Lecture 3 - Semiconductor Physics (II)

Carrier Transport

February 13, 2001

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1. Thermal motion
2. Carrier drift
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Reading assignment:

Howe and Sodini, Ch. 2, §§2.4-2.6

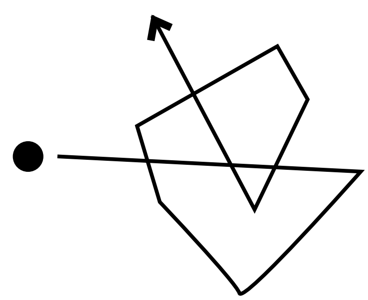
Key questions

- What are the physical mechanisms responsible for current flow in semiconductors?
- How do electrons and holes in a semiconductor behave in an electric field?
- How do electrons and holes in a semiconductor behave if their concentration is non-uniform?

1. Thermal Motion

In thermal equilibrium, carriers are not sitting still:

- undergo collisions with vibrating Si atoms (*Brownian motion*)
- electrostatically interact with charged dopants and with each other



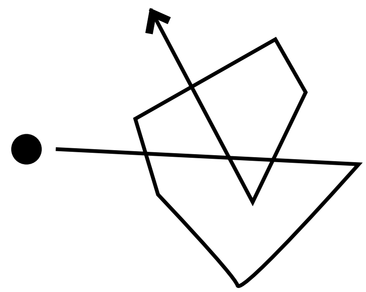
Characteristic time constant of thermal motion - mean free time between collisions:

$$\tau_c \equiv \textit{collision time}\ [s]$$

In between collisions, carriers acquire high velocity:

$$v_{th} \equiv \textit{thermal velocity}\ [cm/s]$$

...but get nowhere!



Characteristic length of thermal motion:

$$\lambda \equiv \textit{ mean free path } [cm]$$

$$\lambda = v_{th}\tau_c$$

Put numbers for Si at room temperature:

$$\tau_c \simeq 10^{-13}\ s$$

$$v_{th} \simeq 10^{7}\ cm/s$$

$$\Rightarrow \lambda \simeq 0.01\ \mu m = 10\ nm$$

For reference, state-of-the-art MOSFETs today:

$$L_g \simeq 0.1\ \mu m$$

$\Rightarrow$ carriers undergo many collisions in modern devices

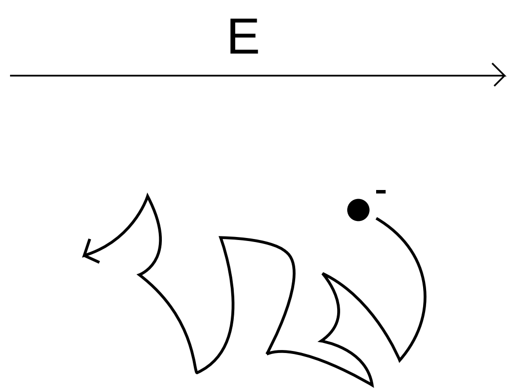
2. Carrier Drift

Apply electric field to semiconductor:

$$E \equiv electric\ field\ [V/cm]$$

$\Rightarrow$ net force on carrier

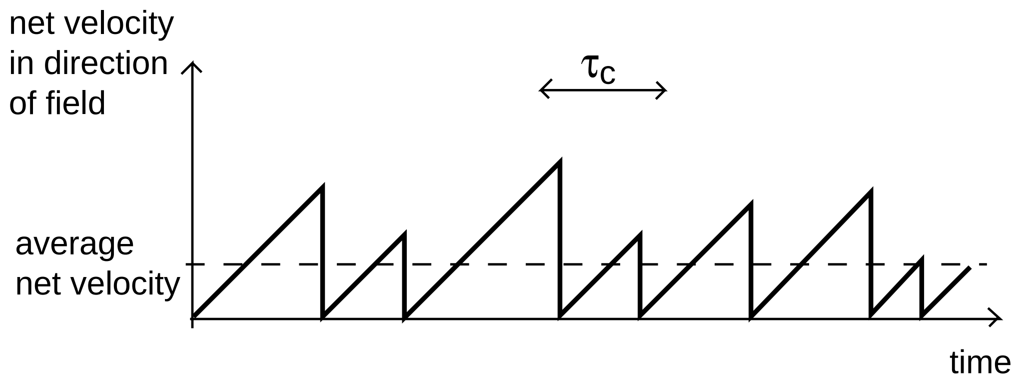
$$F = \pm qE$$



Between collisions, carriers accelerate in direction of field:

$$v(t) = at = \pm \frac{qE}{m_{n,p}} t$$

But velocity randomized every τ_c (on average):



