

Electronic Devices and Circuits

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction to Electronics

The atom, materials used in electronics, current in semiconductors, *N*-Type and *P*-Type semiconductors, the *PN* Junction.

Chapter 2: Diodes and applications

Diode operation, voltage-current (*V-I*) characteristics, diode models, half-wave rectifiers, full-wave rectifiers, power supply filters and regulators, diode limiters and clampers, voltage multipliers.

Chapter 3: Special-Purpose Diodes

The zener diode, zener diode applications, the varactor diode, optical diodes, other types of diodes.

Chapter 4: Bipolar Junction Transistors (BJTs)

Bipolar junction transistor (BJT) structure, basic BJT operation, BJT characteristics and parameters, The BJT as an amplifier, the BJT as a switch, the phototransistor, transistor categories and packaging.

Chapter 5: Transistor Bias Circuits

The DC operating point, voltage-divider bias, other bias methods.

Chapter 6: BJT Amplifiers

Amplifier operation, transistor AC models, the common-emitter amplifier, the common-collector amplifier, the common-base amplifier, multistage amplifiers, the differential amplifier.

Chapter 7: Power Amplifiers

The class A power amplifier, the class B and class AB push-pull amplifiers, the class C amplifier.

Chapter 8: Field-Effect Transistors (FETs)

The JFET, JFET characteristics and parameters, JFET biasing, the ohmic region, the MOSFET, MOSFET characteristics and parameters, MOSFET biasing, the IGBT.

Chapter 9: FET Amplifiers and Switching Circuits

The common-source amplifier, the common-drain amplifier, the common-gate amplifier, the class D amplifier, MOSFET analog switching, MOSFET digital switching.

Chapter 10: Amplifier Frequency Response

Basic concepts, the decibel, low-frequency amplifier response, high-frequency amplifier response, total amplifier frequency response, frequency response of multistage amplifiers.

Chapter 11: Thyristors

The four-layer diode, the silicon-controlled rectifier (SCR), SCR applications, the diac and triac, the silicon-controlled switch (SCS), the unijunction transistor (UJT), the programmable unijunction transistor (PUT).

Chapter 12: The Operational Amplifier

Introduction to operational amplifiers, Op-Amp input modes and parameters, negative feedback, Op-Amps with negative feedback, effects of negative feedback on Op-Amp impedances, bias current and offset voltage, open-loop frequency and phase responses, closed-loop frequency response.

Chapter 13: Basic Op-Amp Circuits

Comparators, summing amplifiers, integrators and differentiators.

Chapter 14: Special-Purpose Op-Amp Circuits

Instrumentation amplifiers, isolation amplifiers, operational transconductance amplifiers (OTAs), log and antilog amplifiers, converters and other Op-Amp circuits.

Chapter 15: Active Filters

Basic filter responses, filter response characteristics, active low-pass filters, active high-pass filters, active band-pass filters, active band-stop filters, filter response measurements.

Chapter 16: Oscillators

The oscillator, feedback oscillators, oscillators with *RC* feedback circuits, oscillators with *LC* feedback circuits, relaxation oscillators, the 555 timer as an oscillator.

Chapter 17: Voltage Regulators

Voltage regulation, basic linear series regulators, basic linear shunt regulators, basic switching regulators, integrated circuit voltage regulators, integrated circuit voltage regulator configurations.

Textbook:

Thomas L. Floyd, Electronic Devices: Electron Flow Version, 9th edition, Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 2012.

References:

1. R. Boylestad., and L. Nashelsky, Electronic Devices and Circuit Theory. 11th edition, Pearson Education Limited, London, 2014.
2. Horowitz and Hill, The Art of Electronics, 2nd edition, Cambridge University Press, 1989.
3. A. Malvino, and D. J. Bates, Electronic principle, McGraw Hill, 7th edition, 2005.

Chapter 1: Introduction to Electronics

Electronic devices such as diodes, transistors, and integrated circuits are made of a semiconductive material. To understand how these devices work, we should have a basic knowledge of the structure of atoms and the interaction of atomic particles. An important concept introduced in this chapter is that of the *pn* junction that is formed when two different types of semiconductive material are joined. The *pn* junction is fundamental to the operation of devices such as the solar cell, the diode, and certain types of transistors.

1.1 The Atom

All matter is composed of atoms; all atoms consist of electrons, protons, and neutrons except normal hydrogen, which does not have a neutron. Each element in the periodic table has a unique atomic structure, and all atoms within a given element have the same number of protons. At first, the atom was thought to be a tiny indivisible sphere. Later it was shown that the atom was not a single particle but was made up of a small dense nucleus around which electrons orbit at great distances from the nucleus, similar to the way planets orbit the sun. Niels Bohr proposed that the electrons in an atom circle the nucleus in different orbits, similar to the way planets orbit the sun in our *solar system*. The Bohr model is often referred to as the *planetary model*. The Bohr model is sufficient and commonly used for most practical purposes in electronics because it is easy to visualize.

The Bohr Model

An atom is the smallest particle of an element that retains the characteristics of that element. Each of the known 118 elements has atoms that are *different* from the atoms of all other elements. This gives each element a unique atomic structure. According to the classical Bohr model, atoms have a planetary type of structure that consists of a central nucleus surrounded by orbiting electrons, as illustrated in Figure 1–1. The nucleus consists of positively charged particles called protons and uncharged particles called neutrons. The basic particles of negative charge are called electrons.

Each type of atom has a certain number of electrons and protons that distinguishes it from the atoms of all other elements. For example, the simplest atom is that of hydrogen (H), which has *one* proton and *one* electron, as shown in Figure 1–2(a). As another example, the helium atom (He), shown in Figure 1–2(b), has *two* protons and *two* neutrons in the nucleus and *two* electrons orbiting the nucleus.

Atomic Number

All elements are arranged in the periodic table of the elements in order according to their atomic number. The atomic number equals the number of protons in the nucleus, which is the same as the number of electrons in an electrically balanced (neutral) atom. For example, hydrogen has an

atomic number of 1 and helium has an atomic number of 2. In their normal (or neutral) state, all atoms of a given element have the same number of electrons as protons; the positive charges *cancel* the negative charges, and the atom has a *net charge of zero*.

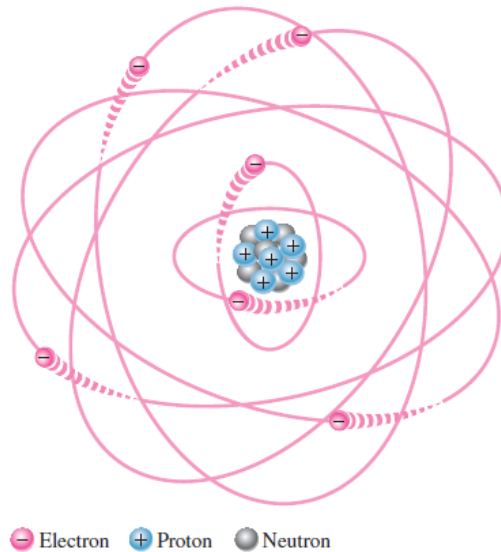


FIGURE 1–1: The Bohr model of an atom showing electrons in orbits around the nucleus, which consists of protons and neutrons. The “tails” on the electrons indicate motion.

