

# **OpenAL 1.1 Specification and Reference**

## Specification and Reference

This is the OpenAL 1.1 Specification and Reference. This document is based upon the older OpenAL Specification and Reference (1.0), published in June 2000. Both copyright notices are presented below.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Revision History, 1.1 Document

Revision 1.0	January 2005	Garin Hiebert	First draft of new specification, submitted to 1.1 list for review.
Revision 1.1	February 2005	Garin Hiebert	Incorporated feedback from Ryan Gordon.
Revision 1.2	February 2005	Garin Hiebert	Incorporated feedback from Ryan Gordon, Daniel Peacock, and Carlo Vogelsang.
Revision 1.3	February 2005	Garin Hiebert	New set of revisions before public release of draft.
Revision 1.4	February 2005	Garin Hiebert	Incorporated feedback from Andrew McDonald, Ryan Gordon, Joe Tennies, and Joseph Valenzuela.
Revision 1.5	March 2005	Garin Hiebert	Incorporated feedback from many openal-devel list members.
Revision 1.6	March 2005	Garin Hiebert	Incorporated feedback from many openal-devel list members.
Revision 1.7	April 2005	Garin Hiebert	Incorporated feedback from many openal-devel list members.
Revision 1.8	April 2005	Garin Hiebert	Incorporated feedback from many openal-devel list members.
Revision 1.9	April 2005	Garin Hiebert	Incorporated feedback from Jean-Marc Jot, Daniel Peacock, and Jean-Michel Trivi.
Revision 2.0	May 2005	Garin Hiebert	Incorporated feedback from many openal-devel list members.
Revision 2.1	May 2005	Garin Hiebert	Incorporated feedback from Bob Aron, Alexandre Mah, and Carlo Vogelsang.
Revision 2.2	May 2005	Garin Hiebert	Added AL_SOURCE_TYPE attribute and description.
Revision 2.3	June 2005	Garin Hiebert	Added feedback from Alexandre Mah and Daniel Peacock.

## 1.2. A Brief History of OpenAL

The first discussions about implementing OpenAL as an audio API complimentary to OpenGL started around 1998. There were a few aborted attempts at creating the headers and a specification, but by late 1999 Loki Entertainment Software was in need for an API of exactly this type and pursued both a specification and a Linux implementation. At around that time, Loki started talking with Creative Labs about standardizing the API and

expanding platform support. The OpenAL 1.0 specification was released in early 2000 and compliant OpenAL libraries were released in the same year for Linux, MacOS 8/9, Windows, and BeOS. Loki Entertainment also shipped several games using OpenAL in 2000 – Heavy Gear 2 and Heretic 2 (both under Linux). In 2001, Creative Labs released the first hardware-accelerated OpenAL libraries. The libraries supported the SoundBlaster Live on MacOS 8/9 and Windows.

Since 2001, there has been continuous improvement in OpenAL. Some platforms are less relevant than in 2000 (BeOS and MacOS 8/9 for instance), but more platforms have been added as well (BSD, Solaris, IRIX, Mac OS X, and the popular console gaming platforms). Hardware support is enabled for many Creative and NVIDIA audio devices under Windows as well.

In terms of product support, OpenAL has been used in a large number of titles over the years, on many platforms (for a list of many of the titles, see <http://www.openal.org/titles.html>).

### ***1.3. What Is the OpenAL Audio System?***

OpenAL (for "Open Audio Library") is a software interface to audio hardware. The interface consists of a number of functions that allow a programmer to specify the objects and operations in producing high-quality audio output, specifically multichannel output of 3D arrangements of sound sources around a listener.

The OpenAL API is designed to be cross-platform and easy to use. It resembles the OpenGL API in coding style and conventions. OpenAL uses a syntax resembling that of OpenGL where applicable.

OpenAL is foremost a means to generate audio in a simulated three-dimensional space. Consequently, legacy audio concepts such as panning and left/right channels are not directly supported. OpenAL does include extensions compatible with the IA-SIG 3D Level 1 and Level 2 rendering guidelines to handle sound-source directivity and distance-related attenuation and Doppler effects, as well as environmental effects such as reflection, obstruction, transmission, reverberation.

Like OpenGL, the OpenAL core API has no notion of an explicit rendering context, and operates on an implied current OpenAL Context. Unlike the OpenGL specification the OpenAL specification includes both the core API (the actual OpenAL API) and the operating system bindings of the ALC API (the "Audio Library Context"). Unlike OpenGL's GLX, WGL and other OS-specific bindings, the ALC API is portable across platforms as well.



## ***1.4. Differences Between OpenAL 1.1 and OpenAL 1.0***

### **1.4.1. Recording API**

OpenAL 1.1 implementations support recording as specified in sections 6.4.2 and 9.1.

### **1.4.2. Get/Set Offset**

OpenAL 1.1 implementations support offset operations as specified in sections 4.3.2 and 9.2.

### **1.4.3. Linear Distance Models**

OpenAL 1.1 implementations will support two new linear distance models as specified in sections 3.4 and 9.3.

### **1.4.4. Exponential Distance Models**

OpenAL 1.1 implementations will support two new exponential distance models as specified in sections 3.4 and 9.4.

### **1.4.5. Doppler**

Doppler behavior has been standardized for OpenAL 1.1, as documented in section 3.5.2.

### **1.4.6. Standard Extensions Listings**

Extension listing behavior has been standardized for OpenAL 1.1, as documented in section 6.3.3. Also, extension names passed to `alIsExtensionPresent` or `alcIsExtensionPresent` are no longer case sensitive. Internally to the implementation, the names will be maintained as all upper-case, and when names are expressed by the implementation they will be expressed as all upper-case.

### **1.4.7. Standard Suspend/Process Behavior**

Context suspend/process behavior has been clarified in section 6.2.5.

### **1.4.8. Deprecate ALUT**

The ALUT functions will continue to be supported on platforms where they were traditionally included with OpenAL (non-Windows platforms), but are considered deprecated.

### **1.4.9. Streaming Clarifications**

Streaming using OpenAL's queuing mechanism has been clarified in section 4.3.5.

### **1.4.10. Error Codes**

Error codes are specified in many cases where the old specification was vague.

### **1.4.11. Pitch Shifting Limits**

The pitch shifting limits for OpenAL 1.1 have changed as specified in section 4.3.2.

### **1.4.12. New ALchar and ALCchar types**

New ALchar and ALCchar types have been added, affecting the following functions: alGetString, alIsExtensionPresent, alGetProcAddress, alGetEnumValue, alcOpenDevice, alcIsExtensionPresent, alcGetProcAddress, alcGetEnumValue, and alcGetString.

### **1.4.13. alcCloseDevice Return Value**

alcCloseDevice now returns ALCboolean to indicate success or failure.

### **1.4.14. Versioning Changes**

Clearer definitions of the AL\_VERSION, AL\_RENDERER, and AL\_VENDOR string queries are defined.

## ***1.5. Programmer's View of OpenAL***

To the programmer, OpenAL is a set of commands that allow the specification of sound sources and a listener in three dimensions, combined with commands that control how these sound sources are rendered into the output buffer. The effect of OpenAL commands is not guaranteed to be immediate, as there are latencies depending on the implementation, but ideally such latency should not be noticeable to the user.

A typical program that uses OpenAL begins with calls to open a sound device which is used to process output and play it on attached hardware (speakers or headphones). Then, calls are made to allocate an AL context and associate it with the device. Once an AL context is allocated, the programmer is free to issue AL commands. Some calls are used to render sources (point and directional sources, looping or not), while others affect the rendering of these sources including how they are attenuated by distance and relative orientation.

## ***1.6. Implementor's View of OpenAL***

To the implementor, OpenAL is a set of commands that affect the operation of CPU and sound hardware. If the hardware consists only of an addressable output buffer, then OpenAL must be implemented almost entirely on the host CPU. In some cases audio

hardware provides DSP-based and other acceleration in various degrees. The OpenAL implementor's task is to provide the CPU software interface while dividing the work for each AL command between the CPU and the audio hardware. This division should be tailored to the available audio hardware to obtain optimum performance in carrying out AL calls.

OpenAL maintains a considerable amount of state information. This state controls how the sources are rendered into the output buffer. Some of this state is directly available to the user: he or she can make calls to obtain its value. Some of it, however, is visible only by the effect it has on what is rendered. One of the main goals of this specification is to make OpenAL state information explicit, to elucidate how it changes, and to indicate what its effects are.

### ***1.7. Our View***

We view OpenAL as a state machine that controls a multichannel processing system to synthesize a digital stream, passing sample data through a chain of parametrized digital audio signal processing operations. This model should engender a specification that satisfies the needs of both programmers and implementors. It does not, however, necessarily provide a model for implementation. Any proper implementation must produce results conforming to those produced by the specified methods, but there may be ways to carry out a particular computation that are more efficient than the one specified.

### ***1.8. Requirements, Conformance and Extensions***

The specification has to guarantee a minimum number of resources. However, implementations are encouraged to compete on performance, available resources, and output quality.

There is a set of conformance tests available along with the open source sample implementation. Vendors and individuals are encouraged to specify and implement extensions to OpenAL. Successful extensions will become part of the core specification as necessary and desirable. OpenAL implementations have to guarantee backwards compatibility and ABI compatibility for minor revisions.

The current sample implementation and documentation for OpenAL can be obtained from <http://www.openal.org/>.

### ***1.9. Architecture Review and Acknowledgments***

Like OpenGL, OpenAL is meant to evolve through a joined effort of implementors and

application programmers meeting in regular sessions of an Architecture Review Board (ARB). As of this time the ARB has not yet been set up.

Consequently OpenAL has been a long-term informal cooperative effort. The following list (in all likelihood incomplete) gives in alphabetical order participants in the discussion and contributors to the specification processes and related efforts:

Bob Aron, Juan Carlos Arevalo Baeza, Jonathan Blow, Keith Charley, Scott Draeker, Ryan Gordon, John Grantham, Jacob Hawley, Garin Hiebert, Carlos Hasan, Nathan Hill, Stephen Holmes, Bill Huey, Mike Jarosh, Jean-Marc Jot, Maxim Kizub, John Kraft, Bernd Kreimeier, Eric Lengyel, Alexandre Mah, Andrew McDonald, Adam Moss, Ian Ollmann, Rick Overman, Sean L. Palmer, Sven Panne, Daniel Peacock, Pierre Phaneuf, Terry Sikes, Joe Tennies, Jean-Michel Trivi, Joseph Valenzuela, Michael Vance, Carlo Vogelsang

## **2. OpenAL Operation**

### **2.1. OpenAL Fundamentals**

OpenAL is concerned with rendering audio into an output buffer and collecting audio data from an input buffer. OpenAL's primary use is assumed to be for spatialized audio. There is no support for MIDI.

OpenAL has three fundamental primitives or objects -- buffers, sources, and a single listener. Each object can be changed independently; the setting of one object does not affect the setting of others. The application can also set modes that affect processing. Modes are set, objects specified, and other OpenAL operations performed by sending commands in the form of function or procedure calls.

Sources store locations, directions, and other attributes of an object in 3D space and have a buffer associated with them for playback. When the program wants to play a sound, it controls execution through a source object. Sources are processed independently from each other.

Buffers store compressed or uncompressed audio data. It is common to initialize a large set of buffers when the program first starts (or at non-critical times during execution -- between levels in a game, for instance). Buffers are referred to by sources. Data (audio sample data) is associated with buffers.

There is only one listener (per audio context). The listener attributes are similar to source attributes, but are used to represent where the user is hearing the audio from. The influence of all the sources from the perspective of the listener is mixed and played for the user.

