

# COE3DY4 Project

## Real-time SDR for mono/stereo FM and RDS

### Objective

The main objective of the project is to navigate a complex (industry-level) specification and understand (and rise to) the challenges that must be addressed for a real-time implementation of a computing system that operates in a form factor-constrained environment.

### Preparation

- Revise the material from labs 1 to 3

### Project Overview

The 3DY4 project leverages front-end radio-frequency (RF) hardware, like RF dongles [1] based on the Realtek RTL2832U chipset [2], and single-board computers, like Raspberry Pi 4 [3], for the implementation of a software-defined radio (SDR) system for real-time reception of frequency-modulated (FM) mono/stereo audio [4], as well as the reception of digital data sent through FM broadcast using the radio data system (RDS) protocol [5]<sup>1</sup>. Due to the affordability of RF hardware, a broad number of open source SDR projects have emerged over the past decade or so, like GNU Radio [8] or Gqrx [9], only to name a couple. The goal of the 3DY4 project is not to duplicate this type of open-source initiatives. Rather, the real-time SDR project in this course is used primarily as a vehicle for consolidating the knowledge acquired so far and to learn how to navigate from the first principles to the complex interrelationships between seemingly disparate, yet practically related, topics from electrical and computer engineering.

Each FM channel occupies 200 KHz of the FM band and it is symmetric around its center frequency that can range from 88.1 MHz to 107.9 MHz in Canada (note, not all the FM channels are used in the same geographic region, hence it is common in some areas that two FM stations will broadcast 400 KHz, or even a higher multiple of 200 KHz, apart). When looking at the positive frequencies of the demodulated FM channel (0 to 100 KHz) there are three different sub-channels within each FM channel that are of interest to this project. The mono sub-channel is from 0 to 15 KHz; the stereo sub-channel is from 23 to 53 KHz and the RDS sub-channel is from 54 to 60 KHz. Above 60 KHz, there *might* be other sub-channels that use SCA subcarriers (where SCA stands for Subsidiary Communications Authorization), which allow FM stations to broadcast additional services. SCA sub-carriers are not standardized and the focus of the 3DY4 project will be on the mono audio, stereo audio and RBDS clearly labeled in Figure 1. Note, in between the mono and

---

<sup>1</sup>Since RDS was initially developed in Europe [6], the official name in the North America is Radio Broadcast Data System (RBDS) [7]. With the exception of some digital codes specific to geographic locations, the two standards are virtually identical and therefore the terms RDS and RBDS will be used interchangeably.

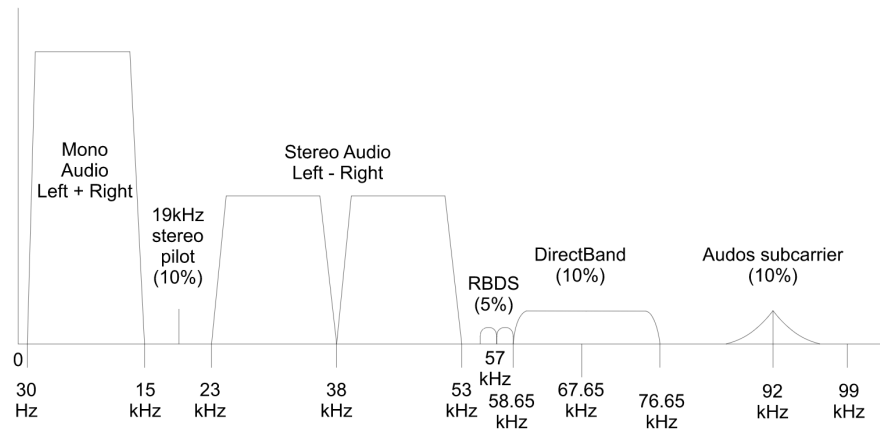


Figure 1: Spectrum of an FM channel [4]

stereo sub-channels there is a 19 KHz stereo pilot tone used to synchronize the stereo sub-carrier to the second harmonic of this tone, i.e., 38 KHz. This mechanism was needed to broadcast stereo audio when the receivers were built with analog technologies. While the RDS sub-channel is expected to be centered around the third harmonic of the pilot tone, i.e., 57 KHz, some FM stations do not necessarily lock the RDS sub-carrier to the pilot tone; hence the carrier recovery and downconversion for RDS will follow an approach that is different from the carrier recovery and downconversion for stereo audio; nonetheless, it is worth noting that the approach used for RDS is resemblant to the approach followed by many modern digital communication standards.

While the data that feeds the SDR system implemented in this project is driven by FM stations, in between the last lab, class discussion and this project document, all the essential FM-related information relevant to the project has been provided. For further information on FM technology, you are referred to academic textbooks on the topic or industry white papers, such as [10, 11, 12]. As a final note, because some terms can be implied from the context, we will refer to sub-channels of an FM channel also as channels, i.e., the mono channel (0 to 15 KHz), the stereo channel (23 to 53 KHz) and the RDS channel (54 to 60 KHz).

The big picture of the 3DY4 project is capture in Figure 2 and it is summarized below:

- the RF hardware is concerned with the acquisition of the RF signal through an antenna and translating it into the digital domain by producing an 8-bit sample for the in-phase (I) component and another 8-bit sample for the quadrature (Q) component of the RF signal (through a process of analog downconversion via mixing and filtering using a local oscillator). Since the software interface to the RF hardware has been developed by a third party [2], the key point that must be accounted for is that the I/Q data is transferred to the host in an interleaved format as I/Q 8-bit sample pairs, i.e., an 8-bit I sample followed by the corresponding 8-bit Q sample, followed by the next I/Q pair and so on.
- The RF front-end block from the SDR system extracts the FM channel through low-pass filtering followed by decimation to intermediate frequency (IF) and FM demodulation. It is conceptually the same as the RF front-end for the last lab, however for the project there will be **four** modes of operation.

**It is critical to note that for the remainder of this document all the figures/examples are described as if there are only two modes of operation. While mode 0 is the same for all the project groups modes 1, 2 and 3 will be custom for each group**

and they unique settings will be uploaded into your group's repo in GitHub after it has been created. Hence, mode 1 from this document is “fictive” and it does not apply to any project for any group. The descriptions concerning mode 1 in this document, including its sample rates (e.g., 2.5 Msamples/sec for the front-end and 250 Ksamples/sec for the intermediate stage) are only for the purpose to highlight the differences of the custom modes 1, 2 and 3 from mode 0 and to articulate the conceptual challenges faced during resampling.

In **mode 0** the input sample rate is **2.4 MSamples/sec** and in *mode 1* the sample rate is *2.5 MSamples/sec*. Considering that the decimation scale factor in the RF front-end block is equal to ten, the FM demodulated signal at the IF sample rate will be 240 KSamples/sec for mode 0 and 250 KSamples/sec for mode 1. **By default, your SDR software should operate in mode 0.** *If a command line argument is provided and it is equal to  $x$  then your SDR software should operate in mode  $x$  (where  $x$  can be 0, 1, 2 or 3 - see your group's project repo in GitHub for custom settings for the sample rates for each mode).*

- The mono block extracts the mono audio channel (0 to 15 KHz) and it reduces the sample rate to 48 KSamples/sec. The input is FM demodulated data that should be represented in floating point format with an IF sample rate at either 240 KSamples/sec or 250 Ksamples/sec depending on the mode of operation. The output should be in 16-bit signed integer format that can be transferred to an audio player. Note, if only mono audio is implemented the 16-bit values are the sum of the left and right audio channels. Since the intermediate data is in floating-point format, it is up to the SDR software developer to choose an internal scale factor for the output audio data in order to adequately use the dynamic range offered by 16-bit signed integer format.
- The stereo block extracts the 19KHz pilot tone through band-pass filtering to perform the downconversion of the stereo channel, which is subsequently filtered and combined with the mono audio data to produce the left and right audio channels. This can be achieved by combining the data from the mono and stereo channels because the mono channel contains the sum of the left and right audio channels, whereas the stereo channel contains the difference between the left and right audio channels. The input and output formats are the same as for the mono path.
- The RDS block first recovers the subcarrier from the RDS channel, it downconverts it through a digital communication approach and it resamples it before performing clock and data recovery. Once the bitstream is generated, the frame synchronization is done in the data link layer before the extracted information words are passed to the RDS application layer. The input to this block is the same as for the mono and stereo paths, however the output is now in terms of bits and words of radio data.

The remainder of this document will provide the motivation and objectives of each processing block in the SDR receiver for FM mono/stereo/RDS and its most critical details. *The more specific details, such as the design methodology, including implementation choices, trade-offs, ..., will be discussed during classes and feedback on your unique approach (and thought process in general) will be provided during project meetings*<sup>2</sup>. Before proceeding with the description of each processing block for this project, below is a summary of the most important take-aways from the lab work:

---

<sup>2</sup>For general details concerning Raspberry Pi, RTL-SDR, FM, RDS, ... that are not specific to this course you should refer to third-party literature.

