

# **Wayverb: A Graphical Tool for Hybrid Modelling Auralisation**

**A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts**

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This is the abstract.

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# Introduction

The aim of impulse response synthesis is to simulate the reverberant properties of a space without having to physically build anything. This is useful for a variety of applications: architects need to be able to evaluate the acoustics of a building before construction begins; sound editors for film sometimes need to mix in recordings which were not made on location; electronic musicians like to conjure imaginary or impossible spaces in their music, and virtual-reality experiences must use audio cues to convince the user that they have been transported to a new environment.

Unfortunately, software allowing the synthesis of accurate binaural impulse responses is not currently widely available. Often, software produced for research purposes is not made public. Such software that *is* available generally suffers from one or more of an array of issues.

Most software relies only on fast geometric methods, which are inaccurate, especially at low frequencies. Conversely, programs opting to use more accurate wave-modelling methods require long time periods, in the order of days, or significant computing power to run.

Licensing is also an problem. Most room-acoustics packages are the product of years of combined research by multiple contributors, which is only made viable by releasing the software commercially. However, this inhibits further research, as the code is not freely available. This model also limits users to those able to pay, restricting widespread adoption.

When software is made available freely, often the user experience suffers. Code requires manual compilation, or perhaps can only be run from a textual interface, or else the project is outdated and unmaintained.

The Wayverb project provides a solution to these problems, by making available a graphical tool for impulse response synthesis. It combines several simulation techniques, providing an adjustable balance between speed and accuracy. It is also free to download, can be run immediately on commodity hardware, and the source code can be used and extended under the terms of the GNU General Public License (GPL).

This thesis will begin by examining common methods of room simulation and the software which implements these methods, explaining why particular techniques were chosen for Wayverb. Then, each of the chosen techniques will be explored in depth, along with a description of their implementation. The procedure for producing a single impulse response from the outputs of multiple modelling techniques will be detailed. Two extensions to the basic room acoustics model will be described, namely frequency-dependent reflections at boundaries, and microphone/head-related transfer function (HRTF) simulation. The project will be evaluated, and finally, avenues for future development will be examined.

# 1 Context

## Overview

Room acoustics algorithms fall into two main categories: *geometric*, and *wave-based* (A. Southern, Siltanen, & Savioja, 2011). Wave-based methods aim to solve the wave equation numerically, simulating the actual behaviour of sound waves within an enclosure. Geometric methods instead make some simplifying assumptions about the behaviour of sound waves, which result in faster but less accurate simulations. These assumptions generally ignore all wave properties of sound, choosing to model sound as independent *rays*, *particles*, or *phonons*.

The modelling of waves as particles has found great success in the field of computer graphics, where *ray-tracing* is used to simulate the reflections of light in a scene. The technique works well for simulating light because of the relatively high frequencies of the modelled waves. The wavelengths of these waves - the wavelengths of the visible spectrum - will generally be many times smaller than any surface in the scene being rendered, so wave phenomena have little or no visible effect.

The assumption that rays and waves are interchangeable falls down somewhat when modelling sound. The wavelengths of sound in air range from 17m to 0.017m for the frequency range 20Hz to 20KHz, so while the simulation may be accurate at high frequencies, at low frequencies the wavelength is of the same order as the wall surfaces in the scene. Failure to take wave effects such as interference and diffraction into account at these frequencies therefore results in noticeable approximation error (Savioja & Svensson, 2015).

In many cases, some inaccuracy is an acceptable (or even necessary) trade-off. Wave-modelling is so computationally expensive that using it to simulate a large scene over a broad spectrum could take weeks on consumer hardware. This leaves geometric methods as the only viable alternative. Though wave-modelling been studied for some time (Smith, 1992), and even applied to small simulations of strings and membranes in consumer devices such as keyboards, it is only recently, as computers have become more powerful, that these techniques have been seriously considered for room acoustics simulation.

Given that wave-based methods are accurate, but become more expensive at higher frequencies, and that geometric methods are inexpensive, but become less accurate at lower frequencies, it is natural to combine the two models in a way that takes advantage of the desirable characteristics of each. That is, by using wave-modelling for low-frequency content, and geometric methods for high-frequency content, simulations may be produced which are accurate across the entire spectrum, without incurring massive computational costs.

## Characteristics of Simulation Methods

A short review of simulation methods will be given here. For a detailed survey of methods used in room acoustics, see P. Svensson & Kristiansen (2002).

The following diagram shows the relationships between the most common simulation methods. The advantages and disadvantages of each method will be discussed throughout the remainder of this section.

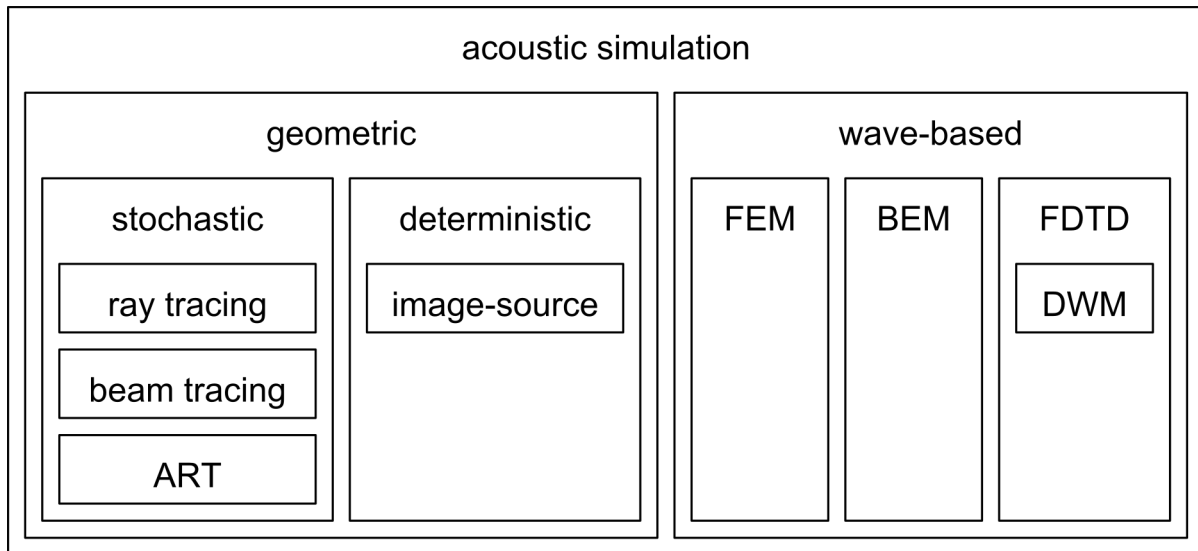


Figure 1.1: An overview of different acoustic simulation methods, grouped by category.

## Geometric

Geometric methods can largely be grouped into two categories: *stochastic* and *deterministic*.

Stochastic methods are generally based on statistical approximation via some kind of Monte Carlo algorithm. Such algorithms are approximate by nature. They aim to randomly and repeatedly sample the problem space, combining the results from multiple trials so that they converge upon the correct answer. The balance of quality and speed can be adjusted in a straightforward manner, simply by adjusting the number of samples taken.

