

# Module: Using the Arduino Analog Inputs

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## Introduction

One of the most powerful features of the Arduino board is its ability to take an *analog* voltage and convert that analog voltage into a number – a 10-bit binary number. This ability enables you to design projects that interface between the real world of sound, heat, pressure, motion, acceleration, and radiation... to the digital world of the Arduino. The devices that convert the properties of the real world to a voltage are part of a general class of devices called transducers. A *transducer* transforms one kind of energy into another. You are very familiar with these devices – your own body is full of them. All of the interfaces to your computer is a transducer of one form or another – the microphone input converts the coherent motion of the air (sound) hitting the microphone into a voltage that is input to the computer – the speaker output converts the voltage generated by the computer to sound waves – the computer's camera inputs electromagnetic radiation in the visible light range from the surrounding environment and converts the resulting image to a voltage that the computer can then process and store.

The magic hardware that allows the analog and digital world to interface are complex devices – an A/D Converter (Analog-to-Digital Converter) and a DAC (Digital-to-Analog Converter). The Arduino only has an Analog-to-Digital Converter so you can only get analog inputs. You cannot create them.

This module will help you set up a simple experiment that illustrates the hardware and software considerations so that you can become familiar with the simple statements needed to get a digitized version of the output of any analog device that outputs a voltage that varies between 0-5V.

# Procedures

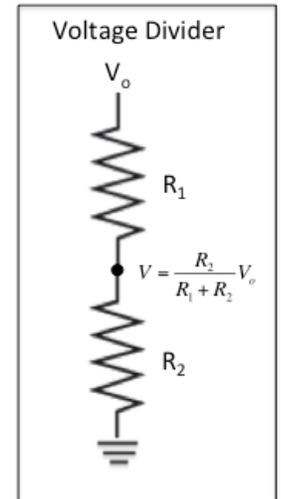
## Building a circuit to test

To fully understand the process of reading an analog voltage and use the result to control external circuitry let's build two circuits. An input circuit and an output circuit. The input circuit consists of a simple device that can provide a variable voltage to the analog input pins on the Arduino/RedBoard. The simplest is a tunable voltage divider built using a potentiometer. The output circuit consists of a simple LED circuit so that it can be controlled based on the voltage at the analog input pin.

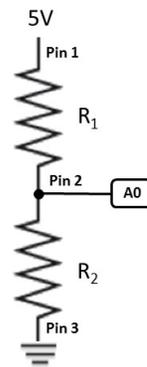
### Input Circuit

Many of the sensors included in your kits are active circuits – made of diodes and/or transistors – that need to be powered to work. Compare these devices with the sensors where only the resistance changes – these do not need to be powered to work. The Active sensors provide a voltage that changes in response to environmental stimulus like changing IR radiation levels, for example.

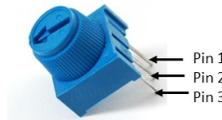
You will model a sensor that provides a variable voltage rather than a variable resistance by a simple tunable voltage divider device called a potentiometer. The figure below shows a conceptual schematic associated with the potentiometer. The total resistance between the voltage source  $V_o$  and ground is a fixed value  $R$ , but it is divided into two separate resistances  $R_1$  and  $R_2$ . This is the quintessential voltage divider circuit (see sidebar). If the potentiometer knob is turned the values of  $R_1$  and  $R_2$  change but the total resistance  $R = R_1 + R_2$  remains the same. By turning the knob you can vary the voltage at Pin 2.



Schematic



Physical Package



Notes:

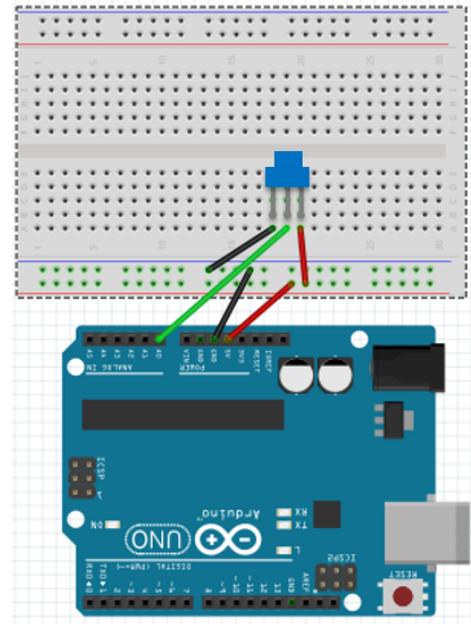
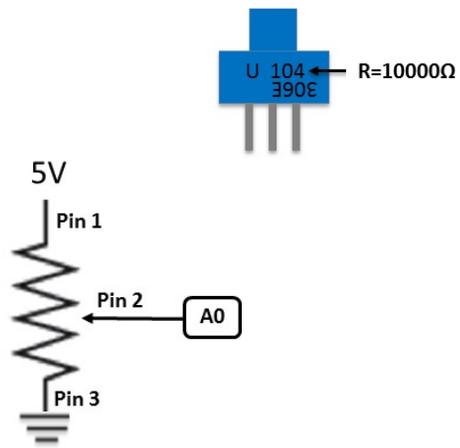
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**Question 1:** What is the maximum and minimum voltage at Pin 2.