### **2.2. Primitive Types**

As OpenAL is meant to allow for seamless integration with OpenGL code if needed, the OpenAL library primitive (scalar) data types mimic the OpenGL data types. Guaranteed minimum sizes are stated for OpenGL data types, but the actual choice of C data type is left to the implementation. All implementations on a given binary architecture, however, must use a common definition of these data types.

Table 2.1: AL Primitive Data Types

<i>AL Type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>GL Type</i>
ALboolean	8-bit boolean	GLboolean
ALchar	character	GLchar
ALbyte	signed 8-bit 2's-complement integer	GLbyte
ALubyte	unsigned 8-bit integer	GLubyte
ALshort	signed 16-bit 2's-complement integer	GLshort
ALushort	unsigned 16-bit integer	GLushort
ALint	signed 32-bit 2's-complement integer	GLint
ALuint	unsigned 32-bit integer	GLuint
ALsizei	non-negative 32-bit binary integer size	GLsizei
ALenum	enumerated 32-bit value	GLenum
ALfloat	32-bit IEEE754 floating-point	GLfloat
ALdouble	64-bit IEEE754 floating-point	GLdouble

### 2.3. Floating-Point Computation

Any representable floating-point value is legal as input to an OpenAL command that requires floating point data. The result of providing a value that is not a floating point number to such a command is unspecified, but must not lead to OpenAL being interrupted or terminated. In IEEE arithmetic, for example, providing a negative zero or a denormalized number to an OpenAL command yields predictable results, while providing a NaN or infinity yields unspecified results.

Some calculations require division. In such cases (including implied divisions required by vector normalizations), a division by zero produces an unspecified result but must not lead to OpenAL interruption or termination.

### 2.4. AL State

OpenAL maintains considerable state. This document enumerates each state variable and describes how each variable can be changed. For purposes of discussion, state variables are categorized somewhat arbitrarily by their function. For example, although we describe operations that OpenAL performs on the implied output buffer, the output buffer is not part of the OpenAL's state. Certain states of OpenAL objects (e.g. buffer states with respect to queuing) are introduced for discussion purposes, but not exposed through the API.

## 2.5. AL Command Syntax

OpenAL's commands are functions or procedures. Various groups of commands perform the same operation but differ in how arguments are supplied to them. To conveniently accommodate this variation, we adopt the OpenGL notation for describing commands and their arguments.

## 2.6. Basic AL Operation

OpenAL can be used for a variety of audio playback tasks, and is an excellent complement to OpenGL for real-time rendering. A programmer who is familiar with OpenGL will immediately notice the similarities between the two APIs in that they describe their 3D environments using similar methods.

For an OpenGL/OpenAL program, most of the audio programming will be in two places in the code: initialization of the program, and the rendering loop. An OpenGL/OpenAL program will typically contain a section where the graphics and audio systems are initialized, although it may be spread into multiple functions. For OpenAL, initialization normally consists of creating a context, creating the initial set of buffers, loading the buffers with sample data, creating sources, attaching buffers to sources, setting locations and directions for the listener and sources, and setting the initial values for state global to OpenAL.

Initialization Example:

```
// Initialize Open AL
device = alcOpenDevice(NULL); // open default device
if (device != NULL) {
    context=alcCreateContext(device,NULL); // create context
    if (context != NULL) {
        alcMakeContextCurrent(context); //Set active context
    }
}
```

The audio update within the rendering loop normally consists of telling OpenAL the current locations of the sources and listener, updating the environment settings, and managing buffers.

Processing Loop Example:

```
// PlaceCamera - places OpenGL camera & updates OpenAL listener data
void AVEEnvironment::PlaceCamera()
{
    // update OpenGL camera position
    glMatrixMode(GL_PROJECTION);
    glLoadIdentity();
    glFrustum(-0.1333, 0.1333, -0.1, 0.1, 0.2, 50.0);

    gluLookAt(listenerPos[0], listenerPos[1], listenerPos[2],
              (listenerPos[0] + sin(listenerAngle)), listenerPos[1],
```

```

        (listenerPos[2] - cos(listenerAngle)),
        0.0, 1.0, 0.0);

// update OpenAL
// place listener at camera
alListener3f(AL_POSITION, listenerPos[0], listenerPos[1], listenerPos[2]);

float directionvect[6];
directionvect[0] = (float) sin(listenerAngle);
directionvect[1] = 0;
directionvect[2] = (float) cos(listenerAngle);
directionvect[3] = 0;
directionvect[4] = 1;
directionvect[5] = 0;
alListenerfv(AL_ORIENTATION, directionvect);
}

```

## 2.7. AL Errors

OpenAL detects only a subset of those conditions that could be considered errors. This is because in many cases error checking would adversely impact the performance of an error-free program. The command

`ALenum alGetError()`

is used to obtain error information. Each detectable error is assigned a numeric code. When an error is detected by AL, a flag is set and the error code is recorded. Further errors, if they occur, do not affect this recorded code. When `alGetError` is called, the code is returned and the flag is cleared, so that a further error will again record its code. If a call to `alGetError` returns `AL_NO_ERROR` then there has been no detectable error since the last call to `alGetError` (or since the AL was initialized).

Error codes can be mapped to strings. The `alGetString` function returns a pointer to a constant (literal) string that is identical to the identifier used for the enumeration value, as defined in the specification.

Table 2.2: Error Conditions

<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>
<code>AL_NO_ERROR</code>	There is no current error.
<code>AL_INVALID_NAME</code>	Invalid Name parameter.
<code>AL_INVALID_ENUM</code>	Invalid parameter.
<code>AL_INVALID_VALUE</code>	Invalid enum parameter value.
<code>AL_INVALID_OPERATION</code>	Illegal call.
<code>AL_OUT_OF_MEMORY</code>	Unable to allocate memory.



The table above summarizes the AL errors. When an error flag is set, results of AL operations are undefined only if `AL_OUT_OF_MEMORY` has occurred. In other cases, the command generating the error is ignored so that it has no effect on AL state or output buffer contents. If the error generating command returns a value, it returns zero. If the generating command modifies values through a pointer argument, no change is made to these values. These error semantics apply only to AL errors, not to system errors such as memory access errors.

Several error generation conditions are implicit in the description of the various AL commands. First, if a command that requires an enumerated value is passed a value that is not one of those specified as allowable for that command, the error `AL_INVALID_ENUM` results. This is the case even if the argument is a pointer to a symbolic constant if that value is not allowable for the given command. This will occur whether the value is allowable for other functions, or an invalid integer value.

Integer parameters that are used as names for OpenAL objects such as buffers and sources are checked for validity. If an invalid name parameter is specified in an OpenAL command, an `AL_INVALID_NAME` error will be generated and the command is ignored.

An attempt to set integral or floating point values out of the specified range will result in the error `AL_INVALID_VALUE`. The specification does not guarantee that the implementation emits `AL_INVALID_VALUE` if a NaN or infinity value is passed in for a float or double argument (as the specification does not enforce possibly expensive testing of floating point values).

Commands can be invalid. For example, certain commands might not be applicable to a given object. There are also illegal combinations of tokens and values as arguments to a command. OpenAL responds to any such illegal command with an `AL_INVALID_OPERATION` error.

If memory is exhausted as a side effect of the execution of an AL command, either on system level or by exhausting the allocated resources at AL's internal disposal, the error `AL_OUT_OF_MEMORY` may be generated. This can also happen independent of recent commands if OpenAL has to request memory for an internal task and fails to allocate the required memory from the operating system.

Otherwise errors are generated only for conditions that are explicitly described in this specification.

## **2.8. Controlling AL Execution**

The application can temporarily disable certain AL capabilities on a per Context basis. This allows the driver implementation to optimize for certain subsets of operations. Enabling and disabling capabilities is handled using a function pair.

```
void alEnable (ALenum target)
void alDisable (ALenum target)
```

The application can also query whether a given capability is currently enabled or not.

```
ALboolean alIsEnabled (ALenum target)
```

If the token used to specify target is not legal, an `AL_INVALID_ENUM` error will be generated.

At this time, this mechanism is not used. There are no valid targets.

## **2.9. Object Paradigm**

OpenAL is an object-oriented API, but it does not expose classes, structs, or other explicit data structures to the application.

### **2.9.1. Object Categories**

OpenAL has three primary categories of objects:

- one unique listener per context
- multiple buffers shared among all contexts (for one device)
- multiple sources, each local to a context

## **2.10. Static vs. Dynamic Objects**

The vast majority of OpenAL objects are dynamic, and will be created on application demand. There are also OpenAL objects that do not have to be created, and can not be created, on application demand. Currently, the listener is the only such static object in OpenAL.

## **2.11. Object Names**

Dynamic objects are manipulated using an integer, which in analogy to OpenGL is referred to as the object's "name." These are of type unsigned integer (ALuint). Names can be valid beyond the lifetime of the context they were requested if the objects in question can be shared among contexts. No guarantees or assumptions are made in the specification about the precise values or their distribution over the lifetime of the application. As objects might be shared, names are guaranteed to be unique within a class of OpenAL objects, but no guarantees are made across different classes of objects. Objects that are unique (singletons), like the listener, do not require and do not have an integer "name".

## **2.12. Requesting Object Names**

OpenAL provides calls to obtain object names. The application requests a number of objects of a given category using `alGen{Object}s`. The actual values of the names returned are implementation dependent. No guarantees on range or value are made.

Allocation of object names does not imply immediate allocation of resources or creation of objects: the implementation is free to defer this until a given object is actually used in mutator calls. The names are written at the memory location specified by the caller.

```
void alGenBuffers (ALsizei n, ALuint *bufferNames)
```

```
void alGenSources (ALsizei n, ALuint *sourceNames)
```

Requesting zero names is a legal NOP. OpenAL will respond with an `AL_INVALID_VALUE` error the implementation knows that it can not store `n` names in the given array or if the implementation knows that it can not generate the requested number of objects due to non-memory resource restrictions. OpenAL will respond with an `AL_OUT_OF_MEMORY` error if it can not allocate the objects due to lack of memory.

## **2.13. Releasing Object Names**

OpenAL releases object names using `alDelete{Object}s`, implicitly requesting deletion of the objects associated with the names released. If one or more of the specified Names is not valid, an `AL_INVALID_NAME` error will be caused, and no objects will be deleted.

Once deleted, the Names are no longer valid for use with any OpenAL function calls including calls to `alDeleteBuffers` or `alDeleteSources`. Any such use will cause an `AL_INVALID_NAME` error.

The OpenAL implementation is free to defer actual release of resources. Ideally,

resources should be released as soon as possible, but no guarantees are made.

```
void alDeleteBuffers(ALsizei n, ALuint *bufferName);
```

```
void alDeleteSources(ALsizei n, ALuint *sourceName);
```

A playing source can be deleted – the source will be stopped and then deleted. A buffer which is attached to a source can not be deleted.

## **2.14. Validating an Object Name**

OpenAL provides calls to validate the name of an object. The application can verify whether an object name is valid using the `alIs{Object}` query. There is no vector (array) version of this function as it defeats the purpose of unambiguous (in)validation. Returns `AL_TRUE` if `id` is a valid object name, and `AL_FALSE` otherwise. Object names are valid between request (`alGen{Object}s`) and release (`alDelete{Object}s`). `alIs{Object}` does not distinguish between invalid and deleted names.

```
ALboolean alIsBuffer (ALuint bufferName);
```

```
ALboolean alIsSource (ALuint sourceName);
```

## **2.15. Setting Object Attributes**

For OpenAL objects, calls to control their attributes are provided. These depend on the actual properties of a given object category. The precise API is discussed for each category, below. Each OpenAL command affecting the state of a named object is usually of the form

```
void al{Object}{n}{sifd}{v}(ALuint objectName, ALenum paramName, T values );
```

In the case of unnamed (unique) objects, the (integer) `objectName` is omitted, as it is implied by the `{Object}` part of function name:

```
void al{Object}{n}{sifd}{v} (ALenum paramName, T values );
```

For example, the `alListener3d` command would not require an (integer) `objectName` argument.

