

Construction and Operating Characteristics

INTRODUCTION

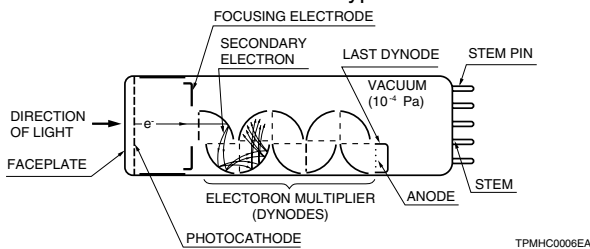
Among photosensitive devices in use today, the photomultiplier tube (or PMT) is a versatile device providing ultra-fast response and extremely high sensitivity. A typical photomultiplier tube consists of a photoemissive cathode (photocathode) followed by focusing electrodes, an electron multiplier and an electron collector (anode) in a vacuum tube, as shown in Figure 1.

When light enters the photocathode, the photocathode emits photoelectrons into the vacuum. These photoelectrons are then directed by the focusing electrode voltages towards the electron multiplier where electrons are multiplied by a secondary emission process. The multiplied electrons then are collected by the anode as an output signal.

Because of secondary-emission multiplication, photomultiplier tubes provide extremely high sensitivity and exceptionally low noise compared to other photosensitive devices currently used to detect radiant energy in the ultraviolet, visible, and near infrared regions. The photomultiplier tube also features fast time response and a choice of large photosensitive areas.

This section describes the prime features of photomultiplier tube construction and basic operating characteristics.

Figure 1: Cross-Section of Head-On Type PMT



CONSTRUCTION

The photomultiplier tube generally has a photocathode in either a side-on or a head-on configuration. The side-on type receives incident light through the side of the glass bulb, while the head-on type receives light through the end of the glass bulb. In general, the side-on type photomultiplier tube is relatively low priced and widely used for spectrophotometers and general photometric systems. Most side-on types employ an opaque photocathode (reflection-mode photocathode) and a circular-cage structure electron multiplier (see description of "ELECTRON MULTIPLIER") which has good sensitivity and high amplification at a relatively low supply voltage.

The head-on type (or the end-on type) has a semitransparent photocathode (transmission-mode photocathode) deposited upon the inner surface of the entrance window. The head-on type provides better uniformity (see page 9) than the side-on type having a reflection-mode photocathode. Other features of head-on types include a choice of photosensitive areas ranging from tens to hundreds of square centimeters.

Variants of the head-on type having a large-diameter hemispherical window have been developed for high energy physics experiments where good angular light reception is important.

Figure 2: External Appearance

a) Side-On Type

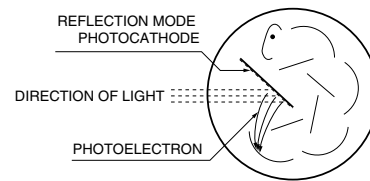


b) Head-On Type



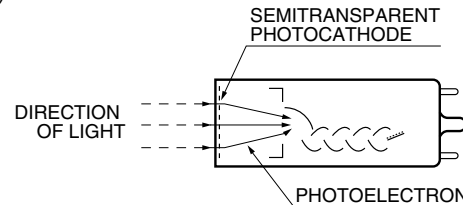
Figure 3: Types of Photocathode

a) Reflection Mode



TPMSC0029EA

b) Transmission Mode



TPMHC0084EB

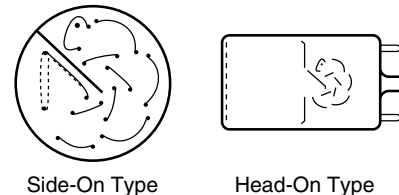
ELECTRON MULTIPLIER

The superior sensitivity (high current amplification and high S/N ratio) of photomultiplier tubes is due to the use of a low-noise electron multiplier which amplifies electrons by a cascade secondary emission process. The electron multiplier consists of 8 to 19 stages of electrodes called dynodes.

There are several principal types in use today.

1) Circular-cage type

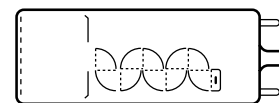
The circular cage is generally used for the side-on type of photomultiplier tube. The prime features of the circular-cage are compactness, fast response and high gain obtained at a relatively low supply voltage.



TPMOC0077EB

2) Box-and-grid type

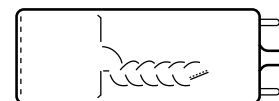
This type consists of a train of quarter cylindrical dynodes and is widely used in head-on type photomultiplier tubes because of good electron collection efficiency and excellent uniformity.



TPMOC0078EA

3) Linear-focused type

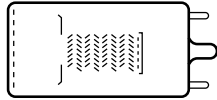
The linear-focused type features extremely fast response time and is widely used in applications where time resolution and pulse linearity are important. This type also has the advantage of providing a large output current.



TPMOC0079EA

4) Venetian blind type

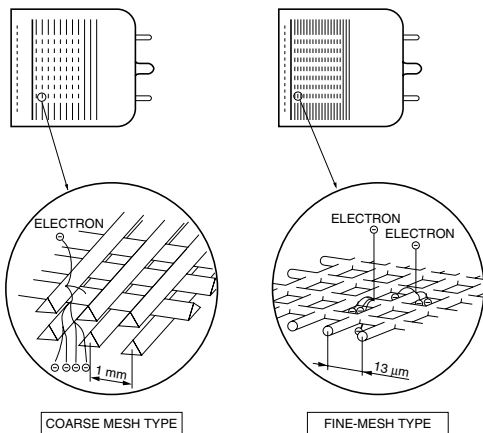
The venetian blind type has a large dynode area and is primarily used for tubes with large photocathode areas. It offers better uniformity and a larger output current. This structure is usually used when time response is not a prime consideration.



TPMOC0080EA

5) Mesh type

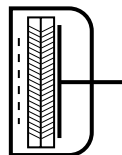
The mesh type has a structure of fine mesh electrodes stacked in close proximity. There are two mesh types of dynode: a coarse mesh type and a fine mesh type. Both types provide improved pulse linearity and high resistance to magnetic fields. The mesh type also has position-sensitive capability when used with cross-wire anodes or multiple anodes. The fine mesh type is particularly suited for use in applications where high magnetic fields are present.



TPMOC0081EB

6) Microchannel plate (MCP) (see page 58)

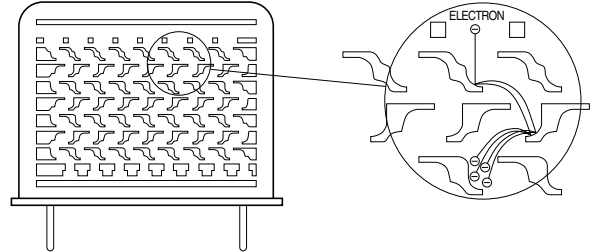
The MCP is a thin disk consisting of millions of microglass tubes (channels) fused in parallel with each other. Each channel acts as an independent electron multiplier. The MCP offers much faster time response than other discrete dynodes. It also features good immunity from magnetic fields and two-dimensional detection ability when multiple anodes are used.



TPMOC0082EA

7) Metal Channel type

The metal channel dynode has a compact dynode construction manufactured by our unique fine machining techniques. It delivers high-speed response due to a space between each dynode stage that is much smaller than other types of conventional dynodes. The metal channel dynode is also ideal for position sensitive measurement.



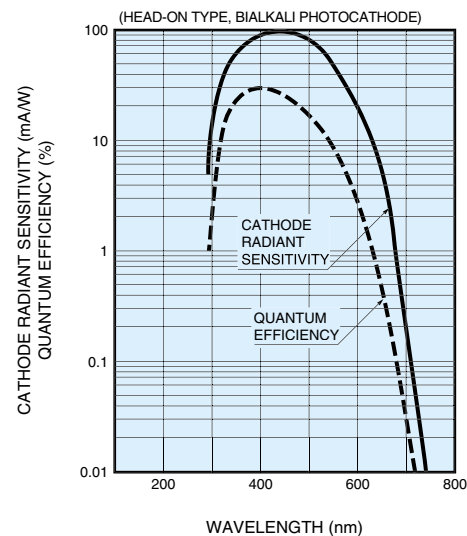
TPMOC0084EA

Hybrid dynodes combining two of the above dynodes are also available. These hybrid dynodes combine the best features of each dynode type.

