffice. For example, I always recommend beginning students power their first DC resistor circuits using small batteries rather than with line-powered DC power supplies. The intrinsic energy limitations of a dry-cell battery make accidents highly unlikely.
- Use line power receptacles that are GFCI (Ground Fault Current Interrupting) to help avoid electric shock from making accidental contact with a “hot” line conductor.
- Always wear eye protection when working with tools or live systems having the potential to eject material into the air. Examples of such activities include soldering, drilling, grinding, cutting, wire stripping, working on or near energized circuits, etc.
- Always use a step-stool or stepladder to reach high places. Never stand on something not designed to support a human load.
- When in doubt, *ask an expert*. If anything even seems remotely unsafe to you, do not proceed without consulting a trusted person fully knowledgeable in electrical safety.

### 8.1.2 Other helpful tips

Experience has shown the following practices to be very helpful, especially when students make their own component selections, to ensure the circuits will be well-behaved:

- Avoid resistor values less than  $1\text{ k}\Omega$  or greater than  $100\text{ k}\Omega$ , unless such values are definitely necessary<sup>4</sup>. Resistances below  $1\text{ k}\Omega$  may draw excessive current if directly connected to a voltage source of significant magnitude, and may also complicate the task of accurately measuring current since any ammeter’s non-zero resistance inserted in series with a low-value circuit resistor will significantly alter the total resistance and thereby skew the measurement. Resistances above  $100\text{ k}\Omega$  may complicate the task of measuring voltage since any voltmeter’s finite resistance connected in parallel with a high-value circuit resistor will significantly alter the total resistance and thereby skew the measurement. Similarly, AC circuit impedance values should be between  $1\text{ k}\Omega$  and  $100\text{ k}\Omega$ , and for all the same reasons.
- Ensure all electrical connections are low-resistance and physically rugged. For this reason, one should avoid *compression splices* (e.g. “butt” connectors), solderless breadboards<sup>5</sup>, and wires that are simply twisted together.
- Build your circuit with **testing** in mind. For example, provide convenient connection points for test equipment (e.g. multimeters, oscilloscopes, signal generators, logic probes).
- Design permanent projects with **maintenance** in mind. The more convenient you make maintenance tasks, the more likely they will get done.
- **Always document and save your work.** Circuits lacking schematic diagrams are more difficult to troubleshoot than documented circuits. Similarly, circuit construction is simpler when a schematic diagram precedes construction. Experimental results are easier to interpret when comprehensively recorded. Consider modern videorecording technology for this purpose where appropriate.
- **Record your steps** when troubleshooting. **Talk to yourself** when solving problems. These simple steps clarify thought and simplify identification of errors.

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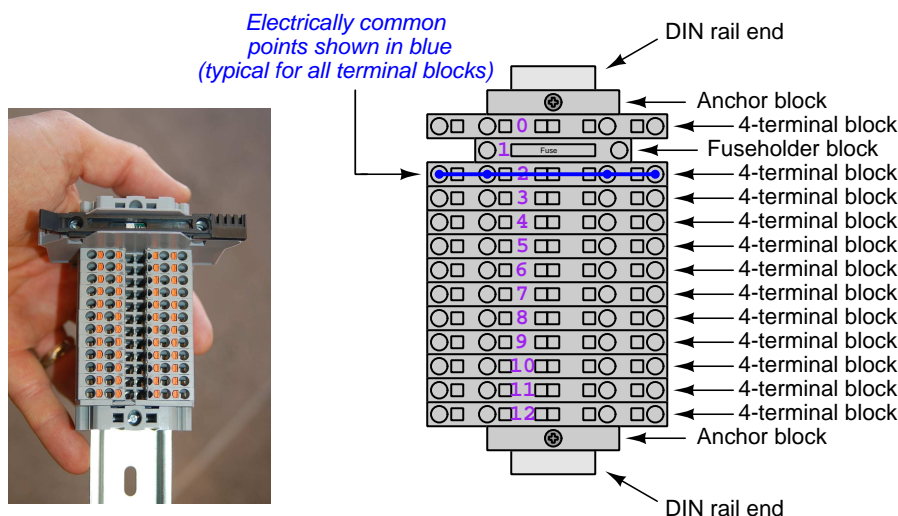
<sup>4</sup>An example of a necessary resistor value much less than  $1\text{ k}\Omega$  is a *shunt resistor* used to produce a small voltage drop for the purpose of sensing current in a circuit. Such shunt resistors must be low-value in order not to impose an undue load on the rest of the circuit. An example of a necessary resistor value much greater than  $100\text{ k}\Omega$  is an electrostatic *drain resistor* used to dissipate stored electric charges from body capacitance for the sake of preventing damage to sensitive semiconductor components, while also preventing a path for current that could be dangerous to the person (i.e. shock).