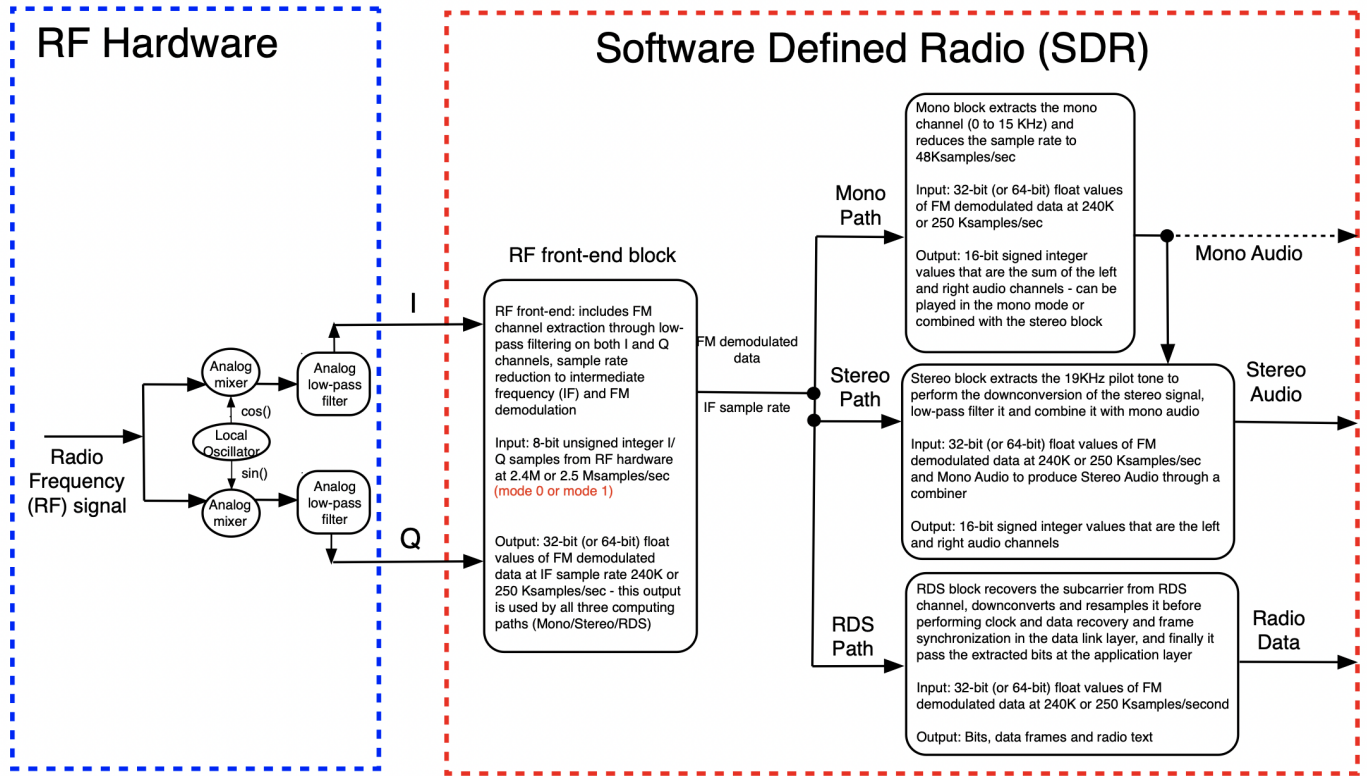


Figure 2: Project overview

- Filters are core building blocks in any digital signal processing (DSP) application and they can be implemented using the convolution of the filter's impulse response with the input sequence (discrete time sequence of digital samples).
- The impulse response coefficients can be derived using the *sinc* function, by relying on the Fourier transform relationship between the rectangular window, used to gate the pass band in the frequency domain, and the *sinc* function in the time domain.
- In practice, idealized (or brick-wall) filters cannot be implemented, hence finite-impulse response (FIR) filters that guarantee linear phase are commonly used; for a given sample rate, the number of FIR taps (input sample delay/coefficient pairs) will have an impact on both the stop band attenuation and the width of the transition band.
- The filter coefficients depend on the number of FIR taps, the cutoff frequency (or frequencies for pass-band) **and** the sample rate.
- For most practical applications, including SDRs, filtering cannot be performed in a single-pass over the entire sequence of input samples. The input sequence is processed in blocks because of the need to avoid both an excessive latency for data acquisition, as well as large memory requirements. This adds to the implementation challenge, nonetheless this is a common issue, which needs be tackled with the same type of mindset across a broad spectrum of real-time computing systems.
- A collection of digital filters and other types of signal processing blocks are connected together in a *signal-flow graph*, which is an abstract representation used to model DSP applications. Depending on the software language and its libraries, as well as the underlying hardware

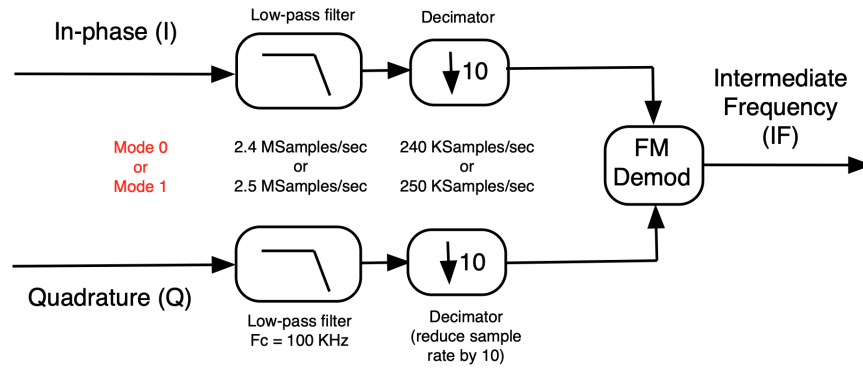


Figure 3: RF front-end processing (in software)

platform, the execution time for the same signal-flow graph with the same parameters can vary substantially. The signal-flow graphs should be modeled first in a high-level language, e.g., `Python` using its scientific libraries `SciPy/NumPy`, and only when the functional requirements have been met they are to be re-implemented in another language, e.g., `C/C++`, in order to facilitate real-time execution.

- The methods used to check the correctness of an implementation while bringing-up a complex system can vary depending on the tasks to be performed and issues at hand; for example, when dealing with the interface to the physical world, there is no reference data in terms of exact values to be matched and therefore one has to rely on visual inspection of power spectra to pass judgment if the code has been implemented correctly; conversely, when re-factoring the `C++` code in order to make the implementation feasible for real-time execution, i.e., converting convolution from single-pass to block processing, bit equivalence is expected in order to guarantee that no implementation artifacts have been introduced during re-factoring.

As a final note, for the machine code compiled from `C++` to work in real-time, special considerations for optimizing the source code will be needed and some of the generic ones will be discussed during lectures and tutorials.

## RF Front-End Processing

The signal-flow graph for the RF front-end block is illustrated in Figure 3. Take note of the following points:

- Conceptually the signal flow graph is identical to the front-end signal-flow graph from the third lab, with one critical difference because now there are two modes (reminder: **check note from page 2 concerning modes of operation**) of operation for the SDR system: in mode 0 the input sample rate, i.e., RF sample rate, is 2.4 MSamples/sec; in mode 1 the RF sample rate is 2.5 Msamples/sec. While this is inconsequential to the modeling of the RF front-end block (because the decimation scale factor is kept at 10 regardless of the mode of operation) it does have a ripple effect on the re-sampling to be done in the other processing blocks. It is worth noting nevertheless that, in any real-time implementation, any filter that is followed by a decimator  $\downarrow$  should compute **only** the samples that will be kept **after** decimation.
- The I/Q samples that will be fed by the RTL-SDR driver [2] to your software will be represented as 8-bit unsigned integers (`unsigned char` in `C++`). If you are to reuse the software model for this block from the last lab, you will need to normalize these 8-bit unsigned inte-

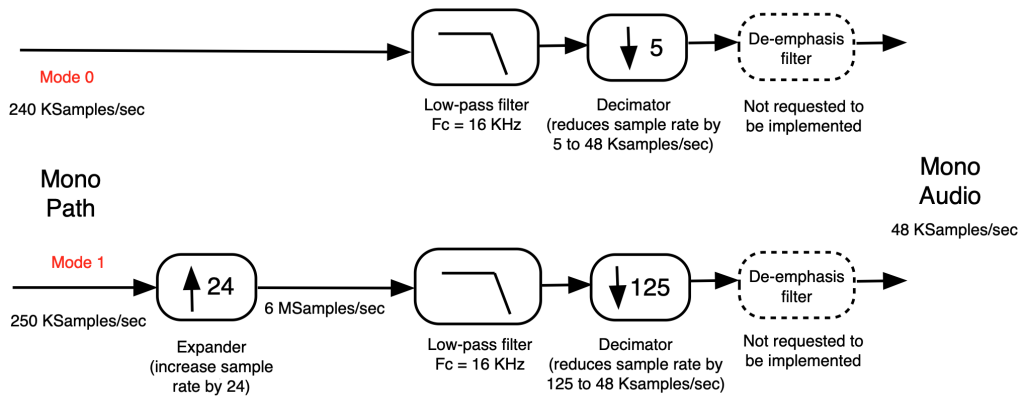


Figure 4: Mono processing

ger values to the -1 to +1 range of real numbers. Note, the code from the labs assumes the `float` data type for real numbers in C++, which represents real values on 32-bits. While both the dynamic range and the precision offered by the `float` data type is normally sufficient, depending on your design approach you might consider using the `double` data type, which represents real numbers on 64-bits. In the context of this SDR application for this project the advantage of `double` over `float` is extra precision, which may or may not be needed because it depends on your unique parameters in the signal-flow graph and your project-specific implementation choices; however this would come at the expense of doubling the memory requirements for all the blocks represented as real numbers and, depending on your unique parameters and project-specific choices, there is a possibility of a small performance overhead, which, in most cases, is expected to be tolerable.

- It is critical to emphasize that the only constraints on the data types are the 8-bit unsigned integer values for the inputs to your SDR software (I/Q samples) and 16-bit signed integer values for the outputs (audio samples) to be fed to an audio player. Note, the output of the RDS path is also clearly defined. However, the internal data representation is at the discretion of each project group and the above discussion concerning normalization to the -1 to +1 real range or `float` vs `double` is *a suggestion rather than a requirement*.

