

BJT: Bipolar Junction Transistors

BJT.1 Basic Operation

A *bipolar junction transistor* is a three-terminal device that, in most logic circuits, acts like a current-controlled switch. If we put a small current into one of the terminals, called the *base*, then the switch is “on”—current may flow between the other two terminals, called the *emitter* and the *collector*. If no current is put into the base, then the switch is “off”—no current flows between the emitter and the collector.

bipolar junction transistor
base
emitter
collector

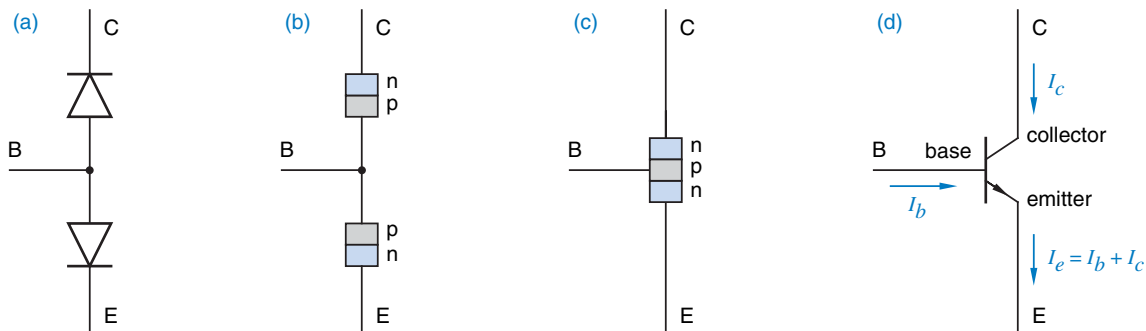
To study the operation of a transistor, we first consider the operation of a pair of diodes connected as shown in Figure BJT-1(a). In this circuit, current can flow from node B to node C or node E, when the appropriate diode is forward biased. However, no current can flow from C to E, or vice versa, since for any choice of voltages on nodes B, C, and E, one or both diodes will be reverse biased. The *pn* junctions of the two diodes in this circuit are shown in (b).

Now suppose that we fabricate the back-to-back diodes so that they share a common *p*-type region, as shown in Figure BJT-1(c). The resulting structure is called an *npn transistor* and has an amazing property. (At least, the physicists working on transistors back in the 1950s thought it was amazing!) If we put current across the base-to-emitter *pn* junction, then current is also enabled to flow across the collector-to-base *np* junction (which is normally impossible) and from there to the emitter.

npn transistor

The circuit symbol for the *npn* transistor is shown in Figure BJT-1(d). Notice that the symbol contains a subtle arrow in the direction of positive current flow. This also reminds us that the base-to-emitter junction is a *pn* junction, the same as a diode whose symbol has an arrow pointing in the same direction.

Figure BJT-1 Development of an *npn* transistor: (a) back-to-back diodes; (b) equivalent *pn* junctions; (c) structure of an *npn* transistor; (d) *npn* transistor symbol.



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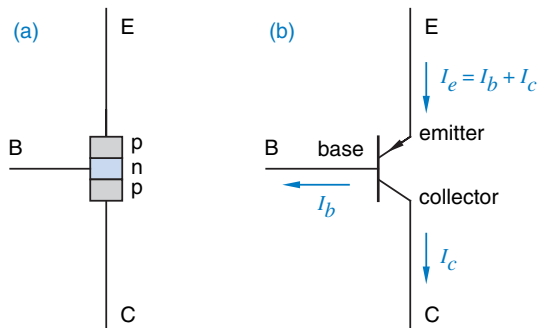


Figure BJT-2
A *pnp* transistor:
(a) structure;
(b) symbol.

It is also possible to fabricate a *pnp transistor*, as shown in Figure BJT-2. However, *pnp* transistors are seldom used in digital circuits, so we won't discuss them any further. *pnp transistor*

The current I_e flowing out of the emitter of an *npn* transistor is the sum of the currents I_b and I_c flowing into the base and the collector. A transistor is often used as a signal *amplifier*, because over a certain operating range (the *active region*) the collector current is equal to a fixed constant times the base current ($I_c = \beta \cdot I_b$). However, in digital circuits, we normally use a transistor as a simple switch that's always fully "on" or fully "off," as explained next. *amplifier*
active region

