**K47 Introduction to Sensors**[www.kumantech.com](http://www.kumantech.com)  
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Sensors are electronic and mechanical components that convert physical phenomena into signals that can be detected by circuits and computer programs. Sensors are everywhere, from the switch that detects a car door is still open, to the computer keyboard and mouse that detect your various finger motions and translate them into specific computer actions. This kit includes a large collection of sensors that can electronically detect, or measure, many different physical phenomena, including many that you can sense with your own body (like touch, sound, light, and heat) as well as some that you can’t (such as magnetism or invisible infrared radiation). *Sensing* the world is the first step in building circuits, or computer programs, that sensibly *interact* with the world! You will have fun imaging creative new applications for the many sensors in this kit.

**Analog vs. Digital Sensors.** Sensors act as inputs to an electronic system. They communicate an external, physical phenomenon or event to some sort of host circuit or software program, often by transmitting a voltage along a wire that connects the sensor to the circuit or software.

At the lowest level, sensors come in two different designs: analog and digital. Each flavor of design corresponds to a different interpretation or meaningof the voltage on the wire. Analog designs look at the relative *strength* of the signal, and answer questions such as “*how much?”* or “*how strong*?” Digital designs, by contrast, consider only the presence or absence of the signal (voltage), and so answer questions of “*whether*” or “*if*.” Where digital signals *detect* a phenomenon, analog signals *measure* it.

Consider, for example, designs for aheat sensor (like a thermometer). In an analog design, this sensor might report the current temperature as an electrical voltage. No voltage—or very low voltage—on the wire would indicate a very cold temperature. “Maximum” voltage would indicate a very hot temperature. And any of the infinite range of intermediate voltages between those extremes would represent the infinite range of temperatures possible between cold and hot. Even before you calibrate the thermometer to a well-known temperature scale (like Celsius or Fahrenheit), you’d know that a signal of 1.80V indicates *hotter* conditions than a signal of 1.79V, because greater voltage corresponds to greater heat, in this analog design. Wherever a physical phenomenon corresponds to a range or spectrum of possibilities (like temperature, in this example), an analog signal is an effective electronic model of that phenomenon.

By contrast, consider a *digital* heat sensor that only warns you when the temperature falls below the freezing point (perhaps so you turn on an alarm or a heater). Here neither the heat sensor, nor you, are interested in the exact temperature, just in the question of whether that temperature currently falls below freezing. Where analog signals represent (through varying voltage) an unlimited number of continuously-related choices or possibilities, digital sensors instead indicate one of only a limited (or *discrete*) number of possible choices—often just two. Digital sensors are therefore good at answering questions that have only a few answers. Where an analog thermometer answers “how cold is it?”, a digital thermometer instead answers “is it below freezing?” Sometimes the digital answer can correspond to a simpler question to ask, and a simpler question can mean building a less complicated, or less expensive, circuit or program to act on that question’s answer.

**Hybrid Sensor Designs.** This kit includes analog and digital sensors, as well as a third *hybrid* type of device which reports *both* an analog signal and a digital signal. The analog signal reports the current amount of the phenomenon that is being sensed (*how much?*), and the digital signal reports whether that *current amount* exceeds some specific threshold (*if/whether*). So, for example, a hybrid thermometer reports *both* the current temperature (analog) *and* if that temperature is above freezing (digital).

These hybrid designs exist primarily for designers’ *convenience*. With both signals available, you can use whichever type of signal (and ask whichever type of question) makes best sense for your application. Also, on a hybrid sensor, the “threshold” that the digital signal detects is often adjustable, using a hardware control dial called a potentiometer. You can tweak this dial to adjust the sensitivity of your sensor’s digital signal in the field. By contrast, if you were working directly with an analog sensor value, and using software to determine whether its present value exceeded some fixed threshold, you’d likely need to change your software and reprogram your hardware to change the threshold value. It’s easier to twist the hybrid sensor dial!

**Analog-to-Digital Conversion.** Because the Raspberry Pi is a digital computer, when you work with purely analog sensor signals, you will need an *analog-to-digital* *converter* (ADC) to translate the variable analog voltage into a digital quantity usable by your computer. An ADC is a separate electronic component that sits between the sensor and the computer. This kit includes one, the ADC0832, and you’ll find instructions on how to connect it to specific sensors with the documentation for those sensors.

**Kinds of Components.** The following table lists all of the many components in this kit, grouped by the kind of physical phenomena they measure or detect. Each sensor is also noted by input *type*, which indicates whether it delivers an analog, digital, or hybrid input to your computer or circuit. Finally, many component designs are *industry standards*. Different manufacturers build very similar components (identical designs), so that you can use them interchangeably in your circuits, and so you can use *your* sensors in circuits designed by others. Unfortunately, some of the conventional names for these standardized components are not very descriptive, and sometimes even not very accurate. For instance, if you are new to working with electronics, you probably don’t know what a “DHT11” or a “4bit\_digital\_tube” is. These conventional names don’t help describe them! In this kit, we try to use descriptive names for each component to help you understand its purpose. But where there is a different common conventional name, we list that too, so you can recognize your components even in descriptions or circuit designs you find online or elsewhere.

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| **Kind** | **Name** | **“Conventional” Name** | **Input Type** |
| **sound & light displays**  (These components are not sensors at all; they are indicators and displays that you can use to *report* the phenomena that sensors sense. Use them as *outputs* rather than *inputs* to the experiments you build and the programs you write.) | 01\_2colorLED |  | output |
| 02\_RGB\_LED |  | output |
| 03\_RGB\_SMD\_LED | 3colorLED | output |
| 04\_7colorLED |  | output |
| 05\_activeBuzzer |  | output |
| 06\_passiveBuzzer |  | output |
| 07\_laser |  | output |
| 08\_1digitLEDdisplay | 8segment\_digital\_tube | output |
| 09\_4digitLEDdisplay | 4bit\_digital\_tube | output |
| **light & infrared sensors** | 10\_photoResistor |  | analog |
| 11\_infraredEmitter |  | output |
| 12\_infraredReceiver |  | digital |
| 13\_lightBlock |  | digital |
| 14\_flameSensor |  | hybrid |
| 15\_obstacleAvoidance |  | digital |
| 16\_trackingSensor |  | digital |
| **touch & impact sensors** | 17\_buttonSwitch |  | digital |
| 18\_touchSensor |  | digital |
| 19\_tiltSwitch |  | digital |
| 20\_metalTouchSensor |  | hybrid |
| 21\_knockSwitch |  | digital |
| 22\_shockSwitch |  | digital |
| 23\_joyStick |  | analog (x2) + digital |
| **sound sensors** | 24\_bigSoundSensor |  | hybrid |
| 25\_smallSoundSensor |  | hybrid |
| **magnetic sensors** | 26\_miniReedSwitch |  | digital |
| 27\_hybridReedSwitch | reedSwitch | hybrid |
| 28\_analogHall |  | analog |
| 29\_digitalHall | hallMagnetic | digital |
| 30\_hybridHall | linearHall | hybrid |
| **temperature sensors** | 31\_analogTempSensor |  | analog |
| 32\_hybridTempSensor |  | hybrid |
| 33\_digitalTempSensor | DS18B20 | digital |
| 34\_tempHumiditySensor | DHT11 | digital |
| **miscellaneous** | 35\_smokeSensor |  | digital |
| 36\_rotaryEncoder |  | digital |
| 37\_relay |  | output |

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