



DO-IT-YOURSELF

Circuitbuilding FOR **DUMMIES®**



**Discover
how to:**

- ✓ Build electronic circuits from start to finish
- ✓ Prepare a project from schematics, then solder and test it
- ✓ Work from detailed do-it-yourself instructions with step-by-step illustrations

H. Ward Silver

Author of Ham Radio For Dummies



Do-It-Yourself Circuitbuilding For Dummies®

Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[What You're Not to Read](#)
[Assumptions About You](#)
[How This Book Is Organized](#)

[Part I: Working Basics for Electronic-ers](#)
[Part II: Building Circuits](#)
[Part III: Cables and Connectors](#)
[Part IV: Measuring and Testing](#)
[Part V: Maintaining Electronic Equipment](#)
[Part VI: The Part of Tens](#)
[Glossary](#)
[Bonus Chapters](#)

[Conventions and Icons](#)
[Where to Go from Here](#)

[Chapter 1: The Toolbox](#)

[Basic Tools for Building Circuits](#)

[Safety and visibility](#)

[Pliers and tweezers](#)
[Cutters and knives](#)
[Screwdrivers and wrenches](#)
[Drills and drill bits](#)
[Special electronic tools](#)
[Measuring sticks](#)

[The Solderless Breadboard](#)

[Using a breadboard](#)
[Breadboard materials](#)
[Limitations of breadboards](#)

[Your Notebook](#) [Software Tools](#)

[Schematic and PC board layout](#)
[Electronic simulators](#)
[Mechanical drawing software](#)
[Utilities and calculators](#)

[Chapter 2: Basic Techniques](#)

[Basic Metalworking](#)
[Making a Practice Panel](#)
[The Joy of Soldering](#)

[Soldering tools and materials](#)

[Introduction to Soldering](#)

[Learning to solder with a kit](#)
[Desoldering](#)

[Making Sense of Schematic Diagrams](#)

[Chapter 3: Using a Solderless Breadboard](#)

[Breadboarding an Audio Amplifier](#)

[Deciphering the amplifier schematic](#)
[How the audio amplifier works](#)

[Breadboarding a Digital Timer](#)

[Digital timer schematic](#)
[How a digital timer works](#)

[Testing the Audio Amplifier Circuit](#)
[Constructing the Digital Timer](#)

[Chapter 4: Building a Printed Circuit Board](#)

[Getting Your Workspace Ready](#)
[Putting a Through-Hole PC Board Together](#)
[Building a Surface-Mount PC Board](#)
[Constructing the Through-Hole Board](#)
[Constructing the Surface-Mount Board](#)

[Chapter 5: Building a Prototype](#)

[Building an Audio Level Controller](#)
[Building a 12V-to-5V Regulator](#)
[Building an Audible Alarm](#)
[Constructing the Alarm](#)

[Chapter 6: Building from a Published Schematic](#)

[Preparing to Build](#)
[Building a Circuit Dead-Bug Style](#)
[Building Circuits Manhattan-Style](#)
[Building Circuits Using Twist 'n' Twirl Wire-Wrap](#)
[Constructing the Timer Circuit](#)

[Chapter 7: Terminals and Connectors](#)

[Crimp Terminals and Tools](#)

[Crimp terminals](#)
[The terminal crimping tool](#)
[The modular-plug crimping tool](#)
[The RJ-45 crimping tool](#)

[Making RS-232 Connectors](#)
[Installing a Crimp Terminal](#)
[Adding a DC Power Fuse](#)
[Installing a Telephone Plug](#)
[Making a Computer Network Cable](#)

[Chapter 8: Wiring for Wireless Radio](#)

[The Case for Coaxial Cable](#)
[Using a Coaxial Connector Crimping Tool](#)
[Coax Connectors — All in the Family](#)

[Type F connectors](#)
[UHF connectors](#)
[BNC connectors](#)
[Not THAT kind of stripper!](#)

[Installing a CB-Style Connector](#)

Chapter 9: Mastering Power

Adding an AC In-Line Switch

Wiring an AC Fuseholder

Installing an AC Plug

Chapter 10: Audio and Sensitive Connections

The XLR: A Real Pro Connector

Standard connection conventions

Plugging In to Phono Plugs

Taking a Temperature Electronically

Temperature Sensor Wiring Diagram

Installing a Phono Plug

Creating a Stereo Patch Cable

Constructing a Temperature Sensor

Chapter 11: Meet the Test Equipment

What to Measure

Your Basic Test Equipment

The voltmeter (okay, multimeter . . .)