In room acoustics, stochastic algorithms may be based directly on reflection paths, using *ray tracing* or *beam tracing*, in which rays or beams are considered to transport acoustic energy around the scene. Alternatively, they may use a surface-based technique, such as *acoustic radiance transfer* (ART), in which surfaces are used as intermediate stores of acoustic energy.

Surface-based methods, especially, are suited to real-time simulations (i.e. interactive, where the listener position can change), as the calculation occurs in several passes, only the last of which involves the receiver object. This means that early passes can be computed and cached, and only the final pass must be recomputed if the receiver position changes.

The main deterministic method is the *image source* method, which is designed to calculate the exact reflection paths between a source and a receiver. For shoebox-shaped rooms, and perfectly rigid surfaces, it is able to produce an exact solution to the wave equation. However, by its nature, it can only model specular (perfect) reflections, ignoring diffuse and diffracted components. For this reason, it is inexact for arbitrary enclosures, and unsuitable for calculating reverb tails, which are predominantly diffuse. The technique also becomes very expensive beyond low orders of reflection. The naive implementation reflects the sound source against all surfaces in the scene, resulting in a set of *image sources*. Then, each of these image sources is itself reflected against all surfaces. For high orders of reflection, the required number of calculations quickly becomes impractical. For these reasons, the image source method is only suitable for early reflections, and is generally combined with a stochastic method to find the late part of an impulse response.

For a detailed reference on geometric acoustic methods, see Savioja & Svensson (2015).

## Wave-based

The main advantage of wave-based methods is that they inherently account for wave effects like diffraction and interference (S. B. Shelley, 2007), while geometric methods do not. This means that these wave-based methods are capable of accurately simulating the low-frequency component of a room impulse-response, where constructive and destructive wave interference form *room modes*. Room modes have the effect of amplifying and attenuating specific frequencies in the room impulse response, and produce much of the subjective sonic ‘colour’ or ‘character’ of a room. Reproducing these room modes is therefore vital for evaluating the acoustics of rooms such as concert halls and recording studios, or when producing musically pleasing reverbs.

Wave-based methods may be derived from the *Finite Element Method* (FEM), *Boundary Element Method* (BEM) or *Finite-Difference Time-Domain* (FDTD) method. The FEM and BEM may be known together as *element methods*.

The FEM is an iterative numerical method for finding natural resonances of a bounded enclosure. It models the air pressure inside the enclosure using a grid of interconnected nodes, each of which represents a mechanical system with a single degree of freedom. The interconnectedness of the nodes leads to a set of simultaneous equations, which can be solved for displacement at each node, and then the solved equations can be used to calculate pressure values at certain elements. The BEM is similar, but models nodes on the surface of the enclosure, instead of within it. This in turn allows it to model unbounded spaces. (D. T. Murphy & Howard, 2000)

The FDTD method works by dividing the space to be modelled into a regular grid, and computing changes in some quantity at each grid point over time. The formula used to update each grid point, along with the topology of the grid, may be varied depending on the accuracy, efficiency, and complexity required by the application. FDTD methods are generally applied to problems in electromagnetics, but a subclass of the FDTD method known as the *Digital Waveguide Mesh* (DWM) is often used for solving acoustics problems.

The FDTD process shares some characteristics with the element methods. They all become rapidly more computationally expensive as the maximum output frequency increases (V. Valimaki, Parker, Savioja, Smith, & Abel, 2012). They also share the problem of discretisation or quantisation, in which details of the modelled room can only be resolved to the same accuracy as the spatial sampling period. If a large inter-element spacing is used, details of the room shape will be lost, whereas a small spacing will greatly increase the computational load.

The major advantage of FDTD over element methods is that it is run directly in the time domain, rather than producing frequency-domain results, which in turn affords a much simpler implementation.

The main disadvantage of the FDTD method is that it is susceptible to *numerical dispersion*, in which wave components travel at different speeds depending on their frequency and direction, especially at high frequencies. Several techniques exist to reduce this error, such as oversampling the mesh (G. R. Campos & Howard, 2005), using different mesh topologies (Savioja & Valimaki, 1999; Van Duyne & Smith, 1995), and post-processing the simulation output (Savioja & Valimaki, 2001). Oversampling further increases the computational load of the simulation, while using different topologies and post-processing both introduce additional complexity.

Despite its drawbacks, the FDTD method is generally preferred for room acoustics simulation (V. Valimaki et al., 2012), probably due to its straightforward implementation, intuitive behaviour, and its ability to directly produce time-domain impulse responses.

## Existing Software

Searching online and in the literature uncovers a handful of programs for acoustic simulation. The table below shows a selection which is not exhaustive, but which is felt to be representative.



Name	Type	Availability
Odeon (“Odeon,” 2016)	Geometric	Commercial
CATT-Acoustic (“CATT-Acoustic,” 2016)	Geometric	Commercial
Olive Tree Lab (“OTL,” 2016)	Geometric	Commercial
EASE (“EASE,” 2016)	Geometric	Commercial
Auratorium (“Audioborn – Auratorium,” 2016)	Geometric	Commercial
RAVEN (Schröder & Vorländer, 2011)	Geometric	None
RoomWeaver (M. J. Beeson & Murphy, 2004)	Waveguide	None
EAR (“Ear,” 2016)	Geometric	Free
PachydermAcoustic (“Pachyderm Acoustic,” 2016)	Geometric	Free
Parallel FDTD (“ParallelFDTD,” 2016)	Waveguide	Free
i-Simpa (“I-Simpa,” 2016)	Geometric, extensible	Free

All commercial acoustics programs found use geometric techniques, probably because they are fast to run, and can often be implemented to run interactively, in real-time. However, low-frequency performance is a known issue with these programs. For example, the FAQ page for the Odeon software notes that:

For Odeon simulations as with real measurements, the source and receiver should be at least 1/4th wave length from the walls. But at the very lowest resonance of the room the level can change a lot from position to position without Odeon being able to predict it. For investigation of low frequency behavior (resonances), indeed Odeon is not the tool. (“Odeon FAQ,” 2016)

Clearly there is a need for wave-modelling acoustics software, which can accurately predict low frequency behaviour. However, such software seems to be somewhat rarer than geometric acoustics software. Of the two wave-modelling programs listed, only one is generally available, which must additionally be run from Python or Matlab scripts. This is a good approach for research software, but would probably not be straightforward for users with limited programming experience.

At time of writing, December 2016, it appears that no generally-available (commercially or otherwise) piece of software has taken the approach of combining wave-modelling and geometric methods, although this technique is well-known in the literature (Aretz, Nöthen, Vorländer, & Schröder, 2009; D. Murphy, Beeson, Shelley, Moore, & Southern, 2008; A. Southern & Siltanen, 2013; A. Southern et al., 2011; Southern, Siltanen, Murphy, & Savioja, 2013; Vorlander, 2009).

## Research Aims

With all this in mind, it appears that there is a requirement for a program which combines geometric and wave-based methods to produce simulations which are accurate across the audible spectrum. Rather than focussing on performance, or interactive simulation (which is already implemented in the commercial software above), such a program should strive towards accuracy first, and performance second. To be useful to end-users, the program should have a graphical interface, though a scripting or library interface might be provided for research purposes. Finally, the program would ideally be free and open-source, to maximise adoption and to aid future research and collaboration. The goal of the Wayverb project was to produce a program which satisfied these requirements.