Then, average net velocity in direction of field:

$$\overline{v} = v_d = \pm\frac{qE}{2m_{n,p}}\tau_c = \pm\frac{q\tau_c}{2m_{n,p}}E$$

This is called *drift velocity* $[cm/s]$.

Define:

$$\mu = \frac{q\tau_c}{2m_{n,p}} \equiv mobility\ [cm^2/V \cdot s]$$

Then, for electrons:

$$v_{dn} = -\mu_n E$$

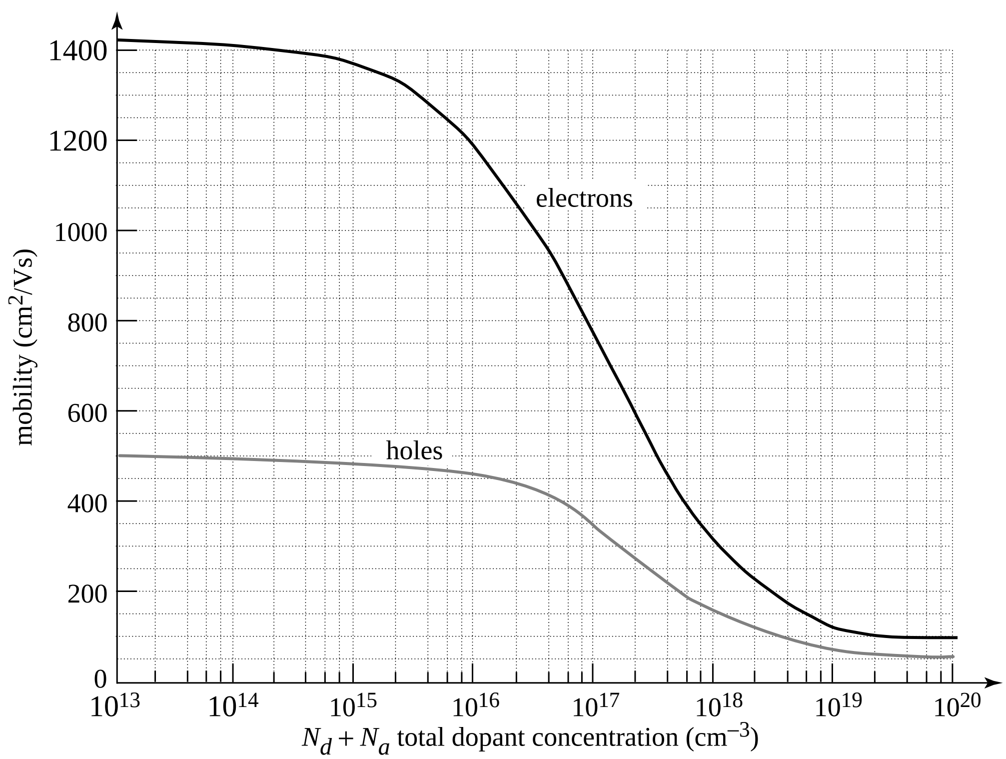
for holes:

$$v_{dp} = \mu_p E$$

Mobility is measure of *ease* of carrier drift:

- if $\tau_c \uparrow$, longer time between collisions $\rightarrow \mu \uparrow$
- if $m \downarrow$, "lighter" particle $\rightarrow \mu \uparrow$

Mobility in Si at room temperature, depends on doping:



- for low doping level, μ limited by collisions with lattice
- for medium and high doping level, μ limited by collisions with ionized impurities
- holes "heavier" than electrons:
  $\rightarrow$ for same doping level, $\mu_n > \mu_p$

Drift current

Net velocity of charged particles ⇒ electric current:

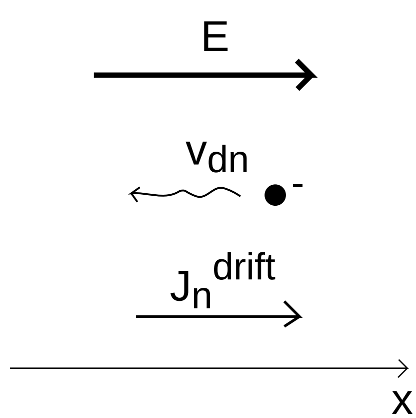
$$\begin{aligned} \textit{Drift current density} &\propto \textit{carrier drift velocity} \\ &\propto \textit{carrier concentration} \\ &\propto \textit{carrier charge} \end{aligned}$$

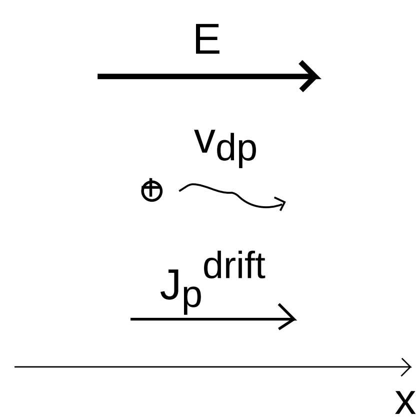
Drift currents:

$$J_n^{drift} = -qnv_{dn} = qn\mu_n E$$

$$J_p^{drift} = qpv_{dp} = qp\mu_p E$$

Check signs:





Total drift current:

$$J^{drift} = J_n^{drift} + J_p^{drift} = q(n\mu_n + p\mu_p)E$$

Has the shape of *Ohm's Law*:

$$J = \sigma E = \frac{E}{\rho}$$

Where:

$$\sigma \ \equiv conductivity \ [\Omega^{-1} \cdot cm^{-1}]$$

$$\rho \ \equiv resistiviy \ [\Omega \cdot cm]$$

Then:

$$\rho = \frac{1}{\sigma} = \frac{1}{q(n\mu_n + p\mu_p)}$$

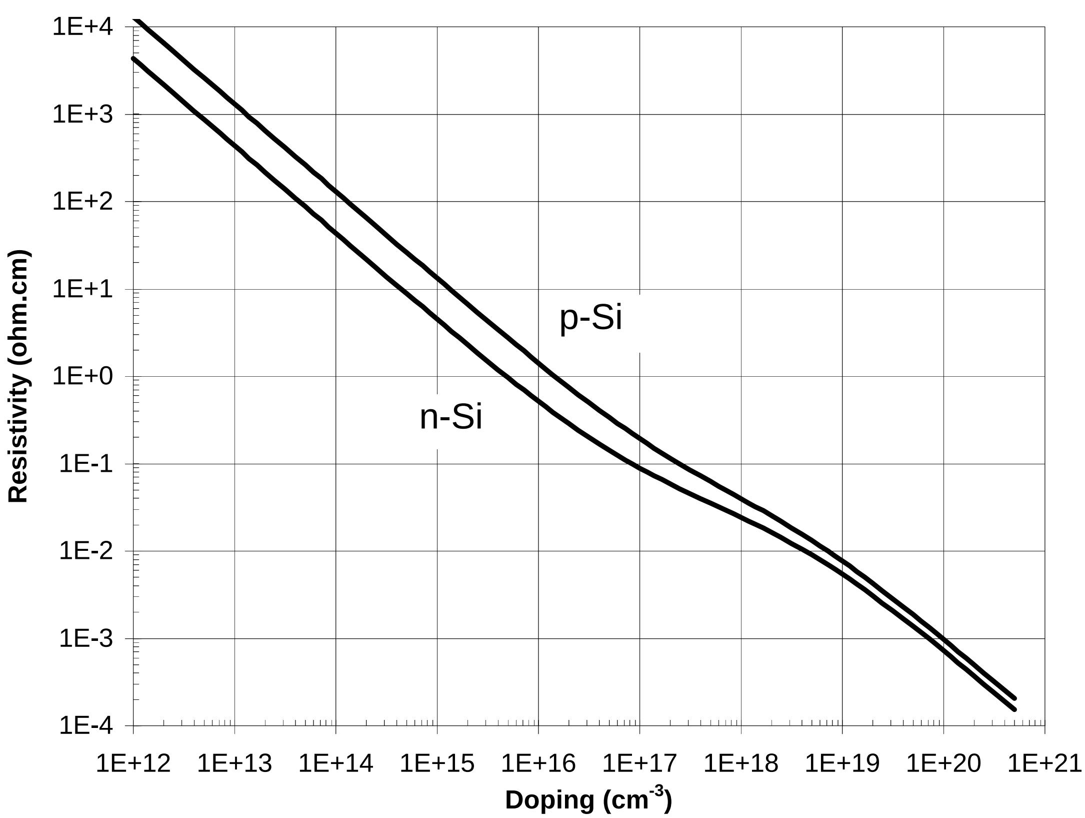
Resistivity commonly used to specify doping level.

