

# The Measurement of Water Salinity for Antarctic Research



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# Abstract

Ice shelves form when glaciers flow from the Antarctic out over the ocean. This ice, which is originally freshwater ice is formed from accumulated snow, extends over the water and floats, because ice is less dense than water. When saltwater freezes at the bottom of the ice shelves, salt is expelled, forming a brine like solution, with a high salt density, directly under the ice shelves.

The salinity of this brine solution and the seawater underneath need to be measured to aid in Antarctic research. This project documents the design and testing of a conductivity-based salinity measuring device to measure the salt content in these areas. The prototype was designed in two parts, a probe module, which would be lowered down through a water tower, which was drilled into the ice shelves, to measure the salinity, and a controller, which would be used to send instructions and receive data from the probe. The probe utilised gold electrodes to measure and analyse the salinity through conductivity. Two methods were investigated, Direct Current (DC), where point voltage measurements and voltage sweeps were conducted, and Alternating Current (AC) where a machine learning model was used to map properties of the input and output waves to a salinity value. [Talk about accuracy TODO]

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# Glossary

**AC** Alternating Current iii, 21, 24

**ADC** Analogue to Digital Converter 21, 23, 24, 28

**ANN** Artificial Neural Network 15

**CTD** Conductivity, Temperature, Depth 12, 17, 18

**DAC** Digital to Analogue Converter 21, 24, 26, 28

**DC** Direct Current iii, 21

**EEC** Equivalent Electrical Circuit 14

**EIS** Electrochemical Impedance Spectroscopy v, 5, 13, 14

**ENIG** Electroless Nickel Immersion Gold 18

**IC** Integrated Circuit 21, 24, 25, 26, 27

**LED** Light Emitting Diode 25, 26

**ML** Machine Learning 5

**PCB** Printed Circuit Board 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 27

**PSU** Practical Salinity Unit 6, 10, 12

**UART** Universal Asynchronous Receiver-Transmitter 24

**‰** Parts per thousand 6, 8

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background to the study

A very brief background to your area of research. Start off with a general introduction to the area and then narrow it down to your focus area. Used to set the scene[?].

### 1.2 Objectives of this study

#### 1.2.1 Problems to be investigated

Description of the main questions to be investigated in this study.

#### 1.2.2 Purpose of the study

Give the significance of investigating these problems. It must be obvious why you are doing this study and why it is relevant.

## 1.3 Scope and Limitations

Scope indicates to the reader what has and has not been included in the study. Limitations tell the reader what factors influenced the study such as sample size, time etc. It is not a section for excuses as to why your project may or may not have worked.

## 1.4 Plan of development

Here you tell the reader how your report has been organised and what is included in each chapter.

**I recommend that you write this section last. You can then tailor it to your report.**

# Chapter 2

## Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Accurate salinity measurement is fundamental to oceanographic research. Traditional measurement techniques have evolved from labour-intensive chemical titration methods to modern electronic sensors, with electrical conductivity emerging as the predominant approach due to its combination of accuracy, speed, and practical deployability. This literature review examines the current state of salinity measurement technology with particular emphasis on conductivity-based methods and emerging machine learning approaches for electrochemical data interpretation. The review is organised into three main sections. First, we establish the fundamental concepts of salinity and provide a comprehensive comparison of available measurement techniques. Second, we examine the theoretical foundations and practical implementation of electrical conductivity measurements for salinity determination, including instrumentation, calibration procedures, and current limitations. Finally, we explore the application of EIS and Machine Learning (ML) as advanced approaches for enhanced salinity analysis, examining how frequency-domain measurements and intelligent data processing can overcome limitations of traditional single-frequency conductivity methods. This comprehensive review provides the theoretical and methodological foundation for developing a machine learning-enhanced impedance spectroscopy approach for salinity determination.

## 2.2 Salinity: Definition

Salinity is a fundamental characteristic of water, and is most commonly defined as the total amount of dissolved salts in water, and in the context of oceanography, seawater. It is typically expressed in Parts per thousand (‰) or Practical Salinity Unit (PSU) [1]. The concept of salinity has evolved significantly from its early definition, which was based on chlorinity measurements. Modern salinity is defined through the Practical Salinity Scale 1978 (PSS-78), where salinity is based on the conductivity ratio of standard seawater solutions, to a standard Potassium Chloride solution, and is dimensionless [2]. The salinity-conductivity relationship is however, quite complex, requiring corrections and calibrations needed for depth and temperature, as these both play a factor in the conductivity of the water.

## 2.3 Overview of Salinity Measurement Methods

There are a multitude of methods which can be used to measure salinity, each with their own advantages, limitations and levels of accuracy. Traditional methods include gravimetric analysis, chemical titration (such as the Mohr-Knudsen method for chlorinity), and refractometry. While these techniques can provide accurate results, they are often time-consuming, require skilled operators, and are not easily adaptable to in-situ or automated measurements. Modern approaches predominantly rely on electrical conductivity sensors, which offer rapid, repeatable, and automated salinity determination. Other techniques, such as optical methods and ion-selective electrodes, have also been explored, but are less commonly used in oceanographic applications due to issues with robustness, calibration, or specificity. The choice of method depends on the required accuracy, operational environment, and available resources.

### 2.3.1 Historical Methods

#### Chlorinity Titration

Early salinity measurements relied on chemical titration methods, in particular the Mohr-Knudsen chlorinity titration, which used silver nitrate. The chlorinity of a solution has the definition ‘the mass of silver required to precipitate completely the halogens in

0.3285234kg of sample seawater'. This method was highly accurate, with results within ( $\pm 0.001$  PSU). However, it relied heavily on toxic chemicals, and was a time-consuming laboratory procedure, with limited practical application in the field [3].

## Gravimetric Methods

Gravimetric analysis, a technique used to determine an amount of a substance, by measuring its change in mass, involves evaporation and the weighing of dissolved solids. This method directly provided measurements of the salt content, within accuracies of ( $\pm 0.001$  PSU), under controlled laboratory conditions. This method remains the reference standard for calibration processes, but is however, extremely slow [4].

### 2.3.2 Physical Property Based Methods

There are several methods that utilise the relationship between salinity and the physical properties of water.

#### Hydrometric and Density Methods

Hydrometric methods using density measurements via hydrometers, offer salinity measurements that are low-cost, and electronics free. However, they are limited in precision with accuracies of  $\pm 1 - 2$  PSU, and require large sample volumes. The hydrometer is a floating instrument, that sinks to different depths depending on the density of the solution, and by measuring how high or low it floats, the density of the solution can be determined [5]. The following equation is used to map the relationship between salinity and density [6].

$$\rho = \rho_0(1 + kS) \quad (2.1)$$

where  $\rho$  is the density,  $\rho_0$  is the density of fresh water,  $S$  is the salinity and  $k$  is the proportionality constant.

