

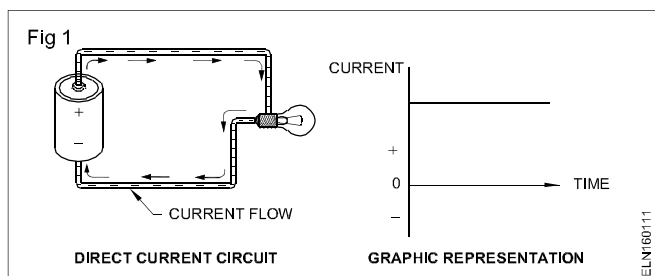
Alternating current - terms & definitions - vector diagrams

Objectives: At the end of this lesson you shall be able to

- state the features of direct current
- list out the advantages of DC over AC
- compare the features of DC and AC
- explain the generation of alternating current and terms used
- state the advantages of AC over DC

Direct current (DC): Electric current can be defined as the flow of electrons in a circuit. Based on the electron theory, electrons flow from the negative (–) polarity to the positive (+) polarity of a voltage source.

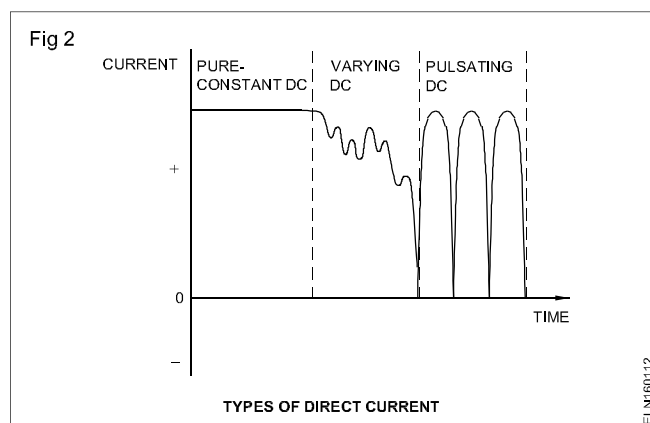
Direct current (DC) is the current that flows only in one direction in a circuit. (Fig 1) The current in this type of circuit is supplied from a DC voltage source. Since the polarity of a DC source remains fixed, the current produced by it flows in one direction only.



Dry cells are commonly used as a DC voltage source. Both the voltage and polarity of the dry cell are fixed. When connected to a load, the current produced flows in one direction at some steady or constant value.

A direct current flow need not necessarily be constant, but it must travel in the same direction at all times. There are several types of direct current, and all of them depend upon the value of the current in relation to time. (Fig 2)

A constant DC current shows no variation in value over a period of time. Both varying and pulsating DC currents have a changing value when plotted against time. The pulsating DC current variations are uniform, and repeat at regular intervals.



Advantages of DC over AC

- 1 DC needs only two wires of transmission, while a 3 phase AC may need upto 4 wires.
- 2 The corona loss associated with DC is negligible while for AC it increases with its frequency.
- 3 The skin effect is also observed in AC leading to problems in transmission conductor designs.
- 4 No inductive and capacitive losses.
- 5 No proximity effect.

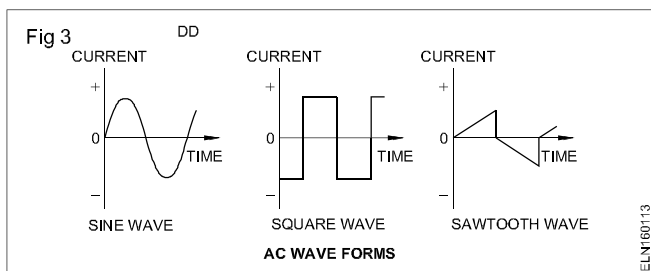
Comparison of AC and DC

	Alternating current	Direct current
Amount of energy that can be carried	Safe to transfer over longer city distances and can provide more power.	Voltage of DC cannot travel very far until it begins to lose energy.
Cause of the direction of flow of electrons	Rotating magnet along the wire.	Steady magnetism along the wire.
Frequency	The frequency of alternating current is 50Hz or 60Hz depending upon the country.	The frequency of direct current is zero.
Direction	It reverse its direction while flowing in a circuit.	It flows in one direction in the circuit.