## Strategy

### Chosen Simulation Techniques

As the image-source method is well-suited to finding early reflections, and stochastic methods are reasonably accurate at computing the more diffuse late reflections, it made sense to combine these two methods for high-frequency simulation. Specifically, a simple ray tracing method was chosen over a phonon- or surface-based method for the late-reflection simulation, for two reasons. Firstly, ray tracing is broadly discussed in the literature (Alpkocak & Sis, 2010; Krokstad, Strom, & Sørsdal, 1968; Kuttruff, 2009; Schröder, 2011; Vorländer, 2007), so would not require a great deal of experimentation to implement. Secondly, ray tracing has the property of being an *embarrassingly parallel* algorithm, because each individual ray can be simulated entirely independently, without requiring communication or synchronisation. By running the algorithm on graphics hardware, which is designed to run great numbers of calculations in parallel, all rays could be simulated in one go, yielding much greater performance than processing each ray sequentially.

A logistical reason for choosing the image-source and ray tracing solution for high-frequency modelling was that the author had previously implemented such a system for an undergraduate project. It was hoped that much of the code from that project could be re-used, but it transpired that much of the code was unsuitable or incorrect (!), so that the majority was completely re-written. The author was, however, able to re-use much of the knowledge and experience gained from the previous project, which would not have been possible if a completely new stochastic method had been introduced.

For low-frequency simulation, a FDTD-based DWM model was chosen. There is a great deal of writing on this method (G. R. Campos & Howard, 2005; Kowalczyk & Walstijn, 2011; D. T. Murphy & Howard, 2000; Savioja, Lokki, & Välimäki, 2014; Van Duyne & Smith III, 1996), it is relatively simple to implement, and shares with ray tracing the characteristic of being embarrassingly parallel. Each element in the waveguide mesh can be updated individually and simultaneously, which it was hoped would yield performance benefits.

An in-depth description of the algorithms implemented is given in the [Image-Source](#), [Ray Tracer](#), and [Waveguide](#) sections.

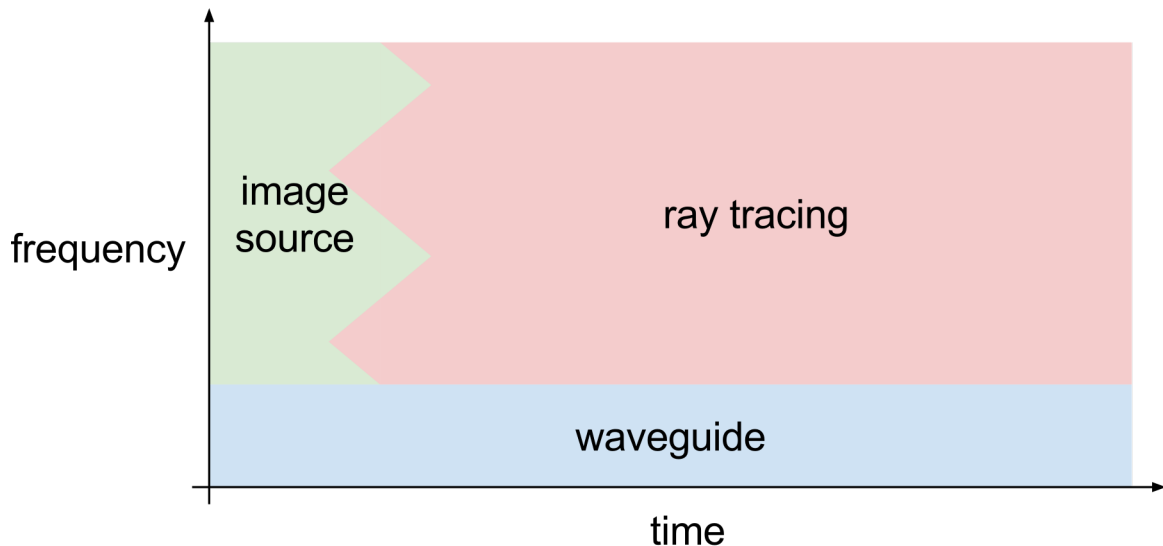


Figure 1.2: The structure of a simulated impulse response.

Deciding on the simulation techniques led to three questions:

- To produce a final output, the three simulations must be automatically mixed in some way. How can this be done?

- Binaural simulation requires some method for direction- and frequency-dependent attenuation at the receiver. How can receivers with polar patterns other than omnidirectional be modelled consistently in all three simulation methods?
- The reverb time and character depends heavily on the nature of the reflective surfaces in the scene. How can frequency-dependent reflective boundaries be modelled consistently in all methods?

These questions will be discussed in the [Hybrid](#), [Microphone Modelling](#), and [Boundary Modelling](#) sections respectively.

## Chosen Technology

The programming language chosen was C++. For acceptable performance in numerical computing, a low-level language is required, and for rapid prototyping, high-level abstractions are necessary. C++ delivers on both of these requirements, for the most part, although its fundamentally unsafe memory model does introduce a class of bugs which don't really exist in languages with garbage collection, borrow checking, or some other safety mechanism.

OpenCL was chosen for implementing the most parallel parts of the simulation. The OpenCL framework allows a single source file to be written, in a C-like language, which can target either standard *central processing units* (CPUs), or highly parallel *graphics processing units* (GPUs). The main alternative to OpenCL is CUDA, which additionally can compile C++ code, but which can only target Nvidia hardware. OpenCL was chosen as it would allow the final program to be run on a wider variety of systems, with fewer limitations on their graphics hardware.

The only deployment target was macOS. This was mainly to ease development, as maintaining software across multiple platforms is often time-consuming. macOS also tends to have support for newer C++ language features than Windows. Visual Studio 2015 for Windows still doesn't support all of the C++11 language features ("Visual Studio support for C++ language features," 2016), while the Clang compiler used by macOS has supported newer C++14 features since version 3.4 ("Clang support for C++ language features," 2016), released in May 2014 ("Download LLVM releases," 2016). Targeting a single platform avoids the need to use only the lowest common denominator of language features. As far as possible, the languages and libraries have been selected to be portable if the decision to support other platforms is made in the future. Once Windows fully supports C++14, it should be possible to port the program with a minimum of effort.

The following additional libraries were used to speed development. They are all open-source and freely available.

- *GLM*: Provides vector and matrix primitives and operations, primarily designed for use in 3D graphics software, but which is useful for any program that will deal with 3D space.
- *Assimp*: Used for loading and saving 3D model files in a wide array of formats, with a consistent interface for querying loaded files.
- *FFTW3*: Provides Fast Fourier Transform routines. Used mainly for filtering and convolution.
- *Libsndfile*: Used for loading and saving audio files, specifically for saving simulation results.
- *Libsamplerate*: Provides high-quality sample-rate-conversion routines. Waveguide simulations are often run at a relatively low sample-rate, which must then be adjusted.
- *Gtest*: A unit-testing framework, used to validate small individual parts of the program, and ensure that changes to one module don't cause breakage elsewhere.
- *Cereal*: Serializes data to and from files. Used for saving program configuration options.
- *ITPP*: A scientific computing library. Used for its implementation of the Yule-Walker method for estimating filter coefficients for a given magnitude response.
- *JUCE*: Provides a framework for building graphical applications in C++. Used for the final application.