<sup>5</sup>Admittedly, solderless breadboards are very useful for constructing complex electronic circuits with many components, especially DIP-style integrated circuits (ICs), but they tend to give trouble with connection integrity after frequent use. An alternative for projects using low counts of ICs is to solder IC sockets into prototype printed circuit boards (PCBs) and run wires from the soldered pins of the IC sockets to terminal blocks where reliable temporary connections may be made.

### 8.1.3 Terminal blocks for circuit construction

Terminal blocks are the standard means for making electric circuit connections in industrial systems. They are also quite useful as a learning tool, and so I highly recommend their use in lieu of solderless breadboards<sup>6</sup>. Terminal blocks provide highly reliable connections capable of withstanding significant voltage and current magnitudes, and they force the builder to think very carefully about component layout which is an important mental practice. Terminal blocks that mount on standard 35 mm DIN rail<sup>7</sup> are made in a wide range of types and sizes, some with built-in disconnecting switches, some with built-in components such as rectifying diodes and fuseholders, all of which facilitate practical circuit construction.

I recommend every student of electricity build their own terminal block array for use in constructing experimental circuits, consisting of several terminal blocks where each block has at least 4 connection points all electrically common to each other<sup>8</sup> and at least one terminal block that is a fuse holder for overcurrent protection. A pair of anchoring blocks hold all terminal blocks securely on the DIN rail, preventing them from sliding off the rail. Each of the terminals should bear a number, starting from 0. An example is shown in the following photograph and illustration:



Screwless terminal blocks (using internal spring clips to clamp wire and component lead ends) are preferred over screw-based terminal blocks, as they reduce assembly and disassembly time, and also minimize repetitive wrist stress from twisting screwdrivers. Some screwless terminal blocks require the use of a special tool to release the spring clip, while others provide buttons<sup>9</sup> for this task which may be pressed using the tip of any suitable tool.

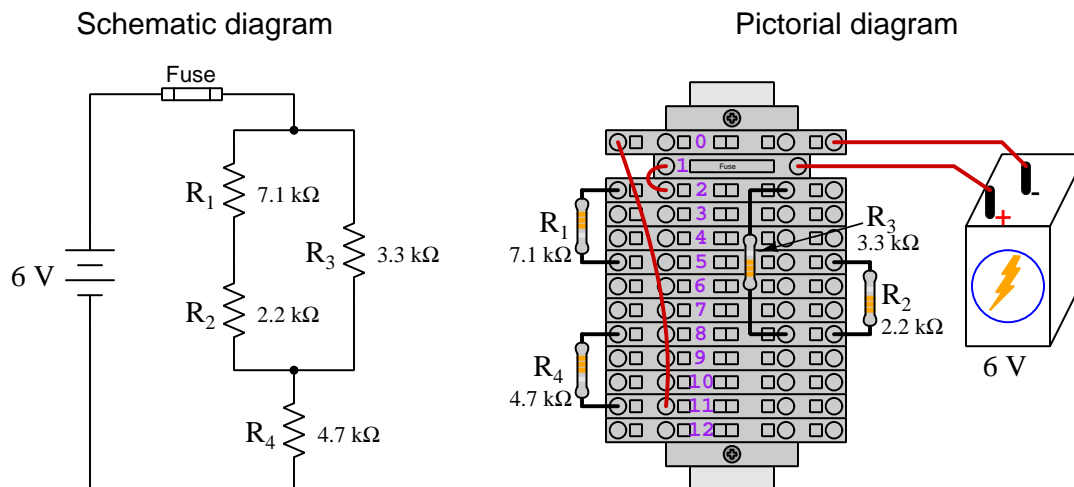
<sup>6</sup>Solderless breadboard are preferable for complicated electronic circuits with multiple integrated “chip” components, but for simpler circuits I find terminal blocks much more practical. An alternative to solderless breadboards for “chip” circuits is to solder chip sockets onto a PCB and then use wires to connect the socket pins to terminal blocks. This also accommodates *surface-mount* components, which solderless breadboards do not.