## Mono Processing

The signal-flow graph for mono processing is shown in Figure 4. Take note of the following points:

- Because the background noise in the very high frequency (VHF) range of electromagnetic waves can affect frequencies toward the higher range of the audio spectrum, the FM broadcasting stations pre-emphasize, i.e., boost, the higher frequency components during transmission. Consequently, receivers are commonly equipped with a de-emphasis filter in the final stage of FM audio decoding. This de-emphasis filter is **ignored** in this project because its absence is hardly noticeable from the user perception perspective and the available time during the project phase is deemed to be better utilized to develop the understanding for other important implementation techniques, like multi-threaded software, in greater depth.
- It is critical to notice that depending on the mode of operation there will be two different types of digital filters and sample rate conversions. In mode 0, the RF sample rate is 2.4 MSamples/sec, the IF sample rate (input to the mono processing) is 240 KSamples/sec



and the audio sample rate (output from the mono processing) is 48 KSamples/sec. This is essentially the same signal-flow graph from the last lab for the mono channel extraction, filtering and downsampling to the audio sample rate.

- In mode 1, the RF sample rate is 2.5 MSamples/sec, the IF sample rate is 250 KSamples/sec and the audio sample rate is 48 KSamples/sec. The fundamental difference from mode 0 is that there is no integer scale factor that can be used to downsample the IF data to the audio data. Rather, a fractional resampler, which is an upsampler followed by a downsampler, is needed. Assuming an integer upscale factor of  $U$  for upsampling, the first step is to implement an expander  $\uparrow$  where  $U - 1$  zeros are padded in between any two input samples. This will produce a sequence at the output of the expander whose sample rate is  $U \times IF$ , which is  $U$  times larger than the sample rate at the input of the resampler ( $IF$  is 250 KSamples/sec in mode 1). The decimator  $\downarrow$  uses an integer downscale factor of  $D$  and it will remove every  $D - 1$  samples from the output sequence, which reduces the sample rate from  $U \times IF$  to  $\frac{U}{D} \times IF$ . Since the expander  $\uparrow$  needs to be followed by a low-pass filter for *anti-imaging* and the decimator  $\downarrow$  needs to be preceded by a low-pass filter for *anti-aliasing*, the two low-pass filters are collapsed into a single filter **in between** the expander  $\uparrow$  and the decimator  $\downarrow$  with a maximum cutoff frequency equal to the minimum of  $\{(\frac{U}{D} \times \frac{IF}{2}), \frac{IF}{2}\}$ .
- To reduce the sample rate at which the low-pass filter operates in mode 1,  $U$  is chosen as the ratio between the output sample rate (48 Ksamples/sec) and the greatest common divisor between the input and output sample rates (250K and 48K respectively for mode 1). This results in  $U=24$  for mode 1. Similarly,  $D=125$  (ratio between the input sample rate and the greatest common divisor between the input and output sample rates). Simple math confirms that the maximum cutoff frequency for the low-pass filter between the expander  $\uparrow$  and decimator  $\downarrow$  for mode 1 is 24 KHz, however to extract only the mono channel we choose an even lower cutoff frequency at 16 KHz.
- What will make the implementation of this filter particularly challenging is that the sampling rate at its input is  $U \times IF$ , i.e.,  $24 \times 250$  KSamples/sec = 6 MSamples/sec. To reduce the transition band width and increase attenuation from the pass to the stop band, one would have to choose a very large number of filter taps. A straightforward implementation would be very computationally demanding, however, when leveraging some inherent properties of the input sequence to the filter, e.g.,  $U - 1$  zeros introduced by the expander  $\uparrow$  in between any two non-zero samples, or canceling computations for the  $D - 1$  output samples that are removed by the decimator  $\downarrow$ , one can speed up the execution time substantially. This will be one of the algorithmic optimization techniques to be learned while making the real-time implementation feasible.

## Stereo Processing Path

The stereo signal carries the **difference** between the left and the right audio channels and for this reason its strength is commonly lower than the signal from the mono channel, which carries the *sum* between the two audio channels. The stereo signal is modulated onto a 38 KHz subcarrier, which is locked to the second harmonic of the 19 KHz pilot tone that is present in each FM channel. During transmission, after upconversion the sub-carrier is suppressed, i.e., the stereo signal is modulated using Double Side Band Suppressed Carrier (DSBSC). The bandwidth of the stereo signal is 15 KHz, with the two sidebands being symmetric with respect to the 38 KHz subcarrier.

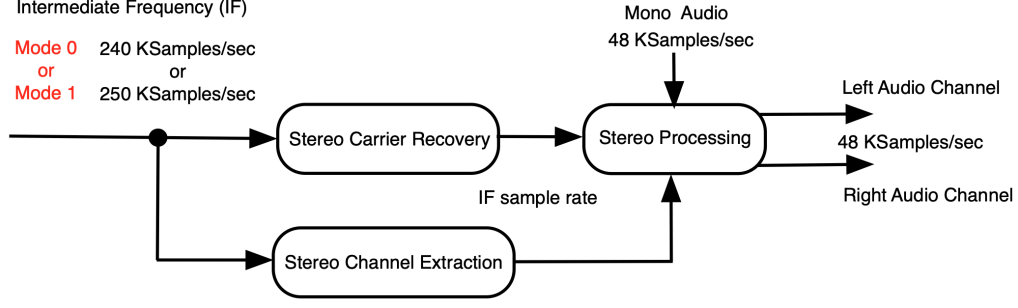


Figure 5: Stereo processing path

The high-level overview of the stereo processing path is shown in Figure 5. The FM demodulated signal at the intermediate frequency (IF) sample rate (either 240 KSamples/sec or 250 KSamples/sec depending on the mode) is passed to two separate sub-blocks: stereo carrier recovery and stereo channel extraction. The outputs of these two sub-blocks are fed into another sub-block for stereo processing, which performs digital downconversion through mixing the recovered carrier with the stereo channel. The output of the mixer will subsequently be converted to the audio sample rate through the same line of reasoning followed in the mono processing path. Finally the stereo data will be combined with mono data to produce the left and right audio channels.

## Stereo Channel Extraction and Carrier Recovery

The sub-blocks for the stereo carrier recovery and stereo channel extraction are shown in Figure 6. However, before explaining them, in order to better appreciate their purpose, it is important to elaborate using simplified formalism *why* their outputs need to be used together as inputs to the mixer from the stereo processing sub-block shown on the right hand side of the figure.

First, it is important to clarify that DSBSC is a distinct modulation technique from FM and the stereo signal is upconverted *within* the FM channel at 38 KHz using DSBSC (note, to avoid any confusion, subsequently all the baseband data from all the sub-channels from the FM channel are still frequency modulated before hitting the airwaves from the FM broadcaster). The basic idea of DSBSC modulation is to mix, i.e., multiply, the message signal with the carrier signal as follows:  $A_m \cos(2\pi f_m) \times \cos(2\pi f_c)$ , where  $A_m$  is the amplitude of the message,  $f_m$  is its frequency and  $f_c$  is the carrier frequency (for the sake of this discussion we ignore the amplitude of the carrier and phases of the two cosines). Using trigonometric identities, the above multiplication translates to the following DSBSC modulated signal:  $\frac{A_m}{2} [\cos(2\pi(f_c + f_m)) + \cos(2\pi(f_c - f_m))]$ . In the receiver, the same type of mixing is done for demodulation purposes, i.e., the carrier frequency is multiplied with the received signal, which has been DSBSC modulated. This mixing in the receiver produces  $2\frac{A_m}{4} \cos(2\pi f_m) + \frac{A_m}{4} [\cos(2\pi(2f_c + f_m)) + \cos(2\pi(2f_c - f_m))]$ . It can be clearly seen that the first term is the original message (whose amplitude is scaled down by 2) and the second term has a much higher frequency than the first term, assuming  $f_c$  is larger than  $f_m$ . Based on the above, if we low-pass filter the output of the mixer from the right hand side of Figure 6, we will recover the original message (we can scale the gain of the low-pass filter to make-up for the loss in message strength due to mixing at the transmit side).

To perform the above-described downconversion accurately, first we have to extract the stereo channel, which can be done through a band-pass filter with its start (or beginning frequency  $f_b$ ) at 22 KHz and end frequency ( $f_e$ ) at 54 KHz. This is the purpose of the stereo channel extraction sub-block from the bottom of Figure 6. Of equal importance is to mix the stereo channel at the