This can then be inverted to give Salinity from Density:

$$S = \frac{\frac{\rho}{\rho_0} - 1}{k} \quad (2.2)$$

This however, does not include temperature correction.

## Refractometric Thechniques

Refractometric techniques measure the refractive index changes cuased by the dissovled salts. The refractive index of seawater is influenced by wavelength, temperature, salinity, and pressure. Within the range of 500-700 nm wavelength, 0-30°C temperature, 0-40 PSU salinity, and 0-11000 dbar pressure, the refractive index equation provides an accuracy of 0.4-80 ppm PSU, with accuracy decreasing as pressure increases [7]. Refractometers, which require only a small sample volume, are compact devices, making them suitable for portable field measurements [8]. Fibre optic refractometers have improved portability and reduced temperature sensitivity, with moderate accuracy ( $\pm 0.5$ -1 PSU), making them increasingly popular in aquaculture applications [9].

## Freezing Point Osmometry

Freezing point depression osmometry exploits the colligative (i.e. relating to the binding together of molecules) properties of dissolved salts. The main principle relies on freezing point depression, which is the phenomenon where a solvents freeeving point is lowered when a solute is added to it. To perform the measurement, the water is cooled till its freezing point and the temperature drop is measured, which is then used to calculate the osmolality [10]. This method can achieve accuracies of  $\pm 2 \text{mOsm/kgH}_2\text{O}$  which is approximately  $\pm 0.1 - 0.2 \text{‰}$ . However its requirement for precise temperature control limits its usage to laboratory applications [11].

## Magnetic Permeability

Magnetic properties of liquids, particularly magnetic susceptibility, vary with ion concentration, offering a potential method for salinity determination. Research has demonstrated that bulk magnetic susceptibility (BMS) of saline water correlates with salinity and conductivity measurements, with water quality parameters exhibiting an inverse relationship with magnetic susceptibility values. This approach offers the benefit of non-contact measurement,

potentially avoiding sample contamination or disturbance [12]. However, the technique requires sophisticated instrumentation, which are typically designed for laboratory use rather than field deployment.

### 2.3.3 Advanced Analytical Methods

#### Ion Chromatography

Ion chromatography is an analytical technique used to separate and quantify ionic species in solution, making it highly valuable for determining the individual ion concentrations in seawater samples [13]. The method works by passing a liquid sample through a column containing special resin beads that selectively hold onto different ions. As a liquid solution flows through, ions are released at different times based on their properties and detected by measuring electrical conductivity. For seawater analysis, ion chromatography can separately measure major ions like chloride, sulfate, sodium, magnesium, calcium, and potassium, providing detailed compositional data rather than just total salinity. The technique offers high precision and can detect ions at very low concentrations, though it requires more sophisticated equipment and longer analysis times compared to simpler methods [14].

## 2.4 Conductivity-Based Salinity Measurements

### 2.4.1 Theoretical Foundation

Electrical conductivity has emerged as the predominant method for salinity measurement due to its practical implementation, high accuracy and fast response time. The technique utilises the strong correlation between dissolved ionic content and electrical conductivity.

The conductivity of a liquid is measured by its ability to conduct electrical current. The relationship between conductivity and salinity is based on the concentration of dissolved ions in seawater. The main ions found in sea water ( $Na^+$ ,  $Cl^-$ ,  $Mg^{2+}$ ,  $SO_4^{2-}$ ,  $Ca^{2+}$ ,  $K^+$ ) maintain a relatively constant proportional relationship, in ocean waters [4]. This enables robust corrections between conductivity and total dissolved salt content. Unlike other measurement techniques, conductivity accounts for all the ions in the water, not only



chlorine, which is why it is considered a more accurate measure of salinity [15].

The Practical Salinity Scale 1978 (PSS-78) defines Practical Salinity  $S_p$  through the conductivity ratio  $K_{15}$ , as shown below [16]:

$$K_{15} = \frac{C(S_p, 15, 0)}{C(KCl, 15, 0)} \quad (2.3)$$

where the numerator,  $C(S, 15, 0)$  represents the conductivity of seawater sample at 15°C and standard atmospheric pressure (1atm/101.325kPa/0dbar), and the denominator,  $C(KCl, 15, 0)$  is the conductivity of a standard  $KCl$  (Potassium Chloride) solution under identical temperature and pressure. The standard  $KCl$  solution consists of  $32.4356 \times 10^{-3}kg$  of  $KCl$  dissolved in 1kg of water [3]. When the ratio between the water sample and the  $KCl$  solution is 1, i.e.  $K_{15} = 1$ , then the Practical Salinity  $S_p$  is, according to the definition, 35 [16].

It is important to note that Practical Salinity is a unit-less quantity, and though it may be convenient, it would be incorrect to quote it in PSU. Practical salinity should rather be quoted as a certain Practical Salinity ‘on the Practical Salinity Scale PSS-78’ [16].

When  $K_{15}$  does not equal 1, Practical Salinity,  $S_p$  can be calculated using the equation below [16]:

$$S_p = \sum_{i=0}^5 a_i (K_{15})^{i/2} \quad (2.4)$$

where  $K_{15}$  is the equation defined above (Equation 2.3), and the coefficients  $a_i$  are given in Table (2.1).

### 2.4.2 Temperature and Pressure Compensation

When calculating salinity at conditions other than 15°C, and 0dbar, the conductivity ratio  $R$  is expanded to the product of three ratios  $R_p$ ,  $R_t$  and  $r_t$  as follows [16]:

$$R = \frac{C(S_p, t, p)}{C(35, 15, 0)} = R_p R_t r_t \quad (2.5)$$

where  $t$ , and  $p$  are the temperature and pressure valid over the ranges  $-2^\circ C \leq t \leq 35^\circ C$

and  $0 \leq p \leq 10000\text{dbar}$  respectively.

