

APPENDIX F How to Get the Right Information From a Data Sheet

Not All Data Sheets Are Created Alike, and False Assumptions Could Cost an Engineer Time and Money

By Robert A. Pease

When a new product arrives in the marketplace, it hopefully will have a good, clear data sheet with it.

The data sheet can show the prospective user how to apply the device, what performance specifications are guaranteed and various typical applications and characteristics. If the data-sheet writer has done a good job, the user can decide if the product will be valuable to him, exactly how well it will be of use to him and what precautions to take to avoid problems.

SPECIFICATIONS

The most important area of a data sheet specifies the characteristics that are guaranteed—and the test conditions that apply when the tests are done. Ideally, all specifications that the users will need will be spelled out clearly. If the product is similar to existing products, one can expect the data sheet to have a format similar to other devices.

But, if there are significant changes and improvements that nobody has seen before, then the writer must clarify what is meant by each specification. Definitions of new phrases or characteristics may even have to be added as an appendix.

For example, when fast-settling operational amplifiers were first introduced, some manufacturers defined settling time as the time after slewing before the output finally enters and stays within the error-band; but other manufacturers included the slewing time in their definition. Because both groups made their definitions clear, the user was unlikely to be confused or misled.

However, the reader ought to be on the alert. In a few cases, the data-sheet writer is playing a specsmanship game, and is trying to show an inferior (to some users) aspect of a product in a light that makes it look superior (which it may be, to a couple of users).

GUARANTEES

When a data sheet specifies a guaranteed minimum value, what does it mean? An assumption might be made that the manufacturer has actually tested that specification and has great confidence that no part could fail that test and still be shipped. Yet that is not always the case.

For instance, in the early days of op amps (20 years ago), the differential-input impedance might have been guaranteed at 1 M Ω —but the manufacturer obviously did not measure the impedance. When a customer insisted, "I have to know how you measure this impedance," it had to be explained that the impedance was not measured, but that the base current was. The correlation between I_b and Z_{in} permitted the substitution of this simple dc test for a rather messy, noisy, hard-to-interpret test.

Every year, for the last 20 years, manufacturers have been trying to explain, with varying success, why they do not measure the Z_{in} *per se*, even though they do guarantee it.

In other cases, the manufacturer may specify a test that can be made only on the die as it is probed on the wafer, but cannot be tested after the die is packaged because that signal is not accessible any longer. To avoid frustrating and confusing the customer, some manufacturers are establishing two classes of guaranteed specifications:

- The tested limit represents a test that cannot be doubted, one that is actually performed directly on 100 percent of the devices, 100 percent of the time.
- The design limit covers other tests that may be indirect, implicit or simply guaranteed by the inherent design of the device, and is unlikely to cause a failure rate (on that test), even as high as one part per thousand.

Why was this distinction made? Not just because customers wanted to know which specifications were guaranteed by testing, but because the quality-assurance group insisted that it was essential to separate the tested guarantees from the design limits so that the AQL (assurance-quality level) could be improved from 0.1 percent to down below 100 ppm.

Some data sheets guarantee characteristics that are quite expensive and difficult to test (even harder than noise) such as long-term drift (20 ppm or 50 ppm over 1,000 hours).

The data sheet may not tell the reader if it is measured, tested or estimated. One manufacturer may perform a 100percent test, while another states, "Guaranteed by sample testing." This is not a very comforting assurance that a part is good, especially in a critical case where only a long-term test can prove if the device did meet the manufacturer's specification. If in doubt, question the manufacturer.

TYPICALS

Next to a guaranteed specification, there is likely to be another in a column labeled "typical".

It might mean that the manufacturer once actually saw one part as good as that. It could indicate that half the parts are better than that specification, and half will be worse. But it is equally likely to mean that, five years ago, half the parts were better and half worse. It could easily signify that a few parts might be slightly better, and a few parts a lot worse; after all, if the noise of an amplifier is extremely close to the theoretical limit, one cannot expect to find anything much better than that, but there will always be a few noisy ones.