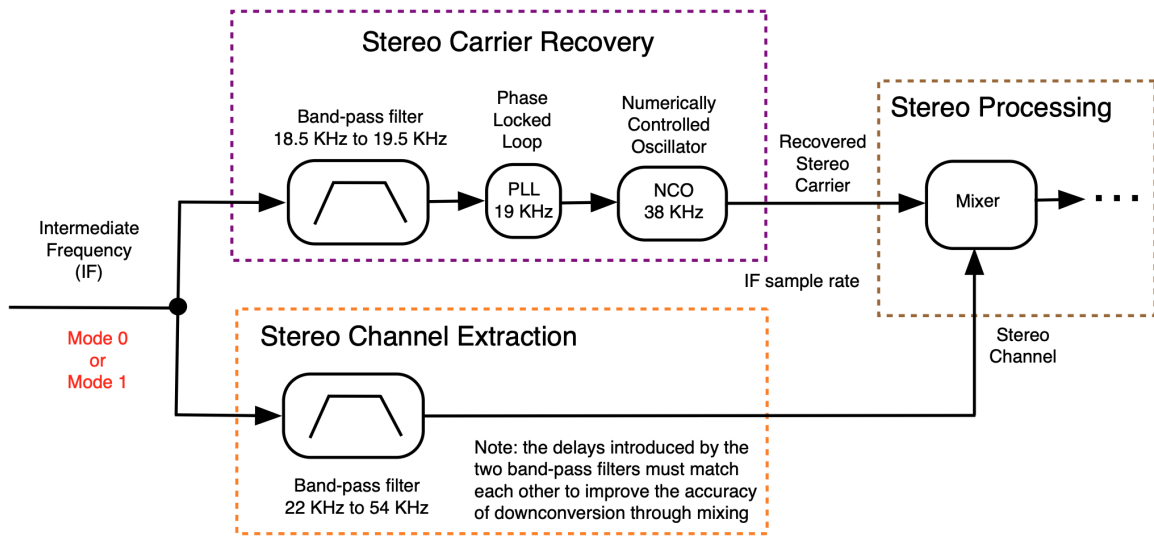


Figure 6: Stereo channel extraction and carrier recovery

receiver with a carrier frequency that is **synchronized** with the subcarrier frequency used by the *mixer at the transmitter*. Considering that DSBSC suppresses the carrier to save transmit power, all the FM stations broadcast a 19 KHz stereo pilot tone whose second harmonic is used for mixing at the transmitter; it is important to note that this 19 KHz pilot tone is sent as a standalone signal in between the mono and stereo sub-channels within the FM channel. As it can be seen in the Stereo Carrier Recovery sub-block from Figure 6, we first extract the 19 KHz pilot tone through a band-pass filter, then we synchronize to it using a phase-locked loop (PLL) and finally we multiply the output of the PLL by a scale factor of 2 using a numerically controlled oscillator (NCO) in order to produce the recovered stereo carrier to be used for mixing.

It is important to clarify that PLLs are phase tracking devices that have traditionally been implemented using integrated circuits, however software PLLs can be implemented reliably these days even on embedded computing devices for reasonable frequency ranges. The applications of PLLs in electrical and computer engineering are very broad, ranging from the control of electrical machines

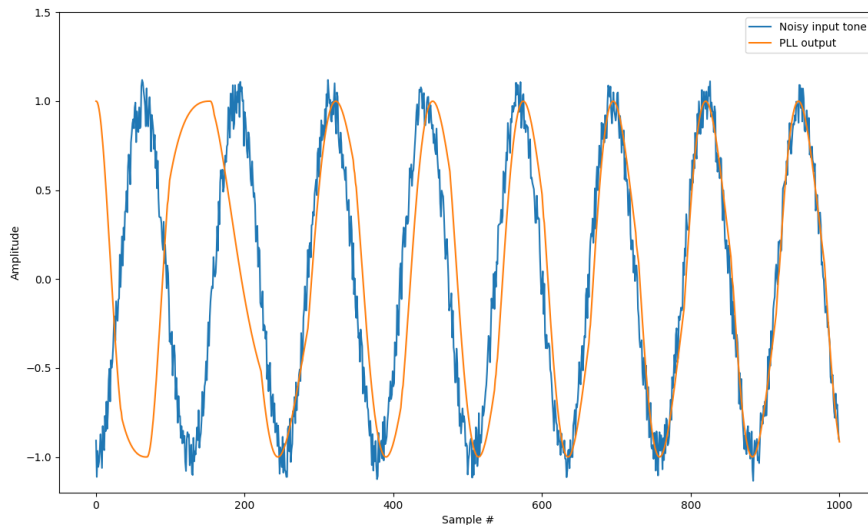


Figure 7: Phase-locked loop (PLL)

to clock distribution in microprocessors to keeping things orderly in wireless communications (or data transmission in general). Elaborating on the inner workings of a PLL is beyond the scope of this project document (note, the backbone code for a software PLL/NCO will be provided in Python). Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning at the intuitive level that an important goal of PLLs is to produce a *clean* output, e.g., filtered (and amplified if the input signal has a weak strength), in lock to a noisy input. An inherent trade-off for PLLs is that the faster a PLL can lock, the more phase jitter will exist in the output and the worse the ability of the PLL to lock to a weak input. To articulate the importance PLLs in FM receivers, the example from Figure 7 illustrates how a PLL is capable of locking to the phase of a periodic yet noisy input signal and pass a “clean” copy to the NCO for frequency scaling. It is also worth noting that the waves from Figure 7 have been produced using a noisy input tone at 19 KHz oversampled at 2.4Msamples/sec; as it can be observed, the PLL can lock within less than 1 KSamples.

Both the stereo carrier recovery and stereo channel extraction rely on band-pass filtering. There are two points worth making: (i) the number of filter taps for the two band-pass filters from Figure 6 should be matched to each other in order to guarantee the same delay from the FM demodulated data to both inputs of the mixer; (ii) the pseudocode for deriving the impulse response coefficients follows the structure and notation from the first lab, where pseudocode was given for deriving the impulse response coefficients for a low-pass filter.

**Input:** Filter parameters:  $f_b$ ,  $f_e$ ,  $f_s$  and  $N_{taps}$

- ▷  $f_b$  is the beginning of the pass band
- ▷  $f_e$  is the end of the pass band
- ▷  $f_s$  is the sample rate
- ▷  $N_{taps}$  is the number of filter taps

**Output:** Coefficients of the impulse response for a band pass filter  $h(i)$  with  $i = 0 \dots N_{taps} - 1$

$Norm_{center} \Leftarrow \frac{(f_e + f_b)/2}{f_s/2}$  ▷ define explicitly the normalized center frequency  $Norm_{center}$

$Norm_{pass} \Leftarrow \frac{f_e - f_b}{f_s/2}$  ▷ define explicitly the normalized pass band  $Norm_{pass}$

```

for  $i \in [0, N_{taps} - 1]$  do
  if  $i = (N_{taps} - 1)/2$  then
     $h(i) \Leftarrow Norm_{pass}$  ▷ avoid division by zero in sinc for the center tap when  $N_{taps}$  is odd
  else
     $h[i] \Leftarrow Norm_{pass} \frac{\sin(\pi(Norm_{pass}/2)(i - (N_{taps} - 1)/2))}{\pi(Norm_{pass}/2)(i - (N_{taps} - 1)/2)}$ 
  end if
   $h(i) \Leftarrow h(i) \cos(i\pi Norm_{center})$  ▷ apply a frequency shift by the center frequency
   $h(i) \Leftarrow h(i) \sin^2(\frac{i\pi}{N_{taps}})$  ▷ apply the Hann window
end for

```

## Stereo Processing: Downconversion, Filtering and Combining

The final sub-block of the stereo path shown in Figure 8 performs downconversion through mixing, sample rate conversion and stereo combining. The principle of downconversion through mixing has been elaborated at the beginning of the previous subsection. From the computational standpoint mixing is a low-demand task because the two input streams are multiplied sample by sample (pointwise multiplication). The output of the mixer will, however, have a significantly higher computational demand because it follows exactly the same sample principles and computational path for digital filtering and sample rate conversion as for the mono channel. Note, the mixer must

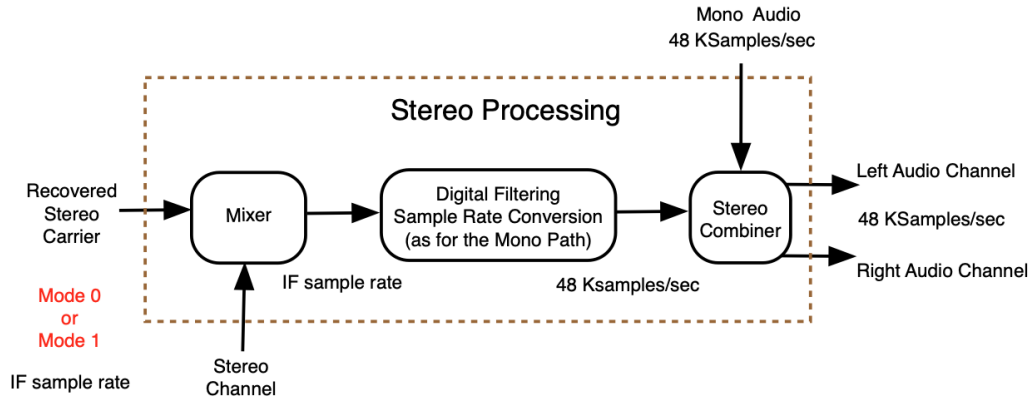


Figure 8: Stereo downconversion, filtering and combining

be followed by a low-pass filter, which is “absorbed” in the digital filtering sub-block. The stereo data at the audio sample rate (48 Ksamples/sec) will be combined with the mono audio in order to produce the left and right audio channels that can be subsequently fed to an audio player.

## RDS Processing Path

The RDS processing path is concerned with extracting the RDS channel (54 to 60 KHz from Figure 1), downconverting it to baseband without explicit synchronization to a pilot tone, and demodulating it for extracting the digital bitstream. Although the digital data rate is low, from the computational standpoint this processing path is particularly challenging because the RDS signal is relatively weak when compared to both the mono and the stereo signals.

The high-level diagram of the RDS processing path is shown in Figure 9. The input to the RDS path is the same FM-demodulated signal that drives the mono and the stereo paths (see Figure 2). This signal is at the intermediate frequency, either 240 KSamples/sec in mode 0. Similarly to the stereo processing path, the first step is extracting the RDS channel. Subsequently the carrier is recovered, however, unlike the case for the stereo path, the recovery is **not** based on locking explicitly to an harmonic of the pilot tone. Consistent with most digital communication standards, the carrier is extracted directly from the signal, as elaborated in the next sub-section. The main processing step is concerned with RDS demodulation, which involves downconversion, sample rate conversion to a rate that is a multiple of the symbol rate, matched filtering and timing recovery. Finally, the extracted symbols, at a rate of 2375 symbols/sec, are passed for RDS data processing where they are converted to a bitstream at 1187.5 bits/sec. In the last step, prior to extracting the radio data, frame synchronization will be needed.

