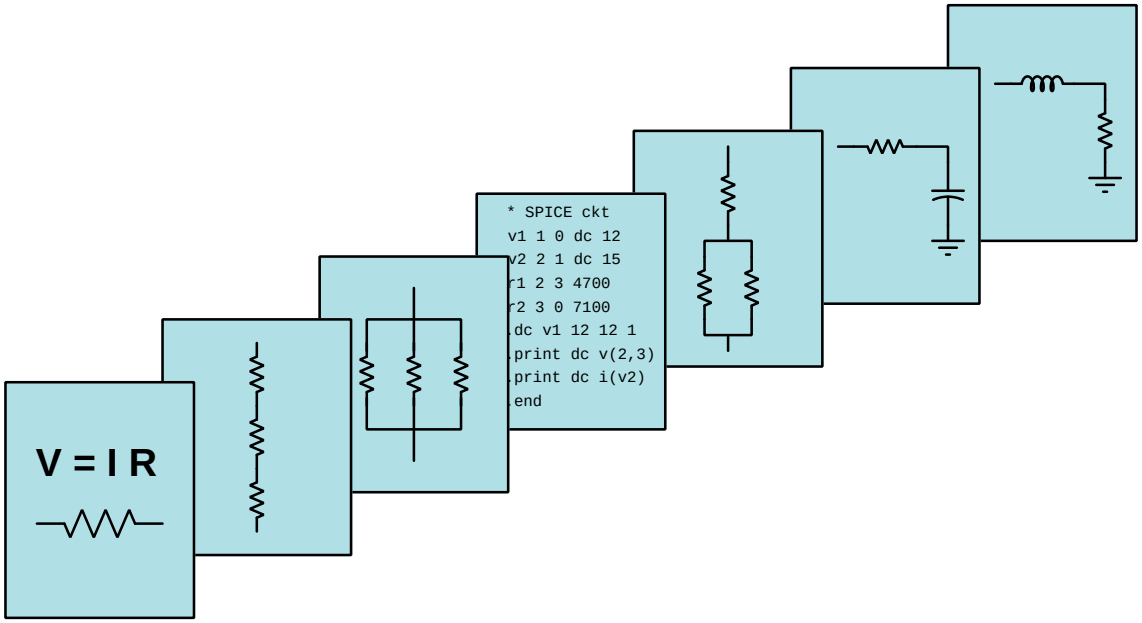
Modular Electronics Learning (ModEL) project



Internet-based Systems

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Recommendations for students

A general trend in consumer and industrial electronic devices is for them to automatically communicate data to a larger network, ultimately the world-wide internet. This is commonly referred to as the *Internet of Things*. This module explores some of the technical details associated with data communication from electronic devices to the internet.

Important concepts related to the Internet of Things include digital **protocols**, the **OSI Reference Model**, **client-server** data transfer, **encryption**, **remote sessions**, the **World-Wide Web** (WWW), **markup languages**, **HTML**, and **file transfer protocols**.

A useful reading strategy is to write your own summary page of important principles. This is useful with a topic such as network protocols and internet communications, where you are faced with an array of different standards and technologies necessary to form a complete communications link over long distances. Your own summary describing what each of these standards represent and what they do will help consolidate all the information you will read in the Tutorial.

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

- How do standardized protocols make the Internet possible?
- How do the IP and TCP protocols function to exchange data over wide-area networks?
- What is a *client-server* data connection and how does it work?
- Where is encryption applied in internet communications?
- What is a *remote session* between computers connected to one another over a network?
- What is *hypertext*?
- How is the text on an internet website encoded?
- What is a *markup language*, and how does it work to make data more presentable to human users?

1.2 Challenging concepts related to internet-based systems

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

- **Markup language** – a "markup" language is a convention by which plain-ASCII characters describe to a computer how text and images should visually appear in finished format to a human reader of a document. It is coding for written documents, as opposed to coding for algorithms. Many markup languages exist, including SGML, XML, HTML, Markdown, LaTeX, TeX, groff, DocBook, etc. Some of these, such as SGML and XML, are *generalized* languages which may be used for more than just human-readable documents.

1.3 Recommendations for instructors

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

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

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

  Assessment – Students present their "Conceptual Toolbox" Theory Journal entries listing important concepts applied in the Tutorial text(s). A "Conceptual Toolbox" serves as inspiration when solving problems, each concept suggesting a potential problem-solving action. Challenge students to collaboratively generate a Conceptual Toolbox for the day's topic during the class session and then use it when solving problems together, thus fostering the habit of reasoning from principles rather than recalling procedures!

- **Outcome** – Write simple HTML code

  Assessment – Write and/or edit a short HTML file to create the desired presentation when that file is viewed on a web browser.

- **Outcome** – Use remote-access tools for computers

  Assessment – Access a computer remotely using `ssh`.

  Assessment – Transfer files to a computer remotely using `sftp`.

Chapter 2

Tutorial

2.1 Connecting to the Internet

The *internet* is a world-wide network for digital communication accessible by most private parties in most countries, and its existence has truly revolutionized commerce, social interactions, education, and many other aspects of modern life. In order to connect any device to the internet, one must typically pay for the connection service offered by an *Internet Service Provider* or *ISP*. Telecommunications companies offer ISP service via such media as traditional telephone lines, cable television lines, satellite radio, cellular telephone radio, and/or fiber optic lines run directly to the point of use.

Standing between your device and the ISP's cabling (or radio access) is a device called a *modem*, which stands for *modulator/demodulator*. In truth, an internet modem usually does far more than just modulate electrical or optical signals to convey digital data[1], but nevertheless this term is often used to describe the device.

[1] Internet modems also typically serve as *routers* to dynamically assign IP addresses to connected devices, radio transceivers to provide short-range internet connectivity to non-wired devices, *Point-to-Point Protocol* (PPP) hosts for managing communications over the ISP's media, *encryption* engines to provide security of data exchange, and Ethernet hubs allowing connection of multiple Ethernet-equipped devices to the same modem.