The `objectName` specifies the OpenAL object affected by this call. Use of an invalid name will cause an `AL_INVALID_NAME` error.

The object's attribute to be affected has to be named as `paramName`. OpenAL parameters

applicable to one category of objects are not necessarily legal for another category of OpenAL objects. Specification of a parameter illegal for a given object will cause an AL\_INVALID\_OPERATION error.

Not all possible values for a type will be legal for a given objectName and parameterName. Use of an illegal value or a NULL value pointer will cause an AL\_INVALID\_VALUE error.

Any command that causes an error is a NOP.

## 2.16. Querying Object Attributes

For named and for unique OpenAL objects, calls to query their current attributes are provided. These depend on the actual properties of a given object category. The performance of such queries is implementation dependent, no performance guarantees are made. The valid values for the parameter paramName are identical to the ones legal for the complementing attribute setting function.

```
void alGet{Object}{n}{if}{v} (uint objectName, enum paramName, T * destination);
```

For unnamed unique Objects, the objectName is omitted as it is implied by the function name:

```
void alGet{Object}{n}{if}{v} (enum paramName, T * destination);
```

Use of an invalid name will cause an AL\_INVALID\_NAME error. Specification of an illegal parameter type (token) will cause an AL\_INVALID\_ENUM error. A call with a destination NULL pointer will be quietly ignored. The OpenAL state will not be affected by errors. In case of errors, destination memory will not be changed.

## 2.17. Object Attributes

Attributes affecting the processing of sounds can be set for various OpenAL object categories, or might change as an effect of OpenAL calls. The vast majority of these object properties are specific to a single OpenAL object category, but some are applicable to two or more categories and are listed separately.

The general form in which this document describes parameters is:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
ParamName	T	Range or set	Scalar or n-tupel

Description:

The description specifies additional restrictions and details. paramName is given as the OpenAL enum defined as its name. T can be a list of legal signatures, usually the array form as well as the flat (unfolded) form.

## 3. State and State Requests

Most state data for OpenAL objects (the listener, sources, and buffers) is retrieved or set using `alGet{Object}` or `al{Object}` calls. There is some state information which is global to the OpenAL context, such as the current error state, Doppler parameters, and the distance model.

### 3.1. Querying OpenAL State

#### 3.1.1. Simple Queries

Like OpenGL, OpenAL uses a simplified interface for querying global state. The following functions accept a set of enumerations.

```
void alGetBooleanv (ALenum paramName, ALboolean *dest);
```

```
void alGetIntegerv(ALenum paramName, ALint *dest);
```

```
void alGetFloatv(ALenum paramName, ALfloat *dest);
```

```
void alGetDoublev(ALenum paramName, ALdouble *dest);
```

```
ALboolean alGetBoolean (ALenum paramName);
```

```
ALint alGetInteger(ALenum paramName);
```

```
ALfloat alGetFloat(ALenum paramName);
```

```
ALdouble alGetDouble(ALenum paramName);
```

Legal values are `AL_DOPPLER_FACTOR`, `AL_SPEED_OF_SOUND`, and `AL_DISTANCE_MODEL`. NULL destinations are quietly ignored.

`AL_INVALID_ENUM` is the response to errors in specifying `paramName`. The amount of memory required in the destination depends on the actual state requested.

Table 3.1: Integer Query Definitions

Name	Description
<code>AL_DOPPLER_FACTOR</code>	exaggeration factor for doppler effect
<code>AL_SPEED_OF_SOUND</code>	speed of sound in same units as velocities
<code>AL_DISTANCE_MODEL</code>	the current distance model

### 3.1.2. String Queries

The application can retrieve state information global to the current OpenAL context. `alGetString` will return a pointer to a constant string. Valid values for `param` are `AL_VERSION`, `AL_RENDERER`, `AL_VENDOR`, and `AL_EXTENSIONS`, as well as the error codes defined by OpenAL.

```
const ALchar * alGetString(ALenum paramName);
```

Table 3.2: String Query Definitions (other than error codes)

Name	Description
AL_VERSION	version string in format “<spec major number>.<spec minor number> <optional vendor version information>”
AL_RENDERER	information about the specific renderer
AL_VENDOR	the name of the vendor
AL_EXTENSIONS	a list of available extensions separated by spaces

### 3.2. Time and Frequency

By default, OpenAL uses seconds and Hertz as units for time and frequency, respectively. A float or integral value of one for a variable that specifies quantities like duration, latency, delay, or any other parameter measured as time, specifies 1 second. For frequency, the basic unit is 1/second, or Hertz. In other words, sample frequencies and frequency cut-offs or filter parameters specifying frequencies are expressed in units of Hertz.

### 3.3. Space and Distance

OpenAL does not define the units of measurement for distances. The application is free to use meters, inches, or parsecs. OpenAL provides means for simulating the natural attenuation of sound according to distance, and to exaggerate or reduce this effect. However, the resulting effects do not depend on the distance unit used by the application to express source and listener coordinates. OpenAL calculations are scale invariant.

The specification assumes Euclidean calculation of distances, and mandates that if two sources are sorted with respect to the Euclidean metric, the distance calculation used by the implementation has to preserve that order.



### **3.4. Attenuation By Distance**

Samples usually use the entire dynamic range of the chosen format/encoding, independent of their real world intensity. In other words, a jet engine and a clockwork both will have samples with full amplitude. The application will then have to adjust source gain accordingly to account for relative differences.

Source gain is then attenuated by distance. The effective attenuation of a source depends on many factors, among which distance attenuation and source and listener gain are only some of the contributing factors. Even if the source and listener gain exceed 1.0 (amplification beyond the guaranteed dynamic range), distance and other attenuation might ultimately limit the overall gain to a value below 1.0.

OpenAL currently supports three modes of operation with respect to distance attenuation, including one that is similar to the IASIG I3DL2 model. The application chooses one of these models (or chooses to disable distance-dependent attenuation) on a per-context basis.

```
void alDistanceModel(ALenum modelName);
```

Legal arguments are `AL_NONE`, `AL_INVERSE_DISTANCE`, `AL_INVERSE_DISTANCE_CLAMPED`, `AL_LINEAR_DISTANCE`, `AL_LINEAR_DISTANCE_CLAMPED`, `AL_EXPONENT_DISTANCE`, and `AL_EXPONENT_DISTANCE_CLAMPED`. `AL_NONE` bypasses all distance attenuation calculation for all sources. The implementation is expected to optimize this situation. `AL_INVERSE_DISTANCE_CLAMPED` is the IASIG I3DL2 model, with `AL_REFERENCE_DISTANCE` indicating both the reference distance and the distance below which gain will be clamped. `AL_INVERSE_DISTANCE` is equivalent to the IASIG I3DL2 model with the exception that `AL_REFERENCE_DISTANCE` does not imply any clamping. The linear models are not physically realistic, but do allow full attenuation of a source beyond a specified distance. The OpenAL implementation is still free to apply any range clamping as necessary. The current distance model chosen can be queried using `alGetInteger{v}` and `AL_DISTANCE_MODEL`.

With all the distance models, if the formula can not be evaluated then the source will not be attenuated. For example, if a linear model is being used with `AL_REFERENCE_DISTANCE` equal to `AL_MAX_DISTANCE`, then the gain equation will have a divide-by-zero error in it. In this case, there is no attenuation for that source.

#### **3.4.1. Inverse Distance Rolloff Model**

The following formula describes the distance attenuation defined by the Inverse Distance Attenuation Model.

$$\text{gain} = \text{AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE} / (\text{AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE} + \text{AL\_ROLLOFF\_FACTOR} * (\text{distance} - \text{AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE}));$$

The AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE parameter used here is a per-source attribute that can be set and queried using the AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE token.

AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE is the distance at which the listener will experience AL\_GAIN (unless the implementation had to clamp effective AL\_GAIN to the available dynamic range). AL\_ROLLOFF\_FACTOR is per-source parameter the application can use to increase or decrease the range of a source by decreasing or increasing the attenuation, respectively. The default value is 1. The implementation is free to optimize for a AL\_ROLLOFF\_FACTOR value of 0, which indicates that the application does not wish any distance attenuation on the respective source.

### 3.4.2. Inverse Distance Clamped Model

This is essentially the Inverse Distance Rolloff Model model, extended to guarantee that for distances below AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE, gain is clamped. This mode is equivalent to the IASIG I3DL2 distance model.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{distance} &= \max(\text{distance}, \text{AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE}); \\ \text{distance} &= \min(\text{distance}, \text{AL\_MAX\_DISTANCE}); \\ \text{gain} &= \text{AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE} / (\text{AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE} + \text{AL\_ROLLOFF\_FACTOR} * (\text{distance} - \text{AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE})); \end{aligned}$$

### 3.4.3. Linear Distance Rolloff Model

This models a linear dropoff in gain as distance increases between the source and listener.

$$\text{gain} = (1 - \text{AL\_ROLLOFF\_FACTOR} * (\text{distance} - \text{AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE}) / (\text{AL\_MAX\_DISTANCE} - \text{AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE}))$$

### 3.4.4. Linear Distance Clamped Model

This is the linear model, extended to guarantee that for distances below AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE, gain is clamped.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{distance} &= \max(\text{distance}, \text{AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE}) \\ \text{distance} &= \min(\text{distance}, \text{AL\_MAX\_DISTANCE}) \end{aligned}$$

$$\text{gain} = (1 - \text{AL\_ROLLOFF\_FACTOR} * (\text{distance} - \text{AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE}) / (\text{AL\_MAX\_DISTANCE} - \text{AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE}))$$

### 3.4.5. Exponential Distance Rolloff Model

This models an exponential dropoff in gain as distance increases between the source and listener.

$$\text{gain} = (\text{distance} / \text{AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE}) ^ (- \text{AL\_ROLLOFF\_FACTOR})$$

### 3.4.6. Exponential Distance Clamped Model

This is the exponential model, extended to guarantee that for distances below AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE, gain is clamped.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{distance} &= \max(\text{distance}, \text{AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE}) \\ \text{distance} &= \min(\text{distance}, \text{AL\_MAX\_DISTANCE}) \\ \text{gain} &= (\text{distance} / \text{AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE}) ^ (- \text{AL\_ROLLOFF\_FACTOR}) \end{aligned}$$

## 3.5. Evaluation of Gain/Attenuation Related State

While amplification/attenuation commute (multiplication of scaling factors), clamping operations do not. The order in which various gain related operations are applied is:

1. Distance attenuation is calculated first, including minimum (AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE) and maximum (AL\_MAX\_DISTANCE) thresholds.
2. The result is then multiplied by source gain.
3. If the source is directional (AL\_CONE\_INNER\_ANGLE less than AL\_CONE\_OUTER\_ANGLE), an angle-dependent attenuation is calculated depending on AL\_CONE\_OUTER\_GAIN, and multiplied with the distance dependent attenuation. The resulting attenuation factor for the given angle and distance between listener and source is multiplied with source AL\_GAIN.
4. The effective gain computed this way is compared against AL\_MIN\_GAIN and AL\_MAX\_GAIN thresholds.
5. The result is guaranteed to be clamped to [AL\_MIN\_GAIN, AL\_MAX\_GAIN], and subsequently multiplied by listener gain which serves as an overall volume control. The implementation is free to clamp listener gain if necessary due to hardware or implementation constraints.

