



PicoVNA[®]

Vector Network Analyzers

User's Guide

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1 Safety

To prevent possible electrical shock, fire, personal injury, or damage to the product, carefully read this safety information before attempting to install or use the product. In addition, follow all generally accepted safety practices and procedures for working with and near electricity.

This instrument has been designed to meet the requirements of EN61010-1 (Safety Requirements for Electrical Equipment for Measurement, Control and Laboratory Use) and is intended only for indoor use only.

The following safety descriptions are found throughout this guide:

A **WARNING** identifies conditions or practices that could result in injury or death.

A **CAUTION** identifies conditions or practices that could result in damage to the product or equipment to which it is connected.



WARNING

To prevent injury or death use the product only as instructed and use only the power supply provided. Protection provided by the product may be impaired if used in a manner not specified by the manufacturer.

1.1 Symbols

These safety and electrical symbols may appear on the product or in this guide.

| Symbol | Description |
|--------|---|
| | Earth (ground) terminal This terminal can be used to make a measurement ground connection. It is not a safety or protective earth. |
| | Chassis terminal |
| | Possibility of electric shock |
| | CAUTION Appearance on the product indicates a need to read these safety instructions. |
| | Do not dispose of this product as unsorted municipal waste. |

1.2 Maximum input/output ranges



WARNING

To prevent electric shock, do not attempt to measure or apply signal levels outside the specified maxima below.

The table below indicates the maximum voltage of the outputs and the overvoltage protection range for each input on the VNA. The overvoltage protection ranges are the maximum voltages that can be applied without damaging the instrument.

| Connector | Maximum operating voltage (output or input) | Overtoltage or overcurrent protection |
|---------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Ports 1 and 2 | +10 dBm (about 710 mV RMS) | +20 dBm (about 2.2 V RMS) |
| Bias tees 1 and 2 | ±15 V DC | 250 mA |
| Trigger and reference in | | ±6 V pk |
| Trigger and reference out | 0 V to +5 V | Do not apply a voltage |

**WARNING**

Signals exceeding the voltage limits in the table below are defined as "hazardous live" by EN 61010.

| Signal voltage limits of EN61010 | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------|------------------|
| ± 70 V DC | 33 V AC RMS | ± 46.7 V pk max. |

**WARNING**

To avoid equipment damage and possible injury, do not operate the instrument outside its rated supply voltages or environmental range.

**CAUTION**

Exceeding the overvoltage protection range on any connector can cause permanent damage to the instrument and other connected equipment.

CAUTION

To prevent permanent damage, do not apply an input voltage to the trigger or reference output of the VNA.

1.3 Grounding

**WARNING**

The instrument's ground connection through the USB cable is for functional purposes only. The instrument does not have a protective safety ground.

WARNING

To prevent injury or death, never connect the ground of an input or output (chassis) to any electrical power source. To prevent personal injury or death, use a voltmeter to check that there is no significant AC or DC voltage between the instrument's ground and the point to which you intend to connect it.

**CAUTION**

Applying a voltage to the ground input is likely to cause permanent damage to the instrument, the attached computer, and other equipment.

CAUTION

To prevent measurement degradation caused by poor grounding, always use the high-quality USB cable supplied with the instrument.

1.4 External connections

**WARNING**

To prevent injury or death, only use the adaptor supplied with the product. This is approved for the voltage and plug configuration in your country.

| Power supply options and ratings | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|---------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Model name | USB connection | Ext DC power supply | | |
| | | Voltage | Current | Total power |
| PicoVNA 106 | USB 2.0. Compatible with USB 3.0. | 12 to 15 V DC | 1.85 A pk | 22 W |
| PicoVNA 108 | | | 2.1 A pk | 25 W |

**WARNING****Containment of radio frequencies**

The instrument contains a swept or CW radio frequency signal source (300 kHz to 6.02 GHz at +6 dBm max. for the PicoVNA 106, 300 kHz to 8.50 GHz at +6 dBm max. for the PicoVNA 108) The instrument and supplied accessories are designed to contain and not radiate (or be susceptible to) radio frequencies that could interfere with the operation of other equipment or radio control and communications. To prevent injury or death, connect only to appropriately specified connectors, cables, accessories and test devices, and do not connect to an antenna except within approved test facilities or under otherwise controlled conditions.

1.5 Environment

**WARNING**

To prevent injury or death, do not use the VNA in wet or damp conditions, or near explosive gas or vapor.

**CAUTION**

To prevent damage, always use and store your VNA in appropriate environments.

| | Storage | Operating |
|------------------|--|--------------|
| Temperature | -20 to +50 °C | +5 to +40 °C |
| Humidity | 20% to 80 %RH (non-condensing) | |
| Altitude | 2000 m | |
| Pollution degree | 1 (no pollution, or only dry non-conductive pollution) | |

**CAUTION**

Do not block the air vents at the back or underside of the instrument as overheating will cause damage.

Do not insert any objects through the air vents as internal interference will cause damage.

1.6 Care of the product

The product and accessories contain no user-serviceable parts. Repair, servicing and calibration require specialized test equipment and must only be performed by Pico Technology or an approved service provider. There may be a charge for these services unless covered by the Pico warranty.

**WARNING**

To prevent injury or death, do not use the product if it appears to be damaged in any way, and stop use immediately if you are concerned by any abnormal behavior.

**CAUTION**

To prevent damage to the device or connected equipment, do not tamper with or disassemble the instrument, case parts, connectors, or accessories.

When cleaning the product, use a soft cloth dampened with a solution of mild soap or detergent in water. Do not allow liquids to enter the instrument's casing.

**WARNING**

To avoid equipment damage, do not block the ventilation ports on the instrument.

**CAUTION**

Take care to avoid mechanical stress or tight bend radii for all connected leads, including all coaxial leads and connectors. Mishandling will cause deformation of sidewalls, and will degrade performance. In particular, note that test port leads should not be formed to tighter than 5 cm (2") bend radius.

To prevent measurement errors and extend the useful life of test leads and accessory connectors, ensure that liquid and particulate contaminants cannot enter. Always fit the dust caps provided and use the correct torque when tightening. Pico recommends: 1 Nm (8.85 inch lb) for supplied and all stainless steel connectors, or 0.452 Nm (4.0 inch-lb) when a brass or gold-plated connector is interfaced.

2 Quick start guide

2.1 Installing the software

- Obtain the software installer from the disk supplied or from www.picotech.com/downloads. The installers are named as follows:
 - PicoVNA 2 (for the PicoVNA 106 model)
 - PicoVNA 3 (for the PicoVNA 108 model)
- Run the installer (right-click and **Run as administrator**) and ensure that the installation was successful.
- Connect the PicoVNA unit to the computer and wait while Windows automatically installs the driver.

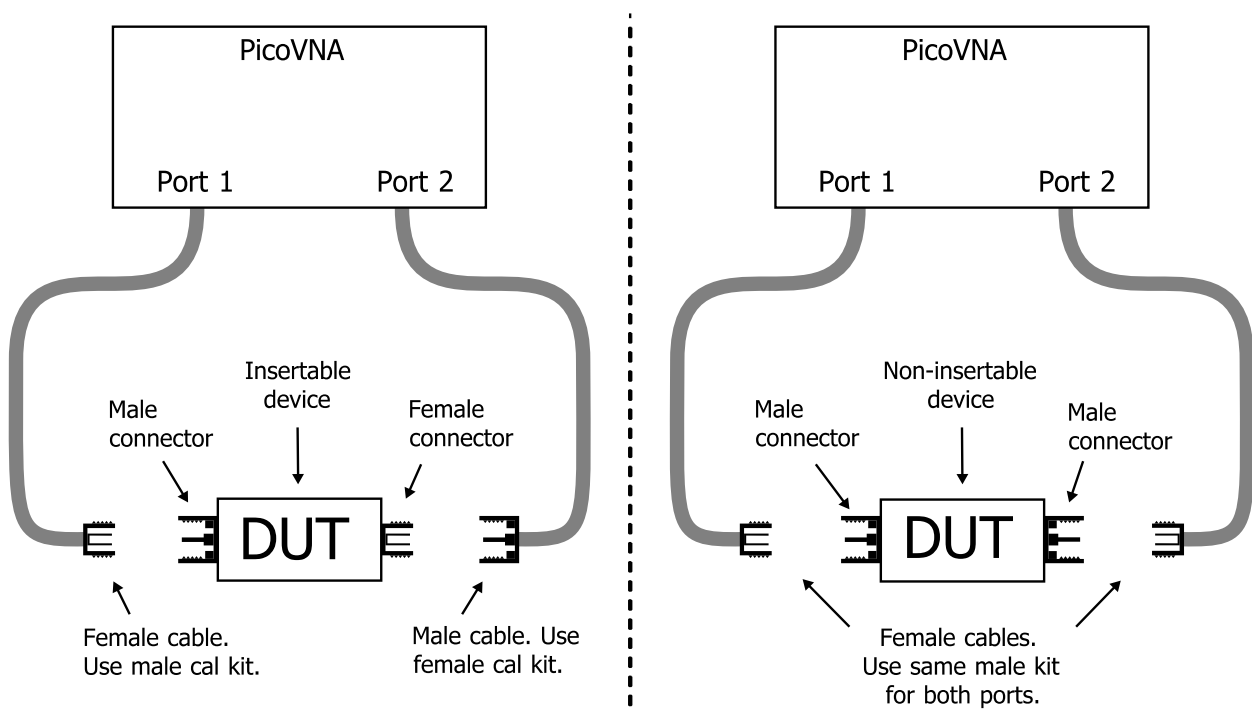
In case of difficulties, refer to [Software installation](#) for more details.

Mixer measurements (PicoVNA 108 only)

Control of the PicoSource AS108 300 kHz to 8 GHz signal source is built into the PicoVNA software. If you wish to carry out mixer measurements using other sources or sensors it is very likely that you will need to install the Keysight® IO Libraries Suite to support communication with external instruments through either the USB or GPIB interfaces. Please see www.keysight.com for details.

2.2 Loading the calibration kit(s)

If the device to be tested is 'insertable' (one female and one male connector), two kits are required. Otherwise a single kit is required. See diagrams below:



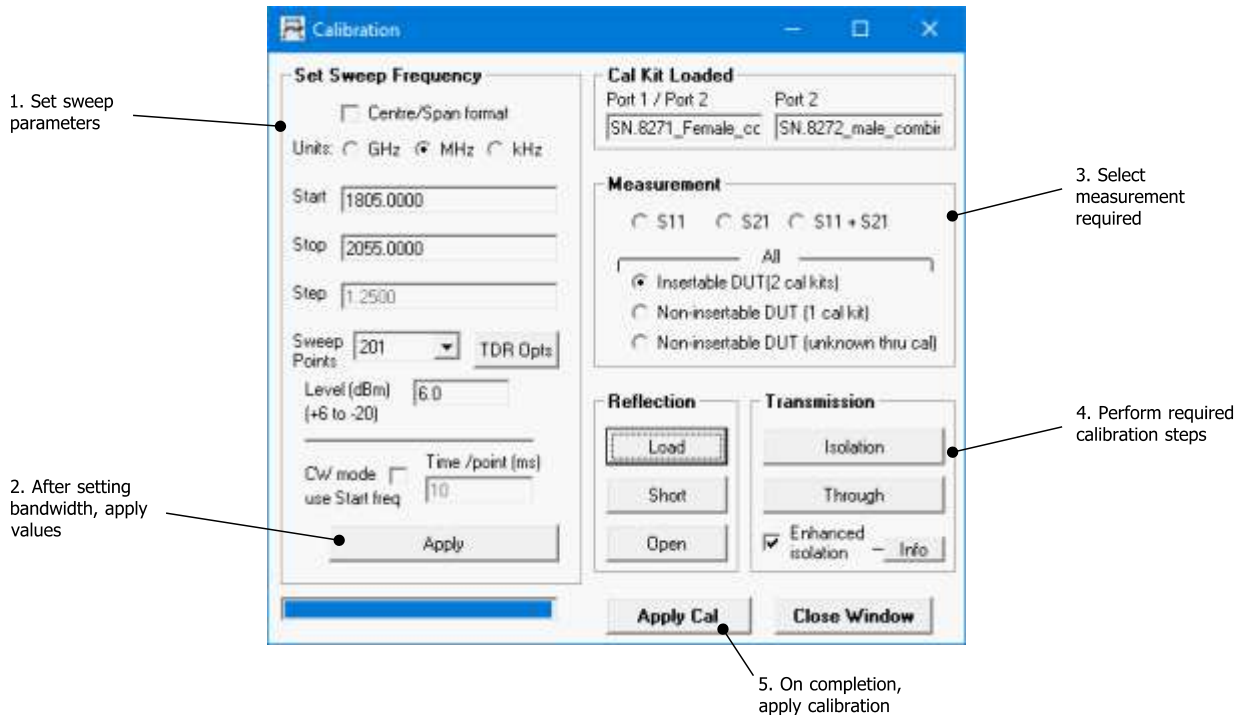
- Run the PicoVNA 2 or PicoVNA 3 software
- In the main menu, select **Tools > Calibration kit**
- Click **Load P1 kit**, select the data for your Port 1 kit and then click **Apply**
- Click **Load P2 kit**, select the data for your Port 2 kit and then click **Apply**

Select the calibration kit(s) required depending on the device to be tested.

Note: If testing a non-insertable DUT with, for example, female connectors, use a single female kit for ports 1 and 2.

2.3 Setting up calibration parameters

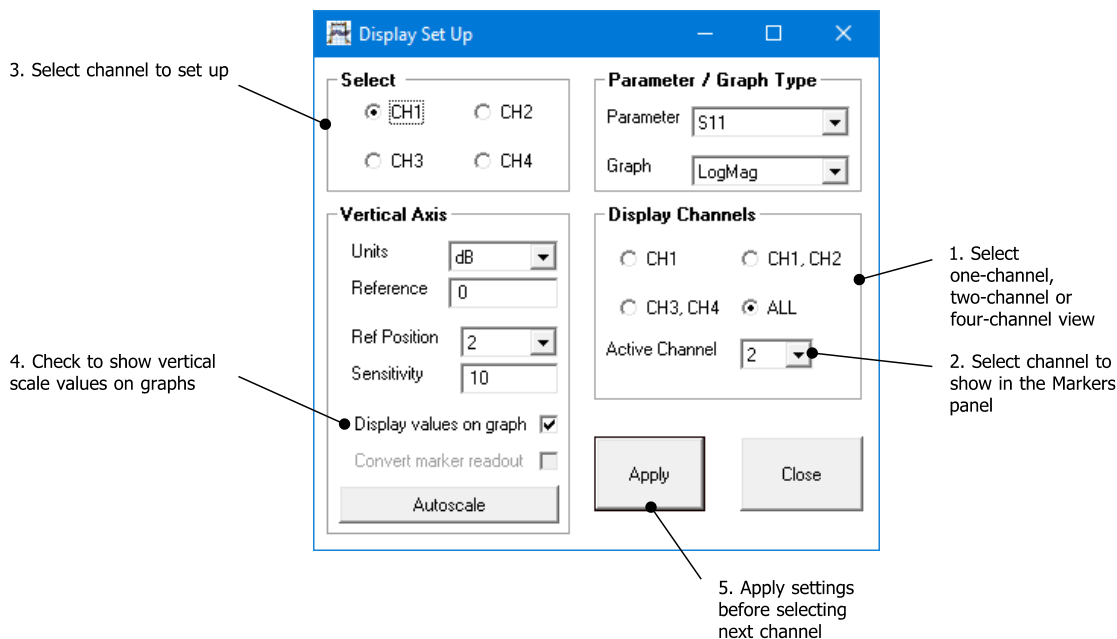
- Click **Calibration** to open the **Calibration** window:



2.4 Setting up display parameters

See [Display Setup](#) for details on using the mouse to set values.

- Click **Display** in the main window to open the **Display Set Up** window:



- When finished, click **Start** in the main window to begin measurements

2.5 Calibration tips

The bandwidth setting used during calibration largely determines the available dynamic range during the measurement. The table below shows suggested bandwidth and power settings to use during calibration for different types of measurement.

| Measurement | Calibration bandwidth | Calibration averaging | Calibration power | Comments |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--|
| Fastest speed | 10 kHz | None | +0 dBm | Set bandwidth to 140 kHz during measurement |
| Best accuracy and ~100 dB dynamic range | 100 Hz | None | -3 dBm | Leave bandwidth set to 100 Hz during measurement |
| General use, fast speed, ~90 dB dynamic range | 1 kHz | None | +0 dBm | Leave bandwidth set to 1 kHz during measurement |
| Best dynamic range | 10 Hz | None | +6 dBm | Leave bandwidth set to 10 Hz during measurement. Refer to " Calibration for best dynamic range – minimizing the effect of crosstalk ". |

2.6 Running in demo mode

Demo mode allows you to explore the user interface software with no instrument connected.

- To enter demo mode, run the PicoVNA 2 or PicoVNA 3 software with no instrument connected.
- Click **Go to demo** in the dialog that appears.

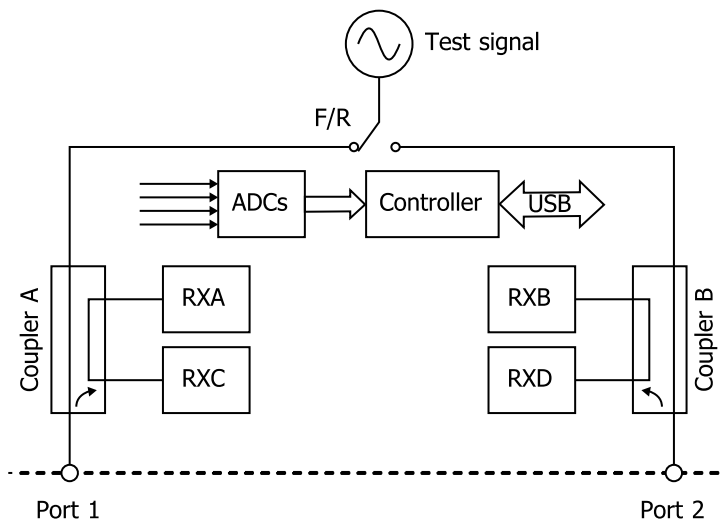
The software will then offer you a selection of demonstration measurements.

3 Description

The PicoVNA 106 and 108 are PC-driven vector network analyzers capable of direct measurement of forward and reverse parameters. The main characteristics are as follows:

| Model | PicoVNA 106 | PicoVNA 108 |
|---------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Operating frequency range | 300 kHz to 6 GHz | 300 kHz to 8.5 GHz |
| Dynamic range | ≤ 118 dB | ≤ 124 dB |
| Frequency resolution | ≤ 10 Hz | ≤ 10 Hz |

A simplified block diagram of the instrument is shown below:

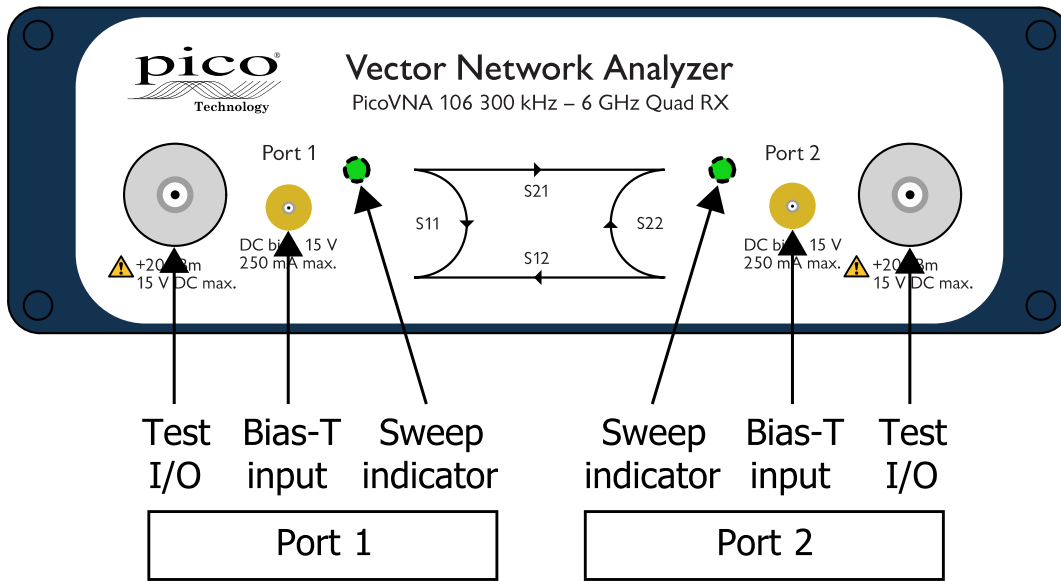


Simplified block diagram of the PicoVNA units

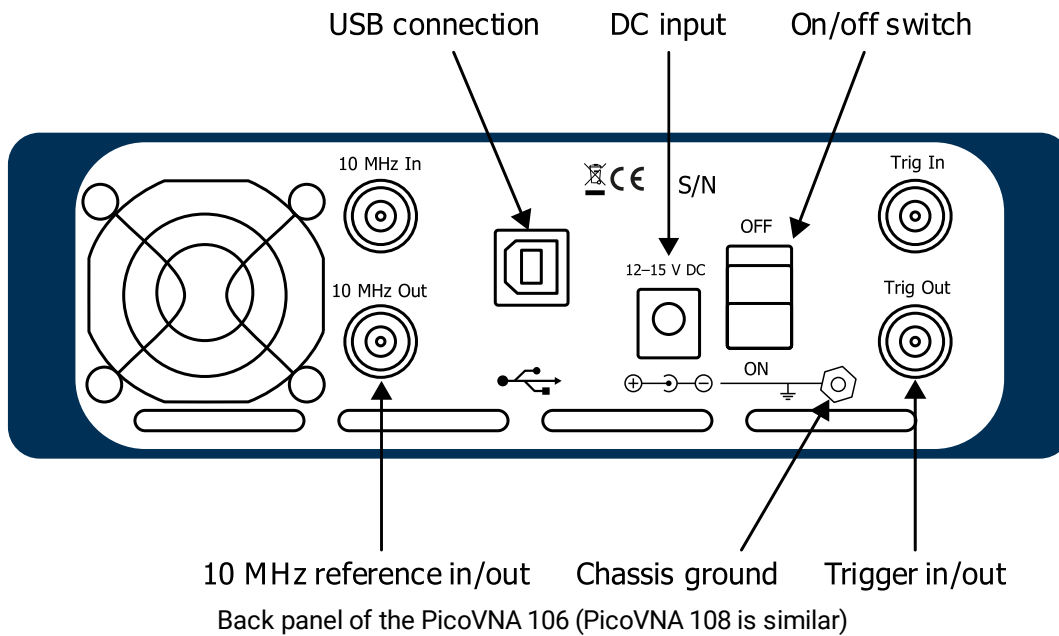
The architecture is based on a four-receiver ("Quad RX") arrangement using a bandwidth of up to 140 kHz. Couplers 1 and 2 are wideband RF bridge components which provide the necessary directivity in both directions. Signal detection is by means of analog-to-digital converters used to sample the IF signal. The sample data is processed by the embedded controller to yield the I and Q components. The detection system operates with an IF of 1.3 MHz and employs a patented circuit technique to yield fast speeds with very low trace noise.

