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How does the vacuum tube work

The first half of the 1900s. In the 1950s, the invention of the transistor started to replace the vacuum tube, as vacuum tubes were larger, fragile like a light bulb, and expensive. As computing devices started to become smaller in size, transistors were more ideal to use due to their smaller size. Today, vacuum tubes are primarily used in high-end audio equipment, preferred by some audiophiles as an alternative to digital systems. Electronics terms, Hardware terms, Nixie tube, Electron tube, Transistor, Williams Tube Device that controls electric current between electrodes in an evacuated container This article is about the electronic device. For experiments in an evacuated pipe, see Free fall. For the transport system, see Pneumatic tube. For Blood sampling, see Venipuncture. Later thermionic vacuum tubes, mostly miniature style, some with top cap connections for higher voltages A vacuum tube, electron tube, [1][2][3] valve (British usage), or tube (North America)[4] is a device that controls electric current flow in a high vacuum through heated filaments arranged around a cathode. The basic principle of operation is that electrons can be emitted from a surface called a cathode and accelerated by an electric field towards one or more other electrodes. Some types have internal structures called grids or diodes which act as gates or switches so that the tube can serve as an amplifier, switch, oscillator, signal detector, rectifier, etc. Vacuum tubes are almost always sealed under high vacuum, and are used for such purposes as the detection of light intensities. In both types, the electrons are accelerated from the cathode to the anode by the electric field in the tube. Valve power amplifiers using tubes, in operation. Red-orange glow is from heated filaments. Illustration representing a primitive triode vacuum tube and the polarities of the typical dc operating potentials. Not shown are the impedances (resistors or inductors) that would be included in series with the C and B voltage sources. The simplest vacuum tube, the diode, invented in 1904 by John Ambrose Fleming, contains only a heated electron-emitting cathode and an anode. Electrons can only flow in one direction through the device—from the cathode to the anode. Adding one or more control grids within the tube allows the current between the cathode and anode to be controlled by the voltage on the grid(s).[5] These devices became a key component of electronic circuits for the first half of the twentieth century. They were crucial to the development of radio, television, radar, sound recording and reproduction, long-distance telephone networks, and analog and early digital computers. Although some applications had used earlier technologies such as the spark gap transmitter for radio or mechanical computers for computing, it was the invention of the thermionic vacuum tube that made these technologies widespread and practical, and created the discipline of electronics.[6] In the 1940s, the invention of semiconductor devices made it possible to produce solid-state devices, which are smaller, more efficient, reliable, durable, safer, and more economical than thermionic tubes. Beginning in the mid-1970s, thermionic tubes were being replaced by the transistor. However, the cathode ray tube remained the basis for television monitors until the early 21st century. Thermionic tubes are still useful in some applications, such as magnetron units in microwave ovens, certain high-frequency amplifiers, and amplifiers at ultra-high frequencies for satellite communications. Nixie tube displays similar to those of vacuum tubes, but instead of emitting electrons they cause phosphor coatings to emit visible light. Cathode-ray tubes (CRTs) are also vacuum tubes, but they do not have a filament; rather, they contain a cold cathode gun that emits a beam of electrons from its tip. The classification of thermionic vacuum tubes is by the number of active electrodes. A device with two active elements is a diode, usually used for rectification. Devices with three elements are triodes used for amplification and switching. Additional electrodes create tetrodes, pentodes, and so forth, which have multiple additional functions made possible by the additional controllable electrodes. Other classifications are: by frequency range (audio, radio, VHF, UHF, microwave) by power rating (small-signal, audio power, high-power radio transmitting) by cathode/filament type (indirectly heated, directly heated) and warm-up time (including "bright-emitter" or "dull-emitter") by characteristic curves design (e.g., sharp versus remote-cut-off in some pentodes) by application (receiving tubes, transmitting tubes, amplifying or switching, rectification, mixing) specialized parameters (long life, very low microphonic sensitivity and low-noise