SPECTRAL RESPONSE

The photocathode of a photomultiplier tube converts energy from incident light into electrons. The conversion efficiency (photocathode sensitivity) varies with the wavelength of the incident light. This relationship between photocathode sensitivity and wavelength is called the spectral response characteristic. Figure 4 shows the typical spectral response of a bialkali photomultiplier tube. The spectral response on long wavelengths is determined by the photocathode material and on short wavelengths by the window material. Typical spectral response characteristics for various types of photomultiplier tubes are shown on pages 114 and 115. In this catalog, the long-wavelength cutoff of the spectral response characteristic is defined as the wavelength at which the cathode radiant sensitivity is 1 % of the maximum sensitivity in bialkali and Ag-O-Cs photocathodes, and 0.1 % of the maximum sensitivity in multialkali photocathodes. Spectral response characteristics shown at the end of this catalog are typical curves for representative tube types. Actual data may be different from tube to tube.

Figure 4: Typical Spectral Response of Bialkali Photocathode



TPMOB0070EA

Construction and Operating Characteristics

PHOTOCATHODE MATERIALS

The photocathode is a photoemissive surface usually consisting of alkali metals with very low work functions. The photocathode materials most commonly used in photomultiplier tubes are as follows:

1) Ag-O-Cs

The transmission-mode photocathode using this material is designated S-1 and sensitive from the range of visible light to infrared radiation (300 nm to 1000 nm). The reflection mode covers a slightly narrower range from 300 nm to 1100 nm. Since Ag-O-Cs has comparatively high thermionic dark emission (refer to "ANODE DARK CURRENT" on page 8), photomultiplier tubes of this photocathode material are chiefly used for detection in the infrared region with the photocathode cooled.

2) GaAs

GaAs activated in cesium is also used as a photocathode. The spectral response of this photocathode material usually covers a wider spectral response range than multialkali, from ultraviolet to 930 nm, which is comparatively flat over the range between 300 nm and 850 nm.

3) InGaAs

This photocathode material has greater extended sensitivity in the infrared range than GaAs. Moreover, in the range between 900 nm and 1000 nm, InGaAs has a much higher S/N ratio than Ag-O-Cs.

4) Sb-Cs

Sb-Cs has a spectral response in the ultraviolet to visible range and is mainly used in reflection-mode photocathodes.

5) Bi-alkali (Sb-Rb-Cs, Sb-K-Cs)

These materials have a spectral response range similar to the Sb-Cs photocathode, but have higher sensitivity and lower dark current than Sb-Cs. They also have a blue sensitivity index matching the scintillation flashes of NaI scintillators, and so are frequently used for radiation measurement using scintillation counting.

6) High temperature bi-alkali or low noise bi-alkali (Na-K-Sb)

This is particularly useful at higher operating temperatures since it can withstand up to 175 °C. One major application is in the oil well logging industry. At room temperatures, this photocathode operates with very low dark current, making it ideal for use in photon counting applications.

7) Multialkali (Na-K-Sb-Cs)

The multialkali photocathode has a high, wide spectral response from the ultraviolet to near infrared region. It is widely used for broad-band spectrophotometers and photon counting applications. The long wavelength response can be extended to 930 nm by special photocathode activation processing.

8) Cs-Te, Cs-I

These materials are sensitive to vacuum UV and UV rays but not to visible light and are therefore referred to as solar blind. Cs-Te is quite insensitive to wavelengths longer than 320 nm, and Cs-I to those longer than 200 nm.

WINDOW MATERIALS

Window materials commonly used in photomultiplier tubes are described below. The window material must carefully be selected according to the application because the window material determines the spectral response short wavelength cutoff.

1) Borosilicate glass

This is the most frequently used window material. Borosilicate glass transmits radiation from the infrared to approximately 300 nm. It is not suitable for detection in the ultraviolet region. For some applications, a combination of a bi-alkali photocathode and a low-noise borosilicate glass (so called K-free glass) is used. The K-free glass contains very low potassium (⁴⁰K) which can cause unwanted background counts. Tubes designed for scintillation counting often employ K-free glass not only for the faceplate but also for the side bulb to minimize noise pulses.

2) UV-transmitting glass (UV glass)

This glass as the name implies is ideal for transmitting ultraviolet radiation and is used as widely as a borosilicate glass. The UV cutoff is approximately 185 nm.

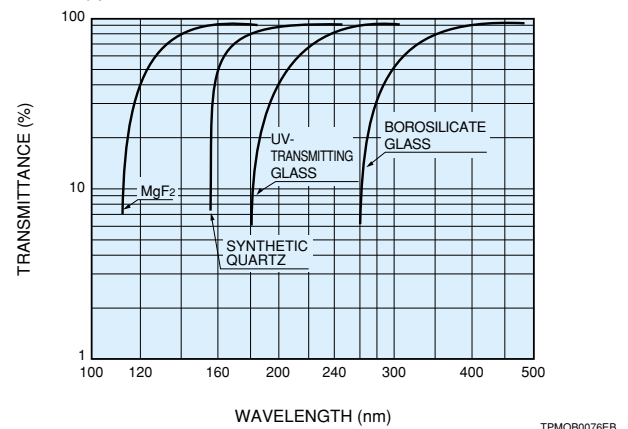
3) Synthetic silica

The synthetic silica transmits ultraviolet radiation down to 160 nm and offers lower absorption in the ultraviolet range compared to fused silica. Since the synthetic silica has a different thermal expansion coefficient than Kovar, which is used for the tube leads, it is not suitable as the tube stem material (see Figure 1 on page 4). Borosilicate glass is used for the stem, and a graded seal using glass with gradually different thermal expansion coefficients is connected to the synthetic silica window. The graded seal structure is vulnerable to shock so the tube should be handled carefully.

4) MgF₂ (magnesium fluoride)

Crystals of alkali halide are superior in transmitting ultraviolet radiation, but have the disadvantage of deliquescence. Among these crystals, MgF₂ is known as a practical window material because it offers low deliquescence and transmits ultraviolet radiation down to 115 nm.

Figure 5: Typical Transmittance of Various Window Materials



RADIANT SENSITIVITY AND QUANTUM EFFICIENCY

As Figure 4 shows, spectral response is usually expressed in terms of radiant sensitivity or quantum efficiency as a function of wavelength. Radiant sensitivity is the photoelectric current from the photocathode, divided by the incident radiant power at a given wavelength, expressed in A/W (amperes per watt). Quantum efficiency (QE) is the number of photoelectrons emitted from the photocathode divided by the number of incident photons. Quantum efficiency is usually expressed as a percent. Quantum efficiency and radiant sensitivity have the following relationship at a given wavelength.

$$QE = \frac{S \times 1240}{\lambda} \times 100$$

where S is the radiant sensitivity in A/W at the given wavelength and λ is the wavelength in nm (nanometers).

LUMINOUS SENSITIVITY

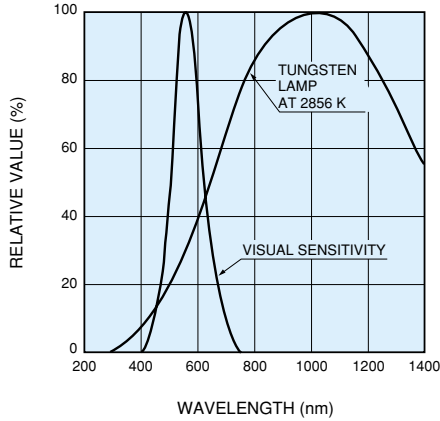
Since measuring the spectral response characteristic of photomultiplier tubes requires a sophisticated system and a great deal of time, we instead provide figures for anode or cathode luminous sensitivity and only provide spectral response characteristics when specially required by the customer.

Cathode luminous sensitivity is the photoelectric current from the photocathode per incident light flux (10^{-5} to 10^{-2} lumens) from a tungsten filament lamp operated at a distribution temperature of 2856K. Anode luminous sensitivity is the anode output current (amplified by the secondary emission process) per incident light flux (10^{-10} to 10^{-5} lumens) on the photocathode. Although the same tungsten lamp is used, the light flux and the applied voltage are adjusted to an appropriate level. These parameters are particularly useful when comparing tubes having the same or

similar spectral response range. Hamamatsu final test sheets accompanying the tubes usually indicate these parameters except for tubes with Cs-I or Cs-Te photocathodes insensitive to tungsten lamp light. (Radiant sensitivity at a specific wavelength is listed for those tubes using CsI or Cs-Te.)

The cathode luminous sensitivity is expressed in uA/lm (microamperes per lumen) and anode luminous sensitivity is expressed in A/lm (amperes per lumen). Note that the lumen is a unit used for luminous flux in the visible region and therefore these values may be meaningless for tubes that are sensitive beyond the visible light region.