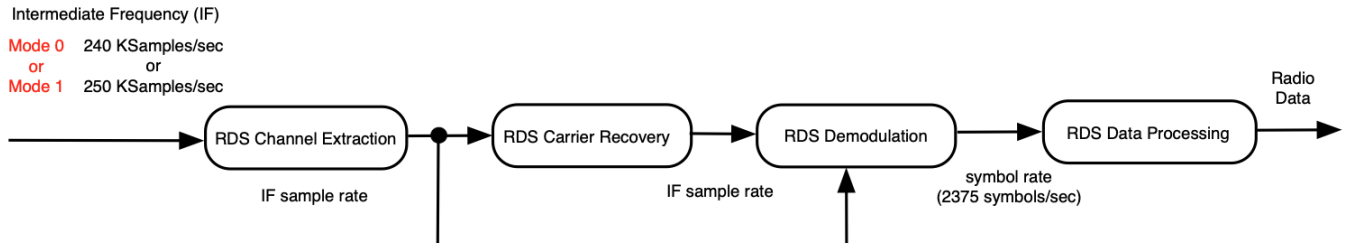


Figure 9: RDS processing path

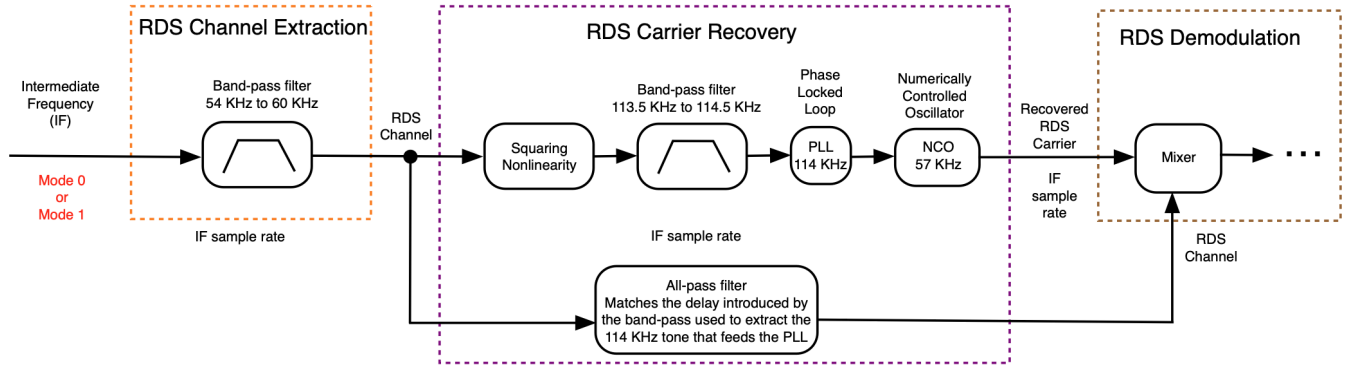


Figure 10: RDS channel extraction and carrier recovery

## RDS Channel Extraction and Carrier Recovery

At the transmitter the RDS channel is upconverted using the same principle as for the stereo channel. When extracting the channel using a band-pass filter, the RDS channel has a center frequency at 57 KHz and the channel bandwidth is 6 KHz; all the information will be subsequently extracted after downconversion from the positive sideband where the digital data is binary-phase (bi-phase) coded at 2375 symbols/sec. As shown in Figure 10, the band-pass filter for the RDS channel extraction operates at the IF sample rate and the data from the RDS channel is passed to the RDS carrier recovery sub-block.

The purpose of the RDS carrier recovery sub-block is to facilitate downconversion to the baseband by mixing the recovered carrier with the RDS channel. The key difference from the stereo path lies in **not** locking to the third harmonic of the pilot tone. This is because of a couple of reasons: not all FM stations synchronize the RDS sub-channel to the pilot tone and it provides the opportunity to learn about a digital-centered approach for carrier recovery. The core idea of this approach lies in the fact that by squaring the message signal  $A_m \cos(2\pi f_m + \phi)$ , one would end up with  $\frac{A_m^2}{2}(1 + \cos(4\pi f_m + 2\phi))$ . The square signal has a frequency  $2f_m$  and a phase  $2\phi$ , which is either 0 or  $2\pi$  when using bi-phase coding of digital data.

The squaring non-linearity from Figure 10 is a simple pointwise multiplication of each sample with itself. This result is used as an input to a narrow band-pass filter to extract a 114 KHz tone, which is double the center frequency of the RDS channel, i.e., 57 KHz. The PLL and the NCO, although drawn separately, can be integrated into a single module to produce a 57 KHz signal used for mixing the RDS channel as part of the downconversion process in the RDS demodulator. The entire RDS carrier recovery sub-block is operating at the IF sample rate. Considering that the input to the PLL is a signal with a 114 KHz tone it is now clear why the IF sample rate in either of the two supported modes has been chosen to be above 228 KSamples/sec.

It is very important to note that for the mixing to work it is essential to delay also the RDS channel by the same delay as in the band-pass filter that extracts the 114 KHz tone (the purpose of the all-pass filter box at the bottom of Figure 10). Because this delay is dependent on the number of filter taps, in order to avoid any additional computations, it is recommended that in the tuning phase, RDS demodulation is done on both the in-phase and quadrature components of the RDS channel. This can be achieved using two outputs from the NCO (the default in-phase output and the quadrature output, which is the in-phase 57 KHz tone delayed by  $\frac{\pi}{2}$ ). Note, while for more sophisticated digital modulation techniques in-phase/quadrature mixing is needed, in binary phase-shift keying (BPSK) modulation, i.e., bi-phase coding as labelled in the RBDS standard

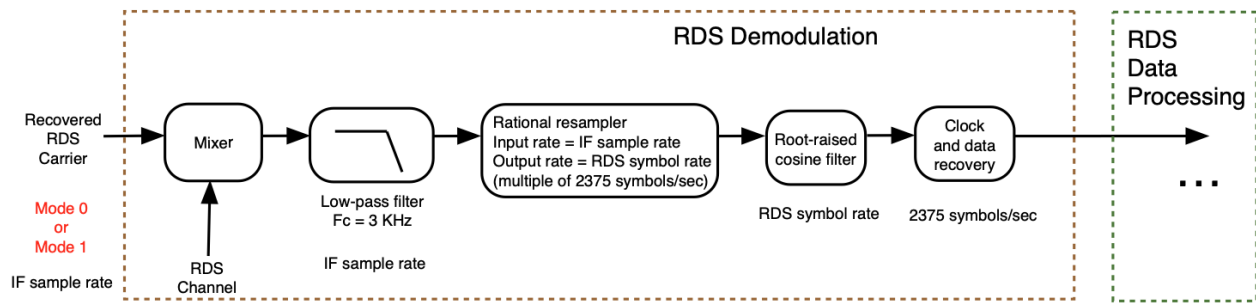


Figure 11: RDS demodulation

[7], this quadrature path can be disabled during real-time execution; it will be used only while tuning the phase of the NCO output used for mixing based on the phase shift observed in the constellation diagrams that can be visualized after timing recovery (as it will be illustrated in the following sub-section).

## RDS Demodulation

The top-level diagram of the RDS demodulator is shown in Figure 11. Its front-end is similar to the stereo path because after mixing, the baseband signal is extracted through a low-pass filter (note, for RDS the cutoff frequency is set at 3 KHz). This is followed by a rational resampler that changes the IF sample rate (either 240 KSamples/sec or 250 KSamples/sec, depending on the mode) to a sample rate that is an integer multiple of the symbol rate, which is 2375 symbols/sec. The rational re-sampler can be implemented using the same principle as discussed for the mono path (see discussion concerning expansion and decimation for mode 1 in Figure 4). For mode 0 it is recommended to set the resampler's output rate to  $24 \times 2375 = 57$  KSamples/sec; this is because it maximizes the greatest common divisor between the input and output sample rates (which in turn reduces the scale factors for the expander and decimator). For similar reasons, for mode 1 it is recommended to set this resampler's output rate to  $25 \times 2375 = 59.375$  KSamples/sec (reminder: **check your group's project repo for the number of samples per symbol for your group, which will define output rate of this resampler**).

Without elaborating on the detailed theory of pulse shaping in digital communications, it is necessary to make a few clarifications to better appreciate the importance of the next sub-block in the RDS demodulator, i.e., the root-raised cosine (RRC) filter [13]. The purpose of this filter is to reduce inter-symbol interference (ISI). Digital pulses are “shaped” before transmitting them to reduce the spectral bandwidth and hence maximize data transmission rates. Because finite bandwidth in the frequency domain causes infinite duration in the time domain, it is desirable to shape the transmitted digital data using Nyquist pulses to minimize ISI. The essential property of Nyquist pulses is that, given the known duration of digital symbols, their impulse response is nonzero only at one particular sample time and it is zero at all the other sampling instants. It is important to note that the root-raised cosine filter [13] is **not** a Nyquist filter when implemented on its own. However, by implementing it for spectrum shaping at **both** the transmitter and the receiver, the **combined** effect of the two filters produces a raised-cosine filter, which is a Nyquist filter.