audio amplification, rugged or military versions) specialized functions (light or radiation detectors, video imaging tubes) tubes used to display information ("magic eye" tubes, vacuum fluorescent displays, CRTs) Tubes have different functions, such as cathode ray tubes which create a beam of electrons for display purposes (such as the television picture tube) in addition to more specialized functions such as electron microscopy and electron beam lithography. X-ray tubes are also vacuum tubes. Phototubes and photomultiplier rely on electron flow through a vacuum, though in these cases electron emission from the cathode depends on energy from photons rather than thermionic emission. Since these sorts of "vacuum tubes" have functions other than electronic amplification and rectification they are often classified separately. Most vacuum tubes have glass envelopes, but some have metal envelopes, usually with a glass-to-metal seal. Metal envelope tubes have borosilicate glasses, though ceramic and metal envelopes (atop insulating beryllium) have been used. The electrodes are attached to leads which pass through the envelope via an airtight seal. Most vacuum tubes have a limited lifetime, due to the filament or heater burning out or other failure modes, so they are made as replaceable units; the electrode leads connect to pins on the tube's base which plug into a tube socket. Tubes were a frequent cause of failure in electronic equipment, and consumers were expected to be able to replace tubes themselves. In addition to the base terminals, some tubes had an electrode terminating at a top cap. The principal reason for doing this was to avoid leakage resistance through the tube base, particularly for the high impedance grid input.[7]:580[8] The bases were commonly made with phenolic insulation which performs poorly as an insulator in humid conditions. Other reasons for using a top cap include improving stability by reducing grid-to-anode capacitance,[9] improved high-frequency performance, keeping a very high plate voltage away from lower voltages, and accommodating one more electrode than allowed by the base. There was even an occasional design that had two top cap connections. The earliest vacuum tubes evolved from incandescent light bulbs, containing a filament sealed in an evacuated glass envelope. When hot, the filament releases electrons into the vacuum, a process called thermionic emission, originally known as the Edison effect. A second electrode, the anode or plate, will attract those electrons if it is at a more positive voltage. The result is a net flow of electrons from the filament to plate. However, electrons cannot flow in the reverse direction because the plate is not heated and does not emit electrons. The filament (cathode) has a dual function: it emits electrons when heated; and, together with the plate, it creates an electric field due to the potential difference between them. Such a tube with only two electrodes is termed a diode, and is used for rectification. Since current can only pass in one direction, the diode acts as a switch. To make a switch that can operate faster, a third electrode, the control grid, is added. The grid is placed between the cathode and anode, and connected to ground. Long after the control grid is added, the cathode is essentially no longer needed to provide the current, since the grid can pull electrons from the cathode without having to heat it. No current flows into it, yet a change of several volts on the control grid is sufficient to make a large difference in the plate current, possibly changing the output by hundreds of volts (depending on the circuit). The solid-state device which operates most like the pentode tube is the junction field-effect transistor (JFET), although vacuum tubes typically operate at over a hundred volts, unlike most semiconductors in most applications. History and development One of Edison's experimental bulbs The 19th century saw increasing research with evacuated tubes, such as the Geissler and Crookes tubes. The many scientists and inventors who experimented with such tubes include Thomas Edison, Eugen Goldstein, Nikola Tesla, and Johann Wilhelm Hittorf. With the exception of early light bulbs, such tubes were only used in scientific research or as novelties. The groundwork laid by these scientists and inventors, however, was critical to the development of subsequent vacuum tube technology. Although thermionic emission was originally reported in 1873 by Frederick Guthrie,[11] it was Thomas Edison's apparently independent discovery of the phenomenon in 1883 that became well known. Although Edison was aware of the unidirectional property of current flow between the filament and the anode, his interest (and patent[12]) concentrated on the sensitivity of the anode current to the current through the filament (and thus filament temperature). It was years later that John Ambrose Fleming applied the rectifying property of the Edison effect to detect radio signals, as an improvement over the magnetic detector.