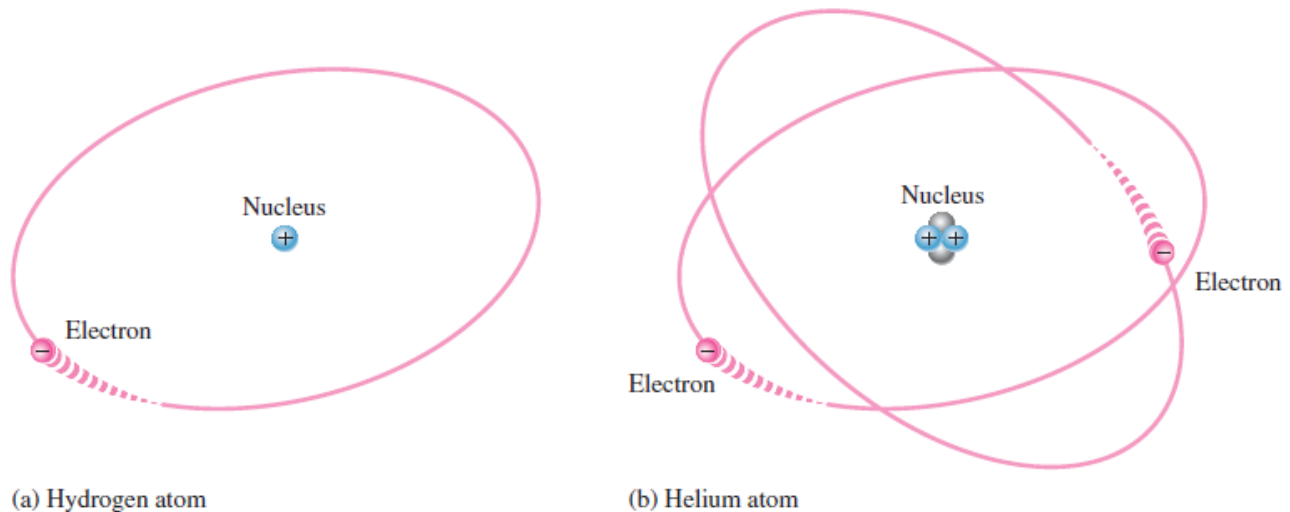


FIGURE 1–2: Two simple atoms, hydrogen and helium.

Electrons and Shells

Energy Levels Electrons orbit the nucleus of an atom at certain distances from the nucleus. Electrons near the nucleus have less energy than those in more distant orbits. Only discrete (separate and distinct) values of electron energies exist within atomic structures. Therefore, electrons must orbit only at discrete distances from the nucleus.

Each discrete distance (**orbit**) from the nucleus corresponds to a certain energy level. In an atom, the orbits are grouped into energy levels known as **shells**. A given atom has a *fixed number* of shells. Each shell has a *fixed maximum number* of electrons. The shells (energy levels) are

designated 1, 2, 3, and so on, with 1 being closest to the nucleus. The Bohr model of the silicon atom is shown in Figure 1–3. Notice that there are 14 electrons and 14 each of protons and neutrons in the nucleus.

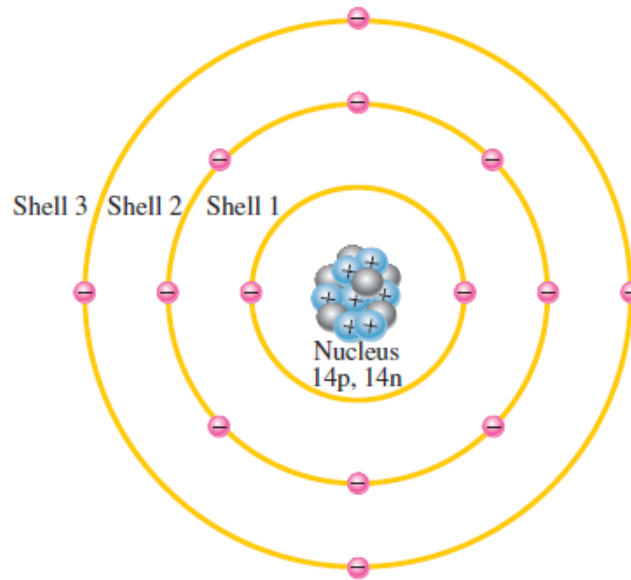


FIGURE 1–3: Illustration of the Bohr model of the silicon atom.

The Maximum Number of Electrons in Each Shell The maximum number of electrons (N_e) that can exist in each shell of an atom is a fact of nature and can be calculated by the formula,

$$N_e = 2n^2 \quad \text{Equation 1-1}$$

where n is the number of the shell. The maximum number of electrons that can exist in the innermost shell (shell 1) is

$$N_e = 2(n)^2 = 2(1)^2 = 2$$

The maximum number of electrons that can exist in shell 2 is

$$N_e = 2(n)^2 = 2(2)^2 = 8$$

The maximum number of electrons that can exist in shell 3 is

$$N_e = 2(n)^2 = 2(3)^2 = 18$$

The maximum number of electrons that can exist in shell 4 is

$$N_e = 2(n)^2 = 2(4)^2 = 32$$

Valence Electrons

Electrons that are in orbits farther from the nucleus have higher energy and are less tightly bound to the atom than those closer to the nucleus. This is because the *force of attraction* between the positively charged nucleus and the negatively charged electron *decreases* with increasing distance from the nucleus. Electrons with the highest energy exist in the outermost shell of an atom and are relatively loosely bound to the atom. **This outermost shell is known as the valence shell and**

electrons in this shell are called **valence electrons**. These valence electrons contribute to chemical reactions and bonding within the structure of a material and determine its electrical properties. When a valence electron gains sufficient energy from an external source, it can break free from its atom. This is the basis for *conduction in materials*.

Ionization

When an atom absorbs energy from a *heat source* or from *light*, for example, the energies of the electrons are raised. The valence electrons possess more energy and are more loosely bound to the atom than inner electrons, so they can easily jump to higher energy shells when *external energy* is absorbed by the atom.

If a valence electron acquires a sufficient amount of energy, called **ionization energy**, it can actually escape from the outer shell and the atom's influence. The departure of a valence electron leaves a *previously neutral atom* with an *excess* of positive charge (more protons than electrons). The process of losing a valence electron is known as **ionization**, and the resulting positively charged atom is called a **positive ion**. For example, the chemical symbol for hydrogen is H. When a neutral hydrogen atom loses its valence electron and becomes a positive ion, it is designated H^+ . The escaped valence electron is called a **free electron**.

The reverse process can occur in certain atoms when a free electron collides with the atom and is captured, releasing energy. The atom that has acquired the extra electron is called a **negative ion**. The ionization process is not restricted to single atoms. In many chemical reactions, a group of atoms that are bonded together can lose or acquire one or more electrons.

For some nonmetallic materials such as chlorine, a free electron can be captured by the neutral atom, forming a negative ion. In the case of chlorine, the ion is more stable than the neutral atom because it has a filled outer shell. The chlorine ion is designated as Cl^- .

1.2 Materials Used in Electronics

Materials can be classified in terms of their electrical properties into three groups: **conductors**, **semiconductors**, and **insulators**. When atoms combine to form a solid, crystalline material, they arrange themselves in a symmetrical pattern. The atoms within the crystal structure are held together by covalent bonds, which are created by the interaction of the valence electrons of the atoms. Silicon is a crystalline material.

Insulators, Conductors, and Semiconductors

All materials are made up of atoms. These atoms contribute to the electrical properties of a material, including its ability to conduct electrical current. For purposes of discussing electrical properties, an atom can be represented by the **valence shell** and a **core** that consists of all the

inner shells and the nucleus. This concept is illustrated in Figure 1–4 for a carbon atom. Carbon is used in some types of electrical resistors. The carbon atom has four electrons in the valence shell and two electrons in the inner shell. The nucleus consists of six protons and six neutrons, so the +6 indicates the positive charge of the six protons. The core has a net charge of +4 (+6 for the nucleus and -2 for the two inner-shell electrons).

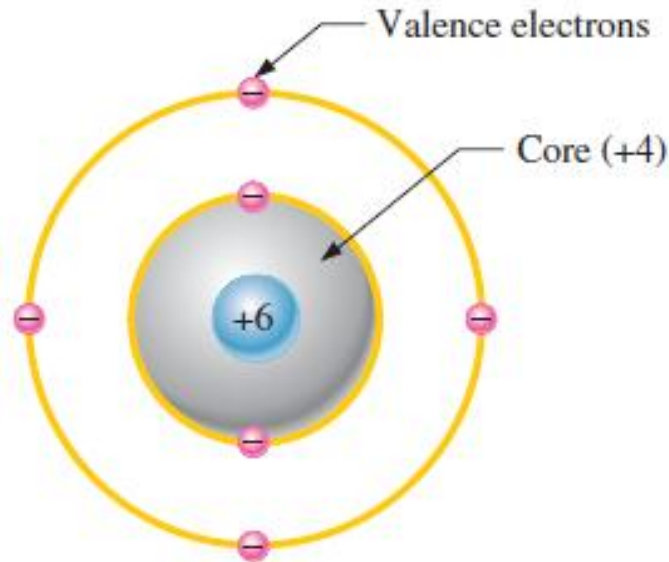


FIGURE 1–4: Diagram of a carbon atom.