### 3.5.1. No Culling By Distance

With the DS3D compatible Inverse Clamped Distance Model, OpenAL provides a per-source `AL_MAX_DISTANCE` attribute that can be used to define a distance beyond which the source will not be further attenuated by distance. The DS3D distance attenuation model and its clamping of volume is also extended by a mechanism to cull (mute) sources from processing, based on distance. However, the OpenAL does not support culling a source from processing based on a distance threshold.

At this time OpenAL is not meant to support culling at all. Culling based on distance, or bounding volumes, or other criteria, is best left to the application. For example, the application might employ sophisticated techniques to determine whether sources are audible that are beyond the scope of OpenAL. In particular, rule based culling inevitably introduces acoustic artifacts. E.g. if the listener-source distance is nearly equal to the culling threshold distance, but varies above and below, there will be popping artifacts in the absence of hysteresis.

### 3.5.2. Velocity Dependent Doppler Effect

The Doppler Effect depends on the velocities of source and listener relative to the medium, and the propagation speed of sound in that medium. The application might want to emphasize or de-emphasize the Doppler Effect as physically accurate calculation might not give the desired results. The amount of frequency shift (pitch change) is proportional to the speed of listener and source along their line of sight.

The Doppler Effect as implemented by OpenAL is described by the formula below. Effects of the medium (air, water) moving with respect to listener and source are ignored.

SS: `AL_SPEED_OF_SOUND` = speed of sound (default value 343.3)

DF: `AL_DOPPLER_FACTOR` = Doppler factor (default 1.0)

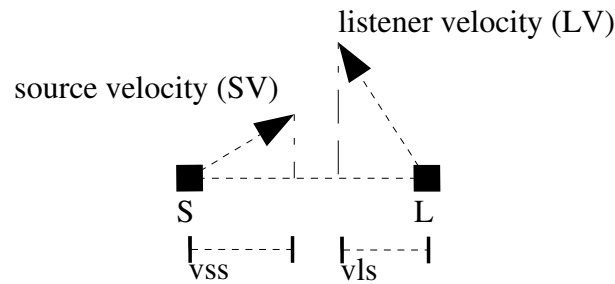
vls: Listener velocity scalar (scalar, projected on source-to-listener vector)

vss: Source velocity scalar (scalar, projected on source-to-listener vector)

f: Frequency of sample

f': effective Doppler shifted frequency

Graphic representation of vls and vss:



3D Mathematical representation of vls and vss:

$\text{Mag}(\text{vector}) = \sqrt{\text{vector.x} * \text{vector.x} + \text{vector.y} * \text{vector.y} + \text{vector.z} * \text{vector.z}}$

$\text{DotProduct}(\text{v1}, \text{v2}) = (\text{v1.x} * \text{v2.x} + \text{v1.y} * \text{v2.y} + \text{v1.z} * \text{v2.z})$

SL = source to listener vector

SV = Source Velocity vector

LV = Listener Velocity vector

$\text{vls} = \text{DotProduct}(\text{SL}, \text{LV}) / \text{Mag}(\text{SL})$

$\text{vss} = \text{DotProduct}(\text{SL}, \text{SV}) / \text{Mag}(\text{SL})$

Dopper Calculation:

$\text{vss} = \min(\text{vss}, \text{SS}/\text{DF})$

$\text{vls} = \min(\text{vls}, \text{SS}/\text{DF})$

$f' = f * (\text{SS} - \text{DF} * \text{vls}) / (\text{SS} - \text{DF} * \text{vss})$

There are two API calls global to the current context that provide control of the speed of sound and Doppler factor. `AL_DOPPLER_FACTOR` is a simple scaling of source and listener velocities to exaggerate or deemphasize the Doppler (pitch) shift resulting from the calculation.

```
void alDopplerFactor(ALfloat dopplerFactor);
```

A negative value will result in an `AL_INVALID_VALUE` error, the command is then ignored. The default value is 1. The current setting can be queried using `alGetFloat{v}` and `AL_DOPPLER_FACTOR`. The implementation is free to optimize the case of `AL_DOPPLER_FACTOR` being set to zero, as this effectively disables the effect.

`AL_SPEED_OF_SOUND` allows the application to change the reference (propagation) speed used in the Doppler calculation. The source and listener velocities should be

expressed in the same units as the speed of sound.

```
void alSpeedOfSound(ALfloat speed);
```

A negative or zero value will result in an `AL_INVALID_VALUE` error, and the command is ignored. The default value is 343.3 (appropriate for velocity units of meters and air as the propagation medium). The current setting can be queried using `alGetFloat {v}` and `AL_SPEED_OF_SOUND`.

Distance and velocity units are completely independent of one another (so you could use different units for each if desired).

***A note for OpenAL library implementors regarding OpenAL 1.0:***

*The OpenAL 1.1 Doppler implementation is different than that of OpenAL 1.0, because the older implementation was confusing and not implemented consistently. The new “speed of sound” property makes the 1.1 implementation more intuitive than the old implementation. If your implementation wants to support the deprecated `AL_DOPPLER_VELOCITY` parameter, the above formula can be changed to the following:*

$$\begin{aligned}vss &= \min(vss, (SS * DV)/DF) \\vls &= \min(vls, (SS * DV)/DF) \\f' &= f * (SS * DV - DF*vls) / (SS * DV - DF*vss)\end{aligned}$$

*OpenAL 1.1 programmers would never use `AL_DOPPLER_VELOCITY` (which defaults to 1.0f).*

## 4. Listener and Sources

### 4.1. Basic Listener and Source Attributes

This section introduces basic attributes that can be set both for the listener object and for source objects. The “Signature” for each attribute refers to the type or types which can be used to represent that attribute. For instance, AL\_POSITION can be represented with a floating-point vector (“fv” -- alGetSourcefv or alSourcefv) or with three individual floating-point values (“3f” -- alGetSource3f or alSource3f).

The OpenAL listener object and source objects have attributes to describe their position, velocity and orientation in three dimensional space. OpenAL -- like OpenGL -- uses a right-handed Cartesian coordinate system (RHS), where in a frontal default view X (thumb) points right, Y (index finger) points up, and Z (middle finger) points towards the viewer/camera. To switch from a left handed coordinate system (LHS) to a right handed coordinate systems, flip the sign on the Z coordinate.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_POSITION	fv, 3f, iv, 3i	Any except NaN	{0.0f, 0.0f, 0.0f}

Description:

AL\_POSITION specifies the current location of the object in the world coordinate system. Any 3-tuple of valid float values is allowed. Implementation behavior on encountering NaN and infinity is not defined. The object position is always defined in the world coordinate system.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_VELOCITY	fv, 3f, iv, 3i	Any except NaN	{0.0f, 0.0f, 0.0f}

Description:

AL\_VELOCITY specifies the current velocity (speed and direction) of the object, in the world coordinate system. Any 3-tuple of valid float/double values is allowed. The object AL\_VELOCITY does not affect its position. OpenAL does not calculate the velocity from subsequent position updates, nor does it adjust the position over time based on the specified velocity. Any such calculation is left to the application. For the purposes of sound processing, position and velocity are independent parameters affecting different aspects of the sounds.

AL\_VELOCITY is taken into account by the driver to synthesize the Doppler effect perceived by the listener for each source, based on the velocity of both source and

listener, and the Doppler related parameters.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_GAIN	f, fv	Any except NaN	1.0f

Description:

AL\_GAIN defines a scalar amplitude multiplier. As a source attribute, it applies to that particular source only. As a listener attribute, it effectively applies to all sources in the current context. The default 1.0 means that the sound is unattenuated. An AL\_GAIN value of 0.5 is equivalent to an attenuation of 6 dB. The value zero equals silence (no output). Driver implementations are free to optimize this case and skip mixing and processing stages where applicable. The implementation is in charge of ensuring artifact-free (click-free) changes of gain values and is free to defer actual modification of the sound samples, within the limits of acceptable latencies.

AL\_GAIN larger than 1 (amplification) is permitted for source and listener. However, the implementation is free to clamp the total gain (effective gain per source times listener gain) to 1 to prevent overflow.

## 4.2. Listener Object

The listener object defines various properties that affect processing of the sound for the actual output. The listener is unique for an OpenAL Context, and has no name. By controlling the listener, the application controls the way the user experiences the virtual world, as the listener defines the sampling/pickup point and orientation, and other parameters that affect the output stream.

It is entirely up to the driver and hardware configuration, i.e. the installation of OpenAL as part of the operating system and hardware setup, whether the output stream is generated for headphones or 2 speakers, 4.1 speakers, or other arrangements, whether (and which) HRTF's are applied, etc...

### 4.2.1. Listener Attributes

Several source attributes also apply to listener: e.g. AL\_POSITION, AL\_VELOCITY, AL\_GAIN. In addition, some attributes are listener specific.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_ORIENTATION	fv, iv	Any except NaN	{{(0.0f, 0.0f, -1.0f), (0.0f, 1.0f, 0.0f)}



Description:

AL\_ORIENTATION is a pair of 3-tuples consisting of a 'at' vector and an 'up' vector, where the 'at' vector represents the 'forward' direction of the listener and the orthogonal projection of the 'up' vector into the subspace perpendicular to the 'at' vector represents the 'up' direction for the listener. OpenAL expects two vectors that are linearly independent. These vectors are not expected to be normalized. If the two vectors are linearly dependent, behavior is undefined.

### **4.2.2. Changing Listener Attributes**

Listener attributes are changed using the listener group of commands.

```
void alListener{n}{if}{v}(ALenum paramName, T values);
```

### **4.2.3. Querying Listener Attributes**

Listener state is maintained inside the OpenAL implementation and can be queried in full. See Querying Object Attributes. The valid values for paramName are identical to the ones for the listener\* command.

```
void alGetListener{n}{if}{v}(ALenum param, T *values);
```

## **4.3. Source Objects**

Sources specify attributes like position, velocity, and a buffer with sample data. By controlling a source's attributes the application can modify and parameterize the static sample data provided by the buffer referenced by the source. Sources define a localized sound, and encapsulate a set of attributes applied to a sound at its origin, i.e. in the very first stage of the processing on the way to the listener. Source related effects have to be applied before listener related effects unless the output is invariant to any collapse or reversal of order. OpenAL also provides additional functions to manipulate and query the execution state of sources: the current playing status of a source (started, stopped, paused), including access to the current sampling position within the associated buffer.

### **4.3.1. Managing Source Names**

OpenAL provides calls to request and release source names handles. Calls to control source execution state are also provided.

#### ***Requesting a Source Name***

The application requests a number of sources using alGenSources.

```
void alGenSources(ALsizei n, ALuint *srcNames);
```

This call creates *n* sources, putting the source names in the *srcNames* array.

### **Releasing Source Names**

The application requests deletion of a number of sources by *alDeleteSources*.

```
void alDeleteSources(ALsizei n, ALuint *sources);
```

### **Validating a Source Name**

The application can verify whether a source name is valid using the *alIsSource* query.

```
ALboolean alIsSource (ALuint sourceName);
```

## **4.3.2. Source Attributes**

This section lists the attributes that are set per source, affecting the processing of the current buffer. Some of these attributes can also be set for buffer queue entries.

