

IC Temperature Sensor Provides Thermocouple Cold-Junction Compensation

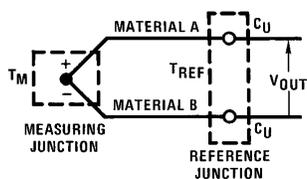
National Semiconductor
Application Note 225
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April 1979



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INTRODUCTION

Due to their low cost and ease of use, thermocouples are still a popular means for making temperature measurements up to several thousand degrees centigrade. A thermocouple is made by joining wires of two different metals as shown in *Figure 1*. The output voltage is approximately proportional to the temperature difference between the measuring junction and the reference junction. This constant of proportionality is known as the Seebeck coefficient and ranges from $5 \mu\text{V}/^\circ\text{C}$ to $50 \mu\text{V}/^\circ\text{C}$ for commonly used thermocouples.



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$$V_{OUT} \propto (T_M - T_{REF})$$

FIGURE 1. Thermocouple

Because a thermocouple is sensitive to a temperature *difference*, the temperature at the reference junction must be known in order to make a temperature measurement. One way to do this is to keep the reference junction in an ice bath. This has the advantage of zero output voltage at 0°C , making thermocouple tables usable. A more convenient approach, known as cold-junction compensation, is to add a compensating voltage to the thermocouple output so that the reference junction appears to be at 0°C independent of the actual temperature. If this voltage is made proportional to temperature with the same constant of proportionality as the thermocouple, changes in ambient temperature will have no effect on output voltage.

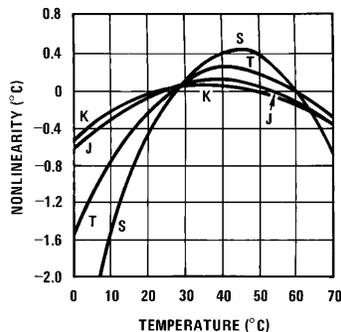
An IC temperature sensor such as the LM135/LM235/LM335, which has a very linear voltage vs. temperature characteristic, is a natural choice to use in this compensation circuit. The LM135 operates by sensing the difference of base-emitter voltage of two transistors running at different current levels and acts like a zener diode with a breakdown voltage proportional to absolute temperature at $10 \text{ mV}/^\circ\text{K}$. Furthermore, because the LM135 extrapolates to zero output at 0°K , the temperature coefficient of the compensation circuit can be adjusted at room temperature without requiring any temperature cycling.

SOURCES OF ERROR

There will be several sources of error involved when measuring temperature with thermocouples. The most basic of

these is the tolerance of the thermocouple itself, due to varying composition of the wire material. Note that this tolerance states how much the voltage vs. temperature characteristic differs from that of an ideal thermocouple and has nothing to do with nonlinearity. Tolerance is typically $\pm 3/4\%$ of reading for J, K, and T types or $\pm 1/2\%$ for S and R types, so that a measurement of 1000°C may be off by as much as 7.5°C . Special wire is available with half this error guaranteed.

Additional error can be introduced by the compensation circuitry. For perfect compensation, the compensation circuit must match the output of an ice-point-referenced thermocouple at ambient. It is difficult to match the thermocouple's nonlinear voltage vs. temperature characteristic with a linear absolute temperature sensor, so a "best fit" linear approximation must be made. In *Figure 2* this nonlinearity is plotted as a function of temperature for several thermocouple types. The K type is the most linear, while the S type is one of the least linear. When using an absolute temperature sensor for cold-junction compensation, compensation error is a function of both thermocouple nonlinearity and also the variation in ambient temperature, since the straight-line approximation to the thermocouple characteristic is more valid for small deviations.



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FIGURE 2. Thermocouple Nonlinearity

Of course, increased error results if, due to component inaccuracies, the compensation circuit does not produce the ideal output. The LM335 is very linear with respect to absolute temperature and introduces little error. However, the complete circuit must contain resistors and a voltage reference in order to obtain the proper offset and scaling. Initial tolerances can be trimmed out, but the temperature coefficient of these external components is usually the limiting factor (unless this drift is measured and trimmed out).

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CIRCUIT DESCRIPTION

A single-supply circuit is shown in *Figure 3*. R3 and R4 divide down the 10 mV/°K output of the LM335 to match the Seebeck coefficient of the thermocouple. The LM329B and its associated voltage divider provide a voltage to buck out the 0°C output of the LM335. To calibrate, adjust R1 so that $V1 = \alpha \cdot T$, where α is the Seebeck coefficient* and T is the ambient temperature in degrees *Kelvin*. Then, adjust R2 so that $V1 - V2$ is equal to the thermocouple output voltage at the known ambient temperature.

