

LECTURE VIII

PCB Design Concepts

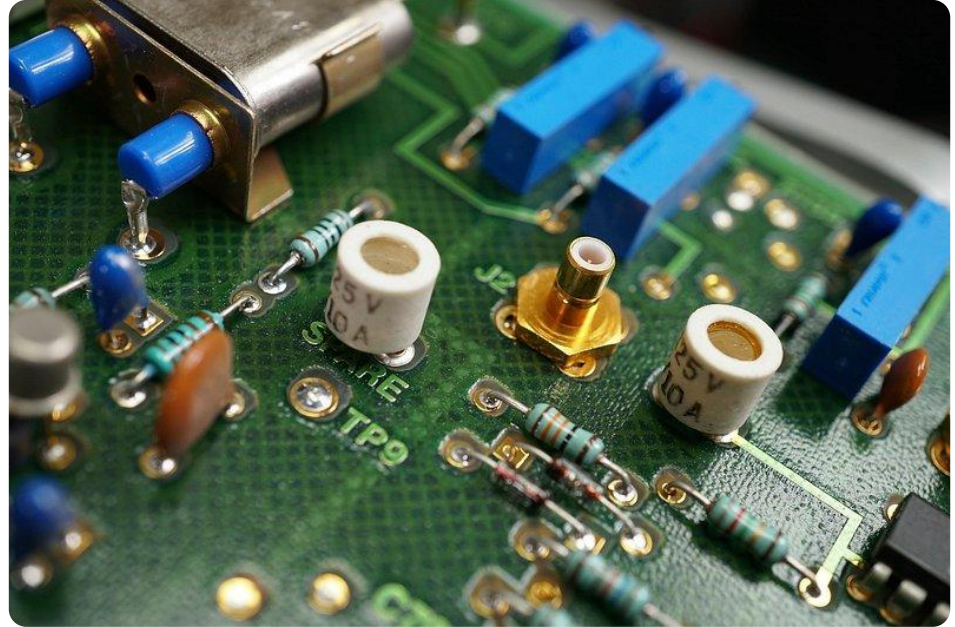
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SECTION I

Introduction to PCBs

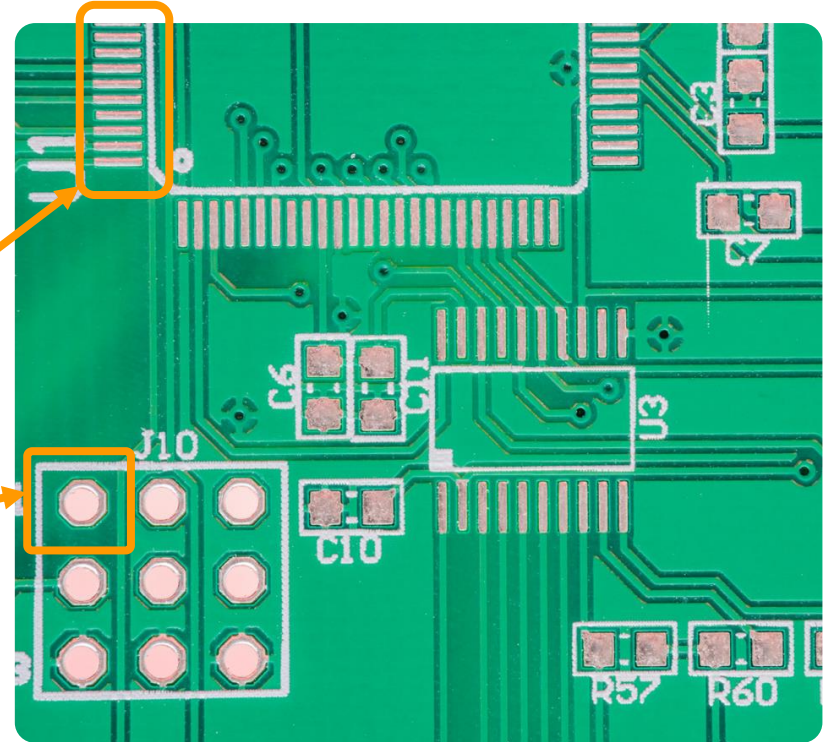
Printed Circuit Boards (PCBs)

- A **printed circuit board (PCB)** is an electronic assembly that uses copper conductors to **connect components**
 - It acts as a permanent **structural support** to electronic components
 - Made from **multiple, alternating layers of conductive** (usually copper) and **insulating material**