Insulators An **insulator** is a material that *does not conduct* electrical current under normal conditions. Most good insulators are *compounds* rather than single-element materials and have *very high resistivities*. Valence electrons are *tightly bound* to the atoms; therefore, there are very few free electrons in an insulator. Examples of insulators are rubber, plastics, glass, mica, and quartz.

Conductors A **conductor** is a material that *easily conducts* electrical current. Most metals are **good conductors**. The best conductors are *single-element* materials, such as copper (Cu), silver (Ag), gold (Au), and aluminum (Al), which are characterized by atoms with only one valence electron *very loosely bound* to the atom. These loosely bound valence electrons become *free electrons*. Therefore, in a conductive material the free electrons are *valence electrons*.

Semiconductors A **semiconductor** is a material that is between **conductors** and **insulators** in its ability to conduct electrical current. A semiconductor in its pure (intrinsic) state is neither a good conductor nor a good insulator. *Single-element semiconductors* are antimony (Sb), arsenic (As), astatine (At), boron (B), polonium (Po), tellurium (Te), silicon (Si), and germanium (Ge). *Compound semiconductors* such as gallium arsenide, indium phosphide, gallium nitride, silicon carbide, and silicon germanium are also commonly used. The single-element semiconductors are *characterized by* atoms with four valence electrons. Silicon is the most commonly used semiconductor.

Band Gap

Recall that the *valence shell* of an atom represents a *band of energy levels* and that the valence electrons are *confined to* that band. When an electron acquires enough additional energy, it can leave the valence shell, become a *free electron*, and exist in what is known as the *conduction band*.

The *difference* in energy between the valence band and the conduction band is called an *energy gap* or *band gap*. This is the amount of energy that a valence electron must have in order to jump from the valence band to the conduction band. Once in the conduction band, the electron is free to move throughout the material and is not tied to any given atom.

Figure 1–5 shows energy diagrams for insulators, semiconductors, and conductors. The energy gap or band gap is the difference between two energy levels and is a region in insulators and semiconductors where no electron states exist. Although an electron may not exist in this region, it can “jump” across it under certain conditions. For insulators, the gap can be crossed only when breakdown conditions occur as when a *very high voltage* is applied across the material. The band gap is illustrated in Figure 1–5(a) for insulators. In semiconductors the band gap is *smaller*, allowing an electron in the valence band to jump into the conduction band *if it absorbs a photon*. The band gap depends on the semiconductor material. This is illustrated in Figure 1–5(b). In conductors, the conduction band and valence band *overlap*, so *there is no gap*, as shown in Figure 1–5(c). This means that electrons in the valence band move freely into the conduction band, so there are always electrons available as free electrons.

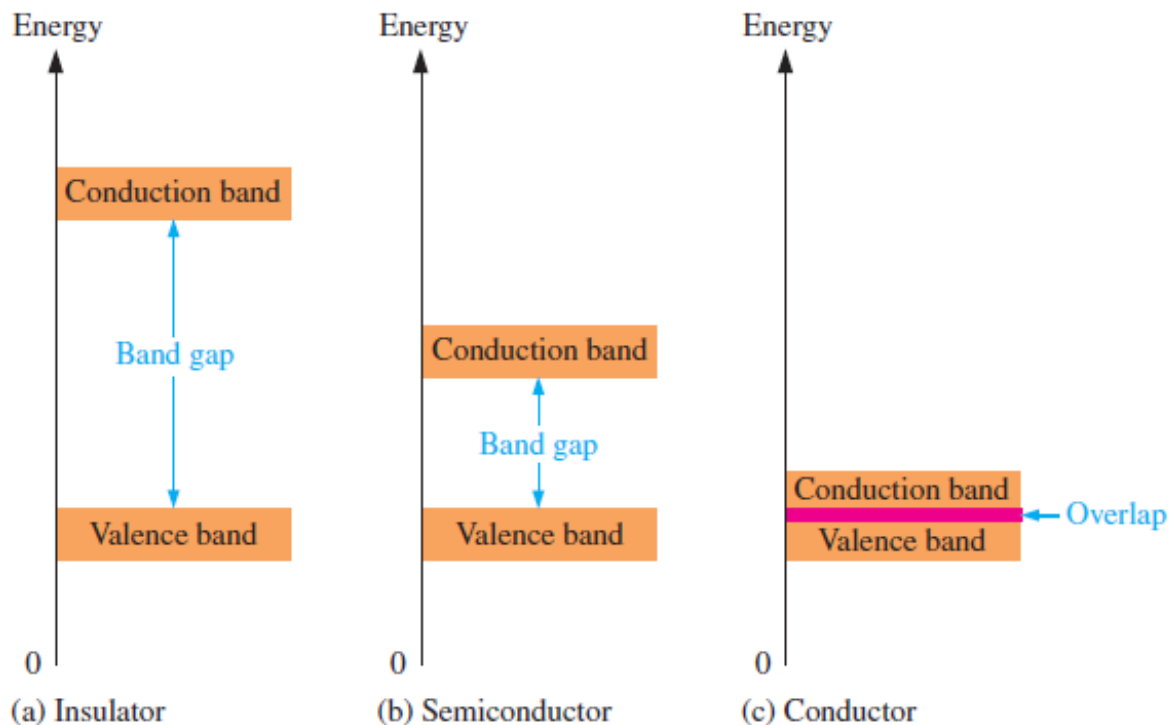


FIGURE 1–5: Energy diagrams for the three types of materials.

Comparison of a Semiconductor Atom to a Conductor Atom

Silicon is a semiconductor and copper is a conductor. Bohr diagrams of the silicon atom and the copper atom are shown in Figure 1–6. The core of the silicon atom has a net charge of +4 (14 protons -10 electrons) and the core of the copper atom has a net charge of +1 (29 protons -28 electrons). The core includes everything except the valence electrons.

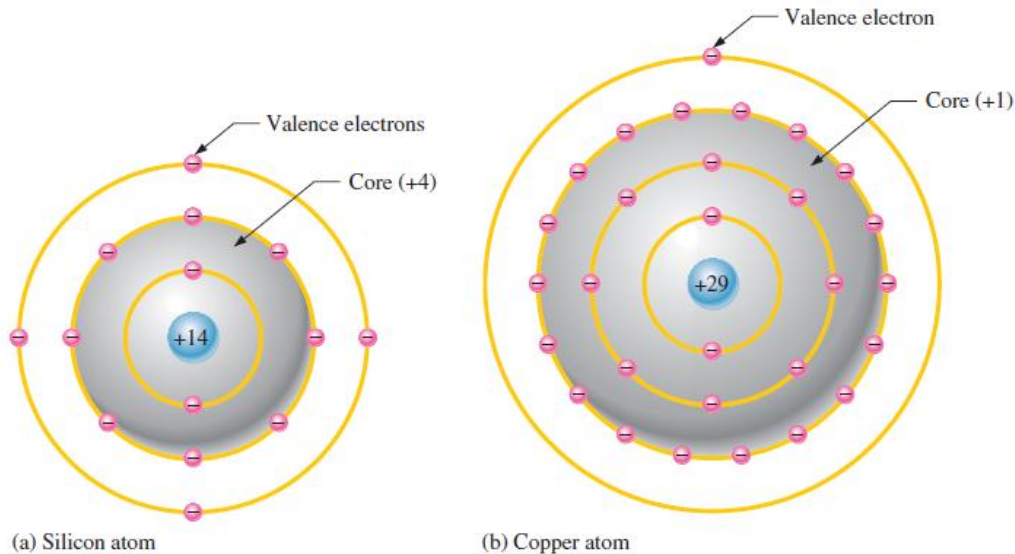


FIGURE 1–6: Bohr diagrams of the silicon and copper atoms.

The valence electron in the copper atom “feels” an attractive force of +1 compared to a valence electron in the silicon atom which “feels” an attractive force of +4. Therefore, there is more force trying to hold a valence electron to the atom in silicon than in copper. The copper’s valence electron is in the fourth shell, which is a greater distance from its nucleus than the silicon’s valence electron in the third shell. Recall that electrons farthest from the nucleus have the most energy. The valence electron in copper has more energy than the valence electron in silicon. This means that it is easier for valence electrons in copper to acquire enough additional energy to escape from their atoms and become free electrons than it is in silicon. In fact, large numbers of valence electrons in copper already have sufficient energy to be free electrons at normal room temperature.

