
RS-485 Drivers and Receivers

Functional Principles of RS-485 Drivers and Receivers

Abstract

The RS-485 standard specifies the electrical characteristics of differential drivers and receivers in multi-point networks but does not explain their functional principles. This document explains how the differential line signals are generated by the driver and processed by the receiver.

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1. Driver Functional Principle

An RS-485 driver consists of a drive logic and four output transistors (Q1 to Q4) in an H-bridge configuration. The drive logic becomes active when the driver enable pin (DE) is asserted high.

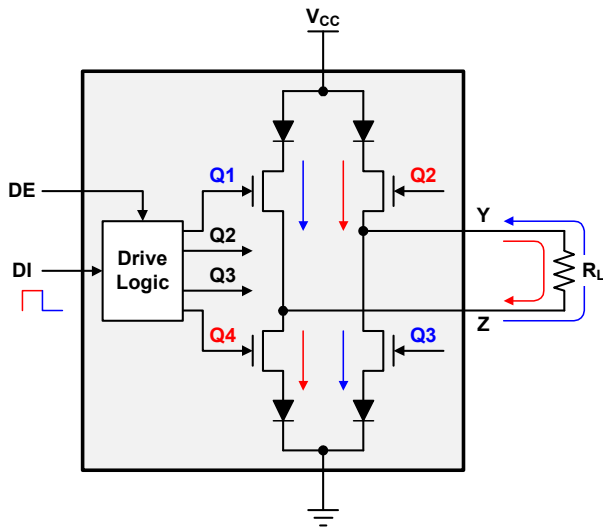


Figure 1. Driver with Drive Logic and H-Bridge Output

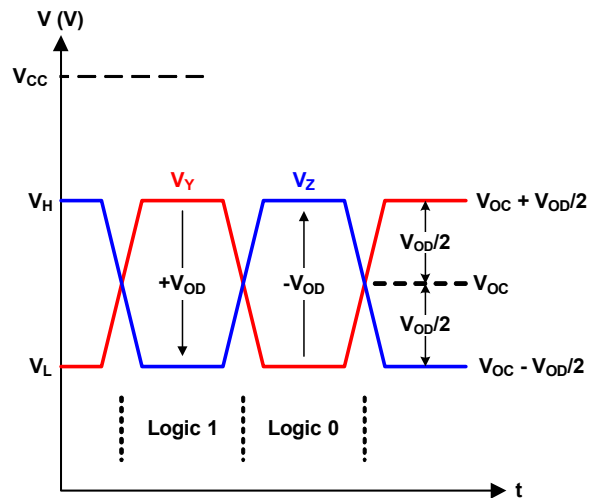


Figure 2. Driver Differential and Common-Mode Output Voltages

A high applied to the data input (DI) turns on Q2 and Q4 and disables Q1 and Q3. This configuration causes current to flow through R_L from Output Y to Output Z. A low applied to DI turns Q2 and Q4 off and enables Q1 and Q3, which causes the current to flow in the opposite direction, from Z to Y.

Each transistor has a diode in series to prevent reverse leakage current from flowing into the transistor if the bus voltage either rises above V_{CC} or drops below ground. When a driver drives a loaded bus, the forward voltages of the diodes and the voltage drops across the $r_{DS(ON)}$ resistance of the transistors causing the output voltages, V_Y and V_Z , to never reach the supply rails. Instead, both outputs switch alternately between the high and low voltage levels, V_H and V_L (Figure 2).

In general, the differential output voltage, V_{OD} , is the difference between the high and low-level output voltages:

$$(EQ. 1) \quad V_{OD} = V_H - V_L$$

However, in practice V_{OD} is defined as $V_Y - V_Z$, so V_Y is referenced to V_Z . For $V_Y > V_Z$, V_{OD} is positive and represents a binary 1 or logic high at DI. For $V_Y < V_Z$, V_{OD} is negative and indicates a binary 0 or logic low at DI.

As both outputs switch within the positive voltage range, the DC-component is common to both outputs. This voltage is the driver output common-mode voltage, V_{OC} , and is defined in Equation 2:

$$(EQ. 2) \quad V_{OC} = \frac{V_H + V_L}{2}$$

Inserting Equation 1 into Equation 2 presents the output voltages in their common-mode and differential components:

$$(EQ. 3) \quad V_H = V_{OC} + \frac{V_{OD}}{2} \quad \text{and} \quad V_L = V_{OC} - \frac{V_{OD}}{2}$$

The driver can therefore be shown as a common-mode voltage source superimposed by two complementary, differential voltages:

$$(EQ. 4) \quad V_Y = V_{OC} \pm \frac{V_{OD}}{2} \quad \text{and} \quad V_Z = V_{OC} \mp \frac{V_{OD}}{2}$$

These depictions will come in handy when evaluating a driver’s output drive capability, or explaining the removal of common-mode voltages through galvanic isolation ([Figure 3](#)).