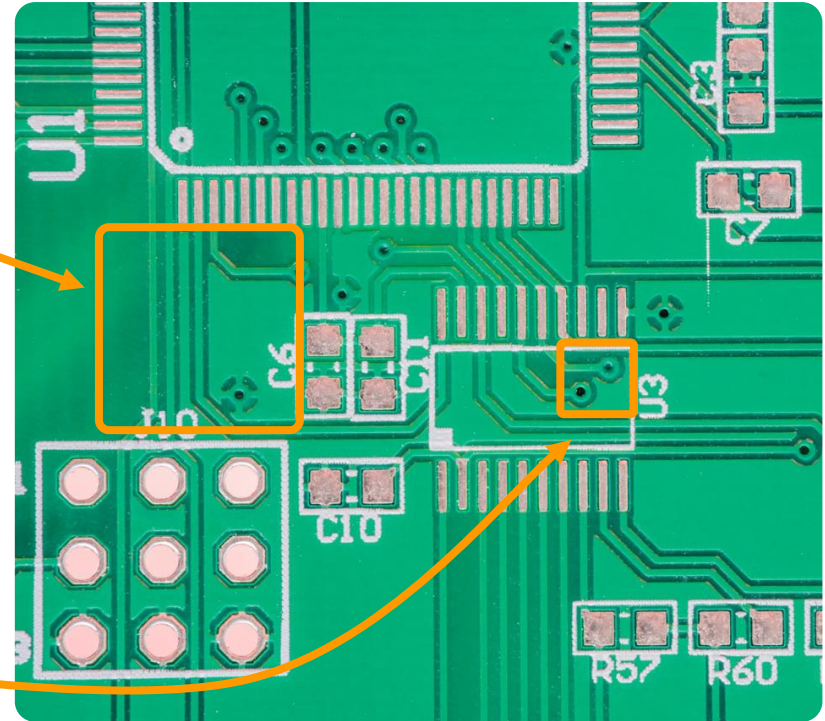
How are Components Connected?

- **Pads** are exposed copper surfaces which connect the leads of the electronic components to the board
 - Some pads are designed for **surface-mounted (SMD)** leads while others are for **through-hole (THT)** leads
 - Component **leads are soldered to the pads**



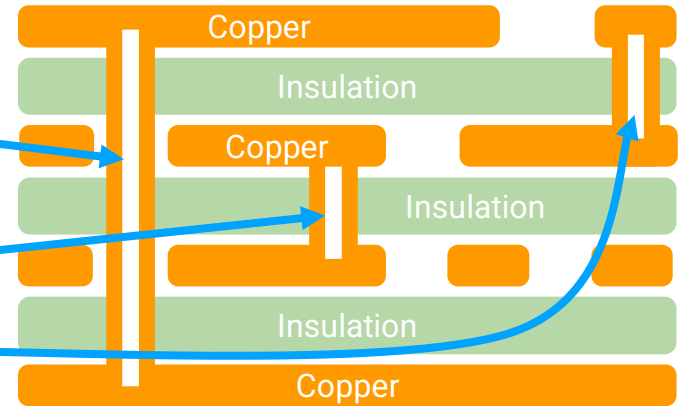
How are Components Connected? (Cont'd)

- **Traces** are **copper tracks** which connect pads
 - They are covered by a layer called the **solder mask** (colored green in the image)
- **Vias** are **conductive holes** drilled into the board to **connect different copper layers**



More on Vias

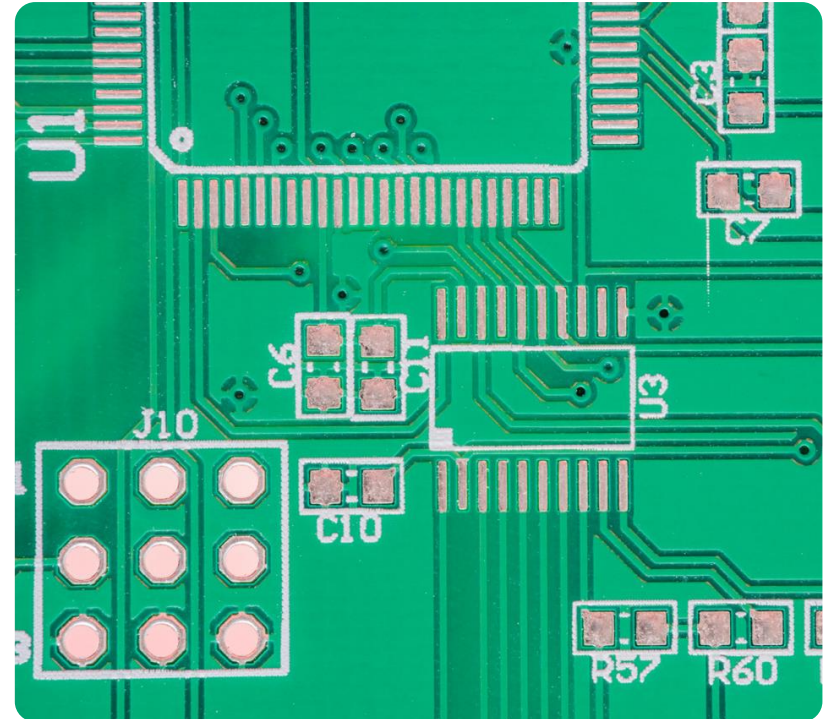
- Common via types...
 - **Through hole via** - drilled and plated from **top layer to bottom layer**
 - **Blind via** - drilled and plated **between two internal layers**
 - **Buried via** - drilled and plated from an **outside layer to an internal layer**
- A void surrounds the via to prevent a **connection** on copper layers which it should not connect



Example PCB Cross Section

How are Components Connected? (Cont'd)