Before transmission, RDS data is Manchester encoded, i.e., a single-bit for binary 1 is translated into **two** symbols (High followed by Low, labeled as HL); similarly binary 0 is translated into LH. This is illustrated in Figure 12, where the shape of the **two** symbols for each of the binary

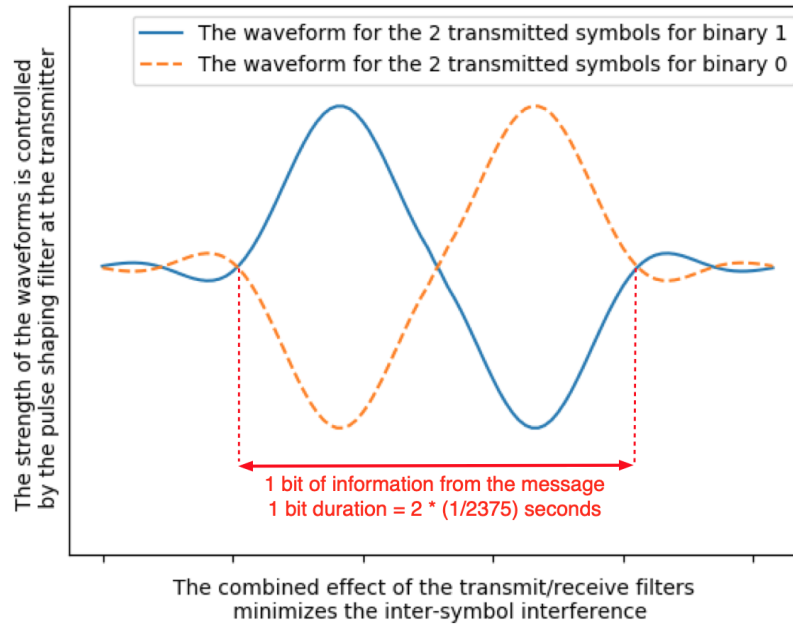


Figure 12: From bits to waveforms

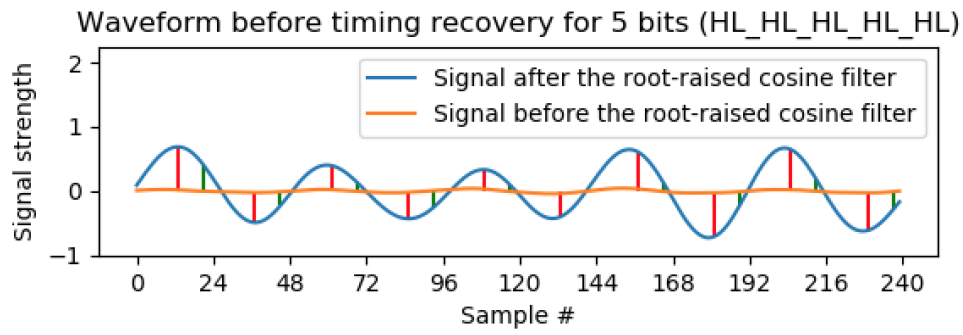
values 1 and 0 is illustrated. Note, because there are two symbols per bit, the symbol rate is 2375 symbols/sec whereas the bitrate is half of it, i.e., 1187.5 bits/sec.

It is important to take note that in a receiver the RRC filter is also used to add gain to the weak RDS signal that has been extracted from the FM channel (note, `Python` code for the RRC impulse response will be provided). The relative size of the input vs the output of the RRC filter is captured in Figure 13. This extra gain is needed for timing recovery (also referred to as clock and data recovery), which is a critical block in any digital communications system. Knowing the expected shape of the transmitted symbols is necessary but not sufficient to recover the binary data. One has to decide when to sample **each** received symbol. Figure 13a shows two choices for sampling times (assume 24 samples per symbol); clearly, the sampling times indicated by the red vertical lines are a better choice over the sampling times indicated by the green vertical lines. The main challenge lies in devising an algorithm to automatically adjust the sampling time.

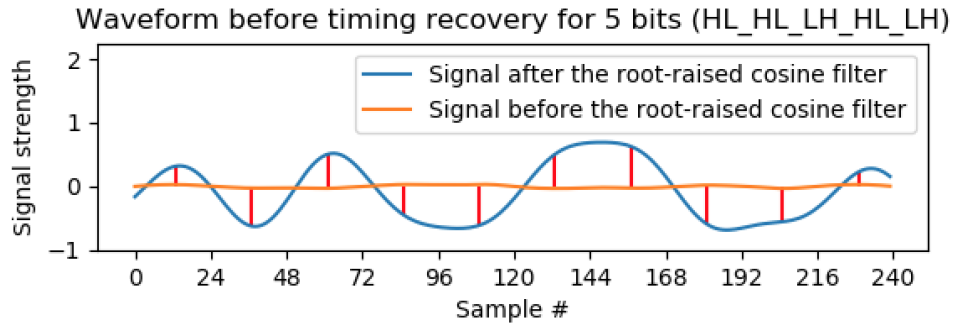
There are a few important points to be made. First, only the in-phase signal (one obtained by mixing the RDS channel with the in-phase component of the NCO) is shown in the Figures 13a and 13b. This explains, in part, the variation in the intensity of the pulses because even for a well-tuned PLL/NCO part of the signal energy will appear in the quadrature component, as it will be clearly observed in the constellation diagrams from Figures 14 and 15. Note, however, after the PLL/NCO have been tuned to match the filter delay used for carrier recovery for BPSK data **only** the in-phase signal is sampled. It can also be observed in Figure 13b how for BPSK modulated data a logic 0 (symbols LH) is a phase-shifted version (by  $\pi$  radians) of logic 1 (symbols HL). It is also worth mentioning that for real RDS data, symbols can be incorrectly sampled, which leads to bit errors that are eventually identified (and possibly corrected) at a later stage in the computing pipe.

A final point worth making for the RDS demodulator is the importance of monitoring signal constellations during the modeling/tuning phase, as illustrated in Figures 14 and 15. Constellation diagrams are a visual representation of the demodulated symbols (after timing recovery) as a





(a) Waveform of the signal at the receiver for five consecutive bits equal to binary 1 (each HL pair is a logic 1 bit); the red lines show a good choice whereas the green lines show a poor choice for sampling the symbols



(b) A different waveform for binary sequence 11010 illustrating the shape of waveforms for real data that was bi-phase coded, as observed at the receiver

Figure 13: From waveforms to bits

scatter diagram in the complex plane that contains **both** the in-phase and quadrature components. As mentioned earlier, for more advanced digital modulation techniques (e.g, QPSK, QAM, etc) processing both the in-phase and quadrature components is needed. For BPSK only the in-phase

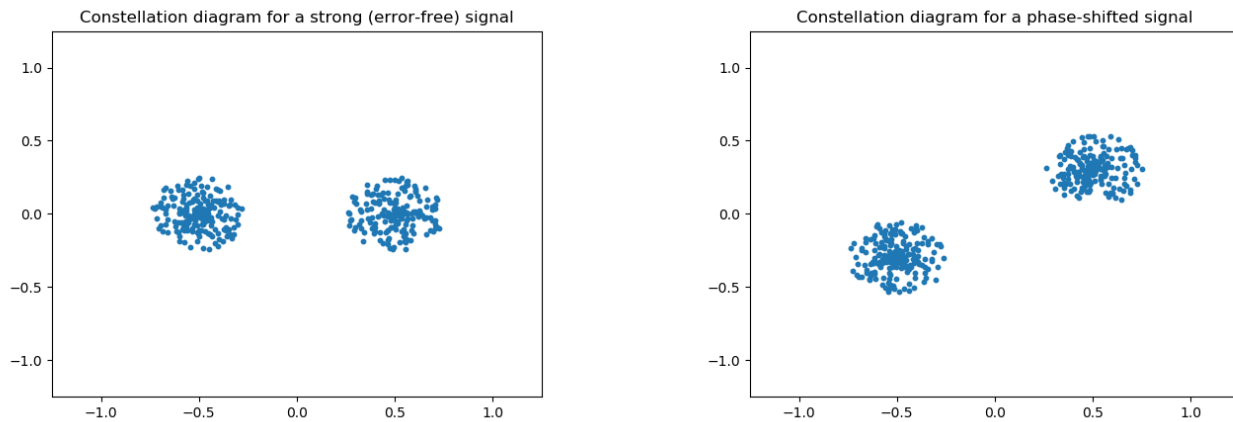


Figure 14: Constellation diagrams for idealized signals

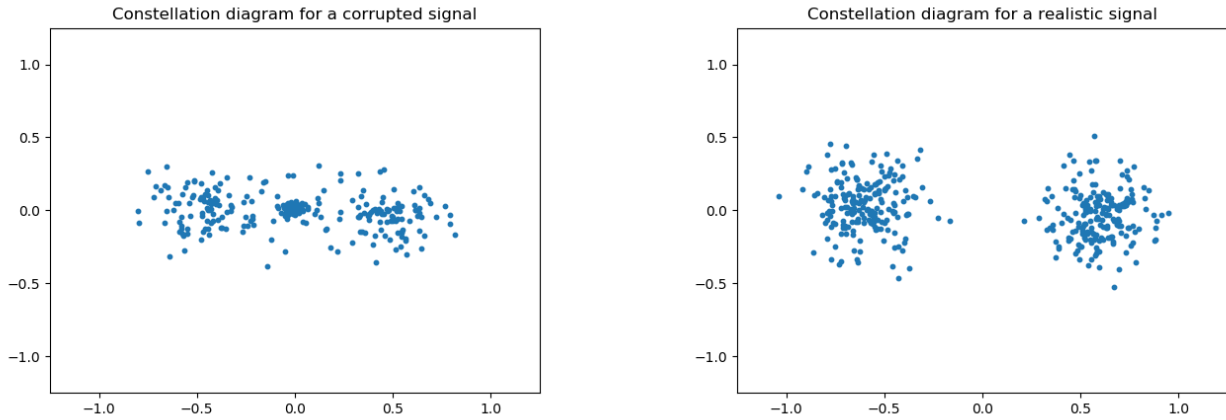


Figure 15: Constellation diagrams for real bi-phase coded signals extracted from the RDS sub-channel broadcast by an FM station

component carries useful information, nonetheless during the tuning phase it is important to understand how to adjust the PLL/NCO in order to transfer most of the energy from the RDS channel to the in-phase component after downconversion. An illustrative example of a phase-shift that needs to be adjusted is shown on the right-hand side of Figure 14.

