Resistance and Resistivity

If we apply the same potential difference between the ends of geometrically similar rods of copper and of glass, very different currents result. The characteristic of the conductor that enters here is its electrical **resistance.** We determine the resistance between any two points of a conductor by applying a potential difference V between those points and measuring the current i that results. The resistance R is then

$$R = \frac{V}{i} \quad \text{(definition of } R\text{)}. \tag{26-8}$$

The SI unit for resistance that follows from Eq. 26-8 is the volt per ampere. This combination occurs so often that we give it a special name, the **ohm** (symbol Ω); that is,

$$\begin{aligned} 1 \text{ ohm} &= 1\ \Omega = 1 \text{ volt per ampere} \\ &= 1 \text{ V/A}. \end{aligned} \tag{26-9}$$

A conductor whose function in a circuit is to provide a specified resistance is called a **resistor** (see Fig. 26-7). In a circuit diagram, we represent a resistor and a resistance with the symbol -WW-. If we write Eq. 26-8 as

$$i = \frac{V}{R},$$

we see that, for a given V, the greater the resistance, the smaller the current.

The resistance of a conductor depends on the manner in which the potential difference is applied to it. Figure 26-8, for example, shows a given potential difference applied in two different ways to the same conductor. As the current density streamlines suggest, the currents in the two cases—hence the measured resistances—will be different. Unless otherwise stated, we shall assume that any given potential difference is applied as in Fig. 26-8*b*.

The Image Works

Figure 26-7 An assortment of resistors. The circular bands are color-coding marks that identify the value of the resistance.

Table 26-1 Resistivities of Some Materials at Room Temperature (20°C)

Material	Resistivity, ρ ($\Omega \cdot m$)	Temperature Coefficient of Resistivity, α (K^{-1})
	Typical Metals	
Silver	1.62×10^{-8}	4.1×10^{-3}
Copper	1.69×10^{-8}	4.3×10^{-3}
Gold	2.35×10^{-8}	4.0×10^{-3}
Aluminum	2.75×10^{-8}	4.4×10^{-3}
Manganin[a]	4.82×10^{-8}	0.002×10^{-3}
Tungsten	5.25×10^{-8}	4.5×10^{-3}
Iron	9.68×10^{-8}	6.5×10^{-3}
Platinum	10.6×10^{-8}	3.9×10^{-3}
	Typical Semiconductors	
Silicon, pure	2.5×10^{3}	-70×10^{-3}
Silicon, *n*-type[b]	8.7×10^{-4}	
Silicon, *p*-type[c]	2.8×10^{-3}	
	Typical Insulators	
Glass	$10^{10} - 10^{14}$	
Fused quartz	$\sim 10^{16}$	

[a] An alloy specifically designed to have a small value of α.
[b] Pure silicon doped with phosphorus impurities to a charge carrier density of $10^{23}\ m^{-3}$.
[c] Pure silicon doped with aluminum impurities to a charge carrier density of $10^{23}\ m^{-3}$.

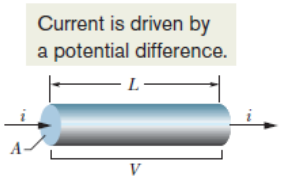


Figure 26-9 A potential difference V is applied between the ends of a wire of length L and cross section A, establishing a current i.

As we have done several times in other connections, we often wish to take a general view and deal not with particular objects but with materials. Here we do so by focusing not on the potential difference V across a particular resistor but on the electric field $\vec{E}$ at a point in a resistive material. Instead of dealing with the current i through the resistor, we deal with the current density $\vec{J}$ at the point in question. Instead of the resistance R of an object, we deal with the **resistivity** ρ of the *material:*

$$\rho = \frac{E}{J} \quad \text{(definition of } \rho\text{)}. \tag{26-10}$$

(Compare this equation with Eq. 26-8.)

If we combine the SI units of E and J according to Eq. 26-10, we get, for the unit of ρ, the ohm-meter ($\Omega \cdot m$):

$$\frac{\text{unit } (E)}{\text{unit } (J)} = \frac{\text{V/m}}{\text{A/m}^2} = \frac{\text{V}}{\text{A}}\,\text{m} = \Omega \cdot \text{m}.$$

(Do not confuse the *ohm-meter,* the unit of resistivity, with the *ohmmeter,* which is an instrument that measures resistance.) Table 26-1 lists the resistivities of some materials.

