To interpret the time reading into a distance you need to change equation 1. The clock on the device you are using will probably count in microseconds or smaller. To use equation 1 the speed of sound needs to determined, which is 343 meters per second at standard temperature and pressure. To convert this into more useful form use equation 2 to change from meters per second to microseconds per centimeter. Then equation 3 can be used to easily compute the distance in centimeters.

$$\text{Equation 2. } Distance = \frac{Speed}{170.15\,m} \times \frac{Meters}{100\,cm} \times \frac{1e6\,\mu S}{170.15\,m} \times \frac{58.772\,\mu S}{cm}$$

$$\text{Equation 3. } Distance = \frac{time}{58} = \frac{\mu s}{\mu s/cm} = cm$$

4. Wiring the HC-SR04 to a Microcontroller

This section only covers the hardware side. For information on how to integrate the software side, look at one of the links below or look into the specific microcontroller you are using.

The HC-SR04 has 4 pins: VCC, GND, TRIG and ECHO.
1. VCC is a 5v power supply. This should come from the microcontroller
2. GND is a ground pin. Attach to ground on the microcontroller.
3. TRIG should be attached to a GPIO pin that can be set to HIGH
4. ECHO is a little more difficult. The HC-SR04 outputs 5v, which could destroy many microcontroller GPIO pins (the maximum allowed voltage varies). In order to step down the voltage use a single resistor or a voltage divider circuit. Once again this depends on the specific microcontroller you are using, you will need to find out its GPIO maximum voltage and make sure you are below that.
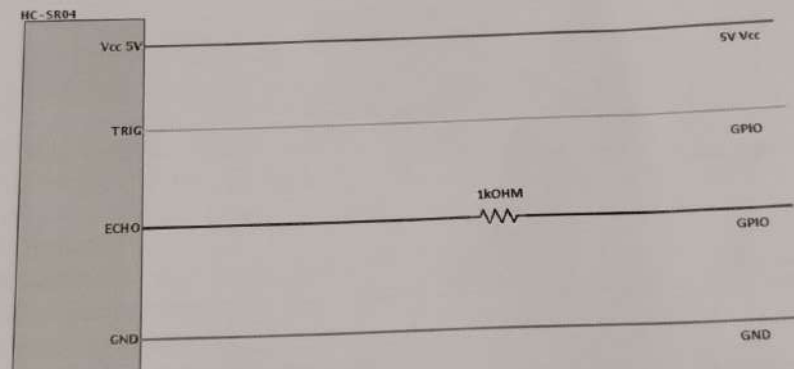

Figure 4

5. Errors and Bad Readings

Ultrasonic sensors are great sensors -- they work well for many applications where other types of sensors fall short. Unfortunately, they do have weaknesses. These weaknesses can be mitigated and worked around, but first they must be understood. The
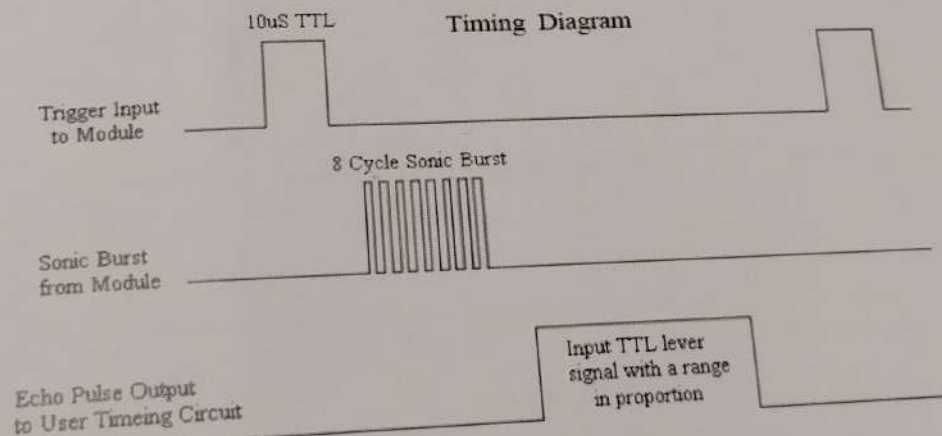
3. Timing Chart and Pin Explanations

The HC-SR04 has four pins, VCC, GND, TRIG and ECHO; these pins all have different functions. The VCC and GND pins are the simplest -- they power the HC-SR04. These pins need to be attached to a +5 volt source and ground respectively. There is a single control pin: the TRIG pin. The TRIG pin is responsible for sending the ultrasonic burst. This pin should be set to HIGH for 10 μs, at which point the HC-SR04 will send out an eight cycle sonic burst at 40 kHZ. After a sonic burst has been sent the ECHO pin will go HIGH. The ECHO pin is the data pin -- it is used in taking distance measurements. After an ultrasonic burst is sent the pin will go HIGH, it will stay high until an ultrasonic burst is detected back, at which point it will go LOW.