<sup>7</sup>DIN rail is a metal rail designed to serve as a mounting point for a wide range of electrical and electronic devices such as terminal blocks, fuses, circuit breakers, relay sockets, power supplies, data acquisition hardware, etc.

<sup>8</sup>Sometimes referred to as *equipotential*, *same-potential*, or *potential distribution* terminal blocks.

<sup>9</sup>The small orange-colored squares seen in the above photograph are buttons for this purpose, and may be actuated by pressing with any tool of suitable size.

The following example shows how such a terminal block array might be used to construct a series-parallel resistor circuit consisting of four resistors and a battery:



Numbering on the terminal blocks provides a very natural translation to SPICE<sup>10</sup> netlists, where component connections are identified by terminal number:

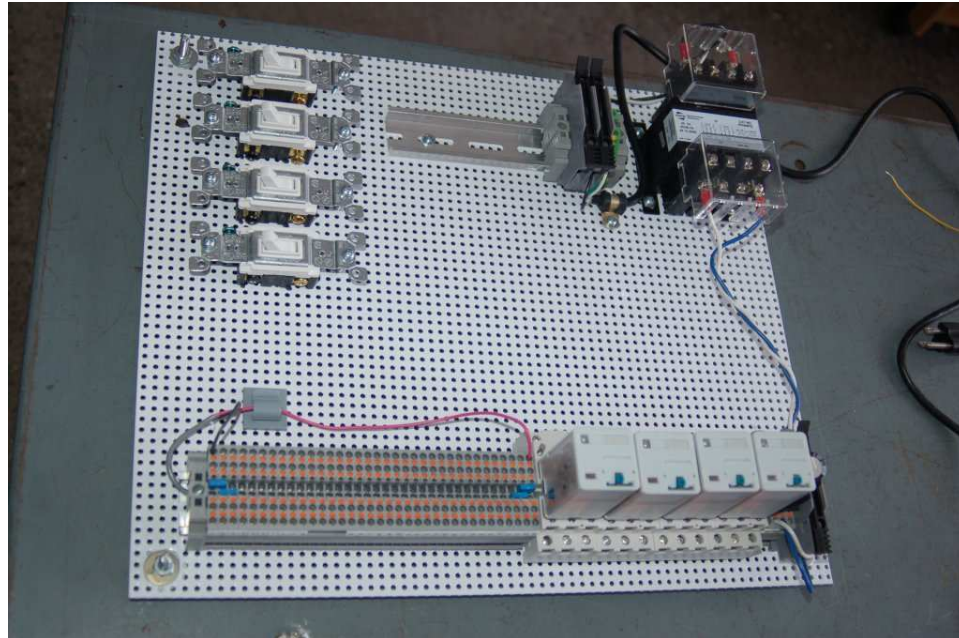
```
* Series-parallel resistor circuit
v1 1 0 dc 6
r1 2 5 7100
r2 5 8 2200
r3 2 8 3300
r4 8 11 4700
rjmp1 1 2 0.01
rjmp2 0 11 0.01
.op
.end
```

Note the use of “jumper” resistances `rjmp1` and `rjmp2` to describe the wire connections between terminals 1 and 2 and between terminals 0 and 11, respectively. Being resistances, SPICE requires a resistance value for each, and here we see they have both been set to an arbitrarily low value of 0.01 Ohm realistic for short pieces of wire.

Listing all components and wires along with their numbered terminals happens to be a useful documentation method for any circuit built on terminal blocks, independent of SPICE. Such a “wiring sequence” may be thought of as a *non-graphical description* of an electric circuit, and is exceptionally easy to follow.