The constellation diagrams from Figure 14 are idealized, i.e., they have been artificially created with a clear separation between all the sampled H and L symbols. For RDS data captured from an FM channel the constellation diagram can look as shown in Figure 15. If the signal was corrupted, i.e., either a weak signal due to channel impairments or an inadequately tuned receiver (e.g., incorrect down-conversion or inadequate timing recovery) it is unlikely that any meaningful data can be extracted from the sampled symbols. Nonetheless, for a reasonably strong, yet realistic, demodulated signal shown on the right-hand side of Figure 15 the bits can be extracted and data frames can be identified, as explained in the next section.

## RDS Data Processing

Once the waveforms have been translated into symbols, the last step of the RDS processing path is concerned with converting symbols to bits and identifying data frames within bitstreams (called groups, and blocks within groups, in RDS) before these “framed bits” are parsed and the text messages are displayed. The application layer (referred to also as presentation/session layers in the RBDS standard [7]) is concerned with digital message formatting.

The first step within the RDS Data Processing block shown in Figure 16 is to convert the stream of symbols obtained by the clock and data recovery sub-block into a bitstream. Note, because

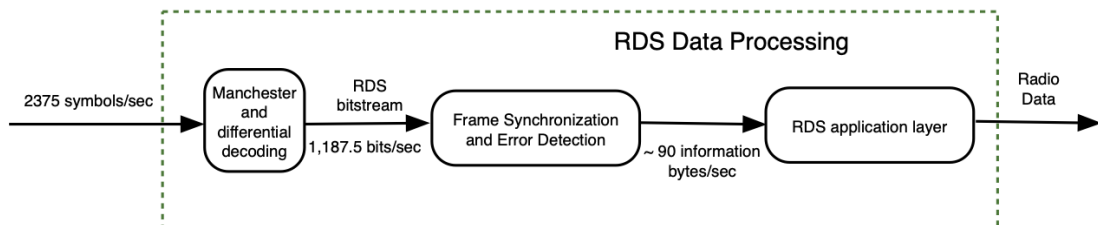


Figure 16: RDS data processing

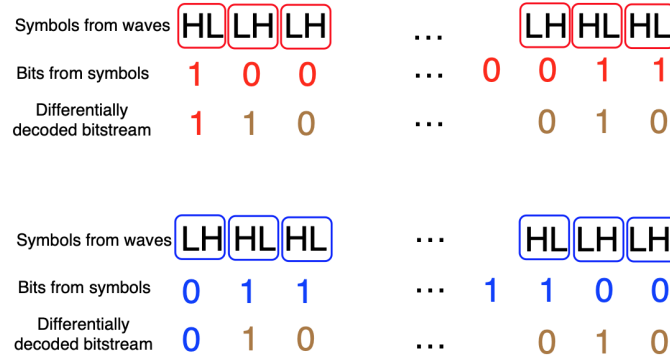


Figure 17: Differential decoding

the logic bits are Manchester encoded before being pulse shaped at the transmitter (i.e., logic 1 is HL and logic 0 is LH as illustrated earlier using Figure 12) the symbol rate is 2375 symbols/sec, whereas the extracted bitstream will have a bitrate equal to 1187.5 bits/sec. It is important to note that at the transmitter the bitstream is *differentially encoded* before being converted to symbols (differential coding performs exclusive OR of the current bit with the previous one). Consequently it must be **differentially decoded** at the receiver. The motivation for differential coding stems from the fact that the RDS receiver uses a local oscillator for carrier synchronization (see the discussion concerning PLL/NCO). Since the oscillator within the PLL locks to the extracted 114 KHz tone, i.e., double the frequency of the RDS sub-carrier, the output of the NCO can have two possible phase shifts with respect to the RDS channel data: either 0 or  $\pi$  radians; the differential coding prevents inversion of waves used for mixing from affecting the binary data. A detailed example is shown in Figure 17, where it can be seen that only the first bit differs if the symbols are inverted (note, this is the type of single-bit error that affects only the first data frame).

The last step of the project is frame synchronization, which confirms that the received data is consistent with the bitstream formatting as defined by the RBDS standard [7]. Figure 18 shows the high-level overview for frame synchronization. Any digital information that is broadcast is embedded into a *block* of data that contains 26 bits: 16 information bits and 10 checkword bits; note, within the context of the 3DY4 project, the checkword bits are concerned **only** with synchronization and no error handling needs to be performed. Sequences of blocks, which are identified by unique offset words (A, B, C or C', and D) that are added to the checkword at the transmitter, are sent repeatedly in *groups* of four blocks. At the receiver the 26 bits from a block are used to compute a **syndrome**, which, if valid, the information bits are extracted for further processing.

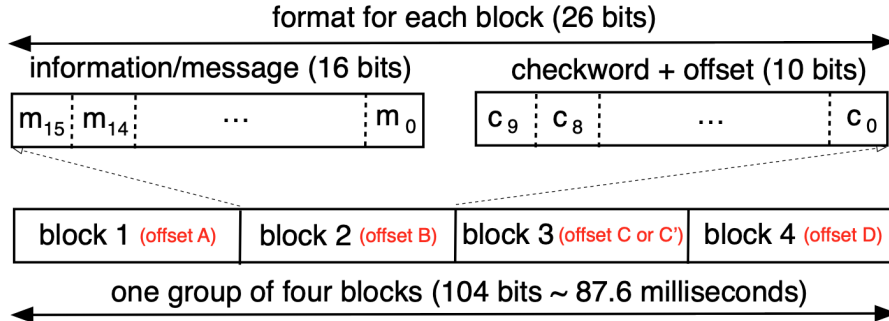


Figure 18: Groups and blocks

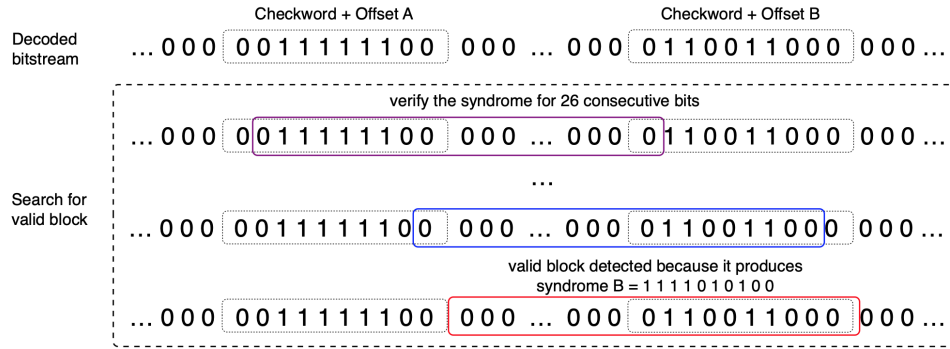


Figure 19: Block search during frame synchronization

Frame synchronization is needed each time when tuning to an FM station. During frame synchronization, when a new bit has been received from the differential decoder (recall the bitstream has a low data rate of 1178.5 bits/sec) a new syndrome must be calculated using the most recent 26 bits; note, the same can be achieved by moving a sliding window of size 26 across a larger volume of data from the bitstream (as shown in Figure 19, where the message bits are assumed to be all zeros). This brute-force check needs to be performed until a sequence of syndromes corresponding to valid offset words is found 26 bits apart. Subsequently, block syndromes are computed only after another block of 26 bits has been assembled; note, however, if the error rate increases due to a weakened signal another brute-force search for frame synchronization will be needed.

The core concepts needed to understand frame synchronization will be discussed in class. As additional references, a good starting point to learn more about cyclic codes for error detection and correction is [15]; the specific information about the modified shortened cyclic code used in RBDS can be found Appendix B from [7]. Note also, for self-containment purposes, the parity check matrix used for syndrome computation, as well as the error-free syndromes for each valid block are provided in the Appendix of this document.

The final step of RDS Data Processing is to extract the message from the information bits from each block. The rather detailed documentation is available in [7] and the overview figure is copied below. There are 16 different group types (the group type is identified in block 2) and in this project it is sufficient to extract: program identification code from block 1 (check [14] for how 16-bit codes are prepared by FM broadcasters), program type from block 2 (check Annex F from [7]), the program service name from group type 0A (section 3.1.5.1 from RBDS standard [7]), radio text from group type 2A (section 3.1.5.3) and clock/time/date from group 4A (section 3.1.5.6).

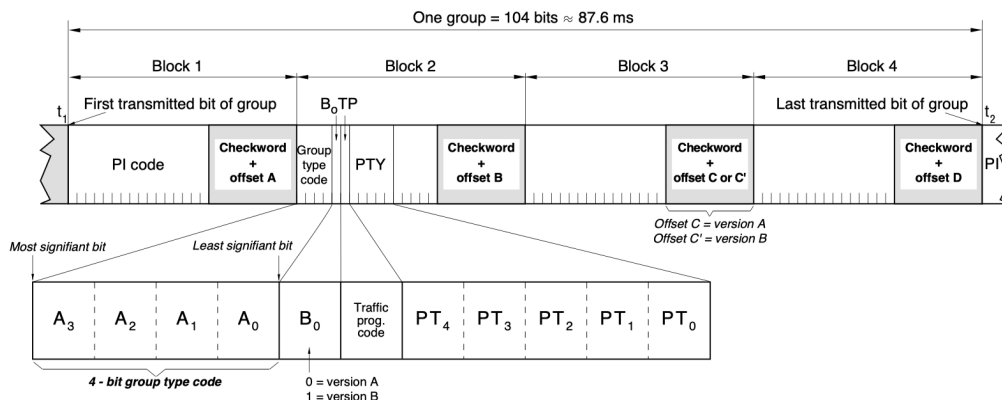


Figure 20: RDS message format (from [7])

## Multi-threading

Due to the nature of this SDR application, there are many degrees of freedom to be leveraged to facilitate the real-time execution on an embedded computing platform [3]. While some optimizations can be explored at the signal-flow graph level, e.g., changing the filter parameters to trade-off runtime vs signal strength or integrating decimation and filtering, others are in the implementation space. While suggestions will be provided during classes and project meetings, there is one particular topic worth planning for in advance and which is discussed in this concluding section.