The project uses Cmake to configure its build, and to automatically download project dependencies. Python and Octave were used for running and automating tests and generating graphs.

This documentation is written in Markdown, and compiled to html and to pdf using Pandoc. The project website is generated with Jekyll.

## 2 Image-source

Coming soon.

## 3 Ray Tracer

Coming soon.

## 4 Waveguide

Coming soon.

## 5 Microphone Modelling

Coming soon.



# 6 Boundary Modelling

## Introduction

The ideal boundary model would allow complete control over the frequency- and direction-dependent absorption and scattering of a surface. Though this is reasonably straightforward in geometric models, it is far from a solved problem for the digital waveguide mesh (DWM). Several possible implementations are discussed in the literature, each with unique drawbacks.

This section will begin by discussing the ideal behaviour of modelled acoustic boundaries. Then, the implementation for geometric models will be discussed. Possibilities for DWM boundary models will be investigated, and the final choice of method explained. The geometric and DWM implementations will be evaluated and compared, to ensure equivalence.

## Background

The books by Vorländer (2007, p. 35) and Kuttruff (2009, p. 35) both devote entire chapters to the topic of sound reflection and scattering. Please refer to these books for a detailed and broad explanation of reflection effects. To avoid unnecessary duplication, this background will be brief, aiming only to put terminology and decisions in context.

## Magnitude and Phase

The reflection factor  $R$  is a complex value given by  $R = |R| \exp(i\chi)$ , which describes a modification to the amplitude and phase of the reflected wave ( $|R|$  is the magnitude term,  $\chi$  is phase). This factor depends both on the frequency and direction of the incident wave. When  $\chi = \pi$ ,  $R = -1$ , corresponding to a phase reversal. This is known as a ‘soft’ wall, but is rarely seen in room acoustics. It is reasonable to assume that reflections are in-phase in the majority of problems.

The wall impedance  $Z$  is defined as the ratio of sound pressure to the normal component of particle velocity at the wall surface. It is related to the reflection factor by  $R = \frac{Z \cos \theta - Z_0}{Z \cos \theta + Z_0}$ , where  $\theta$  is the angle of incidence, and  $Z_0$  is the characteristic impedance of the propagation medium, normally air. In the case that the wall impedance is independent of the wave angle-of-incidence, the surface is known as *locally reacting*. A locally reacting surface does not transmit waves tangentially along the wall surface.

The absorption coefficient  $\alpha$  of the wall is related to the reflection factor by the equation  $\alpha = 1 - |R|^2$ . It describes the proportion of incident energy lost during reflection.

Properties of surfaces in an acoustic simulation may be described fully by either the reflection factor or impedance. The absorption coefficient fails to encode the phase-change properties of the surface, and so cannot fully describe the full range of possible characteristics. However, if surfaces are assumed to be ‘hard’, i.e. they do not induce phase changes, then the absorption coefficient is an adequate descriptor.

## Scattering

The reflection factor, absorption coefficient, and wall impedance describe the behaviour of perfectly-reflected (specular) waves. If the reflecting surface has imperfections or details of the same order as

the wavelength, as many surfaces in the real world do, then some components of the reflected wave will be *scattered* instead of specularly reflected.

Describing the nature of the scattered sound is more complicated than specular reflections. A common method is to use a *scattering coefficient*,  $s$ , which describes the proportion of outgoing energy which is scattered, and which may be dependent on frequency:

$$E_{\text{scattered}} = E_{\text{incident}}(1 - \alpha)s, E_{\text{specular}} = E_{\text{incident}}(1 - \alpha)(1 - s), E_{\text{total}} = E_{\text{incident}}(1 - \alpha)$$

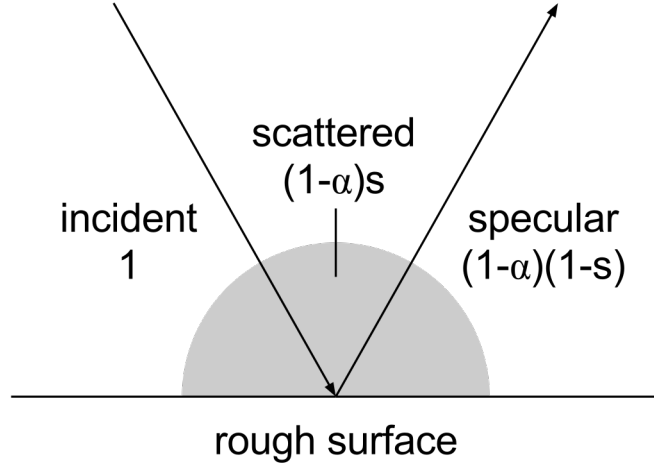


Figure 6.1: Reflected components from a rough surface.

Alone, the scattering coefficient fails to describe the directional distribution of scattered energy. In the case of an ideally-diffusing surface, the scattered energy is distributed according to Lambert's cosine law. That is, the intensity depends only on the cosine of the outgoing scattering angle, and is independent of the angle of incidence. More complex scattering distributions, which also depend on the outgoing direction, are possible (C. L. Christensen & Rindel, 2005; Durany, Mateos, & Garriga, 2015), but there is no single definitive model to describe physically-accurate scattering.

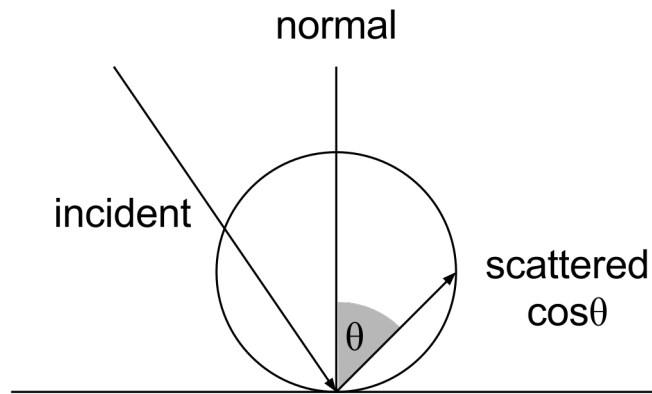


Figure 6.2: Lambert scattering. Scattered intensity is independent of incident angle.

## Geometric Implementation

The geometric implementation of reflective surfaces is straightforward. In both image-source and ray tracing methods, each ray starts with a certain intensity or pressure. For specular reflections, the

ray pressure must merely be multiplied by the wall reflection coefficient, which may be derived from the absorption and scattering coefficients using the equations above. Specifically, the normal-incidence specific impedance  $\xi_0$  is calculated using  $\xi_0 = \frac{1+R_0}{1-R_0}$  where  $R_0$  is the normal-incidence reflection factor. Then, the angle-dependent reflection factor is given by  $R_\theta = \frac{\xi_0 \cos \theta - 1}{\xi_0 \cos \theta + 1}$  where  $\theta$  is the angle of incidence (Southern et al., 2013).