2.2 Data transfer protocols

While the internet's existence owes itself largely to protocols such as *IP* (Internet Protocol) and *TCP* (Transmission Control Protocol) which make possible the division of large data sets into manageably-sized pieces for routing and transmission over redundant pathways, a host of other protocols existing at higher layers of the OSI model, particularly layer 7 (Application) regarding the final application of the data.

A common example of such a protocol is *HTTP* (*HyperText Transfer Protocol*) which is at the root of how internet web browsers function, a protocol designed to connect web browser software with data resident in other computers and allow non-technical users to make practical use of that data. TCP and IP may be responsible for the disassembly, routing, and reassembly of all that data, but it is HTTP that performs all the other work necessary to make that data accessible and usable to the average person. Another example is any form of data *encryption* at the application level used to secure the privacy of certain data transactions such as online banking and purchasing, without which the internet would be an even more risky environment to conduct business and private affairs than it currently is.

An important concept common to these data-transfer protocols is the *client-server* model. In order to transfer data between two computers that is meaningful to the non-technical user, software applications must run on both of those machines to execute the particular protocol[2].

To use web browsing again as an example, the web-browsing software you would use to access a website is an example of a *client* application. At the other end of that communication channel is the computer hosting the information you intend to browse, and to make that information available to your browser application there must be a web *server* running on that computer. The server software interacts with queries and requests from your browser software to both receive and transmit data necessary for the transaction. You could say that the web server software *serves up* that computer's data to your web browser *client*, just as a server in a restaurant provides meal service to any paying client wishing to dine there.

[2] This is true even for lower-level protocols such as IP and TCP: the computer on each end must run IP and TCP services (usually as a task of the operating system software) in order to properly package and unpackage data according to the dictates of those protocols. For layer-7 protocols, however, the functions at each end of the communication channel differ enough to warrant specialized software for each, one called the *client* and the other called the *server*.

2.3 File transfer

Exchanging data files across the internet (e.g. text documents, executable software, graphic images, audio files, video files, etc.) requires a file-transfer protocol to manage the exchange between those computers. One of the early and popular protocols for this purpose was simply called *File Transfer Protocol* or *ftp*.

`ftp` uses client-server architecture, which means any computer hosting the desired file must be running an `ftp` *server* application, and the computer at the receiving end must run an `ftp` *client* to receive and process that data. Modern web browsers actually have `ftp` client ability built-in, and so you have no doubt used an `ftp` client without even knowing it. However, dedicated `ftp` clients do exist which fulfill no purpose whatsoever but to facilitate file transfer across the internet.

`ftp` clients exist in both graphical and command-line varieties. Graphical `ftp` clients resemble web browsers in their point-and-click interfaces, while command-line `ftp` clients function by typing commands at a console prompt as shown in the example below:

```
tony@DESKTOP-YYZ:~$ ftp
ftp> ?
Commands may be abbreviated.  Commands are:

!               debug           mdir            sendport        site
$               dir             mget            put             size
account         disconnect      mkdir           pwd             status
append          exit            mls             quit            struct
ascii           form            mode            quote           system
bell            get             modtime         recv            sunique
binary          glob            mput            reget           tenex
bye             hash            newer           rstatus         tick
case            help            nmap            rhelp           trace
cd              idle            nlist           rename          type
cdup            image           ntrans          reset           user
chmod           lcd             open            restart         umask
close           ls              prompt          rmdir           verbose
cr              macdef          passive         runique         ?
delete          mdelete         proxy           send
ftp>
```

This client session of `ftp` was started in interactive mode by typing `ftp` at the command line. Once the prompt changes to `ftp>` it is ready to receive specific commands to connect with remote computers and to exchange files. The command I entered in this example was a single question-mark (`?`) triggering a display of available commands for this `ftp` client program.

Default TCP port numbers exist for `ftp`, namely port 20 for transferred file data and port 21 for control commands. However, other TCP ports can and are often used by `ftp` for handling file transfers.

An example of a typical `ftp` session is shown here, all text appearing on your computer's console. Logging into an online server consists of specifying the login name followed by an `@` character and then the URL of the server. After arriving at the `ftp` prompt one is then able to issue `get` and `put` commands with specified filenames. The `ftp` session is terminated using the `quit` command:

```
tony@DESKTOP-YYZ:~$ ftp tony@exampleserver.com
ftp> get data.csv
ftp> put helloworld.c
ftp> quit
```

In order for any of this to work, the remote system must not only be running `ftp` server software, but must also have an account configured on it for you to log into. In the early days of the internet many public `ftp` servers had accounts with the name "anonymous" permitting anyone to log in, the password in most cases being arbitrary.

The original version of `ftp` has no internal provision for data encryption, making it vulnerable to surveillance and interception. A more modern version of the protocol called *Secure File Transfer Protocol* (`sftp`)[3] has all but replaced `ftp`, and uses *RSA* public/private key encryption for security. Commands used within `sftp` are identical to those used in `ftp`, and the procedure for logging in to an `sftp` server is much the same. TCP port number 22 is the standard port for `sftp`.

One interesting difference with `sftp` compared to `ftp` is that during your first login to an `sftp` server you will be prompted to accept a new public/private key pair for all future sessions with that remote server, an example of this being shown below:

```
tony@DESKTOP-YYZ:~$ sftp itcsubmit.wustl.edu
The authenticity of host 'itcsubmit.wustl.edu (128.252.17.87)' can't be established.
ECDSA key fingerprint is SHA256:VHImdLEgJxo9hojSK9OtYGtIE7lRupxdKOHz4xvxSsM.
Are you sure you want to continue connecting (yes/no)? yes
Warning: Permanently added 'itcsubmit.wustl.edu,128.252.17.87' (ECDSA) to the list
of known hosts.
```

Not only are file-transfer protocols such as `ftp` and `sftp` directly useful to the end-user running appropriate client software, but client functions are also available as code *libraries* for common programming languages such as C++. This makes it possible for you to write your own programs to function as an file-transfer client for applications where the computer you program must initiate file-transfer operations on its own without human oversight or prompting. When compiled, your source code becomes "linked" to the file-transfer libraries which gives it access to those complex functions necessary to interact with the `ftp` or `sftp` server software on the remote computer(s).