Taking Distance Measurements

The HC-SR04 can be triggered to send out an ultrasonic burst by setting the TRIG pin to HIGH. Once the burst is sent the ECHO pin will automatically go HIGH. This pin will remain HIGH until the the burst hits the sensor again. You can calculate the distance to the object by keeping track of how long the ECHO pin stays HIGH. The time ECHO stays HIGH is the time the burst spent traveling. Using this measurement in equation 1 along with the speed of sound will yield the distance travelled. A summary of this is listed below, along with a visual representation in Figure 2.

1. Set TRIG to HIGH
2. Set a timer when ECHO goes to HIGH
3. Keep the timer running until ECHO goes to LOW
4. Save that time
5. Use equation 1 to determine the distance travelled

Figure 3
Source 2

Timing Diagram

Trigger Input to Module — 10uS TTL

Sonic Burst from Module — 8 Cycle Sonic Burst

Echo Pulse Output to User Timeing Circuit — Input TTL lever signal with a range in proportion

Source 2

To interpret the time reading into a distance you need to change equation 1. The clock on the device you are using will probably count in microseconds or smaller. To use equation 1 the speed of sound needs to determined, which is 343 meters per second at standard temperature and pressure. To convert this into more useful form use equation 2 to change from meters per second to microseconds per centimeter. Then equation 3 can be used to easily compute the distance in centimeters.

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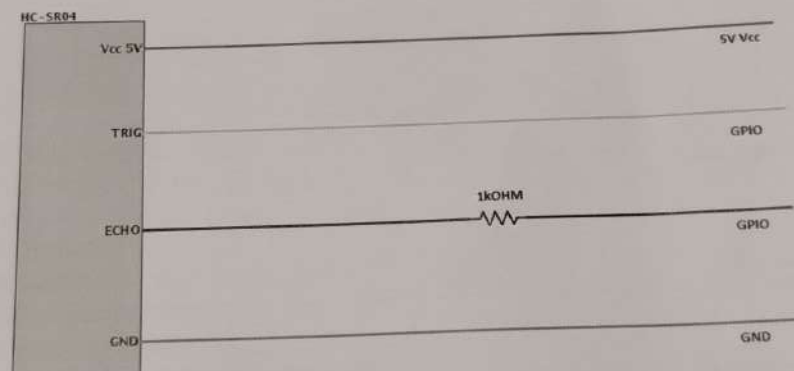

Figure 4

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HC-SR04 Ultrasonic Sensor

The purpose of this file is to explain how the HC-SR04 works. It will give a brief explanation of how ultrasonic sensors work in general. It will also explain how to wire the sensor up to a microcontroller and how to take/interpret readings. It will also discuss some sources of errors and bad readings.

1. How Ultrasonic Sensors Work
2. HC-SR04 Specifications
3. Timing chart, Pin explanations and Taking Distance Measurements
4. Wiring HC-SR04 with a microcontroller
5. Errors and Bad Readings
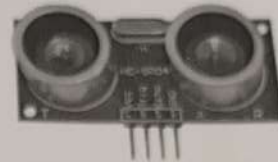
1. How Ultrasonic Sensors Work

Ultrasonic sensors use sound to determine the distance between the sensor and the closest object in its path. How do ultrasonic sensors do this? Ultrasonic sensors are essentially sound sensors, but they operate at a frequency above human hearing.
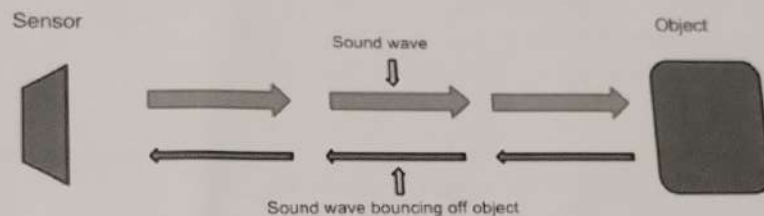
The sensor sends out a sound wave at a specific frequency. It then listens for that specific sound wave to bounce off of an object and come back (Figure 1). The sensor keeps track of the time between sending the sound wave and the sound wave returning. If you know how fast something is going and how long it is traveling you can find the distance traveled with equation 1.

Equation 1. $d = v \times t$

The speed of sound can be calculated based on the a variety of atmospheric conditions, including temperature, humidity and pressure. Actually calculating the distance will be shown later on in this document.

It should be noted that ultrasonic sensors have a cone of detection, the angle of this cone varies with distance, Figure 2 show this relation. The ability of a sensor to