<sup>10</sup>SPICE is computer software designed to analyze electrical and electronic circuits. Circuits are described for the computer in the form of *netlists* which are text files listing each component type, connection node numbers, and component values.

An example of a more elaborate terminal block array is shown in the following photograph, with terminal blocks and “ice-cube” style electromechanical relays mounted to DIN rail, which is turn mounted to a perforated subpanel<sup>11</sup>. This “terminal block board” hosts an array of thirty five undedicated terminal block sections, four SPDT toggle switches, four DPDT “ice-cube” relays, a step-down control power transformer, bridge rectifier and filtering capacitor, and several fuses for overcurrent protection:



Four plastic-bottomed “feet” support the subpanel above the benchtop surface, and an unused section of DIN rail stands ready to accept other components. Safety features include electrical bonding of the AC line power cord’s ground to the metal subpanel (and all metal DIN rails), mechanical strain relief for the power cord to isolate any cord tension from wire connections, clear plastic finger guards covering the transformer’s screw terminals, as well as fused overcurrent protection for the 120 Volt AC line power and the transformer’s 12 Volt AC output. The perforated holes happen to be on  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch centers with a diameter suitable for tapping with 6-32 machine screw threads, their presence making it very easy to attach other sections of DIN rail, printed circuit boards, or specialized electrical components directly to the grounded metal subpanel. Such a “terminal block board” is an inexpensive<sup>12</sup> yet highly flexible means to construct physically robust circuits using industrial wiring practices.

<sup>11</sup>An electrical *subpanel* is a thin metal plate intended for mounting inside an electrical enclosure. Components are attached to the subpanel, and the subpanel in turn bolts inside the enclosure. Subpanels allow circuit construction outside the confines of the enclosure, which speeds assembly. In this particular usage there is no enclosure, as the subpanel is intended to be used as an open platform for the convenient construction of circuits on a benchtop by students. In essence, this is a modern version of the traditional *breadboard* which was literally a wooden board such as might be used for cutting loaves of bread, but which early electrical and electronic hobbyists used as platforms for the construction of circuits.

<sup>12</sup>At the time of this writing (2019) the cost to build this board is approximately \$250 US dollars.



### 8.1.4 Conducting experiments

An *experiment* is an exploratory act, a test performed for the purpose of assessing some proposition or principle. Experiments are the foundation of the *scientific method*, a process by which careful observation helps guard against errors of speculation. All good experiments begin with an *hypothesis*, defined by the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language as:

An assertion subject to verification or proof, as (a) A proposition stated as a basis for argument or reasoning. (b) A premise from which a conclusion is drawn. (c) A conjecture that accounts, within a theory or ideational framework, for a set of facts and that can be used as a basis for further investigation.

Stated plainly, an hypothesis is an *educated guess* about cause and effect. The correctness of this initial guess matters little, because any well-designed experiment will reveal the truth of the matter. In fact, *incorrect* hypotheses are often the most valuable because the experiments they engender lead us to surprising discoveries. One of the beautiful aspects of science is that it is more focused on the process of *learning* than about the status of *being correct*<sup>13</sup>. In order for an hypothesis to be valid, it must be testable<sup>14</sup>, which means it must be a claim possible to refute given the right data. Hypotheses impossible to critique are useless.

Once an hypothesis has been formulated, an experiment must be designed to test that hypothesis. A well-designed experiment requires careful regulation of all relevant variables, both for personal safety and for prompting the hypothesized results. If the effects of one particular variable are to be tested, the experiment must be run multiple times with different values of (only) that particular variable. The experiment set up with the “baseline” variable set is called the *control*, while the experiment set up with different value(s) is called the *test* or *experimental*.