### **Source Positioning**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_SOURCE_RELATIVE	i, iv	AL_TRUE, AL_FALSE	AL_FALSE

Description:

AL\_SOURCE\_RELATIVE set to AL\_TRUE indicates that the values specified by AL\_POSITION and AL\_VELOCITY are to be interpreted relative to the listener position.

### **Source Type**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_SOURCE_TYPE	i, iv	AL_UNDETERMINED, AL_STATIC, AL_STREAMING	AL_UNDETERMINED

Description:

AL\_SOURCE\_TYPE is a read-only property indicating whether a source is ready to queue buffers, ready to use a static buffer, or is in an undetermined state where it can be used for either streaming or static playback.

When first created, a source will be in the AL\_UNDETERMINED state. If a buffer is

then attached using `alSourceci(sid, AL_BUFFER, bid)`, then the source will enter the `AL_STATIC` state. If the first buffer attached to a source is attached using `alSourceQueueBuffers`, then the source will enter the `AL_STREAMING` state. Attaching the `NULL` buffer using `alSourceci(sid, AL_BUFFER, NULL)` to a source of either type will reset the state to `AL_UNDETERMINED`, and attaching any buffer to a streaming source will change the state to `AL_STATIC`.

Attempting to queue a buffer on a static source will result in an `AL_INVALID_OPERATION` error.

### **Buffer Looping**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
<code>AL_LOOPING</code>	i, iv	<code>AL_TRUE</code> , <code>AL_FALSE</code>	<code>AL_FALSE</code>

Description:

`AL_LOOPING` is a flag that indicates that the source will not be in `AL_STOPPED` state once it reaches the end of last buffer in the buffer queue. Instead, the source will immediately promote to `AL_INITIAL` and `AL_PLAYING`. The default value is `AL_FALSE`. `AL_LOOPING` can be changed on a source in any execution state. In particular, it can be changed on a `AL_PLAYING` source.

### **Current Buffer**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
<code>AL_BUFFER</code>	i, iv	any valid bufferName	<code>AL_NONE</code>

Description:

Specifies the current buffer object, making it the head entry in the source's queue. Using `AL_BUFFER` on a source in the `AL_STOPPED` or `AL_INITIAL` state empties the entire queue, then appends the one buffer specified.

For a source in the `AL_PLAYING` or `AL_PAUSED` state, setting `AL_BUFFER` will result in the `AL_INVALID_OPERATION` error state being set. `AL_BUFFER` can be applied only to sources in the `AL_INITIAL` and `AL_STOPPED` states. Specifying an invalid buffer name (either because the buffer name doesn't exist or because that buffer can't be attached to the specified source) will result in an `AL_INVALID_VALUE` error while specifying an invalid source name results in an `AL_INVALID_NAME` error.

AL\_NONE (NULL or 0), is a valid buffer name. alSourcei(sName, AL\_BUFFER, AL\_NONE) is a legal way to release the current buffer queue on a source in the AL\_INITIAL or AL\_STOPPED state, whether the source has just one entry (current buffer) or more. The alSourcei(sName, AL\_BUFFER, AL\_NONE) call still causes an AL\_INVALID\_OPERATION for any source in the AL\_PLAYING or AL\_PAUSED state, consequently it cannot be used to mute or stop a source.

### **Queue State Queries**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_BUFFERS_QUEUED	i, iv	[0, any]	none

Query only. Query the number of buffers in the queue of a given source. This includes those not yet played, the one currently playing, and the ones that have been played already. This will return 0 if the current and only buffer name is 0.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_BUFFERS_PROCESSED	i, iv	[0, any]	none

Query only. Query the number of buffers that have been played by a given source. Indirectly, this gives the index of the buffer currently playing. Used to determine how much slots are needed for unqueuing them. On a source in the AL\_STOPPED state, all buffers are processed. On a source in the AL\_INITIAL state, no buffers are processed, all buffers are pending. This will return 0 if the current and only buffer name is 0.

### **Bounds on Gain**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_MIN_GAIN	f, fv	[0.0f, 1.0f]	0.0f

Description:

AL\_MIN\_GAIN is a scalar amplitude threshold. It indicates the minimal AL\_GAIN that is always guaranteed for this source. At the end of the processing of various attenuation factors such as distance based attenuation and source AL\_GAIN, the effective gain calculated is compared to this value. If the effective gain is lower than AL\_MIN\_GAIN, AL\_MIN\_GAIN is applied. This happens before the listener gain is applied. If a zero AL\_MIN\_GAIN is set, then the effective gain will not be corrected.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_MAX_GAIN	f, fv	[0.0f, 1.0f]	1.0f

Description:

AL\_MAX\_GAIN defines a scalar amplitude threshold. It indicates the maximal AL\_GAIN permitted for this source. At the end of the processing of various attenuation factors such as distance based attenuation and source AL\_GAIN, the effective gain calculated is compared to this value. If the effective gain is higher than AL\_MAX\_GAIN, AL\_MAX\_GAIN is applied. This happens before the listener AL\_GAIN is applied. If the listener gain times AL\_MAX\_GAIN still exceeds the maximum gain the implementation can handle, the implementation is free to clamp. If a zero AL\_MAX\_GAIN is set, then the source is effectively muted. The implementation is free to optimize for this situation, but no optimization is required or recommended as setting GAIN to zero is the proper way to mute a source.

### **Distance Model Attributes**

Table 4-12. REFERENCE\_DISTANCE Attribute

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_REFERENCE_DISTANCE	f, fv, i, iv	[0, any]	1.0f

This is used for distance attenuation calculations based on inverse distance with rolloff. Depending on the distance model it will also act as a distance threshold below which gain is clamped. See the section on distance models for details.

Table 4-13. ROLLOFF\_FACTOR Attribute

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_ROLLOFF_FACTOR	f, fv, i, iv	[0, any]	1.0f

This is used for distance attenuation calculations based on inverse distance with rolloff. For distances smaller than AL\_MAX\_DISTANCE (and, depending on the distance model, larger than AL\_REFERENCE\_DISTANCE), this will scale the distance attenuation over the applicable range. See section on distance models for details how the attenuation is computed as a function of the distance.

In particular, AL\_ROLLOFF\_FACTOR can be set to zero for those sources that are supposed to be exempt from distance attenuation. The implementation is encouraged to optimize this case, bypassing distance attenuation calculation entirely on a per-source basis.

Table 4-14. MAX\_DISTANCE Attribute

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_MAX_DISTANCE	f, fv, i, iv	[0, any]	MAX_FLOAT

This is used for distance attenuation calculations based on inverse distance with rolloff, if the Inverse Clamped Distance Model is used. In this case, distances greater than AL\_MAX\_DISTANCE will be clamped to AL\_MAX\_DISTANCE.

AL\_MAX\_DISTANCE based clamping is applied before AL\_MIN\_GAIN clamping, so if the effective gain at AL\_MAX\_DISTANCE is larger than AL\_MIN\_GAIN, AL\_MIN\_GAIN will have no effect. No culling is supported.

### **Frequency Shift by Pitch**

Table 4-15. SOURCE\_PITCH Attribute

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_PITCH	f, fv	(0.0f, any]	1.0f

Description:

Desired pitch shift, where 1.0 equals identity. Each reduction by 50 percent equals a pitch shift of -12 semitones (one octave reduction). Each doubling equals a pitch shift of 12 semitones (one octave increase). Zero is not a legal value. Implementations may clamp the actual output pitch range to any values subject to the implementation's own limits.

### **Direction and Cone**

Each source can be directional, depending on the settings for AL\_CONE\_INNER\_ANGLE and AL\_CONE\_OUTER\_ANGLE. There are three zones defined: the inner cone, the outside zone, and the transitional zone in between. The angle-dependent gain for a directional source is constant inside the inner cone, and changes over the transitional zone to the value specified outside the outer cone. Source AL\_GAIN is applied for the inner cone, with an application selectable AL\_CONE\_OUTER\_GAIN factor to define the gain in the outer zone. In the transitional zone implementation-dependent interpolation between AL\_GAIN and AL\_GAIN times AL\_CONE\_OUTER\_GAIN is applied.

Table 4-16. Source DIRECTION Attribute

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_DIRECTION	fv, 3f, iv, 3i	Any except NaN	(0.0f, 0.0f, 0.0f)

Description:

If `AL_DIRECTION` does not equal the zero vector, the source is directional. The sound emission is presumed to be symmetric around the direction vector (cylinder symmetry). sources are not oriented in full 3 degrees of freedom, only two angles are effectively needed.

The zero vector is default, indicating that a source is not directional. Specifying a non-zero vector will make the source directional. Specifying a zero vector for a directional source will effectively mark it as non-directional.

Table 4-17. Source `CONE_INNER_ANGLE` Attribute

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
<code>AL_CONE_INNER_ANGLE</code>	f, fv, i, iv	Any except NaN	360.0f

Description:

Inside angle of the sound cone, in degrees. The default of 360 means that the inner angle covers the entire world, which is equivalent to an omni-directional source.

Table 4-18. Source `CONE_OUTER_ANGLE` Attribute

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
<code>AL_CONE_OUTER_ANGLE</code>	f, fv, i, iv	Any except NaN	360.0f

Description: Outer angle of the sound cone, in degrees. The default of 360 means that the outer angle covers the entire world. If the inner angle is also 360, then the zone for angle-dependent attenuation is zero.

Table 4-19. Source `CONE_OUTER_GAIN` Attribute

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
<code>AL_CONE_OUTER_GAIN</code>	f, fv	[0.0f, 1.0f]	0.0f

Description: the factor with which `AL_GAIN` is multiplied to determine the effective gain outside the cone defined by the outer angle. The effective gain applied outside the outer cone is `AL_GAIN` times `AL_CONE_OUTER_GAIN`. Changing `AL_GAIN` affects all directions, i.e. the source is attenuated in all directions, for any position of the listener. The application has to change `AL_CONE_OUTER_GAIN` as well if a different behavior is desired.

## Offset

Table 4-20. Source AL\_SEC\_OFFSET Attribute

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_SEC_OFFSET	f, fv, i, iv	[0.0f, any]	N/A

Description: the playback position, expressed in seconds (the value will loop back to zero for looping sources).

When setting AL\_SEC\_OFFSET on a source which is already playing, the playback will jump to the new offset unless the new offset is out of range, in which case an AL\_INVALID\_VALUE error is set. If the source is not playing, then the offset will be applied on the next alSourcePlay call.

The position is relative to the beginning of all the queued buffers for the source, and any queued buffers traversed by a set call will be marked as processed.

This value is based on byte position, so a pitch-shifted source will have an exaggerated playback speed. For example, you can be 0.500 seconds into a buffer having taken only 0.250 seconds to get there if the pitch is set to 2.0.

Table 4-21. Source AL\_SAMPLE\_OFFSET Attribute

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_SAMPLE_OFFSET	f, fv, i, iv	[0.0f, any]	N/A

Description: the playback position, expressed in samples (the value will loop back to zero for looping sources). For a compressed format, this value will represent an exact offset within the uncompressed data.

When setting AL\_SAMPLE\_OFFSET on a source which is already playing, the playback will jump to the new offset unless the new offset is out of range, in which case an AL\_INVALID\_VALUE error is set. If the source is not playing, then the offset will be applied on the next alSourcePlay call. An alSourceStop, alSourceRewind, or a second alSourcePlay call will reset the offset to the beginning of the buffer.

The position is relative to the beginning of all the queued buffers for the source, and any queued buffers traversed by a set call will be marked as processed.