To achieve maximum performance from this circuit the resistors must be carefully chosen. R3 through R6 should be precision wirewounds, Vishay bulk metal or precision metal film types with a 1% tolerance and a temperature coefficient of ± 5 ppm/°C or better. In addition to having a low TCR, these resistors exhibit low thermal emf when the leads are at different temperatures, ranging from 3 μ V/°C for the TRW MAR to only 0.3 μ V/°C for the Vishay types. This is especially important when using S or R type thermocouples that output only 6 μ V/°C. R7 should have a temperature coefficient of ± 25 ppm/°C or better and a 1% tolerance. Note that the potentiometers are placed where their absolute resistance is not important so that their TCR is not critical. However, the trim pots should be of a stable cermet type. While multi-turn pots are usually considered to have the best resolution, many modern single-turn pots are just as easy to set to within $\pm 0.1\%$ of the desired value as the multi-turn pots.

Also single-turn pots usually have superior stability of setting, versus shock or vibration. Thus, good single-turn cermet pots (such as Allen Bradley type E, Weston series

*See Appendix A for calculation of Seebeck coefficient.

840, or CTS series 360) should be considered as good candidates for high-resolution trim applications, competing with the more obvious (but slightly more expensive) multi-turn trim pots such as Allen Bradley type RT or MT, Weston type 850, or similar.

With a room temperature adjustment, drift error will be only $\pm 1/2^\circ\text{C}$ at 70°C and $\pm 1/4^\circ\text{C}$ at 0°C. Thermocouple nonlinearity results in additional compensation error. The chromel/alumel (type K) thermocouple is the most linear. With this type, a compensation accuracy of $\pm 3/4^\circ\text{C}$ can be obtained over a 0°C–70°C range. Performance with an iron-constantan thermocouple is almost as good. To keep the error small for the less linear S and T type thermocouples, the ambient temperature must be kept within a more limited range, such as 15°C to 50°C. Of course, more accurate compensation over a narrower temperature range can be obtained with any thermocouple type by the proper adjustment of voltage TC and offset.

Standard metal-film resistors cost substantially less than precision types and may be substituted with a reduction in accuracy or temperature range. Using 50 ppm/°C resistors, the circuit can achieve $1/2^\circ\text{C}$ error over a 10°C range. Switching to 25 ppm resistors will halve this error. Tin oxide resistors should be avoided since they generate a thermal emf of 20 μ V for 1°C temperature difference in lead temperature as opposed to 2 μ V/°C for nichrome or 4.3 μ V/°C for cermet types. Resistor networks exhibit good tracking, with 50 ppm/°C obtainable for thick film and 5 ppm/°C for thin film. In order to obtain the large resistor ratios needed, one can use series and parallel connections of resistors on one or more substrates.

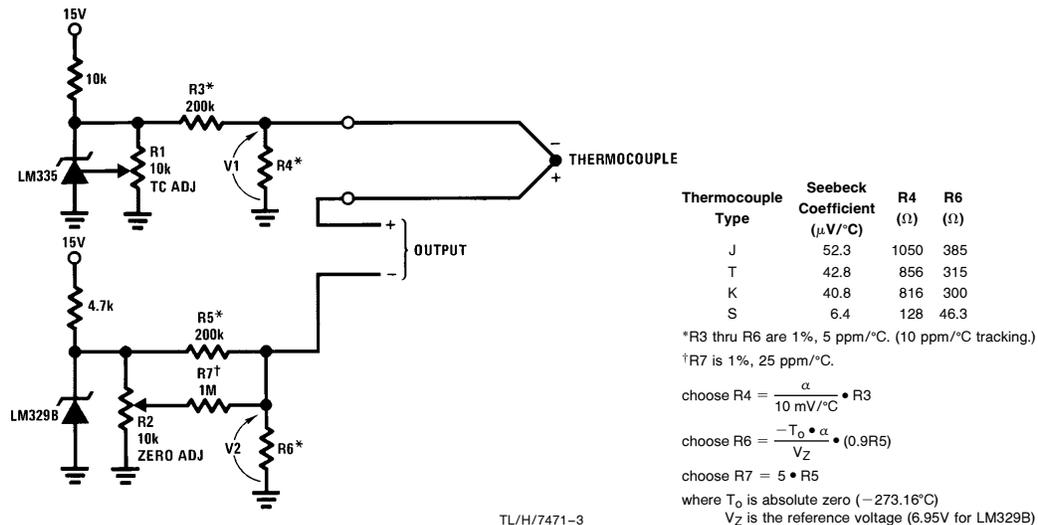


FIGURE 3. Thermocouple Cold-Junction Compensation Using Single Power Supply

A circuit for use with grounded thermocouples is shown in *Figure 4*. If dual supplies are available, this circuit is preferable to that of *Figure 3* since it achieves similar performance with fewer low TC resistors. To trim, short out the LM329B and adjust R5 so that $V_0 = \alpha T$, where α is the Seebeck coefficient of the thermocouple and T is the absolute temperature. Remove the short and adjust R4 so that V_0 equals the thermocouple output voltage at ambient. A good grounding system is essential here, for any ground differential will appear in series with the thermocouple output.

