







Voltage-Current Relationship in a Capacitor

Current and voltage in a capacitor are not in phase with each other. For sinusoidal waves, the voltage across a capacitor lags the current through it by 90°. (In other words, the current leads the voltage by 90°.) In the diagram below, the tall purple waveform represents the current through a capacitor and the shorter blue waveform represents the voltage across a capacitor.







Solving Source Free RC Circuits

Assume the solution is of the form $v(t) = Ae^{st}$ where A and s are the constants that need to be solved for.

Substitute $v(t) = Ae^{st}$ into the equation: $\frac{dv(t)}{dt} + \frac{v(t)}{RC} = 0$

$$v_{C}(t) = V_{C0}e^{\frac{t}{RC}} = V_{C0}e^{-\frac{t}{\tau}}$$

Time Constant

The term *RC* is called the **time constant** and is denoted by the symbol τ (*tau*).

 $\tau_C = RC$ Units: seconds

One time constant is defined as the amount of time required for the output to go from its initial value V(0) to 36.8% of its initial value.

$$e^{-1} = 0.368$$

1st Order Response Observations

- The voltage across a capacitor is the same *prior to* and *after* a switch at *t* = 0 seconds because this quantity cannot change instantaneously.
- Resistor voltage (or current) prior to the switch v(0⁻) can be different from the voltage (or current) after the switch v(0⁺).
- *All* voltages and *all* currents in an RC circuit follow the same natural response $e^{-t/\tau}$.







Procedure for Solving First-Order Circuits

- 1. Identify the variable of interest for the circuit. For RC circuits, it is best to choose the capacitive voltage.
- 2. Determine the initial value of the variable at t = 0. Note that if you choose capacitor voltage, it is not necessary to distinguish between $t = 0^-$ and $t = 0^+$ because this variable is time-wise continuous.
- 3. Calculate the final value of the variable as $t \rightarrow \infty$.
- 4. Calculate the time constant of the circuit.







