Resistance Standards and Decades

STANDARD RESISTORS

Because of its accuracy of adjustment, long-term stability, low and uniform temperature coefficient, and relative immunity to ambient humidity conditions, the wire-wound resistor is the most suitable type for use as a laboratory standard at audio and low radio frequencies, as well as at dc.

AC CONSIDERATIONS

Resistors designed for ac use differ from those intended for use only at dc in that low series reactance and constancy of resistance as frequency is varied are important design objectives. The residual capacitance and inductance become increasingly important as the frequency is raised, acting to change the terminal resistance from its low-frequency value.

For frequencies where the resistance and its associated residual reactances behave as lumped parameters, the equivalent circuit of a resistor can be represented as shown in Figure 1. L is the equivalent inductance in series with the resistance, and C is the equivalent capacitance across the terminals of the resistor.

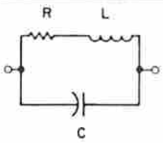

Figure 1.

It is necessary to differentiate clearly between the concepts of equivalent series and equivalent parallel circuits. The two-terminal circuit of Figure 1 can be described as an impedance $R_s + jX_s$ or as an admittance $G + jB = \frac{1}{R_p} + \frac{1}{jX_p}$, wherein the parameters are a function of frequency. This distinction between series and parallel components is more than a mathematical exercise — the use to which the resistor is to be put will frequently determine which component is of principal interest.

The expression for the effective series impedance is:

$$Z_s = R_s + jX_s = \frac{R + j\omega\left[L\left(1 - \frac{\omega^2}{\omega_r^2}\right) - R^2C\right]}{\left(1 - \frac{\omega^2}{\omega_r^2}\right)^2 + (\omega RC)^2}$$

where $\omega_r = \frac{1}{\sqrt{LC}}$ and $\frac{\omega^2}{\omega_r^2} = \omega^2 LC$.

The effective parallel admittance is given by:

$$Y = G + jB = \frac{1}{R_p} + \frac{1}{jX_p} \quad \frac{\frac{1}{R} + j\omega\left[C - \frac{L}{R^2}\left(1 - \frac{\omega^2}{\omega_r^2}\right)\right]}{1 + \left(\frac{\omega L}{R}\right)^2}$$

At low frequencies where terms in ω^2 are negligible, the resistor may be represented by a two-element network consisting of the dc resistance, R, in series with an inductance equal to $L - R^2C$ or in parallel with a capacitance equal to $C - L/R^2$. Because of the presence of the R^2 term in the equivalent reactive parameters, shunt capacitance is the dominating residual for high values of resistance, while for low values the series inductance invariably predominates. Generally, individual wire-wound resistors above a few kilohms are capacitive, while decades are inductive at somewhat lower values.

In the simplified circuit of Figure 1, the effective parallel resistance of a high-valued resistor in which capacitance dominates would be independent of frequency. Actually, other effects may cause the parallel resistance to decrease with frequency. For example, dielectric losses in the shunt capacitance, C, are equivalent to a resistance

$$R_d = \frac{1}{D\omega C}$$

(where D is the dissipation factor of the distributed capacitance), which decreases with frequency and causes the effective parallel resistance to decrease rapidly beyond a certain frequency. In addition, distributed capacitance along the winding causes a similar rapid decrease in resistance even if its dielectric loss is negligible. The equations above indicate that the effective series resistance of low-valued resistors would be independent of frequency up to quite high frequencies. In practice, if the residual inductance and capacitance are kept small, skin effect becomes the main cause for departure from the low-frequency values of these resistors.

GenRad wire-wound resistance elements are designed to minimize inductance in low-resistance values and to minimize capacitance for high values of resistance. All units up through 200 ohms utilize an Ayrton-Perry winding. For very low-valued units, the residual inductance of such a winding is about 1% of that of a corresponding single winding.

Elements of resistance from 500 ohms to 100 kilohms are unifilar wound on flat cards to provide low inductance and capacitance. Separate resistors of higher values are also wound on flat cards for optimum ac performance but spools are used in decade boxes (see Figure 2). This is because the effect of inductors is negligible at these high frequencies and the effect of capacitance between resistors, which is more important than capacitance across a single resistor, is minimized.

DECADE BOXES

In decade boxes, the residual impedances of the switches, wiring, and cabinet are added to those of the resistors themselves. For multiple-decade boxes, the series inductances are additive, but the capacitance is approximately that across the highest valued decade used (see specifications for each type).

The effect of the residual reactance depends greatly upon the way the resistor is connected in the circuit. For example, parallel capacitance can often be compensated for when the resistor is connected in parallel with a capacitor. For high-valued resistors, the upper frequency limit for a given error is some ten times higher in the effective parallel resistance than it is for the series connection.

Figure 2.