When is a volt not a volt?

The power supply

Function generators

Advanced Testing Equipment

Counters

[Component testers](#)

[Logic probe](#)

[Radio-frequency test equipment](#)

[The Oscilloscope](#)

[The basics](#)

[Analog and digital oscilloscopes](#)

[Making measurements with an oscilloscope](#)

[Specialty oscilloscopes: logic and spectrum analyzers](#)

[Chapter 12: Measurements That Test Your Circuits and Projects](#)

[Making Measurements Safely](#)

[Using Ohm's Law to Measure Resistance](#)

[Testing a Transistor](#)

[Measuring in Decibels](#)

[Measuring Voltage](#)

[Measuring Current](#)

[Measuring Period and Frequency](#)

[Making Measurements in Decibels](#)

[Measuring Frequency Response](#)

[Chapter 13: Who Let the Smoke Out?](#)

[Troubleshooting and Debugging Basics](#)

[What is failure?](#)

[Running in circles](#)

[Organize your thoughts](#)

Pondering Power Problems

Fuses and breakers

Battery power

Power troubleshooting guide

Diagnosing Audio Problems

Distortion

Hum and ripple

White and crackling noise

Analyzing Analog Circuits

Use Ohm's Law

Diagnosing Digital Circuits

Chapter 14: Maintaining Your Cool (Stuff)

Taking Care of Tools and Test Instruments

Maintaining a Winning Workspace

Maintaining Electronic Equipment

Portable and mobile electronics

Electronics with moving parts

Keeping on Schedule

Chapter 15: Getting a Charge Out of Batteries

A Bunch of Battery Basics

Ah . . . Introducing Amp-hours and Characteristic Voltage

Disposable Batteries versus Rechargeable Batteries

Disposable batteries
Rechargeable batteries

Exploring the World of Battery Packs
Following Basic Battery Tips
Adhering to the Rules of Battery Safety

Charging and discharging batteries safely
Storing and handling batteries with care
Safely disposing of batteries

Chapter 16: Electronics in Motion

Learning About Mobile Installation

Understanding vehicle safety issues
Tapping into vehicle power
Finding a home for electronics in your vehicle

Chapter 17: Getting Rid of Interference and Noise

Dealing with Interference

Received interference
Direct detection
Avoid causing interference

Installing a High-Pass Filter

Chapter 18: Ten Circuitbuilding Secrets

Be Patient and Alert
Spring for Quality Tools and Toolbox
Use Plenty of Light
Get Good References
Hold On to Your Junk
Buddy Up
Test in Steps
Keep a Notebook
Pass It On
Take Pride in Your Craft

Chapter 19: Ten Circuit First-Aid Techniques and Supplies

Common Replacement Transistors and ICs
Clip Leads
Electrical Tape
Wire Nuts and Crimp Splices
Molded Connectors
12V Soldering Iron
Clothespin and Rubberband Vises
Loose Connectors
Broken Antennas
Dead Rechargeable Batteries

Appendix A: Circuitbuilding Resources

Semiconductors
Data sheets
Packaging
Workshop tips for components
Purchasing tips

Junk boxes

Books

Magazines

Web sites

Tutorials

Vendor sites

Circuitbuilding Do-It-Yourself For Dummies

by H. Ward Silver



Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Published by
Wiley Publishing, Inc.
111 River Street
Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774
www.wiley.com

Copyright © 2008 by Wiley Publishing, Inc.,
Indianapolis, Indiana

Published by Wiley Publishing, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana

Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2007943806

ISBN: 978-0-470-17342-8

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



About the Author

H. Ward Silver has the experience of a 20-year career as an electrical engineer developing instrumentation and medical electronics. He also spent 8 years in broadcasting, both programming and engineering. In 2000 he turned to teaching and writing as a second career. He is a contributing editor to the American Radio Relay League (ARRL) and author of the popular “Hands-On Radio” column in QST magazine every month. He is the author of the ARRL’s Amateur Radio license study guides and numerous other articles. He developed the ARRL’s online courses, “Antenna Design and Construction,” “Analog Electronics,” and “Digital Electronics.” Along with his comedic alter-ego, Dr Beldar, Ward is a sought-after speaker and lecturer among “hams.” When not in front of a computer screen, you will find Ward working on his mandolin technique and compositions.