Figure BJT-3 shows the *common-emitter configuration* of an *npn* transistor, which is most often used in digital switching applications. This configuration uses two discrete resistors, $R1$ and $R2$, in addition to a single *npn* transistor. In this circuit, if V_{IN} is 0 or negative, then the base-to-emitter diode junction is reverse biased, and no base current (I_b) can flow. If no base current flows, then no collector current (I_c) can flow, and the transistor is said to be *cut off (OFF)*. *common-emitter configuration*
cut off (OFF)

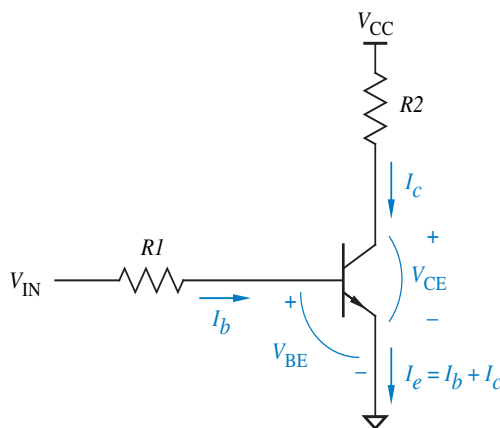


Figure BJT-3
Common-emitter configuration of an *npn* transistor.

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Since the base-to-emitter junction is a *real* diode, as opposed to an ideal one, V_{IN} must reach at least +0.6 V (one diode-drop) before any base current can flow. Once this happens, Ohm's law tells us that

$$I_b = (V_{IN} - 0.6) / R1$$

(We ignore the forward resistance R_f of the forward-biased base-to-emitter junction, which is usually small compared to the base resistor $R1$.) When base current flows, then collector current can flow in an amount proportional to I_b , that is,

$$I_c = \beta \cdot I_b$$

The constant of proportionality, β , is called the *gain* of the transistor, and is in the range of 10 to 100 for typical transistors. β
gain

Although the base current I_b controls the collector current flow I_c , it also indirectly controls the voltage V_{CE} across the collector-to-emitter junction, since V_{CE} is just the supply voltage V_{CC} minus the voltage drop across resistor $R2$:

$$\begin{aligned} V_{CE} &= V_{CC} - I_c \cdot R2 \\ &= V_{CC} - \beta \cdot I_b \cdot R2 \\ &= V_{CC} - \beta \cdot (V_{IN} - 0.6) \cdot R2 / R1 \end{aligned}$$

However, in an ideal transistor V_{CE} can never be less than zero (the transistor cannot just create a negative potential), and in a real transistor V_{CE} can never be less than $V_{CE(sat)}$, a transistor parameter that is typically about 0.2 V.

If the values of V_{IN} , β , $R1$, and $R2$ are such that the above equation predicts a value of V_{CE} that is less than $V_{CE(sat)}$, then the transistor cannot be operating in the active region and the equation does not apply. Instead, the transistor is operating in the *saturation region*, and is said to be *saturated (ON)*. No matter how much current I_b we put into the base, V_{CE} cannot drop below $V_{CE(sat)}$, and the collector current I_c is determined mainly by the load resistor $R2$: *saturation region*
saturated (ON)

$$I_c = (V_{CC} - V_{CE(sat)}) / (R2 + R_{CE(sat)})$$

Here, $R_{CE(sat)}$ is the *saturation resistance* of the transistor. Typically, $R_{CE(sat)}$ is 50Ω or less and is insignificant compared with $R2$. *saturation resistance*

Computer scientists might like to imagine an *npn* transistor as a device that continuously looks at its environment and executes the program in Table BJT-1 on the next page. *transistor simulation*

Table BJT-1 A C program that simulates the function of an *npn* transistor in the common-emitter configuration.

```

/* Transistor parameters */
#define DIODEDROP 0.6 /* volts */
#define BETA 10
#define VCE_SAT 0.2 /* volts */
#define RCE_SAT 50 /* ohms */

main()
{
    float Vcc, Vin, R1, R2; /* circuit parameters */
    float Ib, Ic, Vce; /* circuit conditions */

    if (Vin < DIODEDROP) { /* cut off */
        Ib = 0.0;
        Ic = 0.0;
        Vce = Vcc;
    }
    else { /* active or saturated */
        Ib = (Vin - DIODEDROP) / R1;
        if ((Vcc - ((BETA * Ib) * R2)) >= VCE_SAT) { /* active */
            Ic = BETA * Ib;
            Vce = Vcc - (Ic * R2);
        }
        else { /* saturated */
            Vce = VCE_SAT;
            Ic = (Vcc - Vce) / (R2 + RCE_SAT);
        }
    }
}