As both the codebase and the compute load increase, partitioning the application into several independently maintainable threads becomes a necessity. The suggested thread partitioning is shown in Figure 21. The RF front-end operates at the highest sample rate, and it generates the FM demodulated data for all the other processing paths, can be a standalone thread that fills in a queue of data blocks that are processed independently by the other threads. While mono and stereo paths do most of the processing independently of each other, their outputs are eventually recombined; hence these two audio paths can be integrated into a single thread. Since the output of the RDS path is independent from the audio paths it should be implemented in its own thread; note, however depending on the specific computational load for each thread, it might be needed to divide the RDS path into a couple of threads (e.g., decouple timing recovery and frame synchronization from the rest of the RDS path). It is also worth mentioning that the audio/RDS threads are always behind (in terms of block count) with respect to the RF front-end thread; however they can get ahead of each other in an arbitrary way. So long as the synchronization queue is limited in size, this divergence between audio/RDS paths will not impact the application in a tangible way.

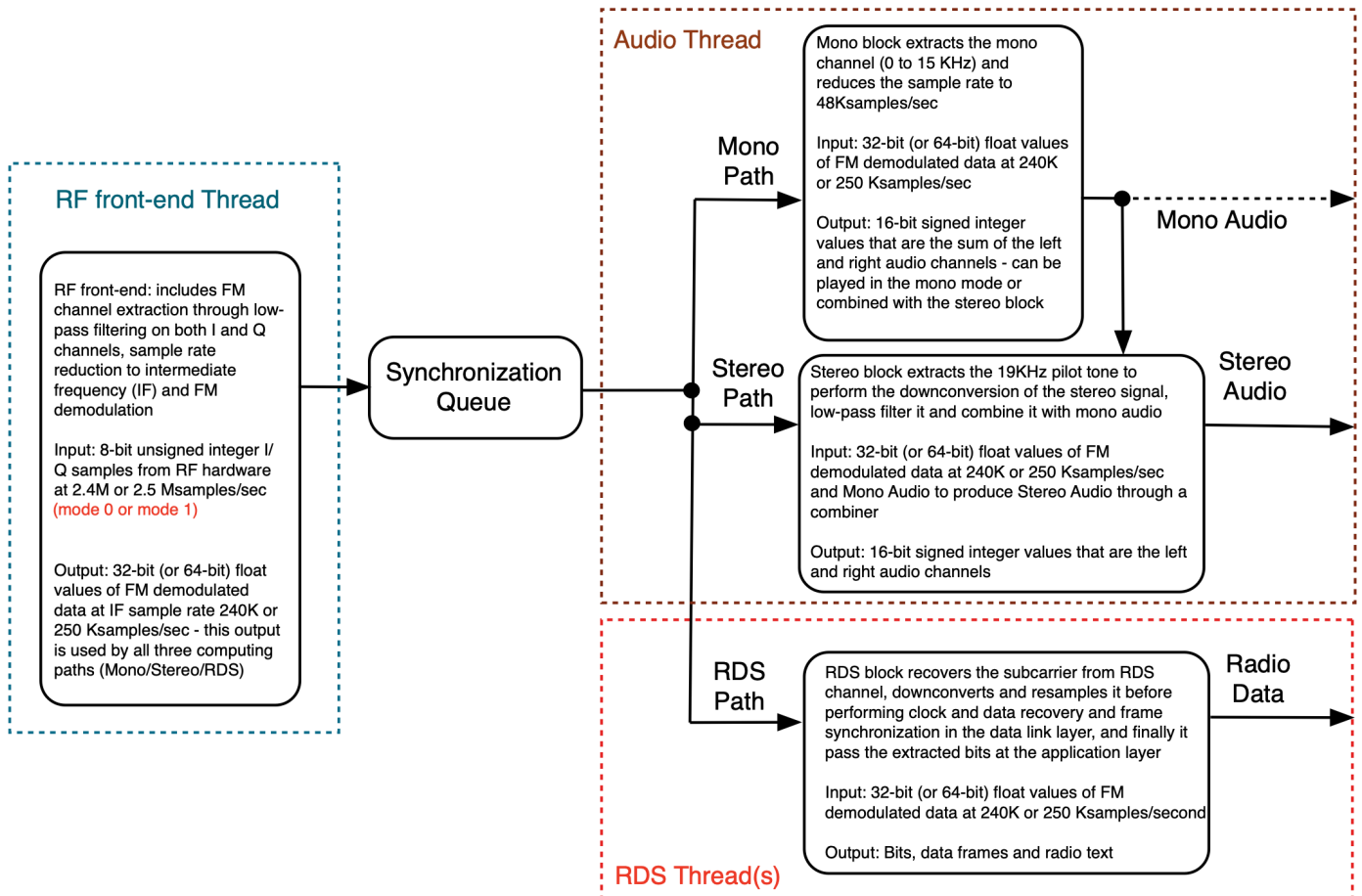


Figure 21: Thread partitioning to leverage the parallelism offered by a multi-core processor

## References

- [1] NESDR SMARt Series. <https://www.nooelec.com/store/sdr/sdr-receivers/smart.html>. Accessed: 2021-02.
- [2] Osmocom RTL SDR. <https://osmocom.org/projects/rtl-sdr/wiki/Rtl-sdr>. Accessed: 2021-02.
- [3] Raspberry Pi 4. <https://www.raspberrypi.org/products/raspberry-pi-4-model-b/>. Accessed: 2021-02.
- [4] FM Broadcasting. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FM\\_broadcasting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FM_broadcasting). Accessed: 2021-02.
- [5] Radio Data System. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radio\\_Data\\_System](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radio_Data_System). Accessed: 2021-02.
- [6] Specification of the Radio Data System (RDS) for VHF/FM Sound Broadcasting in the Frequency Range from 87,5 to 108,0 MHz. [http://www.interactive-radio-system.com/docs/EN50067\\_RDS\\_Standard.pdf](http://www.interactive-radio-system.com/docs/EN50067_RDS_Standard.pdf). Accessed: 2021-02.
- [7] United States RBDS Standard Specification of the radio broadcast data system (RBDS). <https://www.nrsstandards.org/standards-and-guidelines/documents/standards/nrsc-4-b.pdf>. Accessed: 2021-02.
- [8] GNU Radio. <https://wiki.gnuradio.org/>. Accessed: 2021-02.
- [9] Gqrx SDR. <https://gqrx.dk/>. Accessed: 2021-02.
- [10] FM Stereo/RDS Theory. [http://rfmw.em.keysight.com/wireless/helpfiles/n7611b/Content/Main/FM\\_Broadcasting.htm](http://rfmw.em.keysight.com/wireless/helpfiles/n7611b/Content/Main/FM_Broadcasting.htm). Accessed: 2021-02.
- [11] Introduction to FM-Stereo-RDS Modulation. <https://www.advantest.com/documents/11348/7898f05e-0a52-4e68-9221-3b8b75595436>. Accessed: 2021-02.
- [12] Frequency Modulation (FM). <https://www.ni.com/en-ca/innovations/white-papers/06/frequency-modulation--fm-.html>. Accessed: 2021-02.
- [13] Square-Root Raised Cosine Signals (SRRC). [https://gssc.esa.int/navipedia/index.php/Square-Root\\_Raised\\_Cosine\\_Signals\\_\(SRRC\)](https://gssc.esa.int/navipedia/index.php/Square-Root_Raised_Cosine_Signals_(SRRC)). Accessed: 2021-02.
- [14] The Technical Advisory Committee on Broadcasting (B-TAC) - Program Information Codes for Radio Broadcasting Stations. [https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/smt-gst.nsf/eng/h\\_sf08741.html](https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/smt-gst.nsf/eng/h_sf08741.html). Accessed: 2021-02.
- [15] Error Detection and Correction. <https://www.mathworks.com/help/comm/ug/error-detection-and-correction.html>. Accessed: 2021-02.

**Enjoy!**



## Appendix

The full details for the theory and implementation of the modified shortened cyclic code used in RBDS is given in the Appendix B of the official standard document [7]. For self-containment purpose, the parity check matrix from section B.2.1 from [7] (used for frame synchronization in the receiver) is reproduced below.

1000000000
0100000000
0010000000
0001000000
0000100000
0000010000
0000001000
0000000100
0000000010
0000000001
1011011100
0101101110
0010110111
1010000111
1110011111
1100010011
1101010101
1101110110
0110111011
1000000001
1111011100
0111101110
0011110111
1010100111
1110001111
1100011011

A 26-bit block containing the information word (16 bits) and its checkword produced at the transmitter (10 bits) that is added with an offset word (A, B, C, C' or D), which depends on the block type, will pre-multiply the above parity check matrix in a Galois field ( $GF(2)$ ). In  $GF(2)$  a pointwise multiplication is logic AND between two bits and pointwise addition is an exclusive OR. The result of this vector/matrix multiplication in  $GF(2)$  is a 10-bit syndrome that confirms the block type. In the table below you can find the error-free syndromes for the four block types.

Offset type	Offset word (added at transmitter)	Syndrome word (generated at receiver)
A	0011111100	1111011000
B	0110011000	1111010100
C	0101101000	1001011100
C'	1101010000	1111001100
D	0110110100	1001011000