Dedication

Circuitbuilding Do-It-Yourself For Dummies is dedicated to the many technical writers whose articles in *QST*, *Popular Electronics*, *73*, *CQ*, *Scientific American*, among others, inspired me to cut and solder and tinker my way through high school. Getting an amateur radio license on the way, that practical experience led directly to my first career as an electrical engineer. Another dedication is due my students and readers that make my second career as a writer equally enjoyable. If I can do for you what they did for me, I'll be very satisfied, indeed.

Author's Acknowledgments

In the early days of electrical experimentation, before “electronics” was even a word, there was no choice but to build one’s own circuits. Back then, circuits were all about motors, lighting, and simple control systems. They were built with hammers, wrenches, screwdrivers, and, yes, soldering irons. Circuitbuilding was a full-body experience!

For a time not so long ago, it seemed that actually building one’s own circuits was an activity that would go the way of AC-DC motor and knife switch. Electronic gadgets had become so inexpensive and easy to use, why should anyone bother to build anything more complicated than plugging cables together? The Internet and personal computer took building out of the physical world and into the realms of the network and cyberspace.

That trend has reversed in recent years. People of all ages are rediscovering the thrill and satisfaction of learning-by-doing. They’ve found that “lifting the hood” is just as much fun for electronics and circuits as developing a Web site or hooking up the latest gadget from the store. Not only just building, but modifying or “hacking” equipment, is providing hours of enjoyment, too!

If you're a budding circuitbuilder, welcome to the party!
Join the thousands of ham radio operators, robotics
enthusiasts, engineers, inventors, tinkerers, and
hobbyists—people just like you. Heat up that soldering
iron, turn on the voltmeter, and start building!

—H. Ward Silver

Publisher's Acknowledgments

We're proud of this book; please send us your comments through our online registration form located at www.dummies.com/register/.

Some of the people who helped bring this book to market include the following:

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Introduction

Perhaps you've never built anything electronic, and now you want to. Perhaps you have built something before, but now you want to do something different. Look no further. *Circuitbuilding Do-It-Yourself For Dummies* is the book for both kinds of readers. Primarily, this book is intended to act as an introduction and guide to someone just getting started with electronics and circuits. It covers basic tools and techniques. If you are somewhat experienced with electronics, you'll find the book most useful as a workshop reference for specific kinds of tasks. The latter half of the book focuses on specific how-tos: cables, connectors, measurements, and maintenance.

There are so many circuits and applications of electronics that it is impossible to provide a detailed how-to guide for even a tiny fraction of the different types! The goal of this book is to show you the tools and techniques that circuitbuilders use, common to a wide variety of electronic construction needs.

This book presents basic techniques most useful to beginners. As such, you won't find detailed discussions of advanced topics such as fabricating your own circuit boards or performing reflow soldering at home. Nevertheless, if you become familiar with the techniques in this book, it will be easier for you to move on to more sophisticated techniques. I'll also give you pointers about where to find information on them.

This book is *not* a circuit design course or cookbook. I'll be assuming that you already have a schematic from a book or magazine or maybe you've purchased a kit. This

book shows you how to build it, not design it. The list of resources in Appendix A include quite a number of how-to-design books about electronics and even some online courses and tutorials.

What You're Not to Read

As you make your way through *Circuitbuilding Do-It-Yourself For Dummies*, feel free to skip around to where your interests and needs take you. You don't have to read each chapter in order. Use the Table of Contents or the Index to find help on a specific topic, such as wiring up a particular cable. The extensive Glossary in the back of the book will help with unfamiliar terms. Sidebars contain material that's interesting but not required reading.

Assumptions About You

The subject of electronics is big and broad and deep, but don't panic! You only need tackle the small steps at first — be comfortable and progress at your own speed. This book doesn't expect you to have an engineering degree or a complete shop. In fact, I deliberately performed all of the tasks myself with the simplest equipment and tools, just to be sure my readers could do them, too!

What I *do* assume about you, however, is that you're curious and motivated to build on the basic skills in *Circuitbuilding Do-It-Yourself For Dummies*. Take a few minutes to investigate the online resources I note

throughout the book. You'll also find an extensive list of resources in Appendix A.

Finally, you don't have to run out and buy all of the tools and components shown in the book. I'm sure your local electronics emporium would love it if you did, but take your time! Each task lists the tools and materials needed, and you will be just fine if you acquire them as you need them.

How This Book Is Organized

Circuitbuilding Do-It-Yourself For Dummies is composed of six parts. You'll get started with some electronic construction basics, then move onto specific tasks that show how circuitbuilding is done. From there you can read about techniques that support circuitbuilding like taking measurements and maintenance. A Glossary and the famous Parts of Ten wrap up the book.