We can write Eq. 26-10 in vector form as

$$\vec{E} = \rho \vec{J}. \tag{26-11}$$

Equations 26-10 and 26-11 hold only for *isotropic* materials—materials whose electrical properties are the same in all directions.

We often speak of the **conductivity** σ of a material. This is simply the reciprocal of its resistivity, so

$$\sigma = \frac{1}{\rho} \quad \text{(definition of } \sigma\text{)}. \tag{26-12}$$

The SI unit of conductivity is the reciprocal ohm-meter, $(\Omega \cdot m)^{-1}$. The unit name mhos per meter is sometimes used (mho is ohm backwards). The definition of σ allows us to write Eq. 26-11 in the alternative form

$$\vec{J} = \sigma \vec{E}. \tag{26-13}$$

Calculating Resistance from Resistivity

We have just made an important distinction:

Resistance is a property of an object. Resistivity is a property of a material.

If we know the resistivity of a substance such as copper, we can calculate the resistance of a length of wire made of that substance. Let A be the cross-sectional area of the wire, let L be its length, and let a potential difference V exist between its ends (Fig. 26-9). If the streamlines representing the current density are uniform throughout the wire, the electric field and the current density will be constant for all points within the wire and, from Eqs. 24-42 and 26-5, will have the values

$$E = V/L \quad \text{and} \quad J = i/A. \tag{26-14}$$

We can then combine Eqs. 26-10 and 26-14 to write

$$\rho = \frac{E}{J} = \frac{V/L}{i/A}. \tag{26-15}$$

However, V/i is the resistance R, which allows us to recast Eq. 26-15 as

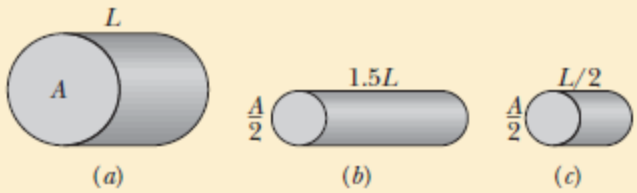
$$R = \rho \frac{L}{A}. \tag{26-16}$$

Equation 26-16 can be applied only to a homogeneous isotropic conductor of uniform cross section, with the potential difference applied as in Fig. 26-8*b*.

The macroscopic quantities V, i, and R are of greatest interest when we are making electrical measurements on specific conductors. They are the quantities that we read directly on meters. We turn to the microscopic quantities E, J, and ρ when we are interested in the fundamental electrical properties of materials.

Checkpoint 3

The figure here shows three cylindrical copper conductors along with their face areas and lengths. Rank them according to the current through them, greatest first, when the same potential difference V is placed across their lengths.



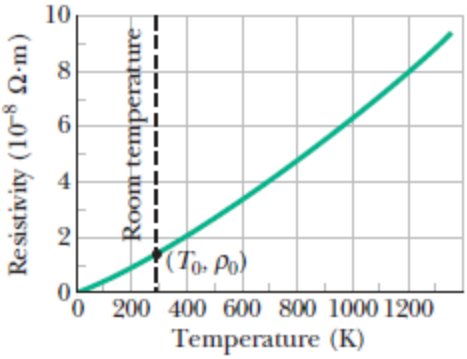
Variation with Temperature

The values of most physical properties vary with temperature, and resistivity is no exception. Figure 26-10, for example, shows the variation of this property for copper over a wide temperature range. The relation between temperature and resistivity for copper—and for metals in general—is fairly linear over a rather broad temperature range. For such linear relations we can write an empirical approximation that is good enough for most engineering purposes:

$$\rho - \rho_0 = \rho_0 \alpha (T - T_0). \tag{26-17}$$

Here T_0 is a selected reference temperature and ρ_0 is the resistivity at that temperature. Usually $T_0 = 293$ K (room temperature), for which $\rho_0 = 1.69 \times 10^{-8}\ \Omega \cdot m$ for copper.

Because temperature enters Eq. 26-17 only as a difference, it does not matter whether you use the Celsius or Kelvin scale in that equation because the sizes of degrees on these scales are identical. The quantity α in Eq. 26-17, called the *temperature coefficient of resistivity,* is chosen so that the equation gives good agreement with experiment for temperatures in the chosen range. Some values of α for metals are listed in Table 26-1.



Resistivity can depend on temperature.

Figure 26-10 The resistivity of copper as a function of temperature. The dot on the curve marks a convenient reference point at temperature $T_0 = 293$ K and resistivity $\rho_0 = 1.69 \times 10^{-8}\ \Omega \cdot m$.