- A **plane** is an **inner conductive layer** often used to create a ground point that is shared by traces and vias
 - Used as the return path for current leaving components
- **Fills** are **large areas of copper** used for the same purpose as planes but can be integrated into the **same layer as traces**



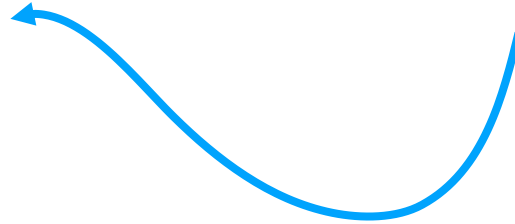
SECTION II

PCB Layers

PCB Stack-Up

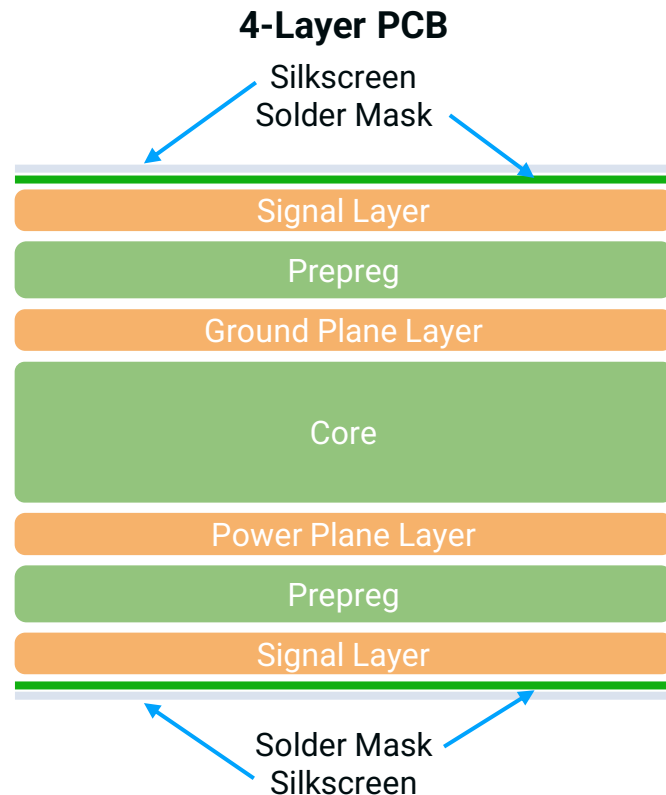
- The **PCB Stack-Up** is the **arrangement** of PCB layers
- Most PCBs have multiple of the following layers:
 - **Copper layer**
 - Signal or routing layer
 - Ground/Power plane layer
 - **Insulation layer**
 - Core
 - Prepreg
 - **Solder mask layer**
 - **Silkscreen layer**

Let's talk about each layer in greater detail



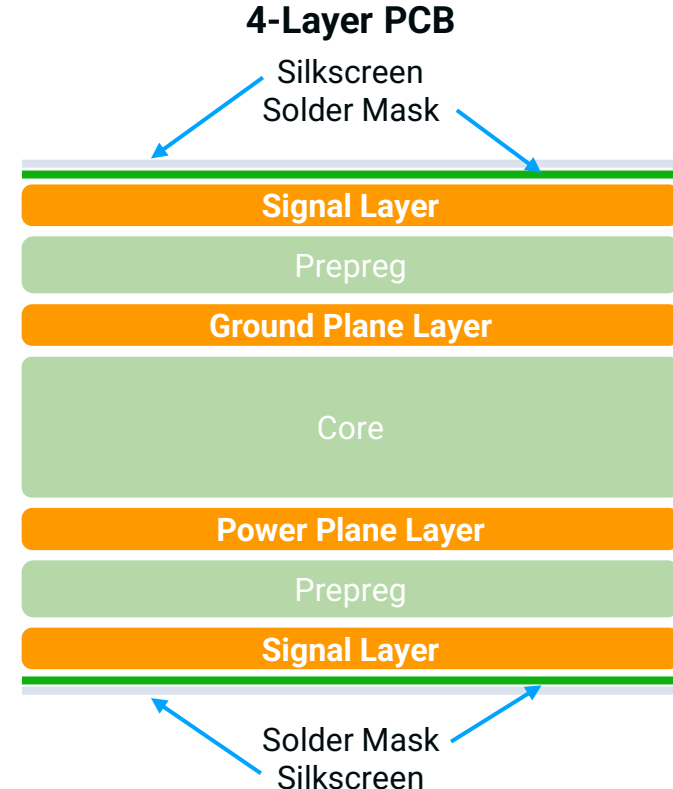
PCB Stack-Up (Cont'd)

- We will analyze an example stack-up for the **4-layer PCB**
 - An “x-layer PCB” contains x copper layers
- Note the **alternating pattern** of conductive and insulating layers