Table 4-22. Source AL\_BYTE\_OFFSET Attribute

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_BYTE_OFFSET	f, fv, i, iv	[0.0f, any]	N/A

Description: the playback position, expressed in bytes (the value will loop back to zero for looping sources). For a compressed format, this value may represent an approximate offset within the compressed data buffer.

When setting AL\_BYTE\_OFFSET on a source which is already playing, the playback will jump to the new offset unless the new offset is out of range, in which case an AL\_INVALID\_VALUE error is set. If the source is not playing, then the offset will be applied on the next alSourcePlay call. An alSourceStop, alSourceRewind, or a second alSourcePlay call will reset the offset to the beginning of the buffer.

The position is relative to the beginning of all the queued buffers for the source, and any queued buffers traversed by a set call will be marked as processed.

### 4.3.3. Changing Source Attributes

The source specifies the position and other properties as taken into account during sound processing.

```
void alSource{n}{if} (ALuint sourceName, ALenum paramName, T value);
```

```
void alSource{n}{if}v (ALuint sourceName, ALenum paramName, T *values);
```

### 4.3.4. Querying Source Attributes

Source state is maintained inside the OpenAL implementation, and the current attributes can be queried. The performance of such queries is implementation dependent, no performance guarantees are made. The valid values for the paramName parameter are identical to the ones for the source set calls.

```
void alGetSource{n}{if}{v} (ALuint sourceName, ALenum paramName, T *values);
```

### 4.3.5. Queuing Buffers with a Source

OpenAL does not specify a built-in streaming mechanism. There is no mechanism to stream data into a buffer object. Instead, the API has a more flexible and versatile mechanism to queue buffers for sources.

There are many ways to use this feature, with streaming being only one of them.

Streaming is replaced by queuing static buffers. This effectively moves any multi-buffer caching into the application and allows the application to select how many buffers it wants to use, the size of the buffers, and whether these are re-used in cycle, pooled, or thrown away.

Looping (over a finite number of repetitions) can be implemented by explicitly repeating buffers in the queue. Infinite loops can (theoretically) be accomplished by sufficiently large repetition counters. If only a single buffer is supposed to be repeated infinitely, using the respective source attribute is recommended.

Loop Points for restricted looping inside a buffer can in many cases be replaced by splitting the sample into several buffers and queuing the sample fragments (including repetitions) accordingly.

Buffers can be queued, unqueued after they have been used, and either be deleted, or refilled and queued again. Splitting large samples over several buffers maintained in a queue has a distinct advantages over approaches that require explicit management of samples and sample indices.

### ***Queuing Command***

The application can queue up one or multiple buffer names using `alSourceQueueBuffers`. The buffers will be queued in the sequence in which they appear in the array.

```
void alSourceQueueBuffers (ALuint sourceName, ALsizei numBuffers,  
                          ALuint *bufferNames);
```

This command is legal on a source in any playback state (to allow for streaming, queuing has to be possible on a `AL_PLAYING` source).

All buffers in a queue must have the same format and attributes, with the exception of the NULL buffer (i.e., 0) which can always be queued. An attempt to mix formats or other buffer attributes will result in a failure and an `AL_INVALID_VALUE` error will be thrown. If the queue operation fails, the source queue will remain unchanged (even if some of the buffers could have been queued).

### ***Unqueuing Command***

Once a queue entry for a buffer has been appended to a queue and is pending processing, it should not be changed. Removal of a given queue entry is not possible unless either the source is stopped (in which case then entire queue is considered processed), or if the queue entry has already been processed (`AL_PLAYING` or `AL_PAUSED` source). A playing source will enter the `AL_STOPPED` state if it completes playback of the last

buffer in its queue (the same behavior as when a single buffer has been attached to a source and has finished playback).

The `alSourceUnqueueBuffers` command removes a number of buffers entries that have finished processing, in the order of appearance, from the queue. The operation will fail with an `AL_INVALID_VALUE` error if more buffers are requested than available, leaving the destination arguments unchanged.

```
void alSourceUnqueueBuffers (ALuint sourceName, ALsizei numEntries,  
                             ALuint *bufferNames);
```

### **4.3.6. Managing Source Execution**

The execution state of a source can be queried. OpenAL provides a set of functions that initiate state transitions causing sources to start and stop execution.

#### ***Source State Query***

The application can query the current state of any source using `alGetSource` with the parameter name `AL_SOURCE_STATE`. Each source can be in one of four possible execution states: `AL_INITIAL`, `AL_PLAYING`, `AL_PAUSED`, `AL_STOPPED`. Sources that are either `AL_PLAYING` or `AL_PAUSED` are considered active. Sources that are `AL_STOPPED` or `AL_INITIAL` are considered inactive. Only `AL_PLAYING` sources are included in the processing. The implementation is free to skip those processing stages for sources that have no effect on the output (e.g. mixing for a source muted by zero GAIN, but not sample offset increments). Depending on the current state of a source certain (e.g. repeated) state transition commands are legal NOPs: they will be ignored, no error is generated.

#### ***State Transition Commands***

The default state of any source is `INITIAL`. From this state it can be propagated to any other state by appropriate use of the commands below. There are no irreversible state transitions.

```
void alSourcePlay (ALuint sName);
```

```
void alSourcePause (ALuint sName);
```

```
void alSourceStop (ALuint sName);
```

```
void alSourceRewind (ALuint sName);
```

The functions are also available as a vector variant, which guarantees synchronized

operation on a set of sources.

```
void alSourcePlayv (ALsizei n, const ALuint * sNames);
```

```
void alSourcePausev (ALsizei n, cost ALuint *sNames);
```

```
void alSourceStopv (ALsizei n, const ALuint *sNames);
```

```
void alSourceRewindv (ALsizei n, const ALuint *sNames);
```

The following state/command/state transitions are defined:

- alSourcePlay applied to an AL\_INITIAL source will promote the source to AL\_PLAYING, thus the data found in the buffer will be fed into the processing, starting at the beginning. alSourcePlay applied to a AL\_PLAYING source will restart the source from the beginning. It will not affect the configuration, and will leave the source in AL\_PLAYING state, but reset the sampling offset to the beginning. alSourcePlay applied to a AL\_PAUSED source will resume processing using the source state as preserved at the alSourcePause operation. alSourcePlay applied to a AL\_STOPPED source will propagate it to AL\_INITIAL then to AL\_PLAYING immediately.
- alSourcePause applied to an AL\_INITIAL source is a legal NOP. alSourcePause applied to a AL\_PLAYING source will change its state to AL\_PAUSED. The source is exempt from processing, its current state is preserved. alSourcePause applied to a AL\_PAUSED source is a legal NOP. alSourcePause applied to a AL\_STOPPED source is a legal NOP.
- alSourceStop applied to an AL\_INITIAL source is a legal NOP. alSourceStop applied to a AL\_PLAYING source will change its state to AL\_STOPPED. The source is exempt from processing, its current state is preserved. alSourceStop applied to a AL\_PAUSED source will change its state to AL\_STOPPED, with the same consequences as on a AL\_PLAYING source. alSourceStop applied to a AL\_STOPPED source is a legal NOP.
- alSourceRewind applied to an AL\_INITIAL source is a legal NOP. alSourceRewind applied to a AL\_PLAYING source will change its state to AL\_STOPPED then AL\_INITIAL. The source is exempt from processing; its current state is preserved, with the exception of the sampling offset, which is reset to the beginning. alSourceRewind applied to a AL\_PAUSED source will change its state to AL\_INITIAL, with the same consequences as on a AL\_PLAYING source. alSourceRewind applied to an AL\_STOPPED source promotes the source to AL\_INITIAL, resetting the sampling offset to the beginning.

## ***Resetting Configuration***

The AL\_INITIAL state is not necessarily identical to the default state in which source is created. AL\_INITIAL merely indicates that the source can be executed using the alSourcePlay command. An AL\_STOPPED or AL\_INITIAL source can be reset into the default configuration by using a sequence of source commands as necessary. As the application has to specify all relevant state anyway to create a useful source configuration, no reset command is provided.

## 5. Buffers

A buffer encapsulates OpenAL state related to storing sample data. The application can request and release buffer objects, and fill them with data. Data can be supplied compressed and encoded as long as the format is supported. Buffers can, internally, contain waveform data as uncompressed or compressed samples.

Unlike source and listener objects, buffer objects can be shared among AL contexts. Buffers are referenced by sources. A single buffer can be referred to by multiple sources. This separation allows drivers and hardware to optimize storage and processing where applicable.

The simplest supported format for buffer data is PCM. PCM data is assumed to use the processor's native byte order. Other formats use the byte order native to that format.

### 5.1. Buffer States

At this time, buffer states are defined for purposes of discussion. The states described in this section are not exposed through the API (can not be queried, or be set directly), and the state description used in the implementation might differ from this.

A buffer is considered to be in one of the following States, with respect to all sources:

- **UNUSED:** the buffer is not included in any queue for any source. In particular, the buffer is neither pending nor current for any source. The buffer name can be deleted at this time.
- **PROCESSED:** the buffer is listed in the queue of at least one source, but is neither pending nor current for any source. The buffer can be deleted as soon as it has been unqueued for all sources it is queued with.
- **PENDING:** there is at least one source for which the buffer has been queued, for which the buffer data has not yet been dereferenced. The buffer can only be unqueued for those sources that have dereferenced the data in the buffer in its entirety, and cannot be deleted or changed.

The buffer state is dependent on the state of all sources that it has been queued for. A single queue occurrence of a buffer propagates the buffer state (over all sources) from UNUSED to PROCESSED or higher. Sources that are in the AL\_STOPPED or AL\_INITIAL states still have queue entries that cause buffers to be PROCESSED.

A single queue entry with a single source for which the buffer is not yet PROCESSED propagates the buffer's queuing state to PENDING.

Buffers that are PROCESSED for a given source can be unqueued from that source's

queue. Buffers that have been unqueued from all sources are UNUSED. Buffers that are UNUSED can be deleted, or changed by alBufferData commands.

## **5.2. Managing Buffer Names**

OpenAL provides calls to obtain buffer names, to request deletion of a buffer object associated with a valid buffer name, and to validate a buffer name. Calls to control buffer attributes are also provided.

### **5.2.1. Requesting Buffers Names**

The application requests a number of buffers using alGenBuffers.

```
void alGenBuffers (ALsizei n, ALuint *bufferNames);
```

### **5.2.2. Releasing Buffer Names**

The application requests deletion of a number of buffers by calling alDeleteBuffers.

Once deleted, names are no longer valid for use with AL function calls. Any such use will cause an AL\_INVALID\_NAME error. The implementation is free to defer actual release of resources.

```
void alDeleteBuffers(ALsizei n, const ALuint *bufferNames);
```

alIsBuffer(bname) can be used to verify deletion of a buffer. Deleting buffer name 0 is a legal NOP .

### **5.2.3. Validating a Buffer Name**

The application can verify whether a buffer name is valid using the alIsBuffer query.

```
boolean alIsBuffer (ALuint bufferName);
```

## **5.3. Manipulating Buffer Attributes**

### **5.3.1. Buffer Attributes**

This section lists the buffer attributes that can queried. Note that the listed attributes are set using alBufferData.

Querying the attributes of a buffer with a buffer name that is not valid throws an AL\_INVALID\_OPERATION. Passing in an attribute name that is invalid throws an

AL\_INVALID\_VALUE error.

Table 5-1. Buffer FREQUENCY Attribute

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_FREQUENCY	i, iv	(0, any]	0

Description: Frequency, specified in samples per second, i.e. units of Hertz [Hz]. Query by alGetBuffer. The frequency state of a buffer is set by alBufferData calls.