Silicon and Germanium

The atomic structures of silicon and germanium are compared in Figure 1–7. **Silicon is used in diodes, transistors, integrated circuits, and other semiconductor devices. Both silicon and germanium have the characteristic four valence electrons.**

The valence electrons in germanium are in the fourth shell while those in silicon are in the third shell, closer to the nucleus. This means that the germanium valence electrons are at higher energy levels than those in silicon and, therefore, require a smaller amount of additional energy to escape

from the atom. This property makes germanium *more unstable* at high temperatures and results in *excessive reverse current*. This is why silicon is a more widely used semiconductive material.

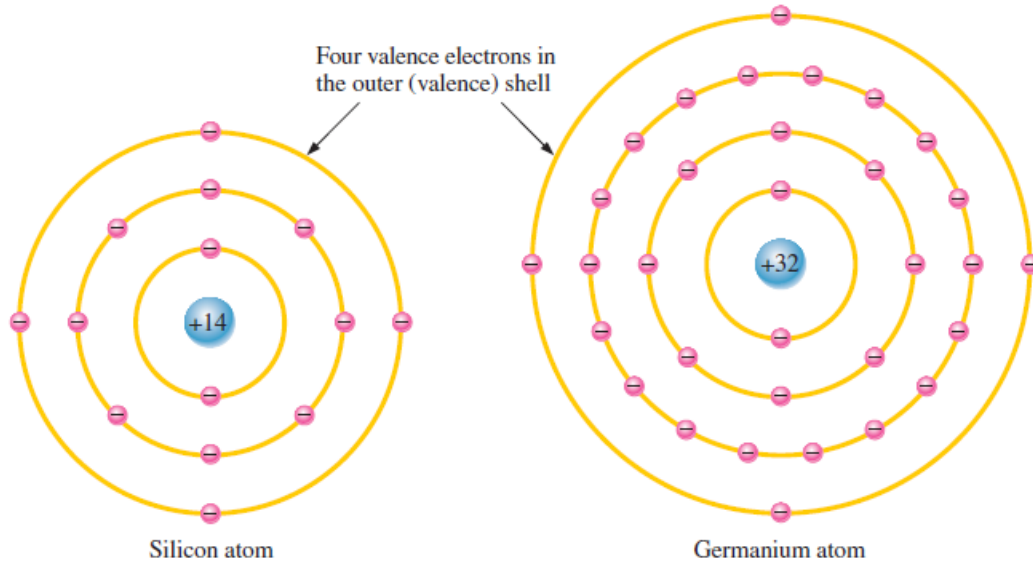


FIGURE 1-7: Diagrams of the silicon and germanium atoms.

Covalent Bonds Figure 1-8 shows how each silicon atom positions itself with four adjacent silicon atoms to form a silicon crystal. A silicon (Si) atom with its four valence electrons *shares* an electron with each of its four neighbors. This effectively creates *eight shared valence electrons* for each atom and produces a state of chemical stability. Also, this sharing of valence electrons produces the **covalent** bonds that hold the atoms together; each valence electron is attracted equally by the two adjacent atoms which share it. Covalent bonding in an intrinsic silicon crystal is shown in Figure 1-9. An **intrinsic** crystal is one that has no impurities. Covalent bonding for germanium is similar because it also has four valence electrons.

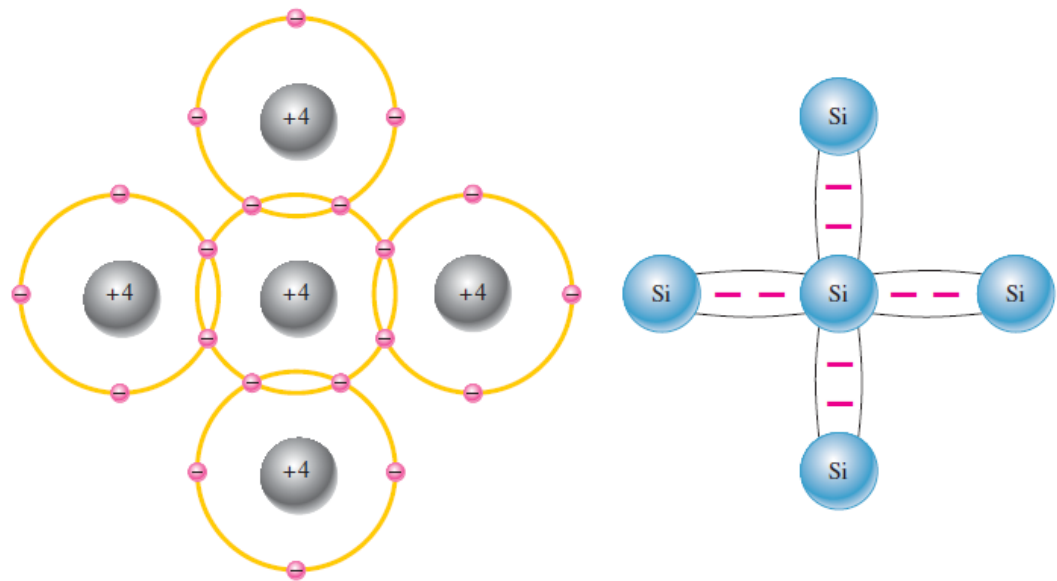


FIGURE 1-8: Illustration of Covalent bonds in silicon.

(a) The center silicon atom shares an electron with each of the four surrounding silicon atoms, creating a covalent bond with each. The surrounding atoms are in turn bonded to other atoms, and so on.

(b) Bonding diagram. The red negative signs represent the shared valence electrons.

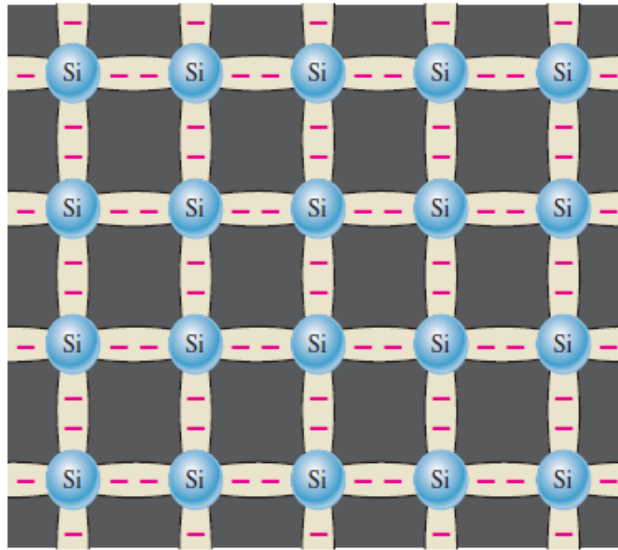


FIGURE 1–9: Covalent bonds in a silicon crystal.

1.3 Current in Semiconductors

The way a material conducts electrical current is important in understanding how electronic devices operate. We can't really understand the operation of a device such as a diode or transistor without knowing something about current in semiconductors.

As we have learned, the electrons of an atom can exist only within prescribed energy bands. Each shell around the nucleus corresponds to a certain energy band and is separated from adjacent shells by band gaps, in which no electrons can exist. Figure 1–10 shows the energy band diagram for an unexcited (no external energy such as heat) atom in a pure silicon crystal. This condition occurs *only* at a temperature of absolute 0 Kelvin.