Figure 6: Typical Human Eye Response and Spectral Distribution of 2856K Tungsten Lamp



TPMOB0054EC

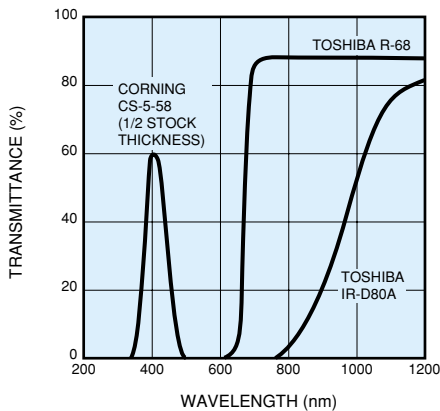
BLUE SENSITIVITY INDEX AND RED/WHITE RATIO

The cathode blue sensitivity index and the red/white ratio are often used as a simple comparison of photomultiplier tube spectral response.

The cathode blue sensitivity index is the photoelectric current from the photocathode produced by a light flux of a tungsten lamp at 2856K passing through a blue filter (Corning CS 5-58 polished to half stock thickness), measured under the same conditions as the cathode luminous sensitivity measurement. The light flux, once transmitted through the blue filter cannot be expressed in lumens. The blue sensitivity index is an important parameter in scintillation counting using an NaI scintillator since the NaI scintillator produces emissions in the blue region of the spectrum, and may be the decisive factor in energy resolution.

The red/white ratio is used for photomultiplier tubes with a spectral response extending to the near infrared region. This parameter is defined as the quotient of the cathode sensitivity measured with a light flux of a tungsten lamp at 2856K passing through a red filter (Toshiba IR-D80A for the S-1 photocathode or R-68 for others) divided by the cathode luminous sensitivity measured without filters under the same conditions as in cathode luminous sensitivity measurement.

Figure 7: Transmittance of Various Filters



TPMOB0055EB

GAIN (CURRENT AMPLIFICATION)

Photoelectrons emitted from a photocathode are accelerated by an electric field so as to strike the first dynode and produce secondary electron emissions. These secondary electrons then impinge upon the next dynode to produce additional secondary electron emissions. Repeating this process over successive dynode stages achieves a high current amplification. A very small photoelectric current from the photocathode can therefore be observed as a large output current from the anode of the photomultiplier tube.

Gain is simply the ratio of the anode output current to the photoelectric current from the photocathode. Ideally, the gain of a photomultiplier tube having n dynode stages and an average secondary emission ratio δ per stage is δⁿ. While the secondary electron emission ratio δ is given by δ=A·E^α where A is the constant, E is the interstage voltage, and α is a coefficient determined by the dynode material and geometric structure. This usually has a value of 0.7 to 0.8.

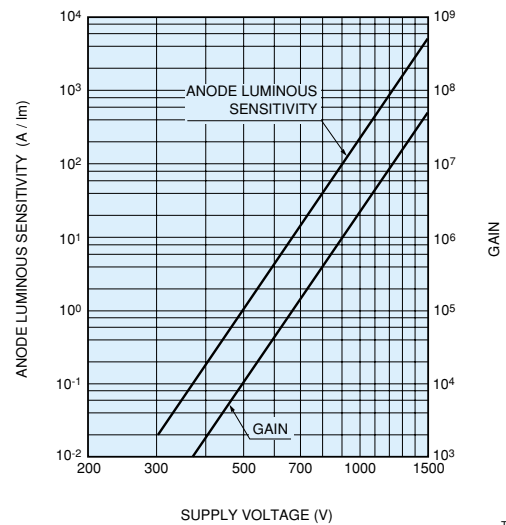
When a voltage V is applied between the cathode and the anode of a photomultiplier tube having n dynode stages, the gain μ, becomes

$$\mu = \delta^n = (A \cdot E^\alpha)^n = \left\{ A \cdot \left(\frac{V}{n+1} \right)^\alpha \right\}^n$$

$$= \frac{A^n}{(n+1)^{\alpha n}} \cdot V^{\alpha n} = K \cdot V^{\alpha n} \quad (K: \text{constant})$$

Since photomultiplier tubes generally have 9 to 12 dynode stages, the anode output has a 6th to 10th power gain proportional to the input voltage. So just a slight fluctuation in the applied voltage will appear as magnified 6 to 10 times in the photomultiplier tube output. This means the photomultiplier tube is extremely susceptible to fluctuations in the power supply voltage, so the power supply must be extremely stable and provide a minimum ripple, drift and temperature coefficient. Various types of well-regulated high-voltage power supplies designed for these requirements are available from Hamamatsu (see page 96).

Figure 8: Typical Gain vs. Supply Voltage



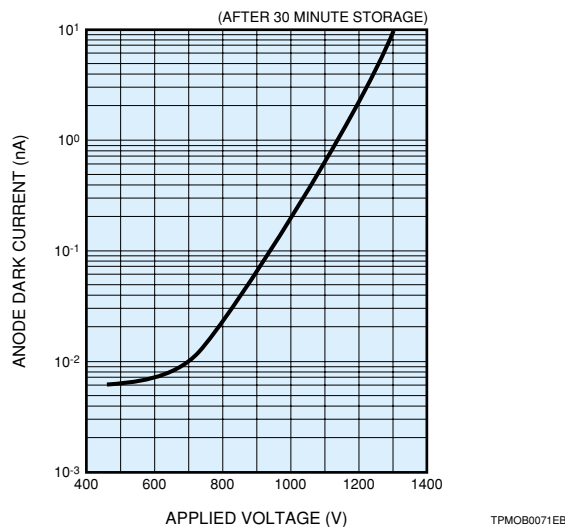
TPMOB0058EB

Construction and Operating Characteristics

ANODE DARK CURRENT

A small amount of current flows in a photomultiplier tube even when the tube is operated in a completely dark state. This output current is called the anode dark current, and the resulting noise is a critical factor in determining the lower limit of light detection. As Figure 9 shows, dark current is greatly dependent on the supply voltage.

Figure 9: Typical Dark Current vs. Supply Voltage



Major sources of dark current may be categorized as follows:

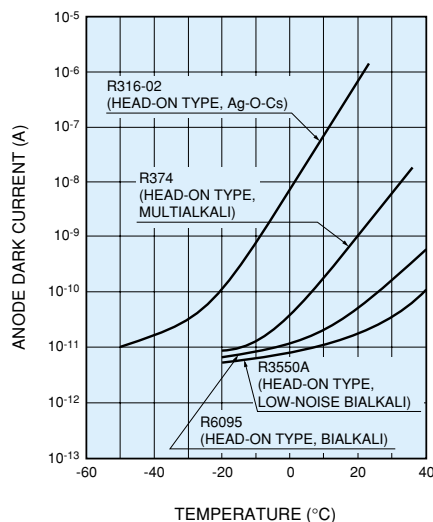
1) Thermionic emission of electrons

The materials of the photocathode emit tiny quantities of thermionic electrons even at room temperature. Most dark currents originate from the thermionic emissions, especially those from the photocathode since they are successively multiplied by the dynodes. Cooling the photocathode is most effective in reducing thermionic emission and is particularly useful in applications where low dark current is essential such as in photon counting.

Figure 10 shows the relationship between dark current and temperature for various photocathodes. Photocathodes which have high sensitivity in the red to infrared region, especially S-1, show higher dark current at room temperature. Photomultiplier tubes using these photocathodes are usually cooled during operation.

Hamamatsu provides thermoelectric coolers (C659 series, C4877, C4878) designed for various sizes of photomultiplier tubes (see page 102).

Figure 10: Anode Dark Current vs. Temperature



2) Ionization of residual gases (ion feedback)

Residual gases inside a photomultiplier tube can be ionized by collision with electrons. When these ions strike the photocathode or earlier stages of dynodes, secondary electrons may be emitted. These secondary electrons result in relatively large output noise pulses. These noise pulses are usually observed as afterpulses following the primary signal pulses. Present photomultiplier tubes are designed to minimize afterpulses.

3) Glass scintillation

When electrons deviating from their normal trajectories strike the glass envelope, scintillations may occur and a dark pulse may result. To eliminate this type of dark pulse, photomultiplier tubes may be operated with the anode at a high voltage and the cathode at ground potential. But this is not always possible during tube operation. To obtain the same effect without difficulty, Hamamatsu developed an "HA coating" in which the glass bulb is coated with a conductive paint making the same electrical potential as the cathode (see "GROUND POLARITY AND HA COATING" on page 11).

4) Leakage current (ohmic leakage)

Leakage current resulting from imperfect insulation of the glass stem base and socket may be another source of dark current. This is predominant when the photomultiplier tube is operated at a low voltage or low temperature. The flatter slopes in Figure 9 and 10 are mainly due to leakage current. Contamination from dirt and moisture on the surface of the tube stem, base or socket may increase the leakage current, and should therefore be avoided.

5) Field emissions

When a photomultiplier tube is operated at a voltage near the maximum rated value, electrons might be emitted from electrodes by the strong electric field and cause dark pulses. So operating the photomultiplier tube at a voltage 20 to 30% lower than the maximum rating is recommended.