Part I: Working Basics for Electronic-ers

This book doesn't neglect the basics — tools and techniques. You may have most of the tools, already! If you don't, this introductory part will help you get the ones you need. Then it's on to simple techniques for working with the materials you'll encounter when building circuits. I'll also help you read and make sense of electronic schematics, the language of circuitbuilders.

Part II: Building Circuits

This part of the book presents several ways of working with electronic components and materials to turn an idea into a living breathing circuit. By learning the basic techniques, you can build even the most complex circuits. Then learn how to install your circuit in a simple enclosure.

Part III: Cables and Connectors

Take a look at the back of any stack of electronic gadgets and what do you find? Cables and connectors! Lots of them! Yet the “how to” of making and repairing cables is rarely presented. That information doesn’t get left out of this book! I cover all kinds of cables and connectors so that when your circuit is finally built, you’ll be able to make the necessary connections to other equipment, too.

Part IV: Measuring and Testing

You can’t see, smell, or touch electricity in your circuits — unless something goes pretty wrong! Testing and evaluating your circuits, then, takes some special electronic eyes and ears. This part of the book shows you how to use basic test instruments as part of the circuitbuilding process and during troubleshooting.

Part V: Maintaining Electronic Equipment

Circuitbuilding isn't just about soldering components together. Once you've built your circuit, what then? This part of the book covers installation and troubleshooting along with information on batteries and dealing with interference and noise. All of these topics are mighty handy out there in the Real World!

Part VI: The Part of Tens

Familiar to all *For Dummies* readers, these are condensed lists of helpful and (hopefully) memorable ideas. In this part, you'll get the top ten secrets of the art of circuitbuilding, as well as indispensable information on circuit first aid and some supplies you should keep handy.

Glossary

As you go through the book, specific technical terms in *italics* will often be found in the Glossary. Keep a bookmark in the glossary and you won't have to *gloss over* a term you don't understand.

Bonus Chapters

The book was so chock-full of critical info, we had to leave a few things out. But have no fear because you can find two bonus chapters on the Web site (www.dummies.com/go/circuitbuildingdiyfd) covering resistor and capacitor types.

Conventions and Icons

To make the reading experience as clear and uncluttered as possible, a consistent presentation style is used:

- ✓ *Italics* are used to note a new or important term.
- ✓ Web site URLs (addresses) use a monospace font.

Additionally you'll see the following icons used as markers for special types of information.



This icon alerts you to a hint that will help you understand a technical or operating topic. These are often referred to as “hints and kinks” by circuitbuilders.



This icon highlights a new term or concept that you'll need to know about. Be sure to check the book's Glossary, as well.



Whenever I could think of a common problem or “oops,” you'll see this icon. Before you become experienced, it's easy to get hung up on some of these little things.



This icon lets you know that there are safety, rules, or performance issues associated with the topic of discussion. Watch for this icon to avoid common gotchas.



These icons remind you of an important idea or fact that you should keep in mind.

Where to Go from Here

If you are just getting started with electronics, I recommend that you read Parts I and II thoroughly and try a few of the tools and techniques. Building a kit (Chapter 4) is a great way to turn your newfound knowledge into a gadget you can really use — a great confidence builder! Then try a couple of the other techniques before striking out on your own. The tasks in Part III can be performed whenever they arise as you build circuits. Study the techniques in Parts IV and V and give them a try.

If you're more experienced with electronics and want to use this book as a reference and how-to guide, be sure to scan through the book first. I'll bet there are a few sections or tips that might be an "Ah, hah!" for you. The Table of Contents can serve as your reference for workbench use.

Appendix A lists many references and provides some bonus material about electronic components, too. Bookmark the sites you find most interesting or useful and you'll have an instant electronic reference library! The print references listed in Appendix A are those that I've found to have a long useful life — many can be found in used bookstores or online at a fraction of their new cost. Even older texts will provide excellent information about how circuits work.

I couldn't be more pleased to welcome all of you readers to the world of electronics and circuitbuilding. You'll be able to use these tools and techniques for a long time. Learning them launched me into a lifetime of professional electronics that I've found to be both rewarding and enjoyable. I hope it's the same for you!

Circuitbuilding Do-It-Yourself For Dummies

Introduction

Circuitbuilding Do-It-Yourself For Dummies

Part I

Working Basics for Electronic-ers