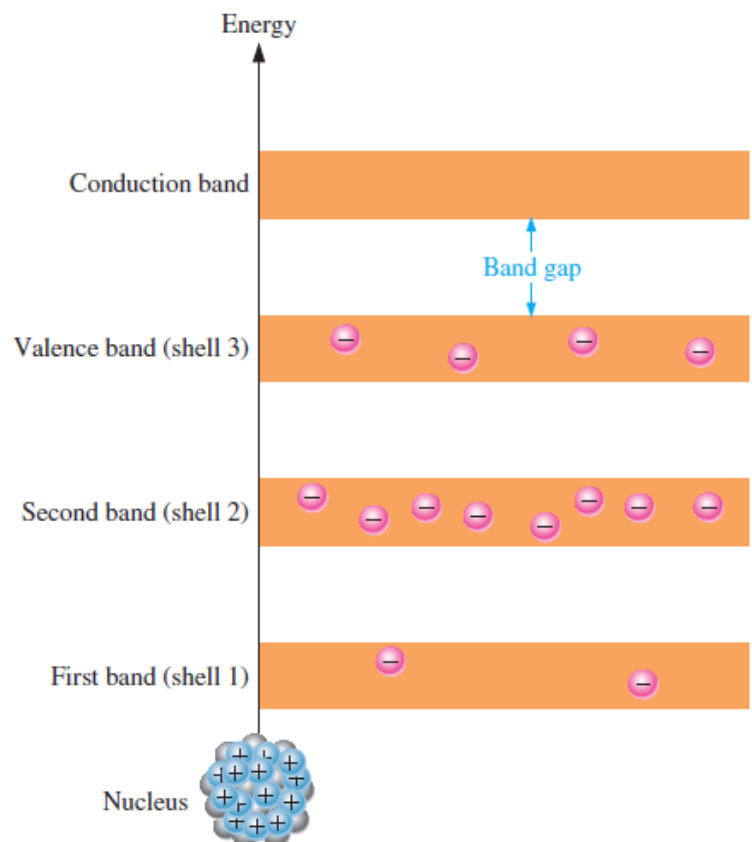


FIGURE 1–10: Energy band diagram for an unexcited atom in a pure (intrinsic) silicon crystal. There are no electrons in the conduction band.

Conduction Electrons and Holes

An intrinsic (pure) silicon crystal at room temperature has sufficient heat (thermal) energy for some valence electrons to jump the gap from the valence band into the conduction band, becoming free electrons. Free electrons are also called **conduction electrons**. This is illustrated in the energy diagram of Figure 1–11(a) and in the bonding diagram of Figure 1–11(b).

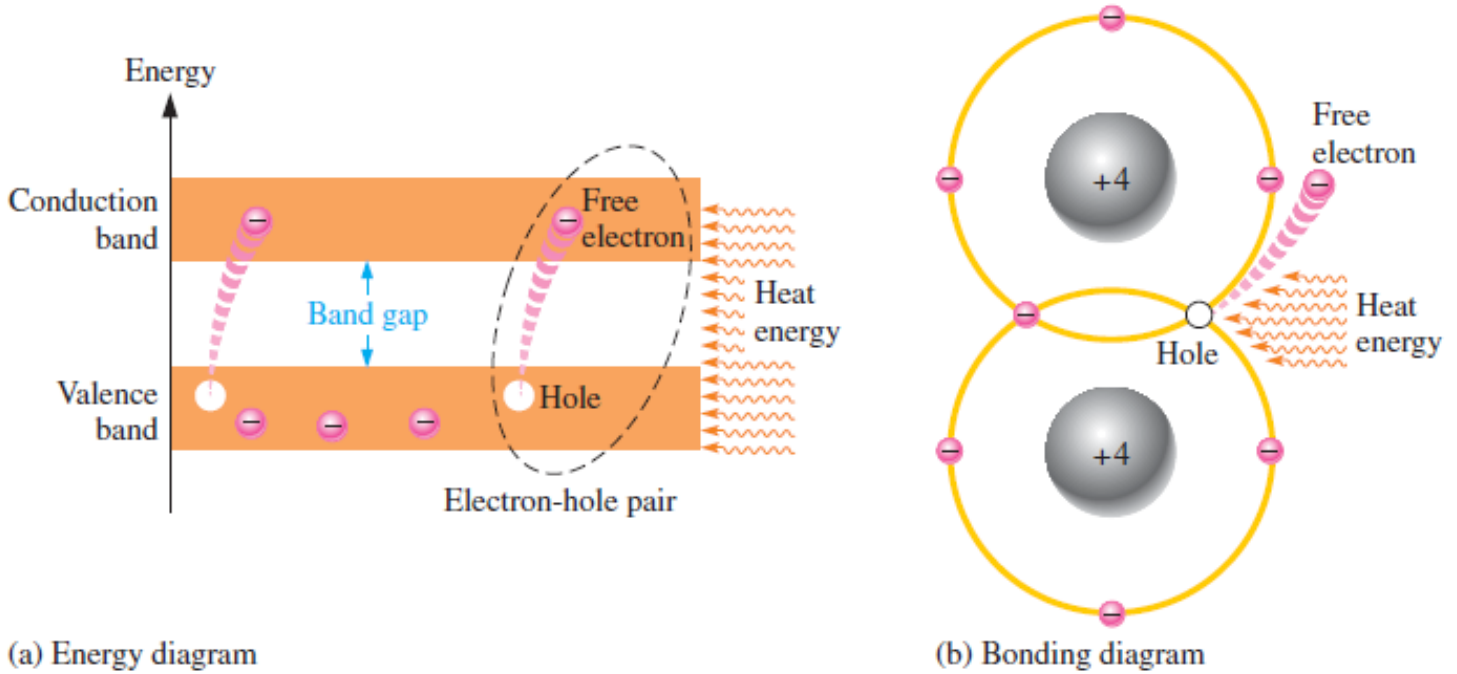
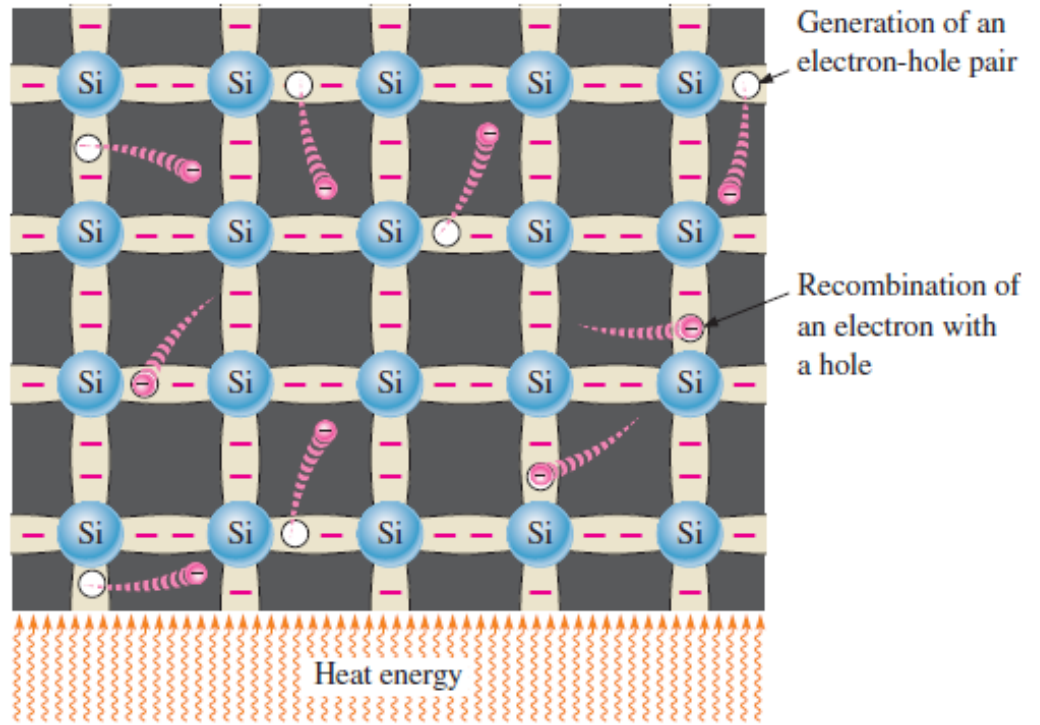


FIGURE 1–11: Creation of electron-hole pairs in a silicon crystal. Electrons in the conduction band are free electrons.

When an electron jumps to the conduction band, a vacancy is left in the valence band within the crystal. This vacancy is called a **hole**. For every electron raised to the conduction band by external energy, there is one hole left in the valence band, creating what is called an **electron-hole pair**. **Recombination** occurs when a conduction-band electron loses energy and falls back into a hole in the valence band.

To summarize, a piece of intrinsic silicon at room temperature has, at any instant, a number of conduction-band (free) electrons that are unattached to any atom and are essentially drifting randomly throughout the material. There is also an equal number of holes in the valence band created when these electrons jump into the conduction band. This is illustrated in Figure 1–12.

FIGURE 1–12: Electron-hole pairs in a silicon crystal. Free electrons are being generated continuously while some recombine with holes.