The anode dark current decreases with time after the tube is placed in a dark state. In this catalog, anode dark currents are measured after 30 minutes of storage in a dark state.

ENI (EQUIVALENT NOISE INPUT)

ENI indicates the photon-limited signal-to-noise ratio. ENI refers to the amount of light in watts necessary to produce a signal-to-noise ratio of unity in the output of a photomultiplier tube. The value of ENI is given by:

$$ENI = \frac{\sqrt{2q \cdot I_{db} \cdot \mu \cdot \Delta f}}{S} \text{ (watts)}$$

where q = electronic charge (1.60×10^{-19} coul.)

I_{db} = anode dark current in amperes after 30minute storage in darkness

μ = gain

Δf = bandwidth of the system in hertz (usually 1 hertz)

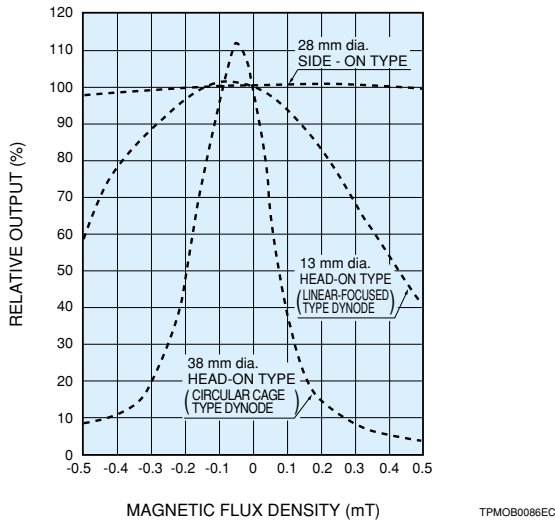
S = anode radiant sensitivity in amperes per watt at the wavelength of interest

For tubes listed in this catalog, the value of ENI may be calculated by the above equation. Usually it has a value between 10^{-15} and 10^{-16} watts (at the peak sensitivity wavelength).

MAGNETIC FIELD EFFECTS

Most photomultiplier tubes are affected by the presence of magnetic fields. Magnetic fields may deflect electrons from their normal trajectories and cause a loss of gain. The extent of the gain loss depends on the type of photomultiplier tube and its orientation in the magnetic field. Figure 11 shows typical effects of magnetic fields on some types of photomultiplier tubes. In general, tubes having a long path from the photocathode to the first dynode (such as large diameter tubes) tend to be more adversely affected by magnetic fields.

Figure 11: Typical Effects by Magnetic Fields Perpendicular to Tube Axis

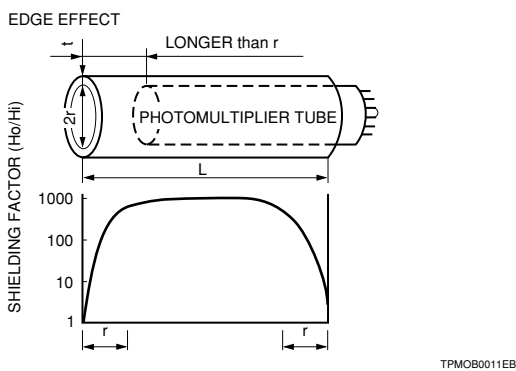


When a photomultiplier tube has to be operated in magnetic fields, it may be necessary to shield the tube with a magnetic shield case. (Hamamatsu provides a variety of magnetic shield cases. See page 106). The magnetic shielding factor is used to express the effect of a magnetic shield case. This is the ratio of the strength of the magnetic field outside the shield case or H_{out} , to that inside the shield case or H_{in} . The magnetic shielding factor is determined by the permeability μ , the thickness t (mm) and inner diameter r (mm) of the shield case as follows.

$$\frac{H_{out}}{H_{in}} = \frac{3 \mu t}{4 r}$$

Note that the magnetic shielding effect decreases towards the edge of the shield case as shown in Figure 12. Covering the tube with a shield case longer than the tube length by at least half the tube diameter is recommended.

Figure 12: Edge Effect of Magnetic Shield Case



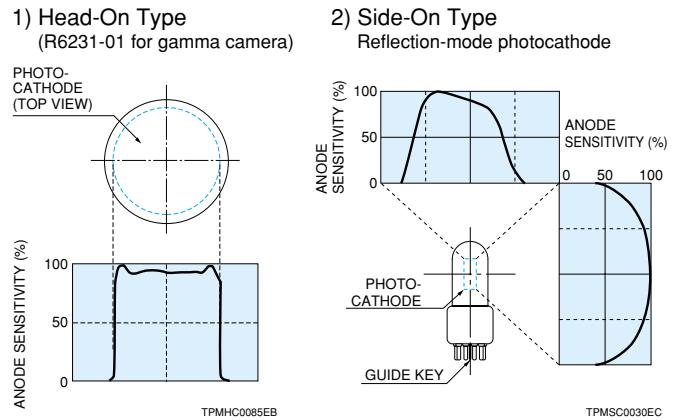
Hamamatsu provides photomultiplier tubes using fine-mesh type dynodes (see page 54). These photomultiplier tubes exhibit much higher resistance to external magnetic fields than the photomultiplier tubes with other dynodes. When the light level to be measured is high, "triode" and "tetrode" type tubes can be used even in highly magnetic fields.

SPATIAL UNIFORMITY

Although the focusing electrodes of a photomultiplier tube are designed so that electrons emitted from the photocathode or dynodes are collected efficiently by the first or following dynodes, some electrons may deviate from their desired trajectories causing lower collection efficiency. The collection efficiency varies with the position on the photocathode from which the photoelectrons are emitted and influences the spatial uniformity of a photomultiplier tube. The spatial uniformity is also determined by the photocathode surface uniformity itself.

In general, head-on type photomultiplier tubes provide better spatial uniformity than side-on types because of the photocathode to first dynode geometry. Tubes especially designed for gamma camera applications have excellent spatial uniformity, because uniformity is the decisive factor in the overall performance of a gamma camera.

Figure 13: Examples of Spatial Uniformity

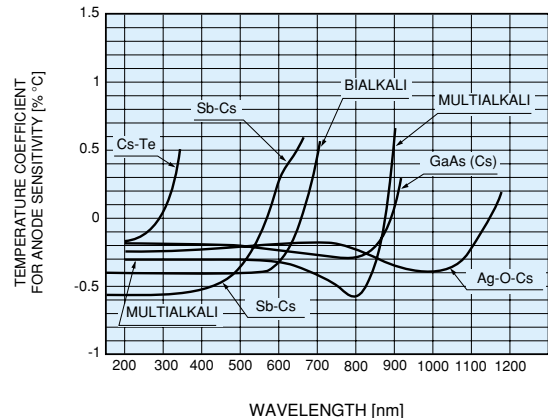


TEMPERATURE CHARACTERISTICS

Dark current originating from thermionic emissions can be reduced by decreasing the ambient temperature of a photomultiplier tube. The photomultiplier tube sensitivity also varies with the temperature, but these changes are smaller than temperature-induced changes in dark current, so cooling a photomultiplier tube will significantly improve the S/N ratio.

In the ultraviolet to visible region, the sensitivity temperature coefficient has a negative value, while near the long wavelength cutoff it has a positive value. Figure 14 shows typical temperature coefficients for various photocathodes versus wavelength, measured at room temperatures. Since the change in temperature coefficient change is large near the long wavelength cutoff, temperature control may be needed in some applications.

Figure 14: Examples of Spatial Uniformity



Construction and Operating Characteristics

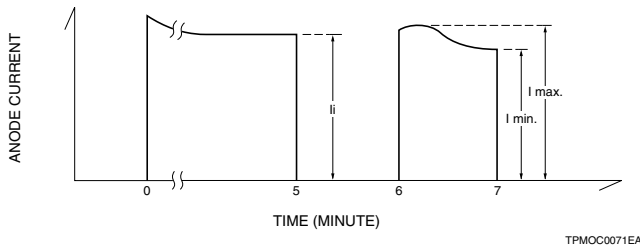
HYSTERESIS

Photomultiplier tubes exhibit a slightly unstable output for several seconds to nearly 1 minute after a voltage is applied or light is input, and the output may overshoot or undershoot before reaching a stable level (Figure 15). This unstable condition is called hysteresis and may be a problem in spectrophotometry and other applications.

Hysteresis is mainly caused by electrons deviating from their planned trajectories and electrostatically charging the dynode support section and glass bulb. When the applied voltage changes along with a change in the input light, noticeable hysteresis can occur.

As a countermeasure, many Hamamatsu side-on photomultiplier tubes employ an "anti-hysteresis design" which virtually eliminates hysteresis.