The instrument's software runs on a personal computer and communication with the instrument is through the USB interface. The software carries out the mathematical processing and allows the display of measured parameters in many forms, including:

- frequency domain
- time domain
- de-embedding utility
- measuring output power at the 1 dB gain compression point
- measuring AM to PM conversion



Front panel of the PicoVNA 106 (PicoVNA 108 is similar)



Back panel of the PicoVNA 106 (PicoVNA 108 is similar)

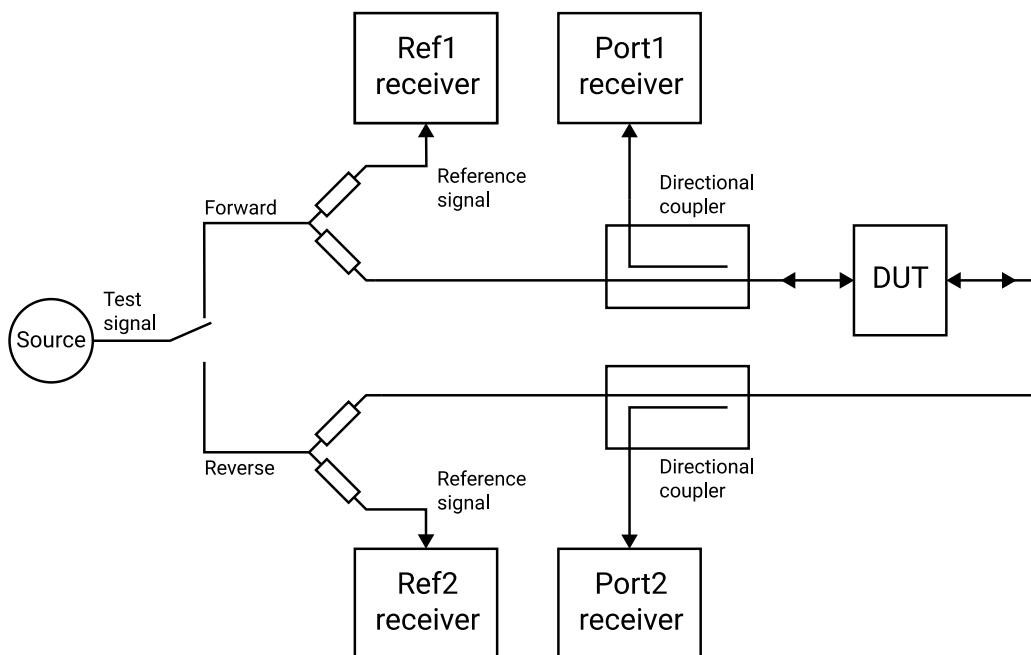
4 Vector network analyzer basics

4.1 Introduction

A vector network analyzer is used to measure the performance of circuits or networks such as amplifiers, filters, attenuators, cables and antennas. It does this by applying a test signal to the network to be tested, measuring the reflected and transmitted signals and comparing them to the test signal. The vector network analyzer measures both the magnitude and phase of these signals.

4.2 Structure of the VNA

The VNA consists of a tunable RF source, the output of which is split into two paths. The signal feeds to the couplers are each measured by their respective reference receivers through power dividers. In the forward mode, the test signal is passed through a directional coupler or directional bridge before being applied to the DUT. The directional output of the coupler, which selects only signals reflected from the input of the DUT, is connected to the Port1 receiver where the signal's magnitude and phase are measured. The rest of the signal, the portion that is not reflected from the input, passes through the DUT to the Port2 receiver where its magnitude and phase are measured. The measurements at the Port1 and Port2 receivers are referenced to the measurements made by the Ref1 and Ref2 receivers so that any variations due to the source are removed. The Ref1 and Ref2 receivers also provide a reference for the measurement of phase.



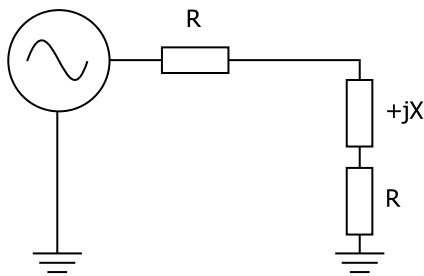
Simplified vector network analyzer block diagram

In reverse mode, the test signal is applied to the output of the DUT, and the Port2 receiver is used to measure the reflection from the output port of the DUT while the Port1 receiver measures the reverse transmission through the DUT.

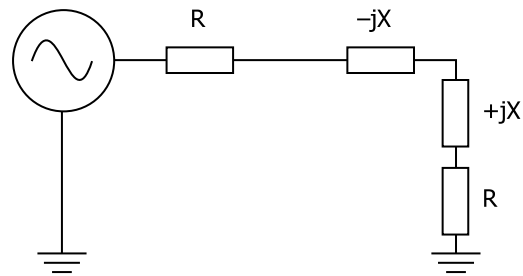
4.3 Measurement

Vector network analyzers have the capability to measure phase as well as magnitude. This is important for fully characterizing a device or network either for verifying performance or for generating models for design and simulation. Knowledge of the phase of the reflection coefficient is particularly important for matching systems for maximum power transfer. For complex impedances the maximum power is transferred when the load impedance is the complex conjugate of the source impedance (see figure).

Source drives an unmatched load. Some signal is reflected.



Matching network, $-jX$, ensures all power is transmitted to the load.



Matching a load for maximum power transfer

Measurement of phase in resonators and other components is important in designing oscillators. In feedback oscillators, oscillation occurs when the phase shift round the loop is a multiple of 360° and the gain is unity. It is important that these loop conditions are met as close as possible to the center frequency of the resonant element to ensure stable oscillation and good phase noise performance.

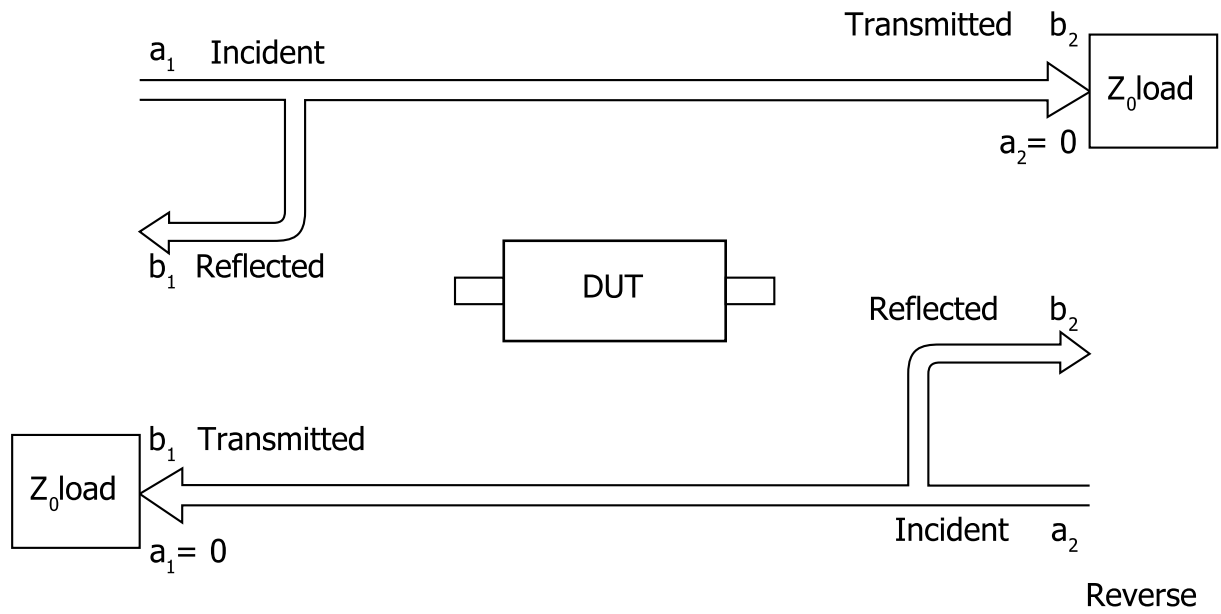
The ability to measure phase is also important for determining phase distortion in a network. Phase distortion can be important in both analog and digital systems. In digital transmission systems, where the constellation depends on both amplitude and phase, any distortion of phase can have serious effects on the errors detected.

4.4 S-parameters

The basic measurements made by the vector network analyzer are S (scattering) parameters. Other parameters such as H, Y and Z parameters may all be deduced from the S-parameters if required. The reason for measuring S-parameters is that they are made under conditions that are easy to produce at RF. Other parameters require the measurement of currents and voltages, which is difficult at high frequencies. They may also require open circuits or short circuits that can be difficult to achieve at high frequencies, and may also be damaging to the device under test or may cause oscillation.

Forward S-parameters are determined by measuring the magnitude and phase of the incident, reflected and transmitted signals with the output terminated with a load that is equal to the characteristic impedance of the test system (see figure below).

Forward



$$S_{11} = \frac{\text{reflected}}{\text{incident}} = \frac{b_1}{a_1} \Big|_{a_2 = 0}$$

$$S_{22} = \frac{\text{reflected}}{\text{incident}} = \frac{b_2}{a_2} \Big|_{a_1 = 0}$$

$$S_{21} = \frac{\text{transmitted}}{\text{incident}} = \frac{b_2}{a_1} \Big|_{a_2 = 0}$$

$$S_{12} = \frac{\text{transmitted}}{\text{incident}} = \frac{b_1}{a_2} \Big|_{a_1 = 0}$$

S-parameter definitions

The measured parameters are presented in a file similar to the one below. The format is as follows:

- Header lines: these start with a ! symbol and give general information such as time and date.
- Format line: this starts with a # symbol and gives information about the format of the data.
 - First field gives the frequency units, in this case MHz
 - Second field indicates the parameters measured, in this case S-parameters
 - Third field indicates the format of the measurement, in this case MA meaning magnitude and angle. Others formats are RI, meaning real and imaginary, and DB, meaning log magnitude and angle.
- Data lines. The number of columns of data depends on the parameters that have been measured.
 - A 1-port measurement measures the reflected signal from the device under test and usually produces three columns. If the format is MA (magnitude and angle), the first column is the measurement frequency, the second is the magnitude of S_{11} and the third is the angle of S_{11} . If the format is RI, the second column is the real part of S_{11} and the third column is the imaginary part of S_{11} .
 - When a reflection and transmission measurement is made there are five columns of data. Column 1 is the measurement frequency, columns 2 and 3 contain S_{11} magnitude and angle or real and imaginary data, and columns 4 and 5 contain S_{21} magnitude and angle or real and imaginary data.
 - If a full 2-port measurement is made, there will be nine columns of data. Column 1 contains frequency information, columns 2 and 3 S_{11} data, 4 and 5 S_{21} data, 6 and 7 S_{12} data, and 8 and 9 S_{22} data.

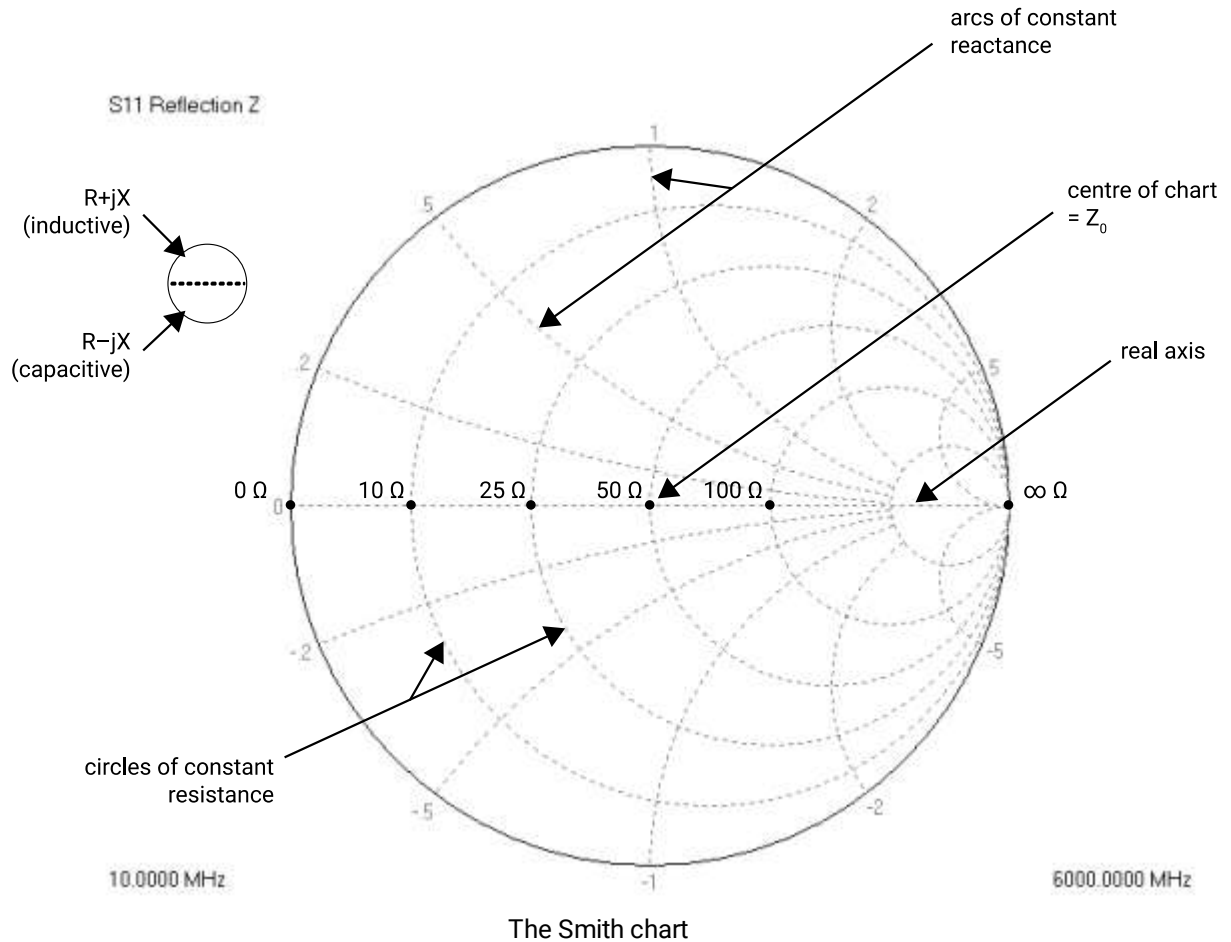
The PicoVNA 106 and 108 can generate full set of 2-port parameters but you can choose to export either 1-port .s1p or full 2-port .s2p S-parameter files to suit most RF and microwave circuit simulators.

Part of a typical 2-port S-parameter file is shown below. The header shows that the frequency units are MHz, the data format is Magnitude and Angle and the system impedance is 50 Ω . Column 1 shows frequency, 2 and 3 S_{11} , 4 and 5 S_{21} , 6 and 7 S_{12} , and 8 and 9 S_{22} .

```
! 06/09/2005 15:47:34
! Ref Plane: 0.000 mm
# MHz S MA R 50
!
3      0.00776  16.96  0.99337  -3.56  0.99324  -3.53  0.00768  12.97
17.985 0.01447  19.99  0.9892  -20.80  0.98985  -20.72  0.01519  15.23
32.97  0.01595  20.45  0.98614  -37.96  0.98657  -37.95  0.01704  6.40
47.955 0.01955  28.95  0.98309  -55.15  0.98337  -55.10  0.018    1.75
62.94  0.02775  24.98  0.98058  -72.29  0.98096  -72.29  0.0199   -6.07
77.925 0.03666  11.76  0.97874  -89.46  0.9803   -89.45  0.02169  -23.06
92.91  0.04159  -6.32  0.97748  -106.62  0.9786  -106.62  0.01981  -48.43
107.895 0.0426  -24.79  0.97492  -123.77  0.97579  -123.89  0.01424  -87.79
122.88  0.0396  -41.35  0.97265  -141.25  0.97269  -141.30  0.00997  -166.81
137.865 0.03451  -52.96  0.96988  -158.65  0.96994  -158.76  0.01877  113.15
152.85  0.03134  -56.07  0.96825  -176.27  0.96858  -176.28  0.03353  69.81
167.835 0.03451  -57.72  0.96686  166.10  0.96612  165.99  0.04901  34.83
182.82  0.04435  -67.59  0.9639  148.18  0.96361  148.21  0.06131  1.42
197.805 0.05636  -86.28  0.96186  130.15  0.96153  130.06  0.07102  -33.33
212.79  0.06878  -110.45  0.95978  111.82  0.95996  111.90  0.07736  -69.57
227.775 0.08035  -136.14  0.9557  93.50  0.9568  93.41  0.08303  -107.21
242.76  0.09099  -161.24  0.95229  74.84  0.95274  74.89  0.08943  -144.34
257.745 0.10183  175.34  0.94707  56.03  0.94755  55.95  0.09906  -179.63
```

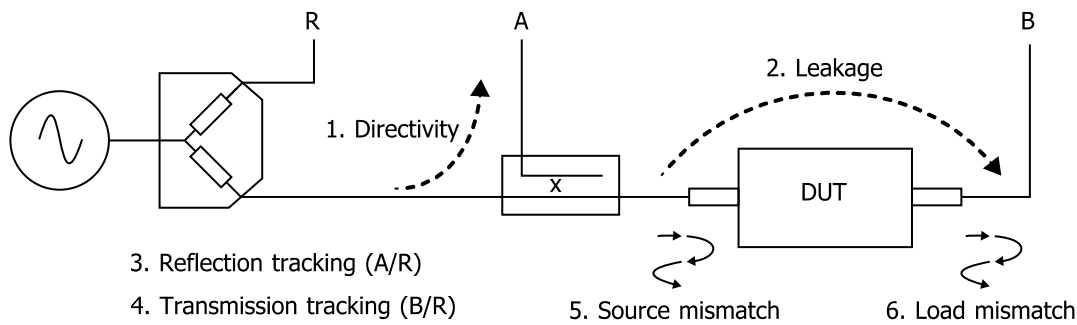
4.5 Displaying measurements

Input and output parameters, S_{11} and S_{22} , are often displayed on a polar plot or a Smith chart. The polar plot shows the result in terms of the complex reflection coefficient, but impedance cannot be directly read off the chart. The Smith chart maps the complex impedance plane onto a polar plot. All values of reactance and all positive values of resistance, from 0 to ∞ , fall within the outer circle. This has the advantage that impedance values can be read directly from the chart.



4.6 Calibration and error correction

Before accurate measurements can be made, the network analyzer needs to be calibrated. In the calibration process, well-defined standards are measured and the results of these measurements are used to correct for imperfections in the hardware. The most common calibration method, SOLT (*short, open, load, thru*), uses four known standards: a short circuit, an open circuit, a load matched to the system impedance, and a through line. These standards are usually contained in a calibration kit and their characteristics are stored on the controlling PC in a Cal Kit definition file. Analyzers such as the PicoVNA 106 and 108 that have a full S-parameter test set can measure and correct all 12 systematic error terms.



Six key sources of errors in forward measurement.
Another six sources exist in the reverse measurement (not shown).

4.7 Other measurements

S-parameters are the fundamental measurement performed by the network analyzer, but many other parameters may be derived from these including H, Y and Z parameters.

4.7.1 Reflection parameters

The input reflection coefficient Γ can be obtained directly from S_{11} :

$$\Gamma = \frac{V_{reflected}}{V_{incident}} = S_{11} = \rho \angle \phi$$

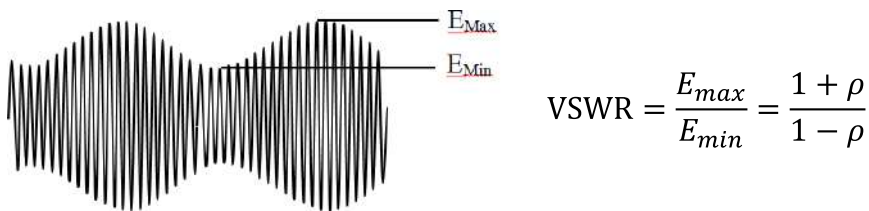
ρ is the magnitude of the reflection coefficient i.e. the magnitude of S_{11} :

$$\rho = |S_{11}|$$

Sometimes ρ is expressed in logarithmic terms as return loss:

$$return\ loss = -20 \log(\rho)$$

VSWR can also be derived:



VSWR definition

4.7.2 Transmission parameters

Transmission coefficient T is defined as the transmitted voltage divided by the incident voltage. This is the same as S_{21} .

$$T = \frac{V_{transmitted}}{V_{incident}} = S_{21} = \tau \angle \phi$$

If T is less than 1, there is loss in the DUT, which is usually referred to as *insertion loss* and expressed in decibels. A negative sign is included in the equation so that the insertion loss is quoted as a positive value:

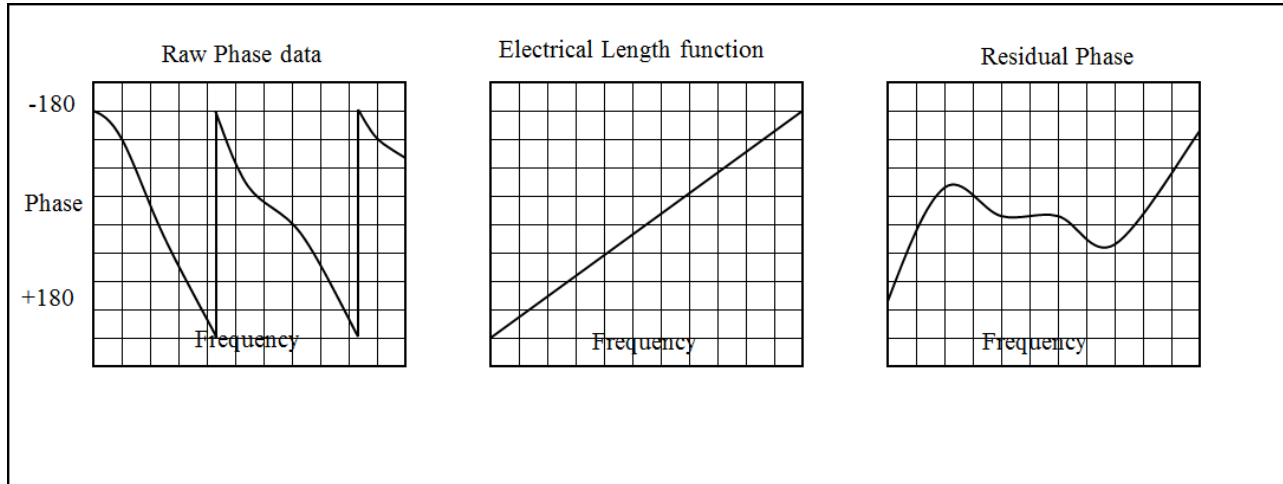
$$insertion_loss(dB) = -20 \log \left| \frac{V_{trans}}{V_{incident}} \right| = -20 \log \tau$$

If T is greater than 1, the DUT has gain, which is also normally expressed in decibels:

$$insertion_gain(dB) = 20 \log \left| \frac{V_{trans}}{V_{incident}} \right| = 20 \log \tau$$

4.7.3 Phase

The phase behavior of networks can be very important, especially in digital transmission systems. The raw phase measurement is not always easy to interpret as it has a linear phase increment superimposed on it due to the electrical length of the DUT. Using the reference plane function the electrical length of the DUT can be removed leaving the residual phase characteristics of the device.