Electron and Hole Current

When a voltage is applied across a piece of intrinsic silicon, as shown in Figure 1-13, the thermally generated free electrons in the conduction band, which are free to move randomly in the crystal structure, are now easily attracted toward the positive end. **This movement of free electrons is one type of current in a semiconductive material and is called *electron current*.**

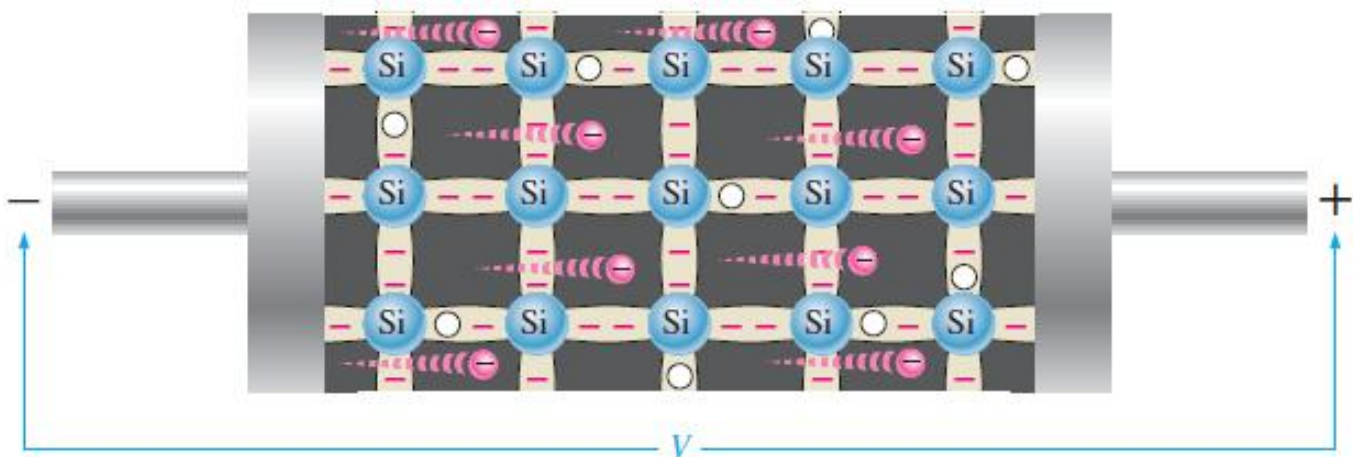


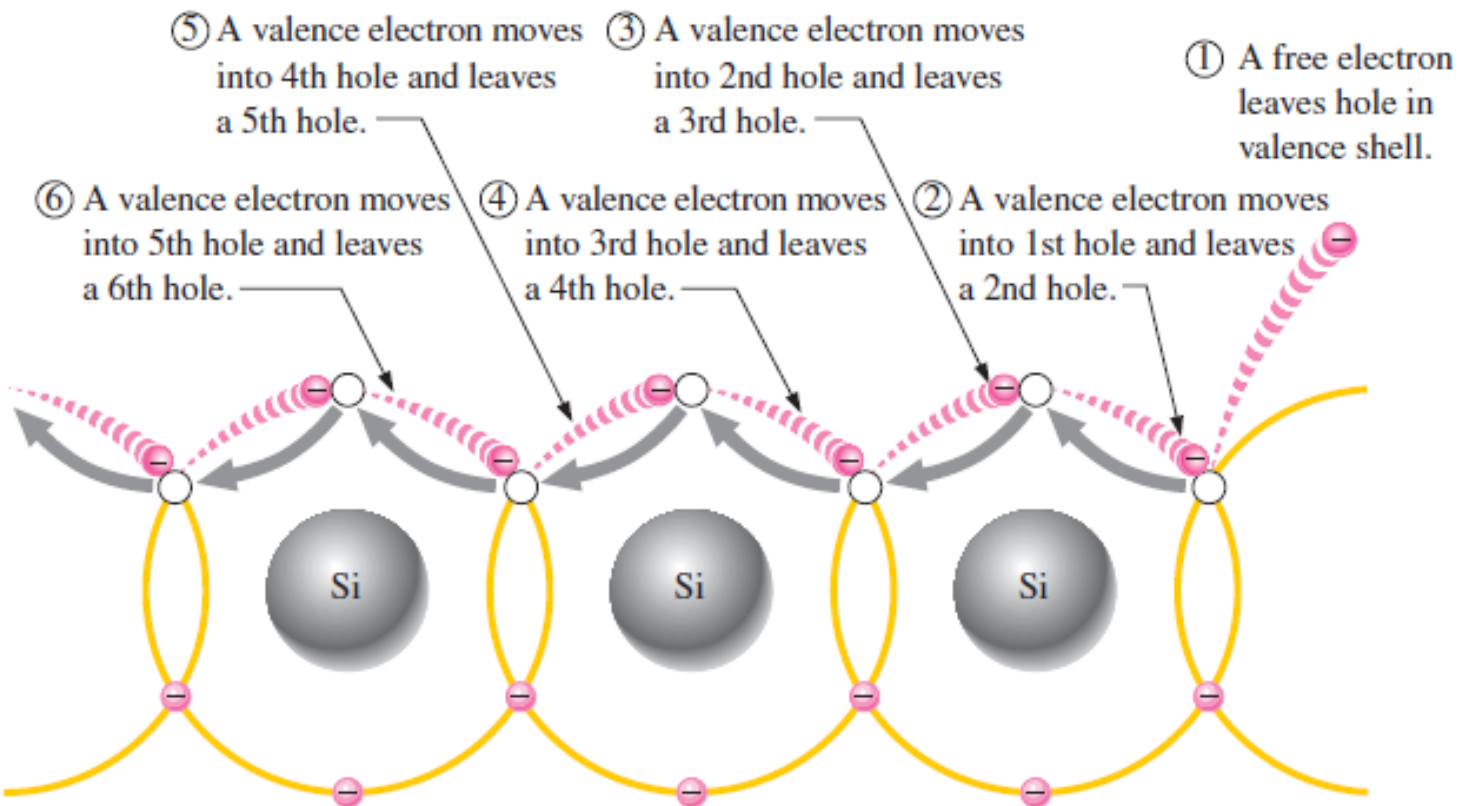
FIGURE 1–13: Electron current in intrinsic silicon is produced by the movement of thermally generated free electrons.

Another type of current occurs in the valence band, where the holes created by the free electrons exist. Electrons remaining in the valence band are still attached to their atoms and are not free to move randomly in the crystal structure as are the free electrons. However, a valence electron can move into a nearby hole with little change in its energy level, thus leaving another hole where it came from. Effectively the hole has moved from one place to another in the crystal structure, as

illustrated in Figure 1–14. Although current in the valence band is produced by valence electrons, it is called *hole current* to distinguish it from electron current in the conduction band.

As we have seen, *conduction in semiconductors* is considered to be either the movement of free electrons in the conduction band or the movement of holes in the valence band, which is actually the movement of valence electrons to nearby atoms, creating hole current in the opposite direction.

It is interesting to contrast the two types of charge movement in a semiconductor with the charge movement in a metallic conductor, such as copper. Copper atoms form a different type of crystal in which the atoms are not covalently bonded to each other but consist of a “sea” of positive ion cores, which are atoms stripped of their valence electrons. The valence electrons are attracted to the positive ions, keeping the positive ions together and forming the metallic bond. The valence electrons do not belong to a given atom, but to the crystal as a whole. Since the valence electrons in copper are free to move, the application of a voltage results in current. There is only one type of current—the movement of free electrons—because there are no “holes” in the metallic crystal structure.



When a valence electron moves left to right to fill a hole while leaving another hole behind, the hole has effectively moved from right to left. Gray arrows indicate effective movement of a hole.

FIGURE 1–14: Hole current in intrinsic silicon.

1.4 N-Type and P-Type Semiconductors

Semiconductive materials do not conduct current well (poor conductors) and are of limited value in their intrinsic state. This is because of the limited number of free electrons in the conduction band and holes in the valence band. Therefore, semiconductive materials conductivity can be drastically increased by the controlled addition of impurities to the intrinsic (pure) semiconductive material. This process, called **doping**, increases the number of current carriers (electrons or holes).