- In n-type semiconductor:

$$\rho_n \simeq \frac{1}{qN_d\mu_n}$$

- In p-type semiconductor:

$$\rho_p \simeq \frac{1}{qN_a\mu_p}$$



Numerical example:

- Si with $N_d = 3 \times 10^{16}\ cm^{-3}$ at room temperature

$$\mu_n \simeq 1000\ cm^2/V \cdot s$$

$$\rho_n \simeq 0.21\ \Omega \cdot cm$$

- apply $E = 1\ kV/cm$

$$v_{dn} \simeq -10^6\ cm/s \ll v_{th}$$

$$J_n^{drift} \simeq 4.8 \times 10^3\ A/cm^2$$

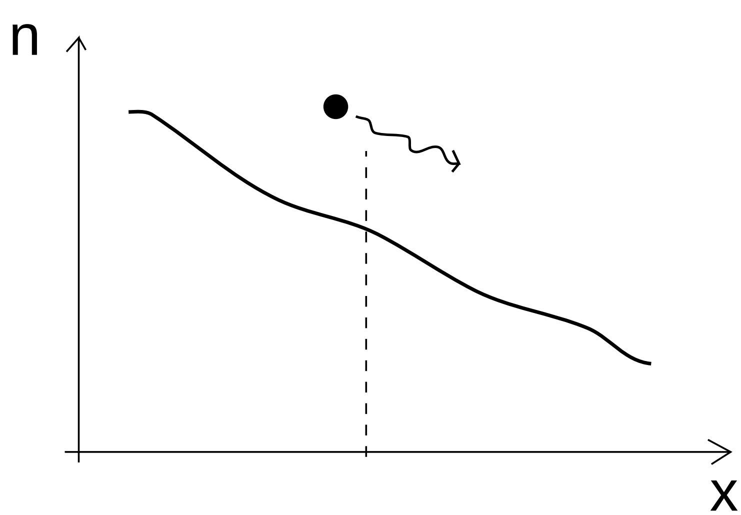
- time to drift through $L = 0.1\ \mu m$:

$$t_d = \frac{L}{v_{dn}} = 10\ ps$$

fast!

3. Carrier diffusion

Diffusion: particle movement in response to concentration gradient.



Elements of diffusion:

- a medium (*Si crystal*)
- a gradient of particles (*electrons and holes*) inside the medium
- collisions between particles and medium send particles off in random directions:
  → overall result is to erase gradient

Key diffusion relationship (*Fick's first law*):

Diffusion flux $\propto$ - *concentration gradient*

Flux $\equiv$ number of particles crossing unit area per unit time $[cm^{-2} \cdot s^{-1}]$

For electrons:

$$F_n = -D_n \frac{dn}{dx}$$

For holes:

$$F_p = -D_p \frac{dp}{dx}$$

$D_n \equiv$ electron diffusion coefficient $[cm^2/s]$
$D_p \equiv$ hole diffusion coefficient $[cm^2/s]$

D measures the ease of carrier diffusion in response to a concentration gradient: $D \uparrow \Rightarrow \; F^{diff} \uparrow$.