These ratios can be expanded as follows:

$$R = \frac{C(S_p, t, p)}{C(35, 15^\circ\text{C}, 0)} = \frac{C(S_p, t, p)}{C(S_p, t, 0)} \cdot \frac{C(S_p, t, 0)}{C(35, t, 0)} \cdot \frac{C(35, t, 0)}{C(35, 15^\circ\text{C}, 0)} = R_p R_t r_t \quad (2.6)$$

This equation represents the ratio between the conductivity measurement of a sample  $C(S_p, t, p)$  and the conductivity of the standard solution  $C(35, 15^\circ, 0)$  [16]. In order to find the salinity,  $R_p$ ,  $R_t$  and  $r_t$  need to be calculated. First,  $r_t$  is calculated using the temperature of the sample:

$$r_t = \sum_{i=0}^4 c_i t_i \quad (2.7)$$

$R_p$  is then calculated as a function of the temperature  $t$ , pressure  $p$ , and conductivity ratio  $R$ :

$$R_p = 1 + \frac{\sum_{i=1}^3 e_i p^i}{1 + d_1 t + d_2 t^2 + R[d_3 + d_4 t]} \quad (2.8)$$

Finally,  $R_t$  can be evaluated using  $R$ ,  $R_p$  and  $r_t$ :

$$R_t = \frac{R}{R_p r_t} \quad (2.9)$$

At standard conditions, i.e., temperature  $t = 15^\circ\text{C}$ ,  $R_t$  is equal to  $K_{15}$  and therefore Practical salinity  $S_p$  can be calculated from Equation 2.3. For cases where the temperature is not  $t = 15^\circ\text{C}$ , Practical Salinity  $S_p$  is given as a function of  $R_t$ , with  $k = 0.0162$  [16]:

$$S_p = \sum_{i=0}^5 a_i (R_t)^{i/2} + \frac{t - 15}{1 + k(t - 15)} \sum_{i=0}^5 b_i (R_t)^{i/2} \quad (2.10)$$

Note that Equations (2.3) to (2.10) are only valid in the range  $2 < S_p < 42$ ,  $-2^\circ\text{C} \leq t \leq 35^\circ\text{C}$  and  $0 \leq p \leq 10000\text{dbar}$ .

It must be noted that the PSS-78 equations use the IPTS-68 temperature scale and in order for them to work with the current ITS-90 scale, must be converted using the equation below [16]:

$$t_{68}^\circ\text{C} = 1.00024 \times t_{90}^\circ\text{C} \quad (2.11)$$

$i$	$a_i$	$b_i$	$c_i$	$d_i$	$e_i$
0	0.0080	0.0005	$6.766\,097 \times 10^{-1}$		
1	-0.1692	-0.0056	$2.005\,64 \times 10^{-2}$	$3.426 \times 10^{-2}$	$2.070 \times 10^{-5}$
2	25.3851	-0.0066	$1.104\,259 \times 10^{-4}$	$4.464 \times 10^{-4}$	$-6.370 \times 10^{-10}$
3	14.0941	-0.0375	$-6.9698 \times 10^{-7}$	$4.215 \times 10^{-1}$	$3.989 \times 10^{-15}$
4	-7.0261	0.0636	$1.0031 \times 10^{-9}$	$-3.107 \times 10^{-3}$	
5	2.7081	-0.0144			

Table 2.1: Table of Coefficients for PSS-78 Equations [16]

### 2.4.3 Instrumentation and Technology

The most common method for measuring salinity is by using a Conductivity, Temperature, Depth (CTD) device. The fundamental concept of these devices involves placing two electrodes in a sample of water, applying a voltage across them and measuring the water's response. This is then paired with a temperature and depth correction, allowing for an accurate salinity measurement. The depth value for these calculations is taken from the pressure at which the measurement is taken. This pressure is then translated to depth using the standard depth to pressure equation [17]. Modern CTD systems achieve salinity accuracies better than  $\pm 0.005$  PSU, with some instruments like the Sea-Bird 911 Plus demonstrating historical accuracies of  $\pm 0.002$  PSU or  $\pm 0.0002$  PSU [17] [18].

### 2.4.4 Applications and Limitations

Conductivity-based salinity measurements excel in most oceanographic and water quality applications due to its accuracy, speed, and reliability. The conductivity method allows for real-time data capture, continuous monitoring, and easy integration with autonomous devices [19].

However, this method does face some limitations. Due to its dependance on the water's capacity to conduct electricity, freshwater applications require specialised low-conductivity sensors, while hyper-saline environments could exceed the standard calibration range. The method's reliance on emperical correlations derived from typical seawater compositions can introduce errors in waters ocean waters affected by external factors such as pollution

or freshwater inflow from connecting rivers, which can alter ionic composition and introduce variability not captured by standard seawater-based calibrations. In such environments supplementary practices may be necessary for accurate salinity measurements [20].

## 2.5 Machine Learning Applications in Electrochemical Impedance Spectroscopy

### 2.5.1 Electrochemical Impedance Spectroscopy (EIS)

Electrochemical Impedance Spectroscopy (EIS) is an analytical technique used to characterise the electrical properties of materials and interfaces, usually electrode or an electrolyte, by measuring impedance (opposition to current flow) across a range of frequencies [21]. In essence, EIS describes the electrode behavior in the presence of an electrolyte in terms of electrical parameters, including resistances and capacitances. It involves measuring the system's response to an applied electrical signal, and then transforming these time-domain signals into the frequency domain. The technique is based on applying an AC signal to the electrodes and determining the corresponding response. Unlike simple conductivity measurements that capture only resistive properties at a single frequency, EIS measures both the magnitude and phase of impedance across a range of frequencies, typically from 0.001 Hz to 1 MHz [22].

The complex impedance  $Z(\omega) = Z'(\omega) + jZ''(\omega)$  contains both resistive (real) and reactive (imaginary) components, that respond differently to ionic concentration, species mobility, and electrode interface effects. High-frequency impedance primarily reflects bulk solution resistance, while lower frequencies reveal interfacial (between two faces) phenomena including double-layer capacitance and charge transfer resistance [23].

EIS has demonstrated success in quantitative concentration analysis across diverse solution systems. In electrolyte analysis, multi-frequency measurements enable determination of ionic strength through characteristic impedance signatures that are less sensitive to temperature variations and electrode fouling than DC conductivity measurements [22].

### 2.5.2 EIS Fundamentals

The EIS measuring process involves applying an AC signal at a specific frequency and amplitude to a sample. By sweeping across a multitude of frequencies, a complete impedance spectrum can be obtained. The impedance magnitude  $|Z|$  and phase angle  $\phi$  at each frequency is recorded, and are used to analyse the electrical properties of the solution [23]. For salinity, it can be used to characterise the electrical properties of ionic solutions, including seawater, by analyzing how ions affect the impedance spectrum. This data can be used to approximate the system using Equivalent Electrical Circuits (EECs), which are circuits used to describe a system with discrete electrical circuit elements [22]. EECs fulfill the overall goal of EIS is to describe the behaviour of the electrode and solution in terms of electrical parameters such as resistances and capacitances [21].

## 2.6 Machine Learning for Impedance to Salinity Mapping

### 2.6.1 Limitations of Traditional Calibration Approaches

Traditional impedance analysis relies on the modelling of EECs, to derive the salinity from the impedance. This process requires extensive electrochemical expertise, in order to understand the chemical composition of the solution. Manual parameter extraction from impedance spectra is time consuming and may fail to capture subtle features that correlate with salinity. Linear calibration methods assume simple relationships between impedance measurements and concentration, which may not hold across wide salinity ranges or in solutions with varying ionic compositions. Temperature effects and electrode aging can further complicate traditional calibration approaches [22].