Table 5-2. Buffer SIZE Attribute

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_SIZE	i, iv	[0, MAX_UINT]	0

Description: Size in bytes of the buffer data. Query through alGetBuffer, can be set only using alBufferData calls. Setting a AL\_SIZE of 0 is a legal NOP.

Table 5-3. Buffer BITS Attribute

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_BITS	i, iv	8, 16	16

Description: The number of bits per sample for the data contained in the buffer. Query by alGetBuffer. The number of bits is set by alBufferData calls.

Table 5-4. Buffer CHANNELS Attribute

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Default</i>
AL_CHANNELS	i, iv	1, 2	1

Description: The number of channels for the data contained in the buffer. Query by alGetBuffer. The number of channels is set by alBufferData calls.

### 5.3.2. Changing Buffer Attributes

A buffer-related extension may wish to set its own buffer attributes using one of the following calls:

```
void alBuffer{n}{if} (ALuint sourceName, ALenum paramName, T value);
```

```
void alBuffer{n}{if}v (ALuint sourceName, ALenum paramName, T *values);
```



### 5.3.3. Querying Buffer Attributes

Buffer state is maintained inside the OpenAL implementation and can be queried in full. The valid values for paramName are AL\_FREQUENCY, AL\_SIZE, AL\_BITS, and AL\_CHANNELS.

```
void alGetBuffer{n}{if}{v} (ALuint bufferName, ALenum paramName, T *values);
```

### 5.3.4. Specifying Buffer Content

A special case of buffer state is the actual sound sample data stored in association with the buffer. Applications can specify sample data using alBufferData.

```
void alBufferData (ALuint bufferName, ALenum format,  
    const ALvoid *data, ALsizei size, ALuint frequency);
```

The data specified is copied to an internal software, or if possible, hardware buffer. The implementation is free to apply decompression, conversion, resampling, and filtering as needed. The internal format of the buffer is not exposed to the application, and not accessible. Valid formats are AL\_FORMAT\_MONO8, AL\_FORMAT\_MONO16, AL\_FORMAT\_STEREO8, and AL\_FORMAT\_STEREO16. An implementation may expose other formats, see the chapter on Extensions for information on determining if additional formats are supported.

Buffers containing audio data with more than one channel will be played without 3D spatialization features – these formats are normally used for background music.

Applications should always check for an error condition after attempting to specify buffer data in case an implementation has to generate an AL\_OUT\_OF\_MEMORY or conversion related AL\_INVALID\_VALUE error. The application is free to reuse the memory specified by the data pointer once the call to alBufferData returns. The implementation has to dereference, e.g. copy, the data during alBufferData execution.

## 6. AL Contexts and the ALC API

This section of the AL specification describes ALC, the OpenAL Context API. ALC is a portable API for managing OpenAL contexts, including resource sharing, locking, and unlocking. Within the core AL API the existence of a Context is implied, but the Context is not exposed. The Context encapsulates the state of a given instance of the AL state machine.

The Context API makes use of ALC types which are defined separately from the AL types – there is an ALCboolean, ALCchar, etc.

### 6.1. Managing Devices

ALC introduces the notion of a Device. A Device can be, depending on the implementation, a hardware device, or a daemon/OS service/actual server. This mechanism also permits different drivers (and hardware) to coexist within the same system, as well as allowing several applications to share system resources for audio, including a single hardware output device. The details are left to the implementation, which has to map the available backends to unique device specifiers.

#### 6.1.1. Connecting to a Device

The `alcOpenDevice` function allows the application (i.e. the client program) to connect to a device (i.e. the server).

```
ALCdevice * alcOpenDevice (const ALCchar *deviceSpecifier);
```

If the function returns NULL, then no sound driver/device has been found. The argument is a null terminated string that requests a certain device or device configuration. If NULL is specified, the implementation will provide an implementation specific default.

#### 6.1.2. Disconnecting from a Device

The `alcCloseDevice` function allows the application (i.e. the client program) to disconnect from a device (i.e. the server).

```
ALCboolean alcCloseDevice (ALCdevice *deviceHandle);
```

The return code will be `ALC_TRUE` or `ALC_FALSE`, indicating success or failure. Once closed, the `deviceHandle` is invalid.

### 6.2. Managing Rendering Contexts

All operations of the AL core API affect a current AL context. Within the scope of AL, the ALC is implied - it is not visible as a handle or function parameter. Only one AL

Context per process can be current at a time. Applications maintaining multiple AL Contexts, whether threaded or not, have to set the current context accordingly. Applications can have multiple threads that share one more or contexts. In other words, AL and ALC are threadsafe.

### 6.2.1. Context Attributes

The application can choose to specify certain attributes for a context at context-creation time. Attributes not specified explicitly are set to implementation dependent defaults.

Table 6.1. Context Creation Attributes

<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>
ALC_FREQUENCY	Frequency for mixing output buffer, in units of Hz
ALC_REFRESH	Refresh intervals, in units of Hz
ALC_SYNC	Flag, indicating a synchronous context
ALC_MONO_SOURCES	A hint indicating how many sources should be capable of supporting mono data
ALC_STEREO_SOURCES	A hint indicating how many sources should be capable of supporting stereo data

### 6.2.2. Creating a Context

A context is created using `alcCreateContext`. The device parameter has to be a valid device. The attribute list can be `NULL`, or a zero terminated list of integer pairs composed of valid ALC attribute tokens and requested values.

```
ALCcontext * alcCreateContext (const ALCdevice * deviceHandle,
                             const ALCint * attrList);
```

Context creation will fail in the following cases:

- a) if the application requests attributes that, by themselves, can not be provided
- b) if the combination of specified attributes can not be provided
- c) if a specified attribute, or the combination of attributes, does not match the default values for unspecified attributes

If context creation fails, the context pointer returned will be `NULL`.

### 6.2.3. Selecting a Context for Operation

To make a Context current with respect to OpenAL operation, `alcMakeContextCurrent` is used. The context parameter can be `NULL` or a valid context pointer (using `NULL` results in no context being current, which is useful when shutting OpenAL down). The operation will apply to the device that the context was created for.

```
ALCboolean alcMakeContextCurrent (ALCcontext * context);
```

For each OS process (usually this means for each application), only one context can be current at any given time. All AL commands apply to the current context. Commands that affect objects shared among contexts (e.g. buffers) have side effects on other contexts.

### 6.2.4. Initiate Context Processing

The current context is the only context accessible to state changes by AL commands (aside from state changes affecting shared objects). However, multiple contexts can be processed at the same time. To indicate that a context should be processed (i.e. that internal execution state like offset increments are supposed to be performed), the application has to use `alcProcessContext`.

```
void alcProcessContext (ALCcontext *context);
```

Repeated calls to `alcProcessContext` are legal, and do not affect a context that is already marked as processing. The default state of a context created by `alcCreateContext` is that it is processing.

### 6.2.5. Suspend Context Processing

The application can suspend any context from processing (including the current one). To indicate that a context should be suspended from processing (i.e. that internal execution state like offset increments is not supposed to be changed), the application has to use `alcSuspendContext`.

```
void alcSuspendContext (ALCcontext *context);
```

Repeated calls to `alcSuspendContext` are legal, and do not affect a context that is already marked as suspended.

### 6.2.6. Destroying a Context

```
void alcDestroyContext(ALCcontext * context);
```

The correct way to destroy a context is to first release it using `alcMakeCurrent` and

NULL. Applications should not attempt to destroy a current context – doing so will not work and will result in an ALC\_INVALID\_OPERATION error.

## **6.3. ALC Queries**

### **6.3.1. Query for Current Context**

The application can query for, and obtain an handle to, the current context for the application. If there is no current context, NULL is returned.

```
ALCcontext * alcGetCurrentContext(void);
```

### **6.3.2. Query for a Context's Device**

The application can query for, and obtain an handle to, the device of a given context.

```
ALCdevice * alcGetContextsDevice(ALCcontext * context);
```

### **6.3.3. Query For Extensions**

To verify that a given extension is available for the current context and the device it is associated with, use

```
ALCboolean alcIsExtensionPresent(const ALCdevice *deviceHandle,  
                                const ALCchar *extName);
```

Invalid and unsupported string tokens return ALC\_FALSE. A NULL deviceHandle is acceptable. A NULL extName will result in an ALC\_INVALID\_VALUE error and the return code will be ALC\_FALSE. extName is not case sensitive – the implementation will convert the name to all upper-case internally (and will express extension names in upper-case).

### **6.3.4. Query for Function Entry Addresses**

The application is expected to verify the applicability of an extension or core function entry point before requesting it by name, by use of alcIsExtensionPresent. Extension entry points can be retrieved using alcGetProcAddress.

```
void * alcGetProcAddress (const ALCdevice *deviceHandle, const ALchar *funcName);
```

Entry points can be device specific, but are not context specific. Using a NULL device handle does not guarantee that the entry point is returned, even if available for one of the available devices. Specifying a NULL name parameter will cause an

ALC\_INVALID\_VALUE error.

### 6.3.5. Retrieving Enumeration Values

Enumeration/token values are device independent, but tokens defined for extensions might not be present for a given device. Using a NULL handle is legal, but only the tokens defined by the AL core are guaranteed. Availability of extension tokens depends on the ALC extension.

```
ALCenum alcGetEnumValue(const ALCdevice *deviceHandle, const ALCchar  
*enumName);
```

Specifying a NULL enumName parameter will cause an ALC\_INVALID\_VALUE error and a return value of AL\_NONE.

### 6.3.6. Query for Error Conditions

ALC uses the same conventions and mechanisms as AL for error handling. In particular, ALC does not use conventions derived from X11 (GLX) or Windows (WGL). The alcGetError function can be used to query ALC errors.

```
ALCenum alcGetError(ALCdevice * deviceHandle);
```

Error conditions are specific to the device, and (like AL) a call to alcGetError resets the error state.

Table 6-2. Error Conditions

<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>
ALC_NO_ERROR	There is no current error.
ALC_INVALID_DEVICE	The device handle or specifier names an accessible driver/server.
ALC_INVALID_CONTEXT	The Context argument does not name a valid context.
ALC_INVALID_ENUM	A token used is not valid, or not applicable.
ALC_INVALID_VALUE	A value (e.g. Attribute) is not valid, or not applicable.
ALC_INVALID_OPERATION	Illegal call.

### 6.3.7. String Query

The application can obtain certain strings from ALC.

```
const ALCchar * alcGetString(ALCdevice * deviceHandle, ALCenum token);
```

Specifying NULL for deviceHandle when asking for ALC\_EXTENSIONS will generate an ALC\_INVALID\_DEVICE error. The deviceHandle value is ignored when asking for ALC\_DEFAULT\_DEVICE\_SPECIFIER.

An alcGetString query of ALC\_DEVICE\_SPECIFIER with a NULL device passed in will return a list of available devices. Each device name will be separated by a single NULL character and the list will be terminated with two NULL characters.

Table 6-3. String Query Tables

<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>
ALC_DEFAULT_DEVICE_SPECIFIER	The specifier string for the default device
ALC_DEVICE_SPECIFIER	The specifier string for the device
ALC_EXTENSIONS	A list of available context extensions separated by spaces.
ALC_CAPTURE_DEFAULT_DEVICE_SPECIFIER	The name of the default capture device.
ALC_CAPTURE_DEVICE_SPECIFIER	The name of the specified capture device, or a list of all available capture devices if no capture device is specified.

