

UART Communication Protocol for our Autonomous Vehicle

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1 Introduction

This document describes a 64-bit fixed-size UART protocol designed for our autonomous vehicle. Key requirements are:

- Low overhead,
- Robustness with CRC error detection,
- Fixed frame size (2 read cycles for each frame),
- Ability to carry up to 50 bits of parameter/reserved data.

Each 64-bit frame is laid out as follows:

$$\underbrace{\text{Addr}}_{2 \text{ bits}} \parallel \underbrace{\text{Command}}_{4 \text{ bits}} \parallel \underbrace{\text{Parameter/Reserved}}_{50 \text{ bits}} \parallel \underbrace{\text{CRC-8}}_{8 \text{ bits}}$$

2 Frame Definition

A single UART frame is 64 bits. The fields are:

- **Address (2 bits):**

$$\text{Addr} \in \{0b00, 0b01, 0b11\}$$

Example address mapping:

$$\begin{aligned} 0b00 &\rightarrow \text{Raspberry Hat}, \\ 0b01 &\rightarrow \text{Motion Controller}, \\ 0b11 &\rightarrow \text{Grip Controller}. \end{aligned}$$

- **Command (4 bits):**

$$\text{Command} \in \{0x0, \dots, 0xF\}$$

Commands currently in use are documented in Table 1.

- **Parameter/Reserved (50 bits):**

$$\underbrace{p_{49} p_{48} \dots p_1 p_0}_{50 \text{ bits}}$$

This field can encode various data types, including those listed in Table 2 (e.g. `int16`, `float16`, flags, etc.) depending on the command. If fewer than 50 bits are needed, the unused bits can be reserved or zeroed.

- **CRC-8 (8 bits):**

$$\underbrace{c_7 c_6 \dots c_1 c_0}_{8 \text{ bits}}$$

This is a standard 8-bit CRC computed over the top 56 bits.

3 Command Reference

Code	Command	Parameter(s)
0x0	Move	int16: distance in cm (or 0/unused for infinite)
0x1	Reverse	int16: distance in cm (or 0/unused for infinite)
0x2	Turn	int16: degrees (positive=right, negative=left)
0x3	Rotate	int16: degrees (default 180 if 0/unused)
0x4	Stop Normal	(open)
0x5	Stop Emergency	(open)
0x6	Info	(open)
0x7	Ping	(open)
0x8	Error Check	(open)

Table 1: Command Codes, Names, and Parameter Definitions

4 Type Reference

Type	Range / Description
int16	-32768 to 32767
int8	-128 to 127
uint16	0 to 65535
uint8	0 to 255
fp16 / float16	half precision
fp8 / float8	mini precision

Table 2: Possible Data Types for Parameters

5 CRC-8 Computation

5.1 Polynomial Definition

The polynomial we'll use for CRC-8 is:

$$x^8 + x^2 + x^1 + x^0,$$

often represented in hexadecimal as 0x07.

5.2 Why This Polynomial?

The polynomial

$$P(x) = x^8 + x^2 + x + 1$$

is known to be *primitive* over the finite field GF(2). This implies that the linear feedback shift register (LFSR) based on $P(x)$ can generate any nonzero 8-bit sequence in a maximal cycle (of length $2^8 - 1 = 255$). In terms of CRC properties, using a primitive polynomial of degree 8 provides:

- **Guaranteed detection of any single-bit error:** A one-bit error corresponds to the polynomial x^k for some k . Because $P(x)$ is primitive, x^k is never divisible by $P(x)$ for $0 \leq k < 255$.
- **Guaranteed detection of many double-bit errors:** If two bits are in error, the error polynomial is $x^m + x^n$. Since $P(x)$ is primitive, it cannot divide $x^m + x^n$ unless $m = n$. Thus, distinct double-bit errors (i.e. $m \neq n$) are almost always detected.¹
- **Detection of bursts up to 8 bits long:** In general, an n -bit CRC can reliably detect bursts of up to n bits in length. Here, that means any burst error of up to 8 consecutive bits will *not* yield a zero remainder when dividing by $P(x)$.

Short Frame Advantage: Because our frames are only 64 bits, the chance of an undetected multi-bit error is further reduced. For random error patterns, the probability of an undetected error is at most $1/2^8 = 1/256$. Actual practical detection is typically even better than the pure random guess model, especially for correlated or bursty errors, due to how the polynomial aligns with short data lengths.

¹Strictly speaking, *no* CRC polynomial can detect *all* double-bit errors at arbitrary distances, but a primitive polynomial has a higher minimum distance for typical codeword lengths and is exceptionally good for short frames like ours.

5.3 Computation Steps (Bitwise)

1. Initialize the CRC register:

$$\text{crc} \leftarrow 0x00.$$

2. Process the first 7 bytes (56 bits) in the frame (i.e. **Addr**, **Command**, and **Parameter/Reserved**).
3. For each byte **b** among those 7 bytes:

$$\text{crc} \leftarrow \text{crc} \oplus \mathbf{b}.$$

Then, for each of the 8 bits in that byte:

$$\begin{cases} \text{if } (\text{crc} \& 0x80) \neq 0 : & \text{crc} \leftarrow (\text{crc} \ll 1) \oplus 0x07 \\ \text{else :} & \text{crc} \leftarrow (\text{crc} \ll 1) \end{cases}$$

(Mask **crc** with **0xFF** after each shift to keep it at 8 bits.)

4. At the end of this 7-byte process, **crc** is the final CRC-8. Store it into the last byte of the 64-bit frame.

6 Transmit & Receive Flow

6.1 Transmit Flow

1. Construct the 56 bits of data, for example:

$$\text{Frame_Hi} = (\text{Addr} \ll 62) \mid (\text{Command} \ll 58) \mid (\text{Param}_{50} \ll 8).$$

2. Compute CRC-8 across these 56 bits, producing one byte.
3. Append this **crc_byte** as the final 8 bits.
4. Send the resulting 64-bit frame via UART.

6.2 Receive Flow

1. Read the full 64 bits from UART (fixed-size).
2. Separate the top 56 bits (**Addr** + **Command** + **Param/Reserved**) and the last 8 bits (the received CRC).
3. Compute a new CRC-8 over the 56 bits.
4. Compare the computed CRC with the received CRC:

$$\text{if computedCRC} \neq \text{receivedCRC} \implies \text{reject packet (error)}.$$

5. If the CRCs match, accept the frame and parse the 56 bits according to the protocol's definitions.