[13] Amplification by vacuum tube became practical only with Lee de Forest's 1907 invention of the three-terminal "audion".[14] By adding a control grid between the filament and the anode, he reduced the anode current to zero when the grid was grounded, and increased it again when the grid was positively charged. This arrangement allowed him to amplify signals received by his wireless receivers. The electronics revolution of the 20th century arguably began with the invention of the triode vacuum tube. Diodes Main article: Diode Fleming's first diodes At the end of the 19th century, radio or wireless technology was in an early stage of development and the Marconi Company was engaged in development and construction of radio communication systems. Marconi appointed English physicist John Ambrose Fleming as scientific advisor in 1899. Fleming had been engaged as scientific advisor to Edison Telephone (1879), as scientific adviser at Edison Electric Light (1882), and was also technical consultant to Edison-Swan.[16] One of Marconi's needs was for improvement of the detector. Marconi had developed a magnetic detector, which was less responsive to natural sources of radio frequency interference than the coherer, but the magnetic detector only provided an audio frequency signal to a telephone receiver. A reliable detector could drive a printing instrument was needed. As a result of experiments conducted on Edison effect bulbs,[13] Fleming developed a vacuum tube that he termed the oscillation valve because it passed current in only one direction.[17] The cathode was a carbon lamp filament, heated by passing current through it, that produced thermionic emission of electrons. Electrons that had been emitted from the cathode were attracted to the plate (anode) when the plate was at a positive voltage with respect to the cathode. Electrons could not pass in the reverse direction because the plate was not heated and not capable of thermionic emission of electrons. Fleming filed a patent for these tubes, assigned to the Marconi company, in the UK in November 1904 and this patent was issued in September 1913.[18] Later known as the Fleming valve, the oscillation valve was developed for the purpose of rectifying radio frequency current as the detector component of radio receiver circuits.[13][19] While offering no advantage over the electrical sensitivity of crystal detectors,[20] the Fleming valve offered advantage, particularly in shipboard applications where crystals were unreliable. The Fleming valve was widely used in early 20th-century radio receivers. Triodes Main article: Triode The first triode, the de Forest Audion, invented in 1906 Triodes as they evolved over 40 years of tube manufacture, from the RE16 in 1918 to a 1960s era miniature tube Triode symbol. From top to bottom: plate (anode), control grid, cathode, heater (filament) Originally, the only use for tubes in radio circuits was for rectification, not amplification. In 1906, Robert von Lieben filed a patent[24] for a cathode ray tube which included magnetic deflection. This could be used for amplifying audio signals and was intended for use in telephony equipment. He would later help refine the triode vacuum tube. However, Lee de Forest is credited with inventing the triode tube in 1907 while experimenting to improve his original (Edison) audion.[25] By placing an additional electrode between the filament (cathode) and plate (anode), he discovered the ability of the resulting device to amplify signals. As the voltage applied to the control grid (or simply "grid") was lowered from the cathode's voltage to somewhat more negative voltages, the amount of current from the filament to the plate would be reduced. The negative electrostatic field created by the grid in the vicinity of the cathode would inhibit the passage of emitted electrons and reduce the current to the plate. With the voltage of the grid less than that of the cathode, no direct current could pass from the cathode to the grid. Thus a change of voltage applied to the grid, requiring very little power input to the grid, could make a change in the plate current and could lead to a much larger voltage change at the plate; the result was voltage and power amplification. In 1908, de Forest was granted a patent (U.S. Patent 879,532) for such a three-electrode version of his original audion vacuum tube. His design was simple enough that it could be easily duplicated. The vacuum tube was made of glass, with a glass-to-metal seal at the base. The residual gas would cause a blue glow (visible ionization) when the plate voltage was high (above about 60 volts). In 1912, de Forest sought the Audion to Harold Arnold in AT&T's engineering department. Arnold recommended that AT&T purchase the patent, and AT&T followed his recommendation. Arnold developed high-vacuum tubes which were tested in the summer of 1913 on AT&T's long-distance network.