Figure 15: Hysteresis

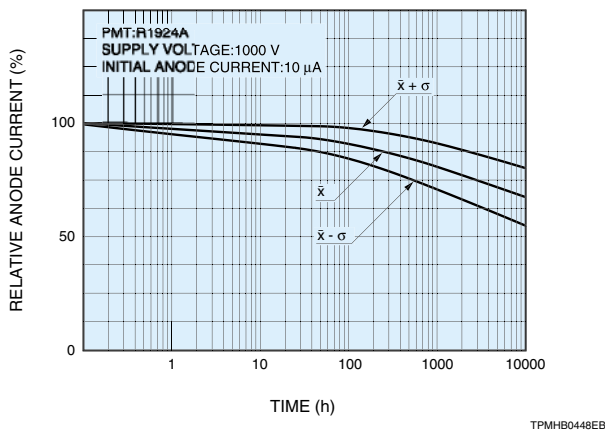


DRIFT AND LIFE CHARACTERISTIC

While operating a photomultiplier tube continuously over a long period, the anode output current of the photomultiplier tube may vary slightly over time, even though operating conditions have not changed. Among the anode current fluctuations, changes over a relatively short time are called "drift", while changes over long periods such as 10^3 to 10^4 hours or more are called the life characteristic. Figure 16 shows typical drift curves.

Drift is primarily caused by damage to the last dynode by heavy electron bombardment. Therefore the use of lower anode current is desirable. When stability is of prime importance, keeping the average anode current within $1 \mu\text{A}$ or less is recommended.

Figure 16: Typical Life Characteristics



TIME RESPONSE

In the measurement of pulsed light, the anode output signal should faithfully reproduce a waveform resembling the incident pulse waveform. This reproducibility is greatly affected by the electron transit time, anode pulse rise time, and electron transit time spread (TTS).

As illustrated in Figure 17, the electron transit time is the time interval between the arrival of a delta function light pulse (pulse width less than 50 ps) at the photocathode and the instant when the anode output pulse reaches its peak amplitude. The anode pulse rise time is defined as the time needed to rise from 10% to 90% of peak amplitude when the entire photocathode is illuminated by a delta function light pulse (pulse width less than 50 ps).

The electron transit time fluctuates between individual light pulses. This fluctuation is called transit time spread (TTS) and defined as the FWHM of the frequency distribution of electron transit times (Figure 18). The TTS is an important factor in time-resolved measurement.

The time response characteristics depend on the dynode structure and applied voltage. In general, photomultiplier tubes using a linear-focused or circular-cage structure exhibit better time response than tubes using a box-and-grid or venetian blind structure. MCP-PMTs, which employ an MCP in place of conventional dynodes, offer better time response than tubes using other dynodes. For example, these have a significantly better TTS compared to normal photomultiplier tubes because a nearly parallel electric field is applied between the photocathode, the MCP and the anode. Figure 19 shows typical time response characteristics vs. applied voltage for Hamamatsu R2059 (51 mm diameter head-on, 12-stage, linear-focused type).

Figure 17: Anode Pulse Rise Time and Electron Transit Time

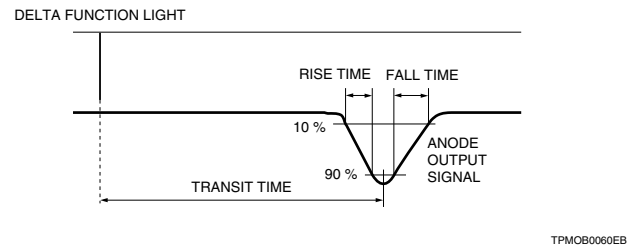


Figure 18: Electron Transit Time Spread (TTS)

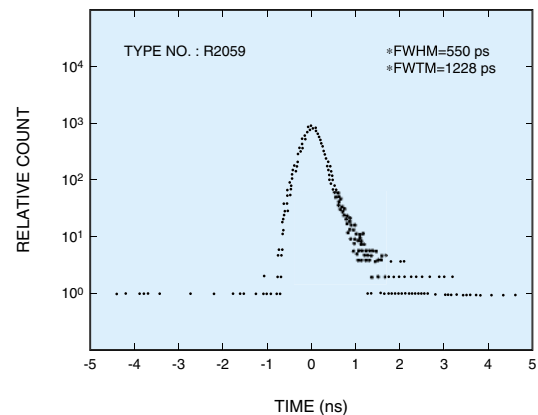
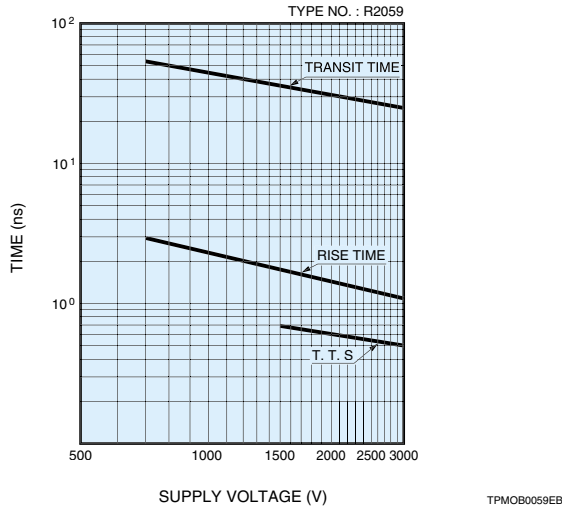


Figure 19: Time Response Characteristics vs. Supply Voltage

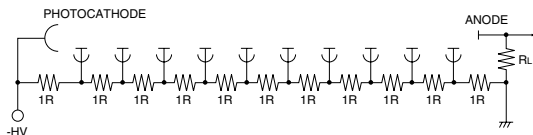


VOLTAGE-DIVIDER CIRCUITS

Interstage voltages for the dynodes of a photomultiplier tube are usually supplied by voltage-divider circuits consisting of series-connected resistors. Schematic diagrams of typical voltage-divider circuits are illustrated in Figure 20. Circuit (a) is a basic arrangement (DC output) and (b) is for pulse operations. Figure 21 shows the relation between the incident light level and the output current of a photomultiplier tube using the voltage-divider circuit (a). Deviation from ideal linearity occurs at a certain incident level (region B). This is caused by an increase in dynode voltage due to the redistribution of the voltage loss between the last few stages, resulting in an apparent increase in sensitivity. As the input light level is increased, the anode output current begins to saturate near the value of the current flowing through the voltage divider (region C). To prevent this problem, it is recommended that the voltage-divider current be maintained at least at 20 times the average anode output current required from the photomultiplier tube.

Figure 20: Schematic Diagrams of Voltage-Divider Circuits

a) Basic arrangement for DC operation



b) For pulse operation

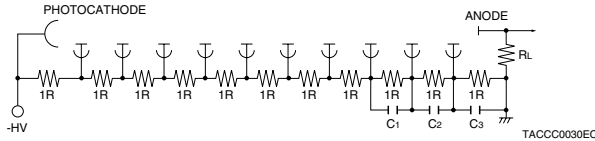
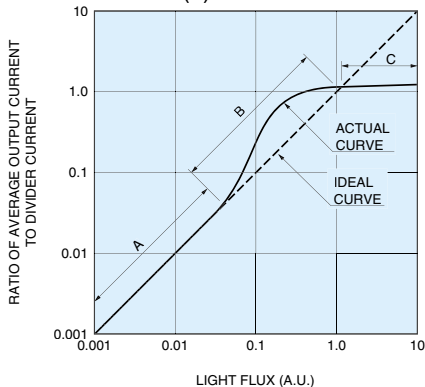


Figure 21: Output Characteristics of PMT Using Voltage-Divider Circuit (a)

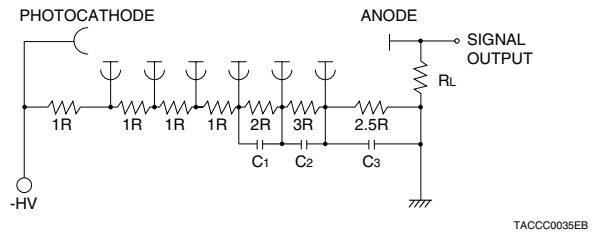


Generally high output current is required in pulsed light applications. In order to maintain dynode potentials at a constant value during pulse durations and obtain high peak currents, capacitors are placed in parallel with the divider resistors as shown in Figure 20 (b). The capacitor values depend on the output charge. When the output linearity versus input pulsed light needs to be better than 1 %, the capacitor value should be at least 100 times the photomultiplier output charge per pulse. If the peak output current (amperes) is I, the pulse width (seconds) t, and the voltage across the capacitor (volts) V, then the capacitor value C should be as follows:

$$C > 100 \frac{I \cdot t}{V} \text{ (farads)}$$

In high energy physics applications where a high pulse output is required, output saturation will occur at a certain level as the incident light is increased while the interstage voltage is kept fixed. This is caused by an increase in electron density between the electrodes, causing space charge effects which disturb the electron current flow. As a corrective measure to overcome these space charge effects, the voltage applied to the last few stages, where the electron density becomes high, should be set to a higher value than the standard voltage distribution so that the voltage gradient between those electrodes is enhanced. For this purpose, a so-called tapered divider circuit (Figure 22) is often employed. Use of this tapered divider circuit improves pulse linearity 5 to 10 times better than in normal divider circuits. Hamamatsu provides a variety of socket assemblies incorporating voltage-divider circuits. They are compact, rugged, lightweight and carefully engineered to obtain the maximum performance of a photomultiplier tube with just a simple connection.

