LIFEPAC® Science

Alpha Omega Publications®

SCIENCE 1207
ELECTRIC CURRENTS

CONTENTS

Author: **James T. Coleman, Ph.D.**
Editor: Alan Christopherson, M.S.
Illustrations: Juanita Farmer
Alpha Omega Graphics

Alpha Omega Publications®

804 N. 2nd Ave. E., Rock Rapids, IA 51246-1759

ELECTRIC CURRENTS

Science LIFEPAC® 1206 dealt with the nature of static electricity and was the first LIFEPAC in electrophysics, the relation of the electrical nature of matter to physical systems. This LIFEPAC will deal with the laws of current flow, the electrical conductivity and resistance that regulate current flow, and basic electrical circuits. These topics will be a natural step from the LIFEPAC on static electricity and will follow the historical development in the knowledge of both electricity and electric circuits. Our present electronic age is built upon these principles. Since we know of no exceptions to these rules, we consider them as electrical laws. The same laws apply both to outer space and to the northern lights. Electric currents flow all the way from the sun to the earth, and the same laws apply that are given in this LIFEPAC.

Electric currents are part of the invisible creation, since we cannot see currents flow. They obey well defined laws, however; and we shall study these invisible laws that the Creator built into the universe and thus better understand the order and beauty He has built into this system.

OBJECTIVES

Read these objectives. The objectives tell you what you will be able to do when you have successfully completed this LIFEPAC.

When you have finished this LIFEPAC, you should be able to:

1. Trace the conceptual development of electric current.
2. Define electromotive force and list two sources.
3. Cite parallels between fluid flow and charge flow.
4. Develop a mathematical expression for resistance of a conductor.
5. Apply Ohm's law to series and parallel circuits.
6. Solve problems involving electrical power.

Survey the LIFEPAC. Ask yourself some questions about this study. Write your questions here.

I. CURRENT

The early ideas of electricity were the results of the experiments conducted by William Gilbert. He concluded that two basic types of electric charges exist. Later, Benjamin Franklin named the two types of charges, *positive* and *negative*, according to the way in which they were generated.

The force law that charges obey is called Coulomb's law. It is given in the following form:

$$F = K \frac{Q_1 Q_2}{r^2}$$

K is a constant that depends on the system of units, Q_1, and Q_2 are charges on objects, and r is the separation between the charged objects. Coulomb's law predicts that unlike charges attract with a force F that varies inversely as the square of the distance between the charged bodies.

Although individual and static charges behave according to Coulomb's law, charges in motion are described somewhat differently. Electric currents behave analogously to fluid flow; in fact, electricity was considered a fluid. Work must be done on fluid to give it the potential energy to do work; and the characteristics of the channel, or **conduit**, will affect the work done.

SECTION OBJECTIVES

Review these objectives. When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

1. Trace the conceptual development of electric current.
2. Define electromotive force and list two sources.
3. Cite parallels between fluid flow and charge flow.

VOCABULARY

Study these words to enhance your learning success in this section.

analogy
conduit
potential drop
conductance
potential

Note: All vocabulary words in this LIFEPAC appear in **boldface** print the first time they are used. If you are unsure of the meaning when you are reading, study the definitions given.

CONCEPTS

The preceding LIFEPAC (Science 1206) covered early experiments on the nature of static charges. When charges are caused to flow in a conductor (for instance, a wire), this flow is called an *electric current*. The flow of an individual charge between two charged objects is very rapid and is difficult to study. What was lacking in the early days was a source of steady current.

Positive charge flow. Steady currents became possible when the Italian physicist, Alessandro Volta (1745-1827), invented the electric (voltaic) cell. The voltaic cell made possible the production of steady currents and, thereby, a means for producing steady voltages in an electrical circuit. The current was first considered to be a flow of positive charges. The charge flow had to be "downhill" from the terminal of high potential to the terminal of low potential. The current was considered to flow as the following diagram, Figure 1, illustrates. Positive

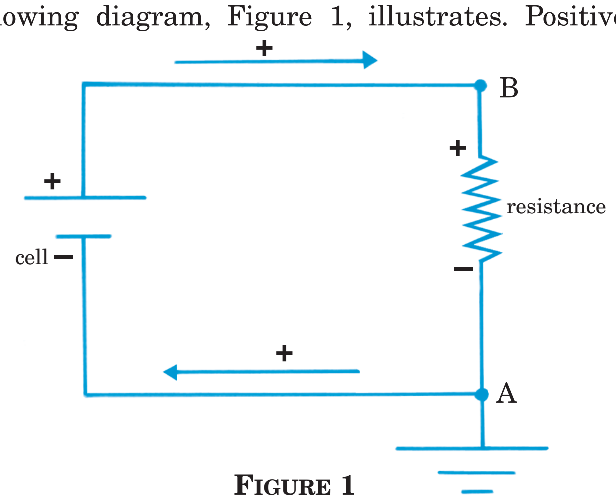

FIGURE 1

charges flowed out of the cell and flowed "down" to the return terminal of the battery, which was negative. The result was an expenditure of energy across the resistance. Again, the positive side of the resistance was where the positive charges entered. If point A was grounded, point B was "hot," or "above ground." The logic of this flow seemed reasonable at the time. Many electricians today still use these concepts.