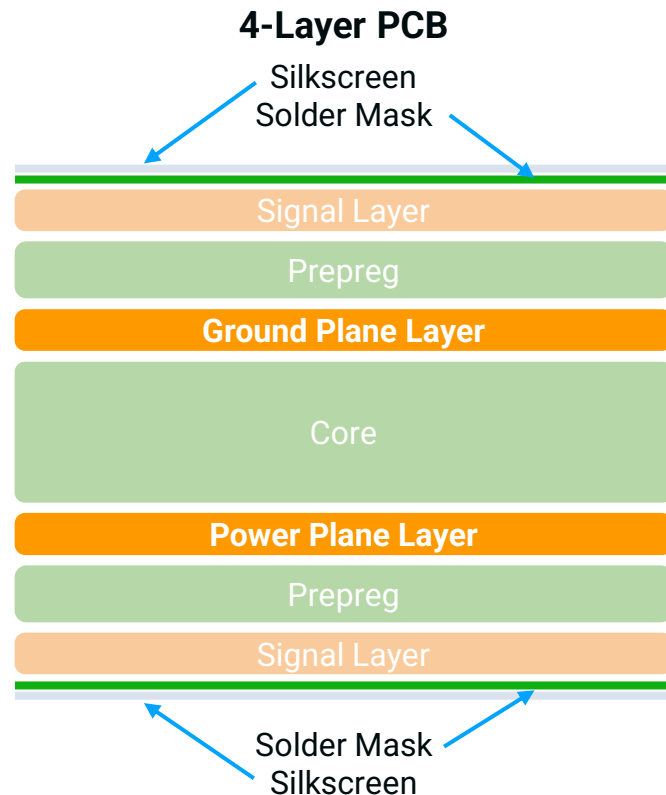
Copper Layer

- Each **copper layer** facilitates current flow between circuit components
- There are two types of copper layers:
 - A **signal/routing layer** is where the **traces and pads** are etched for connecting components
 - A **ground/power plane layer** serves as a **path to the common ground or power voltage**



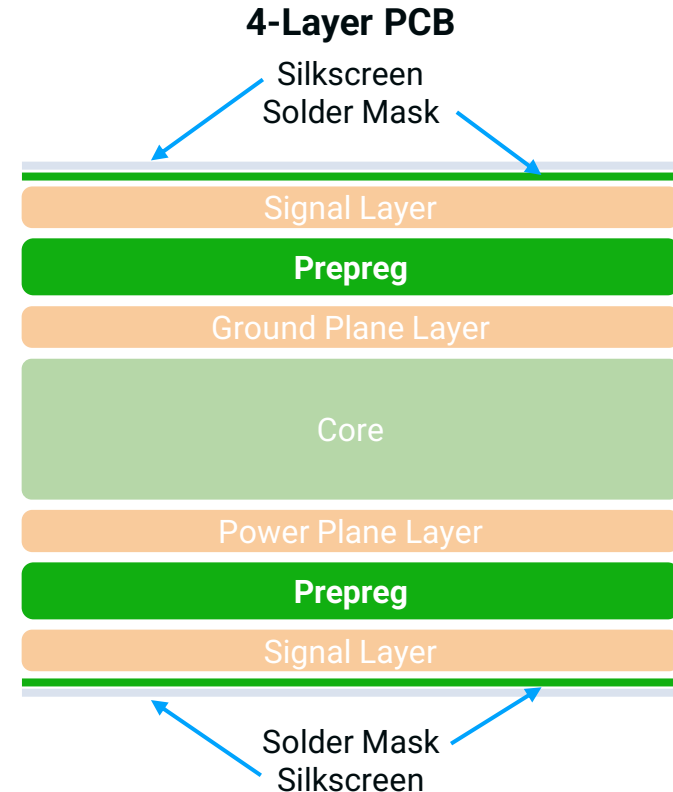
Copper Layer (Cont'd)

- **Why bother with a ground or power plane layer?**
 - Ground/power planes reduce electrical noise and improve the board's heat dissipation



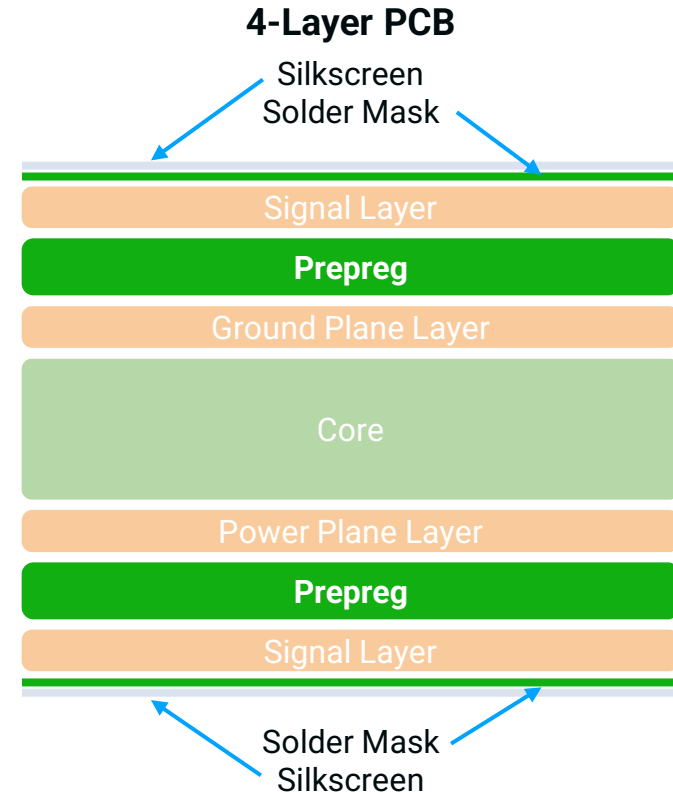
Prepreg Layer

- **Prepreg** is an **insulator layer** that acts as the “glue” to hold the core and copper layers together
 - It is **uncured** and contains resin which is responsible for its “sticky” property
 - When cured with heat and pressure, prepreg bonds all the layers together