### 2.6.2 Machine Learning Modelling for Impedance Analysis

Machine learning approaches offer advantages by learning complex non-linear relationships directly from experimental data without the need for explicit physical models or EECs. Supervised learning algorithms can map measured impedance values at specific input signal frequencies and amplitudes to target salinity concentrations through automated pattern recognition. The general framework involves training a model on a dataset of known salinity samples, where each sample is characterised by its impedance response to

AC excitation at defined frequencies and amplitudes [24]. The trained model can then predict salinity from new impedance measurements, effectively learning the impedance-salinity mapping function. Machine learning eliminates subjective bias inherent in manual impedance interpretation and consistently applies identical analysis procedures across all measurements. The algorithms can identify complex patterns in multi-frequency impedance data that may be overlooked in traditional analysis [25].

### 2.6.3 Machine Learning Algorithms for Salinity Prediction

#### Neural Networks

Neural networks are machine learning programs that make decisions similarly to the human brain, using processes that mimic how biological neurons work together to identify patterns, weigh options, and reach conclusions [26].

Every neural network consists of layers of nodes (artificial neurons), these being an input layer, one or more hidden layers, and an output layer. Each node connects to others and has its own weight and threshold value. When a node's output exceeds its threshold value, it activates and sends data to the next layer, if not, no data passes through. This creates a feed-forward process where information flows from input to output. Each node functions like a linear regression model with inputs, weights, a bias, and an output. Weights determine how important each input is, with larger weights having greater significance. Inputs are multiplied by their weights, summed together, and passed through an activation function to determine if the node fires. Neural networks rely on training data to learn and improve accuracy over time. They use cost functions to evaluate accuracy and adjust their weights and biases through gradient descent and backpropagation to minimize errors and reach optimal performance [26].

Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs) represent the most widely adopted machine learning approach for impedance-based concentration prediction due to their exceptional capability for modelling complex non-linear relationships. The architecture typically consists of an input layer receiving impedance features such as frequency and phase, one or more hidden layers that extract relevant patterns, and an output layer producing predictions [27]. Hidden layers with non-linear activation functions enable the network to capture complex impedance-salinity relationships [28].

Deep neural networks with multiple hidden layers can learn hierarchical representations,

potentially identifying frequency dependent patterns at different levels. However, they require larger training datasets and careful regularisation to prevent overfitting [28].

### **Random Forrest Algorithms**

Random forest is a machine learning algorithm which combines the output of multiple decision trees to reach a single result. It handles both classification and regression problems. The model is built from multiple decision trees. Decision trees start with a basic question and use a series of questions (decision nodes) to split data, ultimately leading to a final decision at the leaf node. They're trained through the Classification and Regression Tree (CART) algorithm. Unlike single decision trees that can be prone to bias and overfitting, when multiple uncorrelated decision trees form an ensemble in random forest, they predict more accurate results. By accounting for potential variability in the data through feature randomness, random forests reduce the risk of overfitting, bias, and overall variance, resulting in more precise predictions [29].

Random Forest methods demonstrate excellent performance with mixed data types, enabling simultaneous utilisation of raw impedance values, derived electrochemical parameters, and statistical features within unified prediction models. The algorithm's resistance to overfitting makes it particularly suitable for limited training data scenarios common in analytical applications [30].

# Chapter 3

## Methodology

### 3.1 Salinity Measurement Method

A CTD sensor, which measures salinity using conductivity, temperature and depth, was chosen as the salinity measurement device. When choosing a measurement technique multiple factors needed to be considered. Firstly, the salinity measurements are to be conducted in the Antarctic, where the environment, and remote nature of the area, make majority of the measurement methods unusable. Secondly, the device would need to fit through an ice core hole with a diameter of  $100mm$ , and lastly, the device would need to be able to take continuous measurements.

CTD sensors do not require sample collection, unlike chlorinity titration, gravimetric analysis and refractometry. This removes both the need for sample collection and the challenges of sample degradation, storage and transport logistics.

Modern CTD sensors are compact, and can easily be designed for specific space constraints. This coupled with its deployments flexibility make it the preferred choice over methods, such as laboratory methods, which suffer from deployment constraints. CTD sensors allow for continuous realtime monitoring, a characteristic none of the the alternative methods provide. The alternative methods either require sample collection, or cannot measure continuously.

CTD instruments inherently measure conductivity, temperature and pressure simultaneously, providing salinity measurements with temperature and depth compensation, whereas laboratory methods measure salinity only, and require seperate temperature measurements.



These factors coupled with the researcher’s significant experience with PCB design and electronics influenced the choice for a CTD sensor.

## 3.2 Electrode Design

When measuring conductivity, choosing an electrode material plays a significant role in the accuracy of the measurements. To get an accurate measurement of the resistance of the water, ideally, a electrode resistance of zero is required. This would allow the resistance measurement to be entirely due to the resistance of the water. Most conductive materials have conductivities of order  $10^6 - 10^8 S/m$ , which is negligible compared to sea (salt) water, which has an average conductivity of  $3.31 S/m$  [31][32]. Preferably, the material with the highest conductivity, silver, would be used. However, conductivity is not the only factor considered when designing an electrode. The electrodes will be submerged in saltwater, which is highly corrosive. The material chosen will require high corrosive resistance. Silver, though having the highest conductivity, has a low corrosion resistance, and therefore cannot be used in this application [33].

Titanium is the material of choice for ocean-use [34]. It is essentially corrosion-free, and offers a conductivity of  $2.68 \times 10^6$  [31]. However, titanium is expensive and fell out of the budget of this project. Gold boasts both a high conductivity of  $4.10 \times 10^7$ , higher than titanium but lower than silver, and a high corrosion resistance, making it an ideal choice. Gold is also a commonly used material in electronic design, with it being used in Printed Circuit Board (PCB) manufacturing, to protect copper pads from corrosion. This is done through a Electroless Nickel Immersion Gold (ENIG) plating process, where a layer of nickel is chemically deposited onto the exposed copper traces, to prevent the copper from oxidizing, and then a layer of gold is applied over the nickel through an emmersion process, to protect the nickel. This process is significantly more expensive compared to standard PCB manufacturing, however, it allowed for the use of gold electrodes, and therefore was factored into the budget.

In order to utilise the ENIG process a PCB was used to design the gold electrodes. This allowed the electrodes to be designed with a known area and seperation distance, allowing for accurate conductivity calculations. A solder pad was used to design the portion of the PCB that would act as the electrode, since it allowed the copper/gold to be exposed. Then during manufacturing ENIG was chosen as the surface finish, to achieve the gold finish.