Electron flow. Since in a metallic conductor the true charge motion is a movement of electrons in the conductor (LIFEPAC 1206), the more accurate picture is presented by the following diagram, Figure 2. When Point A is again grounded, Point B is still the "hot" point, and the voltage is still positive in respect to ground. Point A is more negative than Point B. The external result is the same as Figure 1.

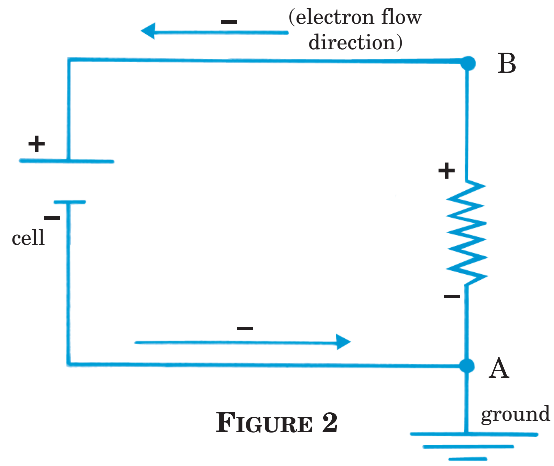

FIGURE 2

Thus, the assumption of a positive charge flow was useful at the time because it gave proper voltage polarity, and it satisfied our intuition. Because all of the equations for electricity were developed using the positive charge flow model, we will continue to use this concept for all our conventional electrical studies.

Complete these sentences.

1.1 The inventor of the electric cell was ______________________ .

1.2 The electric cell made possible ______________________ currents.

1.3 In a voltaic cell electrons flow from the a. ______________ to the b. ______________ terminal.

1.4 The negative terminal of an electric cell is negative because it possesses a surplus of ______________________ .

Research and report.

1.5 The men on this list contributed to the development of electrical theory. Write a report integrating their contributions in a historical perspective. The report should be six pages, double-spaced. You will be graded 60 percent for content and 40 percent for grammar.

Charles Coulomb — Alessandro Volta

André Ampère — Georg Ohm

Score ______________________

Adult check ______________________

Initial **Date**

ELECTROMOTIVE FORCE

Analogy with fluid flow requires a device to raise the fluid to a level from which it can fall to do work. In nature the sun raises water by evaporation; the most common man-made device to raise water is a pump.

In current electricity, a device is required to "lift" a charge to a potential from which they can "fall" to do work. The "lift" in potential is called the electromotive force (emf). Two common examples of such an electron pump, called source of *emf*, are storage batteries and generators.

Storage batteries. A battery is a chemically operated device for storing very large numbers of electrons on one battery terminal (electrode) by stripping an adjacent electrode of its supply.

Because of this lack of balance, one (electrode) is negative and one is positive, with the result being a voltage (or *potential difference*, or **potential**) between terminals. The electron-rich electrode is considered negative. The electrode with an electron shortage is considered positive.

Requirements for a battery are an electrolyte and two dissimilar conducting materials. When the two electrodes are immersed in the electrolyte, a battery is formed. The cell formed will convert chemical energy into electrical energy.

An example of a simple storage battery is a container of ionic liquid with two metal plates. The liquid (electrolyte) is sulfuric acid, and the two plates are made of copper and zinc. The zinc atoms are converted into charged ions in the acid. When this conversion occurs, two electrons are left on the electrode for every ion that leaves, giving the zinc electrode excess electrons.

The electrolyte stays neutral in charge by taking hydrogen ions from the electrolyte and converting them to neutral hydrogen at the copper electrode. The net result is a chemical process that constantly deposits electrons on the zinc electrode and removes the same number of electrons from the copper electrode. This sequence of events happens billions or trillions of times a second, with the result that the battery provides a steady flow of electrical charge to the resistance connected across its terminals. When a light bulb is placed across the battery terminals, electrical charge will flow from one terminal to the other through the bulb. The same amount of charge per second delivered to the bulb must be returned to the other battery terminal.

Generators. Whereas a battery converts chemical energy to electrical energy, a generator converts mechanical energy to electrical energy. A generator operates on the principle that an electric current is induced in a wire that is moving through a magnetic field. This principle is developed in detail in Science LIFEPAC 1208.

Answer *true* **or** *false*.

1.6 ____________ Batteries convert chemical energy into electrical energy.

1.7 ____________ The negative battery terminal is electron-enriched.

1.8 ____________ The battery electrolyte is positively charged.

1.9 ____________ Batteries can supply a steady flow of electrons.

1.10 ____________ A generator converts chemical energy to electrical energy.

Complete this activity.

1.11 Describe the principle upon which a generator operates. ________________________________

____

____

____

FLUID FLOW

Having never seen a flow of electrical charges, the early experimenters thought of the movement of electrical charges as a flow of a fluid, such as water. Water in a stream flows downhill; a stream must have a drop in height from one end to the other, or the water will not flow. The potential decreases from a higher level to a lower level.

Conduit. The flow of water is illustrated in Figure 3. Water flows from a tank at Point b and goes over a small waterfall at Point c. The gradual drop from Point d to Point e results in more flow of water. If the drop is increased from Point d to Point e, the water will flow faster in that part of the channel. If Point f in the channel is lifted up so that it is at the same height as Point a, all water flow will stop. A physical drop in the channel is necessary to permit water flow.

If the flow is stopped at Point e, then all flow in the channel will stop. Flaw at Point b in the channel is not permitted unless flow at Point d is also permitted. The amount of water leaving the tank