[26] The high-vacuum tubes could operate at high plate voltages without a blue glow. Finnish inventor Eric Tigerstedt significantly improved on the original triode design in 1914, while working on his sound-on-film process in Berlin, Germany. Tigerstedt's innovation was to make the electrodes concentric cylinders with the cathode at the centre, thus greatly increasing the collection of emitted electrons at the anode.[27] Irving Langmuir at the General Electric research laboratory (Schenectady, New York) had improved Wolfgang Gaede's high-vacuum diffusion pump and used it to settle the question of thermionic emission and conduction in a vacuum. Consequently, General Electric started producing hard vacuum triodes (which were branded Piñotons) in 1915.[28] Langmuir patented the hard vacuum triode, but de Forest and AT&T successfully asserted priority and invalidated the patent. Piñotons were closely followed by the French type 'TM' and later the English type 'R' which were in widespread use by the allied military by 1916. Historically, vacuum levels in production vacuum tubes typically ranged from 10 pPa down to 10 nPa (8×10⁻⁸ Torr down to 8×10⁻¹¹ Torr).[29] The triode and its derivatives (tetrodes and pentodes) are thermionic emission devices, in which the controlling signal applied to the grid is a voltage, and the resulting amplified signal appearing at the anode is a current.[30] Compare this to the behavior of the bipolar junction transistor, in which the controlling signal is a current and the output is also a current. For vacuum tubes, transconductance or mutual conductance is the ratio of change in plate current to change in grid voltage, measured with the anode-circuit load resistance held constant. The Miller equation relates the gain of a vacuum tube to its transconductance and plate resistance Rp or Ra. The Van der Bijl equation defines their relationship as follows: g_m = μ R_p (displaysyle g_m) (=μ over R_p). The non-linear operating characteristics of the triode caused early tube audio amplifiers to exhibit harmonic distortion at low volumes. Plotting plate current as a function of applied grid voltage, it was seen that there was a range of grid voltages for which the transfer characteristics were approximately linear. To use this range, a negative bias voltage had to be applied to the grid to position the DC operating point in the linear region. This was called the idle condition, and the plate current at this point the "idle current". The controlling voltage was superimposed onto the bias voltage, resulting in a linear variation of plate current in response to positive and negative variation of the input voltage around that point. This concept is called grid bias. Many early radio sets had a third battery called the "C battery" (unrelated to the present-day C cell, for which the letter denotes its size and shape). The C battery's positive terminal was connected to the cathode of the tubes (or "ground" in most circuits) and whose negative terminal supplied this bias voltage to the grids of the tubes. Later circuits, after tubes were made with heaters isolated from their cathodes, used cathode biasing, avoiding the need for a separate negative power supply. For cathode biasing, a relatively low-value resistor is connected between the cathode and ground. This makes the cathode positive with respect to the grid, which is at ground potential for DC. However C batteries continued to be included in some equipment even when the "A" and "B" batteries had been replaced by power from the AC mains. That was possible because these tubes did not draw significant currents from the batteries, at least for many years (often long enough to allow replacement without requiring replacement of the batteries). When tubes were first used in radio transmitters and receivers, it was found that tuned amplification stages had a tendency to oscillate unless their gain was very limited. This was due to the fact that the feedback path between the anode and the control grid was too strong. The Miller capacitance, known as the Miller effect, causes the effective capacitance between the anode and the control grid to increase. If the feedback path was too strong, the tube would oscillate. To prevent this, the feedback path was weakened by connecting back to the grid through a small capacitor, and when properly adjusted would cancel the Miller capacitance. This technique was employed and led to the success of the Neutrodyne radio during the 1920s. However, neutralization required careful adjustment and proved unsatisfactory when used over a wide range of frequencies. Tetrodes and pentodes Main articles: Tetrode and Pentode Tetrode symbol. From

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