For some hypotheses a viable alternative to a physical experiment is a *computer-simulated experiment* or even a *thought experiment*. Simulations performed on a computer test the hypothesis against the physical laws encoded within the computer simulation software, and are particularly useful for students learning new principles for which simulation software is readily available<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>13</sup>Science is more about clarifying our view of the universe through a systematic process of error detection than it is about proving oneself to be right. Some *scientists* may happen to have large egos – and this may have more to do with the ways in which large-scale scientific research is *funded* than anything else – but *scientific method* itself is devoid of ego, and if embraced as a practical philosophy is quite an effective stimulant for humility. Within the education system, scientific method is particularly valuable for helping students break free of the crippling fear of *being wrong*. So much emphasis is placed in formal education on assessing correct retention of facts that many students are fearful of saying or doing anything that might be perceived as a mistake, and of course making mistakes (i.e. having one’s hypotheses disproven by experiment) is an indispensable tool for learning. Introducing science in the classroom – *real* science characterized by individuals forming actual hypotheses and testing those hypotheses by experiment – helps students become self-directed learners.

<sup>14</sup>This is the principle of *falsifiability*: that a scientific statement has value only insofar as it is liable to disproof given the requisite experimental evidence. Any claim that is unfalsifiable – that is, a claim which can *never* be disproven by any evidence whatsoever – could be completely wrong and we could never know it.

<sup>15</sup>A very pertinent example of this is learning how to analyze electric circuits using simulation software such as SPICE. A typical experimental cycle would proceed as follows: (1) Find or invent a circuit to analyze; (2) Apply your analytical knowledge to that circuit, predicting all voltages, currents, powers, etc. relevant to the concepts you are striving to master; (3) Run a simulation on that circuit, collecting “data” from the computer when complete; (4) Evaluate whether or not your hypotheses (i.e. predicted voltages, currents, etc.) agree with the computer-generated results; (5) If so, your analyses are (provisionally) correct – if not, examine your analyses and the computer simulation again to determine the source of error; (6) Repeat this process as many times as necessary until you achieve mastery.

Thought experiments are useful for detecting inconsistencies within your own understanding of some subject, rather than testing your understanding against physical reality.

Here are some general guidelines for conducting experiments:

- The clearer and more specific the hypothesis, the better. Vague or unfalsifiable hypotheses are useless because they will fit *any* experimental results, and therefore the experiment cannot teach you anything about the hypothesis.
- Collect as much data (i.e. information, measurements, sensory experiences) generated by an experiment as is practical. This includes the time and date of the experiment, too!
- *Never* discard or modify data gathered from an experiment. If you have reason to believe the data is unreliable, write notes to that effect, but never throw away data just because you think it is untrustworthy. It is quite possible that even “bad” data holds useful information, and that someone else may be able to uncover its value even if you do not.
- Prioritize *quantitative* data over *qualitative* data wherever practical. Quantitative data is more specific than qualitative, less prone to subjective interpretation on the part of the experimenter, and amenable to an arsenal of analytical methods (e.g. statistics).
- Guard against your own bias(es) by making your experimental results available to others. This allows other people to scrutinize your experimental design and collected data, for the purpose of detecting and correcting errors you may have missed. Document your experiment such that others may independently replicate it.
- Always be looking for sources of error. No physical measurement is perfect, and so it is impossible to achieve *exact* values for any variable. Quantify the amount of uncertainty (i.e. the “tolerance” of errors) whenever possible, and be sure your hypothesis does not depend on precision better than this!
- Always remember that scientific confirmation is provisional – no number of “successful” experiments will prove an hypothesis true for all time, but a single experiment can disprove it. Put into simpler terms, *truth is elusive but error is within reach*.
- Remember that scientific method is about *learning*, first and foremost. An unfortunate consequence of scientific triumph in modern society is that science is often viewed by non-practitioners as an unerring source of truth, when in fact science is an ongoing process of challenging existing ideas to probe for errors and oversights. This is why it is perfectly acceptable to have a failed hypothesis, and why the only truly failed experiment is one where nothing was learned.



The following is an example of a well-planned and executed experiment, in this case a physical experiment demonstrating Ohm's Law.

Planning Time/Date = 09:30 on 12 February 2019

HYPOTHESIS: the current through any resistor should be exactly proportional to the voltage impressed across it.

PROCEDURE: connect a resistor rated 1 k Ohm and 1/4 Watt to a variable-voltage DC power supply. Use an ammeter in series to measure resistor current and a voltmeter in parallel to measure resistor voltage.

