STABILITY AND COMPENSATION

- Ground Loops
- Supply Loops
- Local Internal Loops
- Coupling: Internal and External
- Aol Loop Stability

ELIMINATE COUPLING
INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL

- Ground the Case
- Reduce Impedances
- Eliminate Ib Compensation Resistor on +IN
- Don't Run Output Traces Near Input Traces
- Run Iout Traces Adjacent to Iout Return Traces

1. Grounding the case forms a Faraday shield around the internal circuitry of the power amplifier which prevents unwanted coupling from external noise sources.

2. Reducing impedances keeps node impedances low to prevent pick-up of stray noise signals which have sufficient energy only to drive high impedance nodes.

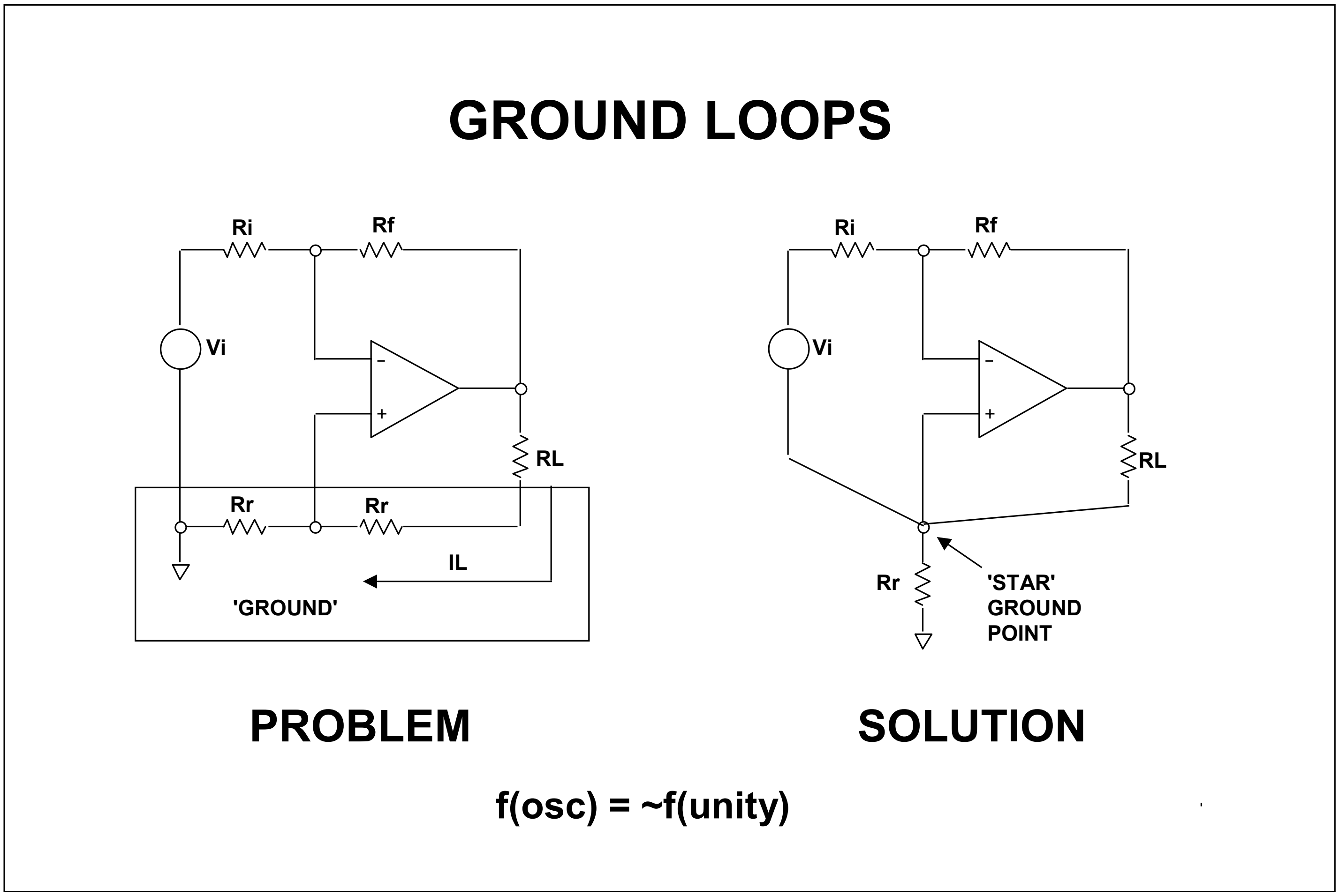
3. Elimination of the Ib compensation resistor on the +input will prevent a high impedance node on the +input which can act as an antenna, receiving unwanted noise or positive feedback, which would result in oscillations. This famous Ib compensation resistor is the one from the +input to ground when running an amplifier in an inverting gain. The purpose of this resistor is to reduce input offset voltage errors due to bias current drops across the equivalent impedance as seen by the inverting and non-inverting input nodes. Modern op amps feature compensated input stages and benefit very little from this technique.

