Transfer Functions Theory, Derivation, and Applications

This paper is part of the Engineering and Technology Learning Portfolio, documenting continuous self-study and experimental work.

Mini Research Paper by Altanbaatar Enkhsuld

Introduction

A **transfer function** is a mathematical representation that describes the behavior of a linear time-invariant (LTI) system in the frequency domain. It provides a compact relationship between the input and output of a system by transforming differential equations into algebraic equations using the Laplace transform. Transfer functions are foundational in control engineering, power electronics, signal processing, and mechanical system analysis because they simplify modeling, stability evaluation, and controller design.

Definition of Transfer Function

For an LTI system, the transfer function $G(s)$is defined as:

$$G(s) = \frac{Y(s)}{X(s)}$$

where:

- $X(s)$: Laplace transform of the input
- $Y(s)$: Laplace transform of the output
- s: complex frequency variable $(s = \sigma + j\omega)$

The transfer function assumes **zero initial conditions**, allowing clean analysis of system behavior independent of past state.

Derivation From Differential Equations

Most physical systems are initially described by differential equations.
Example: an RC circuit governed by

$$RC\frac{dv_o(t)}{dt} + v_o(t) = v_i(t)$$

Applying the Laplace transform under zero initial conditions:

$$RC \cdot sV_o(s) + V_o(s) = V_i(s)$$

Solving for the ratio:

$$\frac{V_o(s)}{V_i(s)} = \frac{1}{RCs + 1}$$

This result is the transfer function of a first-order low-pass filter.

Standard Transfer Function Structure

A general transfer function is expressed as:

$$G(s) = \frac{b_m s^m + b_{m-1} s^{m-1} + \cdots + b_1 s + b_0}{a_n s^n + a_{n-1} s^{n-1} + \cdots + a_1 s + a_0}$$

where:

- Numerator polynomial defines zeros
- Denominator polynomial defines poles

The order of the system equals the highest power of s in the denominator.

Poles and Zeros

1. Poles

Poles are values of s that make the denominator zero:

$$a_n s^n + \cdots + a_1 s + a_0 = 0$$

Poles determine:

- Stability
- Response speed

- Damping
- Oscillation characteristics

A system is stable if all poles have negative real parts.

2. Zeros

Zeros are values of s making the numerator zero:

$$b_m s^m + \cdots + b_1 s + b_0 = 0$$

Zeros shape the frequency response and affect system dynamics such as phase and transient characteristics.

First-Order System Example

Consider again the RC low-pass filter with:

$$G(s) = \frac{1}{RCs + 1}$$

Key parameters:

- Time constant: $\tau = RC$
- Pole: $s = -\frac{1}{RC}$

Interpretation:

- Larger $RC \rightarrow$ slower response
- Smaller $RC \rightarrow$ faster response

This system attenuates high-frequency signals and passes low-frequency components, making it a fundamental filter in electronics.

Step Response

For a step input $V_{in}(t) = V_0 u(t)$:

$$V_o(t) = V_0(1 - e^{-t/RC})$$

Characteristics:

- Exponential rise
- Settles to V_0as $t \to \infty$
- Time to reach ~63% of final value is RC

This time-domain response is directly tied to the pole location.

Transfer Functions in Control Systems

Control systems use transfer functions to model both plants and controllers.

1. Example: PI Controller

$$G_{PI}(s) = K_p + \frac{K_i}{s}$$

This structure combines proportional and integral action, enabling steady-state error elimination and improved low-frequency response.

2. Closed-Loop System

With feedback transfer function $H(s)$:

$$G_{cl}(s) = \frac{G(s)}{1 + G(s)H(s)}$$

This form is essential for analyzing stability, sensitivity, and system robustness.

Block Diagram Operations

1. Series Connection

$$G_{eq}(s) = G_1(s)G_2(s)$$

2. Parallel Connection

$$G_{eq}(s) = G_1(s) + G_2(s)$$

3. Feedback Loop

$$G_{cl}(s) = \frac{G(s)}{1 + G(s)H(s)}$$

These rules allow modular modeling of complex multi-stage systems.

Frequency Response and Bode Plots

Transfer functions directly yield frequency-domain characteristics through substitution $s = j\omega$:

$$G(j\omega)$$

This produces:

- Magnitude response
- Phase response

Bode plots derived from transfer functions give insight into:

- Bandwidth
- Cutoff frequency
- Gain margin
- Phase margin

- Resonance behavior

These properties guide controller tuning and filter design.

Stability Analysis

Stability is determined by pole locations.
A system is stable if:

$$\mathrm{Re}(s_i) < 0 \forall s_i \text{ (poles)}$$

If any pole enters the right-half plane:

- Output grows unbounded
- Closed-loop performance deteriorates
- System becomes unsafe

Transfer functions make stability evaluation straightforward through denominator polynomial analysis.

Applications in Engineering

Transfer functions are widely applied in:

- **Power electronics:** buck, boost, buck-boost, current/voltage control
- **Motor drives:** torque and speed regulation
- **Communications:** filters, modulators
- **Signal processing:** shaping frequency behavior
- **Mechanical systems:** vibration, damping
- **Robotics:** position and velocity control

Their universality stems from their mathematical clarity and compatibility with controller design techniques.

Conclusion

Transfer functions are a core analytical tool that bridges physical system behavior and mathematical modeling. By converting differential equations into algebraic expressions in the s-domain, transfer functions enable efficient analysis of system dynamics, stability, frequency response, and control design. Their structure defined by poles and zeros captures essential characteristics of system behavior and provides a foundation for modern control theory and engineering practice.