**Question 2:** Pretend that the potentiometer is set so that  $R_1 = R_2 = R/2$ . What is the voltage measured between Pin 2 and ground?

**Question 3:** If the knob is turned so that the resistance  $R_1$  increases by a value  $d$  so that  $R_1 = (R/2)+d$ , what is the voltage measured between Pin 2 and ground.

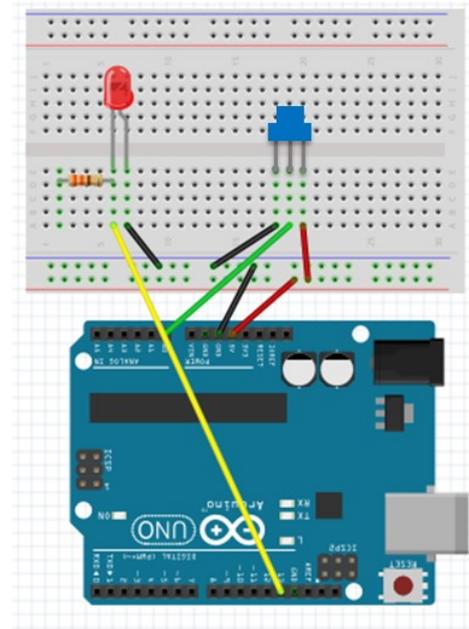
Build this circuit on a breadboard – note the schematic symbol for the potentiometer. Use the potentiometer that has a total resistance of 10k $\Omega$ . The way you can tell is by looking at the markings on the side (see figure – the 104 means  $1 \times 10^4$ ). A suggested layout is shown in the physical layout diagram to the right. As you can see the 5V and ground connections are provided by the Arduino/RedBoard.



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## Output Circuit

Build a simple LED circuit that can be controlled using digital output pin 13 on the board to control the behavior of the LED.



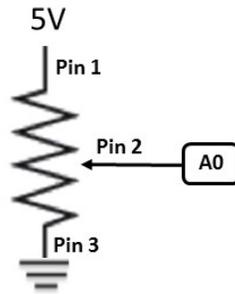
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## Testing and Debugging the Circuit

The circuit is built and the Arduino is programmed. Is it working? By looking at the code downloaded to the Arduino board and the circuit you built you can describe how it should work. It is essential that, even in this simple example, you get into the habit of checking that each portion of your design works properly.

At your bench in the lab you have available many useful debugging tools. Since the circuit is designed to produce a time varying signal using the oscilloscope comes to mind.

**Question 4:** If you were at the bench and you wanted to use the oscilloscope or multimeter to monitor the voltage at the pin labeled A0, where would you connect the two terminals of the probes? Notate these 2 points on the schematic below.



- ✓ Open a new Sketch in the Arduino IDE. It should give you as always the bare minimum scaffolding.

```
void setup() {  
  // put your setup code here, to run once:  
  
}  
  
void loop() {  
  
  int sensorValue = analogRead(A0); //This statement creates a variable sensorValue of  
                                     // of type integer AND associates the 10-bit binary  
                                     // number read from Analog Pin A0.  
  
}
```

- ✓ Upload and run the program.

**Question 5:** Is the program working? You can fiddle with the potentiometer knob, knowing that you are probably changing the voltage. Probe the voltage between the analog input pin A0 and one of the GND pins with the multimeter. As you turn the knob on the potentiometer describe what happens to the voltage.

Is it working? There is no way to tell because the resulting 10 – bit binary number is not accessed and so far we have not connected the output circuitry to monitor the response based on the input voltage. There is a method to monitor any variable while the program is running. This ability provides an invaluable debugging resource so that away from the bench and an oscilloscope, you can still debug the circuit if the Arduino is connected to a computer running the Arduino IDE. All communication to the Arduino happens using some type of *serial communication* – and the boards supports a few. Serial (as opposed to parallel communication) implies that the digital information is transmitted 1-bit at a time. That is why serial communication is usually slower than the protocols that send entire words at once.

- ✓ Amend the program so that it uses the serial connection provided by the USB cable to provide information about what the board measures.