Consequently, intrinsic silicon (or germanium) must be modified by increasing the number of free electrons or holes to increase its conductivity and make it useful in electronic devices by adding impurities to the intrinsic material. Two types of extrinsic (impure) semiconductive materials, *n*-type and *p*-type, are the key building blocks for most types of electronic devices.

N-Type Semiconductor

To increase the number of conduction-band electrons in intrinsic silicon, **pentavalent** impurity atoms are added. These are atoms with five valence electrons such as arsenic (As), phosphorus (P), bismuth (Bi), and antimony (Sb).

As illustrated in Figure 1–15, each pentavalent atom (antimony, in this case) forms covalent bonds with four adjacent silicon atoms. Four of the antimony atom's valence electrons are used to form the covalent bonds with silicon atoms, leaving one extra electron. This extra electron becomes a conduction electron because it is not involved in bonding. Because the pentavalent atom gives up an electron, it is often called a **donor atom**. The number of conduction electrons can be carefully controlled by the number of impurity atoms added to the silicon. A conduction electron created by this doping process **does not** leave a hole in the valence band because it is in excess of the number required to fill the valence band.

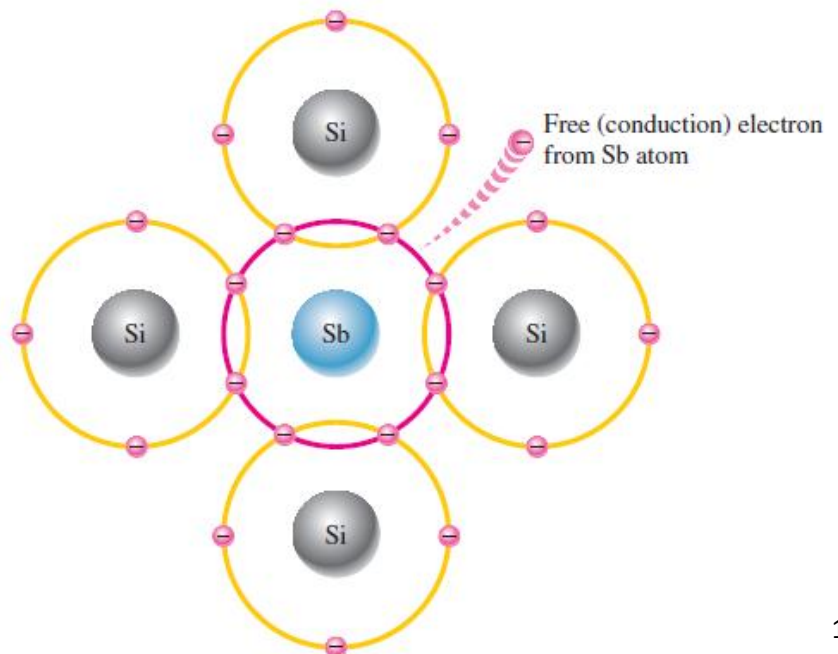


FIGURE 1–15: Pentavalent impurity atom in a silicon crystal structure. An antimony (Sb) impurity atom is shown in the center. The extra electron from the Sb atom becomes a free electron.

Majority and Minority Carriers Since most of the current carriers are electrons, silicon (or germanium) doped with pentavalent atoms is an *n*-type semiconductor (the *n* stands for the negative charge on an electron). **The electrons are called the majority carriers in *n*-type material.** Although the majority of current carriers in *n*-type material are electrons, there are also a few holes that are created when electron-hole pairs are thermally generated. These holes are ***not*** produced by the addition of the pentavalent impurity atoms. **Holes in an *n*-type material are called minority carriers.**

P-Type Semiconductor

To increase the number of holes in intrinsic silicon, **trivalent** impurity atoms are added. These are atoms with three valence electrons such as boron (B), indium (In), and gallium (Ga). As illustrated in Figure 1–16, each trivalent atom (boron, in this case) forms covalent bonds with four adjacent silicon atoms. **All three of the boron atom's valence electrons are used in the covalent bonds; and, since four electrons are required, a hole results when each trivalent atom is added. Because the trivalent atom can take an electron, it is often referred to as an *acceptor atom*.** The number of holes can be carefully controlled by the number of trivalent impurity atoms added to the silicon. A hole created by this doping process is ***not*** accompanied by a conduction (free) electron.

Majority and Minority Carriers Since most of the current carriers are holes, silicon (or germanium) doped with trivalent atoms is called a *p*-type semiconductor. The holes are the majority carriers in *p*-type material. Although the majority of current carriers in *p*-type material are holes, there are also a few conduction-band electrons that are created when electron-hole pairs are thermally generated. These conduction-band electrons are ***not*** produced by the addition of the trivalent impurity atoms. Conduction-band electrons in *p*-type material are the minority carriers.

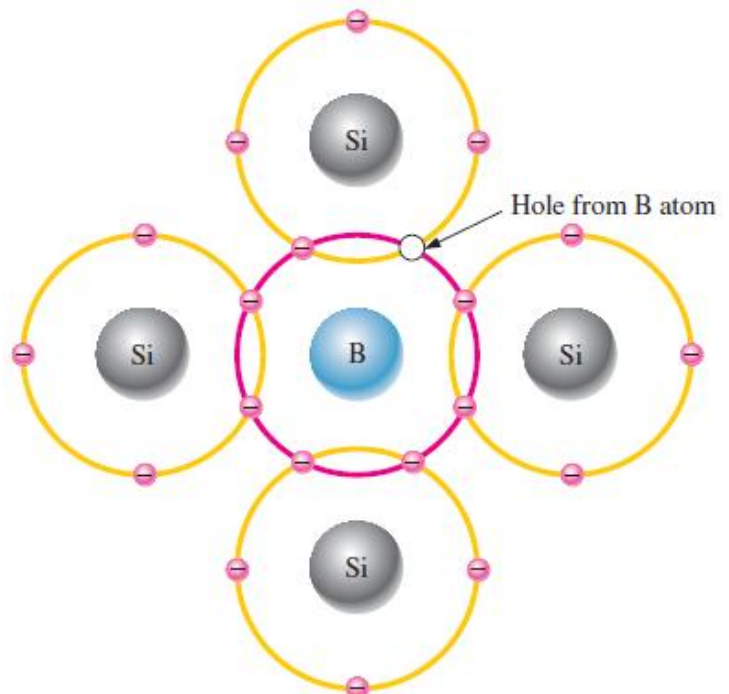


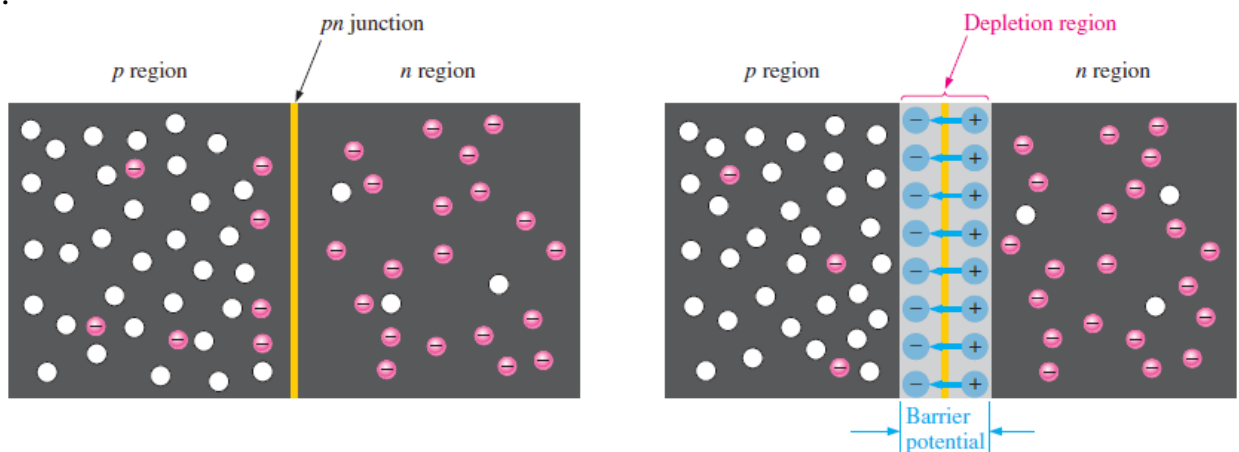
FIGURE 1–16: Trivalent impurity atom in a silicon crystal structure. A boron (B) impurity atom is shown in the center.