If the specification of interest happens to be the bias current (I_b) of an op amp, a user can expect broad variations. For example, if the specification is 200 nA maximum, there rnight be many parts where I_b is 40 nA on one batch (where the beta is high), and a month later, many parts where the I_b is 140 nA when the beta is low.



Absolute Maximum Ratings (Note 11)

If Military/Aerospace specified devices are required, contact the National Semiconductor Sales Office/ Distributors for availability and specifications.

Supply Voltage	+35V to $-0.2V$
Output Voltage	+6V to -1.0V
Output Current	10 mA
Storage Temperature,	
TO-46 Package	-76°F to +356°F
TO-92 Package	-76°F to +300°F

* Lead Temp. (Soldering, 4 seconds)	
TO-46 Package	+ 300°C
TO-92 Package	+260°C
Specified Operating Temp. Range (Note 2)	
	True to Trees

'MAX
300°F
230°F
212°F
2

DC Electrical Characteristics (Note 1, Note 6)

		LM34A			LM34CA			
Parameter	Conditions	Typical	Tested Limit (Note 4)	Design Limit (Note 5)	Typical	Tested Limit (Note 4)	Design Limit (Note 5)	Units (Max)
Accuracy (Note 7)	$ \begin{aligned} T_A &= +77^\circ F \\ T_A &= 0^\circ F \\ T_A &= T_{MAX} \\ T_A &= T_{MIN} \end{aligned} $	$\pm 0.4 \\ \pm 0.6 \\ \pm 0.8 \\ \pm 0.8$	±1.0 ±2.0 ±2.0		$\pm 0.4 \\ \pm 0.6 \\ \pm 0.8 \\ \pm 0.8$	±1.0 ±2.0	±2.0 ±3.0	ہ ہے ہ
Nonlinearity (Note 8)	$T_{MIN} \le T_A \le T_{MAX}$	±0.35		±0.7	±0.30		±0.6	°F
Sensor Gain (Average Slope)	$T_{MIN} \leq T_{A} \leq T_{MAX}$	+ 10.0	+ 9.9, + 10.1		+ 10.0		+9.9, +10.1	mV/°F, min mV/°F, max
Load Regulation (Note 3)	$\begin{array}{l} T_A = \ +77^\circ F \\ T_{MIN} \leq T_A \leq T_{MAX} \\ 0 \leq I_L \leq 1 \ mA \end{array}$	±0.4 ± 0.5	±1.0	± 3.0	±0.4 ± 0.5	±1.0	± 3.0	mV/mA mV/mA
Line Regulation (Note 3)	$\begin{array}{l} T_{A}=\ +77^{\circ}F\\ 5V\leqV_{S}\leq30V \end{array}$	±0.01 ± 0.02	±0.05	±0.1	±0.01 ± 0.02	±0.05	±0.1	mV/V mV/V
Quiescent Current (Note 9)	$V_{S} = +5V, +77^{\circ}F$ $V_{S} = +5V$ $V_{S} = +30V, +77^{\circ}F$ $V_{S} = +30V$	75 131 76 132	90 92	160 163	75 116 76 117	90 92	139 142	μΑ μΑ μΑ μΑ
Change of Quiescent Current (Note 3)	$\begin{array}{l} 4V \leq V_S \leq 30V, +77^{\circ}F \\ 5V \leq V_S \leq 30V \end{array}$	+0.5 + 1.0	2.0	3.0	0.5 1.0	2.0	3.0	μΑ μΑ
Temperature Coefficient of Quiescent Current		+0.30		+ 0.5	+0.30		+ 0.5	μA/°F
Minimum Temperature for Rated Accuracy	In circuit of <i>Figure 1,</i> $I_L = 0$	+3.0		+ 5.0	+ 3.0		+ 5.0	۴F
Long-Term Stability	$T_j = T_{MAX}$ for 1000 hours	±0.16			±0.16			°F

Note 1: Unless otherwise noted, these specifications apply: $-50^{\circ}F \le T_j \le +300^{\circ}F$ for the LM34 and LM34A; $-40^{\circ}F \le T_j \le +230^{\circ}F$ for the LM34C and LM34CA; and $+32^{\circ}F \le T_j \le +212^{\circ}F$ for the LM34D. $V_S = +5$ Vdc and $I_{LOAD} = 50 \ \mu$ A in the circuit of *Figure 2*; +6 Vdc for LM34 and LM34A for $230^{\circ}F \le T_j \le 300^{\circ}F$. These specifications also apply from $+5^{\circ}F$ to T_{MAX} in the circuit of *Figure 1*.