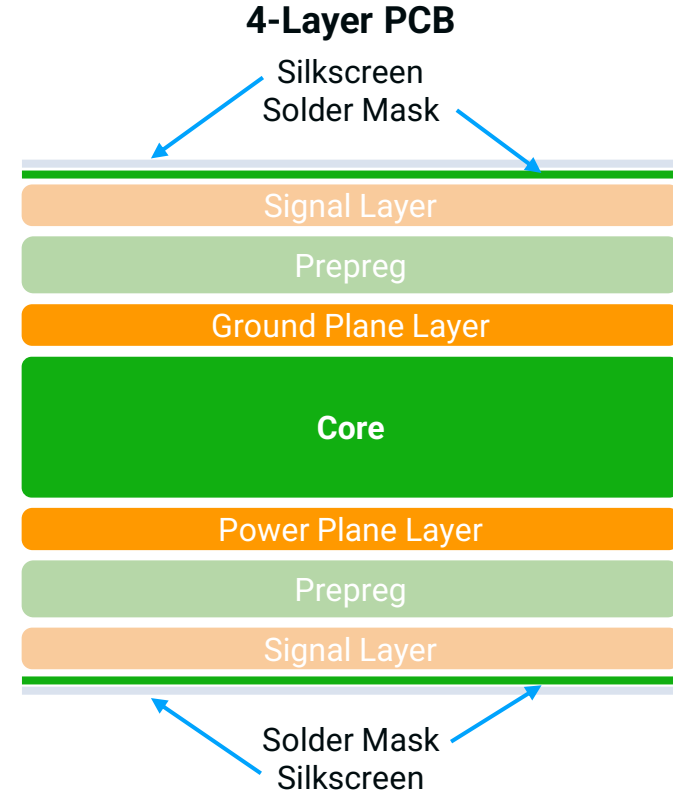
Prepreg Layer (Cont'd)

- Prepreg is made of **substrate** (insulating material)
 - Common substrates are...
 - **Fiberglass** (often FR-4)
 - Most often used
 - Cheap
 - **PTFE**
 - Better thermal stability and electrical properties than FR-4 but much more expensive



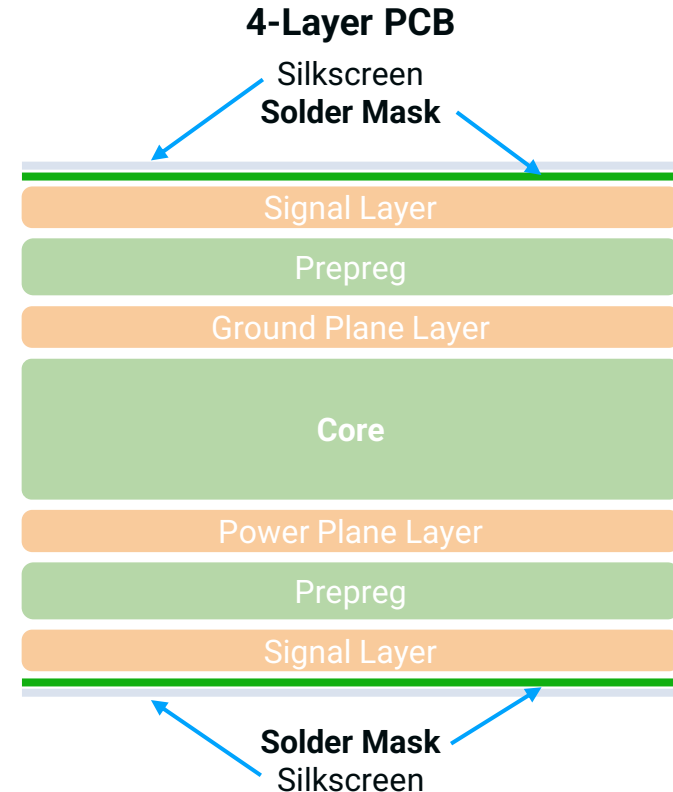
Core Layer

- **Core** is an **insulator layer** made of multiple prepreg layers pressed together, **plated with copper foil on either side**, and **cured**
 - It technically incorporates the two adjacent copper layers
- In a 4-layer PCB, only one core exists, separated by prepreg on either side
- In an 8-layer PCB, three cores are “sandwiched” by four prepreg layers



