

FAQ

How do I determine what bandwidth of scope I require for my application?

Solution: The bandwidth of a digital oscilloscope, often called analog bandwidth, refers to the bandwidth of the front-input amplifier of the oscilloscope and is equivalent to a low pass filter. Oscilloscope bandwidth is defined as the frequency at which the amplitude of the observed signal drops by -3dB (or drops to 70.7% of its actual value) as we increase the test signal's frequency as plotted on the amplitude-frequency characteristic curve (Figure 1).

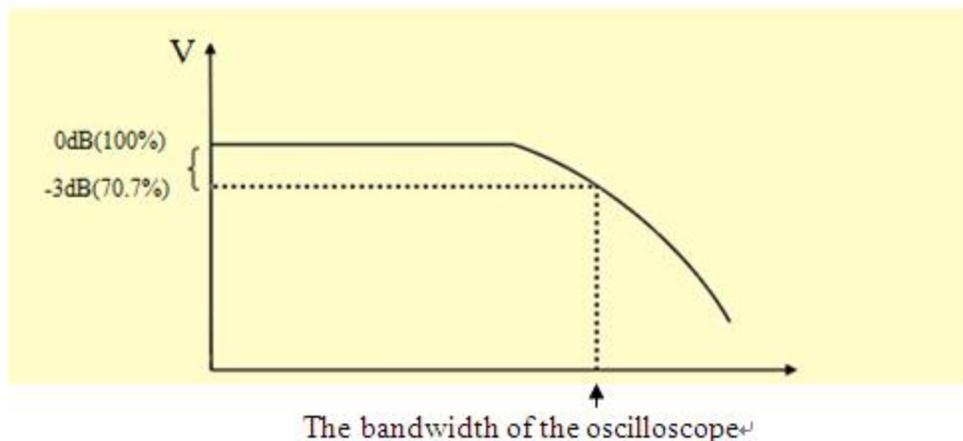


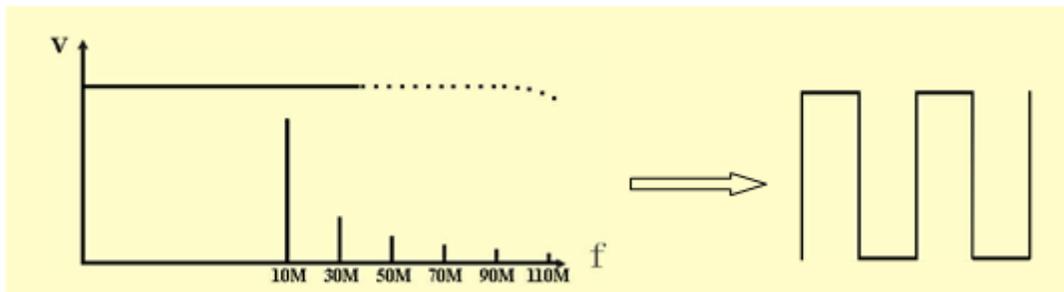
Figure 1: The amplitude-frequency characteristic curve.

If the input signal is a sine wave, the bandwidth of the oscilloscope must be equal to or greater than the fundamental frequency of the input signal. For a non-sinusoidal waveforms (square waves, pulses, digital communications, etc..), a bandwidth 5 or more times the fundamental frequency is an adequate starting point but may be too low for precise rise time measurements. A bandwidth of 10 times the fundamental frequency (1st order harmonic) may be more appropriate.