An electronic thermometer with a 10 mV/°C output from 0°C to 1300°C is seen in *Figure 5*. The trimming procedure is as

follows: first short out the LM329B, the LM335 and the thermocouple. Measure the output voltage (equal to the input offset voltage times the voltage gain). Then apply a 50 mV input voltage and adjust the GAIN ADJUST pot until the output voltage is 12.25V above the previously measured value. Next, short out the thermocouple again and remove the short across the LM335. Adjust the TC ADJUST pot so that the output voltage equals 10 mV/°K times the absolute temperature. Finally, remove the short across the LM329B and adjust the ZERO ADJUST pot so that the output voltage equals 10 mV/°C times the ambient temperature in °C.

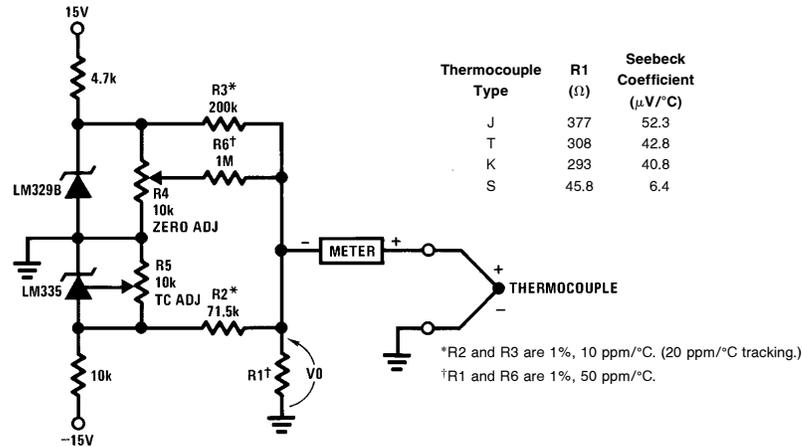


FIGURE 4. Cold-Junction Compensation for Grounded Thermocouple

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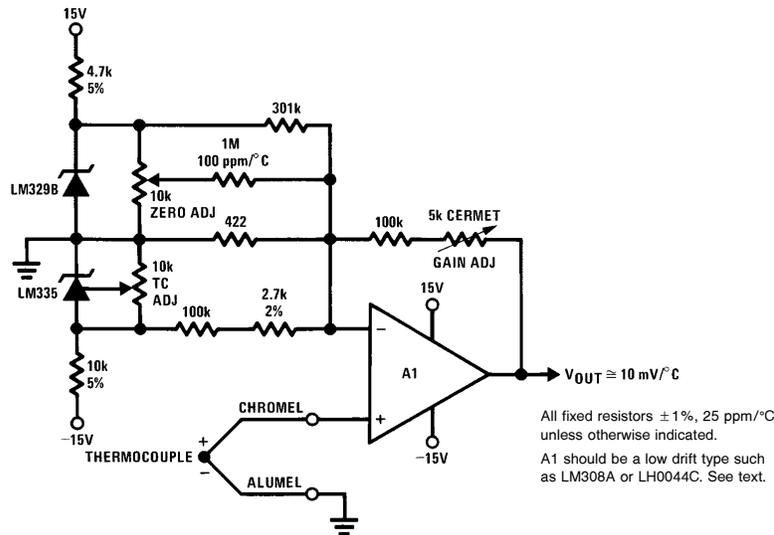


FIGURE 5. Centigrade Thermometer with Cold-Junction Compensation

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Before trimming, all components should be stabilized. A 24-hour bake at 85°C is usually sufficient. Care should be taken when trimming to maintain the temperature of the LM335 constant, as body heat nearby can introduce significant errors. One should either keep the circuit in moving air or house it in a box, leaving holes for the trimpots.