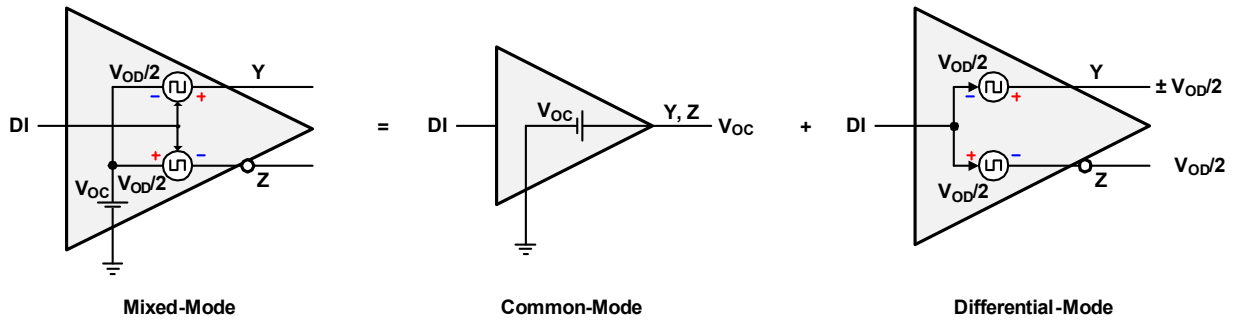


Figure 3. Mixed, Differential, and Common-Mode Representations of an RS-485 Driver

2. Receiver Functional Principle

An RS-485 receiver must be able to detect small differential bus signals as small as $\pm 200\text{mV}$ in the presence of large common-mode voltages that range from -7V to $+12\text{V}$. To detect these signals, the receiver consists of an input voltage divider with biasing stage, followed by a differential comparator. Its simplified equivalent circuit diagram is shown in [Figure 1 on page 2](#).

Here the voltage divider action between the input resistor, R_{IN} , and the biasing resistors, R_B , attenuate the line voltage by a gain factor of about $1/10$ to $1/12$. The attenuated input signal is then biased or level-shifted to approximately $V_{CC}/2$. This level-shift is necessary to enable the single-supply comparator to process large negative voltages.

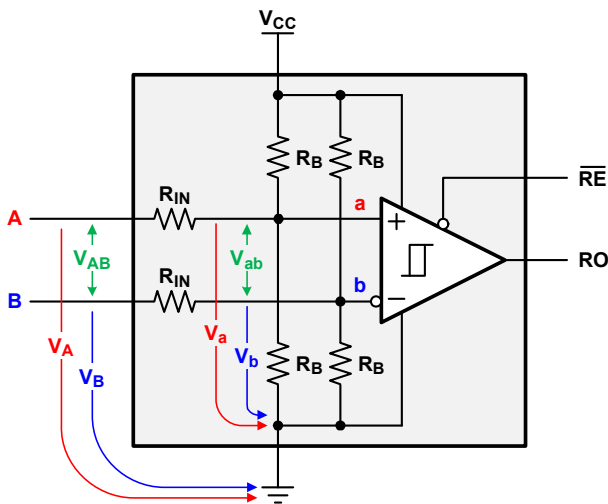


Figure 4. Input Voltage Divider with Comparator

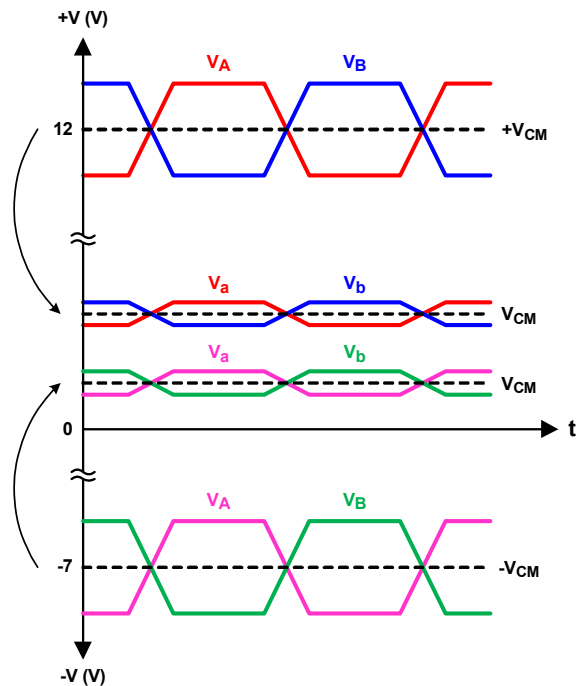


Figure 5. Input Voltage Attenuation and Biasing

[Figure 5](#) shows how large positive and negative line voltages are attenuated and then level-shifted into the positive operating voltage range of the comparator. Expressing the line voltages V_A and V_B through their common-mode and differential components: $V_A = V_{CM} + V_D/2$ and $V_B = V_{CM} - V_D/2$ respectively, the internal comparator input voltages are:

$$(EQ. 5) \quad V_a = \left(V_{CM} + \frac{V_D}{2} \right) \cdot G_1 + V_{CC} \cdot G_2 \quad \text{and} \quad V_b = \left(V_{CM} - \frac{V_D}{2} \right) \cdot G_1 + V_{CC} \cdot G_2$$

where G_1 is the gain factor of the voltage divider and G_2 is the gain factor of the biasing stage.

The comparator input voltage is $V_{ab} = V_a - V_b = V_D \cdot G_1$, which is purely differential. Because the comparator only reacts to differential inputs, all common-mode and biasing voltage components are rejected.

Note: Internal biasing references the receiver input voltages to receiver ground, so it is not necessary to connect the driver and a remote receiver with a ground wire.

RS-485 is therefore known as a true 2-wire bus.

3. Revision History

Rev.	Date	Description
1.00	Jun.25.19	Updated equations 3 and 5. Updated disclaimer. Applied new format.
0.00	Apr.26.17	Initial release

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