```

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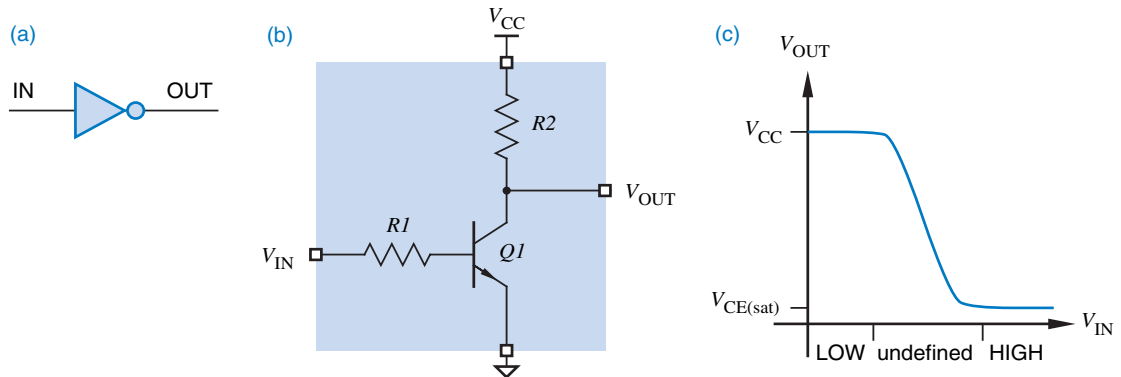


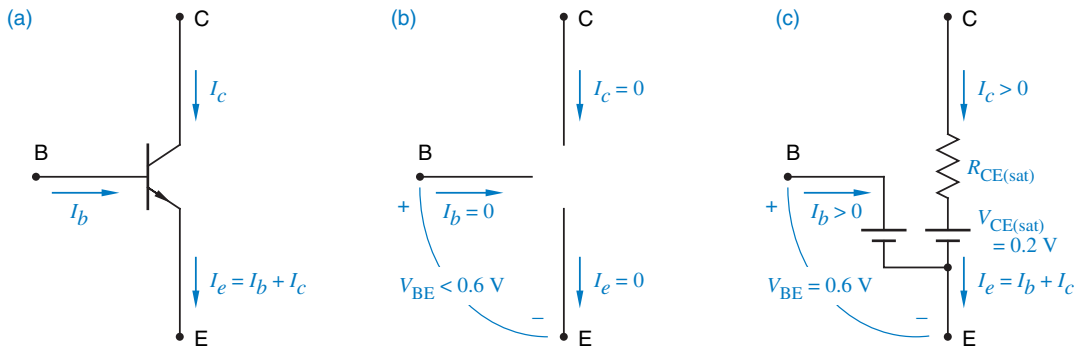
Figure BJT-4 Transistor inverter: (a) logic symbol; (b) circuit diagram; (c) transfer characteristic.

BJT.2 Transistor Logic Inverter

Figure BJT-4 shows that we can make a logic inverter from an *npn* transistor in the common-emitter configuration. When the input voltage is LOW, the output voltage is HIGH, and vice versa.

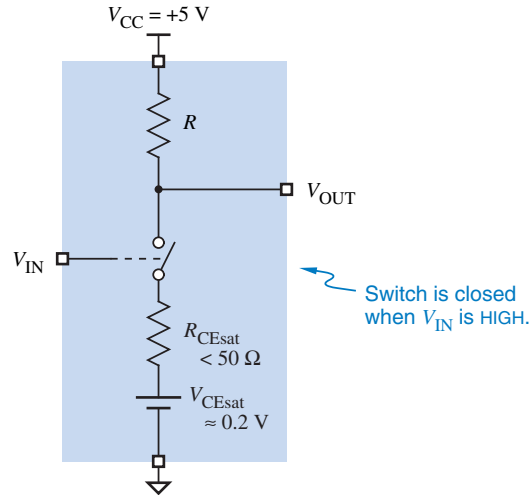
In digital switching applications, bipolar transistors are often operated so they are always either cut off or saturated. That is, digital circuits such as the inverter in Figure BJT-4 are designed so that their transistors are always (well, almost always) in one of the states depicted in Figure BJT-5. When the input voltage V_{IN} is LOW, it is low enough that I_b is zero and the transistor is cut off; the collector-emitter junction looks like an open circuit. When V_{IN} is HIGH,

Figure BJT-5 Normal states of an *npn* transistor in a digital switching circuit: (a) transistor symbol and currents; (b) equivalent circuit for a cut-off (OFF) transistor; (c) equivalent circuit for a saturated (ON) transistor.