RISKS AND MITIGATION: excessive power dissipation may harm the resistor and/or pose a burn hazard, while excessive voltage poses an electric shock hazard. 30 Volts is a safe maximum voltage for laboratory practices, and according to Joule's Law a 1000 Ohm resistor will dissipate 0.25 Watts at 15.81 Volts ( $P = V^2 / R$ ), so I will remain below 15 Volts just to be safe.

Experiment Time/Date = 10:15 on 12 February 2019

DATA COLLECTED:

(Voltage)	(Current)	(Voltage)	(Current)
0.000 V	= 0.000 mA	8.100	= 7.812 mA
2.700 V	= 2.603 mA	10.00 V	= 9.643 mA
5.400 V	= 5.206 mA	14.00 V	= 13.49 mA

Analysis Time/Date = 10:57 on 12 February 2019

ANALYSIS: current definitely increases with voltage, and although I expected exactly one milliAmpere per Volt the actual current was usually less than that. The voltage/current ratios ranged from a low of 1036.87 (at 8.1 Volts) to a high of 1037.81 (at 14 Volts), but this represents a variance of only -0.0365% to +0.0541% from the average, indicating a very consistent proportionality -- results consistent with Ohm's Law.

ERROR SOURCES: one major source of error is the resistor's value itself. I did not measure it, but simply assumed color bands of brown-black-red meant exactly 1000 Ohms. Based on the data I think the true resistance is closer to 1037 Ohms. Another possible explanation is multimeter calibration error. However, neither explains the small positive and negative variances from the average. This might be due to electrical noise, a good test being to repeat the same experiment to see if the variances are the same or different. Noise should generate slightly different results every time.

The following is an example of a well-planned and executed *virtual* experiment, in this case demonstrating Ohm's Law using a computer (SPICE) simulation.

Planning Time/Date = 12:32 on 14 February 2019

HYPOTHESIS: for any given resistor, the current through that resistor should be exactly proportional to the voltage impressed across it.

PROCEDURE: write a SPICE netlist with a single DC voltage source and single 1000 Ohm resistor, then use NGSPICE version 26 to perform a "sweep" analysis from 0 Volts to 25 Volts in 5 Volt increments.

```
* SPICE circuit
v1 1 0 dc
r1 1 0 1000
.dc v1 0 25 5
.print dc v(1) i(v1)
.end
```

RISKS AND MITIGATION: none.

DATA COLLECTED:

DC transfer characteristic Thu Feb 14 13:05:08 2019

Index	v-sweep	v(1)	v1#branch
0	0.000000e+00	0.000000e+00	0.000000e+00
1	5.000000e+00	5.000000e+00	-5.00000e-03
2	1.000000e+01	1.000000e+01	-1.00000e-02
3	1.500000e+01	1.500000e+01	-1.50000e-02
4	2.000000e+01	2.000000e+01	-2.00000e-02
5	2.500000e+01	2.500000e+01	-2.50000e-02

Analysis Time/Date = 13:06 on 14 February 2019

ANALYSIS: perfect agreement between data and hypothesis -- current is precisely 1/1000 of the applied voltage for all values. Anything other than perfect agreement would have probably meant my netlist was incorrect. The negative current values surprised me, but it seems this is just how SPICE interprets normal current through a DC voltage source.

ERROR SOURCES: none.

As gratuitous as it may seem to perform experiments on a physical law as well-established as Ohm's Law, even the examples listed previously demonstrate opportunity for real learning. In the physical experiment example, the student should identify and explain why their data does not perfectly agree with the hypothesis, and this leads them naturally to consider sources of error. In the computer-simulated experiment, the student is struck by SPICE's convention of denoting regular current through a DC voltage source as being *negative* in sign, and this is also useful knowledge for future simulations. Scientific experiments are most interesting when things *do not* go as planned!