If the reflection factor is dependent on frequency then the frequency range, and the pressure carried by the ray, must be discretised into bands. Then each band must be modified using a representative reflection factor for that frequency range. This is similar to the approach taken in graphical ray tracing, in which each ray carries separate red, green, and blue components. These components are modified independently, depending on the colour of the reflective surface.

By definition, image-source models find only specular reflections (i.e. image sources), so scattering is not implemented in these models. Scattering can be implemented in ray tracers, but there is no consensus on the optimum method. One option is to spawn two rays at every reflection: a specular ray, and a diffuse ray with random direction. Though this properly replicates the theory, it leads to an explosion in the number of rays which must be traced, so is impractical in most cases. A second option is to decide, using the scattering coefficient as a probability, whether the reflection should be specular or diffuse (Savioja & Svensson, 2015). This solves the ray-explosion problem, but requires an additional random number to be generated per-reflection, which can be costly for large numbers of rays. An elegant solution is to simply mix the specular and diffuse rays together, using the scattering coefficient as a weighting (Rindel, 2000), a technique known as *vector based scattering* (C. L. Christensen & Rindel, 2005). This is the approach taken by Wayverb. A major drawback of all these scattering methods is that the scattering coefficient can only be frequency-dependent if a separate ray is traced for each band. If a single ray is used to carry all frequency components, then each component must be scattered in exactly the same way.

The plain scattering model affects only the ongoing ray direction and amplitude. However, it is worth considering that, at each reflection, the scattered energy may be directly visible to the receiver. This fact is exploited by the *diffuse rain* technique, in which each reflection is considered to spawn a ‘secondary source’ which emits scattered energy towards the receiver. This scattered energy is recorded only if the secondary source is visible from the receiver.

An equation for the magnitude of diffuse rain scattered energy is given by Schröder (2011, p. 64), assuming perfect Lambert diffusion:

$$E_{\text{scattered}} = E_{\text{incident}}(1 - \alpha)2s \cos \theta (1 - \cos \frac{\gamma}{2})$$

Here,  $\theta$  is the angle from secondary source to receiver relative against the surface normal, and  $\gamma$  is the opening angle. The magnitude of the scattered energy depends on the direction from the secondary source to the receiver (by Lambert’s cosine law), and also on the solid angle covered by the receiver.

## DWM Implementation

Modelling boundary surfaces in the digital waveguide mesh (DWM) is a problem that is yet to be solved in a way that is flexible, accurate, and realistic. Methods from the literature each have unique drawbacks, meaning none are particularly satisfactory for applications where realism is required. The two most common methods will be reviewed, and the choice of method for Wayverb will be explained.

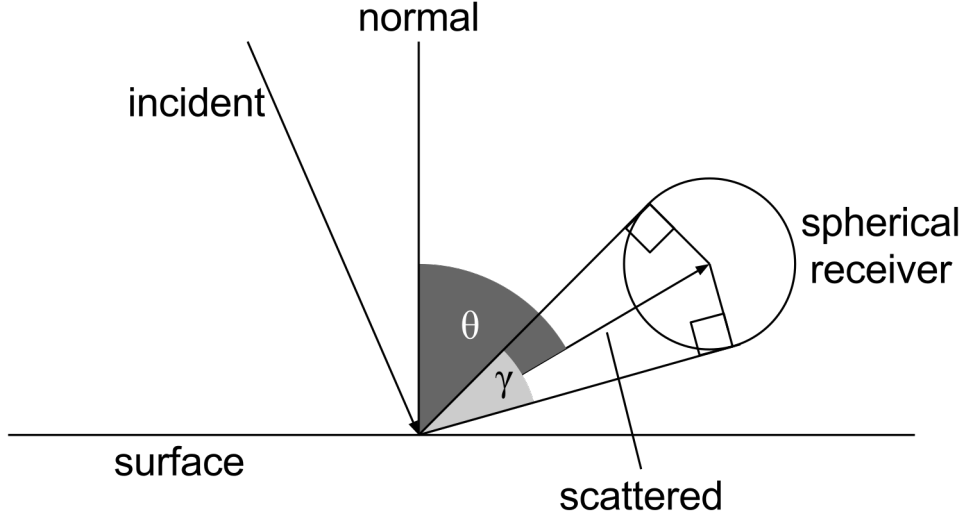


Figure 6.3: Angles used in the diffuse rain equation for a spherical receiver.

## Possible Methods

### KW-Pipe Technique

This method is described by Murphy & Beeson (2007) and Kelloniemi (2006).

There are two main technically-equivalent formulations of digital waveguides meshes, known as *W-models* and *K-models*. W-models are based on travelling wave variables, which allow for straightforward interaction with a variety of termination types, such as ringguides, fractional delays, or wave digital filters. Wave digital filters, in particular, could be used to model frequency-dependent boundaries and air absorption. However, W-models have great memory requirements, making them impractical for large multi-dimensional simulations. K-models are based on Kirchhoff variables, and depend on physical quantities rather than travelling wave components. Under certain conditions, K-models and finite-difference time-domain (FDTD) simulations are equivalent. FDTD models have much smaller memory requirements than W-models, at the cost of decreased flexibility of filtering, as these models cannot directly interact with wave digital filters.

The KW-pipe is a ‘converter’ between wave- and Kirchhoff- variables, which is designed to allow the majority of a model (that is, the air-filled space inside it) to be constructed as a K-model waveguide mesh. At the boundaries of the model, the KW-pipe is used to connect K-model nodes to W-model nodes. These W-model nodes can then be connected to wave digital filters to simulate frequency-dependent absorption of wave energy. The complete model retains both the memory-efficiency of the K-model and the termination flexibility of the W-model, with the drawback of additional implementation complexity at the interface between the two model types.

This sounds extremely promising, but has a major drawback, as described by Kowalczyk & Walstijn (2008a): while the inside of the mesh will be 2- or 3-dimensional, the boundary termination afforded by the wave-variable boundary is 1-dimensional. Each boundary node connects to just the closest interior node. As a result, the edges and corners are not considered to be part of the model, as these nodes do not have a directly adjacent interior node. Additionally, the 1D boundary termination equation implies a smaller inter-nodal distance than that of the 2D or 3D mesh interior. This means that when updating an interior node next to a boundary, the inter-nodal distance is greater than when updating the boundary node itself. For these reasons, the 1D termination is unphysical and can lead to large errors in the phase and amplitude of reflections.

## Locally Reactive Surfaces Technique

This method, described by Kowalczyk & Walstijn (2008a), aims to create physically correct higher-dimensional boundaries by combining a boundary condition, defined by a boundary impedance, with the multidimensional wave equation. This leads to a model for a *locally reacting surface* (LRS), in which boundary impedance is represented by an infinite-impulse-response (IIR) filter.

As noted above, a surface is locally reacting if the normal component of the particle velocity on the boundary surface is dependent solely upon the sound pressure in front of the boundary. In most physical surfaces, the velocity at the surface boundary will also be influenced by the velocity of adjacent elements on the boundary, so LRS is not a realistic physical model in the vast majority of cases.