Figure 22: Typical Tapered Divider Circuit



GROUND POLARITY AND HA COATING

The general technique used for voltage-divider circuits is to ground the anode with a high negative voltage applied to the cathode, as shown in Figure 20. This scheme facilitates the connection of such circuits as ammeters or current-to-voltage conversion operational amplifiers to the photomultiplier tube. However, when a grounded anode configuration is used, bringing a grounded metallic holder or magnetic shield case near the bulb of the tube can cause electrons to strike the inner bulb wall, resulting in the generation of noise. Also, in head-on type photomultiplier tubes, if the faceplate or bulb near the photocathode is grounded, the slight conductivity of the glass material causes a current to flow between the photocathode (which has a high negative potential) and ground. This may cause significant deterioration of the photocathode. For this reason, extreme care is required when designing housings for photomultiplier tubes and when using electrostatic or magnetic shield cases.

.In addition, when using foam rubber or similar material to mount the tube in its housing, it is essential that material having sufficiently good insulation properties be used. This problem can be solved by applying a black conductive coat around the bulb, connecting it to the cathode potential and covering the bulb with a protective film. This is called an "HA Coating" (see Figure 23).

Construction and Operating Characteristics

As mentioned above, the HA coating can be effectively used to eliminate the effects of external potential on the side of the bulb. However, if a grounded object is located on the photocathode faceplate, there are no effective countermeasures. Glass scintillation, if occurring in the faceplate, has adverse noise effects and also causes deterioration of the photocathode sensitivity. To solve these problems, it is recommended that the photomultiplier tube be operated in the cathode grounding scheme, as shown in Figure 24, with the anode at a high positive voltage. For example, in scintillation counting, since the grounded scintillator is directly coupled to the faceplate of a photomultiplier tube, grounding the cathode and maintaining the anode at a high positive voltage is recommended. In this case, a coupling capacitor C_c must be used to isolate the high positive voltage applied to the anode from the signal, and DC signals cannot be output.

Figure 23: HA Coating

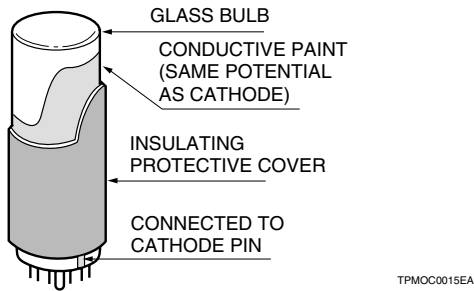
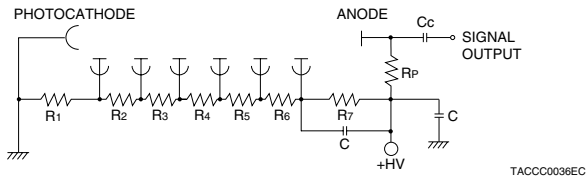


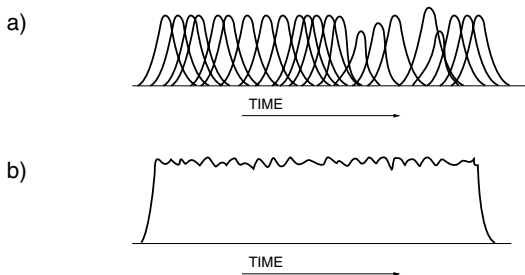
Figure 24: Cathode Ground Scheme



PHOTON COUNTING

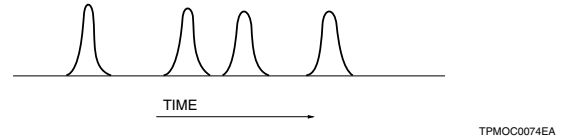
Photon counting is one effective way to use a photomultiplier tube for measuring extremely low light levels and is widely used in astronomical photometry and for making chemiluminescence and bioluminescence measurements. In its usual application, a number of photons enter the photomultiplier tube and create an output pulse train like that in (a) of Figure 25. The actual output obtained by the measurement circuit is a DC current with a fluctuation as shown at (b).

Figure 25: Overlapping Output Pulses



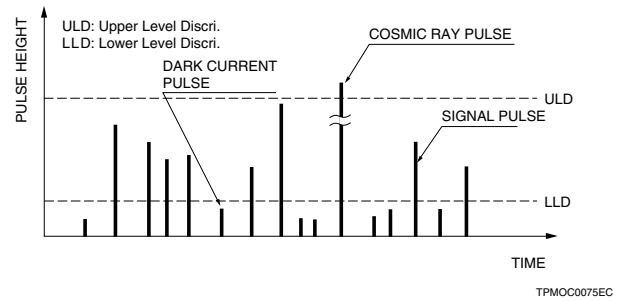
When the light intensity becomes so low that the incident photons are separated as shown in Figure 26. This condition is called a single photon event. The number of output pulses is in direct proportion to the amount of incident light and this pulse counting method has the advantages of better S/N ratio and stability than the current measurement method that averages all the pulses. This pulse counting technique is known as the photon counting method.

Figure 26: Discrete Output Pulses (Single Photon Event)



Simply counting the photomultiplier tube output pulses will not result in an accurate measurement, since the output contains noise pulses such as dark pulses and cosmic ray pulses extraneous to the signal pulses representing photoelectrons as shown in Figure 27. The most effective method for eliminating the noise is to discriminate the output pulses according to their

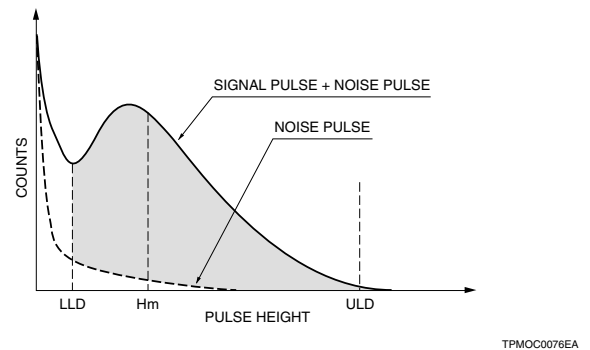
Figure 27: Output Pulse and Discrimination Level



A typical pulse height distribution (PHD) for a photomultiplier tube output is shown in Figure 28. In this PHD, the lower level discrimination (LLD) is set at the valley trough and the upper level discrimination (ULD) at the foot where there are very few output pulses. Most pulses smaller than the LLD are noise and pulses larger than the ULD result from cosmic rays, etc. Therefore, by counting the pulses remaining between the LLD and ULD, accurate light measurements can be made. In the PHD, H_m is the mean height of the pulses. The LLD should be set at $1/3$ of H_m and the ULD at triple H_m . The ULD may be omitted in most cases.

Considering the above, a clearly defined peak and valley in the PHD is a very significant characteristic required of photomultiplier tubes for photon counting. Figure 28 shows the typical PHD of a photomultiplier tube selected for photon counting.

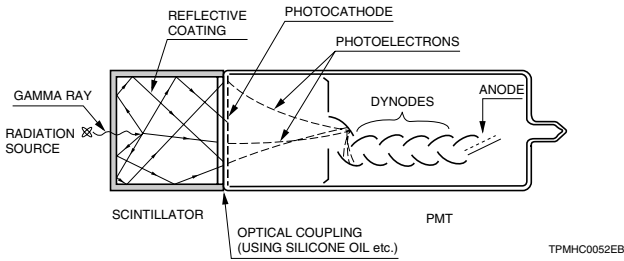
Figure 28: Typical Single Photon Pulse Height Distribution



SCINTILLATION COUNTING

Scintillation counting is one of the most sensitive and effective methods for detecting radiation. It uses a photomultiplier tube coupled to a scintillator that produces light when struck by radiation.

Figure 29: Scintillation Detector Using PMT and Scintillator



In radiation particle measurements, there are two parameters that should be measured. One is the energy of individual radiation particles and the other is the amount of radiation. Radiation measurement should determine these two parameters.

