

Engineering Technology

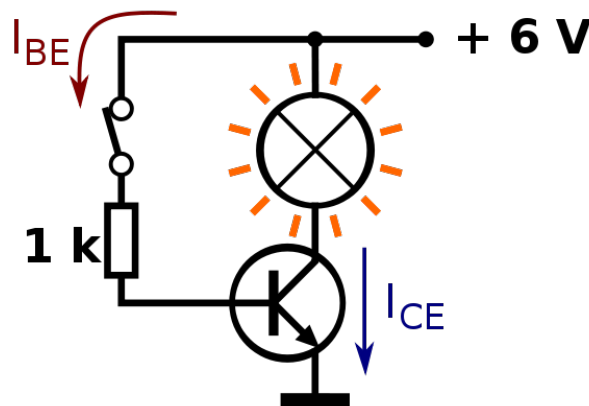
Electricity / Electronics

Transistors

A **transistor** is a semiconductor device used to amplify or switch electronic signals and electrical power. It is composed of semiconductor material usually with at least three terminals for connection to an external circuit. A voltage or current applied to one pair of the transistor's terminals controls the current through another pair of terminals. Because the controlled (output) power can be higher than the controlling (input) power, a transistor can amplify a signal. Today, some transistors are packaged individually, but many more are found embedded in integrated circuits.

The transistor is the fundamental building block of modern electronic devices, and is ubiquitous in modern electronic systems. The first practically implemented device was a point-contact transistor invented in 1947 by American physicists John Bardeen, Walter Brattain, and William Shockley. The transistor revolutionized the field of electronics, and paved the way for smaller and cheaper radios, calculators, and computers, among other things. Bardeen, Brattain, and Shockley shared the 1956 Nobel Prize in Physics for their achievement.

Transistor as a switch



BJT used as an electronic switch, in grounded-emitter configuration. Transistors are commonly used in digital circuits as electronic switches which can be either in an "on" or "off" state, both for high-power applications such as switched-mode power supplies and for low-power applications such as logic gates. Important parameters for this application include the current switched, the voltage handled, and the switching speed, characterized by the rise and fall times.

In a grounded-emitter transistor circuit, such as the light-switch circuit shown, as the base voltage rises, the emitter and collector currents rise exponentially. The collector voltage drops because of reduced resistance from collector to emitter. If the voltage difference between the collector and emitter were zero (or near zero), the collector current would be limited only by the load resistance (light bulb) and the supply voltage. This is called *saturation* because current is flowing from collector to emitter freely. When saturated, the switch is said to be *on*.

Providing sufficient base drive current is a key problem in the use of bipolar transistors as switches. The transistor provides current gain, allowing a relatively large current in the collector to be switched by a much smaller current into the base terminal. The ratio of these currents varies depending on the type of transistor, and even for a particular type, varies depending on the collector current. In the example light-switch circuit shown, the resistor is chosen to provide enough base current to ensure the transistor will be saturated.

In a switching circuit, the idea is to simulate, as near as possible, the ideal switch having the properties of open circuit when off, short circuit when on, and an instantaneous transition between the two states. Parameters are chosen such that the "off" output is limited to leakage currents too small to affect connected circuitry; the resistance of the transistor in the "on" state is too small to affect circuitry; and the transition between the two states is fast enough not to have a detrimental effect.

Transistor as an amplifier

The common-emitter amplifier is designed so that a small change in voltage (V_{in}) changes the small current through the base of the transistor; the transistor's current amplification combined with the properties of the circuit means that small swings in V_{in} produce large changes in V_{out} .

Various configurations of single transistor amplifier are possible, with some providing current gain, some voltage gain, and some both.

From mobile phones to televisions, vast numbers of products include amplifiers for sound reproduction, radio transmission, and signal processing. The first discrete-transistor audio amplifiers barely supplied a few hundred milliwatts, but power and audio fidelity gradually increased as better transistors became available and amplifier architecture evolved. Modern transistor audio amplifiers of up to a few hundred watts are common and relatively inexpensive.