However, despite that it is not a realistic physical model, the implementation of the LRS modelling technique is both stable and accurate, as opposed to the 1D KW-pipe termination, which does not accurately model even locally-reacting surfaces.

The LRS model leads to an implementation that is efficient (as it is based completely on the K-model/FDTD formulation) and tunable (boundaries are defined by arbitrary IIR filters).

## Choice of Boundary Technique for the DWM

The LRS technique was chosen, as it represented the best compromise between memory efficiency, customization and tuning, and realism. The particular strengths of this model are its performance and tunability, though as mentioned previously it is not physically accurate in many cases. That being said, neither of the boundary models considered are particularly realistic, so even for applications where realism is the most important consideration, the LRS model seems to be the most appropriate.

## LRS Implementation

See Kowalczyk & Walstijn (2008a) and Kowalczyk & Walstijn (2008b) for a more detailed explanation.

In the **Background** section it was noted that the reflection characteristics of a surface are fully defined by a reflection coefficient or wall impedance, both of which might be frequency- and direction-dependent. The LRS technique starts from the definition of wall reflectance:

$$R = \frac{Z \cos \theta - Z_0}{Z \cos \theta + Z_0}$$

This may instead be written in terms of *specific acoustic impedance*  $\xi$ , which is equal to the wall impedance  $Z$  divided by the acoustic impedance of the propagation medium (air)  $Z_0$ :  $\xi = \frac{Z}{Z_0}$ .

$$R = \frac{\xi \cos \theta - 1}{\xi \cos \theta + 1}$$

This equation can be rearranged to define the wall impedance in terms of the reflection coefficient. Further, the reflection coefficient can be replaced with a digital filter  $R_0(z)$ , describing the frequency-dependent normal-incidence behaviour of the surface. This filter might be derived from per-band absorption coefficients, using the relationship  $|R| = \sqrt{1 - \alpha}$ . In Wayverb, reflection magnitudes are found in this way, and then the Yule-Walker method is used to approximate coefficients for  $R_0$ . The substitution leads to an equation for a filter, describing the specific acoustic impedance of the surface:

$$\xi(z) = \frac{1 + R_0(z)}{1 - R_0(z)}$$

This impedance filter is most efficiently implemented as an *infinite impulse response* (IIR) filter, though surfaces with detailed frequency responses will require high-order filters, which tend to become numerically unstable. The usual solution to this problem would be to split the high-order filter into a series-combination of lower-order filters, however the LRS requires access to intermediate values from the filter delay-line which makes this approach impossible. An alternative solution is suggested by Oxnard, O'Brien, Mourik, & Murphy (2015), who suggests running the entire simulation multiple times, once for each octave band. This means that the boundary filters can be single-order, and resistant to accumulated numerical error. Compared to high-order boundary filters, this method gives much improved accuracy, but at the (immense) cost of running the entire simulation multiple times. In Wayverb, both approaches are taken, allowing the user to choose between a fast, inaccurate single-run simulation with high-order filters; or a slow, accurate multi-run simulation with low-order filters.

The implementation of the boundaries themselves in the DWM is fairly simple. Appropriate impedance filter coefficients can be inserted into special update equations, which are found by combining the discrete 3D wave equation with the discrete LRS boundary condition. Recall that the DWM operates by updating each mesh node individually, depending on the states of the immediately adjacent nodes. To model boundaries, the update equation for each of the boundary nodes is replaced.

In the case of a flat wall, the boundary node is adjacent to a single inner-node, and a '1D' update equation is used. Where two perpendicular walls meet, the nodes along the edge will each be adjacent to two '1D' nodes, and a '2D' update equation is used for these nodes. Where three walls meet, the corner node will be directly adjacent to three '2D' nodes, and a '3D' update equation is used for this node. Note that this method is only capable of modelling mesh-aligned surfaces. Other sloping or curved surfaces must be approximated as a group of narrow mesh-aligned surfaces separated by 'steps'. For example, a wall tilted at 45 degrees will be modelled as a staircase-like series of '2D' edge nodes, instead of '1D' wall nodes.

## Test Procedure

Only the LRS method is tested here. The implementation of frequency-dependent boundaries in geometric simulations amounts to multiplication by a reflection coefficient (with optional scattering) per-band, so there is little to test. The LRS waveguide boundary is more complicated, as it embeds IIR filters into the waveguide boundaries, so it is worth testing that the boundary nodes behave as expected.

The testing procedure used is similar to that of Kowalczyk & Walstijn (2008a). Code for the test can be seen at [https://github.com/reuk/wayverb/blob/master/bin/boundary\\_test/boundary\\_test.cpp](https://github.com/reuk/wayverb/blob/master/bin/boundary_test/boundary_test.cpp).

## Simulation Parameters

- Cubic room,  $300 \times 300 \times 300$  nodes.
- 8 KHz mesh sampling frequency.
- Run for 420 steps.
- Source and receiver placed 37 node-spacings from the centre of the boundary.

The following diagram shows the testing setup, which will be explained in the next section.

## Method

A simulation was run using the parameters above, and the reflected signal at the receiver was recorded. This first recording,  $r_f$ , contained a direct and a reflected response. Then, the room was doubled in size along the plane of the wall being tested, essentially removing this boundary from the model. The simulation was run again, recording just the direct response at the receiver ( $r_d$ ). Finally, the receiver