Ohm's Law

As we just discussed, a resistor is a conductor with a specified resistance. It has that same resistance no matter what the magnitude and direction (*polarity*) of the applied potential difference are. Other conducting devices, however, might have resistances that change with the applied potential difference.

Figure 26-11*a* shows how to distinguish such devices. A potential difference V is applied across the device being tested, and the resulting current i through the device is measured as V is varied in both magnitude and polarity. The polarity of V is arbitrarily taken to be positive when the left terminal of the device is at a higher potential than the right terminal. The direction of the resulting current (from left to right) is arbitrarily assigned a plus sign. The reverse polarity of V (with the right terminal at a higher potential) is then negative; the current it causes is assigned a minus sign.

Figure 26-11*b* is a plot of i versus V for one device. This plot is a straight line passing through the origin, so the ratio i/V (which is the slope of the straight line) is the same for all values of V. This means that the resistance $R = V/i$ of the device is independent of the magnitude and polarity of the applied potential difference V.

Figure 26-11*c* is a plot for another conducting device. Current can exist in this device only when the polarity of V is positive and the applied potential difference is more than about 1.5 V. When current does exist, the relation between i and V is not linear; it depends on the value of the applied potential difference V.

We distinguish between the two types of device by saying that one obeys Ohm's law and the other does not.

Ohm's law is an assertion that the current through a device is *always* directly proportional to the potential difference applied to the device.

(This assertion is correct only in certain situations; still, for historical reasons, the term "law" is used.) The device of Fig. 26-11*b*—which turns out to be a 1000 Ω resistor—obeys Ohm's law. The device of Fig. 26-11*c*—which is called a *pn* junction diode—does not.

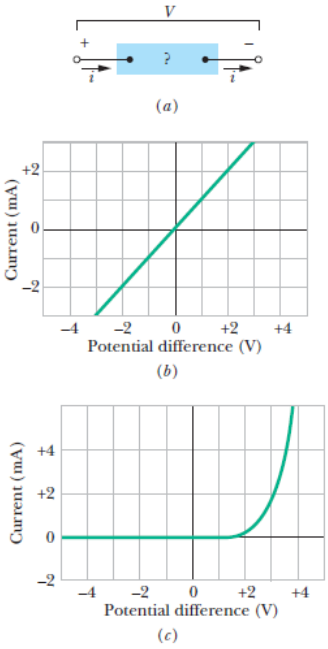


Figure 26-11 (*a*) A potential difference V is applied to the terminals of a device, establishing a current i. (*b*) A plot of current i versus applied potential difference V when the device is a 1000 Ω resistor. (*c*) A plot when the device is a semiconducting *pn* junction diode.

A conducting device obeys Ohm's law when the resistance of the device is independent of the magnitude and polarity of the applied potential difference.

It is often contended that $V = iR$ is a statement of Ohm's law. That is not true! This equation is the defining equation for resistance, and it applies to all conducting devices, whether they obey Ohm's law or not. If we measure the potential difference V across, and the current i through, any device, even a *pn* junction diode, we can find its resistance *at that value of* V as $R = V/i$. The essence of Ohm's law, however, is that a plot of i versus V is linear; that is, R is independent of V. We can generalize this for conducting materials by using Eq. 26-11 ($\vec{E} = \rho\vec{J}$):

A conducting material obeys Ohm's law when the resistivity of the material is independent of the magnitude and direction of the applied electric field.

All homogeneous materials, whether they are conductors like copper or semiconductors like pure silicon or silicon containing special impurities, obey Ohm's law within some range of values of the electric field. If the field is too strong, however, there are departures from Ohm's law in all cases.

Checkpoint 4

The following table gives the current i (in amperes) through two devices for several values of potential difference V (in volts). From these data, determine which device does not obey Ohm's law.

Device 1		Device 2	
V	i	V	i
2.00	4.50	2.00	1.50
3.00	6.75	3.00	2.20
4.00	9.00	4.00	2.80

A Microscopic View of Ohm's Law

To find out *why* particular materials obey Ohm's law, we must look into the details of the conduction process at the atomic level. Here we consider only conduction in metals, such as copper. We base our analysis on the *free-electron model,* in which we assume that the conduction electrons in the metal are free to move throughout the volume of a sample, like the molecules of a gas in a closed container. We also assume that the electrons collide not with one another but only with atoms of the metal.