Operation on phase data to yield underlying characteristics

4.7.4 Group delay

Another useful measurement of phase is group delay. Group delay is a measure of the time it takes a signal to pass through a network versus frequency. It is calculated by differentiating the phase response of the device with respect to frequency, i.e. the rate of change of phase with frequency:

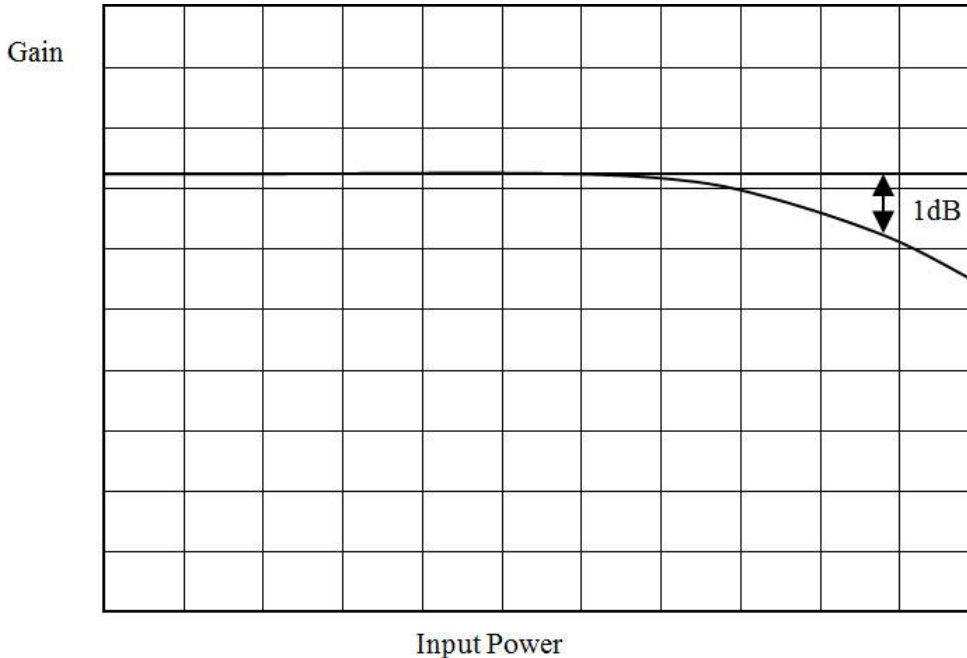
$$group_delay = \frac{d\phi}{d\omega}$$

The linear portion of phase is converted to a constant value typically, though not always, representing the average time for a signal to transit the device. Differences from the constant value represent deviations from linear phase. Variations in group delay will cause phase distortion as a signal passes through the circuit.

When measuring group delay the aperture must be specified. Aperture is the frequency step size used in the differentiation. A small aperture will give more resolution but the displayed trace will be noisy. A larger aperture effectively averages the noise but reduces the resolution.

4.7.5 Gain compression

The 1 dB gain compression point of amplifiers and other active devices can be measured using the power sweep. The small signal gain of the amplifier is determined at low input power, then the power is increased and the point at which the gain has fallen by 1 dB is noted.



The 1 dB gain compression is often used to quote output power capability.

4.7.6 AM to PM conversion

Another parameter that can be measured with the VNA is AM to PM conversion. This is a form of signal distortion where fluctuations in the amplitude of a signal produce corresponding fluctuations in the phase of the signal. This type of distortion can have serious effects in digital modulation schemes where both amplitude and phase accuracy are important. Errors in either phase or amplitude cause errors in the constellation diagram.

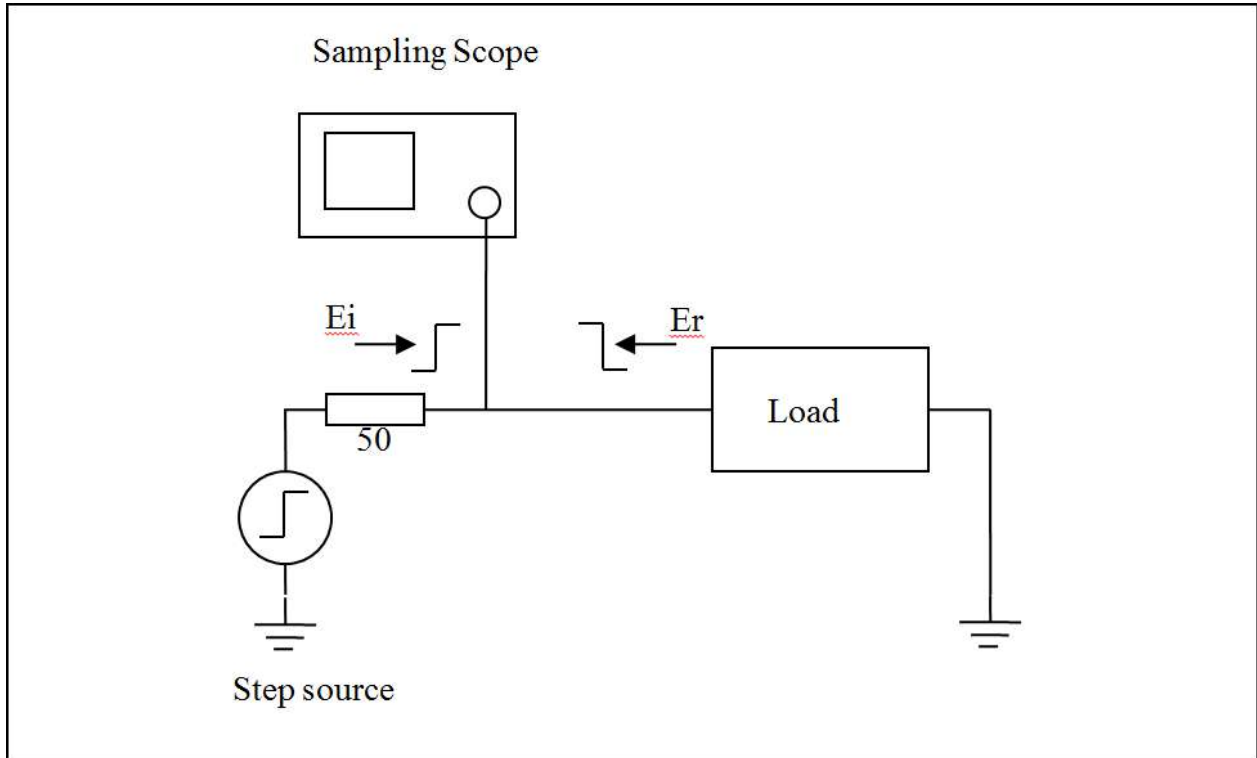
4.7.7 Time domain reflectometry (TDR)

Time domain reflectometry is a useful technique for measuring the impedance of transmission lines and for determining the position of any discontinuities due to connectors or damage. The network analyzer can determine the time domain response to a step input from a broad band frequency sweep at harmonically related frequencies. An inverse Fourier Transform is performed on the reflected frequency data (S_{11}) to give the impulse response in the time domain. The impulse response is then integrated to give the step response. Reflected components of the step excitation show the type of discontinuity and the distance from the calibration plane.

A similar technique is used to derive a TDT (Time Domain Transmission) signal from the transmitted signal data (S_{21}). This can be used to measure the rise time of amplifiers, filters and other networks. The following provides a more detailed treatment of TDR and TDT.

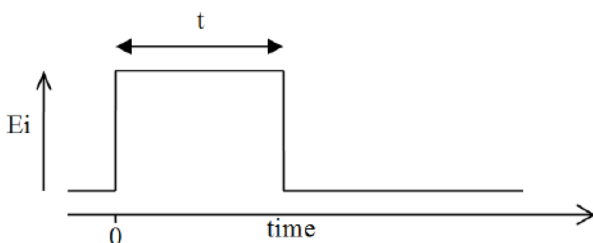
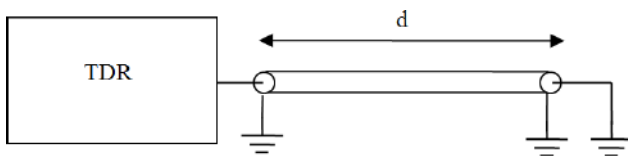
4.7.7.1 Traditional TDR

The traditional TDR consists of a step source and sampling oscilloscope (see figure below). A step signal is generated and applied to a load. Depending on the value of the load, some of the signal may be reflected back to the source. The signals are measured in the time domain by the sampling scope. By measuring the ratio of the input voltage to the reflected voltage, the impedance of the load can be determined. Also, by observing the position in time when the reflections arrive, it is possible to determine the distance to impedance discontinuities.



Traditional TDR setup

4.7.7.1.1 Example: shorted 50 ohm transmission line



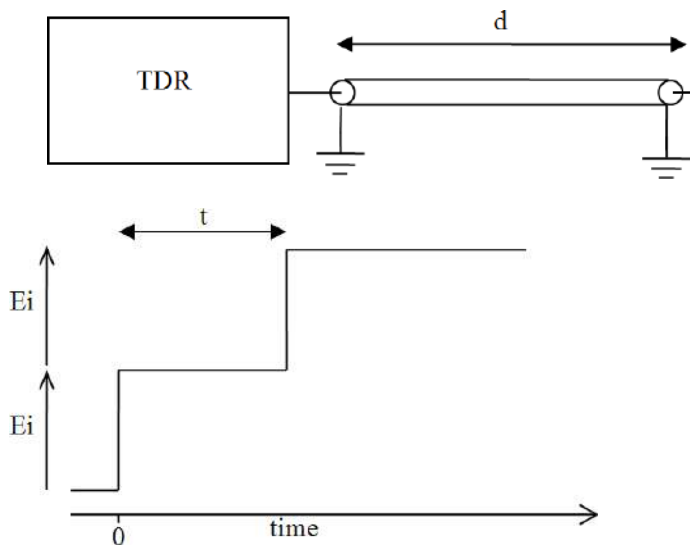
Simplified representation of the response of a shorted line.

For a transmission line with a short circuit (figure above) the incident signal sees the characteristic impedance of the line so the scope measures E_i . The incident signal travels along the line to the short circuit where it is reflected back 180° out of phase. This reflected wave travels back along the line canceling out the incident wave until it is terminated by the impedance of the source. When the reflected signal reaches the scope the signal measured by the scope goes to zero as the incident wave has been canceled by the reflection. The result measured by the scope is a pulse of magnitude E_i and duration that corresponds to the time it takes the signal to pass down the line to the short and back again. If the velocity of the signal is known, the length of the line can be calculated:

$$d = \frac{tv}{2}$$

where v is the velocity of the signal in the transmission line, t is the measured pulse width and d is the length of the transmission line.

4.7.7.1.2 Example: open-circuited 50 ohm transmission line



Simplified representation of the response of an open line

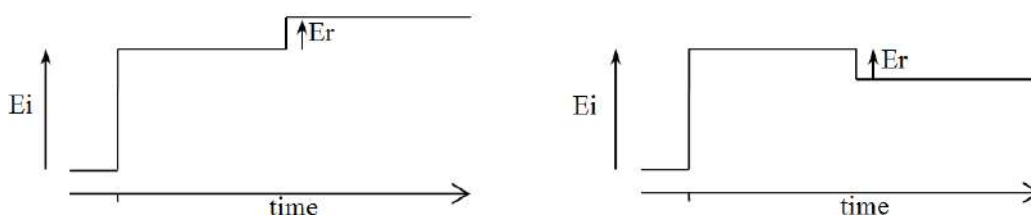
In the case of the open circuit transmission line (figure above) the reflected signal is in phase with the incident signal, so the reflected signal combines with the incident signal to produce an output at the scope that is twice the incident signal. Again, the distance d can be calculated if the velocity of the signal is known.

4.7.7.1.3 Example: resistively terminated 50 ohm transmission line

$$\rho = \frac{E_r}{E_i} = \frac{R-50}{R+50}$$

$R > 50$

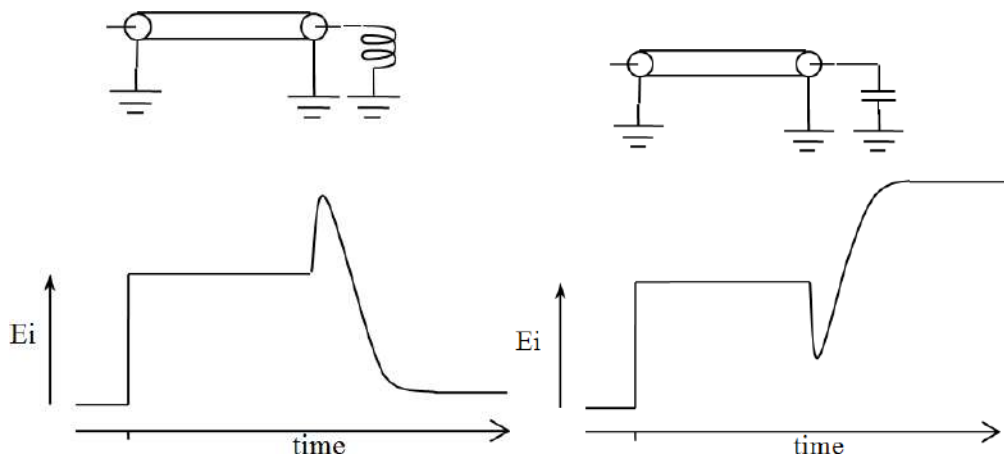
$R < 50$



Simplified representation of the response of a resistively terminated line

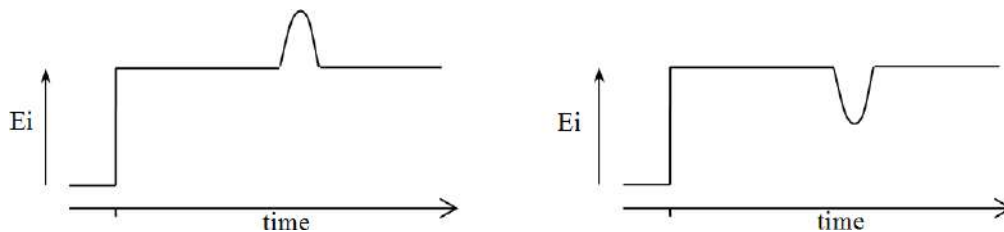
4.7.7.1.4 Reactive terminations and discontinuities

Reactive elements can also be determined by their response. Inductive terminations produce a positive pulse. Capacitive terminations produce a negative pulse.



Simplified representation of the response of a reactively terminated line

Similarly, the position and type of discontinuity in a cable, due to connectors or damage, can be determined. A positive pulse indicates a connector that is inductive or damage to a cable, such as a removal of part of the outer screen. A negative-going pulse indicates a connector with too much capacitance or damage to the cable, such as being crushed.



Simplified representation of the response of a line discontinuity

4.7.7.2 Time domain from frequency domain

An alternative to traditional TDR is where the time domain response is determined from the frequency domain using an Inverse Fast Fourier Transform (IFFT). Several methods are available for extracting time domain information from the frequency domain. The main methods are *lowpass* and *bandpass*.

4.7.7.2.1 Lowpass method

The lowpass method can produce results that are similar to the traditional TDR measurements made with a time domain reflectometer using a step signal, and can also compute the response to an impulse. It provides both magnitude and phase information and gives the best time resolution. However, it requires that the circuit is DC-coupled. This is the method supported by the PicoVNA 106 and 108.

The lowpass method uses an Inverse Fourier Transform to determine the impulse response in the time domain from the reflection coefficient measured in the frequency domain. The DC component is extrapolated from the low-frequency data to provide a phase reference. Alternatively, if the DC termination is known it can be entered manually. Once the impulse response is computed, the step response may be determined from the time integral of the impulse response. In the step response mode the trace is similar to that of a TDR, except that there is no step at $t = 0$. When the time domain response is derived from the frequency information the value at $t = 0$ is the impedance of the transmission line or load immediately following the calibration plane. The value is referenced to 50Ω , the characteristic impedance of the system. For example, an open circuit would appear as a value of +1 unit relative to the reference value and a short circuit would appear as a value of -1 unit relative to the reference value (see example TDR plots above).

To facilitate the use of the Inverse Fourier Transform to compute the time domain response, the samples in the frequency domain must be harmonically related and consist of 2^n points. For this reason, the TDR facility in the PicoVNA 106 and 108 makes available special 512, 1024, 2048 and 4096-frequency-point calibrations with a stop frequency of up to 6000 MHz (PicoVNA 106) or 8500 MHz (PicoVNA 108). The resulting alias-free range is a function of the number of frequency points (N) and the total frequency span. It is given by the expression:

$$R = \frac{N - 1}{FreqSpan}$$

So, the available ranges on the PicoVNA units are approximately as follows:

| Model | PicoVNA 106 | PicoVNA 108 |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Ranges | 100 ns, 171 ns, 341 ns, 683 ns | 60 ns, 120 ns, 240 ns, 481 ns |
| Time resolution | 98 ps to 84 ps | 58 ps |

The transform returns twice the number of points of the calibration in the time domain. Therefore the above ranges provide time resolutions approximately as shown.

4.7.7.2 Bandpass method

The bandpass method provides only magnitude information so it is not possible to distinguish between inductive and capacitive reactances. Also, the time resolution is only half as good as in the lowpass mode. However, the method can be used for circuits where there is no DC path and hence is suitable for AC-coupled circuits such as bandpass filters. This method is not currently supported by the PicoVNA 106 and 108.

4.7.7.3 Windowing

The bandwidth of the network analyzer is limited by the frequency range, so the frequency domain data will be truncated at the bandwidth of the analyzer. Also the analyzer gathers data at discrete frequencies. The result of the sampled nature of the data and the truncation in the frequency domain is to produce a $\sin(x)/x$ response when transformed to the time domain. This appears as ringing on both the displayed impulse response and the step response. To overcome this problem, a technique known as windowing can be applied to the frequency domain data before implementing the Inverse Fourier Transform.

The windowing function progressively reduces the data values to zero as the edge of the frequency band is approached, thus minimizing the effect of the discontinuities. When the modified data is transformed, the ringing is reduced or removed depending on the selected windowing function. However, the windowing function reduces the bandwidth and so increases the width of the pulse in impulse response mode and slows the edge in step response mode. A balance must be made between the width of the pulse, or speed of the edge, and the amount of ringing to be able to determine closely spaced discontinuities. The PicoVNA 106 and 108 allow you to choose a rectangular window (no bandwidth reduction), a Hanning window (raised cosine), or a Kaiser–Bessel window. The order of the Kaiser–Bessel window is configurable.

4.7.7.4 Aliasing

The sampled nature of the data means it is subject to the effects of aliasing. The result is repetition of time-domain response at the effective sampling rate in the frequency domain. This limits the maximum time delay and hence maximum cable length that can be observed. In the PicoVNA 106 this is 683 ns (approximately 138 m of cable) and in the PicoVNA 108 it is 481 ns (approximately 97 m of cable).

5 Getting started

Refer to the [Quick Start Guide](#) above for initial instructions, then return here for more detail.

5.1 Minimum requirements

A PC or laptop is required to operate the VNA. The recommended minimum requirements are stated in the [Specifications](#).

The performance of the software is influenced by the performance of the PC and video adaptor installed in it. It is important that an adaptor with good graphics performance is used. As a general guide, it is recommended that an adaptor with at least 64 MB of memory is used.

5.2 Software installation

Follow the [Quick Start Guide](#) to install the software from the disk or from www.picotech.com. The installer will copy the program and the USB driver to your computer. You need administrative privileges in order to run the installer.

The installer creates a support directory at one of these locations:

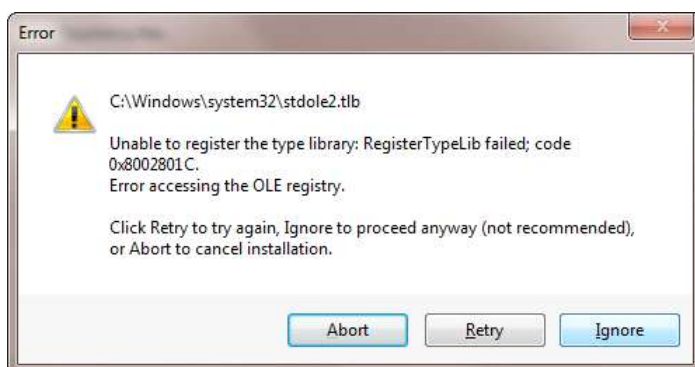
- PicoVNA 106: C:\User\Public\Documents\PicoVNA2
- PicoVNA 108: C:\User\Public\Documents\PicoVNA3

This directory contains the following files:

- xxx-log.txt The status log file. 'xxx' is the serial number
- DefCal.cal Default calibration data (last used calibration)
- UsersGuide.pdf This *User's Guide*
- Support\ Folder with data files to support the software

5.2.1 Typical error messages

On Windows 7 machines it is common to see the following error message:



It is safe to click **Ignore** to continue the installation.

5.2.2 Mixer measurements (PicoVNA 108 only)

Control of the PicoSource AS108 300 kHz to 8 GHz signal source is built into the PicoVNA software. If you wish to carry out mixer measurements using other sources or sensors it is very likely that you will need to install the Keysight® IO Libraries Suite to support communication with external instruments through either the USB or GPIB interfaces. Please see www.keysight.com for details.

5.3 Switching on the VNA

When the VNA is powered on, the front-panel channel activity indicators will flash to indicate that the controller has started correctly.

5.4 Calibration kit parameters

The minimum requirements to carry out a 12-term calibration (full error correction) depend on the device to be tested. For example, the most accurate calibration is for *insertable* devices, and this requires a total of six standards: three of the four in each of the male and female cal standards.

An 'insertable' device is one that has connectors of different sexes at its ports. On the other hand, a calibration for a non-insertable device can be carried out using only three standards by using the *unknown thru* calibration method.

The calibration kits parameters can be inspected using the **Calibration Kit Parameters** window (see below) found under the **Tools** menu. From this the kit editor can be launched to modify and create new kits as discussed later in the section.

The *unknown thru* calibration method only requires that the *thru* adaptor be reciprocal: that is, have $S_{21} = S_{12}$.

1. If calibration data for the matched load or through adaptor is available for the Port 1 kit, check the box(es)

2. If calibration data for the Open/Short is available for the Port 1 kit, check the box

3. Enter details of kit to be used with Port 1

4. Enter details of kit to be used with Port 2

5. Click to load existing kits

6. Use the Cal Kit Editor to create a new kit based on an existing kit

7. After kits are loaded, click to apply

The screenshot shows the 'Calibration Kit Parameters' window with two sections for Port 1 and Port 2. Each section includes fields for 'Kit name', 'Load data available', 'Thru data available', and 'Short and Open data available'. Below these are 'Kit parameters' (Female/Male selection, Loss, Open/Short offsets), 'Open capacitance coefficients' (C0, C1, C2, C3), and 'Short inductance L (pH)'. At the bottom are buttons for 'Load P1 Kit', 'Load P2 Kit', 'Apply', 'Close', and 'Cal Kit Editor'.

Calibration Kit window. The short/open offsets are in mm in air.

5.4.1 Insertable DUT

- Open circuit (2 pieces, one male and one female)
- Short circuit (2 pieces, one male and one female)
- Matched termination (2 pieces, one male and one female)
- Through connection test cable(s)

For insertable DUTs the requirement is for two calibration kits, one of each sex. Generally, it is required that the matched termination should be of good quality and, as a guide, should have a return loss of better than 40 dB. However, the PicoVNA 106 and 108 allow terminations with relatively poor return loss values to be used and still maintain good accuracy. This is discussed in [Using a matched termination](#).

5.4.2 Non-insertable DUT

- Open circuit (1 piece)
- Short circuit (1 piece)
- Matched termination (1 piece)
- Either a characterized through connection adaptor (1 piece) or any uncharacterized reciprocal adaptor
- Through connection test cable(s)

For non-insertable DUTs only a single calibration kit is required. In addition, a reciprocal but otherwise *unknown thru* adaptor, or a fully characterized *thru* adaptor, is required. These are supplied with all Pico standard kits.

5.4.3 Open circuit model

The open circuit capacitance model used is described by the equation below, where F is the operating frequency. Generally, with typical open circuit standards, the effect is small, amounting to no more than a few degrees of phase shift at 6 or 8.5 GHz.

$$C_{open} = C_0 + C_1F + C_2F^2 + C_3F^3$$

In addition, an offset length (sometimes referred to as offset delay) can be entered as well as the loss of the offset line.

5.4.4 Short circuit model

The short circuit inductance is modeled by an inductance component and in addition, a non-zero offset length can be entered together with the loss of the offset line.