The frequency content (or bandwidth) of the waveform affects the measurement in two ways:

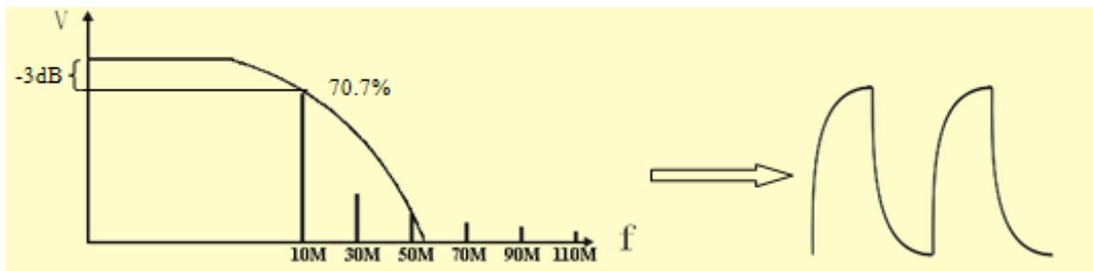
1. The higher order harmonics are filtered due to the low bandwidth, and the original waveform shape distorts, becoming similar to a sine wave.
2. The displayed and measured rise time will be distorted and the amplitude will error will increase.

Figure 2 is a 10 MHz square wave, which is displayed on a 200 MHz bandwidth and a 10 MHz bandwidth oscilloscope.



200MHz Bandwidth oscilloscope

Correct



10MHz Bandwidth oscilloscope

Distortion

Figure 2: A 10MHz square wave viewed on a 200MHz bandwidth oscilloscope vs a 10MHz oscilloscopes. Note how the 10MHz scope attenuates higher frequency components Which distorts the waveform as viewed on the instrument.

Rise time is typically defined as the length of time it takes for the signal to go from 10% to 90% of its maximum value.



Figure 3 Rise Time

The rise time measurement capability of an oscilloscope is directly related to its bandwidth.

The relationship is as follows:

$$T (\text{rise}) = 0.35 / \text{oscilloscope bandwidth (below 1 GHz)}$$

The measurement error can be easily calculated. Let's take a look at a 100MHz bandwidth, 3.5 ns rise time square wave as it would be measured by a 100 MHz bandwidth oscilloscope:

$$\text{The rise time of the 100 MHz oscilloscope} = 0.35/100\text{MHz} = 3.5 \text{ ns}$$

$$\text{The rise time of input signal} = \sqrt{(3.5\text{nS})^2 + (3.5\text{nS})^2} = 4.95\text{nS}$$

$$\text{Measurement error} = (4.95 \text{ ns} - 3.5 \text{ ns}) / 3.5 \text{ ns} = 0.414 = 41\%$$



To improve the accuracy of measurement, let's perform the same calculations, but this time, let's select an oscilloscope with a bandwidth that is 5 times higher:

The rise time of 500 MHz oscilloscope = $0.35/500\text{MHz} = 0.7 \text{ ns}$

The displayed signal rise time = $\sqrt{(3.5\text{nS})^2 + (0.7\text{nS})^2} = 3.569\text{nS}$

Measuring error = $(3.569 \text{ ns} - 3.5 \text{ ns}) / 3.5 \text{ ns} = 0.0198 = 2\%$

This is sometimes referred to as the five times rule of the oscilloscope bandwidth selection:

The required bandwidth of a oscilloscope = the highest frequency component of the measured signal x 5

The measurement error of an oscilloscope using the five times rules will be less than $\pm 2\%$, which is enough for most measurements.



For more information, check the [SDS Series Webpage](#), or contact your local Siglent office.

America

SIGLENT Technologies America, Inc

6557 Cochran Rd Solon, Ohio 44139

Tel: 440-398-5800

Toll Free: 877-515-5551

Fax: 440-399-1211

info@siglent.com

www.siglentamerica.com

Headquarter

SIGLENT TECHNOLOGIES CO., LTD.

Blog No.4 & No.5, Antongda Industrial Zone, 3rd Liuxian Road, Bao'an District, Shenzhen, 518101, China.

Tel: + 86 755 3661 5186

Fax: + 86 755 3359 1582

sales@siglent.com

www.siglent.com/ens

Europe

SIGLENT TECHNOLOGIES EUROPE GmbH

Liebigstrasse 2-20, Gebaeude 14, 22113 Hamburg Germany

Tel: +49(0)40-819-95946

Fax: +49(0)40-819-95947

info-eu@siglent.com

www.siglenteu.com

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