Calculate your DC errors without the resistor. Some op amps have input bias current cancellation negating the effect of this resistor. Some op amps have such low input bias currents that the error is insignificant when compared with the initial input offset voltage. Leave this +input bias resistor out and ground the +input if possible. If the resistor is required, bypass it with a .1μF capacitor to ground.

4. Don't route input traces near output traces. This will eliminate positive feedback through capacitive coupling of the output back to the input.

5. Run Iout traces adjacent to Iout return traces. If a printed circuit board has both a high current output trace and a return trace for that high current , then these traces should be routed adjacent to each other (on top of each other on a multi-layer printed circuit board) so they form an equivalent twisted pair by virtue of their layout. This will help cancel EMI generated from outside from feeding back into the amplifier circuit.

Ref. AN1 STABILITY, AN19

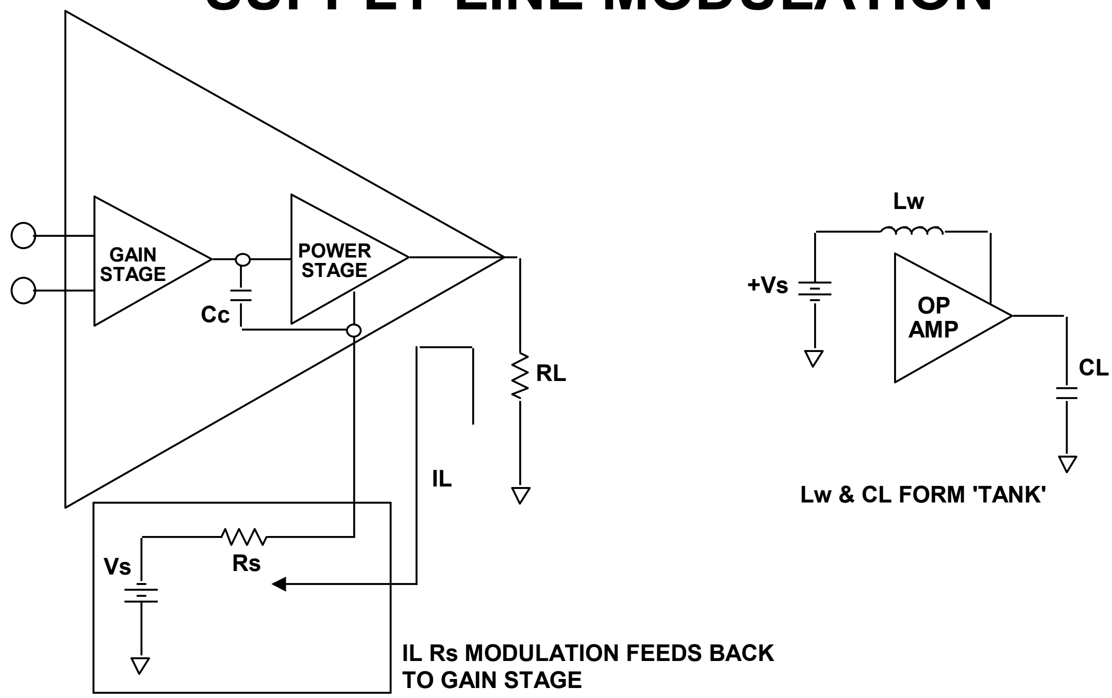


Ground loops come about from load current flowing through parasitic layout resistances, causing part of the output signal to be fed back to the input stage. If the phase of the signal is in phase with the signal at the node it is fed back to, it will result in positive feedback and oscillation. Although these parasitic resistances (Rr) in the load current return line cannot be eliminated, they can be made to appear as a common mode signal to the amplifier. This is done by the use of a star ground point approach. The star point is merely a point that all grounds are referred to, it is a common point for load ground, amplifier ground, and signal ground.

The star ground point needs to be a singular mechanical feature. Run each connection to it such that current from no other part of the circuit can mingle until reaching the star point. Don't forget your star point when making circuit measurements. Moving the ground lead around may change the indication leading to false assumptions about circuit operation.