The first statement associated with the serial communication functionality is the *Serial.begin(9600)* statement. This sets up the serial port between the computer and the Arduino. The speed of serial connection is specified by the number 9600 – this is not the only possible speed but is the most common for communications with Personal computers. The rate or units associated with serial communication is termed baud so the above statement says the interface runs at 9600 baud. What is a baud? The term Baud hails back to telegraphy when the quintessential serial communications method, Morse Code, was used. Morse code assigns each letter of the alphabet a sequence of shorter (dots) or longer duration (dashes) voltage pulses. A baud was equal to sending a single “dot” in one second. A good operator can send upwards of 60 or more words per minute with a word equaling 5 characters. The longest letters are 4 symbols which makes 60 words per minute approximately 1200 symbols per minute or 20 symbols per second. This correlates to speeds of 20 baud or more. The computer communicates at 9600 baud.

The second *Serial.println(sensorvalue)* prints out the numerical value specified as an argument using C++ formatting conventions.

- ✓ Upload this new program to the Arduino and click on the icon that looks like a magnifying glass located at the top right of all open windows. A new window should pop-up and numbers should appear (give it a moment) streaming continuously – one per line. This window is often called the console.

**Question 6:** Describe what happens to the numbers as you twist the knob on the potentiometer. Specify the maximum and minimum values you read from the console window when the potentiometer is fully turned in both directions.

**Question 7:** Insert a statement that converts the integer sensorValue to the corresponding voltage. Store this value in a floating point variable voltageValue. It should look something like this – `float voltageValue = 5.*sensorValue/1023.;` Explain how this equation transforms the integer into the correct voltage. NOTE: Do not forget the periods after the numbers. If left off, since sensorValue is an integer the divide by 1023 may result zero which is not what you want. Print it out to the console with a simple addition to the print statement (see program below).

```
void setup() {  
  
    Serial.begin(9600); //This statement sets up the communication channel between the computer and  
                        // the board.  
  
}  
  
void loop() {  
  
    int sensorValue = analogRead(A0); //This statement creates a variable sensorValue of  
                                     // of type integer AND associates the 10-bit binary  
                                     // number read from Analog Pin A0.  
  
    float voltageValue = 5.*sensorValue/1023.; //This statement maps the integer in sensorValue  
                                               // to the actual voltage.  
    Serial.println(sensorValue);  
  
}
```

**Question 8:** Twiddle the potentiometer and watch how the voltage changes on the serial monitor and the multimeter. How close is the agreement?

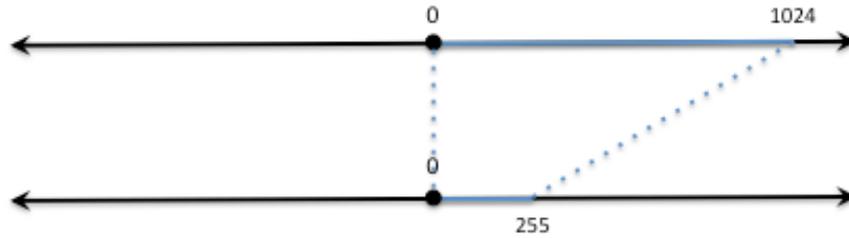
## Using the Sampled Data

As you have discovered, the connection to the A0 pin is the “analog” signal varied by turning the knob on the potentiometer whose continuous voltage range (0-5V). The integer value read from the pin connected to an analog-to-digital converter is used within the loop section of the program to vary the interval used to turn the LED ON and OFF at a rate dependent on the voltage of the sampled signal. There are several parameters needed to characterize the A/D process. The **dynamic range** is the range of voltage to be sampled – in this case the dynamic range is 5V. The dynamic range would have been the same if the voltages varied from -1V to 4V. The **sampling rate** is the frequency at which the samples are obtained – in the case of the Arduino unless you access the processor directly you are limited to 10Ksamples/sec. The **resolution** specifies the number of values mapped to the dynamic range – in this case the voltage range 0-5V is mapped onto the integers 0-1023 in equal intervals.

**Question 9:** What is the voltage range that is mapped onto a single integer interval. For example, if the Arduino reads a value of 1 from pin A0 what was the voltage input?

Using the LED circuit let's use the value stored in `sensorValue` to control the brightness of the LED connected to Pin 13. A single statement `analogWrite(ledPin, dutyCycle);` is used to generate a square wave of peak-to-peak amplitude 5V, period 2 $\mu$ s and a variable duty cycle. The brightness of the LED is directly related to the duty cycle. The problem comes when specifying the duty cycle. The value stored in variable `sensorPin` varies between 0-1024 but the value passed to the `analogWrite` statement

specifying the duty cycle can only vary between 0-255. So the two intervals must be mapped onto one another. This case is very simple – divide the value so *sensorPin* by 1024 reducing the interval from (0, 1024) to (0, 1) then multiply by 255 to map it onto the interval (0,255). That was easy. It is exactly identical to the equation used to convert the integer to the actual voltage.



Notes:

