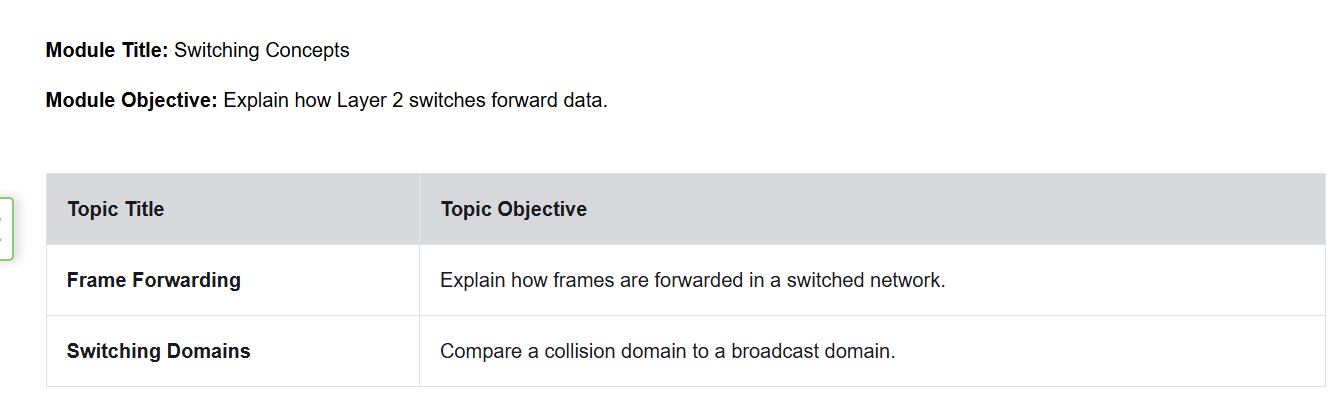
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# SWITCHING CONCEPTS



## Frame Forwarding

### Switching in Networking

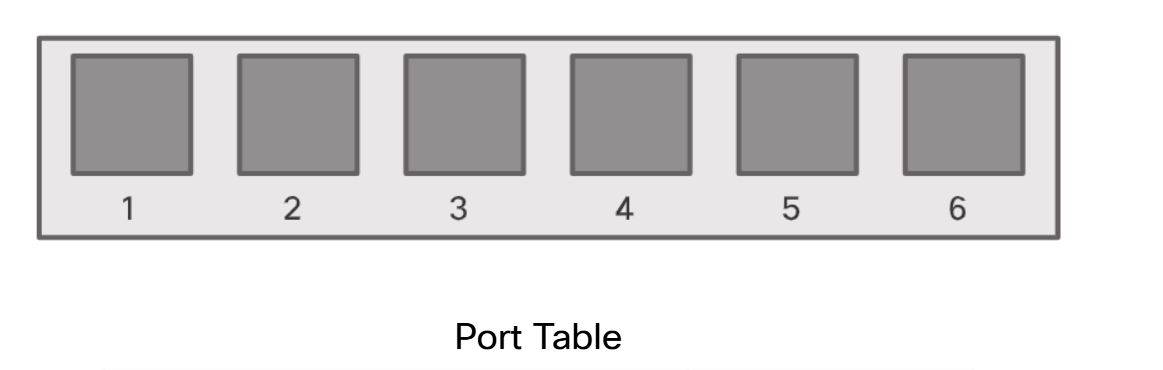
The concept of switching and forwarding frames is universal in networking and telecommunications. Various types of switches are used in LANs, WANs, and in the public switched telephone network (PSTN).

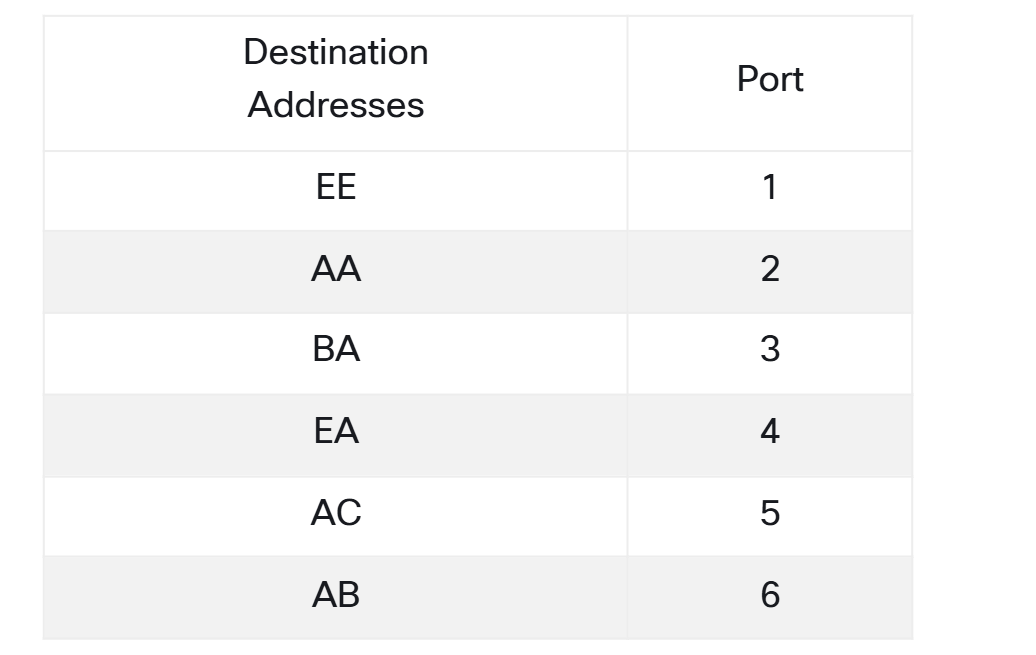
The decision on how a switch forwards traffic is made based on the flow of that traffic. There are two terms associated with frames entering and leaving an interface:

* **Ingress** - This is used to describe the port where a frame enters the device.
* **Egress** - This is used to describe the port that frames will use when leaving the device.

A LAN switch maintains a table that is referenced when forwarding traffic through the switch. The only intelligence of a LAN switch is its ability to use its table to forward traffic. A LAN switch forwards traffic based on the ingress port and the destination MAC address of an Ethernet frame. With a LAN switch, there is only one master switching table that describes a strict association between MAC addresses and ports; therefore, an Ethernet frame with a given destination address always exits the same egress port, regardless of the ingress port it enters.

**Note:** An Ethernet frame will never be forwarded out the same port it was on which it was received.

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### The Switch MAC Address Table

A switch is made up of integrated circuits and the accompanying software that controls the data paths through the switch. Switches use destination MAC addresses to direct network communications through the switch, out the appropriate port, toward the destination.

For a switch to know which port to use to transmit a frame, it must first learn which devices exist on each port. As the switch learns the relationship of ports to devices, it builds a table called a MAC address table. This table is stored in content addressable memory (CAM) which is a special type of memory used in high-speed searching applications. For this reason, the MAC address table is sometimes also called the CAM table.

LAN switches determine how to handle incoming data frames by maintaining the MAC address table. A switch populates its MAC address table by recording the source MAC address of each device connected to each of its ports. The switch references the information in the MAC address table to send frames destined for a specific device out of the port which has been assigned to that device.

### The Switch Learn and Forward Method

The following two-step process is performed on every Ethernet frame that enters a switch.

**Step 1. Learn - Examining the Source MAC Address**

Every frame that enters a switch is checked for new information to learn. It does this by examining the source MAC address of the frame and port number where the frame entered the switch:

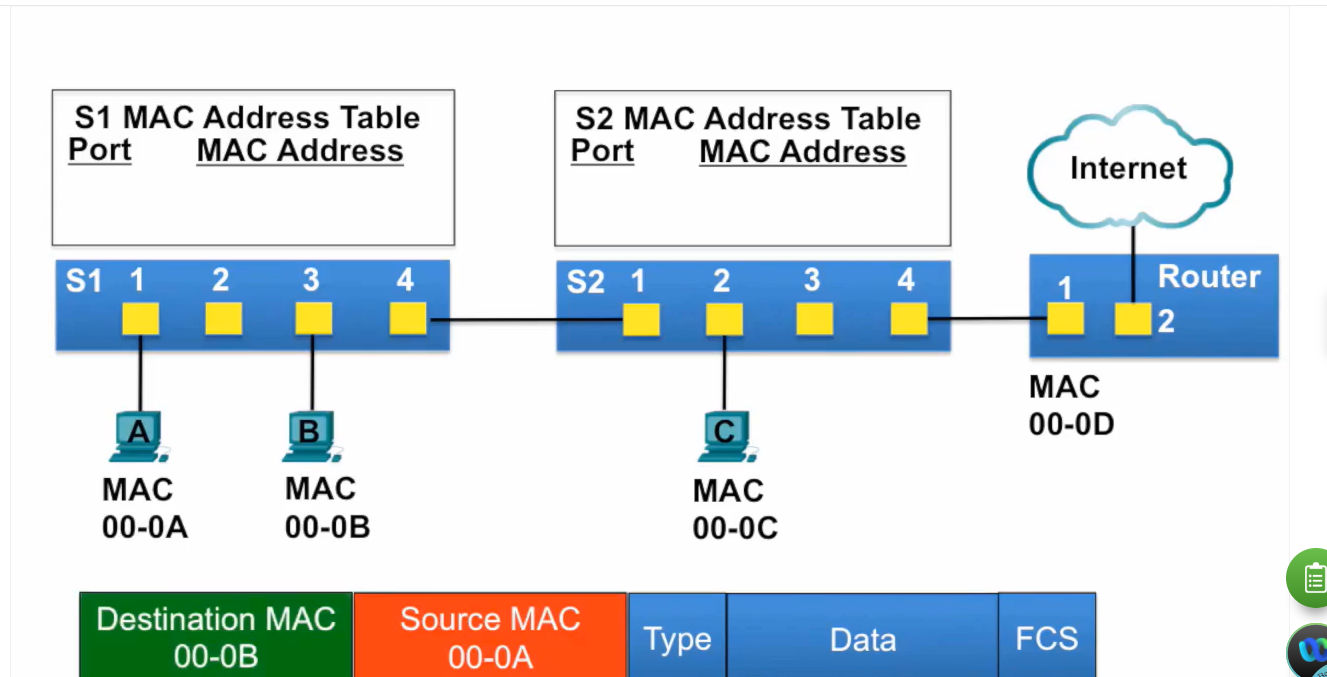
* If the source MAC address does not exist in the MAC address table, the MAC address and incoming port number are added to the table.
* If the source MAC address does exist, the switch updates the refresh timer for that entry. By default, most Ethernet switches keep an entry in the table for five minutes. If the source MAC address does exist in the table but on a different port, the switch treats this as a new entry. The entry is replaced using the same MAC address, but with the more current port number.