The PCB was designed to allow for easy calculation of the conductivity  $\sigma$ , using the equation below:

$$\sigma = \frac{L}{RA} \quad (3.1)$$

where  $L$  is the distance between the electrodes,  $R$  is the resistance of the water, and  $A$  is the cross-sectional area of the electrodes. A square face of  $20mm \times 20mm$  was chosen to allow for easy cross-sectional area calculations, and a distance of  $10mm$  was chosen as the separation distance. This distance was chosen as it is close enough to reduce current spreading, but not too small to where the water could not flow easily between the electrodes. A  $2mm$  fringe guard was added around the main electrode area to reduce current fringing, which is an effect that causes the current to spread beyond the edges of the gap [35]. The fringe guards counteract this by saturating the area surrounding the main pads with current, preventing them from fringing.

The resistance of the electrodes was calculated using the Equation 3.1 and was found to have an approximate resistance of  $7.55\Omega$

The electrode PCB was designed with the consideration of mounting to the probe PCB. To accomodate this, solder pads were added to allow the electrodes to be soldered to the probe PCB. Mounting legs were also factored into the design to ensure that the electrodes stayed straight and secure. The design can be seen in Figure 3.1.

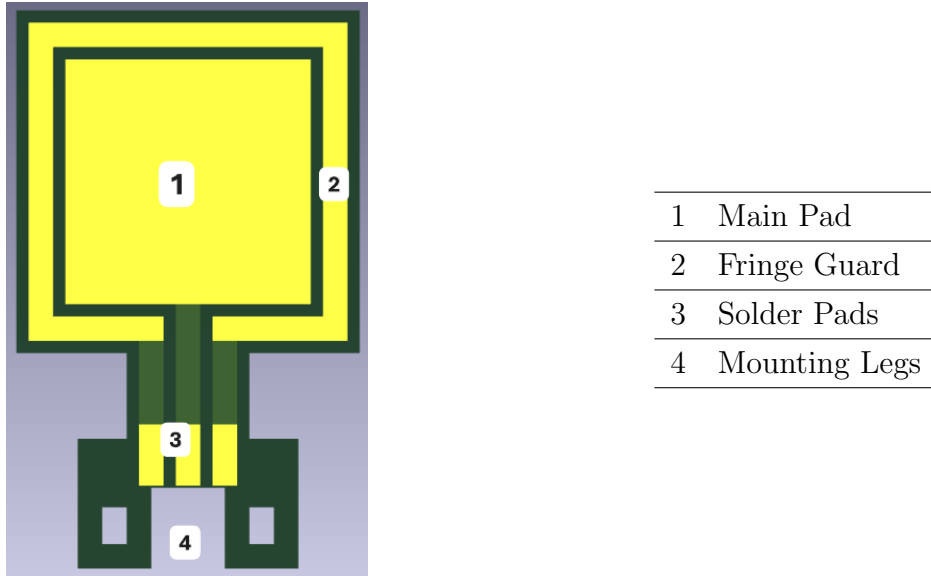


Figure 3.1: Gold Electrode PCB

### 3.3 Resistance Measurement

There are multiple ways to measure resistance, however most rely on the same principle, which is the voltage divider principle. This principle works by using a series circuit with two resistors, and a constant known input voltage. The voltage over each of the resistors will be proportional to their resistance, and therefore, if the resistance of one resistor is known, the resistance of the other can be calculated. A simple voltage divider circuit can be seen in Figure 3.3. For this application the electrodes were chosen as the  $R_2$  resistor, with  $R_1$  being a large resistor of known resistance.

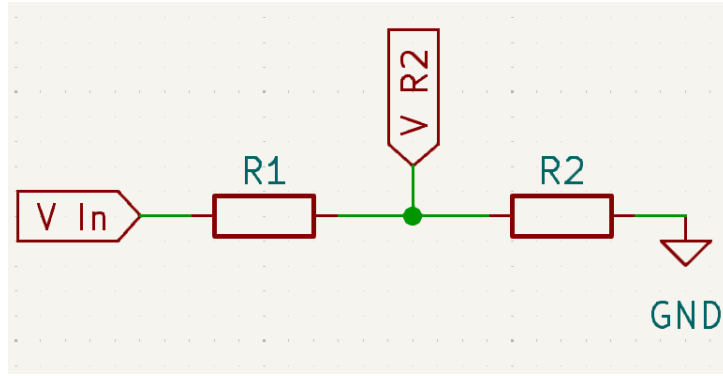


Figure 3.2: Simple voltage divider circuit used for resistance measurement.

Equations 3.2 and 3.3 are used to calculate the resistance from the voltage divider equation.

$$V_{R2} = V_{In} \times \frac{R_2}{R_1 + R_2} \quad (3.2)$$

$$R_2 = \frac{R_1 \times V_{R2}}{V_{In} - V_{R2}} \quad (3.3)$$

### 3.4 Circuit Design

The probe circuit is the circuit which contains the resistor divider, was designed to be printed onto a PCB. This design was influenced by Reference [36], where a similar device was designed for salinity measurements in ice columns. A PCB was chosen for this circuit as the researcher had significant experience with PCB design, and the manufacturing process offered higher precision than hand soldering, and is relatively cost-effective. Significant improvements and modifications were made to the resistor divider circuit, to allow for a wider range of testing.

For input power, a Digital to Analogue Converter (DAC) was used to drive the circuit. This allowed the input voltage to be varied between  $0V$  and the reference voltage, which was chosen to be  $5V$ . This allowed for a range of voltages to be applied, which allowed for the measurement of the water's voltage-resistance relationship, and the creation of AC signals. A function generator was considered for generating the AC signal, as it would allow for signals of a wider frequency and high precision, however the price could not be accommodated by the budget. The choice of DAC, and all following components, was first influenced by availability on JLCPCB, the PCB manufacturing house. The MCP4725 was chosen for its high resolution of 12-bits, offering a digital range of 0-4095, fast update time of  $6\mu s$ , and interface speed of 3.4MHz. These features allow for both DC and AC signal analysis.

An op-amp with unity gain was connected to the output of the DAC. This is because DACs have limited output drive capabilities, and the op-amp would allow for heavier loads to be driven. Additionally the op-amp offers improved output stability, introduces impedance isolation, which protects the DAC from load variations and feedback effects, and allows for better sine wave quality.

As mentioned in Section 3.3, for the resistor divider circuit, the electrodes would serve as  $R_2$  and a known resistor as  $R_1$ . Three alternative values of  $R_1$  were chosen, to accommodate for any circuit errors. These could be switched between using the TS3A4751 multiplexer Integrated Circuit (IC). This switching multiplexer was chosen, for its low on-state resistance of  $0.9\Omega$ , and fast switching speed of  $4 - 5ns$  [36].

