

Analog Electronics Final Project Report

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Overview

The goal of this project is to create an analog circuit that can process the output of an accelerometer, interpret the orientation, and based on set values produce the required output to drive four motors on a quadcopter to balance the system.

Control Circuit

For this project we chose an accelerometer from Freescale Semi which operated between 1.7 V and 3.6 V. The device can also toggle between a low sensitivity mode ($\pm 8g$) and a high sensitivity mode ($\pm 2g$). When the power is supplied and mode set, the accelerometer outputs three voltages proportional to the acceleration in X, Y, and Z.

Thus on level ground at rest, the accelerometer should measure a net acceleration of $[0, 0, -g]$. However, at zero acceleration, the device outputs an offset voltage of 0.75 V, thus the equilibrium position in terms of voltage will be $[0.75\text{ V}, 0.75\text{ V}, 0.979\text{ V}]$.

To determine this equilibrium, we need to integrate the Z signal twice to determine the net displacement, and select for the height we wish to hover at with a comparator. Then to balance, we also integrate both X and Y signals once to select for zero velocity. Since the comparator will output a rail voltage based on the net difference between measured value and set point, it must be scaled to appropriately control the motors to restore balance.

Motor Control

To control the motors, it is first important to understand the motors themselves. Quadcopters no longer use simple DC motors to control their speed, since they are not precise enough. Instead, they use what is known as three-phase AC signals. Each AC signal is 120 deg out of phase with each other, to trigger one of three electromagnet in the motor. The frequency determines the rpm, which is precisely controlled by an electronic speed controller (ESC). This ESC measures the back emf of the first two poles to determine the phase shift of the third pulse.

The ESC in turn is controlled by a square wave from a central control system, such as a micro-controller or an analog circuit. The throttle it applies to the motors is controlled by the duty cycle of the wave, which can be simply generated by using a triangle wave and a comparator.

By comparing the output of the triangle wave to a set voltage, the resultant signal will either go to zero or the upper rail, with the width of the pulse equaling the width of the triangle wave that is above the set voltage. This the duty cycle of the square wave can be controlled simply by adjusting the set voltage of the comparator.

Testing this circuit revealed that these set voltages must be scaled to range between 2 and 4V, to control the duty cycle between 25% to 65%. The triangle wave itself needs a 2.5V offset, with 4V full swing to register properly.

Mechanical Design

The quadcopter itself had very few mechanical constraints, however the chassis did need to accommodate the following parts at minimum:

- Motors (x4)
- ESC (x4)
- Battery
- Central control board
- TTL board (x4)

The only parts that have an exact mechanical requirement are the motors, which have threaded holes for M3 bolts at the bottom to panel mounting. Thus it was decided to utilize the 3D printer at OIST to produce a custom designed chassis for the quadcopter, as shown in Figure 1. Each arm has room for the motor to be mounted, along with space for the corresponding ESC to be mounted underneath with zip ties. Each arm locks into the central body, and is secured using an M5 bolt. The top section has holes to allow zip ties to wrap around the inner section to hold down the central electronics. Finally the bottom of the central piece has an additional hollowed section to more zip ties to hold the battery underneath, keeping the center of gravity low.

Feedback

The feedback mechanism in this case is not electrical, but connected through the orientation of the copter, and how it'll affect the output of the accelerometer.

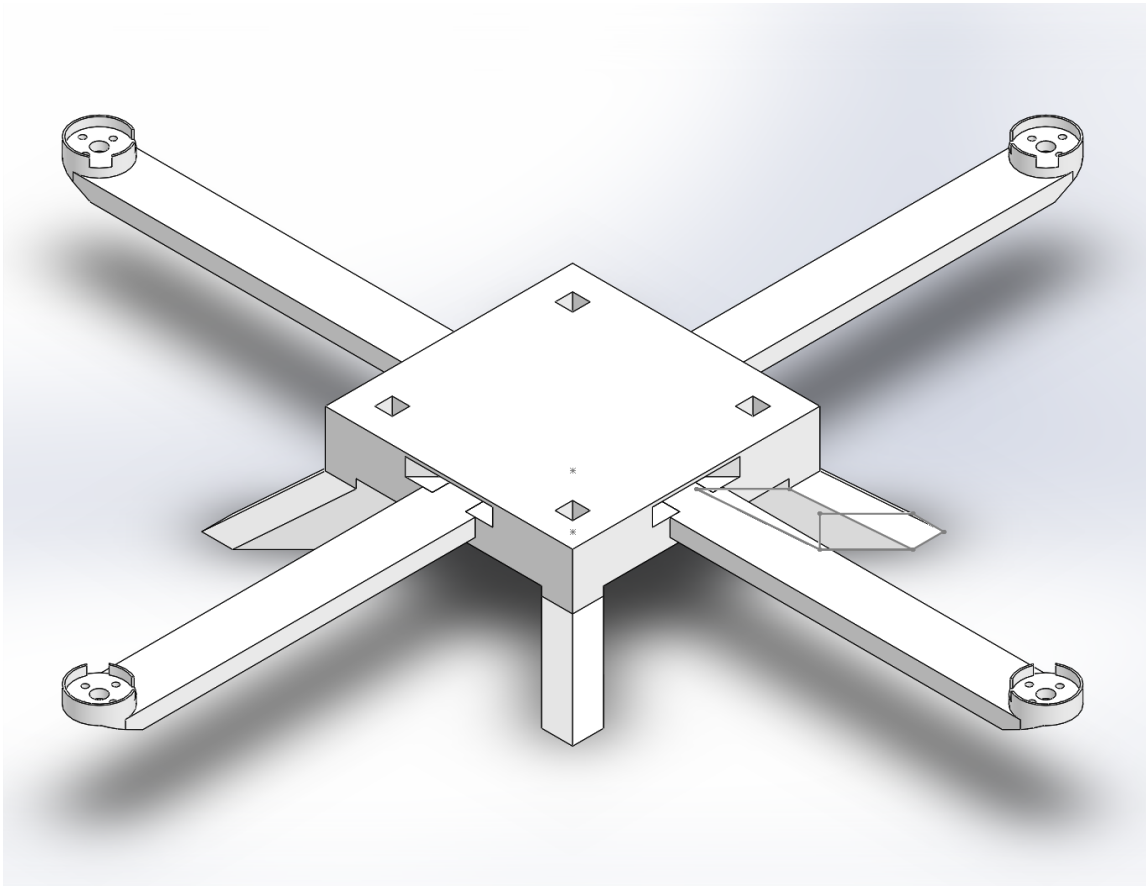


Figure 1: 3D render of quadcopter chassis, with room for motors, battery, and requisite electronics.

Problems and Issues

Conclusion

Characterizing Motors

Data Sheets