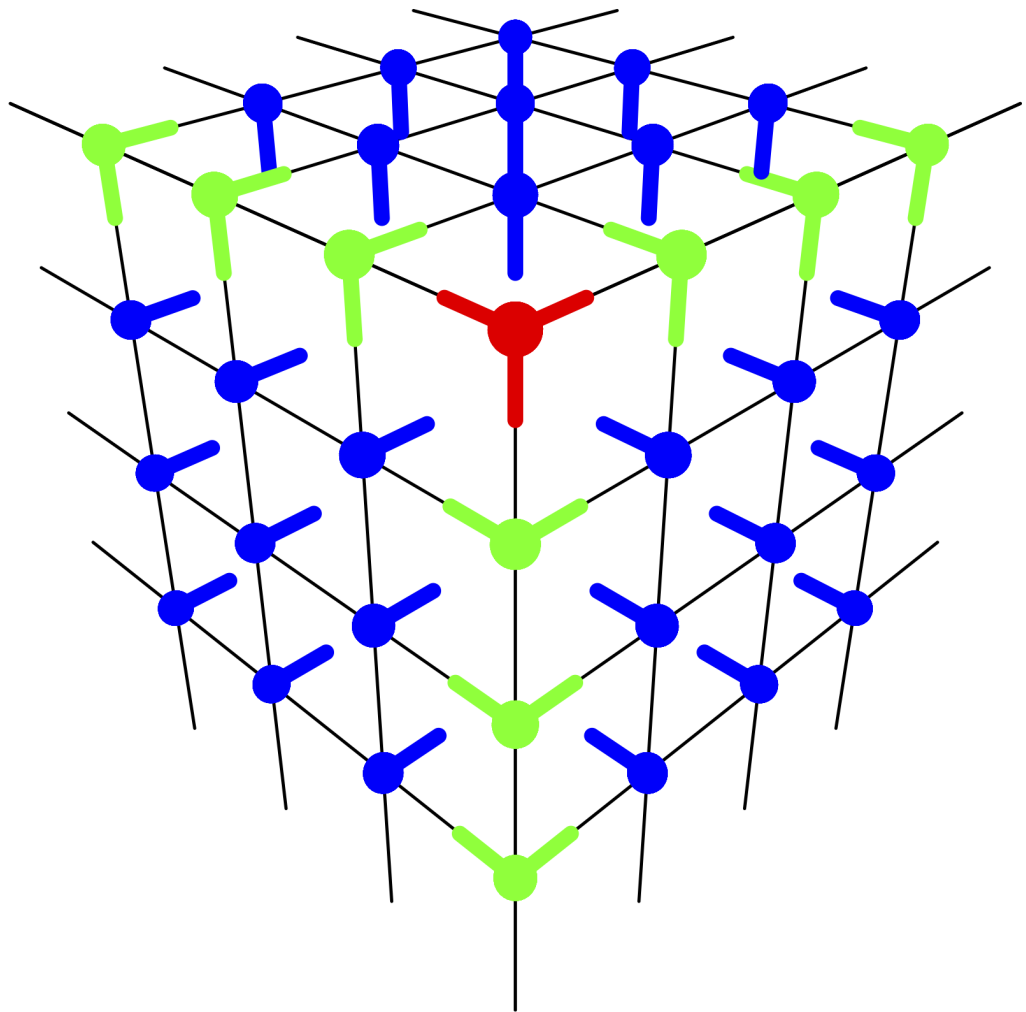
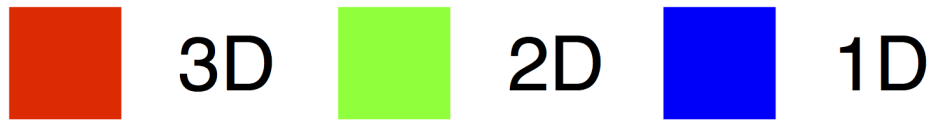


Figure 6.4: The three types of boundary nodes. 1D nodes are adjacent to inner nodes, 2D nodes are adjacent to two 1D nodes, and 3D nodes are adjacent to three 2D nodes.

 source     reflected     image

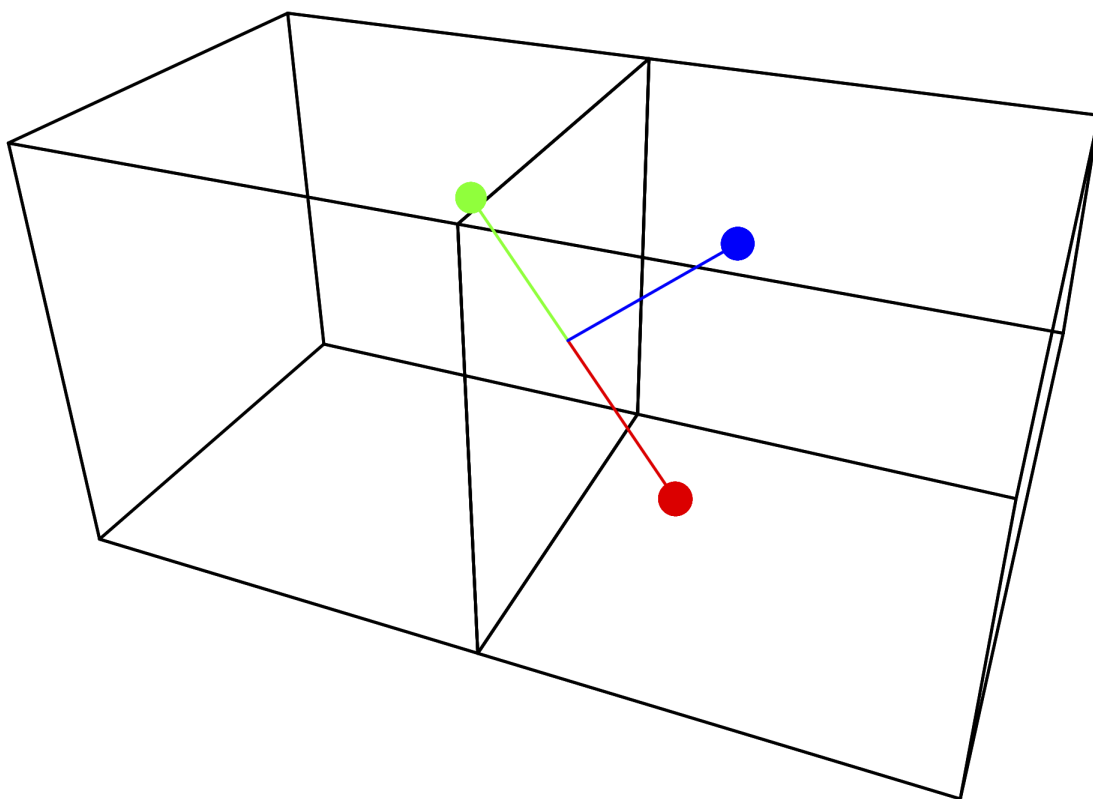


Figure 6.5: The setup of the two room-sizes, and the positions of sources and receivers inside.



position was moved to its reflected position ‘through’ the tested wall, and the simulation was run once more, producing a free-field response ( $r_i$ ).

The reflected response was isolated by subtracting  $r_d$  from  $r_f$ , cancelling out the direct response. This isolated reflection is  $r_r$ . To find the effect of the frequency-dependent boundary, the frequency content of the reflected response was compared to the free-field response  $r_i$ . This was achieved by windowing  $r_r$  and  $r_i$  with the right half of a Hanning window, then taking FFTs of each. The experimentally determined numerical reflectance was determined by dividing the absolute values of the two FFTs.

To find the accuracy of the boundary model, the numerical reflectance was compared to the theoretical reflection of the digital impedance filter being tested, which is defined as:

$$R_{\theta,\phi}(z) = \frac{\xi(z) \cos \theta \cos \phi - 1}{\xi(z) \cos \theta \cos \phi + 1}$$

where  $\theta$  and  $\phi$  are the reflection azimuth and elevation respectively.

The test was run for three different angles of incidence, with azimuth and elevation of 0, 30, and 60 degrees respectively. Three different sets of surface absorption coefficients were used, giving a total of nine combinations of source position and absorption coefficients. The specific absorption coefficients are those suggested by Oxnard et al. (2015), shown in the following table:

frequency / Hz	31	73	173	411	974
plaster	0.08	0.08	0.2	0.5	0.4
wood	0.15	0.15	0.11	0.1	0.07
concrete	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.03

The boundary filter for each material was generated by converting the absorption coefficients to per-band reflectance coefficients using the relationship  $R = \sqrt{1 - \alpha}$ . Then, the Yule-Walker method from the ITPP library (“ITPP homepage,” 2013) was used to calculate coefficients for a sixth-order IIR filter which approximated the per-band reflectance. This filter was converted to an impedance filter by  $\xi(z) = \frac{1+R_0(z)}{1-R_0(z)}$ , which was then used in the boundary update equations for the DWM.

