

(circle one)

PRE-LAB #3: Resistor Circuits

Please use the Notes margin on the right for both notes to yourself about the experiment as well as for feedback to your TA on the quality or clarity of the lab procedure. Thanks!

The Interpretation of Basic Circuit Laws

In 1845, Gustav Kirchhoff, partially working from Ohm's discovery, formulated two more mathematical theories. These are known as **Kirchhoff's Laws** and they drastically aid our understanding of circuits. As we begin our own exploration of electronics, we will re-investigate these fundamental laws of circuit theory ourselves.

Ohm's law may be used to describe a very simple circuit with only a single source and a single resistor. When two resistances are connected across the same voltage drop (such as the second schematic of Figure 1), there are, in fact, *two* paths for the current to flow from the positive terminal of the source to the negative terminal. In this configuration, the two resistances are said to be connected in **parallel**. It is sometimes beneficial to think of resistors as water pipes. The narrower the pipe, the larger the resistance to current flow. Having two resistances in parallel is similar to adding an extra pipe for the water to follow compared to the single resistor configuration. In the analogy, water would flow through both pipes, but more water would flow through the wider pipe as it offers less resistance to flow.

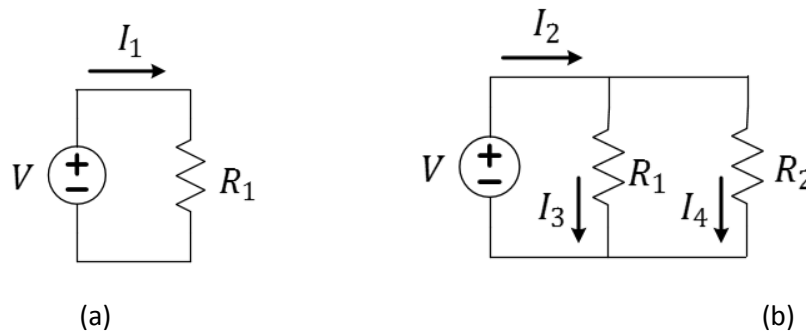


Figure 1: Two circuit schematics used to explore current in parallel resistive elements. In (a), the current has one path back to the source. In (b), the current has two *parallel* paths back to the source.

Question 1: Assume R_1 is the same value in both Figure 2 (a) and (b). Then the current I_2 will be larger than I_1 . Explain this fact using both Ohm's law and the water-pipe analogy.

Question 2: If you are given that $R_1 = R_2$, how do I_3 and I_4 relate to one another? Is one greater than the other? How do they each relate to I_1 ? Explain your reasoning using Ohm's Law.

The Role of Schematics in Electronic Circuits

There are three main ways in which you are likely to encounter a circuit design in the ECE110 lab. Since this lab is hands-on, you will build prototype circuits. A **prototype** is a *preliminary version of a product that can be easily tested and modified before a final design is mass produced*. In the ECE110 laboratory, we construct prototype circuits on a **breadboard** (*a construction base for connecting circuit elements without the use of solder; might also be known as a protoboard, although this later term often refers to a board where a circuit can be quickly laid out and soldered*). To build a prototype, you would require a written guide. The easiest written guide for a student is the physical diagram.

A **physical diagram** might be a *photograph or detailed drawings depicting the physical structure of the components comprising a circuit*. The physical diagram is also suggestive of the physical layout of the circuit and attempts to leave little room for error for the novice experimenter. Finally, the most-concise method of providing a written guide is the circuit schematic.

A **circuit schematic** is an abstraction of a circuit that generalizes the specific components as symbols. The circuit schematic does typically suggest the physical locations of the components as they may fit into the final prototype. There is a one-to-one relationship between the components described in the circuit schematic, the physical diagram, and the prototype. It is important that an aspiring engineer learn to map one representation to another!

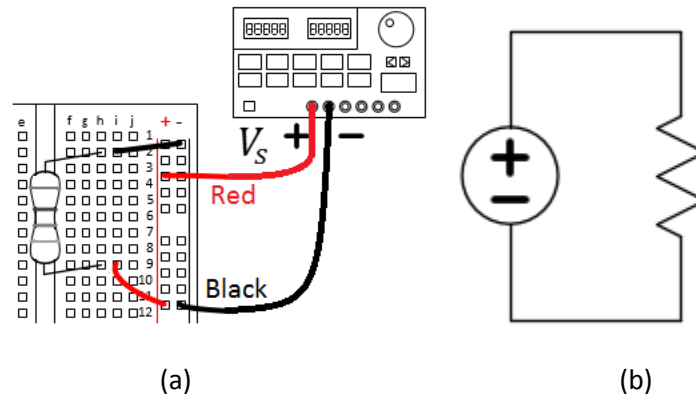


Figure 2: A physical diagram (a) and the circuit schematic (b) for the same circuit.

In lab, you will build simple circuits using the equipment at your bench. It is important that you learn to read a circuit schematic and use it to build a physical prototype of the circuit. Sometimes, this task can be more difficult than you would think, especially when there are many components, several test points to measure, and wires going everywhere in what may appear to be a jumbled mess! If you can learn to properly interpret a circuit schematic, this task will become much easier for you.