Aside from verifying well-established physical laws, simple experiments are extremely useful as educational tools for a wide range of purposes, including:

- Component familiarization (e.g. *Which terminals of this switch connect to the NO versus NC contacts?*)
- System testing (e.g. *How heavy of a load can my AC-DC power supply source before the semiconductor components reach their thermal limits?*)
- Learning programming languages (e.g. *Let's try to set up an "up" counter function in this PLC!*)

Above all, the priority here is to inculcate the habit of hypothesizing, running experiments, and analyzing the results. This experimental cycle not only serves as an excellent method for self-directed learning, but it also works exceptionally well for troubleshooting faults in complex systems, and for these reasons should be a part of every technician's and every engineer's education.

### 8.1.5 Constructing projects

Designing, constructing, and testing projects is a very effective means of practical education. Within a formal educational setting, projects are generally chosen (or at least vetted) by an instructor to ensure they may be reasonably completed within the allotted time of a course or program of study, and that they sufficiently challenge the student to learn certain important principles. In a self-directed environment, projects are just as useful as a learning tool but there is some risk of unwittingly choosing a project beyond one's abilities, which can lead to frustration.

Here are some general guidelines for managing projects:

- Define your goal(s) before beginning a project: what do you wish to achieve in building it? What, exactly, should the completed project *do*?
- Analyze your project prior to construction. Document it in appropriate forms (e.g. schematic diagrams), predict its functionality, anticipate all associated risks. In other words, *plan ahead*.
- Set a reasonable budget for your project, and stay within it.
- Identify any deadlines, and set reasonable goals to meet those deadlines.
- Beware of *scope creep*: the tendency to modify the project's goals before it is complete.
- Document your progress! An easy way to do this is to use photography or videography: take photos and/or videos of your project as it progresses. Document failures as well as successes, because both are equally valuable from the perspective of learning.

## 8.2 Experiment: (first experiment)

Conduct an experiment to . . .

### EXPERIMENT CHECKLIST:

- Prior to experimentation:
  - ☒ Write an hypothesis (i.e. a detailed description of what you expect will happen) unambiguous enough that it could be disproven given the right data.
  - ☒ Write a procedure to test the hypothesis, complete with adequate controls and documentation (e.g. schematic diagrams, programming code).
  - ☒ Identify any risks (e.g. shock hazard, component damage) and write a mitigation plan based on best practices and component ratings.
- During experimentation:
  - ☒ Safe practices followed at all times (e.g. no contact with energized circuit).
  - ☒ Correct equipment usage according to manufacturer's recommendations.
  - ☒ All data collected, ideally quantitative with full precision (i.e. no rounding).
- After each experimental run:
  - ☒ If the results fail to match the hypothesis, identify the error(s), correct the hypothesis and/or revise the procedure, and re-run the experiment.
  - ☒ Identify any uncontrolled sources of error in the experiment.
- After all experimental re-runs:
  - ☒ Save all data for future reference.
  - ☒ Write an analysis of experimental results and lessons learned.

### Challenges

- Science is an *iterative* process, and for this reason is never complete. Following the results of your experiment, what would you propose for your *next* hypothesis and *next* experimental procedure? Hint: if your experiment produced any unexpected results, exploring those unexpected results is often a very good basis for the next experiment!
- ???.
- ???.

## 8.3 Project: (first project)

*This is a description of the project!*

### PROJECT CHECKLIST:

- Prior to construction:
  - ☒ Prototype diagram(s) and description of project scope.
  - ☒ Risk assessment/mitigation plan.
  - ☒ Timeline and action plan.
- During construction:
  - ☒ Safe work habits (e.g. no contact made with energized circuit at any time).
  - ☒ Correct equipment usage according to manufacturer's recommendations.
  - ☒ Timeline and action plan amended as necessary.
  - ☒ Maintain the originally-planned project scope (i.e. avoid adding features!).
- After completion:
  - ☒ All functions tested against original plan.
  - ☒ Full, accurate, and appropriate documentation of all project details.
  - ☒ Complete bill of materials.
  - ☒ Written summary of lessons learned.

Challenges
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- ???.
- ???.
- ???.

## 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 environment<sup>1</sup> 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 Socratic<sup>2</sup> 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 absurdity<sup>3</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup>In 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.