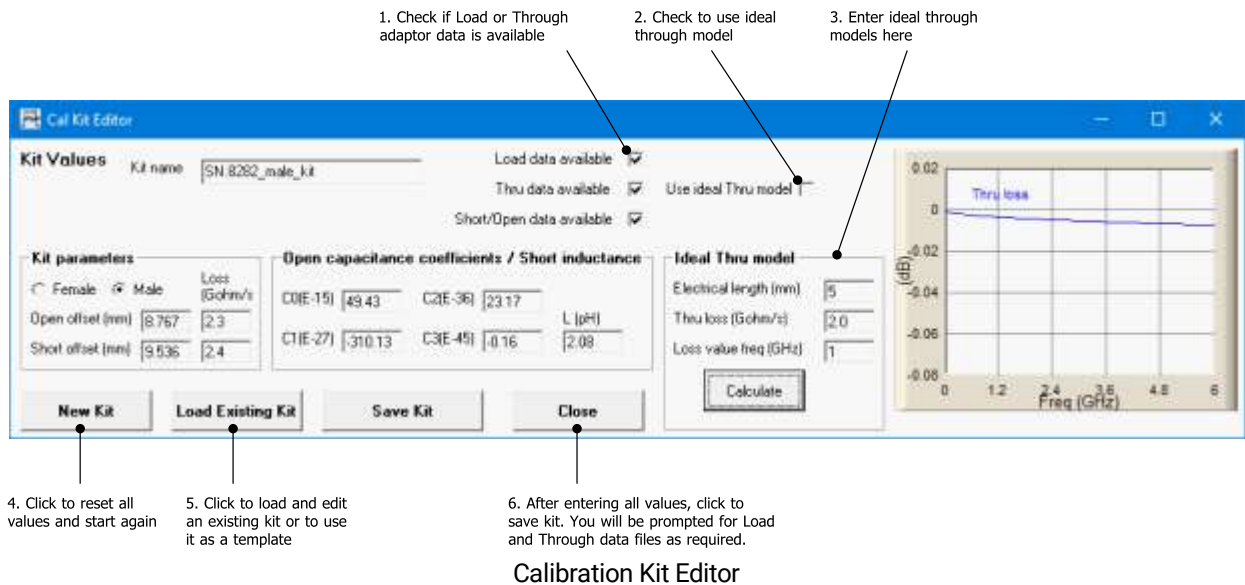
5.4.5 Short and open without models

The PicoVNA 106 and 108 support short and open standards defined by data only. In this case the data is supplied in the form of a 201-frequency-points table. Each frequency point has three comma-separated entries: frequency (in MHz), real part of the reflection coefficient and the imaginary part of the reflection coefficient.

5.4.6 Calibration kit editor

As already mentioned, the calibration kit editor can be used to create or edit an existing calibration kit. The figure below shows the editor window. A typical example is to create a new kit using an existing kit as a template to speed the process. So, the process would be to first load the existing calibration kit from the [Calibration Kit Parameters](#) window. Type the new kit name in the name box and modify the parameters as needed. Finally, click **Save Kit** to save the new kit with a new name.

In the above example, if the existing kit loaded had load data or through data and you want to replace this with new data, uncheck the appropriate box and then check it again.



Calibration Kit Editor

The calibration kits optionally supplied with the PicoVNA 106 and 108 provide an economical solution while retaining good measurement accuracy. They are supplied with SMA or precision PC3.5 (SMA-compatible) connectors. Refer to the *PicoVNA 100 Series Data Sheet* for details.

5.4.7 Using a matched termination with poor return loss or unmodeled short and open

A successful calibration can be carried out without the need for a good-quality matched load. In order to retain accuracy, it is necessary to provide the instrument with accurate performance data of the matched load to be used. The data needs to be in a fixed format thus:

| Frequency (MHz) | S11 (real) | S11 (imaginary) |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|
| ↓ | ↓ | ↓ |
| 1.0 | -1.7265E-03 | 7.7777E-05 |
| 30.995 | -1.6588E-03 | 3.3093E-04 |
| 60.99 | -1.4761E-03 | 5.9003E-04 |
| 90.985 | -1.4653E-03 | 1.0253E-03 |
| 120.98 | -1.3841E-03 | 1.2608E-03 |
| 150.975 | -1.1924E-03 | 1.5800E-03 |
| 240.96 | -1.0884E-03 | 1.9085E-03 |
| 300.95 | -8.7216E-04 | 2.1355E-03 |
| 330.945 | -7.0326E-04 | 2.4109E-03 |
| 360.94 | -5.7006E-04 | 2.6790E-03 |

*There must be 201 data lines. Typically these should cover the band 1 MHz to (6.00 GHz or 8.50 GHz). **No empty or comment lines are allowed.***

Format for characteristics of matched load

In the case when the models for the open and short are not known, it is possible to enter measured data in the same format as shown above. This approach can give good results if the open and short can be measured accurately, particularly at the higher frequencies where it is usually difficult to model components accurately.

When supplied, the data for the through connection adaptor must be in the format shown below. The data must be a full set of S-parameters with no empty or comment lines. It is important that the data spans as much of the full frequency range as possible, for example from 1 MHz to (6000 MHz or 8500 MHz).

| Freq (MHz) | S11r | S11i | S21r | S21i | S12r | S12i | S22r | S22i |
|------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| 0.3 | 1.1450E-04 | -1.0852E-04 | 0.9965E-01 | -1.0394E-03 | 9.9947E-01 | -7.4717E-04 | 1.0723E-04 | 4.9711E-05 |
| 40.3 | 2.9307E-04 | 1.9923E-04 | 9.9973E-01 | -1.0241E-02 | 9.9934E-01 | -1.0505E-02 | 2.0715E-04 | 2.0814E-04 |
| 80.3 | 4.1774E-04 | 4.3168E-04 | 9.9922E-01 | -1.9672E-02 | 9.9927E-01 | -1.9668E-02 | 2.8195E-04 | 2.8897E-04 |
| 120.3 | 5.3415E-04 | 5.7609E-04 | 9.9898E-01 | -2.9165E-02 | 9.9855E-01 | -2.8852E-02 | 4.0525E-04 | 2.8043E-04 |
| 160.3 | 7.1924E-04 | 6.4942E-04 | 9.9883E-01 | -2.9165E-02 | 9.9855E-01 | -2.8852E-02 | 4.0646E-04 | 2.8133E-04 |
| 200.3 | 7.8941E-04 | 7.5903E-04 | 9.9834E-01 | -3.8214E-02 | 9.9846E-01 | -3.8128E-02 | 5.4323E-04 | 2.2344E-04 |
| 240.3 | 9.9069E-04 | 7.8162E-04 | 9.9792E-01 | -5.7033E-02 | 9.9758E-01 | -4.7805E-02 | 5.7273E-04 | 2.9411E-04 |
| 280.3 | 1.0791E-03 | 8.0397E-04 | 9.9715E-01 | -6.6419E-02 | 9.9699E-01 | -6.5967E-02 | 5.7191E-04 | 2.6551E-04 |
| 320.3 | 1.2779E-03 | 8.5429E-04 | 9.9648E-01 | -7.5557E-02 | 9.9625E-01 | -7.5449E-02 | 6.3081E-04 | 2.9580E-04 |

...
and so on, to a total of 201 frequency points

Format for the characteristics of the through connector. These must be a full set of S-parameters (real and imaginary).

To add matched load, short and open, or thru adaptor data to a calibration kit, follow the steps below:

- Load kit using the Kit Editor (see [Calibration Kit](#))
- Check the **Load Data Available** box and similarly the boxes for the **Thru** and **Short and Open circuits** in the **Kit Editor parameters** window.
- If the existing kit already has load, short and open, or through data, uncheck and recheck the appropriate box. **If this is not done, the existing data will be kept and copied to the new kit.**
- If needed, manually enter the rest of the kit parameters. Ensure that the correct offset is entered.
- Click **Save Kit**
- When prompted, select the data file containing the matched load or the thru adaptor data in the format shown above.
- Save the kit for future use by clicking the **Save Kit** button (see [Calibration Kit](#)).

Note: When a kit is loaded, any available *matched load* or *thru* adaptor data that is associated with the kit will be automatically loaded.

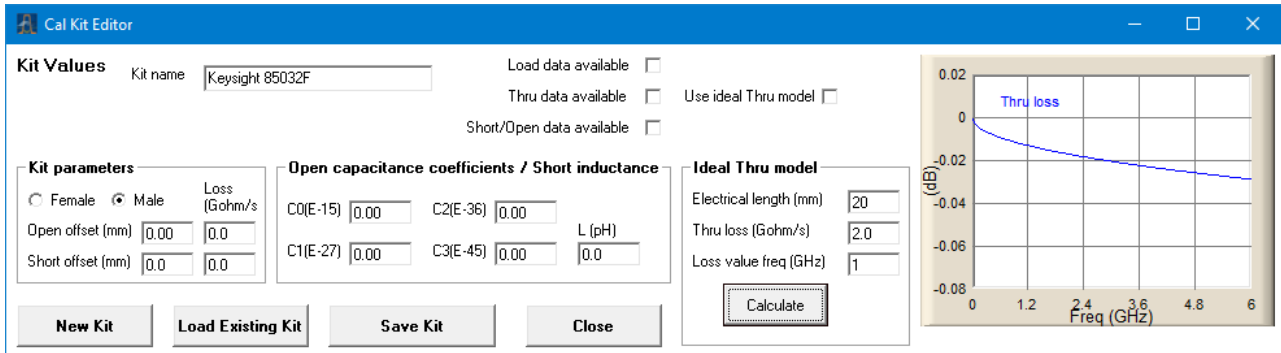
The calibration kits available for the PicoVNA 106 and 108 come complete with *matched load*, *short* and *open*, and *thru* adaptor data. Copy these files to your computer for easy access.

It is critically important that the correct kit data, with the correct serial number, is loaded.

5.4.8 Using a third-party calibration kit

The PicoVNA 106 and 108 may be used with third-party calibration kits, such as the Keysight/Agilent 85032F, that are characterized by polynomial coefficient models either in written form or as a text file.

1. Use the PicoVNA cal kit editor (**Tools > Calibration Kit > Cal Kit Editor**).
2. Uncheck all the **"data available"** boxes.
3. Enter the four poly coefficients of **Open capacitance**.
4. Enter only the L0 poly coefficient of **Short inductance** (neglecting the small and HF dominating coefficients)
5. Enter the **Short** and **Open Loss** terms.
6. Convert **Short** and **Open offset** times (ps) to distance (mm) in air and enter those.
7. The short and open Z_0 values are not used (assumed 50 Ω).
8. Nothing is entered for the Load.
9. As this Cal Kit does not have a **Thru**, we have left the length as zero. If a Thru is provided, measure the length (reference plane to reference plane in mm) and enter that to recreate these files.



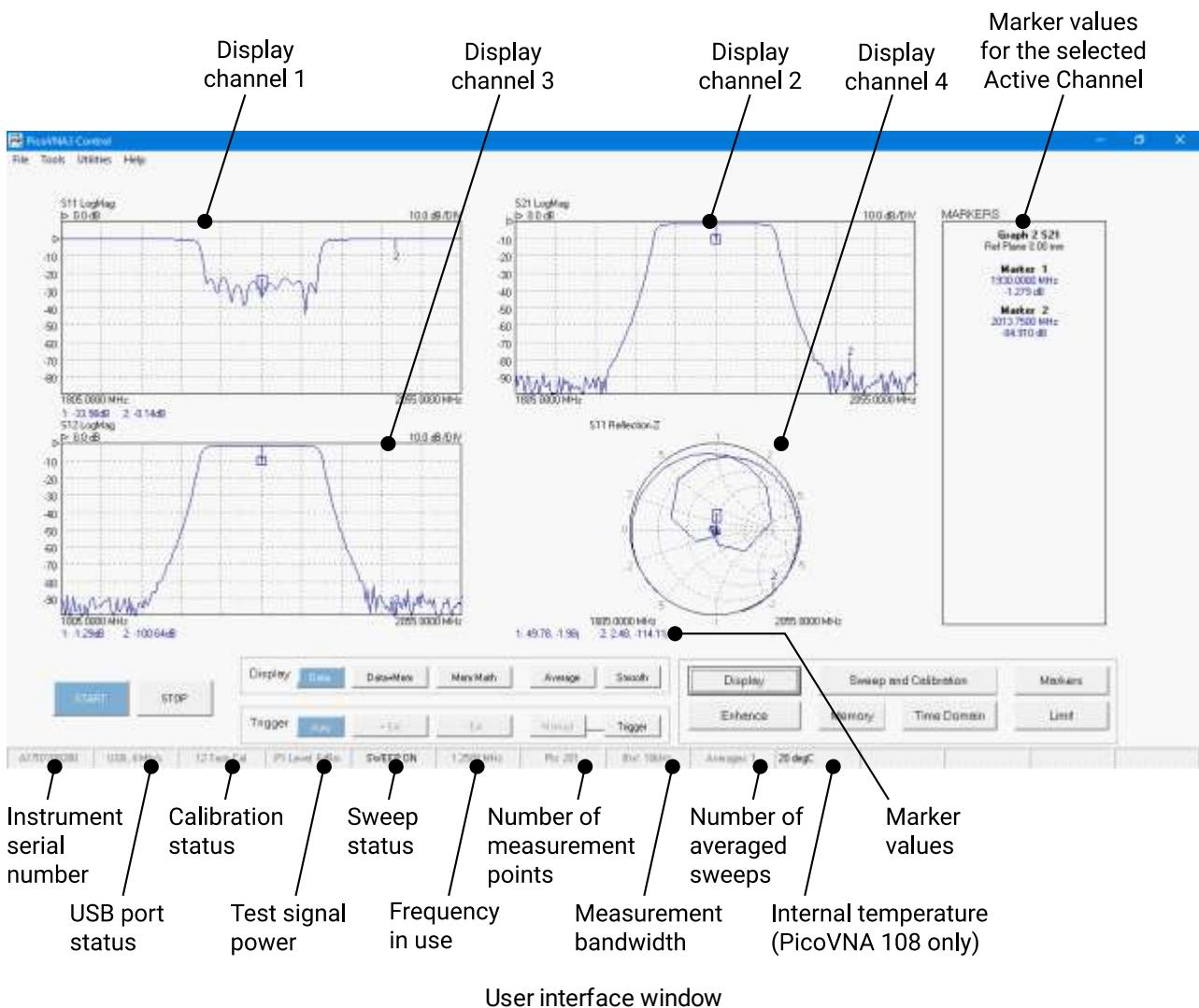
10. Save the cal kit file(s) generated by the editor. We suggest including the calibration kit model number, and serial number if provided, in the file name.

6 Operation

The PicoVNA 2 and PicoVNA 3 software allows you to program the measurement parameters and plots the measurement results in real time. The main window includes a status panel that displays information including calibration status, frequency sweep step size and sweep status. The **Help** menu includes a copy of this manual.

6.1 The PicoVNA 2 or 3 main window

The PicoVNA 2 main window is shown below. PicoVNA 3 is similar. It is dominated by a large graphics area where the measurement results are plotted together with the readout of the markers. One, two or four plots can be displayed simultaneously. The plots can be configured to display the desired measurements.



6.1.1 Display setup

Setting up the display is carried out through the **Display Set Up** window which is called up from the main window by clicking **Display**. The window is shown below. The typical sequence to set up the display is as follows:

- Set the number of channels to be displayed by clicking the appropriate radio button under **Display Channels**
- Select the desired active channel from the drop-down list (can also be selected by clicking on a marker in the main window on the desired display channel)
- Select the channel to set up by clicking the appropriate radio button under **Select**

- Choose the desired parameter to display on this channel from the drop-down list under **Parameter / Graph Type**
- Choose the desired graph type from the drop-down list under **Parameter / Graph Type**
- Select the vertical axis values from the **Vertical Axis** section. Optionally, click **Autoscale** to automatically set the sensitivity and reference values. Note that reference position 1 is at the top (see second figure below).
- Click **Apply** to apply the selected values
- Repeat the above steps for each display needed

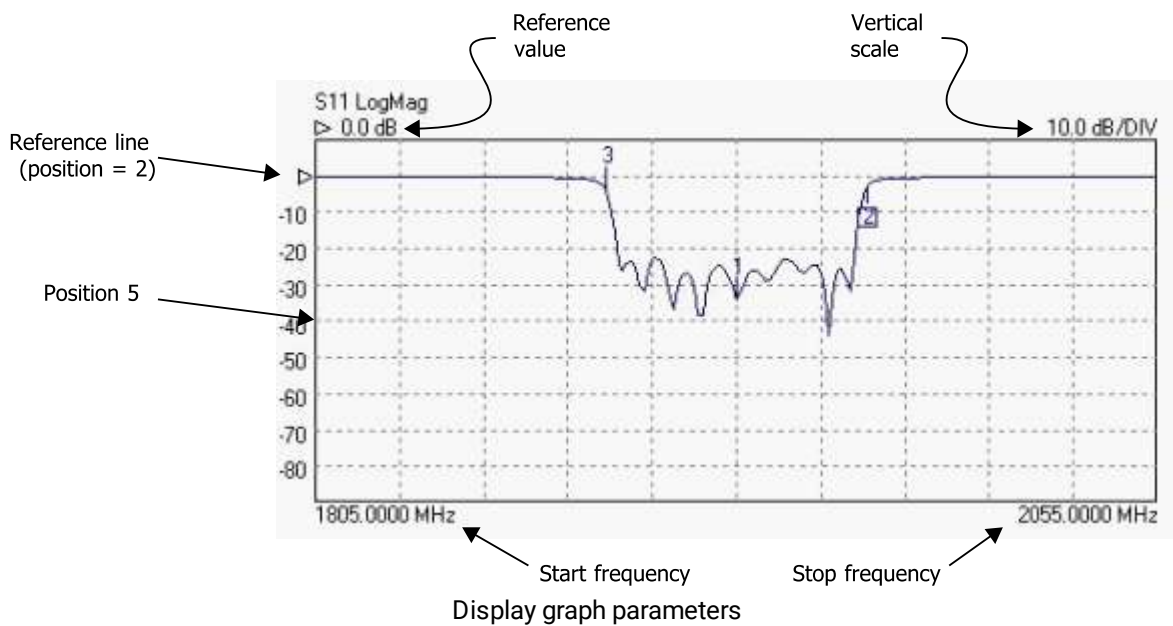
Note: The Active Channel must be one of the displayed channels.

The screenshot shows the 'Display Set Up' dialog box with the following settings and callouts:

- 3. Select channel to set up:** Points to the 'Select' section where 'CH1' is selected.
- 1. Select one-channel, two-channel or four-channel view:** Points to the 'Display Channels' section where 'ALL' is selected.
- 2. Select channel to show in the Markers panel:** Points to the 'Active Channel' dropdown set to '2'.
- 4. Check to show vertical scale values on graphs:** Points to the 'Display values on graph' checkbox, which is checked.
- 5. Apply settings before selecting next channel:** Points to the 'Apply' button.

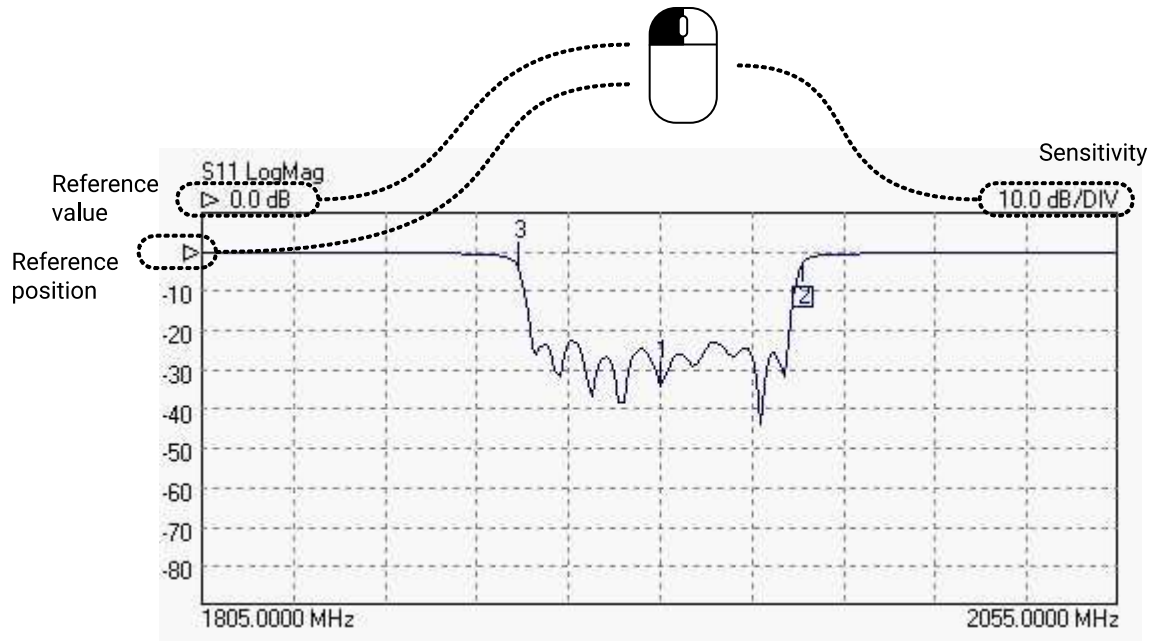
Other settings visible in the window include: Parameter: S11, Graph: LogMag, Units: dB, Reference: 0, Ref Position: 2, Sensitivity: 10, and an 'Autoscale' button.

The Display Set Up window is used to set up the measurements display



The **colors** of the main graphics display can be changed to suit individual preferences. This can be done by selecting the **Color Scheme** item from the **Tools** menu. To set a color, click the color preview box next to the item name.

Once you have set up a color scheme, you can save and recall it as a **Cal and Status** or just a **Status** setting using the **File** menu.



Editing graph parameters using the mouse

The figure above shows how the mouse can be used to quickly adjust reference position, reference value and vertical scale sensitivity for the graph. Drag the indicated values up and down to adjust, or type a new value where the cursor indicates.

6.1.2 Data markers

It is possible to display up to eight markers on each display. They are set up by clicking on the **Markers** button (see figure below). There are four possible marker modes as follows:

Active marker: The active marker is the marker used for comparison when the delta marker mode (switched on by selecting a reference marker) is on. One of the displayed markers must be chosen as the active marker.

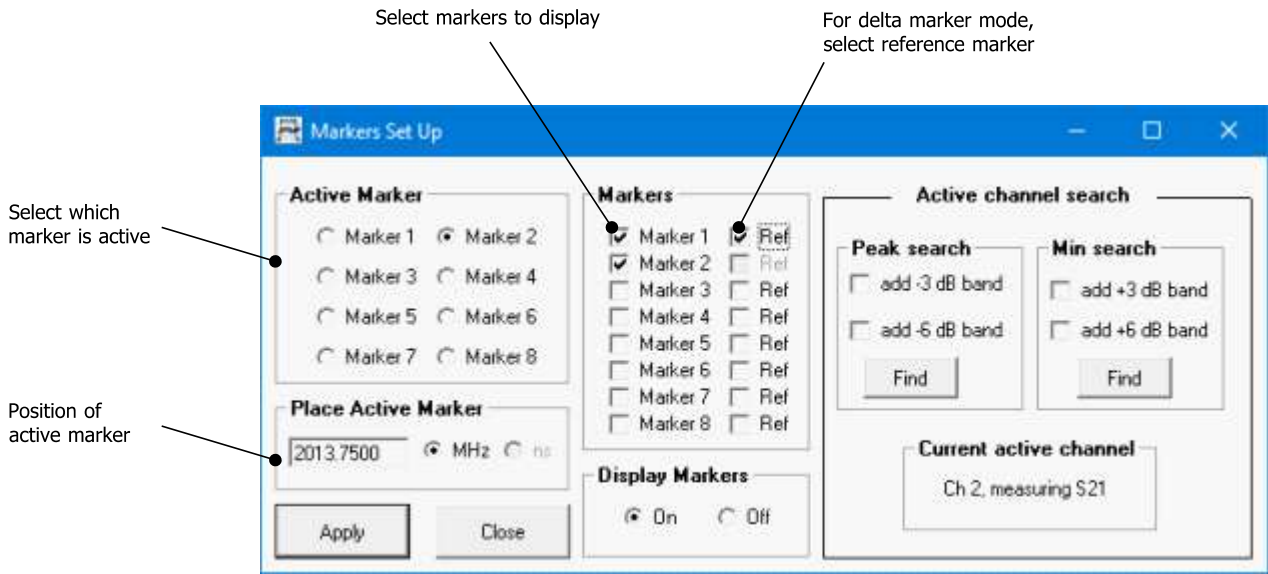
Reference marker: The reference marker causes the delta marker mode to be switched on. The value difference between the active marker and the reference markers is shown on the right hand marker display panel.

Fixed marker: A fixed marker cannot be moved and its position is not updated with subsequent measurement values. It provides a fixed reference point. Only a reference marker can be made a fixed marker. Once a marker is fixed, it cannot be moved until it is unfixed.

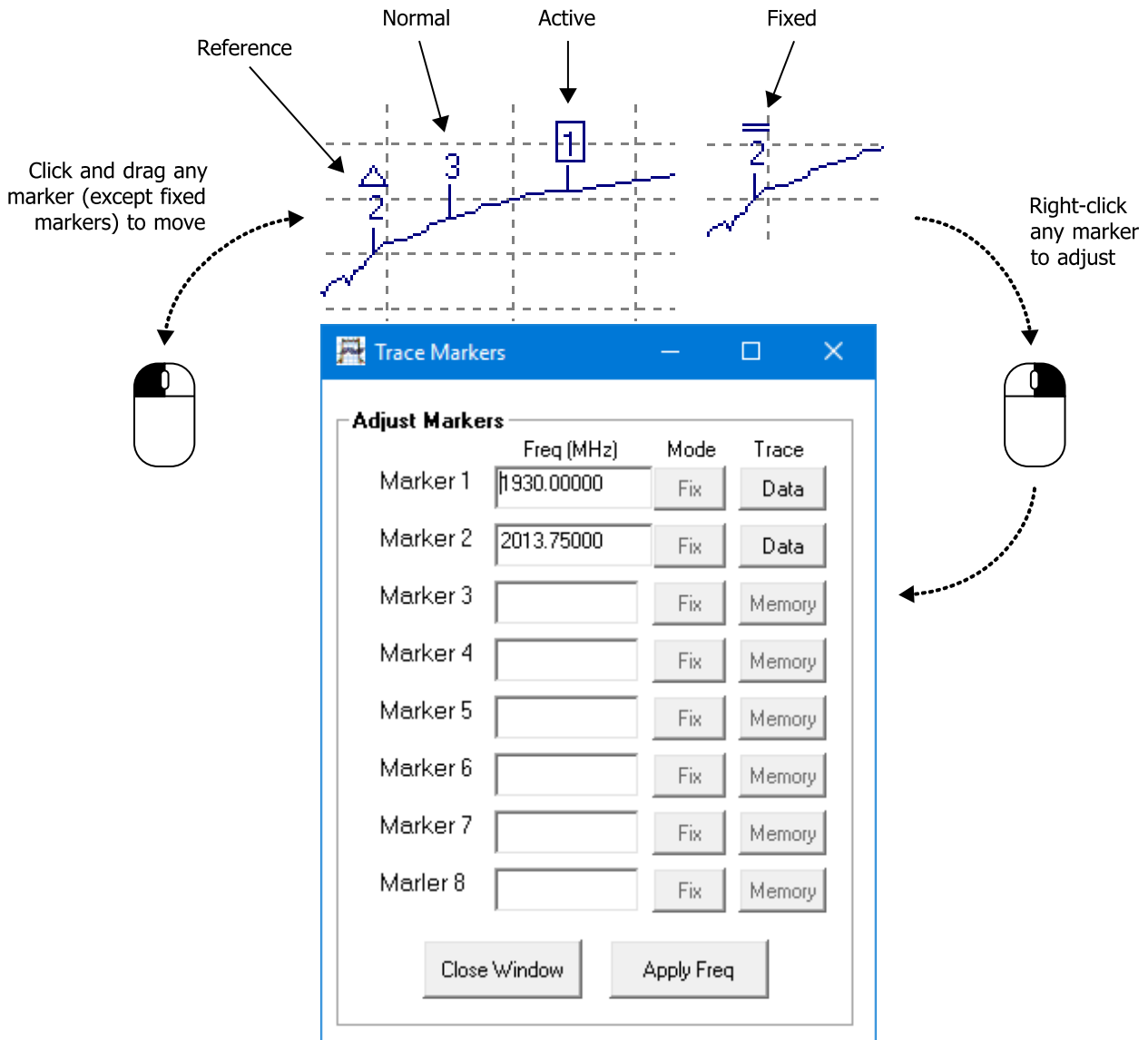
Normal marker: The value of a normal marker is displayed on the right-hand marker readout panel and in lower resolution readouts below each measurement plot.

Any marker (except a fixed marker) can be moved to a new position by left clicking on it (on any displayed channel) and dragging it to a new position.

The markers set up form provides a **Peak / Minimum Search** facility. This places marker 1 at either the peak or minimum value on the displayed trace on the active channel when the corresponding **Find** button is pressed.



The Markers Set Up dialog is used to display measurement markers



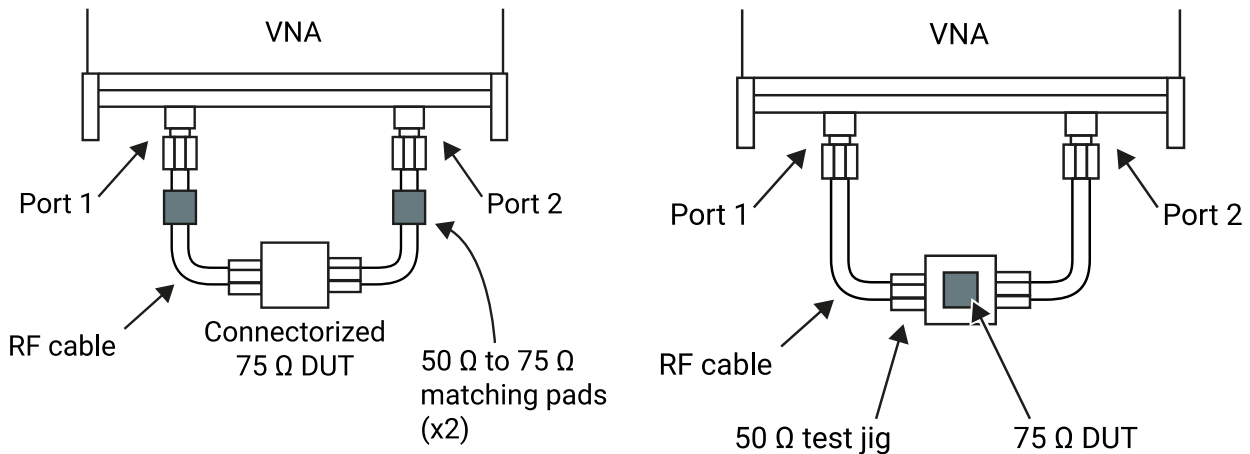
Change the marker type by right-clicking on any marker on the active channel. Note that only the reference marker can be fixed.

The peak / minimum search facility provides a means of placing additional markers to indicate the **3 or 6 dB bandwidth**. If either the 3 dB or 6 dB band box are selected, then clicking **Find** will place markers 2 and 3 on the frequency points either side of marker 1 which are 3 dB or 6 dB relative to it. Note that for best accuracy a sufficient number of sweep points should be used. This will ensure a fine enough resolution to allow accurate determination of the band points.

6.1.3 Measurement enhancement

The **System Z₀ Conversion** facility allows measurements, which are always taken in 50 Ω, to be converted to another impedance that you select. This feature can be useful, for example, for measuring 75 Ω devices. The value of Z₀ entered must be real (purely resistive) and must be within the range of 10 Ω to 200 Ω. Whenever this facility is selected, an indicator is displayed on the top right corner of the graphics display as shown in the second figure below. **Note** that when requested, impedance conversion will performed on the **live measurement** and any stored **memory trace**.

There are two possible ways of using the **System Z₀ Conversion** facility. For example, 75 Ω devices can be measured using the techniques illustrated below.



Impedance matching pads can be used to measure a connectorized device. Use external matching pads and calibrate with a 75 Ω calibration kit.

A discrete device mounted on a 50 Ω test jig is simpler to measure. Calibrate with a 50 Ω calibration kit, use de-embedding to remove the test jig and allow mathematical conversion to 75 Ω impedance.

Possible techniques for measuring 75 Ω devices

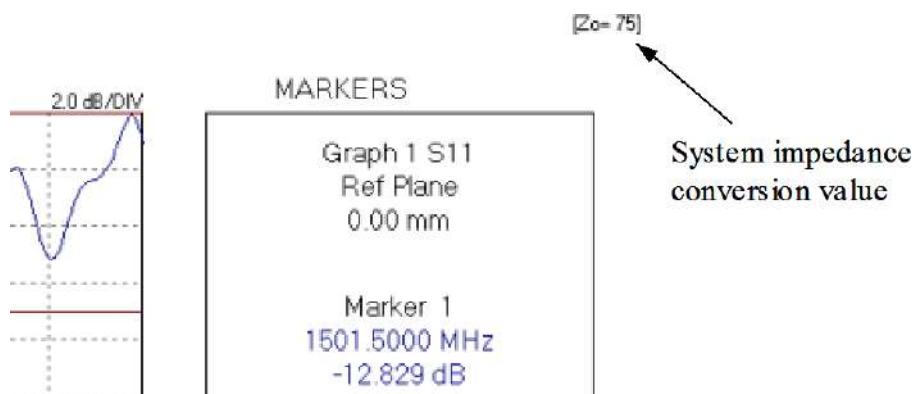
The steps necessary for each of the two techniques illustrated in the figure above are as follows:

75 Ω device with connectors

- Connect **50 Ω to 75 Ω impedance matching networks** (e.g. matching pads) at the ends of the cables connected to ports 1 and 2.
- In the **Enhancement** window, check the **Convert System Zo** box
- Check **External Zo match** to indicate external matching networks in use
- Enter **75** in the **Convert System Zo** value box and click **Apply**
- Proceed to calibrate using a **75 Ω calibration kit**
- Connect the DUT and **start the measurement**

75 Ω device mounted on 50 Ω test jig

- In the **Enhancement** window, uncheck the **Convert System Zo** box
- Calibrate at the ends of the test cables using a 50 Ω calibration kit
- Apply de-embedding to remove test jig effects. See [Calibration kit](#) for some suggestions.
- In the **Enhancement** window, check the **Convert System Zo** box
- Uncheck the **External Zo match** box (in this case mathematical impedance conversion is done by the software)
- Enter 75 in the **Convert System Zo** value box and click **Apply**
- Connect the DUT and start the measurement



System impedance chosen is displayed on the top right corner

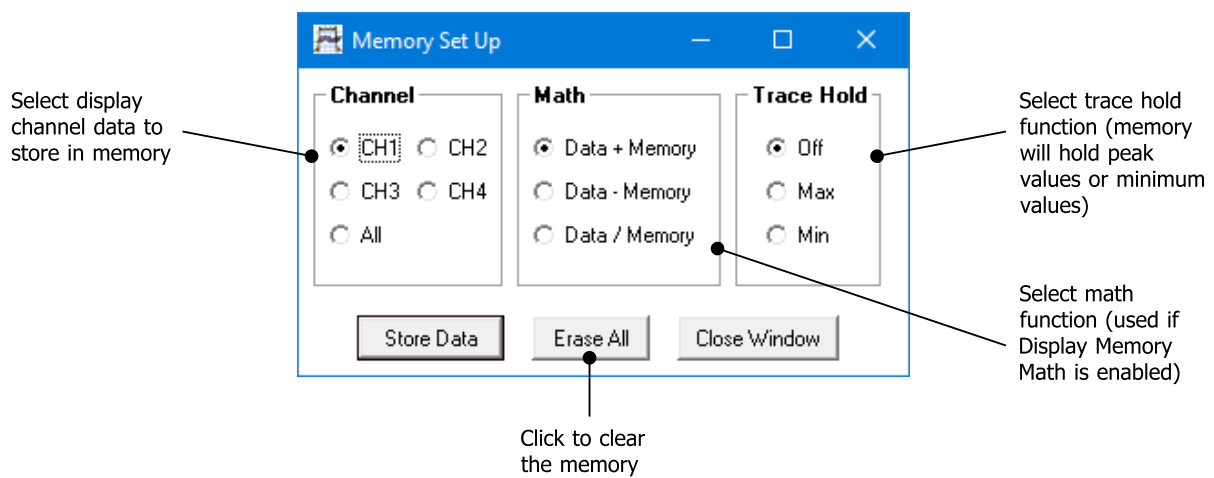
Note: S-parameters are interrelated, so, when using the Z_0 conversion facility (and no external impedance matching networks) without a full set of S-parameters available (e.g. only an S_{11} calibration) the program will assume values for the unavailable parameters as shown in the following table. A warning will be displayed in such cases.

| S_{11} | S_{12} | S_{21} | S_{22} |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| $10^{-6}, j0.0$ | $10^{-6}, j0.0$ | $10^{-6}, j0.0$ | $10^{-6}, j0.0$ |

Values assumed for parameters not available during Z_0 conversion

6.1.4 Memory facility

The current displayed data on each channel can be stored in memory. Also, each channel can be stored independently of all others. The **Memory Set Up** window is used to store the data and this window can be displayed by clicking **Memory** in the main window.



The Memory Set Up window is used to store data into memory

Once the data is stored, it can be displayed by clicking **Display Data and Memory** in the main window.

There are three vector math functions available: sum, subtraction and division. The selected function is used when you select the **Display Memory Math** function on the main window.

The trace hold is used to store the maximum or minimum values on the memory trace. Trace hold is **not** available when group delay is displayed.

6.1.5 Limit lines facility

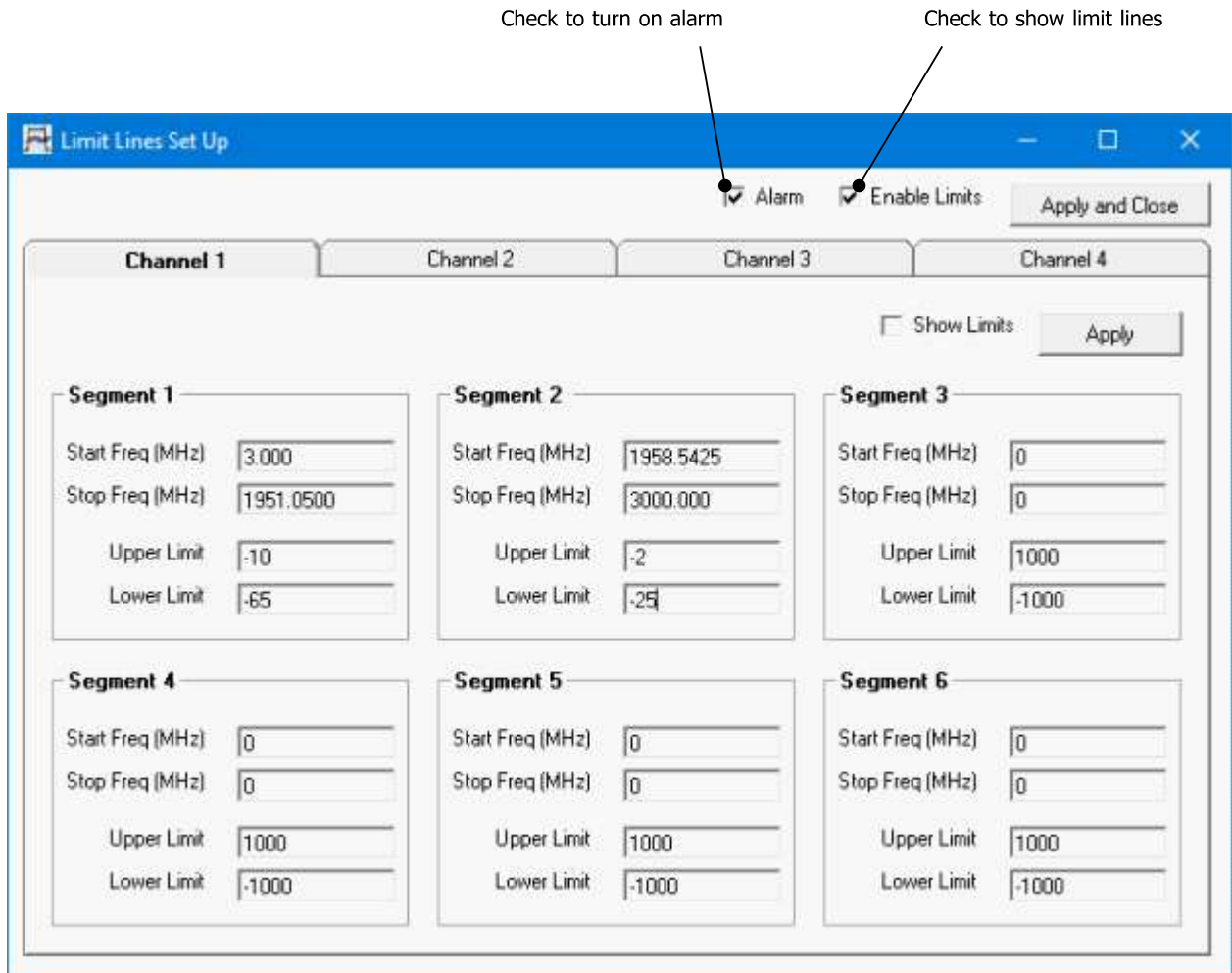
The limit lines facility allows six segments to be defined for each displayed graph. By taking advantage of the overlapping capability (see below) a maximum of 11 segments can be created. The set up window, shown below, is displayed by clicking **Limit Lines** in the main window.

Overlapping segments

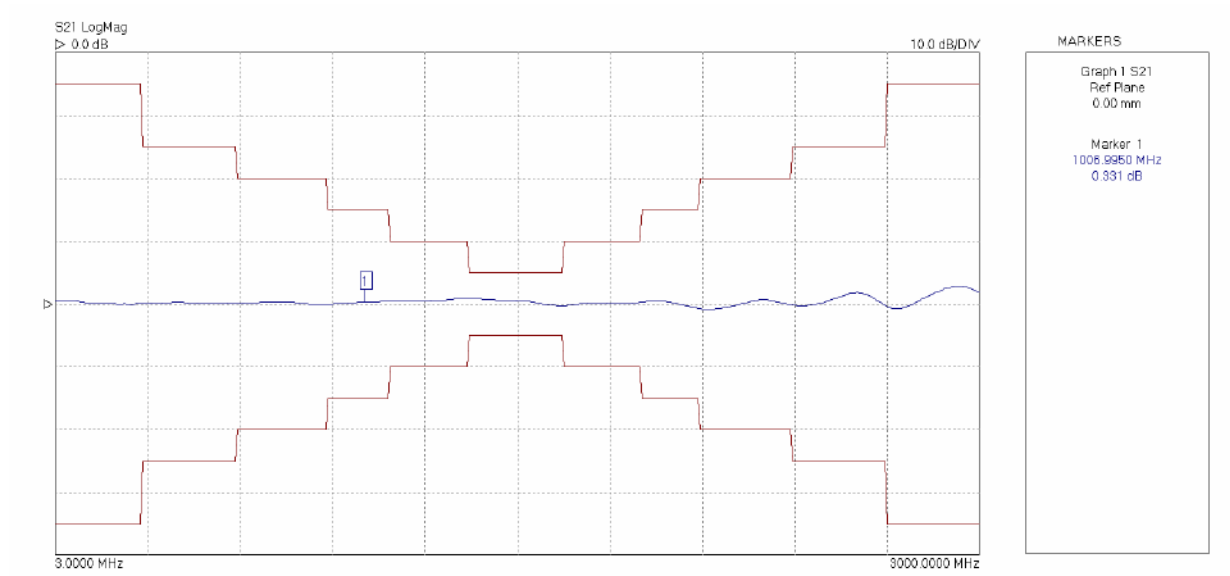
All valid segments entered are loaded in sequence (i.e. segment 1 first) with the each segment loaded having priority over the previous segment. This feature allows overlapping segments to be loaded. For example, if segment 1 is specified to cover, say, 400 to 800 MHz, then a second segment can be specified to a section of this band, for example, 500 to 600 MHz. This would result in a total of three segments—that is, 400 to 500, 500 to 600 and 600 to 800 MHz—even though only two were specified. An example of a complex 11-segment template is shown in the first plot below.

Alarm

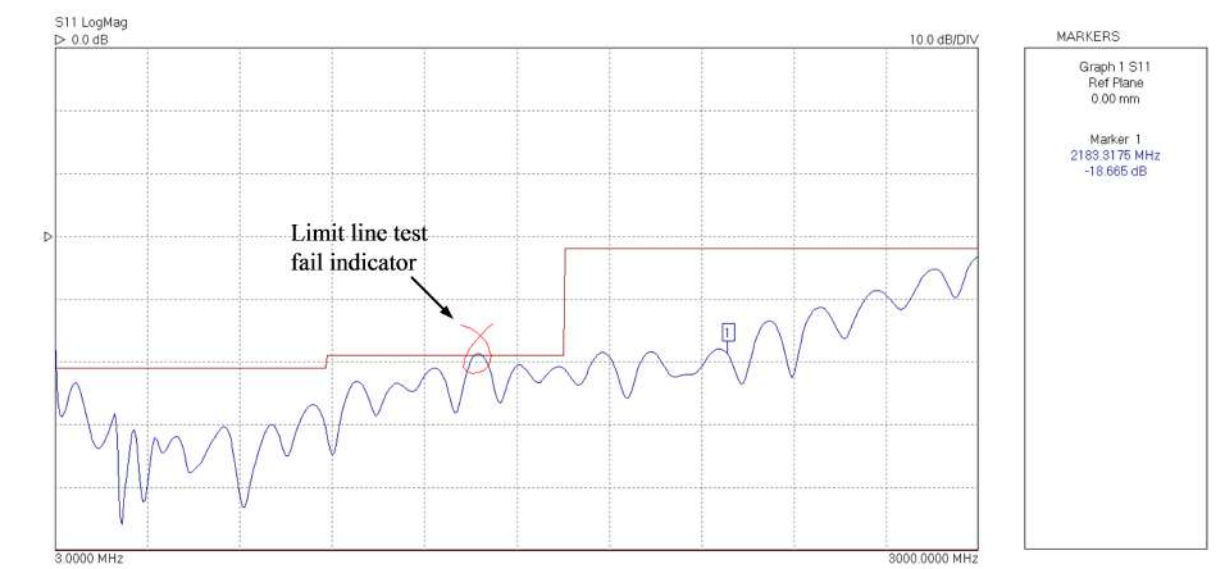
An alarm facility is provided with the limit lines. This provides audible warning during a sweep if any measurement exceeds the limits set. A visible indication of the last measurement and measurement channel in error is provided on the status panel where normally the calibration type is displayed. In addition a symbol is drawn on the trace indicating the last error point detected as shown in the second plot below. The alarm is available for all graph types except Smith plots.



The Limit Lines Set Up allows at least six segments per graph



Complex Limit Lines templates are possible by overlapping segments



Limit Lines failure graphical visual indicator

6.1.6 Status panel

The status panel in the [main window](#) provides useful information as follows:

- **Instrument serial number**
- **Calibration status** (S_{11} , S_{21} , $S_{11} + S_{21}$, 12 terms or U/T). A question mark indicates that the test power has been changed from that used for calibration
- **Test signal power.** This is the Port 1 signal level
- **Sweep status.** Indicates whether instrument is sweeping
- **Frequency step.** Step size of sweep
- **Sweep points.** Number of points in programmed sweep
- **Limit Lines alarm** if any measurement exceed the set limits (temporarily replaces **Calibration status**)
- **Internal instrument temperature** (PicoVNA 108 only)

6.1.7 Triggered sweep

It is possible to synchronize each measurement sweep to an external trigger. Simply click the appropriate radio button in the main window and ensure that a trigger signal is connected to the instrument's rear panel **Trigger** terminal.