1.5 The PN Junction

A *p*-type material consists of silicon atoms and trivalent impurity atoms such as boron. The boron atom adds a hole when it bonds with the silicon atoms. However, since the number of protons and the number of electrons are equal throughout the material, there is no net charge in the material and so it is neutral.

An *n*-type silicon material consists of silicon atoms and pentavalent impurity atoms such as antimony. An impurity atom releases an electron when it bonds with four silicon atoms. Since there is still an equal number of protons and electrons (including the free electrons) throughout the material, there is no net charge in the material and so it is neutral.

If a piece of intrinsic silicon is doped so that part is *n*-type and the other part is *p*-type, a **pn junction** forms at the boundary between the two regions and a diode is created, as indicated in Figure 1–17(a). The *p* region has many holes (majority carriers) from the impurity atoms and only a few thermally generated free electrons (minority carriers). The *n* region has many free electrons (majority carriers) from the impurity atoms and only a few thermally generated holes (minority carriers).



(a) The basic silicon structure at the instant of junction formation showing only the majority and minority carriers. Free electrons in the *n* region near the *pn* junction begin to diffuse across the junction and fall into holes near the junction in the *p* region.

(b) For every electron that diffuses across the junction and combines with a hole, a positive charge is left in the *n* region and a negative charge is created in the *p* region, forming a barrier potential. This action continues until the voltage of the barrier repels further diffusion. The blue arrows between the positive and negative charges in the depletion region represent the electric field.

FIGURE 1–17: Formation of the depletion region.

Formation of the Depletion Region

The free electrons in the *n* region are randomly drifting in all directions. At the instant of the *pn* junction formation, the free electrons near the junction in the *n* region begin to diffuse across the junction into the *p* region where they combine with holes near the junction, as shown in Figure 1–17(b). Before the *pn* junction is formed, there are as many electrons as protons in the *n*-type material, making the material neutral in terms of net charge. The same is true for the *p*-type material.

When the pn junction is formed, the n region loses free electrons as they diffuse across the junction. This creates a layer of positive charges (pentavalent ions) near the junction. As the electrons move across the junction, the p region loses holes as the electrons and holes combine. This creates a layer of negative charges (trivalent ions) near the junction. These two layers of positive and negative charges form the **depletion region**, as shown in Figure 1–17(b). The term *depletion* refers to the fact that the region near the pn junction is depleted of charge carriers (electrons and holes) due to diffusion across the junction. The depletion region is formed very quickly and is very thin compared to the n region and p region.

After the initial surge of free electrons across the pn junction, the depletion region has expanded to a point where equilibrium is established and there is no further diffusion of electrons across the junction. This occurs as follows. As electrons continue to diffuse across the junction, more and more positive and negative charges are created near the junction as the depletion region is formed. A point is reached where the total negative charge in the depletion region repels any further diffusion of electrons (negatively charged particles) into the p region (like charges repel) and the diffusion stops. In other words, the depletion region acts as a barrier to the further movement of electrons across the junction.

Barrier Potential Any time there is a positive charge and a negative charge near each other, there is a force acting on the charges as described by Coulomb's law. In the depletion region there are many positive charges and many negative charges on opposite sides of the pn junction. The forces between the opposite charges form an **electric field**, as illustrated in Figure 1–17(b) by the blue arrows between the positive charges and the negative charges. This electric field is a barrier to the free electrons in the n region, and energy must be expended to move an electron through the electric field. That is, external energy must be applied to get the electrons to move across the barrier of the electric field in the depletion region.

The potential difference of the electric field across the depletion region is the amount of voltage required to move electrons through the electric field. This potential difference is called the **barrier potential** and is expressed in volts. Stated another way, a certain amount of voltage equal to the barrier potential and with the proper polarity must be applied across a pn junction before electrons will begin to flow across the junction. The barrier potential of a pn junction **depends on several factors**, including the type of semiconductive material, the amount of doping, and the temperature. The typical barrier potential is approximately 0.7V for silicon and 0.3V for germanium at 25°C.

Energy Diagrams of the PN Junction and Depletion Region

The valence and conduction bands in an n -type material are at slightly lower energy levels than the valence and conduction bands in a p -type material. The trivalent impurities exert lower forces

on the outer-shell electrons than the pentavalent impurities. The lower forces in p -type materials mean that the electron orbits are slightly larger and hence have greater energy than the electron orbits in the n -type materials.

An energy diagram for a pn junction at the instant of formation is shown in Figure 1–18(a). As we can see, the valence and conduction bands in the n region are at lower energy levels than those in the p region, but there is a significant amount of overlapping.

The free electrons in the n region that occupy the upper part of the conduction band in terms of their energy can easily diffuse across the junction (they do not have to gain additional energy) and temporarily become free electrons in the lower part of the p -region conduction band. After crossing the junction, the electrons quickly lose energy and fall into the holes in the p -region valence band as indicated in Figure 1-18(a).

As the diffusion continues, the depletion region begins to form and the energy level of the n -region conduction band decreases. The decrease in the energy level of the conduction band in the n region is due to the loss of the higher-energy electrons that have diffused across the junction to the p region. Soon, there are no electrons left in the n -region conduction band with enough energy to get across the junction to the p -region conduction band, as indicated by the alignment of the top of the n -region conduction band and the bottom of the p -region conduction band in Figure 1–18(b). At this point, the junction is at equilibrium; and the depletion region is complete because diffusion has ceased. There is an energy gradient across the depletion region which acts as an “energy hill” that an n -region electron must climb to get to the p region. As the energy level of the n -region conduction band has shifted downward, the energy level of the valence band has also shifted downward. It still takes the same amount of energy for a valence electron to become a free electron. In other words, the energy gap between the valence band and the conduction band remains the same.

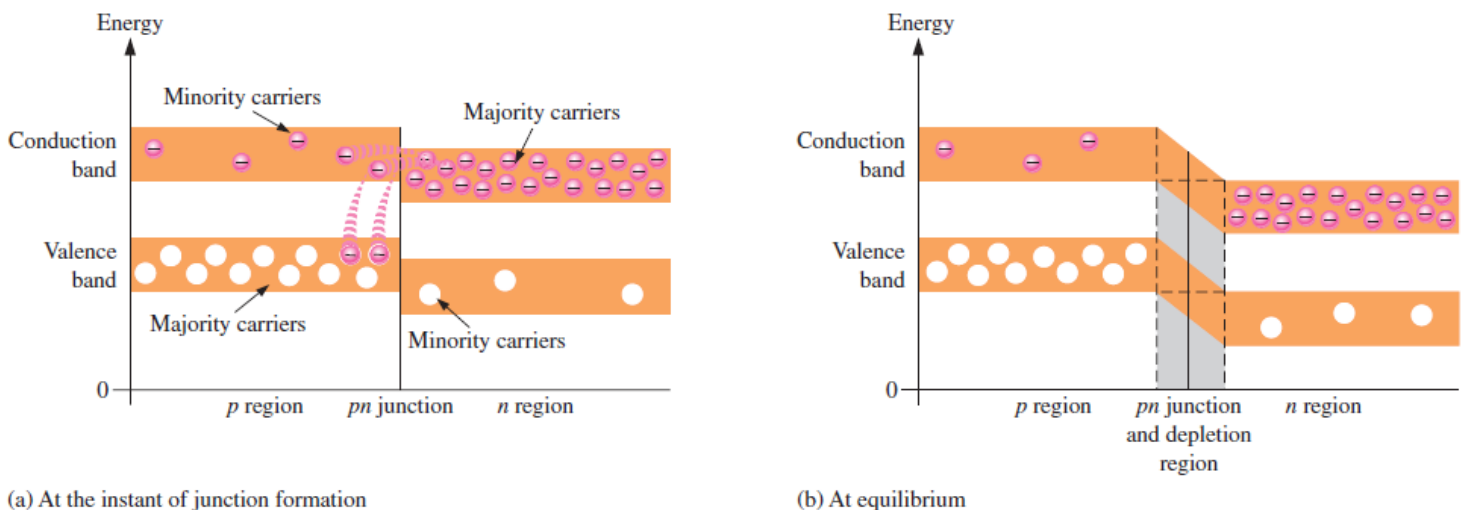


FIGURE 1–18: Energy diagrams illustrating the formation of the pn junction and depletion region.