When radiation particles enter the scintillator, they produce light flashes in response to each particle. The amount of flash is extremely low, but is proportional to the energy of the incident particle. Since individual light flashes are detected by the photomultiplier tube, the output pulses obtained from the photomultiplier tube contain information on both the energy and amount of pulses, as shown in Figure 30. By analyzing these output pulses using a multichannel analyzer (MCA), a pulse height distribution (PHD) or energy spectrum is obtained, and the amount of incident particles at various energy levels can be measured accurately. Figure 31 shows typical PHDs or energy spectra when radiation (^{55}Fe , ^{137}Cs , ^{60}Co) is detected by the combination of an NaI(Tl) scintillator and a photomultiplier tube. The PHD must show distinct peaks at each energy level. These peaks are evaluated as pulse height resolution which is the most significant characteristic in the radiation measurements. As Figure 32 shows, the pulse height resolution is defined as the FWHM (a) divided by the peak value (b) when pulse height distribution is measured using a single radiation source such as ^{137}Cs and ^{55}Fe .

Figure 30: Incident Radiation Particles and PMT Output

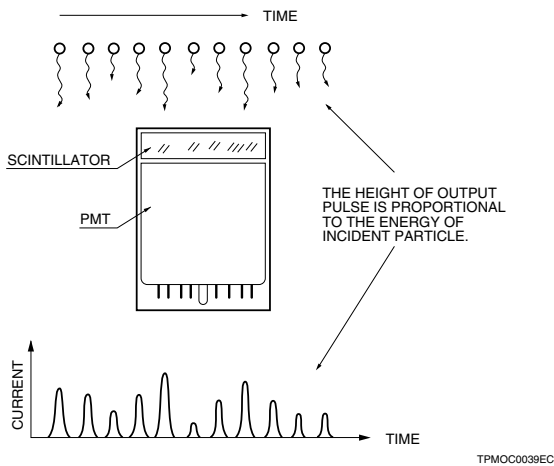


Figure 31: Typical Pulse Height Distributions (Energy Spectra)

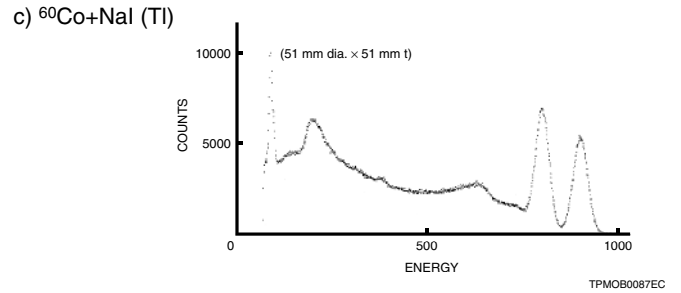
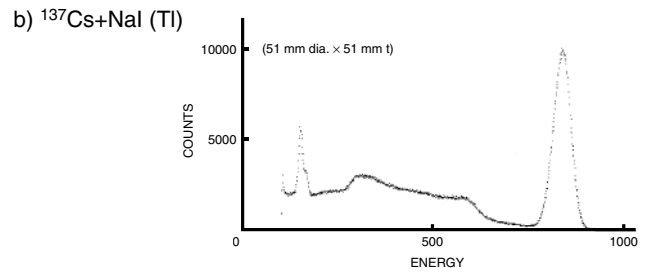
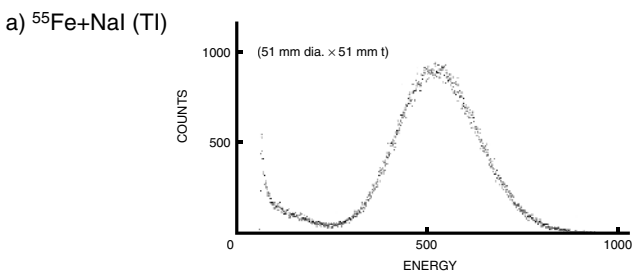
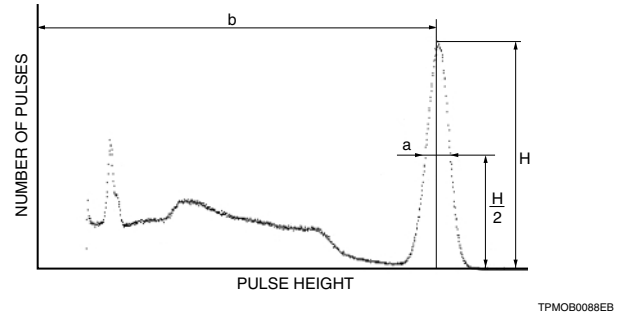
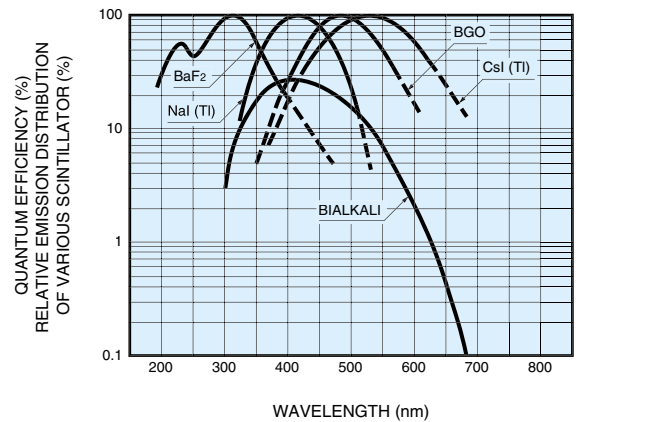


Figure 32: Definition of Pulse Height Resolution



$$\text{Energy resolution} = \frac{a}{b} \times 100 \%$$

Figure 33: PMT Spectral Response and Spectral Emission of Scintillators



Pulse height resolution is mainly determined by the quantum efficiency of the photomultiplier tube that detects the scintillator emission. In the case of thallium-activated sodium iodide or NaI(Tl), which is one of the most popular scintillators, a head-on type photomultiplier tube with a bialkali photocathode is widely used since its spectral response matches the NaI(Tl) scintillator spectrum.

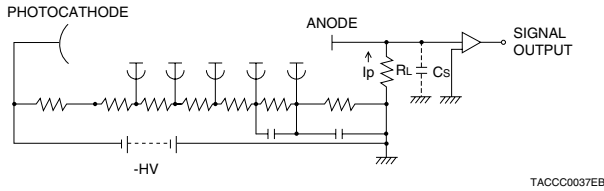
Connections to External Circuits

LOAD RESISTANCE

Since the output of a photomultiplier tube is a current signal and the type of external circuit to which photomultiplier tubes are usually connected has voltage inputs, a load resistor is used for current-voltage conversion. This section describes factors to consider when selecting this load resistor.

Since for low output current levels, the photomultiplier may be assumed to act as virtually an ideal constant-current source, the load resistance can be made arbitrarily large, when converting a low-level current output to a high-level voltage output. In practice, however, using a very large load resistance causes poor frequency response and output linearity as described below.

Figure 34: Photomultiplier Tube Output Circuit

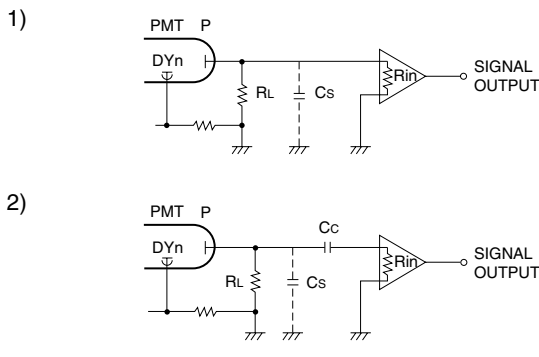


In the circuit of Figure 34, if we let the load resistance be R_L and the total capacitance of the photomultiplier tube anode to all other electrodes including stray capacitance such as wiring capacitance be C_s , then the cutoff frequency f_c is expressed by the following relationship.

$$f_c = \frac{1}{2\pi C_s \cdot R_L}$$

This relationship indicates that even if the photomultiplier tube and amplifier have very fast response, the response will be limited to the cutoff frequency f_c of the output circuit. If the load resistance is made large, then the voltage drop across R_L becomes large at high current levels, affecting the voltage differential between the last dynode stage and the anode. This increases the effect of the space charge and lowers the efficiency of the anode in collecting electrons. In effect, the output becomes saturated above a certain current, causing poor output linearity (output current linearity versus incident light level) especially when the circuit is operated at low voltages.