The instrument supports either positive or negative edge trigger depending on the radio button selected on the main panel. The input impedance is 10 k Ω .



Trigger selection radio button on main panel (PicoVNA 106)



Trigger selection radio button on main panel (PicoVNA 108)
Note that Save on Trigger works in +Ext, -Ext and Manual modes only.

When the **Manual** trigger option is selected, the instrument will wait until the **Manual** button is pressed before starting a sweep.

6.1.8 Sweep trigger output

The rear panel **Trigger Output** terminal provides a 3 V logic output with the rising edge synchronized to the start of the measurement sweep. The signal goes to 0 V at the end of the sweep. The output resistance is about 500 Ω .

6.1.9 Measurement start / stop

The measurement **Start / Stop** buttons (see figure) are used to start or stop the instrument's sweep mode (measurement mode). This is necessary as functions which require reprogramming the instrument can only take place when the instrument is idle. The instrument status is shown in the Status Panel as described in the previous section.



The Start / Stop Measurement buttons control the sweep status

Note that when the sweep is stopped, the test signal frequency is held at the frequency point at the time the stop command is received by the instrument. In the case of triggered sweep, by default, at the end of the sweep, the frequency is held at the last frequency point until the next sweep trigger event is received. This can be changed from the **Tools > Diagnostics** menu.

6.1.10 PC data link interruption

The data flow between the VNA and its controlling PC can be interrupted by external factors. If the software cannot restore the link, a message similar to this will appear:



Warning message when the link with the PC is interrupted

In such a case:

- Restart the software using the selection in the drop-down menu under **Tools**
- Switch the VNA off and on again (using the switch on the back) when prompted to do so
- Wait until the front panel lights have stopped flashing
- Click **OK** to complete the software restart
- Recalibrate the instrument

You should rarely see a 'No Response' message. If it happens often, check that the PC is not running other applications and that the VNA software is not running as a background task when the sweep is on.

6.2 Calibration

The instrument must be calibrated before any measurements can be carried out. This is done by loading a previous calibration (see **File** menu) or carrying a fresh calibration by clicking **Calibration** in the main window, which brings up the **Calibration** window as shown here:

1. Set sweep parameters

2. After setting bandwidth, apply values

3. Select measurement required

4. Perform required calibration steps

5. On completion, apply calibration

Instrument calibration is carried out through the Calibration window. Before starting calibration select the preferred enhancement settings (bandwidth and averages).

Note: The frequency sweep is set by entering the start, stop and selecting the number of sweep points. Alternatively, by entering the centre frequency and span after clicking on the **Centre/Span format** option box.

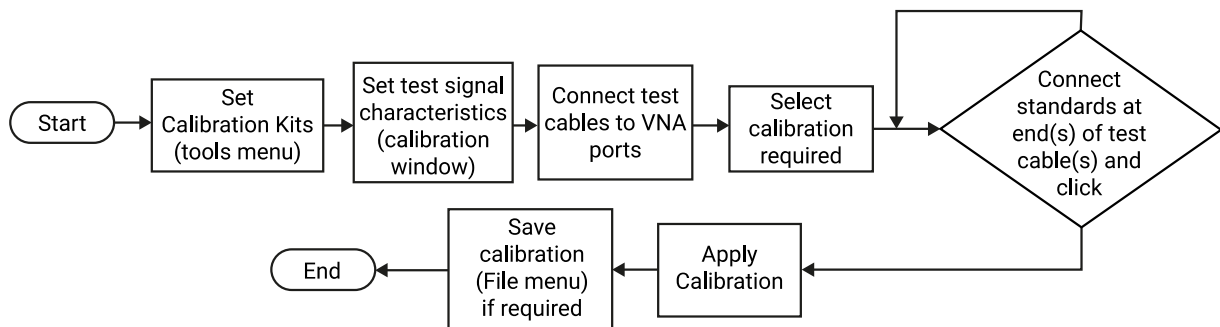
The table below summarizes the calibration types available together with the standards required to complete the calibration. For best overall accuracy, particularly when measuring low isolation devices with poor return loss values, a 12-term calibration should be performed.

| | S_{11} | S_{21} | $S_{11} + S_{21}$ | 12 terms (insertable DUT) | 12 terms or 8 terms* (non-insertable DUT) |
|--|--|--|---|--|--|
| Minimum calibration standards required | Matched load Open Short | Through connection Termination (see text) | Matched load Open Short Through connection | Matched load (x 2) Open (x 2) Short (x 2) Through cable | Matched load (x 1) Open (x 1) Short (x 1) Thru adaptor (x 1) Through cable |
| Measurement capability | S_{11} using 3-term error correction | Frequency response with isolation correction | S_{11} using 3-term error correction Frequency response with isolation and source match correction | $S_{11}, S_{21}, S_{12}, S_{22}$ using 12-term error correction | $S_{11}, S_{21}, S_{12}, S_{22}$ using 12-term error correction |

Calibration types supported.

* The *unknown thru* calibration (8 error terms) requires only a reciprocal *thru* adaptor.

Here is the basic calibration sequence:

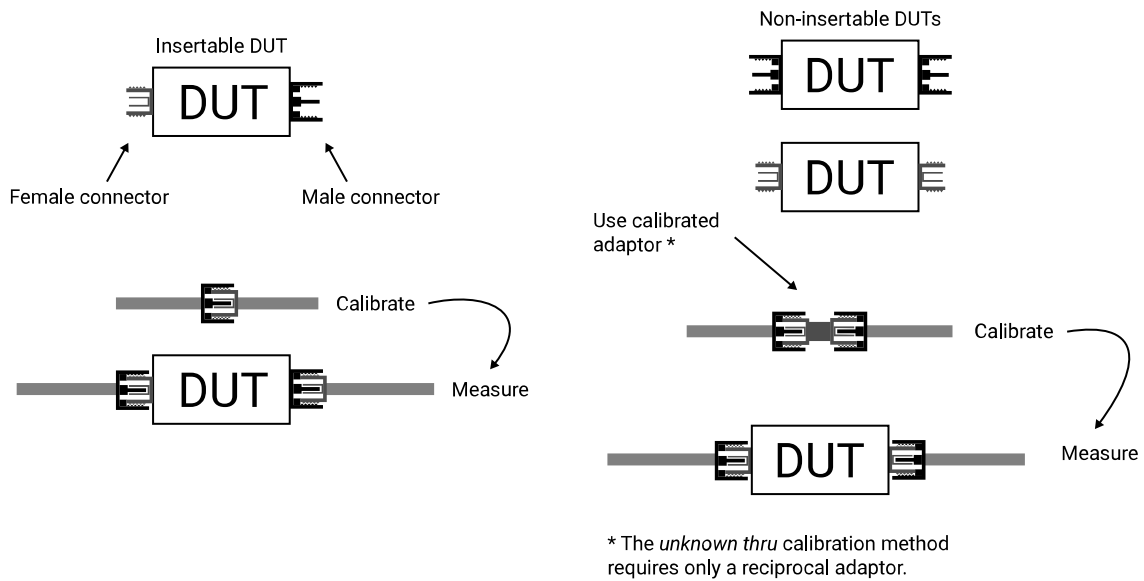


Instrument calibration sequence

The calibration process involves connecting each standard in turn and clicking. An asterisk will appear once it has been measured so that the next standard can be done.

Note: For best results, ensure that the instrument is fully warmed up before carrying out a calibration.

Calibration for measuring non-insertable devices



Insertable and non-insertable DUTs

It is important to be aware of the difference between ‘insertable’ and ‘non-insertable’ devices and the impact on measurement and calibration technique. The figure above illustrates the difference between an insertable device and non-insertable devices. The key issue is that with non-insertable devices an adaptor may be required during the measurement as shown. In order to obtain accurate measurement data, the effect of the adaptor needs to be removed from the measurements. Some of the possible ways of doing this with the PicoVNA 106 and 108 are as follows:

| Calibration used | Adaptor removal method | Comments |
|--|--|---|
| (A) 12-term (non-insertable DUT) | Calibration removes adaptor effect | Accurate but requires kit with thru adaptor standard. Only one calibration kit is required. |
| (B) 8-Term (<i>unknown thru</i> method) | Calibration automatically removes adaptor effect | Accurate and easiest method as it does not require a characterized thru standard |
| (C) Any except 12-term or 8-term | De-embedding | Accurate but requires prior knowledge of adaptor characteristics |
| (D) Any except 12-term or 8-term | Reference plane extension | Quick and easy but errors due to loss of adaptor remain |

Techniques for dealing with non-insertable DUTs

The preferred method is method (B) in the table above. This requires only a reciprocal thru adaptor. **Note** that with this method the *isolation calibration* is done automatically by the software using measurements taken during the *short, open* and *load* steps.

Note that only the 12-term non-insertable DUT calibration and 8-term *unknown thru* methods support a non-zero length thru connection. All other calibrations (S_{21} or $S_{11}+S_{21}$ or full 12-term insertable DUT) require a thru connection of zero length. In effect, this means that the calibration port terminals should be of opposite sexes. In other words, it should be possible to connect the terminals together without the use of an adaptor. Consequently, the DUT must be an *insertable* device. If this is not the case, an adaptor will be needed during the measurement and its effect will need to be removed by either moving the reference plane or by using the de-embedding facility as indicated in the table above.

When performing just an S_{21} calibration it is possible to complete the calibration without doing the isolation calibration. Simply click **Apply Cal** after performing the *through* calibration. The isolation calibration corrects errors due to crosstalk (see [Calibration and error correction](#)) and should be used when measuring insertion losses larger than about 40 dB. The terminations to use during the isolation calibration can, as a guide, be 50 Ω loads. In some circumstances, such as when testing a highly reactive device (e.g. filter beyond cut-off), a short or an open circuit may be more appropriate or for best results two actual DUTs with 50 Ω loads at their unused ports.

6.2.1 Changing the frequency sweep settings without recalibrating

If the start or stop frequency or number of sweep points is changed when the instrument has a valid calibration, you are given the choice to either keep or delete the existing calibration. If you choose to keep the calibration, a new set of calibration error terms will be automatically generated by *interpolation* to fit in with the new sweep parameters. In this case, a "?" is added to the calibration status bar to indicate that operating parameters have changed from those used in calibration.

If it is required to change the frequency sweep parameters without recalibrating, then simply enter the new values (see **Set Sweep Frequency** values under [Calibration](#)) and click **Apply**. Once the new values are sent to the instrument, just close the window (click **Close Window**) to exit. Note that this process will **delete all memory traces** and the display data may be invalid until a fresh measurement sweep is performed.

Take care when using interpolation, particularly at low frequencies, say below 20 MHz. For example, if starting with a wide band sweep with large frequency steps, say 500 kHz or larger, then interpolating down to a narrow band of, for example, 1 MHz to 10 MHz may lead to larger than expected errors.

6.2.2 Calibration steps for S11 measurements

The calibration for S_{11} measurements performs a three term error correction calibration. Note that if the device to be tested has a female connector, then a female calibration kit should be used for best results. The typical steps are as follows:

1. Select the calibration kit (**Tools > Calibration kit > Load P1 kit > Apply**)
2. Set the bandwidth and test power (**Enhancement** button)
3. Set the frequency range and measurement steps (**Calibration** button)
4. Select S_{11} calibration (in **Calibration** window)
5. Connect adaptor and test cable to port 1 of the instrument
6. Connect each standard in turn and click appropriate **Standard** button (in **Calibration** window)
7. When all 3 Standards are done click **Apply** (in **Calibration** window)
8. If desired, for later use, save calibration (**File > Save cal**)
9. Connect device to be tested and click **Start**

Tips:

- For best linearity and dynamic range combination use a test power level of 0 dBm
- For best accuracy calibrate using the same bandwidth you intend to use for your measurements
- You can remeasure any standard at any stage before completing the calibration. Just reconnect the standard and click again on the appropriate **Standard** button before completing the calibration

6.2.3 Calibration steps for S21 measurements

The simple S_{21} calibration is a frequency response calibration. Sometimes it is referred to as normalization and only corrects for response characteristics of instrument and external connections. The typical steps are as follows:

1. Set the bandwidth and test power (**Enhancement** button)
2. Set the frequency range and measurement steps (**Calibration** button)
3. Select S_{21} calibration (in **Calibration** window)
4. Connect adaptors and test cable 2 to port 1 of the instrument

5. Connect ends of test cable together (the 'through' connection) and select **Through** (in **Calibration** window)
6. Connect 50 Ω load to the ends of test cables (to perform the isolation step) and select **Isolation** (in **Calibration** window)
7. Click **Apply** (in **Calibration** window)
8. If desired, for later use, save calibration (**File > save cal**)
9. Connect device to be tested and click **Start**

Tips:

- For best dynamic range, use a test power level of +6 dBm and calibrate using the same bandwidth you intend to use for your measurements
- For best accuracy (linearity) use a test power level of -3 dBm and calibrate using the same bandwidth you intend to use for your measurements

6.2.4 Calibration steps for S₁₁ and S₂₁ measurements

The **S₁₁ + S₂₁** calibration provides three term error correction for S₁₁ measurements and Source match correction for S₂₁ measurements. The typical steps are as follows:

1. Select the calibration kit (**Tools > Calibration kit > Load P1 kit > Apply**)
2. Set the bandwidth and test power (**Enhancement** button)
3. Set the frequency range and measurement steps (**Calibration** button)
4. Select **S₁₁ + S₂₁** calibration (in **Calibration** window)
5. Connect each standard (short, open and load) in turn and click appropriate **Standard** button (in **Calibration** window)
6. Connect ends of test cables together and click **Through**
7. Connect 50 Ω load to the ends of test cables (to perform the isolation step) and select **Isolation** (in **Calibration** window)
8. Click **Apply** (in **Calibration** window)
9. If desired, for later use, save calibration (**File > Save Cal**)
10. Connect device to be tested and click **Start**

Tips:

- For best linearity and dynamic range combination, use a test power level of 0 dBm
- For best dynamic range use a test power level of +6 dBm and calibrate using the same bandwidth you intend to use for your measurements – particularly at the *isolation* calibration step

6.2.5 Calibration steps for all S-parameters measurements (insertable DUT)

This calibration provides full error correction for all S-parameters. Typical steps are as follows:

1. Select the calibration kits (**Tools > Calibration kits > Load P1 Kit > Load P2 Kit > Apply**)
2. Set the bandwidth and test power (**Enhancement** button)
3. Set the frequency range and measurement steps (**Calibration** button)
4. Select 'All – Insertable DUT' calibration (in **Calibration** window)
5. Connect each standard (short, open and load) in turn and click appropriate **Standard** button (in **Calibration** window)
6. Click **Isolation** select the first method on the left (isolation is measured with 50 Ω loads on each calibration port which is the same as the load step in 5 above)
7. Connect ends of test cables together and click **Through**
8. Click **Apply** (in **Calibration** window)
9. If desired, for later use, save calibration (**File > Save Cal and Status**)
10. Connect device to be tested and click **Start**

Tips:

- For best linearity and dynamic range combination use a test power level of 0 dBm. Use the same bandwidth as you will use during measurements.

- For best dynamic range use a test power level of +6 dBm and calibrate using the same bandwidth you intend to use for your measurements.

6.2.6 Calibration steps for all S-parameters measurements (non-insertable DUT)

This calibration provides full error correction for all S-parameters. It requires a calibration kit with a characterized through connection. Typical steps are as follows:

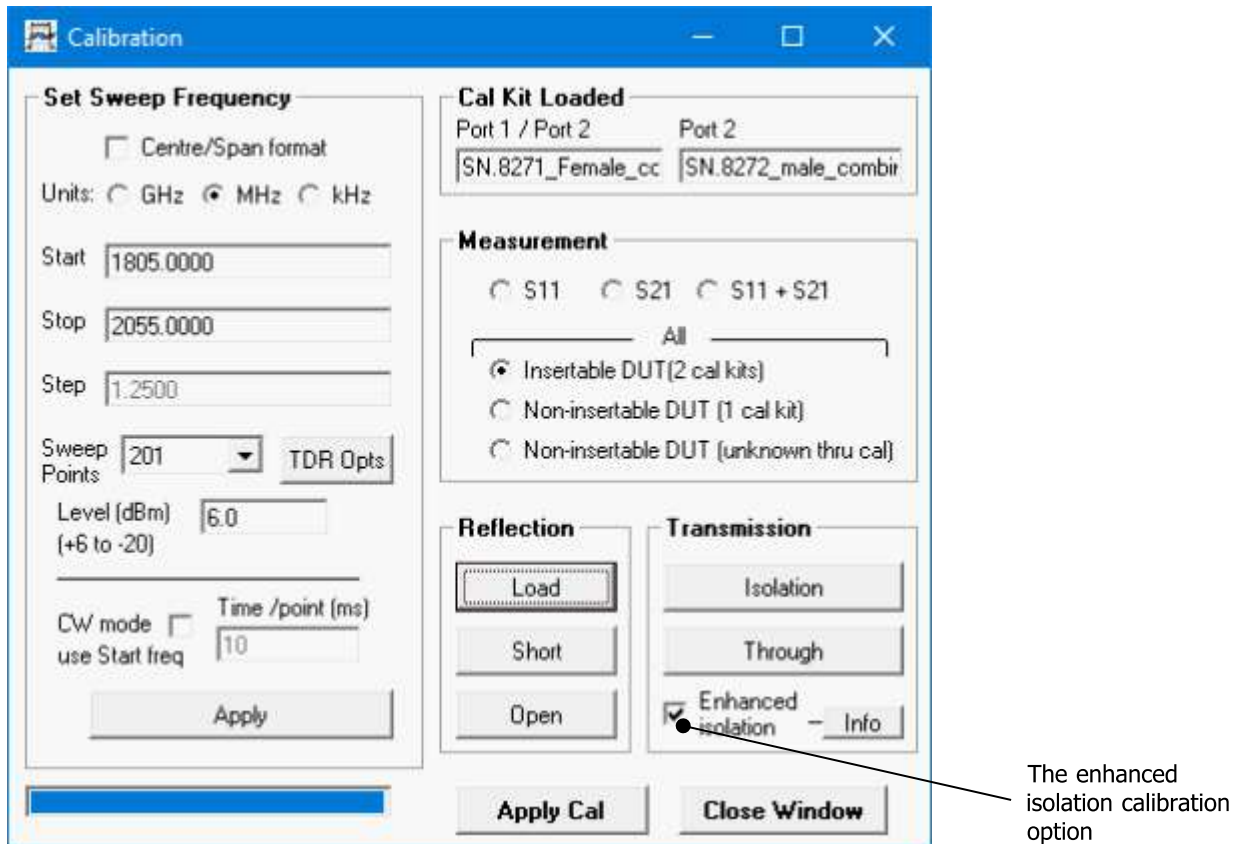
1. Select the calibration kit (**Tools > Calibration kits > Load P1 Kit > Apply**)
2. Set the bandwidth and test power (**Enhancement** button)
3. Set the frequency range and measurement steps (**Calibration** button)
4. Select **All – Non-insertable DUT** calibration (in **Calibration** window)
5. Connect each reflection standard (short/open) in turn and click appropriate **Standard** button (in **Calibration** window)
6. Click **Load** to measure the Load Standard (in **Calibration** window)
7. Connect ends of test cables together using the characterized through included in the calibration kit and click **Through**
8. Click **Apply** (in **Calibration** window)
9. If desired, for later use, save calibration (**File > Save Cal and Status**)
10. Connect device to be tested and click **Start**

6.2.7 Calibration for best dynamic range – minimizing the effect of crosstalk

Instrument crosstalk is a limiting factor when making large dynamic range measurement. This is particularly the case at higher frequencies, say above 4 GHz. The reason is that some of the crosstalk is dependent on the loading at the test ports. Therefore, the isolation calibration process can only compensate it fully when the terminations are left unchanged from those used at the isolation calibration step.

Enhanced isolation calibration

The PicoVNA 106 and 108 provide an enhanced isolation calibration option. This method makes crosstalk measurements at the *short*, *open* and *load* calibration steps. In this way it attempts to more closely model the effect of port termination on the internal crosstalk components of the instrument.

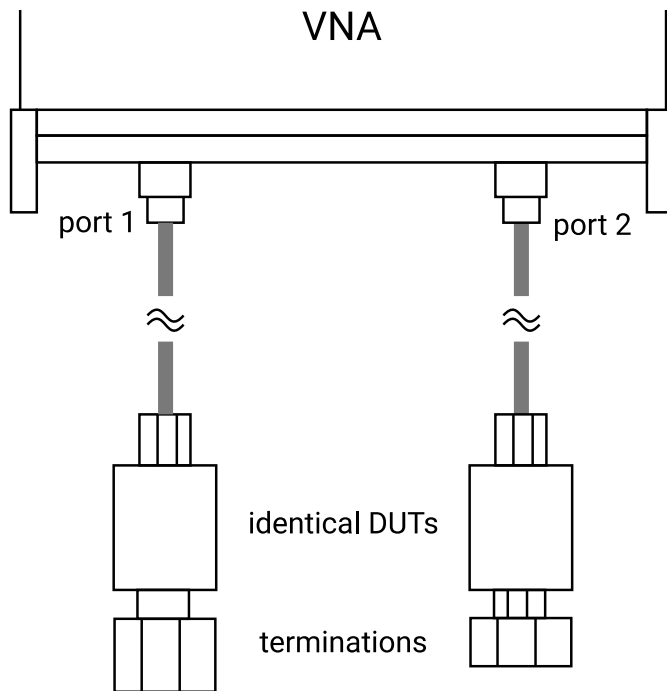


The enhanced isolation calibration helps to model the crosstalk more accurately

It is important to note that for best dynamic range, when using the enhanced isolation calibration method, each of the *short*, *open* and *load* steps need to be made at the same or lower resolution bandwidth that will be used for the measurement. So, for the ultimate range, each calibration step will need to be done using 10 Hz bandwidth. This is the downside of the enhanced isolation calibration (slower overall calibration process) compared to traditional isolation calibration, where only the isolation step need be taken at the lowest bandwidth setting.

Achieving the ultimate dynamic range using conventional isolation calibration

In cases when two identical DUTs are available, the ultimate dynamic range can be achieved using a conventional crosstalk (isolation) calibration step as shown in the figure below. In this approach the correct termination is presented at each port during the crosstalk calibration step. In this way its effect can be removed accurately over the entire measurement band. Note that when using this technique, only the isolation step need be performed at the lowest resolution bandwidth. The other calibration steps can be performed at higher bandwidth settings to speed up the process.



If two identical DUTs are available, a conventional isolation calibration step can be carried out as shown

6.2.8 Loading and saving calibrations and status

Load and save calibrations using the **File > Load Cal and Status** and **File > Save Cal and Status** commands.