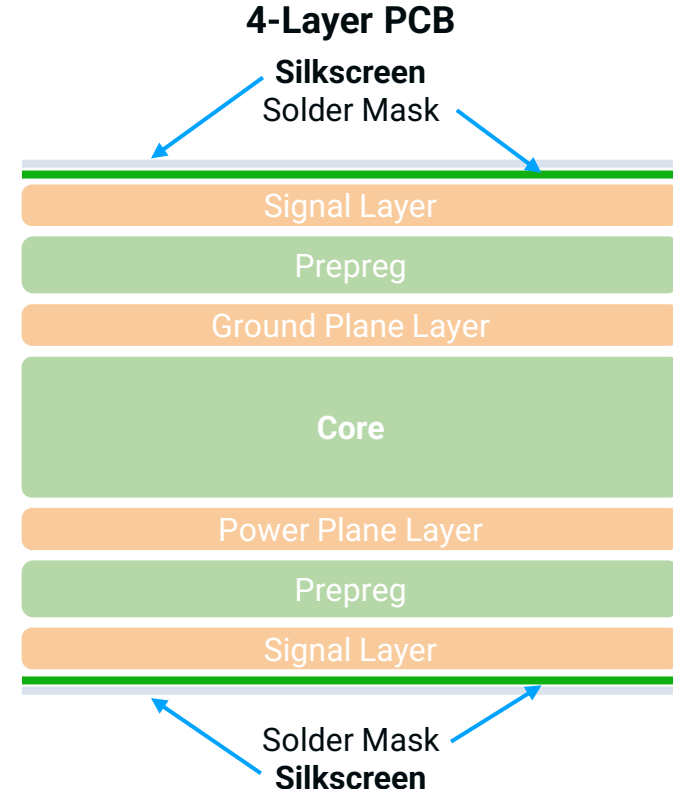
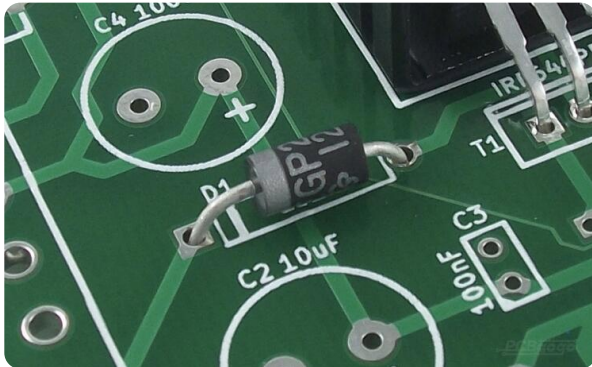
Solder Mask Layer

- Both outer copper layers are covered by a **solder mask layer**
 - It is a thin material used to **protect outer traces from oxidation** and **prevent solder bridges** between pads
 - It is the green material you see on the surface of the PCB (sometimes it is a different color)



Silkscreen Layer

- The **silkscreen** is a layer of ink traces (often white) used for symbols, logos, and other component markings
 - It is the outermost layer on either side of the board



SECTION III

PCB Fabrication

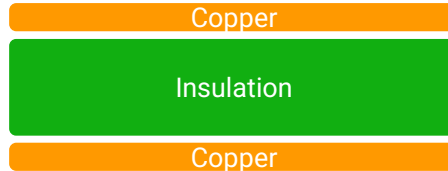
Fabrication Process Overview

2-Layer PCB

1. Raw materials are cut into boards and **holes are drilled**



1. Core, prepreg, and copper **layers are set and cured** (lamination)



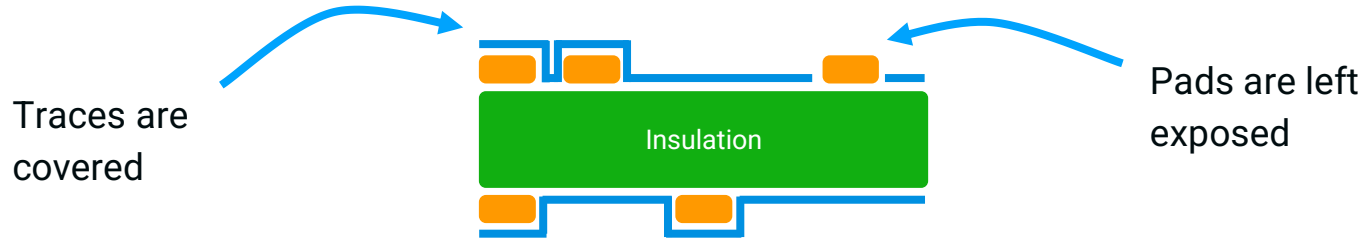
2. Copper layers are **etched** to remove excess copper, **leaving only the traces**