**Step 2. Forward - Examining the Destination MAC Address**

If the destination MAC address is a unicast address, the switch will look for a match between the destination MAC address of the frame and an entry in its MAC address table:

* If the destination MAC address is in the table, it will forward the frame out of the specified port.
* If the destination MAC address is not in the table, the switch will forward the frame out all ports except the incoming port. This is called an unknown unicast. If the destination MAC address is a broadcast or a multicast, the frame is also flooded out all ports except the incoming port.

### Video - MAC Address Tables on Connected Switches



* 00:02- In this video, PC-A is going to send
* 00:04an ethernet frame to PC-B, and
* 00:07PC-B is going to send an ethernet frame to PC-A.
* 00:10We're going to examine how switches S1 and S2
* 00:14build their MAC address tables,
* 00:16and also how they forward frames
* 00:18based on the information in those MAC address tables.
* 00:23PC-A has an ethernet frame to send to PC-B.
* 00:27The source MAC address of the frame is 00-0A
* 00:30and the destination MAC address is 00-0B.
* 00:34The ethernet frame is sent to switch S1.
* 00:38S1 receives the ethernet frame,
* 00:40examines the source MAC address
* 00:42and notices that this MAC address
* 00:43is not in its MAC address table,
* 00:46so it adds the MAC address and the incoming port number.
* 00:51Next, switch S1 examines the destination MAC address
* 00:55and notices that this MAC address is not in its table,
* 00:58so it floods it out all ports.
* 01:03PC-B receives the ethernet frame,
* 01:06examines the destination MAC address
* 01:08against its own MAC address and notices that
* 01:11that is a match and receives the rest of the frame.
* 01:16The ethernet frame continues to be
* 01:18forwarded to switch S2.
* 01:20Switch S2 examines the source MAC address
* 01:23to the frame and notices it is not in
* 01:25its MAC address table, so it adds the MAC address
* 01:29and the incoming port to its MAC address table.
* 01:33Next, switch S2 examines the destination MAC address,
* 01:36notices that is not in its MAC address table
* 01:39so it floods it out all ports.
* 01:43PC-C receives the ethernet frame
* 01:46and its MAC address does not match
* 01:49the destination MAC address of the ethernet frame,
* 01:52so it does not accept the rest of the frame.
* 01:55The router receives the ethernet frame,
* 01:58examines the destination MAC address
* 02:00against its own MAC address
* 02:02and notices it is not a match
* 02:04so it does not receive the rest of the frame.
* 02:08Now, let's have PC-B sending a frame back to PC-A.
* 02:16The source MAC address of the frame is 00-0B
* 02:20and the destination MAC address is 00-0A.
* 02:24PC-B sends it to switch S1.
* 02:27S1 notices that the source MAC address
* 02:31is not in its MAC address table
* 02:32so it adds the MAC address
* 02:34and the incoming port number.
* 02:37Next, switch S1 examines the destination MAC address
* 02:41and notices that MAC address is in its MAC address table.
* 02:46So it sends it out just port 1.
* 02:51PC-A receives the ethernet frame,
* 02:54examines the destination MAC address
* 02:56against its own MAC address and notices
* 02:59it is a match so it receives the rest of the frame.

### Switching Forwarding Methods

Switches make Layer 2 forwarding decisions very quickly. This is because of software on application-specific-integrated circuits (ASICs). ASICs reduce the frame-handling time within the device and allow the device to manage an increased number of frames without degrading performance.

Layer 2 switches use one of two methods to switch frames:

* **Store-and-forward switching** - This method makes a forwarding decision on a frame after it has received the entire frame and checked the frame for errors using a mathematical error-checking mechanism known as a cyclic redundancy check (CRC). Store-and-forward switching is Cisco’s primary LAN switching method.
* **Cut-through switching** - This method begins the forwarding process after the destination MAC address of an incoming frame and the egress port have been determined.

### Store-and-Forward Switching