The  $R_1$  resistor values were chosen to be  $100\Omega$ ,  $1K\Omega$  and  $10K\Omega$ . These values would be used when the resistance between the probes was  $1 - 10\Omega$ ,  $10 - 100\Omega$ , and  $100 - 1K\Omega$  respectively. Each IC contained 4 switches.

For measuring the output resistor, the voltage over it was directed into a multiplying op-amp with a gain of 11. This increases the resolution for the Analogue to Digital Converter (ADC) readings, as low voltages may be hard to differentiate between when converted to digital data.

This configuration would allow for a minimum resolution of 11% of  $V_{DAC}$  and maximum of 100% of  $V_{DAC}$ , for the voltage measurement by the ADC, as shown in Equations 3.4 and 3.5 [36]. Equations 3.4 and 3.5 show for the expected resistance of  $7.55\Omega$  falling into the  $1 - 10\Omega$  range. However, if the resistance falls into the  $10 - 100\Omega$ , or  $100 - 1K\Omega$ , the respective  $R_1$  resistors would be used and the maximum and minimum DAC resolutions would be the same.

$$\frac{1\Omega}{1\Omega + 100\Omega} \times V_{DAC} \times 11 = 11\%V_{DAC} \quad (3.4)$$

$$\frac{10\Omega}{10\Omega + 100\Omega} \times V_{DAC} \times 11 = 100\%V_{DAC} \quad (3.5)$$

The accuracy of the  $R_1$  resistor is integral to achieving an accurate  $R_2$  measurement. The resistors available on JLCPCB had an accuracy of  $\pm 1\%$ . To increase the accuracy 3 equal resistors were put in parallel. This decreases the uncertainty of the total equivalent resistance [36]. This is shown in Equations 3.6 to 3.9.

$$R_T = \left[ \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{1}{R_n} \right]^{-1} \quad (3.6)$$

If all the Resistors are equal this simplifies to:

$$R_T = \left( \frac{n}{R} \right)^{-1} = \frac{1}{n} \times R \quad (3.7)$$

To propagate uncertainty the standard equation for combined uncertainty can be used:

If a quantity  $y$  depends on several independent variables  $x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n$ :

$$y = f(x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n)$$

and each  $x_i$  has a standard uncertainty  $u(x_i)$  then the combined standard uncertainty of  $y$ , denoted  $u_c(y)$ , is:

$$\delta_y = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n \left( \frac{\partial f}{\partial x_i} \delta_{x_i} \right)^2} \quad (3.8)$$

For Resistance this can be shown as:

$$\delta_{R_T} = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n \left( \frac{\partial R_T}{\partial R} \delta_R \right)^2} = \sqrt{\left( \frac{1}{n} \delta_R \right)^2} = \frac{1}{n} \delta_R \quad (3.9)$$

Using the above equations, with resistors with an individual uncertainty of  $\pm 1\%$ , three

resistors in parallel have a combined uncertainty of  $\pm 0.33\%$ . To create the intended  $R_1$  resistances of  $100\Omega$ ,  $1K\Omega$  and  $10K\Omega$ , the three parallel resistors were chosen to use values of  $300\Omega$ ,  $3K\Omega$  and  $30K\Omega$  respectively.

A second switch circuit was then used to configure the  $R_2$  resistor. With there being two electrodes, the switching circuit allowed for the user to choose which would be the anode and the cathode. The switch also included a calibration resistor of  $5\Omega$ , which would allow for the calculation of the gain of the ADC when measuring. This calibration resistor was also created using a parallel resistor configuration, where four  $20\Omega$  resistors were connected in parallel to give the required resistance at an uncertainty of  $\pm 0.25\%$ .

A simplified circuit diagram showing the resistance measuring circuit is shown in Figure 3.4.

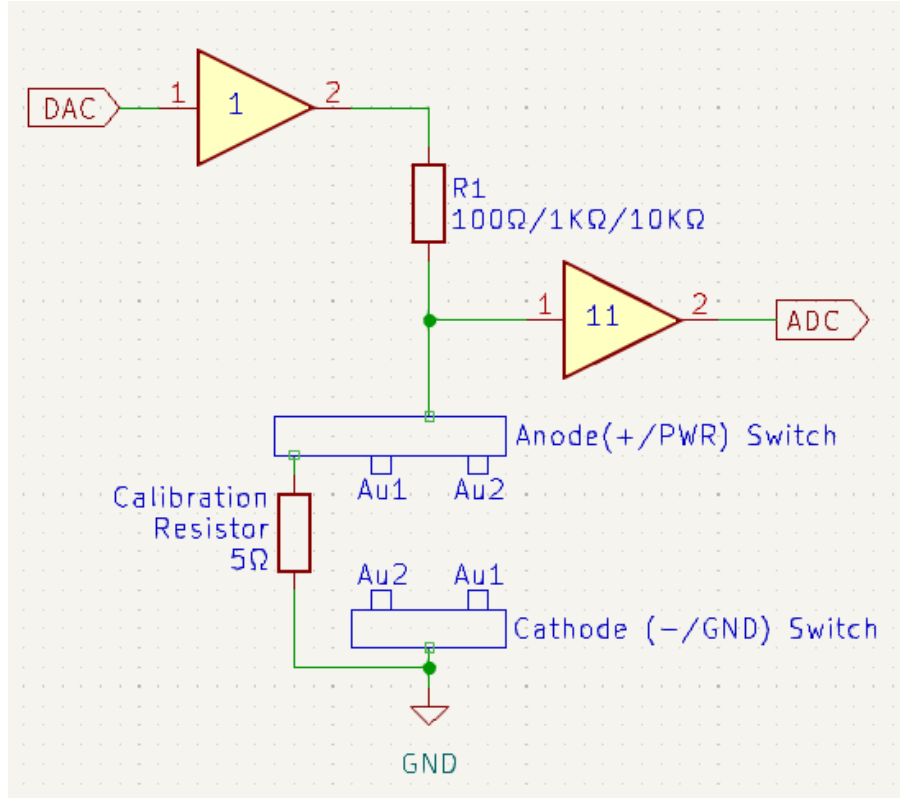


Figure 3.3: Simple circuit diagram of the resistance measuring circuit.

*Note: Au1 Denotes Gold Electrode 1, and Au2 Gold electrode 2.*

A third switch was added to allow for the configuration of the fringe guard, allowing the fringe guard paired with an electrode to share the same voltage configuration, i.e. when an electrode acted as the anode its fringe guard would also act as an anode, and vice versa. The voltage of  $R_1$  was directed through a unity gain buffer op-amp, and then connected on its output to the fringe guard, allowing for the same voltage over the electrodes to be

over the fringe guards without affecting the measurement of the electrode voltage.