Note 2: Thermal resistance of the TO-46 package is 292°F/W junction to ambient and 43°F/W junction to case. Thermal resistance of the TO-92 package is 324°F/W junction to ambient.

Note 3: Regulation is measured at constant junction temperature using pulse testing with a low duty cycle. Changes in output due to heating effects can be computed by multiplying the internal dissipation by the thermal resistance.

Note 4: Tested limits are guaranteed and 100% tested in production.

Note 5: Design limits are guaranteed (but not 100% production tested) over the indicated temperature and supply voltage ranges. These limits are not used to calculate outgoing quality levels.

Note 6: Specification in BOLDFACE TYPE apply over the full rated temperature range.

Note 7: Accuracy is defined as the error between the output voltage and 10 mV/°F times the device's case temperature at specified conditions of voltage, current, and temperature (expressed in °F).

Note 8: Nonlinearity is defined as the deviation of the output-voltage-versus-temperature curve from the best-fit straight line over the device's rated temperature range.

Note 9: Quiescent current is defined in the circuit of Figure 1.

Note 10: Contact factory for availability of LM34CAZ.

** Note 11: Absolute Maximum Ratings indicate limits beyond which damage to the device may occur. DC and AC electrical specifications do not apply when operating the device beyond its rated operating conditions (see Note 1).

A Point-By-Point Look

Let's look a little more closely at the data sheet of the National Semiconductor LM34, which happens to be a temperature sensor.

Note 1 lists the nominal test conditions and test circuits in which all the characteristics are defined. Some additional test conditions are listed in the column "Conditions", but Note 1 helps minimize the clutter.

Note 2 gives the thermal impedance, (which may also be shown in a chart or table).

Note 3 warns that an output impedance test, if done with a long pulse, could cause significant self-heating and thus, error.

Note 6 is intended to show which specs apply at all rated temperatures.

Note 7 is the definition of the "Accuracy" spec, and Note 8 the definition for non-linearity. Note 9 states in what test circuit the quiescent current is defined. Note 10 indicates that one model of the family may not be available at the time of printing (but happens to be available now), and Note 11 is the definition of Absolute Max Ratings.

- * Note—the "4 seconds" soldering time is a new standard for plastic packages.
- ** Note—the wording of Note 11 has been revised—this is the best wording we can devise, and we will use it on all future datasheets.

APPLICATIONS

Another important part of the data sheet is the applications section. It indicates the novel and conventional ways to use a device. Sometimes these applications are just little ideas to tweak a reader's mind. After looking at a couple of applications, one can invent other ideas that are useful. Some applications may be of no real interest or use.

In other cases, an application circuit may be the complete definition of the system's performance; it can be the test circuit in which the specification limits are defined, tested and guaranteed. But, in all other instances, the performance of a typical application circuit is not guaranteed, it is only typical. In many circumstances, the performance may depend on external components and their precision and matching. Some manufacturers have added a phrase to their data sheets:

"Applications for any circuits contained in this document are for illustration purposes only and the manufacturer makes no representation or warranty that such applications will be suitable for the use indicated without further testing or modification."

In the future, manufacturers may find it necessary to add disclaimers of this kind to avoid disappointing users with circuits that work well, much of the time, but cannot be easily guaranteed.

The applications section is also a good place to look for advice on quirks—potential drawbacks or little details that may not be so little when a user wants to know if a device will actually deliver the expected performance.

For example, if a buffer can drive heavy loads and can handle fast signals cleanly (at no load), the maker isn't doing anybody any favors if there is no mention that the distortion goes sky-high if the rated load is applied. Another example is the application hint for the LF156 family:

"Exceeding the negative common-mode limit on either input will cause a reversal of the phase to output and force the amplifier output to the corresponding high or low state. Exceeding the negative common-mode limit on both inputs will force the amplifier output to a high state. In neither case does a latch occur, since raising the input back within the common-mode range again puts the input stage and, thus the amplifier, in a normal operating mode."