CONCLUSION

Two circuits using the LM335 for thermocouple cold-junction compensation have been described. With a single room temperature calibration, these circuits are accurate to $\pm 3/4^\circ\text{C}$ over a 0°C to 70°C temperature range using J or K type thermocouples. In addition, a thermocouple amplifier using an LM335 for cold-junction compensation has been described for which worst case error can be as low as 1°C per 40°C change in ambient.

**APPENDIX A
DETERMINATION OF SEEBECK COEFFICIENT**

Because of the nonlinear relation of output voltage vs. temperature for a thermocouple, there is no unique value of its Seebeck coefficient α . Instead, one must approximate the thermocouple function with a straight line and determine α from the line's slope for the temperature range of interest.

On a graph, the error of the line approximation is easily visible as the vertical distance between the line and the nonlinear function. Thermocouple nonlinearity is not so gross, so that a numerical error calculation is better than the graphical approach.

Most thermocouple functions have positive curvature, so that a linear approximation with minimum mean-square error will intersect the function at two points. As a first cut, one can pick these points at the 1/3 and 2/3 points across the ambient temperature range. Then calculate the difference between the linear approximation and the thermocouple.[†] This error will usually then be a maximum at the midpoint and endpoints of the temperature range. If the error becomes too large at either temperature extreme, one can modify the slope or the intercept of the line. Once the linear approximation is found that minimizes error over the temperature range, use its slope as the Seebeck coefficient value when designing a cold-junction compensator.

An example of this procedure for a type S thermocouple is shown in Table II. Note that picking the two intercepts (zero error points) close together results in less error over a narrower temperature range.

[†]A collection of thermocouple tables useful for this purpose is found in the Omega Temperature Measurement Handbook published by Omega Engineering, Stamford, Connecticut.

TABLE II. Linear Approximations to Type S Thermocouple

Centigrade Temperature	Type S Thermocouple Output (μV)	Approximation # 1 Zero Error at 25°C and 60°C			Approximation # 2 Zero Error at 30°C and 50°C		
		Linear Approx.	Error		Linear Approx.	Error	
			μV	°C		μV	°C
0°	0	-17	-17	-2.7°	-16	-16	-2.8°
5°	27	15	-12	-1.9°	16	-11	-1.7°
10°	55	46	-9	-1.4°	47	-8	-1.3°
15°	84	78	-6	-0.9°	78	-6	-0.9°
20°	113	110	-3	-0.5°	110	-3	-0.5°
25°	142	142	0	0	142	-1	-0.2°
30°	173	174	1	0.2°	173	0	0
35°	203	206	3	0.5°	204	1	0.2°
40°	235	238	3	0.5°	236	1	0.2°
45°	266	270	4	0.6°	268	2	0.3°
50°	299	301	2	0.3°	299	0	0
55°	331	333	2	0.3°	330	-1	-0.2°
60°	365	365	0	0	362	-3	-0.5°
65°	398	397	-1	-0.2°	394	-4	-0.6°
70°	432	429	-3	-0.5°	425	-7	-1.1°
		$\alpha = 6.4 \mu\text{V}/^\circ\text{C}$			$\alpha = 6.3 \mu\text{V}/^\circ\text{C}$		
		0.6°C error for 20°C < T < 70°C			0.3°C error for 25°C < T < 50°C		

Note: Error is the difference between linear approximation and actual thermocouple output in μV . To convert error to °C, divide by Seebeck coefficient.

APPENDIX B

TECHNIQUE FOR TRIMMING OUT OFFSET DRIFT

Short out the thermocouple input and measure the circuit output voltage at 25°C and at 70°C. Calculate the output voltage temperature coefficient, β as shown.

$$\beta = \frac{V_{OUT}(70^{\circ}C) - V_{OUT}(25^{\circ}C)}{45^{\circ}K} \text{ in mV/^{\circ}K}$$

Next, short out the LM329B and adjust the TC ADJ pot so that $V_{OUT} = (20 \text{ mV/^{\circ}K} - \beta) \times 298^{\circ}K$ at 25°C. Now remove the short across the LM329B and adjust the ZERO ADJUST pot so that $V_{OUT} = 246 \text{ mV}$ at 25°C (246 times the 25°C output of an ice-point-referenced thermocouple).

This procedure compensates for all sources of drift, including resistor TC, reference drift ($\pm 20 \text{ ppm/^{\circ}C}$ maximum for the LM329B) and op amp offset drift. Performance will be limited only by TC nonlinearities and measurement accuracy.

REFERENCES

- R. C. Dobkin, "Low Drift Amplifiers," National Semiconductor LB-22, June 1973.
- Carl T. Nelson, "Super Matched Bipolar Transistor Pair Sets New Standards for Drift and Noise," National Semiconductor AN-222, February 1979.

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