Four points on the resistance circuit were routed to separate ADCs, and a test point added to allow for the comparison between the voltage measured by the ADC and by a multimeter. These points were at the DAC output before the unity gain buffer op-amp, after the unity gain buffer op-amp, before the 11x multiplying op-amp and after the 11x multiplying op-amp. A separate capacitor was connected across each of these points and ground to stabilise the ADC readings and remove noise. These capacitors were connected via switches, to allow them to be disconnected when an AC signal needed to be measured. Two additional test points were added to measure the rail voltages from the voltage regulators.

In addition to the resistance measuring circuitry, a waterproof pressure and temperature sensor was included, as these values are needed for calculating salinity. The MS583702BA01-50 was chosen for its low price and availability on JLCPCB. This sensor only allowed for up to 2 Bar pressure measurements, which was enough for this prototype, but would not satisfy the real-world requirements of the salinity probe. Lastly, an RS-485 IC was included for inter board communication.

A ESP-32 S2-Mini-2 was chosen for the microcontroller, as it was the most cost effective ESP32 based microcontroller. It offered an FPU, allowing for the complex salinity calculations to be done, did not require a Universal Asynchronous Receiver-Transmitter (UART) bridge as it has built-in USB OTG support, allowing it to connect directly to a computer for easy programming, which was done via a USB-Micro port, and offered 13-bit ADCs, allowing for a good voltage measurement resolution. Additionally the wireless capabilities allowed for easy debugging, through a web interface, as the researcher's computer only had one USB port. The researcher also had significant experience with this microcontroller.

A controller PCB was designed alongside the probe PCB. This controller was designed to communicate with the probe while it was submerged, sending it instructions and receiving results. It allowed for the measurements to be recorded in a *.txt* file on a micro-SD card, and displayed on a  $16 \times 2$  LCD screen. The PCB for this controller was minimal, and relied on external breakout circuit boards. This was due to budget constraints, and did not affect the effectiveness of the controller. Only the voltage regulation circuitry, and inter-board communication (RS-485) circuitry were included in the production. Headers were included on the controller PCB to allow an ESP-Wroom-32 Devkit module to be mounted to it. Additional headers were included to allow the breakout boards for the LCD display and SD card reader to connect to the ESP32.

For the inter-board connection the RS-485 communication protocol was chosen. The ESP32 microcontrollers do support wireless communication through bluetooth and Wi-Fi. However, wireless communication, especially electro-magnetic waves suffer interference [37]. A wired connection medium, the RS-485 protocol was chosen. Compared to most other communication protocols which typically support distances no longer than  $\pm 50m$ , RS-485 supports up to 1200m, and has good underwater stability. The IC only requires simple  $I^2C$  and is relatively cheap. RS-485 usually uses a pair of twisted cables, which strengthens the electromagnetic magnetic interference rejection and reduces signal degradation. However, due to availability, simple 4-core communication was used, where the additional two cores were used to transmit power between the PCBs.

## 3.5 Assembly and Programming

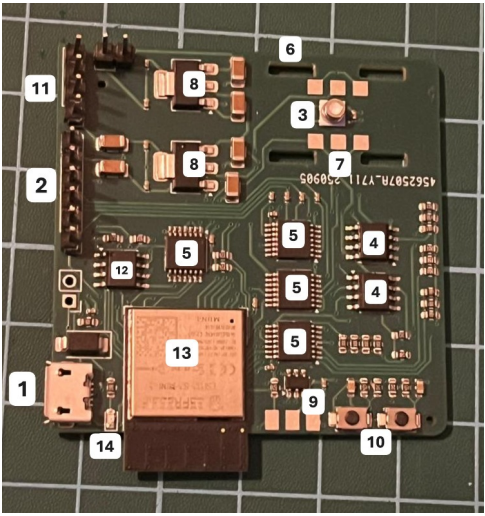
### 3.5.1 PCB and Circuit Assembly

The Probe, Controller and electrode circuitry PCBs were designed using KiCAD software, and manufactured by JLCPCB. The KiCAD design files for these can be found in the GitHub repository linked in Appendix C.

The probe PCB had dimensions of  $50 \times 50mm$  was fabricated onto a 4-layer PCB. This was chosen as the probe would need to fit in the ice hole, with a diameter of 100mm, and JLCPCB offers a discounted rate on 4-layer PCBs if the dimensions are  $50 \times 50mm$  or less. This size also made debugging easier. In addition to the components required for transmission and measurement, test points with headers were added for easy debugging, and an indicator Light Emitting Diode (LED), to indicate power. The probe is shown in Figure 3.4.

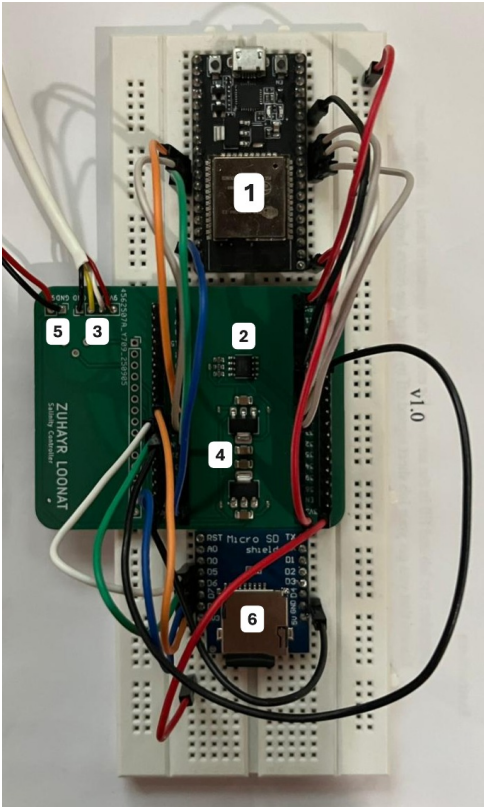
The controller was relatively simple, and only require a 2-layer PCB, with dimensions of  $70 \times 55mm$ . This size and layer count fell into the same discounted bracket as the probe PCB. The external micro-SD card reader was connected to the PCB through a breadboard. The chosen ESP32-Wroom Devkit module when designing the PCB was not the same one the researcher had access to when assembling the controller, and differed in size. To accommodate for this the available ESP32-Wroom module was also placed on the breadboard and was connected to the PCB via jumper cables. Additionally the 16x2 LCD display was not used because of this. The complete Controller PCB and additional circuitry can be seen in Figure 3.5.