That's the kind of information a manufacturer should really give to a data-sheet reader because no one could ever guess it.

Sometimes, a writer slips a quirk into a characteristic curve, but it's wiser to draw attention to it with a line of text. This is because it's better to make the user sad before one gets started, rather than when one goes into production. Conversely, if a user is going to spend more than 10 minutes using a new product, one ought to spend a full five minutes reading the entire data sheet.

FINE PRINT

What other fine print can be found on a data sheet? Sometimes the front page may be marked "advance" or "preliminary." Then on the back page, the fine print may say something such as:

"This data sheet contains preliminary limits and design specifications. Supplemental information will be published at a later date. The manufacturer reserves the right to make changes in the products contained in this document in order to improve design or performance and to supply the best possible products. We also assume no responsibility for the use of any circuits described herein, convey no license under any patent or other right and make no representation that the circuits are free from patent infringement."

In fact, after a device is released to the marketplace in a preliminary status, the engineers love to make small improvements and upgrades in specifications and characteristics, and hate to degrade a specification from its first published value—but occasionally that is necessary.

Another item in the fine print is the manufacturer's telephone number. Usually it is best to refer questions to the local sales representative or field-applications engineer, because they may know the answer or they may be best able to put a questioner in touch with the right person at the factory.

Occasionally, the factory's applications engineers have all the information. Other times, they have to bring in product engineers, test engineers or marketing people. And sometimes the answer can't be generated quickly—data have to be gathered, opinions solidified or policies formulated before the manufacturer can answer the question. Still, the telephone number is the key to getting the factory to help.

ORIGINS OF DATA SHEETS

Of course, historically, most data sheets for a class of products have been closely modeled on the data sheet of the forerunner of that class. The first data sheet was copied to make new versions.

That's the way it happened with the UA709 (the first monolithic op amp) and all its copies, as well as many other similar families of circuits. Even today, an attempt is made to build on the good things learned from the past and add a few improvements when necessary. But, it's important to have real improvements, not just change for the sake of change.

So, while it's not easy to get the format and everything in it exactly right to please everybody, new data sheets are continually surfacing with new features, applications ideas, specifications and aids for the user. And, if the users complain loudly enough about misleading or inadequate data sheets, they can help lead the way to change data sheets. That's how many of today's improvements came about through customer demand.

Who writes data sheets? In some cases, a marketing person does the actual writing and engineers do the checking. In other companies, the engineer writes, while marketing people and other engineers check. Sometimes, a committee seems to be doing the writing. None of these ways is necessarily wrong.

For example, one approach might be: The original designer of the product writes the data sheet (inside his head) at the same time the product is designed. The concept here is, if one can't find the proper ingredients for a data sheet—good applications, convenient features for the user and nicely tested specifications as the part is being designed—then maybe it's not a very good product until all those ingredients are completed. Thus, the collection of raw materials for a good data sheet is an integral part of the design of a product. The actual assembly of these materials is an art which can take place later.

WHEN TO WRITE DATA SHEETS

A new product becomes available. The applications engineers start evaluating their application circuits and the test engineers examine their production test equipment.

But how can the users evaluate the new device? They have to have a data sheet—which is still in the process of being written. Every week, as the data sheet writer tries to polish and refine the incipient data sheet, other engineers are reporting, "These spec limits and conditions have to be revised," and, "Those application circuits don't work like we thought they would; we'll have one running in a couple of days." The marketing people insist that the data sheet must be finalized and frozen right away so that they can start printing copies to go out with evaluation samples.

These trying conditions may explain why data sheets always seem to have been thrown together under panic conditions and why they have so many rough spots. Users should be aware of the conflicting requirements: Getting a data sheet "as completely as possible" and "as accurately as possible" is compromised if one wants to get the data sheet "as quickly as possible."

The reader should always question the manufacturer. What are the alternatives? By not asking the right question, a misunderstanding could arise; getting angry with the manufacturer is not to anyone's advantage.

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