	Alternating current	Direct current
Current	It is the current of magnitude varying with time.	It is the current of constant magnitude.
Flow of electrons	Electrons keep switching directions - forward and backward.	Electrons move steadily in one direction or 'forward'.
Obtained from	AC generator and mains.	Cell or battery.
Passive parameters	Impedence.	Resistance only.
Power factor	Lies between 0 to 1.	It is always 1.
Types	Sinusoidal, trapezoidal, triangular, square	Pure and pulsating.

Alternating current (AC): An alternating current (AC) circuit is one in which the direction and amplitude of the current flow change at regular intervals. The current in this type of circuit is supplied from an AC voltage source. The polarity of an AC source changes at regular intervals resulting in a reversal of the circuit current flow.

Alternating current usually changes in both value and direction. The current increases from zero to some maximum value, and then drops back to zero as it flows in one direction. This same pattern is then repeated as it flows in the opposite direction. The wave-form or the exact manner in which the current increases and decreases is determined by the type of AC voltage source used. (Fig 3)



Alternating current generation: Alternating current is used wherever a large amount of electrical power is required. Almost all of the electrical energy supplied for domestic and commercial purposes is alternating current.

AC voltage is used because it is much easier and cheaper to generate, and when transmitted over long distances, the power loss is low.

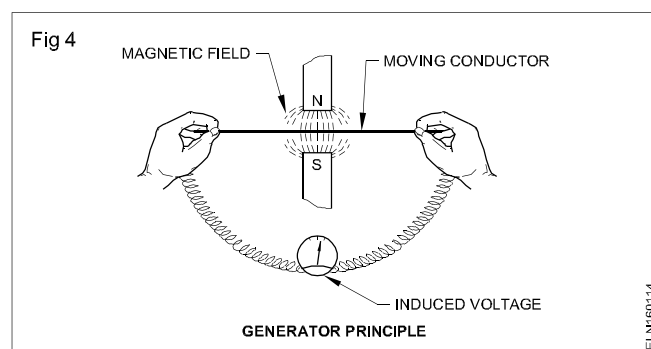
AC equipment is generally more economical to maintain and requires less space per unit of power than the DC equipment.

Alternating current can be generated at higher voltages than DC, with fewer problems of heating and arcing. Some standard values of voltages are 1.1KV, 2.2.KV, 3.3KV for low capacity and 6.6KV (6600V), 11KV(11000V) and 33KV(33000V) for high capacity requirements. The values are increased to 66 000, 110 000, 220 000, 400 000 volts for transmission over long distances. At the load area, the voltage is decreased to working values of 240V and 415V.

The basic method of obtaining AC is by the use of an AC generator. A generator is a machine that uses magnetism

to convert mechanical energy into electrical energy. The generator principle, simply stated, is that a voltage is induced in a conductor whenever the conductor is moved through a magnetic field so as to cut the lines of magnetic force.

Fig 4 shows the basic generator principle. A change in a magnetic field around a conductor tends to set electrons in motion. The mere existence of a magnetic field is not enough; there must be some form of change in the field.



If we move the conductor through the magnetic field, a force is exerted by the magnetic field on each of the free electrons within the conductor. These forces add together and the effect is that voltage is generated or induced into the conductor.

An AC generator produces an AC voltage by causing a loop of wire to turn within a magnetic field. This relative motion between the wire and the magnetic field causes a voltage to be induced between the ends of the wire. This voltage changes in magnitude and polarity as the loop is rotated within the magnetic field. (Fig 5)

The force required to turn the loop can be obtained from various sources. For example, very large AC generators are turned by steam turbines or by the movement of water.