In addition, printable error message strings are provided for all valid error tokens, including ALC\_NO\_ERROR, ALC\_INVALID\_DEVICE, ALC\_INVALID\_CONTEXT, ALC\_INVALID\_ENUM, ALC\_INVALID\_VALUE.

### 6.3.8. Integer Query

The application can query ALC for information using an integer query function.

```
void alcGetInterv(ALCdevice * deviceHandle, ALCenum token, ALCsizei size,  
                 ALCint *dest);
```

For some tokens, NULL is a legal deviceHandle. In other cases, specifying a NULL

device will generate an `ALC_INVALID_DEVICE` error. The application has to specify the size of the destination buffer provided. A `NULL` destination or a zero size parameter will cause ALC to ignore the query.

All tokens in table 6-2 (context creation) and table 6-4 (context query types) are valid for this call.

Table 6-4. Integer Query Types

Name	Description
<code>ALC_ATTRIBUTES_SIZE</code>	The size (number of <code>ALCint</code> values) required for a zero-terminated attributes list, for the current context. <code>NULL</code> is an invalid device.
<code>ALC_ALL_ATTRIBUTES</code>	Expects a destination of <code>ALC_CURRENT_ATTRIBUTES_SIZE</code> , and provides an attribute list for the current context of the specified device. <code>NULL</code> is an invalid device.
<code>ALC_MAJOR_VERSION</code>	specification revision for this implementation (major version)
<code>ALC_MINOR_VERSION</code>	specification revision for this implementation (minor version)
<code>ALC_CAPTURE_SAMPLES</code>	The number of capture samples available.

## 6.4. Shared Objects

For efficiency reasons, certain AL objects are shared across ALC contexts. At this time, AL buffers are the only shared objects.

### 6.4.1. Shared Buffers

Buffers are shared among contexts. The processing state of a buffer is determined by the dependencies imposed by all contexts, not just the current context. This includes suspended contexts as well as contexts that are processing.

### 6.4.2. Capture

#### *Procedures and Functions*

```
ALCdevice* alcCaptureOpenDevice(const ALCchar *deviceName, ALCuint freq,
                                ALCenum fmt, ALCsizei bufsize);
```



```

void alcCaptureCloseDevice(ALCdevice *device);
void alcCaptureStart(ALCdevice *device);
void alcCaptureStop(ALCdevice *device);
void alcCaptureSamples(ALCdevice *device, ALCvoid *buf, ALCsizei samps);

```

## **Tokens**

```

ALC_CAPTURE_DEFAULT_DEVICE_SPECIFIER
ALC_CAPTURE_DEVICE_SPECIFIER
ALC_CAPTURE_SAMPLES

```

Separate from traditional output devices, the AL may provide facilities for input, or "capture" of audio data from the user's environment. Capture devices run parallel to the rest of the AL, and don't contain a context or possess most AL or ALC state. As such, they contain their own entry points that represent a greatly simplified interface.

The `alcCaptureOpenDevice` function allows the application to connect to a capture device. To obtain a list of all available capture devices, use `alcGetString` to retrieve `ALC_CAPTURE_DEVICE_SPECIFIER` with a NULL device specified – a list of all capture devices will be returned (each name will be NULL-terminated, and the list will be terminated with two NULL characters). Retrieving `ALC_CAPTURE_DEVICE_SPECIFIER` with a valid capture device specified will result in the name of that device being returned as a single NULL-terminated string.

```

ALCdevice* alcCaptureOpenDevice(const ALCchar *deviceName,
                                ALCuint freq, ALCenum fmt, ALCsizei bufsize);

```

If the function returns NULL, then no sound driver/device has been found, or the requested format could not be fulfilled.

The "deviceName" argument is a null terminated string that requests a certain device or device configuration. If NULL is specified, the implementation will provide an implementation specific default. The "freq" and "fmt" arguments specify the format that audio data will be presented to the application, and match the values that can be passed to `alBufferData`. The implementation is expected to convert and resample to this format on behalf of the application. The "bufsize" argument specifies the number of sample frames to buffer in the AL, for example, requesting a format of `AL_FORMAT_STEREO16` and a buffer size of 1024 would require the AL to store up to 1024 \* 4 bytes of audio data. Note that the implementation may use a larger buffer than requested if it needs to, but the implementation will set up a buffer of at least the requested size.

Specifying a compressed or extension-supplied format may result in failure, even if the

extension is supplied for rendering.

The `alcCaptureCloseDevice` function allows the application to disconnect from a capture device.

```
void alcCaptureCloseDevice(ALCdevice *deviceHandle);
```

If `deviceHandle` is `NULL` or invalid, an `ALC_INVALID_DEVICE` error will be generated. Once closed, a `deviceHandle` is invalid.

### **Audio capture**

Once a capture device has been opened via `alcCaptureOpenDevice`, it is made to start recording audio via the `alcCaptureStart` entry point:

```
void alcCaptureStart(ALCdevice *device);
```

Once started, the device will record audio to an internal ring buffer, the size of which was specified when opening the device.

The application may query the capture device to discover how much data is currently available via the `alcGetInteger` with the `ALC_CAPTURE_SAMPLES` token. This will report the number of sample frames currently available.

When the application feels there are enough samples available to process, it can obtain them from the AL via the `alcCaptureSamples` entry point:

```
void alcCaptureSamples(ALCdevice *device, ALCvoid *buf, ALCsizei samps);
```

The "`buf`" argument specifies an application-allocated buffer that can contain at least "`samps`" sample frames. The implementation may defer conversion and resampling until this point. Requesting more sample frames than are currently available is an error.

If the application doesn't need to capture more audio for an amount of time, they can halt the device without closing it via the `alcCaptureStop` entry point:

```
void alcCaptureStop(ALCdevice *device);
```

The implementation is encouraged to optimize for this case. The amount of audio samples available after restarting a stopped capture device is reset to zero. The application does not need to stop the capture device to read from it.

## 7. Appendix: Extensions

Extensions are a way to provide for future expansion of the OpenAL API. Typically, extensions are specified and proposed by a vendor, and can be treated as vendor neutral if no intellectual property restrictions apply. Extensions can also be specified as, or promoted to be, ARB extensions, which is usually the final step before adding a tried and true extension to the core API. ARB extensions, once specified, have mandatory presence for backwards compatibility.

### 7.1. Extension Query

To use an extension, the application will have to obtain function addresses and enumeration values. Before an extension can be used, the application should verify the presence of an extension using `alIsExtensionPresent`. The application can then retrieve the address (function pointer) of an extension entry point using `alGetProcAddress`. Extensions and entry points can be Context-specific, and the application can not count on an extension being available unless `alIsExtensionPresent` returns `AL_TRUE`. The application also has to maintain pointers on a per-context basis.

```
ALboolean alIsExtensionPresent(const ALchar *extName);
```

Returns `AL_TRUE` if the given extension is supported for the current context, `AL_FALSE` otherwise. `extName` is not case sensitive – the implementation will convert the name to all upper-case internally (and will express extension names in upper-case).

### 7.2. Retrieving Function Entry Addresses

```
void *alGetProcAddress(const ALchar *funcName);
```

Returns `NULL` if no entry point with the name `funcName` can be found. Implementations are free to return `NULL` if an entry point is present, but not applicable for the current context. However the specification does not guarantee this behavior.

Applications can use `alGetProcAddress` to obtain core API entry points, not just extensions. This is the recommended way to dynamically load and unload OpenAL DLL's as sound drivers.

### 7.3. Retrieving Enumeration Values

To obtain enumeration values for extensions, the application has to use `alGetEnumValue` of an extension token. Enumeration values are defined within the OpenAL name space and allocated according to specification of the core API and the extensions, thus they are context-independent.

`ALuint alGetEnumValue(const ALchar *enumName);`

Returns 0 if the enumeration can not be found. The presence of an enum value does not guarantee the applicability of an extension to the current context. A non-zero return indicates merely that the implementation is aware of the existence of this extension. Implementations should not attempt to return 0 to indicate that the extensions is not supported for the current context.

## 8. Appendix: Extension Process

There are two ways to suggest an Extension to AL or ALC. The simplest way is to write an ASCII text that matches the following template:

RFC:      rfc-iiyymmdd-nn  
Name:      (indicating the purpose/feature)  
Maintainer: (name and spam-secured e-mail)  
Date:      (last revision)  
Revision:   (last revision)

new enums  
new functions

description of operation

Such an RFC can be submitted on the OpenAL discussion list (please use RFC in the Subject line), or send to the maintainer of the OpenAL specification. If you are shipping an actual implementation as a patch or as part of the OpenAL CVS a formal writeup is recommend. In this case, the Extension has to be described as part of the specification, which is maintained in OpenOffice.org format.

## 9. Appendix: 1.0-Compatible Extensions

This section shows how to access most of the expanded functionality of OpenAL 1.1 from an OpenAL 1.0 application. It is not necessary to query for these extensions from an OpenAL 1.1 application (use the `ALC_MAJOR_VERSION` and `ALC_MINOR_VERSION` properties to verify the implementation version).

### 9.1. `ALC_EXT_CAPTURE`

An OpenAL 1.1 implementation will always support the `ALC_EXT_CAPTURE` extension. This allows an application written to the OpenAL 1.0 specification to access the capture abilities expressed in section 6.4.2.

Capture Procedures and Functions

```
ALCdevice* alcCaptureOpenDevice(const ALCchar *deviceName, ALCuint freq,
                                ALCenum fmt, ALCsizei bufsize);

void alcCaptureCloseDevice(ALCdevice *device);
void alcCaptureStart(ALCdevice *device);
void alcCaptureStop(ALCdevice *device);
void alcCaptureSamples(ALCdevice *device, ALCvoid *buf, ALCsizei samps);
```

Capture Tokens

```
ALC_CAPTURE_DEFAULT_DEVICE_SPECIFIER
ALC_CAPTURE_DEVICE_SPECIFIER
ALC_CAPTURE_SAMPLES
```

### 9.2. `AL_EXT_OFFSET`

An OpenAL 1.1 implementation will always support the `AL_EXT_OFFSET` extension. This allows an application written to the OpenAL 1.0 specification to access the offset abilities expressed in section 4.3.2.

Offset tokens:

```
AL_SEC_OFFSET
AL_SAMPLE_OFFSET
AL_BYTE_OFFSET
```

### **9.3. *AL\_EXT\_LINEAR\_DISTANCE***

An OpenAL 1.1 implementation will always support the ALC\_EXT\_LINEAR\_DISTANCE extension. This allows an application written to the OpenAL 1.0 specification to access the offset abilities expressed in sections 3.4.3 and 3.4.4.

Tokens:

AL\_LINEAR\_DISTANCE  
AL\_LINEAR\_DISTANCE\_CLAMPED

### **9.4. *AL\_EXT\_EXPONENT\_DISTANCE***

An OpenAL 1.1 implementation will always support the ALC\_EXT\_EXPONENT\_DISTANCE extension. This allows an application written to the OpenAL 1.0 specification to access the offset abilities expressed in sections 3.4.5 and 3.4.6.

Tokens:

AL\_EXPONENT\_DISTANCE  
AL\_EXPONENT\_DISTANCE\_CLAMPED

### **9.5. *ALC\_ENUMERATION\_EXT***

An OpenAL 1.1 implementation will always support the ALC\_ENUMERATION\_EXT extension. This extension provides for enumeration of the available OpenAL devices through alcGetString. An alcGetString query of ALC\_DEVICE\_SPECIFIER with a NULL device passed in will return a list of devices. Each device name will be separated by a single NULL character and the list will be terminated with two NULL characters.