For example, you could write software in C++ for a computer to function as a weather station, reading data from weather sensors, collating that data into archived files, and periodically "uploading" those files to one or more remote computers using `ftp` or `sftp` client functions. Alternatively, your weather station software could simply write files with weather data stored in them and also run `ftp` or `sftp` server software, allowing remote computers to log in using `ftp` or `sftp` client functions.

[3] `sftp` is actually a subset of another protocol called *Secure SHell*, or `ssh`. This protocol is described in the next section of this Tutorial.

2.4 Remote session

Another class of client-server based protocols permits a user of one computer to "log in" to a remote computer and issue commands to that remote computer as though they had direct access to its peripherals (e.g. keyboard, mouse). The person desiring to log in remotely to another computer must run a remote-session *client* application, and the remote computer being logged into must be running a remote-session *server* application. This goes beyond mere file exchange, allowing the remote user as much access and privilege as their login credentials permit in the remote computer's operating system.

An early remote-session protocol was *telnet*, but like `ftp` telnet lacked encryption which made telnet sessions vulnerable to hacking. A modern replacement for telnet is *Secure SHell* (`ssh`) which uses *RSA* public/private key encryption to render the exchanged data nearly impossible to comprehend to unauthorized interceptors.

Command-line clients for telnet and `ssh` work much like command-line `ftp` clients. First, you enter the name of the client software (usually called `telnet` or `ssh` for simplicity) and then interact with that software by typing specialized commands at the new console prompt. Below is an example showing telnet's available commands:

```
tony@DESKTOP-YYZ:~$ telnet
telnet> ?
Commands may be abbreviated.  Commands are:

close    close current connection
logout   forcibly logout remote user and close the connection
display  display operating parameters
mode     try to enter line or character mode ('mode ?' for more)
open     connect to a site
quit     exit telnet
send     transmit special characters ('send ?' for more)
set      set operating parameters ('set ?' for more)
unset    unset operating parameters ('unset ?' for more)
status   print status information
toggle   toggle operating parameters ('toggle ?' for more)
slc      change state of special characters ('slc ?' for more)
z        suspend telnet
!        invoke a subshell
environ  change environment variables ('environ ?' for more)
?        print help information
telnet>
```

`ssh` requires more command-line arguments at its invocation. Simply typing `ssh` and pressing the Enter key generates a message showing some of those options:

```
tony@DESKTOP-YYZ:~$ ssh
usage: ssh [-1246AaCfgKkMNnqsTtVvXxYy] [-b bind_address] [-c cipher_spec]
           [-D [bind_address:]port] [-e escape_char] [-F configfile]
           [-I pkcs11] [-i identity_file]
           [-L [bind_address:]port:host:hostport]
           [-l login_name] [-m mac_spec] [-O ctl_cmd] [-o option] [-p port]
           [-R [bind_address:]port:host:hostport] [-S ctl_path]
           [-W host:port] [-w local_tun[:remote_tun]]
           [user@]hostname [command]
tony@DESKTOP-YYZ:~$
```

Once logged in to a remote computer using either telnet or `ssh`, the user is able to enter operating system commands at the prompt as though they were sitting before that remote computer's keyboard and monitor. The default TCP port number for `ssh` is port 22, just like `sftp`, although this is not the only possible TCP port `ssh` may use.

Alternatively, remote-session client and server functionality are also available as code libraries for programming languages such as C, C++, and Python. The availability of these pre-written libraries of code makes it much simpler to write software applications utilizing `ssh`: the libraries provide a set of pre-designed functions that you may call within the code you write, those functions performing all the same tasks available to ordinary users of `ssh` clients, just available for automatic execution by your program. Thus, the computer you program will be able to "log in" to another computer (that other computer running an `ssh` server, of course) all on its own without need for human supervision or assistance.

A strictly graphical remote-session protocol called *Remote Framebuffer Protocol* (*RFP*) is popular because it functions at the level of graphical images on the computer's monitor rather than the level of direct access to the operating system console. This means RFP may be used on *any* window-based operating system. RFP is the protocol used by the popular *RealVNC* client/server software suite, and is exceptionally useful for performing remote diagnostic work on unattended computers.

2.5 The World-Wide Web

Perhaps the most widely-recognized aspect of the internet is *web browsing*, where ordinary users with minimal specialized training in computers are able to run "browser" software to view data stored on computers across the globe. A special protocol exists for this type of data transfer called *HyperText Transport Protocol* (*HTTP*). Prior to the existence of HTTP and the client/server software supporting it, the internet was usable only by those possessing the necessary knowledge and specialized software to transfer files and gain remote access of systems. You could say that HTTP and its associated applications democratized the internet, turning it into the "world-wide web" that it is today.

Credit goes largely to Tim Berners-Lee for developing HTTP, as well as the first web browser client software application and the first web server software application. This protocol gets its name from the fact that it supports the convenient and rapid navigation to different files and data sources by selecting "hypertext" *links* displayed on the screen of the browser client software. Prior to this innovation one was forced to type a new network address into the client application every time you wanted to access a different piece of data.

HTTP has now been superseded by *HTTPS*, a secure version using cryptographic algorithms to encrypt and decrypt messages for data privacy. This is obviously important for web-based applications such as online banking and online purchasing.

When a person starts a web browser application on a computer and provides it with a starting address – called a *Uniform Resource Locator* (*URL*) or *Uniform Resource Identifier* (*URI*) – that browser client initiates a session with the specified server application, which serves up data contained in a file stored on that computer. The default name for this file is `index.html`, but other filenames are possible as well. The browser interprets the contents of that file and displays it as some combination of text, interactive "buttons", video, graphic images, sound, etc. A *website* is nothing more than a set of such files stored on a computer that is also running an HTTP or HTTPS server. Creating a website with active data is as simple as running software on that same computer to continually update the contents of those files.

Most website files consist of plain-text (ASCII) characters, organized according to a specific language definition that the web browser software is programmed to understand. This language is called *HyperText Markup Language* (*HTML*).

2.6 HyperText Markup Language

A *markup language* is a text-based language intended to organize and usually display information on a graphical display for human beings to view. Unlike a *programming language* which gives generalized instructions to a computer, a markup language merely describes how the information should appear.