1	USB-Micro Port
2	Test Points
3	Pressure Sensor
4	Op-Amps
5	Switch ICs
6	Gold Electrode Mounts
7	Gold Electrode Solder Pads
8	Voltage Regulators
9	DAC
10	Boot and Enable Buttons
11	RS-485 Port
12	RS-485 IC
13	ESP32 Microcontroller
14	Power Indicator LED

Figure 3.4: The probe PCB



1	ESP32-Wroom-Devkit
2	RS-485 IC
3	RS-485 Port
4	Voltage Regulators
5	Input Power
6	Micro-SD Card Reader

Figure 3.5: Controller PCB and Additional Circuitry

The two PCBs were connected via 4-core communication cable, with pins for RS-485 Tx and Rx, Ground and 9V Power. Additionally, 6 core wire was connected to the probe PCB along the 6 test points, to allow for easy debugging when submerged. Both PCBs were powered by an input voltage of 9V which was stepped down appropriately, using voltage regular ICs, for a stable power input.

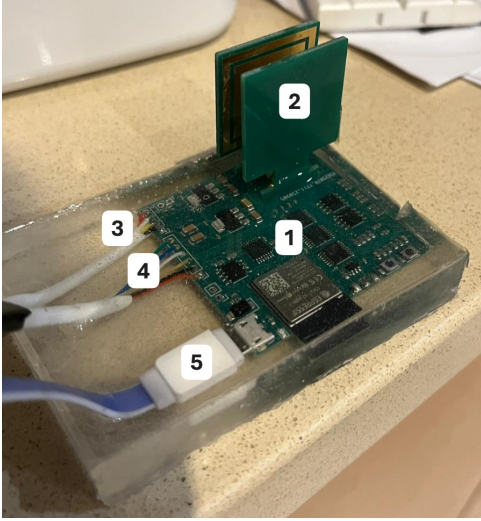
The electrode manufacturing was trivial, as it consisted of the gold plated solder pads, as mentioned in Section 3.2. No additional modifications had to be made to the electrode PCBs, and they were hand soldered to the corresponding solder pads on the probe PCB.

### 3.5.2 Waterproofing

Since the probe PCB would need to be submerged in water, it will would need to be waterproofed. A multitude of methods were considered including conformal coating, a 3D-printed waterproof enclosure, and resin casting. Conformal coating is a thin protective layer applied to shield circuitry and PCBs from moisture and extreme temperature, and usually comes in a spary can. It is relatively cheap but has a low pressure resistance, and offers low physical protection. A 3D-printed enclosure was considered too complex, ultimately leaving a resin cast as the chosen method. This method offers good physical protection and is considered the most reliable.

The RE33/HE33 resin from AMT Composites was chosen for the PCB to be cast in, as it is specifically designed for the encapsulation of electrical components. The cast was made using acrylic sheeting, which were chosen because they do not stick to the resin. The sheets were cut using a saw and joined using waterproof superglue.

The electrodes were spaced using two pieces of acrylic measured to 10mm (i.e. the electrode seperation distance). A plastic straw was used to isolate the pressure sensor as the diamter of the stray matched the pressure sensor perfectly. This ensured that the sensor could measure the pressure of the water accurately. A fully encapsulated probe PCB can be seen in Figure 3.6.



1	Probe Board
2	Gold Electrodes
3	RS-485 and Power Cable
4	Test Point Cable
5	Programming Cable

Figure 3.6: Encapsulated Probe

### 3.5.3 Microcontroller Programming

The controller was programmed to send commands to the probe via RS-485, and the probe to follow the command and return the data back to the controller. These commands would first be sent by a computer to the serial monitor on the controller board, and then would be sent from the controller to the probe. Multiple measurement modes were programmed into the probe board and they were triggered with specific commands. A separate C++ header file, with functions for the salinity calculation equations, was created for ease of coding and reusability.

The voltage measurements were done using the ESP32's built in ADCs, which used a reference voltage of 3.3V. To account for measurement inaccuracies caused by the DAC, ADC or op-amp, the calibration resistor was used to find a calibration factor, which will be denoted by  $C_F$ . This factor was calculated by connecting the calibration resistor ( $R_2$ ) to a chosen  $R_1$  resistor, and measuring the voltage drop over it. This value would then be compared to the expected voltage drop, calculated mathematically. The expected voltage is divided by the measured voltage to give the calibration factor  $C_F$ . Readings from the ADC would then be multiplied by this calibration factor, removing any inaccuracies. The calculation of the calibration factor is shown in Equations 3.10 to 3.13.

$$\text{Given calibration resistor } R_C = 5\Omega \quad (3.10)$$

$$\text{Expected } V_C = 11 \times V_{IN} \times \frac{R_C}{R_C + R_1} \quad (3.11)$$

$$\text{Measured } V_C = \frac{\text{ADC Reading}}{\text{ADC Resolution}} \times V_{Ref} \quad (3.12)$$

$$\text{Calibration Factor } C_F = \frac{\text{Expected } V_C}{\text{Measured } V_C} \quad (3.13)$$

### DC Voltage Sweep

### DC Single Voltage

### 3.5.4 Machine Learning Programming

# Chapter 4

## Results

These are the results I found from my investigation.

Present your results in a suitable format using tables and graphs where necessary. Remember to refer to them in text and caption them properly.

### 4.1 Simulation Results

### 4.2 Experimental Results

# Chapter 5

## Discussion

Here is what the results mean and how they tie to existing literature...

Discuss the relevance of your results and how they fit into the theoretical work you described in your literature review.

# Chapter 6

## Conclusions

These are the conclusions from the investigation and how the investigation changes things in this field or contributes to current knowledge...

Draw suitable and intelligent conclusions from your results and subsequent discussion.

# Chapter 7

## Recommendations

Make sensible recommendations for further work.



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# Appendix A

## Additional Files and Schematics

Add any information here that you would like to have in your project but is not necessary in the main text. Remember to refer to it in the main text. Separate your appendices based on what they are for example. Equation derivations in Appendix A and code in Appendix B etc.

**IMPORTANT:** Appendix A (see the table below) should provide a summary of how you have met the GAs associated with the course, and where in the report the evidence can be found.

If you have used AI in writing your report, you need to provide details in one of the appendices of how you used it.

If appropriate, in a subsequent appendix, provide a link to any GitHub repository where the code and additional materials for your project can be found.

GA	Requirement	Justification and section in the report
1	Problem-solving	Description here
4	Investigations, experiments and data analysis	Description here
5	Use of engineering tools	Description here
6	Professional and technical communication (Long report)	Description here
8	Individual work	Description here
9	Independent learning ability	Description here

# Appendix B

## Addenda

### B.1 Ethics Forms

# Appendix C

## GitHub Repository

[Click here to access the GitHub repository.](#)

## GitHub Structure