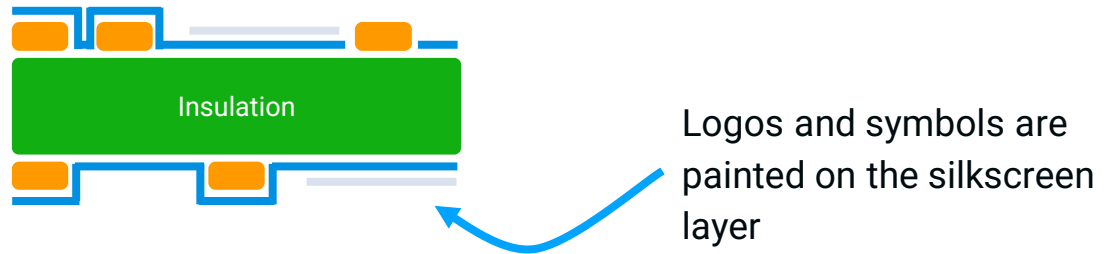
Fabrication Process Overview (Cont'd)

2-Layer PCB

4. The **solder mask** is **applied** to outer copper layers



4. The **silkscreen** is **painted** onto the solder mask



SECTION IV

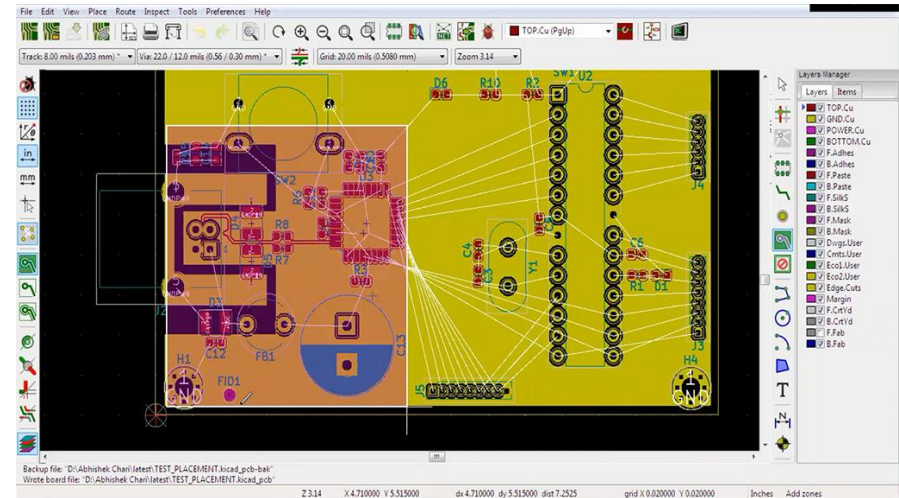
PCB Design Process

KiCad Schematic Capture

PCB Design Process (Cont'd)

3. Component placement and routing

- Arrange the components on the PCB layout; when placing components, consider (in order of priority)...
 - The board shape
 - Connector locations
 - Heat dissipation requirements
 - Decoupling capacitor locations

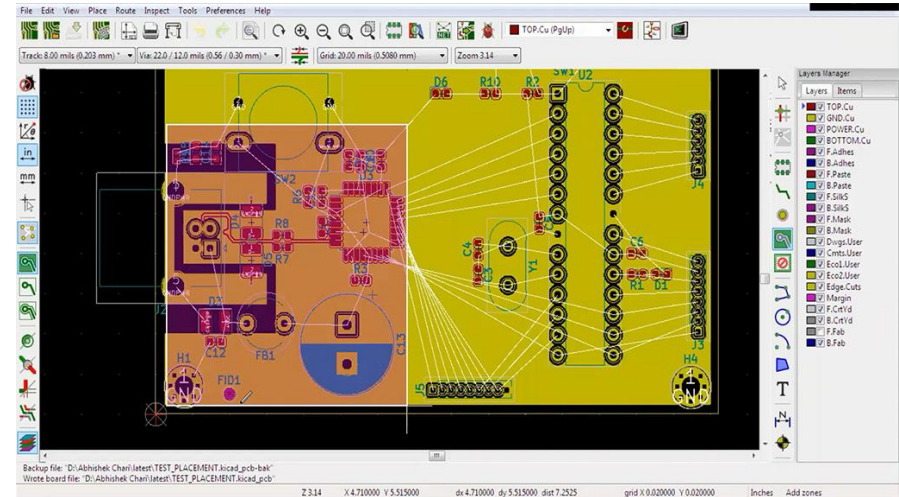


KiCad Routing

PCB Design Process (Cont'd)

3. Component placement and routing (Cont'd)

- Route the traces between component pads
- EDA tools will make sure the layout conforms to the schematic you defined



KiCad Routing

PCB Design Process (Cont'd)

4. Verification

- EDA software will have design rules checking tools to make sure components are properly connected and traces correctly routed

5. Generate the manufacturing files

- EDA software will create the files which you share with a manufacturer
- These files are used by machines for automated PCB fabrication

6. Fabricate the PCB

PCB EDA Software

- Popular PCB design software are...