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Figure BJT-6
Switch model for a
transistor inverter.



it is high enough (and R_I is low enough and β is high enough) that the transistor will be saturated for any reasonable value of R_2 ; the collector-emitter junction looks almost like a short circuit. Input voltages in the undefined region between LOW and HIGH are not normally encountered, except during transitions. This undefined region corresponds to the noise margin that we discussed with Figure 1-2 on page 8.

Another way to visualize the operation of a transistor inverter is shown in Figure BJT-6. When V_{IN} is HIGH, the transistor switch is closed, and the output terminal is connected to ground, definitely a LOW voltage. When V_{IN} is LOW, the transistor switch is open and the output terminal is pulled to +5 V through a resistor; the output voltage is HIGH unless the output terminal is too heavily loaded (i.e., improperly connected through a low impedance to ground).

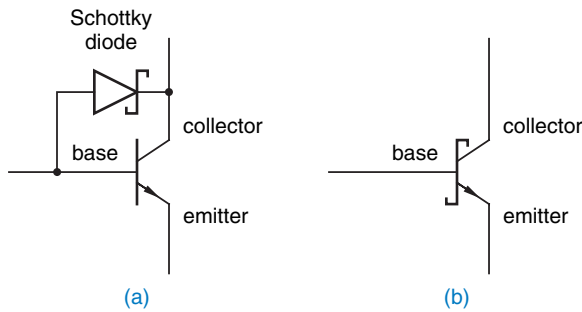


Figure BJT-7
Schottky-clamped transistor: (a) circuit; (b) symbol.

BJT.3 Schottky Transistors

When the input of a saturated transistor is changed, the output does not change immediately; it takes extra time, called *storage time*, to come out of saturation. In fact, storage time accounts for a significant portion of the propagation delay in the original TTL logic family.

storage time

Storage time can be eliminated and propagation delay can be reduced by ensuring that transistors do not saturate in normal operation. Contemporary TTL logic families do this by placing a *Schottky diode* between the base and collector of each transistor that might saturate, as shown in Figure BJT-7. The resulting transistors, which do not saturate, are called *Schottky-clamped transistors* or *Schottky transistors* for short.

Schottky diode
Schottky-clamped transistor
Schottky transistor

When forward biased, a Schottky diode’s voltage drop is much less than a standard diode’s, 0.25 V vs. 0.6 V. In a standard saturated transistor, the base-to-collector voltage is 0.4 V, as shown in Figure BJT-8(a). In a Schottky transistor, the Schottky diode shunts current from the base into the collector before the transistor goes into saturation, as shown in (b). Figure BJT-9 is the circuit diagram of a simple inverter using a Schottky transistor.

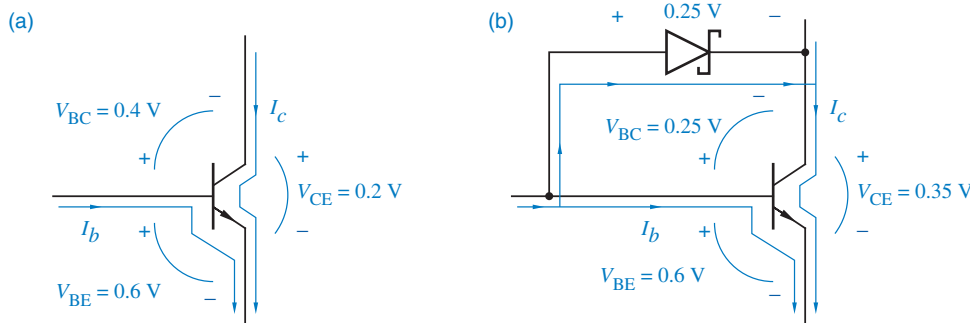


Figure BJT-8 Operation of a transistor with large base current: (a) standard saturated transistor; (b) transistor with Schottky diode to prevent saturation.

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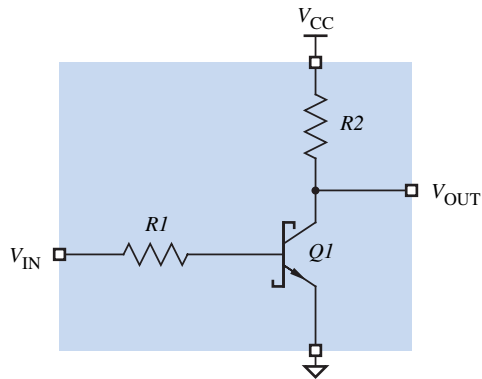


Figure BJT-9
Inverter using Schottky
transistor.

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