Figure 35: Amplifier Internal Resistance



In Figure 35, let us consider the effect of the internal resistance of the amplifier. If the load resistance is R_L and the input impedance of the amplifier is R_{in} , the combined parallel output resistance of the photomultiplier tube, R_o , is given by the following equation.

$$R_o = \frac{R_L \cdot R_{in}}{R_L + R_{in}}$$

This value of R_o , which is less than the value of R_L , is then the effective load resistance of the photomultiplier tube. If, for example, $R_L = R_{in}$, then the effective load resistance is 1/2 that of R_L alone. From this we see that the upper limit of the load resistance is actually the input resistance of the amplifier and that making the load resistance much greater than this value does not have a significant effect.

While the above description assumed the load and input impedances to be purely resistive, stray capacitances, input capacitance and stray inductances affect the phase relationships during actual operation. Therefore, as the frequency is increased, these circuit elements must be considered as compound impedances rather than pure resistances.

From the above, three guides can be derived for selecting the load resistance:

- 1) When frequency response is important, the load resistance should be made as small as possible.
- 2) When output linearity is important, the load resistance should be chosen to keep the output voltage within a few volts.
- 3) The load resistance should be less than the input impedance of the external amplifier.

HIGH-SPEED OUTPUT CIRCUITS

When detecting high-speed and pulsed light signals, a coaxial cable is used to make the connection between the photomultiplier tube and the electronic circuit. Since commonly used cables have characteristic impedances of 50 Ω or 75 Ω , this cable must be terminated in a pure resistance equal to the characteristic impedance to match the impedance and ensure distortion-free transmission of the signal waveform. If a matched transmission line is used, the impedance of the cable as seen by the photomultiplier tube output will be the characteristic impedance of the cable, regardless of the actual cable length so no distortion will occur in the signal waveform.

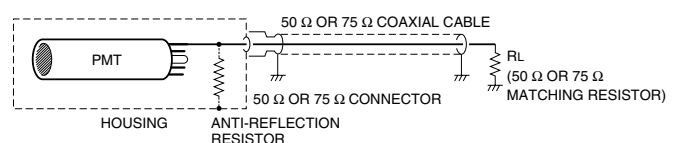
If the impedance is not properly matched when the signal is received, the impedance seen at the photomultiplier tube output will differ depending on both frequency and cable length, causing significant waveform distortion. Impedance mismatches might also be due to the connectors being used. So these connectors should be chosen according to the frequency range to be used, to provide a good match with the coaxial cable.

When a mismatch at the signal receiving end occurs, not all of the pulse energy from the photomultiplier tube is dissipated at the receiving end and is instead partially reflected back to the photomultiplier tube via the cable. However if an impedance match has been achieved at the cable end on the photomultiplier tube side, then this reflected energy will be fully dissipated there.

If this is a mismatch, however, the energy will be reflected and returned to the signal-receiving end because the photomultiplier tube itself acts as an open circuit. Since part of the pulse makes a round trip in the coaxial cable and is again input to the receiving end, this reflected signal is delayed with respect to the main pulse and results in waveform distortion (so called ringing phenomenon).

To prevent this phenomenon, in addition to matching the impedance at the receiving end, a resistor is needed for matching the cable impedance at the photomultiplier tube end as well (Figure 36). If this is provided, it is possible to eliminate virtually all ringing caused by an impedance mismatch, although the output pulse height of the photomultiplier tube is reduced to one-half of the normal level by use of this impedance matching resistor.

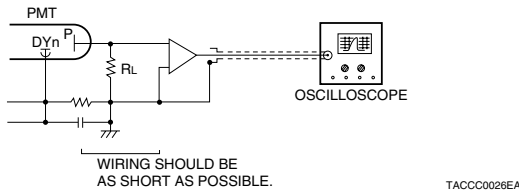
Figure 36: Connection to Prevent Ringing



Next, let us consider waveform observation of high-speed pulses using an oscilloscope. This type of operation requires a low load resistance. However, the oscilloscope sensitivity is limited so an amplifier may be required.

Cables with a matching resistor have the advantage that the cable length will not affect the electrical characteristics of the cable. However, since the matching resistance is very low compared to the usual load resistance, the output voltage becomes too small. While this situation can be remedied with a high gain amplifier, the inherent noise of such an amplifier can itself hurt measurement performance. In such cases, the photomultiplier tube should be brought as close as possible to the amplifier to reduce stray capacitance and a larger load resistance should be used (while still maintaining the frequency response), to achieve the desired input voltage. (See Figure 37.)

Figure 37: Measurement with Ringing Suppression Measures



It is relatively simple to implement a high-speed amplifier using a wide-band video amplifier or operational amplifier. However, as a trade-off for design convenience, these ICs tend to create performance problems (such as noise). This makes it necessary to know their performance limits and take corrective action if necessary.

As the pulse repetition frequency increases, baseline shift becomes one reason for concern. This occurs because the DC signal component has been eliminated from the signal circuit by coupling with a capacitor which blocks the DC components. If this occurs, the reference zero level observed at the last stage is not the actual zero level. Instead, the apparent zero level is a time-average of the positive and negative fluctuations of the signal waveform. This is known as baseline shift. Since the height of the pulses above this baseline level is affected by the repetition frequency, this phenomenon can be a problem when observing waveforms or discriminating pulse levels.

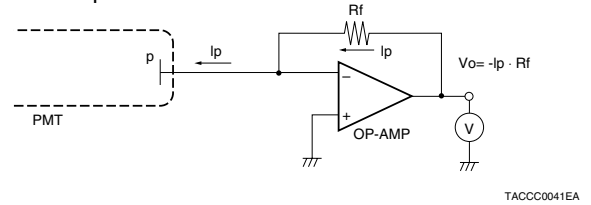
OPERATIONAL AMPLIFIERS

When a high-sensitivity ammeter is not available, using an operational amplifier allows making measurements with an inexpensive voltmeter. This section explains the technique for converting the output current of a photomultiplier tube to a voltage signal. The basic circuit is as shown in Figure 38, for which the output voltage, V_o , is given by the following relationship.

$$V_o = -R_f \cdot I_p$$

This relationship is derived for the following reason. If the input impedance of the operational amplifier is extremely large, and the output current of the photomultiplier tube is allowed to flow into the inverted (-) input terminal of the amplifier, most of the current will flow through R_f and subsequently to the operational amplifier output circuit. The output voltage V_o is therefore given by the expression $-R_f \times I_p$. When using such an operational amplifier, it is not of course possible to make unlimited increases in the output voltage because the actual maximum output is roughly equal to the operational amplifier supply voltage. At the other end of the scale, for extremely small currents, there are limits due to the operational amplifier offset current (I_{os}), the quality of R_f , and other factors such as the insulation materials used.

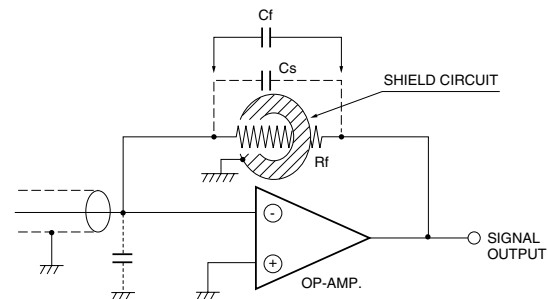
Figure 38: Current-Voltage Conversion Using Operational Amplifier



If the operational amplifier has an offset current (I_{os}), the above-described output voltage becomes $V_o = -R_f (I_p + I_{os})$, with the offset current component being superimposed on the output. Furthermore, the magnitude of the temperature drift may create a problem. In general, a metallic film resistor which has a low temperature coefficient is used for the resistance R_f , and for high resistance values, a vacuum-sealed type with a low leakage current is used. Carbon resistors with their highly temperature-dependent resistance characteristics are not suitable for this application.

In addition to the above factors, when measuring extremely low level currents such as 100 pA and below, the materials used to fabricate the circuit also require careful selection. For example, materials such as bakelite are not suitable. More suitable materials include teflon, polystyrol or steatite. Low-noise cables should also be used, since general-purpose coaxial cables exhibit noise due to physical factors. An FET input operational amplifier is recommended for measuring low-level current.

Figure 39: Frequency Compensation by Operational Amplifier



In Figure 39, if a capacitance C_f (including any stray capacitance) is in parallel with the resistance R_f , the circuit exhibits a time constant of $(R_f \times C_f)$, and the response speed is limited to this time constant. This is a particular problem if the R_f is large. Stray capacitance can be reduced by passing R_f through a hole in a shield plate. When using coaxial signal input cables, oscillations may occur and noise might be amplified since the cable capacitance C_c and R_f are in a feedback loop. While one method to avoid this is to connect C_f in parallel with R_f , to reduce high frequency gain as described above, this method creates a time constant of $R_f \times C_f$ which limits the response speed.