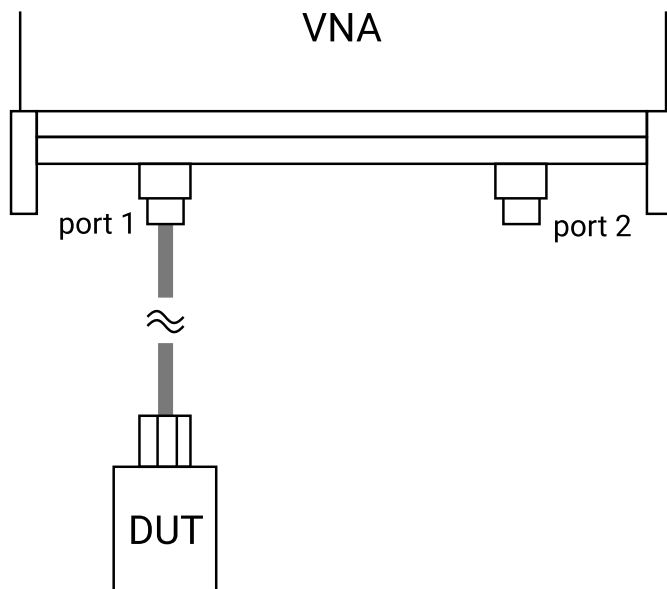
Select the file type according to the type of data you wish to load or save:

- **.cal** – includes calibration and status data
- **.sta** – includes status data only

6.3 Measurements

6.3.1 Return loss

In order to carry out return loss measurements (S_{11}) the VNA must be calibrated as described before, either S_{11} calibration only, both S_{11} and S_{21} or 12-term. The device to be tested (DUT) is then connected to Port 1 of the VNA as indicated in the figure below. *If the DUT can only be connected to the VNA using a cable, then the VNA should be calibrated at the end of the cable for best results.*



Connect device under test to Port 1 to carry out S_{11} measurements.

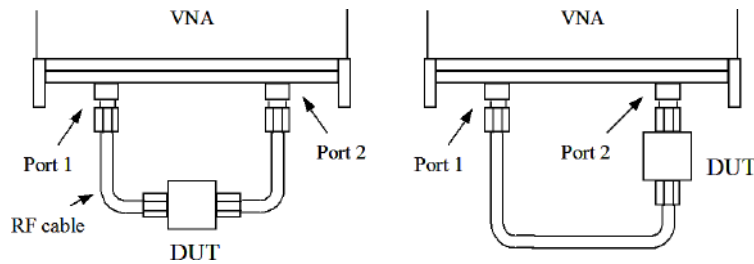
Displaying the results

The measurement result can be displayed by selecting the S_{11} parameter and an appropriate display graph as described in [Display setup](#). Note that the measured phase is relative to the calibration reference plane as discussed in [Reference plane extension and de-embedding](#). The reference plane can be shifted at any time from the **Enhancement** window. Note that changes to the reference plane only take place when the instrument is sweeping.

6.3.2 Insertion loss / gain

To carry out insertion loss measurements (S_{21}) the VNA must be calibrated with the test cables in place, either S_{21} calibration only, both S_{11} and S_{21} or full 12-term. The device to be tested (DUT) is then connected between Ports 1 and 2 of the VNA as indicated in the figure below.

For best results, the arrangement shown on the right hand side of the figure should be used whenever possible. When using an $S_{11}+S_{21}$ calibration this will minimize errors introduced by the load return loss. On the other hand, when using a 12-term calibration, this will minimize repeatability / cable flexing errors associated with the connecting cables.



Connect DUT between Ports 1 and 2 to carry out S_{21} measurements. For best results use the arrangement shown on the right.

Displaying the results

The measurement result can be displayed by selecting the S_{21} parameter and an appropriate display graph and described in [Reference plane extension and de-embedding](#). Note that the measured phase is relative to the calibration reference plane as discussed in that section. The reference plane can be shifted at any time from the **Enhancement** window. Note that changes to the reference plane only take place when the instrument is sweeping.

6.3.3 Complete 2-port measurement

In order to measure all four s-parameters a 12-term calibration needs to be completed. The arrangement shown on the right hand side of the figure above is likely to yield best results in terms of repeatability by virtue of using only one test cable, reduces the effects of cable flexing.

Displaying the results

The measurement result can be displayed by selecting a different parameter for each of the possible four display graphs, as described in the previous section. Note that the measured phase is relative to the calibration reference plane as discussed in [Reference plane extension and de-embedding](#). The reference plane can be shifted (independently for each parameter) at any time from the **Enhancement** window. Note that changes to the reference plane only take place when the instrument is sweeping.

Maximizing dynamic range

Refer to [Calibration for best dynamic range – minimizing the effect of crosstalk](#) for guidance on achieving the largest dynamic range.

6.3.4 Group delay

Group delay is defined as the rate of change of phase with frequency:

$$group_delay = \frac{d\phi}{d\omega}$$

In relatively non-dispersive components such as transmission lines, group delay is the transit time through the line. However, some components such as filters can exhibit negative group delays so care is needed when attaching an interpretation to group delay.

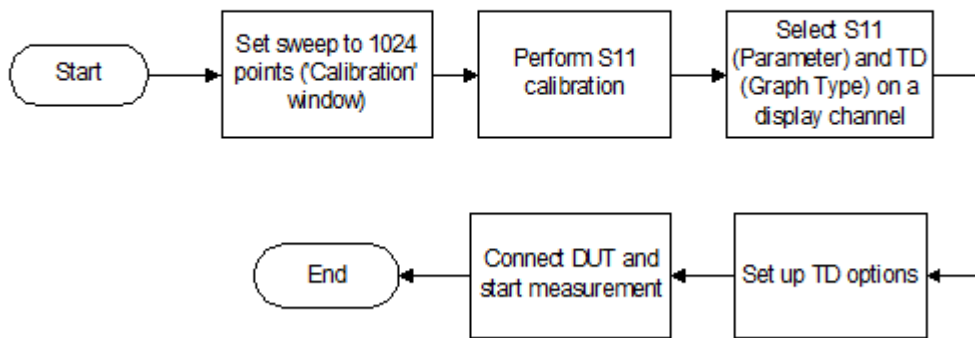
The PicoVNA 106 and 108 calculate the group delay by dividing the phase change between adjacent sweep points and dividing by the size of the sweep step. It is usual to apply some degree of trace smoothing to remove very rapidly changing perturbations from the trace. Care should be exercised to ensure that genuine sharp group delay variations are not masked by the smoothing.

Displaying the results

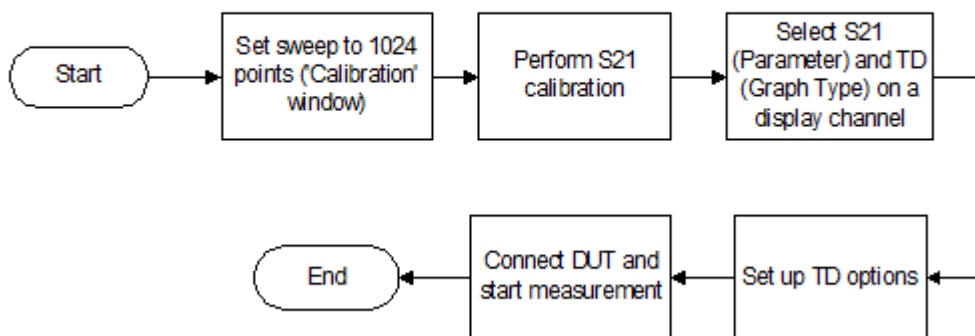
Group delay of any S-parameter can be measured. The result can be displayed by selecting the required parameter and group delay graph from the **Display** window as described in [Display setup](#).

6.3.5 Time domain measurements

The time domain facility allows the display of the time domain response of a network under test. For example, time domain reflectometry (TDR) measurements can be made by first carrying out an S_{11} calibration using 1024 sweep points. Similarly, time domain transmission (TDT) measurements can be made by first completing an S_{21} calibration using 1024 sweep points. The steps necessary are shown in the flowcharts below.



Performing a TDR measurement



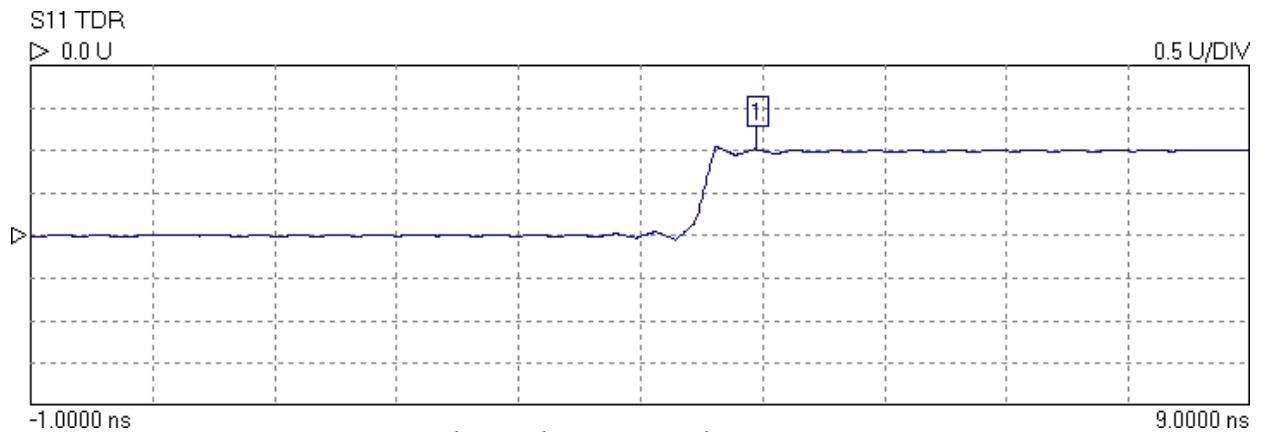
Performing a TDT measurement

Note that carrying out time domain measurements requires a lot of mathematical processing and therefore each sweep will be noticeably slower when displaying time domain.

In TD mode, the plot markers display resistance and distance values for S_{11} and S_{22} , and distance values for S_{21} and S_{12} , as well as levels.

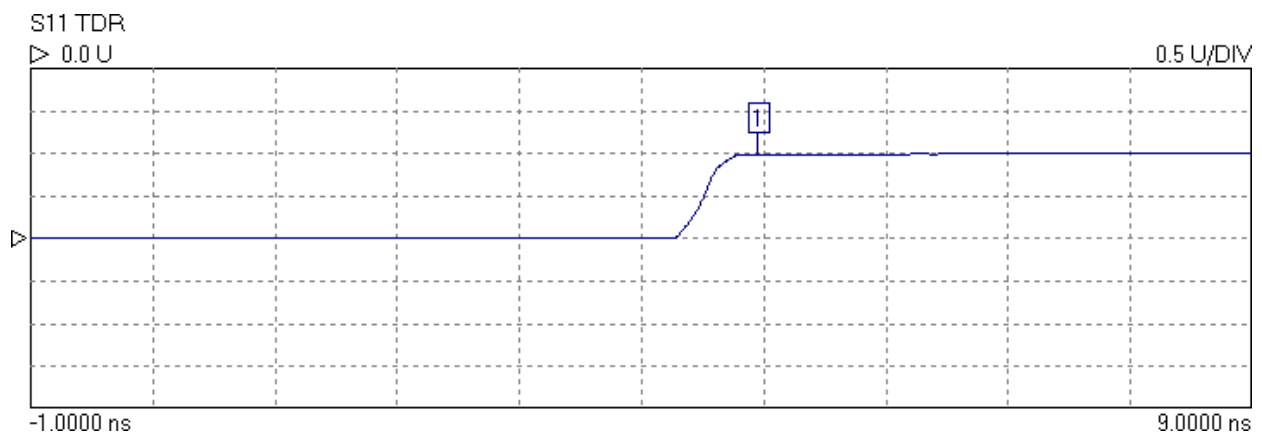
Examples of TDR measurements using the PicoVNA

The trace below shows the time domain response of a 50 cm, 50 Ω coaxial cable with an open circuit termination. The trace goes to +1 relative to the reference indicating a reflection coefficient of +1 for an open circuit. The window used is rectangular.



Measured 50 cm line terminated in an open circuit.

The trace below is the same as above except that the ringing either side of the transition has been reduced by the use of a fifth-order Kaiser–Bessel window. This reduces the ringing but also slows the rise time.



Same as previous figure but using the Kaiser–Bessel window.

The type of window, the order of the Kaiser–Bessel window, and the time span over which the signal is displayed can be selected in the TDR options window, shown below.

Entering values for T1 and T2 allow zooming in on a portion of the waveform

Time Domain Options

X-Axis Range

Full

Enter T1, T2

T1 (ns)

T2 (ns)

dc Termination

Auto

Open circuit

Short circuit

Resistive

Window Function

Rectangular

Hanning

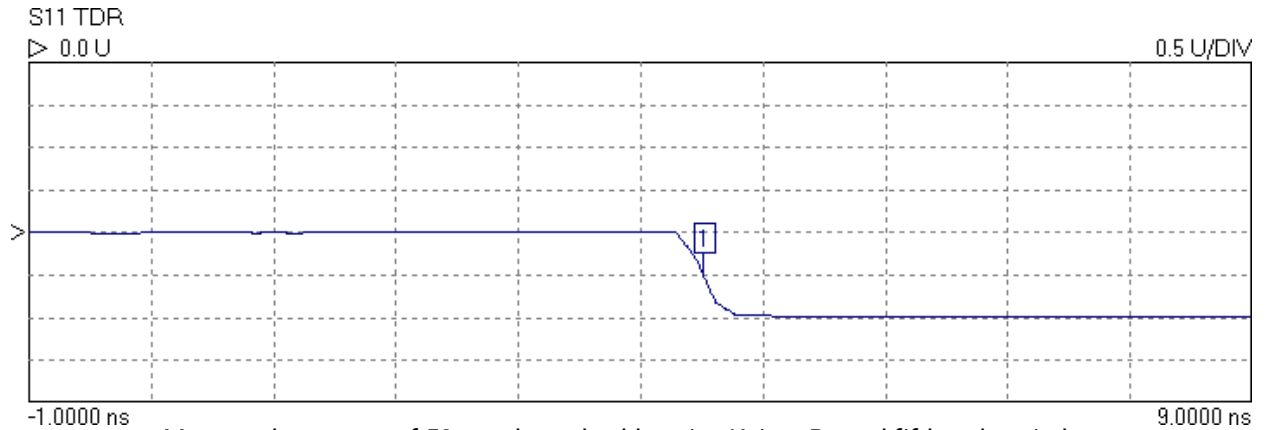
Kaiser Bessel

Order

Time Domain Options window allows measurement setup

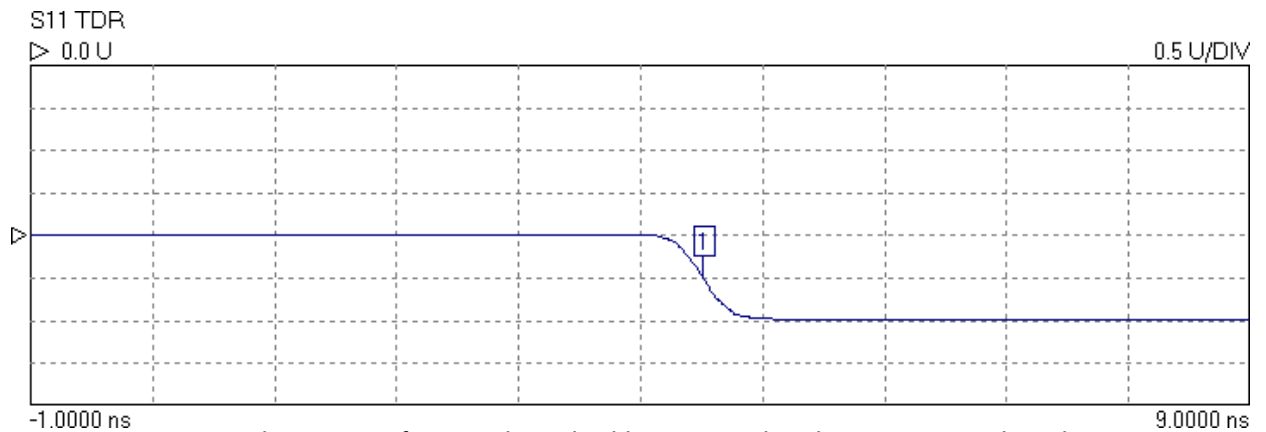
Note: To set a time range either starting or ending beyond 161.66 ns, use the **Enter T1, T2** facility. However, the displayed total time span must be less than 166.66 ns.

The plot below shows the same cable terminated with a short circuit. The window is fifth-order Kaiser-Bessel. This time the trace goes to -1 relative to the reference, indicating a reflection coefficient of -1 for the short circuit.



Measured response of 50 cm shorted cable using Kaiser-Bessel fifth-order window

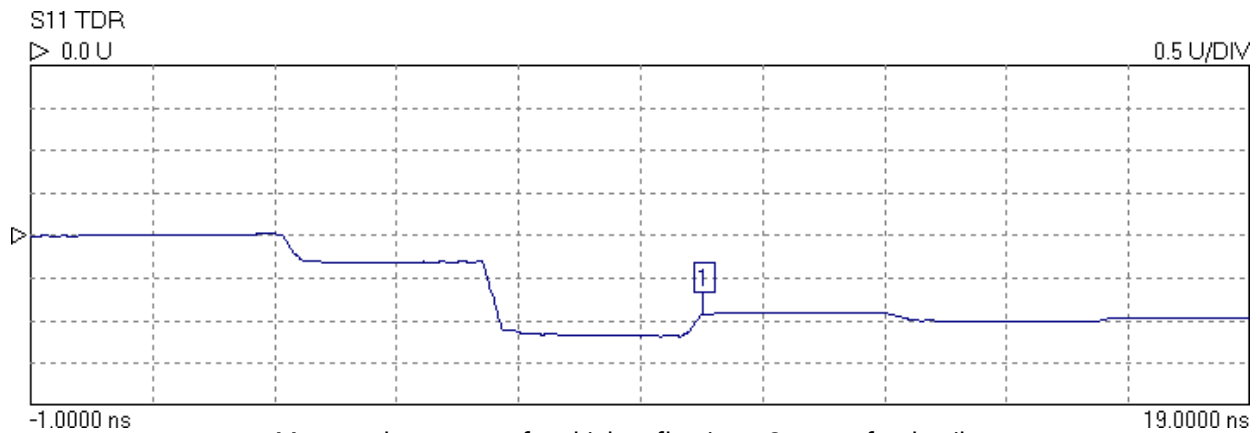
The trace below shows the effect of increasing the order of the Kaiser-Bessel window to 10. The ripple has been completely removed but the slope of the edge has been further reduced.



Measured response of 50 cm shorted cable using tenth-order Kaiser-Bessel window.

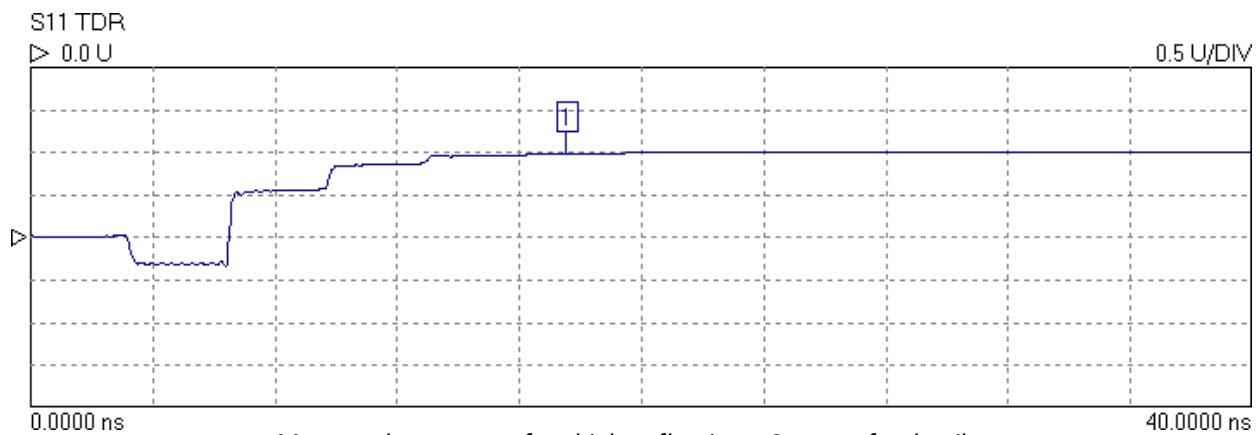
A more complicated example

The trace below shows the response of a 30 cm, 50 Ω line followed by 30 cm of 25 Ω line terminated in a short circuit. The window is third-order Kaiser–Bessel. The trace shows the multiple reflections from the discontinuity of impedance at the connection between the lines and the short circuit termination.



Measured response of multiple reflections. See text for details.

The last example is the same 50 Ω / 25 Ω cable combination but this time the termination is an open circuit. The response is also displayed over a longer period.

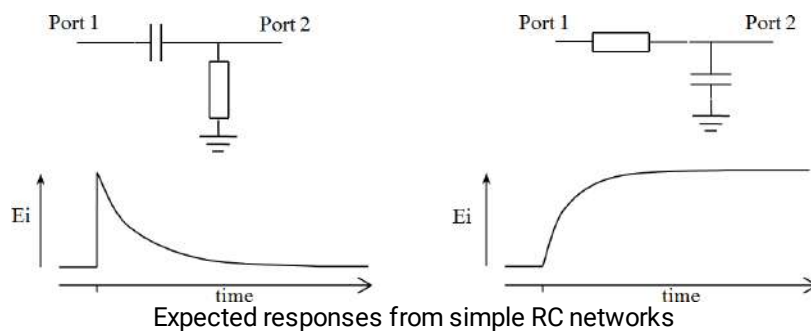


Measured response of multiple reflections. See text for details.

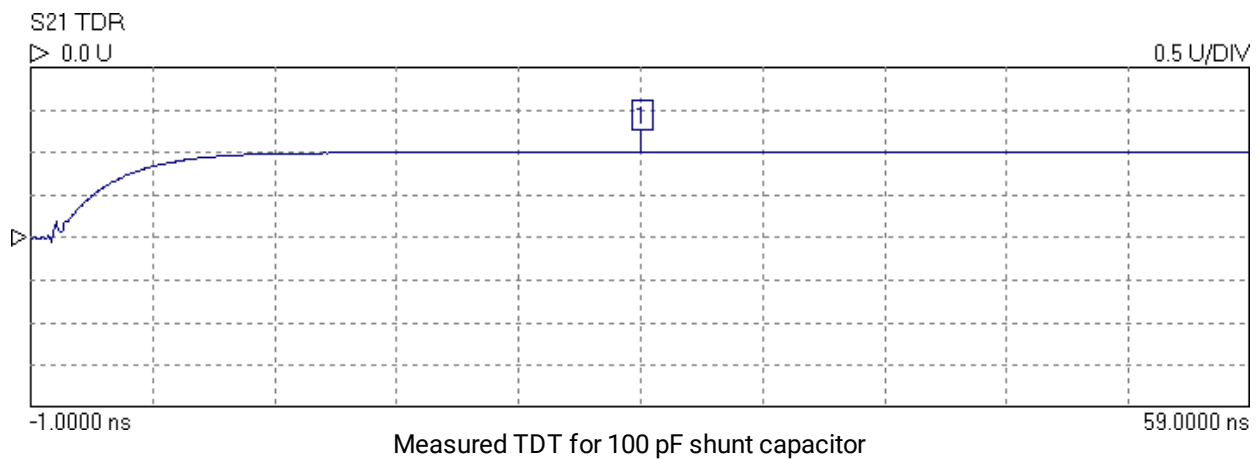
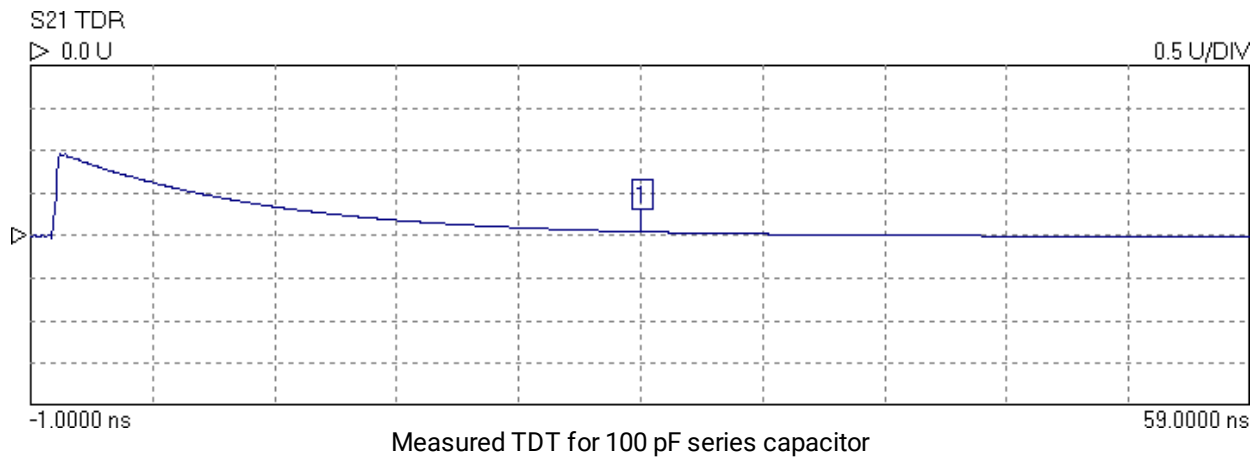
Time domain transmission

Time domain transmission (TDT) is similar to the TDR technique except that the transmitted signal is observed. Traditionally, this is accomplished using a step source and a sampling scope, as with the TDR, but the transmitted signal at the output of the network is observed rather than the reflected signal at the input to the network. This technique is useful for measuring the step response or rise time of amplifiers, filters and other networks.