Many such markup languages exist[4], but the one used predominantly for internet websites is another invention of Tim Berners-Lee called *HyperText Markup Language* (*HTML*). The general format of an HTML file is a series of "tags" consisting of alphabetical instructions enclosed in < and > symbols.

[4] An interesting note is that this document is actually created using a markup language called LaTeX which was designed to typeset professional-quality books. The author of a LaTeX document types plain-ASCII characters into a file, and then uses LaTeX software to "compile" that source file into another file suitable for reading as a graphical object, for example an Adobe PDF file.

The following text may be copied and pasted into a file, named `index.html`, and immediately viewed using a web browser application[5].

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html lang="en">
  <head>
    <title>This is my web page</title>
  </head>
  <body>

    <p>This is a paragraph.  It may contain many sentences.  Special fonts
       such as <i>italic</i> and <b>bold-face</b> and <tt>typewriter</tt>
       are easy to describe in HTML.</p>

    <table>
    <tr>
    <th>Heading A</th>
    <th>Heading B</th>
    <th>Heading C</th>
    </tr>
    <tr>
    <td>Entry 1</td>
    <td>Entry 2</td>
    <td>Entry 3</td>
    </tr>
    <tr>
    <td>Entry 4</td>
    <td>Entry 5</td>
    <td>Entry 6</td>
    </tr>
    </table>

    <p>Clicking on <a href="https://webfoundation.org">this link</a> will
       bring you to the World Wide Web Foundation's website</p>

    <p>Below is a CPU timing diagram:</p>

    <img src="image_3849.png">

  </body>
</html>
```

[5] Web browser clients are capable of reading HTML files resident on the same computer – they are not *limited* to accessing files stored on remote computers!

The result of processing this HTML file with a web browser is shown below:

This is a paragraph. It may contain many sentences. Special fonts such as *italic* and **bold-face** and `typewriter` are easy to describe in HTML.

Heading A	Heading B	Heading C
Entry 1	Entry 2	Entry 3
Entry 4	Entry 5	Entry 6

Clicking on this link will bring you to the World Wide Web Foundation's website

Below is a CPU timing diagram:

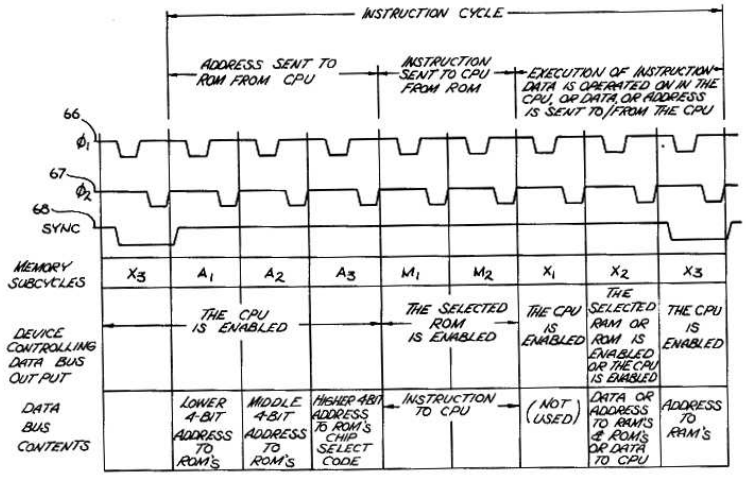


Fig. 2

If you try this on your own computer, you will see everything here *except* for the timing diagram graphic, because the "image" tag (`<img>`) will not have access to the source file for this graphic image (`image_3849.png`) that exists on my computer.

Note how most HTML tags come in *pairs*, and how those pairs always follow the same pattern: `<p>` and `</p>`, `<table>` and `</table>`, `<td>` and `</td>`, etc. These function not unlike the curly-brace symbols ({ and }) used in general-purpose computer programming languages such as Java, C, and C++ to "enclose" blocks of code belonging together.

While it certainly is possible to hand-code HTML files for use as website pages, this is rarely done in practice. Modern web pages are extremely complex, and the coding would be too tedious for most people to reliably write. Graphical-based WYSIWYG[6] software exists for creating HTML code in a manner similar to word processor applications. However, for simple web-based applications it is quite easy to write a computer program that will output HTML-compliant text to a file which a web server application may then "serve up" for any available web clients to access. An example of such a program (written in C++) is shown in section 4.3 beginning on page 31.

[6] "What You See Is What You Get"

Chapter 3

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.

3.1 The OSI Reference Model

Digital communication is a fairly complex topic, and there are a great many ways in which one digital device might communicate information to another. In order to help describe how different methods (protocols) function in forming a complete communication system, the *OSI Reference Model* was developed. This is not a standard itself, but rather a taxonomical system for *describing* and *classifying* various aspects of any communications system.

For example, one communication system might use discrete voltage pulses in a non-return-to-zero (NRZ) format to represent 0 and 1 bit states, while another might use analog audio tone frequency voltage signals to do the same. According to the OSI model, the choice over electrical signal types is a *Layer 1* matter. The patterns in which bit states make up larger serial data frames is another matter which must be standardized in any communication system, and according to the OSI model that is the domain of *Layer 2*. At the highest level of the OSI model we have *Layer 7* which regards the practical meaning of the bits communicated, whether those be alphanumeric codes representing an internet web page's contents, Modbus control functions, or anything else.

Layer 7 **Application**	This is where digital data takes on practical meaning in the context of some human or overall system function. *Examples: HTTP, FTP, HART, Modbus*
Layer 6 **Presentation**	This is where data gets converted between different formats. *Examples: ASCII, EBCDIC, MPEG, JPG, MP3*
Layer 5 **Session**	This is where "conversations" between digital devices are opened, closed, and otherwise managed for reliable data flow. *Examples: Sockets, NetBIOS*
Layer 4 **Transport**	This is where complete data transfer is handled, ensuring all data gets put together and error-checked before use. *Examples: TCP, UDP*
Layer 3 **Network**	This is where the system determines network-wide addresses, ensuring a means for data to get from one node to another. *Examples: IP, ARP*
Layer 2 **Data link**	This is where basic data transfer methods and sequences (frames) are defined within the smallest segment(s) of a network. *Examples: CSMA/CD, Token passing, Master/Slave*
Layer 1 **Physical**	This is where data bits are equated to electrical, optical, or other signals. Other physical details such as cable and connector types are also specified here. *Examples: EIA/TIA-232, 422, 485, Bell 202*

Students of philosophy might see a parallel between the OSI model's description of digital communication versus the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle's classification of *causes*. Aristotle proposed four different ways to describe what causes a thing to exist or to occur. I have arranged these four causes in an order analogous to the OSI model's layers:

Aristotle's Four Causes

Layer 4 **Final**	This is the end-purpose for which something exists or has happened.
Layer 3 **Efficient**	This is the means by which something came into existence or occurred.
Layer 2 **Formal**	This is the structure or form taken by something.
Layer 1 **Material**	This is the fundamental substance something is made of.

For example, we might classify the four causes of a textbook as follows:

- **Final cause** – to educate and enlighten the reader
- **Efficient cause** – a human author wrote the book, and it came into existence through the operation of a printing press
- **Formal cause** – a series of characters and images arranged into words, paragraphs, diagrams, graphs, equations, etc. following one or more standards of language (e.g. English, international math notation, Cartesian-coordinate graphs)
- **Material cause** – paper and ink

All of these causes describe different aspects of what was required for a book to come into existence. Similarly, with the OSI model, each level of the model is like one of Aristotle's causes in that it describes something necessary for the communication to take place.

Chapter 4

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*.

4.1 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[1] to view.

[1] 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[2], 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[3], 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

[2] 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!

[3] 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.

4.2 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`[4] 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()
```