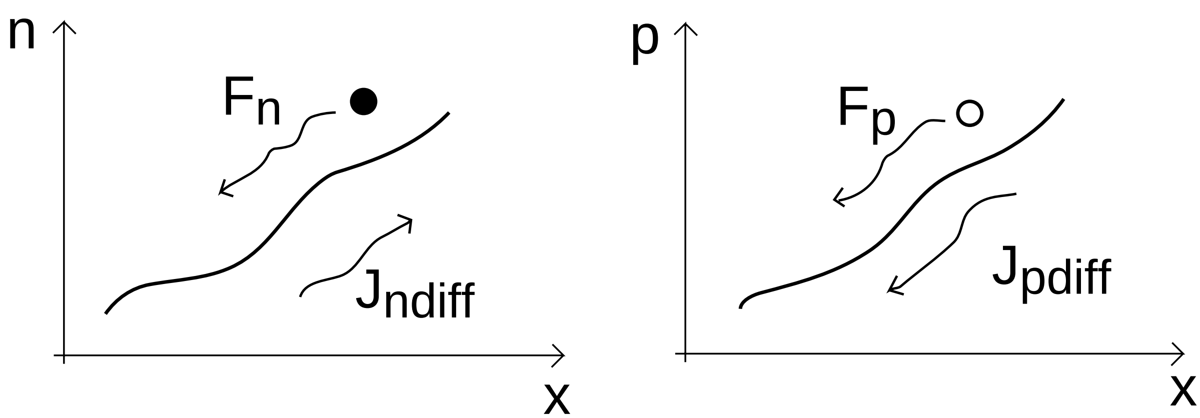
D limited by vibrating lattice atoms and ionized dopants

Diffusion current density = charge × carrier flux

$$J_n^{diff} = qD_n \frac{dn}{dx}$$

$$J_p^{diff} = -qD_p \frac{dp}{dx}$$

Check signs:



Einstein relation

At the core of diffusion and drift is same physics: collisions among particles and medium atoms
$\Rightarrow$ there should be a relationship between D and μ

Einstein relation [don't derive in 6.012]:

$$\frac{D}{\mu} = \frac{kT}{q}$$

In semiconductors:

$$\frac{D_n}{\mu_n} = \frac{D_p}{\mu_p} = \frac{kT}{q}$$

$$\frac{kT}{q} \equiv \textit{thermal voltage}\ [V]$$

At room temperature:

$$\frac{kT}{q} \simeq 25\ mV$$

For example: for $N_d = 3 \times 10^{16}\ cm^{-3}$:

$$\mu_n \simeq 1000\ cm^2/V \cdot s \rightarrow D_n \simeq 25\ cm^2/s$$
$$\mu_p \simeq 400\ cm^2/V \cdot s \rightarrow D_p \simeq 10\ cm^2/s$$

Total current

In general, current can flow by drift and diffusion separately. Total current:

$$J_n = J_n^{drift} + J_n^{diff} = qn\mu_n E + qD_n \frac{dn}{dx}$$

$$J_p = J_p^{drift} + J_p^{diff} = qp\mu_p E - qD_p \frac{dp}{dx}$$

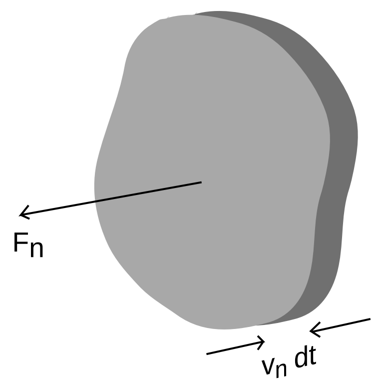
And

$$J_{total} = J_n + J_p$$

Summary: relationship between v, F, and J

In semiconductors: charged particles move
⇒ particle flux ⇒ electrical current density

Particle flux: number of particles that cross surface of unit area placed normal to particle flow every unit time



Relationship between particle flux and velocity:

$$F_n = nv_n \qquad F_p = pv_p$$

Current density: amount of charge that crosses surface of unit area placed normal to particle flow every unit time

$$J_n = -qF_n = -qnv_n \qquad J_p = qF_p = qpv_p$$

whether carriers move by drift or diffusion.

Key conclusions

- Electrons and holes in semiconductors are mobile and charged ⇒ *carriers* of electrical current!
- *Drift current*: produced by electric field

$$J^{drift} \propto E$$

- *Diffusion current*: produced by concentration gradient

$$J^{diff} \propto \frac{dn}{dx}, \frac{dp}{dx}$$

- Carriers move fast in response to fields and gradients
- Diffusion and drift currents are sizable in modern devices