Ref. AN1 STABILITY, AN19

SUPPLY LINE MODULATION

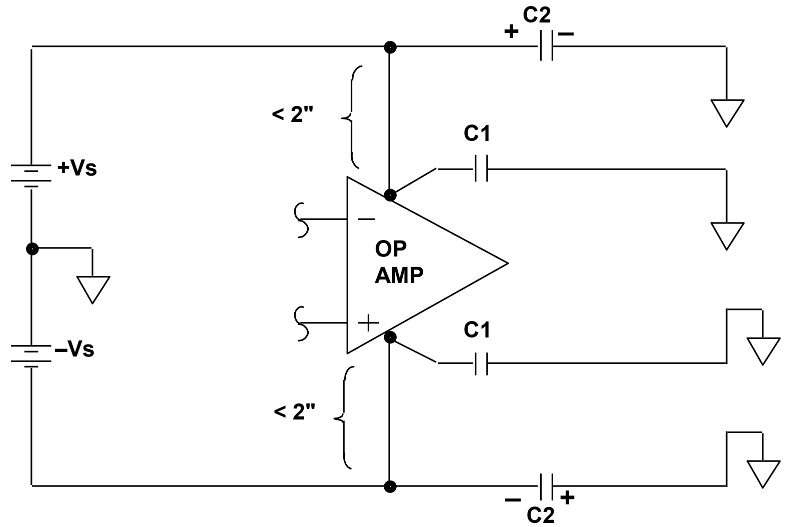


Supply loops are another source of oscillation. In one form of power supply related oscillations the load current flowing through supply source resistance and parasitic trace resistance modulates the supply voltage seen at the power supply pin of the op amp. This signal voltage is then coupled back into a gain stage via the compensation capacitor which is usually referred to one of the supply lines as an AC ground.

Another form of oscillatory circuit that can occur is due to parasitic power supply lead inductance reacting with load capacitance to form a high Q tank circuit.

Ref. AN1 STABILITY, AN19

BYPASSING SUPPLY LINES



C1 = 0.1 to 1µF, Ceramic
C2 = 10µF/Amp out (peak), Electrolytic

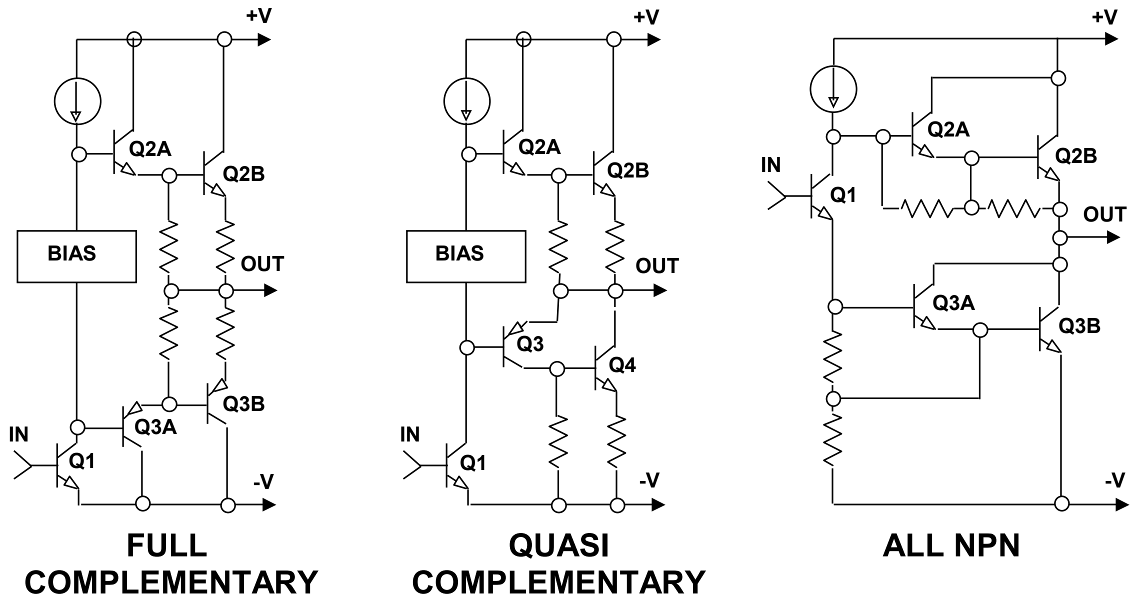
All supply line related oscillation and coupling problems can be avoided with proper bypassing.