<sup>2</sup>Socrates 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.

<sup>3</sup>This 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 varied<sup>4</sup> 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 challenge<sup>5</sup> one another.

To high standards of education,

Tony R. Kuphaldt

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<sup>4</sup>As 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.

<sup>5</sup>Avoid 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 $\text{\TeX}$ 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.  $\text{\TeX}$  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,  *$\text{\TeX}$  is a programmer's approach to word processing*. Since  $\text{\TeX}$  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  $\text{\TeX}$  makes it relatively easy to learn how other people have created their own  $\text{\TeX}$  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 $\text{\LaTeX}$ extensions to $\text{\TeX}$

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



## 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.

**28 October 2020** – document first created.

# Index

- Adding quantities to a qualitative problem, 76
- Annotating diagrams, 75
- Bel, 12
- Breadboard, solderless, 64, 65
- Breadboard, traditional, 67
- C++, 34
- Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation, 62
- Checking for exceptions, 76
- Checking your work, 76
- Code, computer, 83
- Common logarithm, 12
- Compiler, C++, 34
- Computer programming, 33
- CPR, 62
- Dalziel, Charles, 62
- dB, 12
- dBm, 16
- dBW, 17
- Decibel, 12
- Dimensional analysis, 75
- DIN rail, 65
- DIP, 64
- Edwards, Tim, 84
- Electric shock, 62
- Electrically common points, 63
- Enclosure, electrical, 67
- Equipotential points, 63, 65
- Experiment, 68
- Experimental guidelines, 69
- Fourier transform, 18
- Gain, amplifier, 12
- Graph values to solve a problem, 76
- Greenleaf, Cynthia, 45
- How to teach with these modules, 78
- Hwang, Andrew D., 85
- IC, 64
- Identify given data, 75
- Identify relevant principles, 75
- Instructions for projects and experiments, 79
- Intermediate results, 75
- Interpreter, Python, 38
- Inverted instruction, 78
- Java, 35
- Joule's Law, 19
- Knuth, Donald, 84
- Lamport, Leslie, 84
- Laplace transform, 18
- Limiting cases, 76
- Logarithm, common, 12
- Maxwell, James Clerk, 9
- Metacognition, 50
- Moolenaar, Bram, 83
- Murphy, Lynn, 45
- Open-source, 83
- Potential distribution, 65
- Problem-solving: annotate diagrams, 75
- Problem-solving: check for exceptions, 76
- Problem-solving: checking work, 76
- Problem-solving: dimensional analysis, 75
- Problem-solving: graph values, 76
- Problem-solving: identify given data, 75
- Problem-solving: identify relevant principles, 75

- Problem-solving: interpret intermediate results, 75
- Problem-solving: limiting cases, 76
- Problem-solving: qualitative to quantitative, 76
- Problem-solving: quantitative to qualitative, 76
- Problem-solving: reductio ad absurdum, 76
- Problem-solving: simplify the system, 75
- Problem-solving: thought experiment, 69, 75
- Problem-solving: track units of measurement, 75
- Problem-solving: visually represent the system, 75
- Problem-solving: work in reverse, 76
- Programming, computer, 33
- Project management guidelines, 72
- Python, 38
- Qualitatively approaching a quantitative problem, 76
- Reading Apprenticeship, 45
- Reductio ad absurdum, 76–78
- Safety, electrical, 62
- Schoenbach, Ruth, 45
- Scientific method, 50, 68
- Scope creep, 72
- Shunt resistor, 64
- Simplifying a system, 75
- Socrates, 77
- Socratic dialogue, 78
- Solderless breadboard, 64, 65
- Source code, 34
- SPICE, 45, 69
- SPICE netlist, 66
- Stallman, Richard, 83
- Subpanel, 67
- Surface mount, 65
- Terminal block, 63–67
- Thought experiment, 69, 75
- Torvalds, Linus, 83
- Transform function, 18
- Units of measurement, 75
- Visualizing a system, 75
- Whitespace, C++, 34, 35
- Whitespace, Python, 41
- Wiring sequence, 66
- Work in reverse to solve a problem, 76
- WYSIWYG, 83, 84