According to classical physics, the electrons should have a Maxwellian speed distribution somewhat like that of the molecules in a gas (Module 19-6), and thus the average electron speed should depend on the temperature. The motions of electrons are, however, governed not by the laws of classical physics but by those of quantum physics. As it turns out, an assumption that is much closer to the quantum reality is that conduction electrons in a metal move with a single effective speed v_{eff}, and this speed is essentially independent of the temperature. For copper, $v_{\text{eff}} \approx 1.6 \times 10^6$ m/s.

When we apply an electric field to a metal sample, the electrons modify their random motions slightly and drift very slowly—in a direction opposite that of the field—with an average drift speed v_d. The drift speed in a typical metallic conductor is about 5×10^{-7} m/s, less than the effective speed (1.6×10^6 m/s) by many orders of magnitude. Figure 26-12 suggests the relation between these two speeds. The gray lines show a possible random path for an electron in the absence of an applied field; the electron proceeds from A to B, making six collisions along the way. The green lines show how the same events *might* occur when an electric field $\vec{E}$ is applied. We see that the electron drifts steadily to the right, ending at B' rather than at B. Figure 26-12 was drawn with the assumption that $v_d \approx 0.02 v_{\text{eff}}$. However, because the actual value is more like $v_d \approx (10^{-13}) v_{\text{eff}}$, the drift displayed in the figure is greatly exaggerated.

The motion of conduction electrons in an electric field $\vec{E}$ is thus a combination of the motion due to random collisions and that due to $\vec{E}$. When we consider all the free electrons, their random motions average to zero and make no contribution to the drift speed. Thus, the drift speed is due only to the effect of the electric field on the electrons.

If an electron of mass m is placed in an electric field of magnitude E, the electron will experience an acceleration given by Newton's second law:

$$a = \frac{F}{m} = \frac{eE}{m}. \tag{26-18}$$

After a typical collision, each electron will—so to speak—completely lose its memory of its previous drift velocity, starting fresh and moving off in a random direction. In the average time τ between collisions, the average electron will acquire a drift speed of $v_d = a\tau$. Moreover, if we measure the drift speeds of all the electrons at any instant, we will find that their average drift speed is also $a\tau$. Thus, at any instant, on average, the electrons will have drift speed $v_d = a\tau$. Then Eq. 26-18 gives us

$$v_d = a\tau = \frac{eE\tau}{m}. \tag{26-19}$$

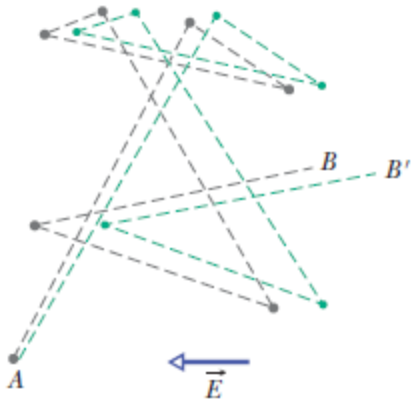


Figure 26-12 The gray lines show an electron moving from A to B, making six collisions en route. The green lines show what the electron's path might be in the presence of an applied electric field $\vec{E}$. Note the steady drift in the direction of $-\vec{E}$. (Actually, the green lines should be slightly curved, to represent the parabolic paths followed by the electrons between collisions, under the influence of an electric field.)

Combining this result with Eq. 26-7 ($\vec{J} = ne\vec{v}_d$), in magnitude form, yields

$$v_d = \frac{J}{ne} = \frac{eE\tau}{m}, \tag{26-20}$$

which we can write as

$$E = \left(\frac{m}{e^2 n\tau}\right) J. \tag{26-21}$$

Comparing this with Eq. 26-11 ($\vec{E} = \rho\vec{J}$), in magnitude form, leads to

$$\rho = \frac{m}{e^2 n\tau}. \tag{26-22}$$

Equation 26-22 may be taken as a statement that metals obey Ohm's law if we can show that, for metals, their resistivity ρ is a constant, independent of the strength of the applied electric field $\vec{E}$. Let's consider the quantities in Eq. 26-22. We can reasonably assume that n, the number of conduction electrons per volume, is independent of the field, and m and e are constants. Thus, we only need to convince ourselves that τ, the average time (or *mean free time*) between collisions, is a constant, independent of the strength of the applied electric field. Indeed, τ can be considered to be a constant because the drift speed v_d caused by the field is so much smaller than the effective speed v_{eff} that the electron speed—and thus τ—is hardly affected by the field. Thus, because the right side of Eq. 26-22 is independent of the field magnitude, metals obey Ohm's law.