[4] 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*[5] 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 $X_C \angle -90^o$ 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 Ω), then computed capacitive and inductive reactances at 60 Hz and defined each of those as complex (phasor) values ($0 - jX_c$ Ω and $0 + jX_l$ Ω, 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 Ω $\angle -25.102^o$). 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

[5] 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[6] 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.

[6] 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.

4.3 Generating a simple web page using C++

This program written in the C++ language outputs text to a file named `index.html` which may then be read by a web browser application, either locally on the same computer or remotely if that computer is running an http server:

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

int main ()
{
  float temp = 19.3;

  ofstream testfile;

  testfile.open ("index.html");
  testfile << "<!DOCTYPE html>" << endl;
  testfile << "<html lang=\"en\">" << endl;
  testfile << endl;
  testfile << "  <head>" << endl;
  testfile << "    <title>This is my web page</title>" << endl;
  testfile << "  </head>" << endl;
  testfile << endl;
  testfile << "  <body>" << endl;
  testfile << "    <p>This is how you make a paragraph</p>" << endl;
  testfile << "    <br>" << endl;
  testfile << "    <p>The temperature is " << temp << " degrees</p>" << endl;
  testfile << "  </body>" << endl;
  testfile << endl;
  testfile << "</html>" << endl;
  testfile.close();

  return 0;
}
```

When run, a file named `index.html` is created with the following content:

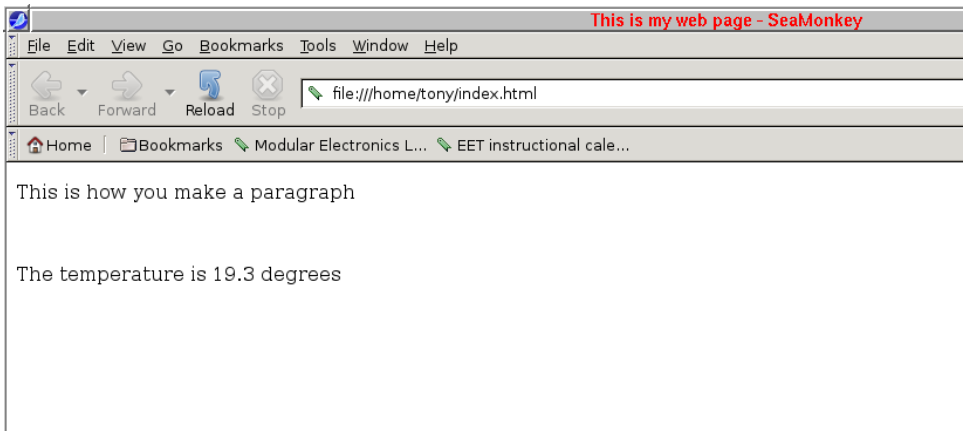
```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html lang="en">

  <head>
    <title>This is my web page</title>
  </head>

  <body>
    <p>This is how you make a paragraph</p>
    <br>
    <p>The temperature is 19.3 degrees</p>
  </body>

</html>
```

Viewed with a web browser, the result is as follows:



Let's explore the design of this program in detail, during which we will elaborate on the following programming principles:

- Reading/execution order
- Preprocessor directives (`#include`)
- The `main` function
- Arguments
- Delimiter characters (e.g. `{ } ;`)
- Variable declarations
- `float` and `int` data types
- Variable names
- Variable initialization
- File stream instructions
- Return

Generally speaking text-based computer programming languages are read and executed in the same order as English documents: character by character left-to-right, and line by line top-to-bottom.

The `#include` statements are called *preprocessor directives*, and simply tell the compiler software to read the contents of certain standardized files included as part of the C++ compiler installation on your computer, in this case the `iostream`, `fstream`, *class templates* and code libraries. Without these in place, your code would have to be much longer and much more complicated because you would have to define for the compiler what certain functions like `testfile.open()` are supposed to do.

Following the `#include` statements is a line declaring which `namespace` this program will use. Namespaces are one of those concepts distinguishing C++ from its predecessor language C, and for the scope of this discussion all you need to know is that this line instructs the compiler to use the *standard* (`std`) definitions of C++ functions.

Our HTML-writing code must be encapsulated inside the `main` function. Every C and C++ program has a `main` function where execution begins. In simple programs such as this, there is only one function, and that is the `main` function. In more complicated programs there will be one `main` function as well as other functions of different names.

The "`int`" preceding `main` tells the computer to expect an integer number value produced by the function upon completion. This is not strictly necessary, but it is considered good programming practice to have every function "return" some value such as this, which might be read by other portions of the program as a positive indication of that function's completion.

The parentheses "`()`" immediately following `main` exist to contain *arguments* to the function, i.e. data "passed" to the function for it to process. In this case there are no arguments at all to be passed to `main` and so the parentheses contain the word `void`.

Boundaries for the `main` function are defined by the placement of {} characters, called *braces* or sometimes *curly braces*. Indentation of code lines helps the reader see where each pair of braces is located in the page(s) of code, but this indentation is not strictly necessary in C or C++. It is the braces, akin to parentheses for mathematical functions, which define how much code is contained within any function.

Immediately following the opening brace { of the `main` function we find our first custom lines of code. The first line begins with `float` and ends with a semicolon (`;`), *declaring* a variable named `temp` we will use in our program, analogous to a variable we might used in a mathematical formula (x, y, z). Many programming languages require you to "declare" each of the variables you intend to use before you actually use them. This gives the computer opportunity to reserve right-sized locations in its memory to store the variable data. The term `float` is short for *floating-point* which is a form of binary notation useful for expressing numerical values in scientific notation. Floating-point variables are good for expressing numbers ranging from very small to very large, and they are necessary for expressing fractional (i.e. between integer) values. Integer data types are also offered within C and C++, the most common being called `int`.

Unlike mathematics where variables are customarily denoted by single characters, in computer programming variable names are spelled out as *words*. We are allowed to make up any variable names we wish using English alphanumeric characters, with no spaces between the characters. In this case, we are pretending that the variable `temp` will store a floating-point temperature value.

This particular variable declaration line happens to *initialize* the variable with a numerical value immediately after declaring it. In a practical version of this program there would be additional lines of code assigning values to `temp` based on a real temperature, but in this simple example all we're demonstrating is how to embed numerical values in an HTML file to be displayed in a web browser.

You will notice multiple lines in this program starting with `testfile`, containing double-less-than symbols (`<<`), and of course ending with semicolons (`;`). These instruct the computer to send text characters to a *file stream* to be written to a file named `index.html`. For those familiar with the `cout` instruction in C++, it works similarly. Anything enclosed in quotation marks (`" "`) will be printed to the screen verbatim, while any other "arguments" are interpreted as variables, the result being the *values* of those variables being written to the file rather than their literal names. For example, `testfile << "x";` will write the ASCII character `x` to the `index.html` file, while `testfile << x;` will write the ASCII characters corresponding to the numerical value of the variable x to the `index.html` file.

In addition to literal text (enclosed in quotes) and variables, other arguments may be passed on to the file stream. An important one is `endl` (end-line), which tells the computer to end that line of text when printing to the file. Without these `endl` inclusions, the text written to the `index.html` file by our program would be a messy run-on statement with no breaks between lines.

Perhaps the best way to understand what how this file stream writing works is to compare the code with the output generated by the program as it executes. Both have been included in this example for your edification.

Finally, the last line of code within the `main` function *returns* an integer number value. This is in agreement with the `int` preceding `main` near the top of the code listing: we told the compiler that the `main` function would generate an integer-number value upon completion, and the `return`

line is where this happens. As mentioned earlier, this is not strictly necessary, but it is considered good programming practice to have every function, main included, return some sort of data upon completion.

Chapter 5

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[1] the tutorials and attempt to answer questions on their own *prior* to the instructor's interaction with them. In place of lecture[2], 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.

[1] 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 textitReading For Understanding – How Reading Apprenticeship Improves Disciplinary Learning in Secondary and College Classrooms by Ruth Schoenbach, Cynthia Greenleaf, and Lynn Murphy.

[2] 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?

5.1 Conceptual reasoning

These questions are designed to stimulate your analytic and synthetic thinking[3]. In a Socratic discussion with your instructor, the goal is for these questions to prompt an extended dialogue where assumptions are revealed, conclusions are tested, and understanding is sharpened. Your instructor may also pose additional questions based on those assigned, in order to further probe and refine your conceptual understanding.

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

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

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

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

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

5.1.1 Reading outline and reflections

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5.1.2 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.

Client

Server

Internet Protocol (IP)

Transmission Control Protocol (TCP)

Hypertext

Markup language

Encryption

5.1.3 Testing sftp access

Search the internet for public `sftp` servers you may connect to for testing purposes, and then use `sftp` to log into one of them. Try retrieving any files you can from that server after you've successfully logged in.

Challenges

- Why do you suppose most public `sftp` servers are read-only?

5.1.4 Writing a simple HTML file

Write a simple HTML file (saved to your computer's drive with an `.html` extension to its filename) and then view with a web browser to see the effects.

- Try different font types
- Create a table with words and numbers in it
- Research how to alter colors
- Determine what is necessary for the browser to "update" so that it reflects edits made to the HTML code

Challenges

- Tim Berners-Lee could have designed web files in such a way that they were not readable as ASCII text. Why do you suppose he chose a format based on ASCII characters?

5.2 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[4]" for gaining proficiency in the use of circuit simulation software, and then once that proficiency is gained you will never need to rely[5] on an answer key!

[4] 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.

[5] 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.

5.2.1 Miscellaneous physical constants

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gravitational constant (G) = $6.67430(15) \times 10^{-11}$ cubic meters per kilogram-seconds squared ($m^3/kg\text{-}s^2$)

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

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

Stefan-Boltzmann constant (σ) = **5.670374419...** $\times 10^{-8}$ **Watts per square meter-Kelvin**^{4} ($W/m^2 \cdot K^4$)

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

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

5.2.2 Introduction to spreadsheets

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

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

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

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

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

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

[6] 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[7] 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[8] 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[9] 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.

[7] 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.

[8] 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.

[9] 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:

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

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

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

Note how the square-root term (y) is calculated in cell C1, and the denominator term (z) in cell C2. This makes the two final formulae (in cells B1 and B2) simpler to interpret. The positioning of all these cells on the grid is completely arbitrary[10] – 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.

[10] 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.*

5.2.3 HTML color codes

Colors may be specified in several different ways within HTML code. One popular way is by using a six-character[11] hexadecimal number value, where every pair of characters represents an intensity value for *red*, *green*, and *blue* light, respectively:

```
#rrggbb
```

For example, the hexadecimal color value `#08C21A` represents the blend of `0x08` ($\frac{8}{255} = 3.137\%$) red, `0xC2` ($\frac{194}{255} = 76.08\%$) green, and `0x1A` ($\frac{26}{255} = 10.20\%$) blue. The physical principle at work is that *any* color may be created by mixing these three primary-color lights together in the proper proportions.

Identify the color code for *black*.

Identify the color code for *white*.

Identify the color code for pure *green*.

Identify the color code for *grey* at 50% intensity.

Challenges

- Explain how a program could be written to vary the color of something on a webpage in response to changes in measured (or simulated) temperature.
- Identify some alternative means of specifying colors in HTML.

[11] You may also use an *eight*-character code, where the last two hexadecimal characters specify the *transparency* of the colored object.

5.3 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.

5.3.1 Faulty C++ program

This C++ file is supposed to generate an HTML file to display room temperature (here, just a constant value of 22.5 degrees Celsius) that a web browser can display. However, instead of displaying "22.5 degrees" on the screen it says "temp degrees".

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

int main ()
{
  float temp = 22.5;   // Initializing room temperature value

  ofstream testfile;
  testfile.open ("index.html");

  testfile << "<!DOCTYPE html>" << endl;
  testfile << "<html lang=\"en\">" << endl;
  testfile << endl;
  testfile << " <head>" << endl;
  testfile << "     <title>Room Temperature Monitor</title>" << endl;
  testfile << " </head>" << endl;
  testfile << endl;
  testfile << " <body>" << endl;
  testfile << "     <p>The temperature is temp degrees</p>" << endl;
  testfile << " </body>" << endl;
  testfile << endl;
  testfile << "</html>" << endl;
  testfile.close();

  return 0;
}
```

What is wrong with this program, and how would we fix the error?

Challenges

- Modify this program so that it repeatedly increases the value of `temp` by some small amount, and continually re-writes to the HTML file.

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

B.1 First principles of learning

- **Anyone can learn anything** given appropriate time, effort, resources, challenges, encouragement, and expectations. Dedicating time and investing effort are the student's responsibility; providing resources, challenges, and encouragement are the teacher's responsibility; high expectations are a responsibility shared by both student and teacher.

- **Transfer is not automatic.** The human mind has a natural tendency to compartmentalize information, which means the process of taking knowledge learned in one context and applying it to another usually does not come easy and therefore should never be taken for granted.

- **Learning is iterative.** The human mind rarely learns anything perfectly on the first attempt. Anticipate mistakes and plan for multiple tries to achieve full understanding, using the lessons of those mistakes as feedback to guide future attempts.

- **Information is absorbed, but understanding is created.** Facts and procedures may be memorized easily enough by repeated exposure, but the ability to reliably apply principles to novel scenarios only comes through intense personal effort. This effort is fundamentally creative in nature: casting new concepts in one's own words, running mental experiments to perceive patterns and trends, etc. These acts of making knowledge "one's own" need not be perfect in order to be effective, as the value lies in the activity and not necessarily the finished product. Depth of understanding and permanence of memory are both directly related to mental effort during the learning process – i.e. *easy learning is shallow and fleeting.*

- **Education trumps training.** There is no such thing as an entirely isolated subject, as all fields of knowledge are connected. Training is narrowly-focused and task-oriented. Education is broad-based and principle-oriented. When preparing for a life-long technical career, education beats training every time.

- **Character matters.** Poor habits are more destructive than deficits of knowledge or skill. This is especially true in collective endeavors, where a team's ability to function depends on trust between its members. Simply put, no one wants an untrustworthy person on their team. An essential component of education then, is character development.

- **People learn to be responsible by bearing responsibility.** An irresponsible person is someone who has never *had* to be responsible for anything that mattered enough to them. Just as anyone can learn anything, anyone can become responsible if the personal cost of irresponsibility becomes high enough.

- **What gets measured, gets done.** Accurate and relevant assessment of learning is key to ensuring all students learn. Therefore, it is imperative to measure what matters.

- **Failure is nothing to fear.** Every human being fails, and fails in multiple ways at multiple times. Eventual success only happens when we don't stop trying.

B.2 Proven strategies for instructors

- Assume every student is capable of learning anything they desire given the proper conditions. Treat them as capable adults by granting real responsibility and avoiding artificial incentives such as merit or demerit points.
- Create a consistent culture of high expectations across the entire program of study. Demonstrate and encourage patience, persistence, and a healthy sense of self-skepticism. Anticipate and de-stigmatize error. Teach respect for the capabilities of others as well as respect for one's own fallibility.
- Replace lecture with "inverted" instruction, where students first encounter new concepts through reading and then spend class time in Socratic dialogue with the instructor exploring those concepts and solving problems individually. There is a world of difference between observing someone solve a problem versus actually solving a problem yourself, and so the point of this form of instruction is to place students in a position where they *cannot* passively observe.
- Require students to read extensively, write about what they learn, and dialogue with you and their peers to sharpen their understanding. Apply Francis Bacon's advice that "reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man". These are complementary activities helping students expand their confidence and abilities.
- Use artificial intelligence (AI) to challenge student understanding rather than merely provide information. Find productive ways for AI to critique students' clarity of thought and of expression, for example by employing AI as a Socratic-style interlocutor or as a reviewer of students' journals. Properly applied, AI has the ability to expand student access to critical review well outside the bounds of their instructor's reach.
- Build frequent and rapid feedback into the learning process so that students know at all times how well they are learning, to identify problems early and fix them before they grow. Model the intellectual habit of self-assessing and self-correcting your own understanding (i.e. a cognitive *feedback loop*), encouraging students to do the same.
- Use "mastery" as the standard for every assessment, which means the exam or experiment or project must be done with 100% competence in order to pass. Provide students with multiple opportunity for re-tries (different versions of the assessment every time).
- Require students to devise their own hypotheses and procedures on all experiments, so that the process is truly a scientific one. Have students assess their proposed experimental procedures for risk and devise mitigations for those risks. Let nothing be pre-designed about students' experiments other than a stated task (i.e. what principle the experiment shall test) at the start and a set of demonstrable knowledge and skill objectives at the end.
- Have students build as much of their lab equipment as possible: building power sources, building test assemblies[1], and building complete working systems (no kits!). In order to provide

[1] In the program I teach, every student builds their own "Development Board" consisting of a metal chassis with DIN rail, terminal blocks, and an AC-DC power supply of their own making which functions as a portable lab environment they can use at school as well as take home.

this same "ground-up" experience for every new student, this means either previous students take their creations with them, or the systems get disassembled in preparation for the new students, or the systems grow and evolve with each new student group.