The "must do" in all bypassing is a good high frequency capacitor right at each amplifier or socket power supply pin to ground. Not just any ground but the star point ground. This will most often be a multilayer ceramic, at least 1000pF, and as large as possible up to about 1µF. Above that capacitance high frequency characteristics shouldn't be taken for granted. Polysterene, polypropylene, and mylar are possible alternatives when ceramics cannot be used for any reason. Check the manufacturer's data sheet for low ESR at least two times the unity gain bandwidth of the op amp being used.

Once high frequency bypassing is addressed, additional low frequency decoupling is advisable. In general use about 10µF/amp of peak output current, either electrolytic or tantalum type capacitors.

Ref. AN1 STABILITY, AN19

BIPOLAR OUTPUT STAGES



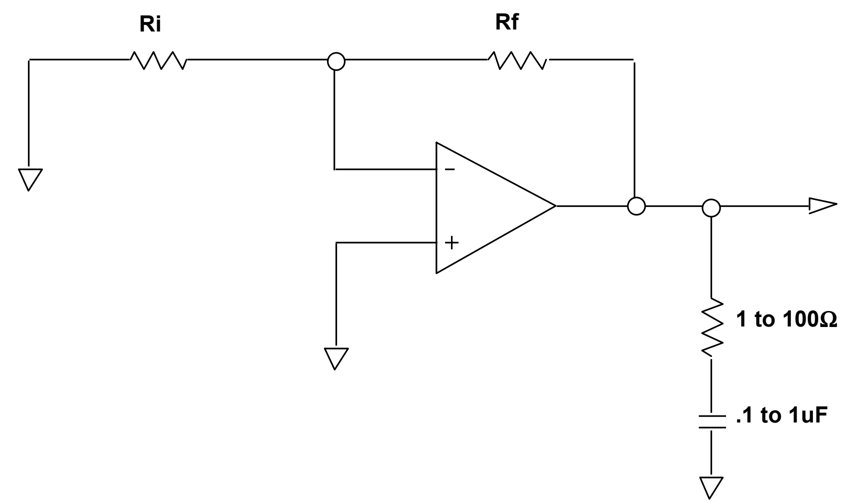
The full complementary output stage is a very easy to use stage. It exhibits symmetric output impedance and low crossover distortion. It is also easy to bias and is inherently stable under most load conditions. Q1 acts as a class A, high voltage gain, common emitter amplifier. Its collector voltage drives the output darlingtons. The bias circuitry provides class AB operation for the output darlingtons, minimizing crossover distortion. Both Q2 and Q3 are only called upon to provide impedance buffering. This is a unity voltage gain, high current gain stage. Both devices are operated as followers and thus provide very low output impedance for either sinking or sourcing current. Monolithic designers are constrained to work with NPN's for handling high currents. For this reason, the "all-NPN" output stage, followed by the "quasi-complementary" output stage were developed.

The quasi-complementary is similar to the full complementary in that Q1 again acts as a class A, common emitter, high gain amplifier and the output devices provide impedance buffering only. Q2 provides the same function as Q2 in a full complementary approach. Q3 and Q4 form a "composite PNP". The inherent problem with this approach is that there is heavy local feedback in the Q3, Q4 loop and this can lead to oscillations driving inductive loads.

The "all-NPN" output stage was an early approach to delivering power in a monolithic. During current source this stage operates much the same as the previous two. The major difference comes about during current sink. During the current sink cycle Q1 changes from a common emitter to an emitter follower. It now provides base voltage drive for Q3. Q3 is operated as a common emitter amplifier. The major disadvantage to this approach is the large changes in both output impedance and open loop gain between source and sink cycles. A problem common to both the quasi-complementary and the all NPN stage is the difficulty of biasing properly over extended temperature range.

Ref. AN1 STABILITY, AN19

FIXING OUTPUT STAGE OSCILLATIONS



F(osc) > f(unity)

Any time you encounter an oscillation above the unity gain bandwidth of the amplifier it is bound to be one of the output stage problems discussed previously. These can be fixed through the use of a simple “snubber” network from the output pin to ground. This network is comprised of a resistance of from 1 to 100 ohms in series with a .1 to 1 uF capacitor. This network passes high frequencies to ground, thus preventing it from being fed back to the input.

Some manufacturers who use all NPN output stages in their monolithic power amplifiers suggest the use of this type of network to reduce output stage oscillations. Other manufacturers, while having a similar problem, never suggest that this type of network is necessary for proper use. Apex either takes care of the problem internally or specifies specific values for the external network.

Ref. AN1 STABILITY, AN19