- [Altium Designer](#)
- [Autodesk EAGLE](#)
- [KiCAD EDA](#) (Free)

Altium
Designer

 **EAGLE**

- We will use KiCAD for this course

- It is an open source schematic capture and PCB design tool

 **KiCad**

PCB Manufacturers

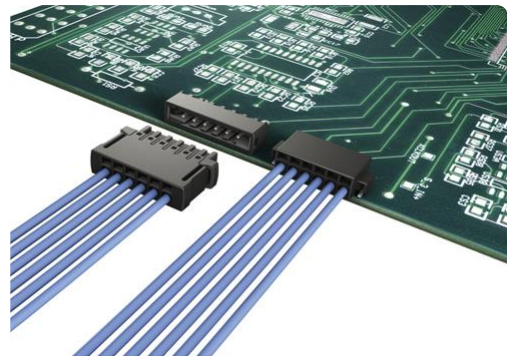
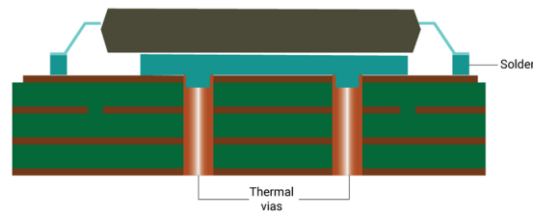
- [JLCPCB](#)
 - Inexpensive 2-layer FR-4 boards
 - Fast manufacturing and shipping
 - Used by hobbyists
- [PCBWay](#)
 - Better for more precise design requirements (small traces, vias, etc.)
 - Advanced manufacturing options

SECTION V

PCB Layout Tips

PCB Layout Tips

- **Use thermal vias to help cool components**
 - **Thermal vias** (unconnected vias) move heat away from components through the board layers
- **Place board-to-wire connectors near the edge of the PCB**
 - It's harder to connect wires in the middle of the PCB

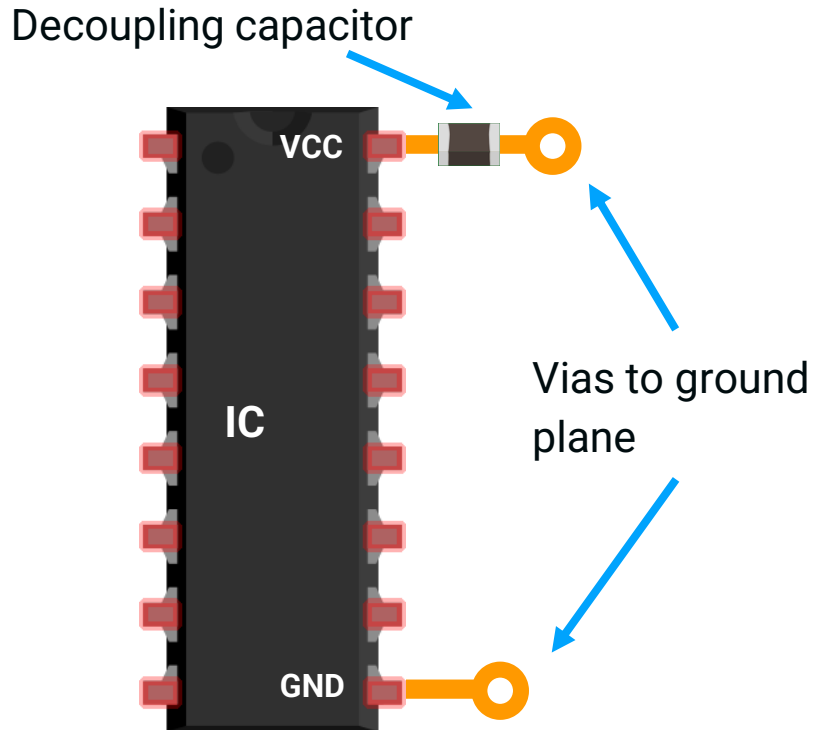


PCB Layout Tips (Cont'd)

- **Use ground fills or planes** to reduce electrical noise and improve signal integrity
 - **Electrical noise** - random variations in voltage and current, which affects sensitive components
 - **Signal integrity** - how well a signal maintains its original characteristics (strength, shape, timing) from sender to receiver
- **Leave space between** pads and traces
 - Make sure that the pad and trace spacing **adheres to design constraints** (devices packaging, manufacturer requirements)

PCB Layout Tips

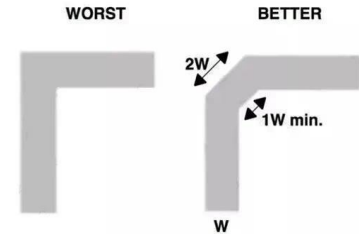
- **Use decoupling capacitors on ICs**
 - **Decoupling capacitors** help **reduce electrical noise** in power supply signals
 - **Ensures a clean and stable power supply** for the IC, preventing unexpected behavior and malfunctions
 - Place the capacitor **between the VCC and GND pins** of the IC



PCB Layout Tips (Cont'd)

- **Avoid 90° trace angles**

- Use 45° angles instead
- The corners of 90° angles are narrower than the standard trace width; traces should be consistent widths



- **Widen the power and ground traces**

- Reduces heat buildup from high current
- Improves signal integrity
- Signal traces, which are low current, may be narrower

“Darling, **PCBs are like Hollywood backlots** – a whole lot of drama, some **unexpected connections**, and you better know where to put your power or you'll end up with a **whole mess of smoke and burned out stars.**”

Betty White (circa 1997)

Famous Misquotes



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