- Incorporate external accountability for you and for your students, continuously improving the curriculum and your instructional methods based on proven results. Have students regularly network with active professionals through participation in advisory committee meetings, service projects, tours, jobshadows, internships, etc. Practical suggestions include requiring students to design and build projects for external clients (e.g. community groups, businesses, different departments within the institution), and also requiring students attend all technical advisory committee meetings and to dialogue with the industry representatives at those meetings.
- Repeatedly explore difficult-to-learn concepts across multiple courses, so that students have multiple opportunities to build their understanding.
- Relate all new concepts, whenever possible, to previous concepts and to relevant physical laws. Challenge each and every student, every day, to *reason* from concept to concept and to explain the logical connections between. Challenge students to verify their conclusions by multiple approaches (e.g. double-checking their work using different methods). Ask *"Why?"* often.
- Maintain detailed records on each student's performance and share these records privately with them. These records should include academic performance as well as professionally relevant behavioral tendencies.
- Hold mandatory "check-in" meetings between all program faculty and each new student during their first term. Offer these to all other students as an option, except for any students continuing to manifest unprofessional behaviors, poor academic performance, or who have some other need for a face-to-face meeting with faculty.
- Address problems while they are small, before they grow larger. This is equally true for tutoring technical concepts as it is for helping students build professional habits.
- Build rigorous quality control into the curriculum to ensure every student masters every important concept, and that the mastery is retained over time. This includes (1) review questions added to every exam to re-assess knowledge taught in previous terms, (2) cumulative exams at the end of every term to re-assess all important concepts back to the very beginning of the program, and (3) review assessments in practical (hands-on) coursework to ensure critically-important skills were indeed taught and are still retained. What you will find by doing this is that it actually boosts retention of students by ensuring that important knowledge gets taught and is retained over long spans of time. In the absence of such quality control, student learning and retention tends to be spotty and this contributes to drop-out and failure rates later in their education.
- Finally, *never rush learning.* Education is not a race. Give your students ample time to digest complex ideas, as you continually remind yourself of just how long it took you to achieve mastery! Long-term retention and the consistently correct application of concepts are always the result of *focused effort over long periods of time* which means there are no shortcuts to learning.

B.3 Proven strategies for students

The single most important piece of advice I have for any student of any subject is to take responsibility for your own development in all areas of life including mental development. Expecting others in your life to entirely guide your own development is a recipe for disappointment. This is just as true for students enrolled in formal learning institutions as it is for auto-didacts pursuing learning entirely on their own. Learning to think in new ways is key to being able to gainfully use information, to make informed decisions about your life, and to best serve those you care about. With this in mind, I offer the following advice to students:

- **Approach all learning as valuable**. No matter what course you take, no matter who you learn from, no matter the subject, there is something useful in every learning experience. If you don't see the value of every new experience, you are not looking closely enough!
- **Continually challenge yourself**. Let other people take shortcuts and find easy answers to easy problems. The purpose of education is to stretch your mind, in order to shape it into a more powerful tool. This doesn't come by taking the path of least resistance. An excellent analogy for an empowering education is productive physical exercise: becoming stronger, more flexible, and more persistent only comes through intense personal effort.
- **Master the use of language**. This includes reading extensively, writing every day, listening closely, and speaking articulately. To a great extent language channels and empowers thought, so the better you are at wielding language the better you will be at grasping abstract concepts and articulating them not only for your benefit but for others as well.
- **Do not limit yourself to the resources given to you**. Read books that are not on the reading list. Run experiments that aren't assigned to you. Form study groups outside of class. Take an entrepreneurial approach to your own education, as though it were a business you were building for your future benefit.
- **Express and share what you learn**. Take every opportunity to teach what you have learned to others, as this will not only help them but will also strengthen your own understanding[2].
- Realize that **no one can give you understanding**, just as no one can give you physical fitness. These both must be *built*.
- **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[3] effort, and never give up! That concepts don't immediately come to you is not a sign of something wrong, but rather of something right: that you have found a worthy challenge!

[2] On a personal note, I was surprised to learn just how much my own understanding of electronics and related subjects was strengthened by becoming a teacher. When you are tasked every day with helping other people grasp complex topics, it catalyzes your own learning by giving you powerful incentives to study, to articulate your thoughts, and to reflect deeply on the process of learning.

[3] 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.

B.4 Design of these learning modules

"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. Every effort has been made to embed the following instructional and assessment philosophies within:

- 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[4] 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[5] 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[6] 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

[4] 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.

[5] 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.

[6] 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 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.

To high standards of education,

Tony R. Kuphaldt

Appendix C

Tools used

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

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

The `GNU/Linux` computer operating system

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

Bram Moolenaar's `Vim` text editor

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

Donald Knuth's TEX typesetting system

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

Leslie Lamport's LATEX extensions to TEX

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

Tim Edwards' `Xcircuit` drafting program

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

`Gimp` graphic image manipulation program

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

`SPICE` circuit simulation program

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

Andrew D. Hwang's `ePiX` mathematical visualization programming library

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

`gnuplot` mathematical visualization software

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

`Python` programming language

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

Appendix D

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Appendix E

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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.

24 February 2026 – corrected a minor formatting error in the Tutorial, and a typographical error correction in a footnote.

21-23 September 2025 – added references to TCP port numbers used by various file transfer and remote-access protocols. Also added a new Conceptual Reasoning question prompting readers to try using `sftp` on a public server. Also added reference to transparency bytes on HTML color codes.

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

10 May 2021 – commented out or deleted empty chapters.

5 October 2020 – added to the Introduction chapter.

24 September 2020 – added more instructor notes to questions.

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

25-27 June 2020 – added content to Tutorial, introduction.

24 June 2020 – document first created.

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