## Results

The results are shown in the following figure. Although the waveguide mesh has a theoretical upper frequency limit of 0.25 of the mesh sampling rate, the 3D FDTD scheme has a cutoff frequency of 0.196 of the mesh sampling rate for axial directions. This point has been marked as a vertical line on the result graphs.

## Evaluation

The initial impression of the results is that the measured response is reasonably accurate, to within 6dB of the predicted response, but only below 0.15 of the mesh sampling rate. Above this point, the responses become very erratic, with very large peaks and troughs. This is especially true for the on-axis (0-degree) tests, where some erratic behaviour is seen as low as 0.12 of the mesh sampling rate. This may be due to numerical dispersion in the waveguide mesh, which is greatest along axial directions (Kowalczyk & Walstijn, 2008a). At the other end of the spectrum, the results look acceptable, adhering closely to the predicted response.

The poor performance at the top of the spectrum is not particularly concerning, as the waveguide mesh is designed to generate low-frequency content. If wideband results are required, then the mesh can

Comparison of Measured and Predicted Boundary Reflectance

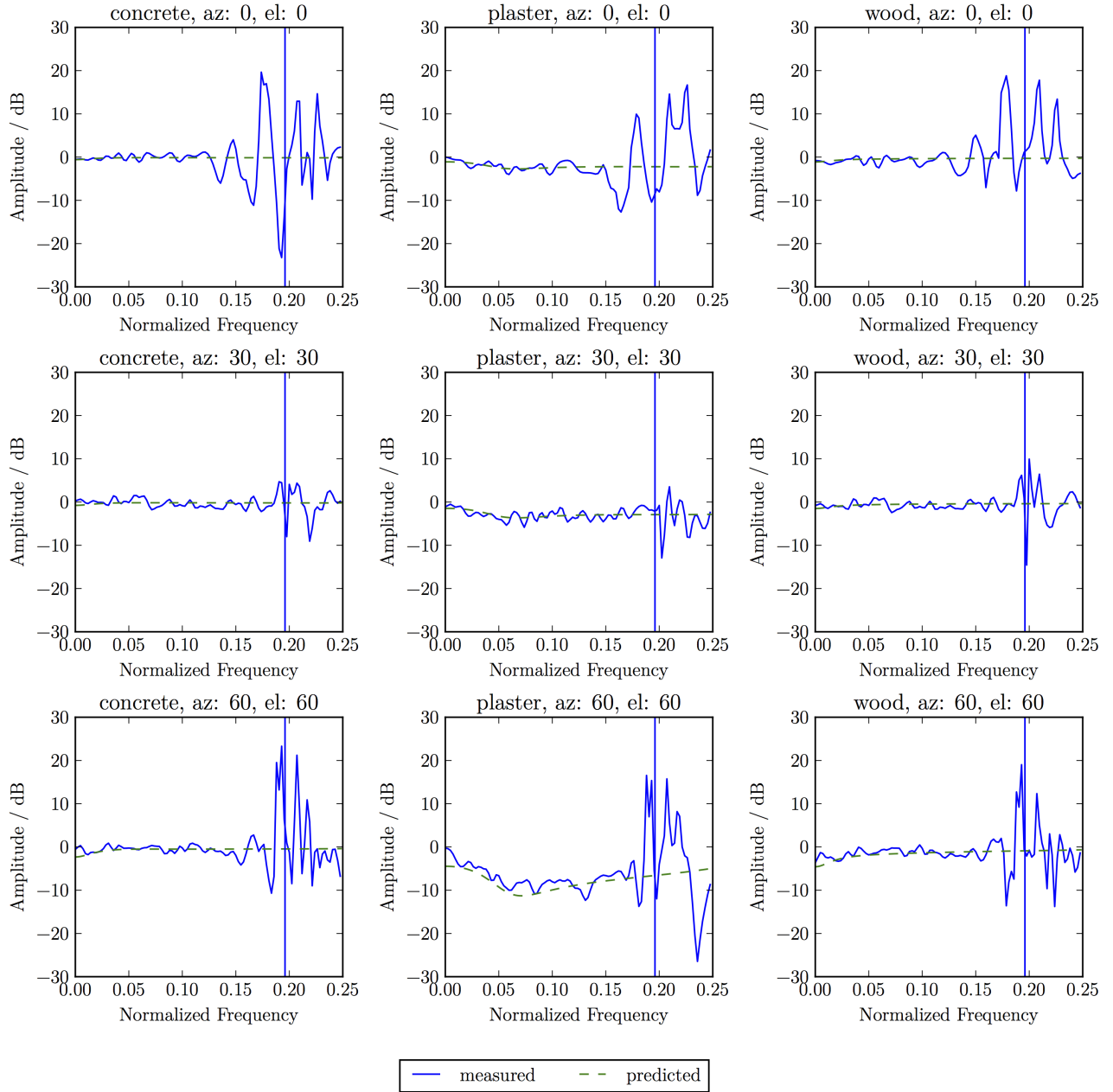


Figure 6.6: Measured boundary reflectance is compared against the predicted reflectance, for three different materials and three different angles of incidence.

simply be oversampled. To prevent boundary modelling error affecting the results of impulse response synthesis in the Wayverb app, the mesh cutoff frequency is locked to a maximum of 0.15 of the mesh sampling rate.

It is also worth noting that ideally this experiment would be conducted with a completely flat wave-front, which is not easily accomplished. In their experiments, Kowalczyk & Walstijn (2008a) use large meshes (around 3000 by 3000 nodes, nine million in total) and place their sources a great distance away from the boundary being studied in order to maintain a mostly-flat wave-front. However, they only run their experiments in two dimensions. In fact, they do not present experimental results for their implementation of boundaries in three dimensions at all. This is probably because running a 3D simulation on a similar scale would require a mesh of twenty-seven billion nodes, which in turn would require gigabytes of memory and hours of simulation time.

Kowalczyk & Walstijn (2008a) note that in some of the experiments with 2D meshes, there are disparities at low frequencies between the predicted and actual results, which they say is an artefact of non-flat wave-fronts. Interestingly, there is little low-frequency error in the experimental results above, despite the fact that the source is placed very close to the boundary, and the wave-front is therefore very rounded. This might, however, be the cause of the relatively small broadband fluctuations between 0 and 0.15 of the mesh sampling rate. The filters used in this test are also of much higher order than those tested by Kowalczyk & Walstijn (2008a), giving a greater chance of accumulated numerical error. This may be the cause of the volatile high-frequency behaviour.

In conclusion, for the most part, the results presented adhere closely to the expected results, with the caveat that the surface reflectance is only accurate at low frequencies, below around 0.15 of the mesh sampling rate. Different absorption coefficients lead to clearly-different reflectance coefficients, which are additionally accurate at multiple angles of incidence. While not completely accurate, this model is both fast and tunable, making it a good candidate for boundary modelling in room acoustics simulations.

## 7 Evaluation

Coming soon.

## 8 The Future

Coming soon.

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This list contains all items cited in the text. It also contains some items not directly mentioned, but which nonetheless guided the development of the project, or might shape its future.

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