Examples:



Expected responses from simple RC networks



6.3.6 Reverse measurements on two port devices

In order to measure the reverse parameters (S_{12} and S_{22}), it is necessary to complete a 12-term calibration first (select 'insertable' or 'non-insertable' DUT on calibration window as shown in [Display setup](#)). The other calibration options measure only forward parameters. After the 12-term calibration is completed, simply select the reverse parameter(s) to be required on any displayed channel and start the measurement.

6.3.7 Powering active devices using the built-in bias-Ts

The PicoVNA 106 and 108 include two bias-Ts, which can be used to provide DC bias to the measurement ports 1 and 2. The bias-Ts are rated at 250 mA and can support DC voltages up to 15 V. The DC injection terminals are type SMB, male, and are located on the front panel. This facility can be used, for example, to provide DC bias to an active device being measured.



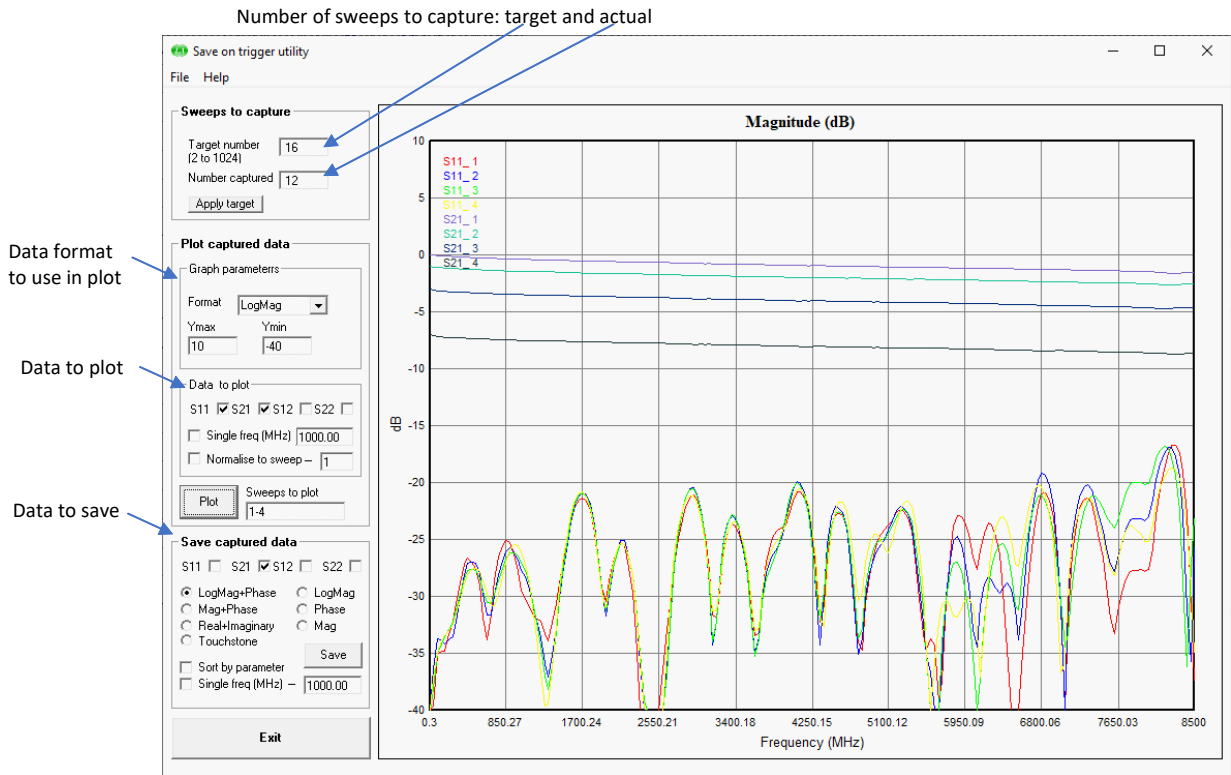
CAUTION

To avoid causing permanent damage to the internal biasing circuit, do not exceed the voltage and current ratings.

6.3.8 Save-on-trigger measurements (PicoVNA 108 only)

The **Save on Trigger** facility (**Utilities** menu) provides a convenient way of measuring multi-state devices such as adjustable gain amplifiers and attenuators or phase shifters.

The Save on Trigger mode works by saving each triggered measurement sweep. Once the desired number of sweeps have been captured (or you stop the measurement), you can selectively plot the available data in various formats. The data can also be saved in a number of formats and sorted by parameter if so desired. A further option is to save the *entire data set* (menu option in the **File** drop-down menu) for later use. A copy of the Save on Trigger form (in **Utilities** menu) is shown below.



Save on Trigger settings form and display graph

Setting the target and enabling Save on Trigger mode

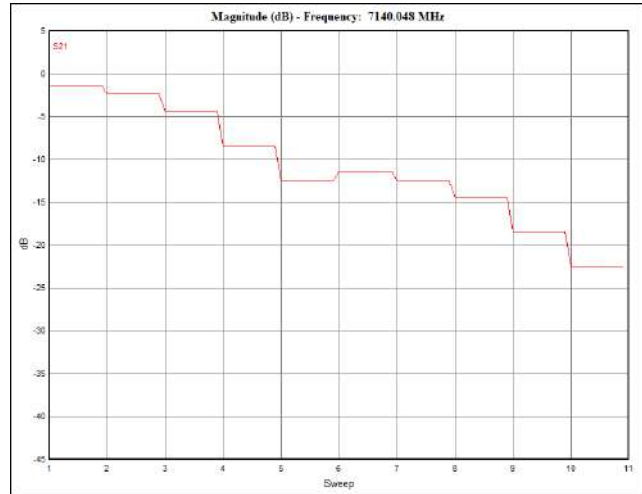
Save on Trigger operation is enabled using the check box on the trigger selection area on the main application dialog as shown on the right. When the box is first checked, you will be asked to enter the target number of sweeps to be captured. If the trigger mode is set to free run (auto trigger), you will be warned that the Save on Trigger will only operate on a trigger event, i.e. any trigger mode except free run.



Plotting captured data

The captured data for each s-parameter measured can be plotted either in the form of a family of traces (one for each measurement sweep) over the sweep frequency (as in the graph above) or as a single trace displaying the value for a chosen frequency over the sweep number. The latter is useful, for example, to examine the attenuation or phase value of a digital attenuator at each setting at a given frequency.

An example of a plot showing the measured data at a single frequency over the sweep number is shown on the right. This is a measurement of 10 states of a programmable attenuator. The horizontal axis represents each of the states measured (each sweep measured a different state) and the vertical axis is set to display the magnitude of S_{21} in decibels. The user-requested frequency for the plot is shown at the top.



The settings for the measurement sweeps to be plotted can be specified as shown below.

Maximum number of graph traces

When plotting s-parameter data over the measurement sweep (as on the graph above) the maximum number of traces (one for each measurement sweep) is 16 for each S-parameter. If all 4 S-parameters are being plotted this will result in a total of 64 traces. In any case, the maximum number of trace legends (which identifies the parameter and sweep number of each trace) is limited to 38.

- Format: LogMag (Select format for the data plots)
- Ymax: 10, Ymin: -40 (Set the vertical axis limits)
- Single freq (MHz): 7140.00 (If plotting data for a single frequency, specify it here)
- Normalise to sweep: 1 (Plot data can be normalised to any of the captured sweeps)
- Sweep(s) to plot: 1-4 (Examples of valid values: "All" or "1,2,3,4" or "1,2,4-6,7")

Saving the captured data

The default save mode ('sort by parameter' and 'single frequency' not ticked) creates a data file for each captured sweep. The example below shows the result of saving after capturing 12 measurement sweeps. In this, the user requested the magnitude S_{11} and S_{21} .

As can be seen, 12 data files have been created (each has the name provided by you, with the sweep number appended, e.g. "Step_Attn_5.dat" is the data file for sweep 5) and each data file has 3 columns. The first is the frequency in MHz, the second contains the requested S_{11} magnitude value and the third the requested S_{21} magnitude.

| Name | Date modified | Type | Size |
|------------------|------------------|----------|------|
| Step_Attn_1.dat | 01/01/2020 08:52 | DAT File | 9 KB |
| Step_Attn_2.dat | 01/01/2020 08:52 | DAT File | 9 KB |
| Step_Attn_3.dat | 01/01/2020 08:52 | DAT File | 9 KB |
| Step_Attn_4.dat | 01/01/2020 08:52 | DAT File | 9 KB |
| Step_Attn_5.dat | 01/01/2020 08:52 | DAT File | 9 KB |
| Step_Attn_6.dat | 01/01/2020 08:52 | DAT File | 9 KB |
| Step_Attn_7.dat | 01/01/2020 08:52 | DAT File | 9 KB |
| Step_Attn_8.dat | 01/01/2020 08:52 | DAT File | 9 KB |
| Step_Attn_9.dat | 01/01/2020 08:52 | DAT File | 9 KB |
| Step_Attn_10.dat | 01/01/2020 08:52 | DAT File | 9 KB |
| Step_Attn_11.dat | 01/01/2020 08:52 | DAT File | 9 KB |
| Step_Attn_12.dat | 01/01/2020 08:52 | DAT File | 9 KB |

| File | View | Help |
|----------|---------|----------|
| 0.3 | 0.00475 | 1.001E0 |
| 42.7985 | 0.01052 | 9.947E-1 |
| 85.297 | 0.01759 | 9.90E-1 |
| 127.7955 | 0.01816 | 9.874E-1 |
| 170.294 | 0.01831 | 9.834E-1 |
| 212.7925 | 0.02165 | 9.819E-1 |

Default save mode saves a file for each captured sweep. In this example, the user requested the magnitude of S_{11} and S_{21}

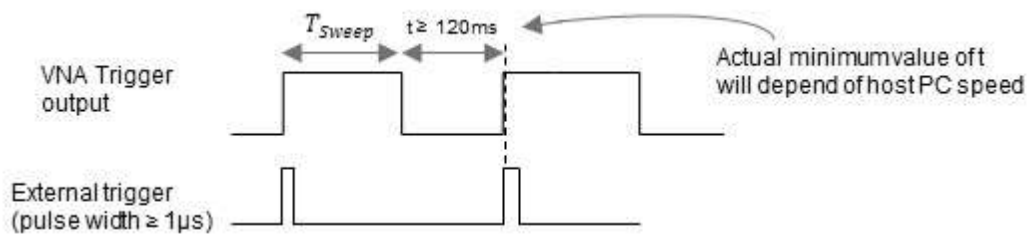
The default save data mode creates a data file for each sweep.

External trigger considerations

The save on trigger mode programs the instrument to perform a specified number of sweeps, each synchronized to an external trigger. You must consider the maximum possible repetition rate of the external trigger. This rate is a function of factors such as the number of sweep points, bandwidth in use and crucially the speed of the host PC's operating system in allocating USB communication resources. If the trigger rate exceeds the maximum, the host PC may miss some trigger events.

The timing diagram that applies to the Save on Trigger mode is shown below. In this it is assumed that the external trigger is set to rising edge.

The measurement sweep time T_{Sweep} is a function of the number of sweep points and measurement bandwidth in use. For example, a plan with 201 points using a bandwidth setting of 140 kHz will have T_{Sweep} of 38.3 ms when measuring all 4 S-parameters. Ideally, the external system that generates the trigger signal will synchronize the trigger signal to the falling edge of the trigger output from the VNA and make allowance for the speed of the host PC and its operating system allocating USB communication resources and processing all data and graphics in time.

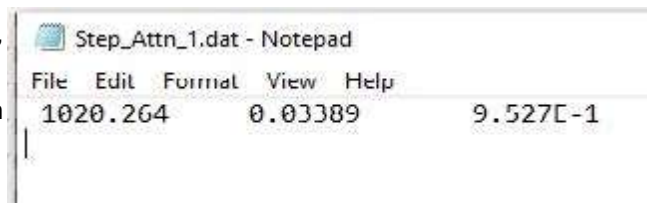


Typically, external trigger should occur 120 ms or more after the end of the sweep but will depend on speed of host PC.

Note: In the case when the external trigger occurs sooner than the host PC can support after the end of the sweep time, it is possible that some trigger events will be missed. Controlling the VNA through the API (using the DLL file supplied) places a lighter load on the host PC (no graphics) so will support significantly faster rates.

Single frequency option

If required, it is possible to request that only data for a single frequency is saved. Ticking the 'single frequency' box and entering the desired frequency results in each saved data file containing a single line of data as shown here on the right. In this example the frequency requested was 1 GHz. The nearest calibrated data point (1020.264 MHz) is chosen as shown.



The single frequency option causes a single line of data to be saved.

Sort by parameter option

It is possible to save the data to a disk file on a parameter by parameter basis by selecting the **Sort by parameter** tick box in the **Save captured data** section of the form. So, for example, it is possible to save all the values of S_{21} in a single file with the values for each sweep in separate columns.

For example, choosing to save all 4 s-parameters sorted by parameter will result in 4 separate disk files being created as shown below:

| Name | Date modified | Type | Size |
|-------------------|------------------|----------|-------|
| Step_Attn_S11.dat | 01/01/2020 14:55 | DAT File | 37 KB |
| Step_Attn_S12.dat | 01/01/2020 14:55 | DAT File | 37 KB |
| Step_Attn_S21.dat | 01/01/2020 14:55 | DAT File | 37 KB |
| Step_Attn_S22.dat | 01/01/2020 14:55 | DAT File | 37 KB |

The 'Sort by parameter' option creates a file for each s-parameter.

The figure below shows part of the contents of a sorted by parameter file created for the S_{11} values. In this example, the user chose to save magnitude only. As can be seen, the first column has the frequency value in MHz and subsequent columns contains the S_{11} value of the measurement sweeps captured.

S11 (mag) sweep 1, S11 (mag) sweep 2, S11 (mag) sweep 3, ...

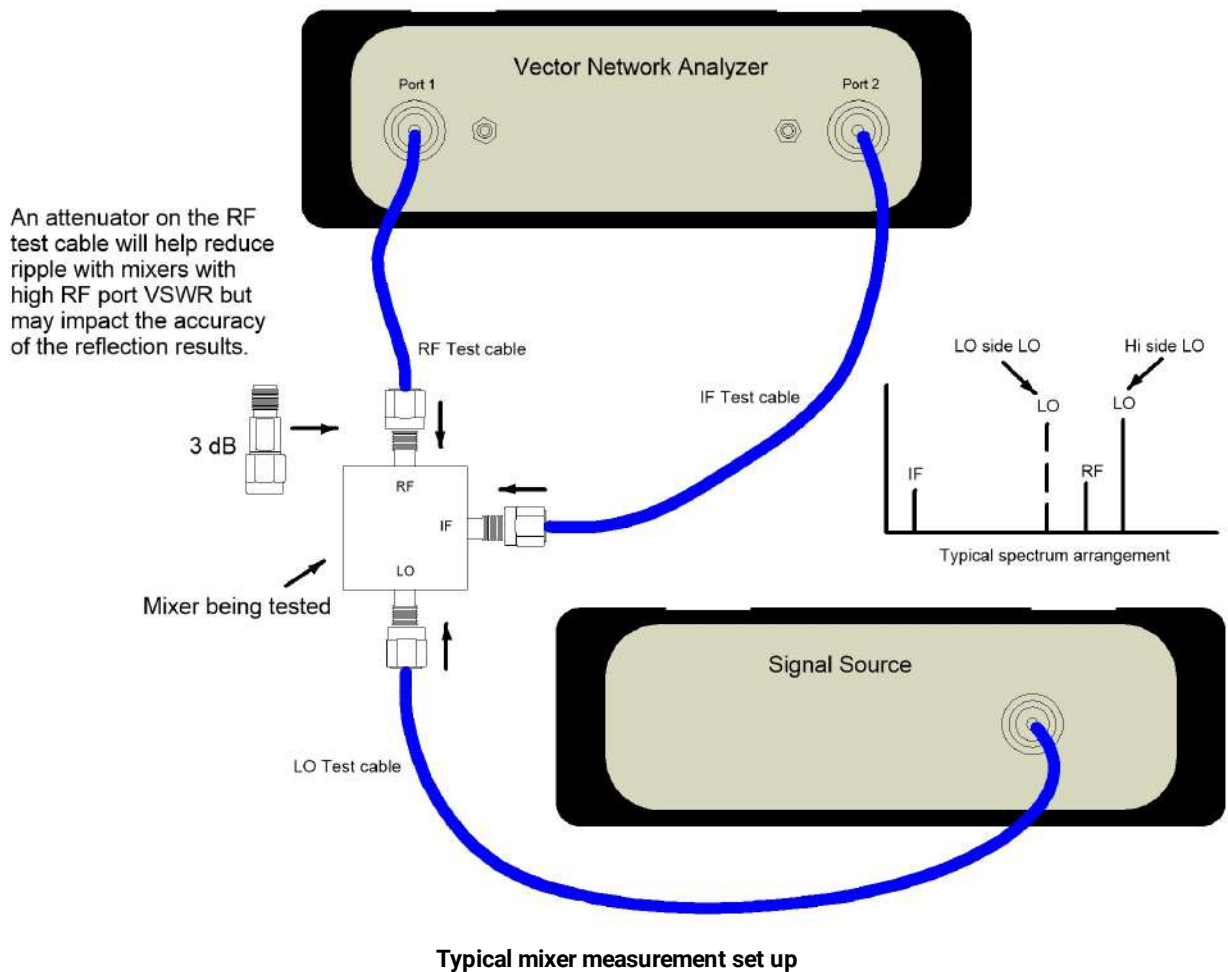
| File | Edit | Format | View | Help | | | | | |
|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--|--|
| 0.3 | 0.00475 | 0.00328 | 0.00232 | 0.0068 | 0.0077 | 0.00731 | 0.008 | | |
| 42.7985 | 0.01052 | 0.01528 | 0.01251 | 0.01393 | 0.01396 | 0.00914 | 0.00958 | | |
| 85.297 | 0.01759 | 0.0206 | 0.01793 | 0.01808 | 0.01785 | 0.01036 | 0.01048 | | |
| 127.7955 | 0.01816 | 0.02027 | 0.0197 | 0.02021 | 0.02021 | 0.01075 | 0.01051 | | |
| 170.294 | 0.01831 | 0.0196 | 0.02078 | 0.02135 | 0.02156 | 0.01048 | 0.01011 | | |
| 212.7925 | 0.02165 | 0.02048 | 0.0228 | 0.02257 | 0.02254 | 0.01021 | 0.00976 | | |

Each column contains the data for each sweep

Sorted by parameter files have a column for each sweep captured.

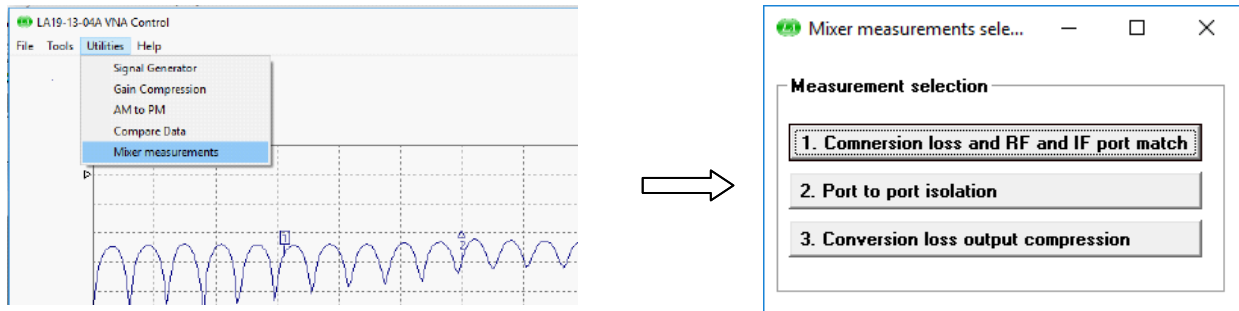
6.3.9 Mixer measurements (PicoVNA 108 only)

The PicoVNA 106 and 108 can perform measurements on mixers (frequency conversion devices) with the use of an external LO source. The user interface software provides support for some commercially available instruments as well as power sensors (power meters) needed to carry out signal level calibration for improved measurement accuracy.



Measurement selection

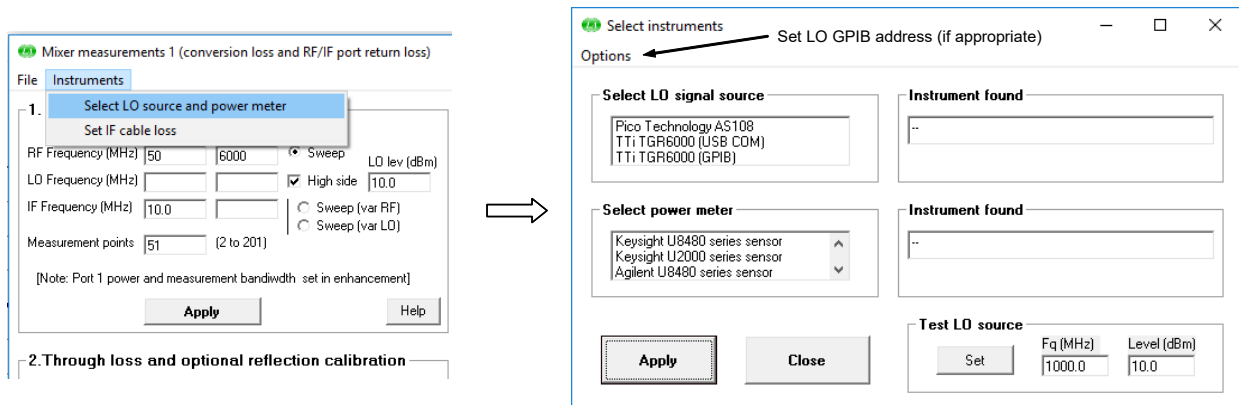
The appropriate mixer measurement form is launched from the **Utilities** drop down menu as shown below:



Mixer measurement selection

External instrument selection

Before setting the measurement parameters, select the source of the LO signal and the means for calibrating the power level. This is done from the **Instruments** drop-down menu as shown below. The host PC requires the Keysight® IO Libraries Suite to support communication with external instruments such as power sensors through either the USB or GPIB interfaces. See www.keysight.com. Contact the factory if your preferred instrument(s) is not on the list in case support may be added at a later date.



External instrument (LO source and power meter) selection

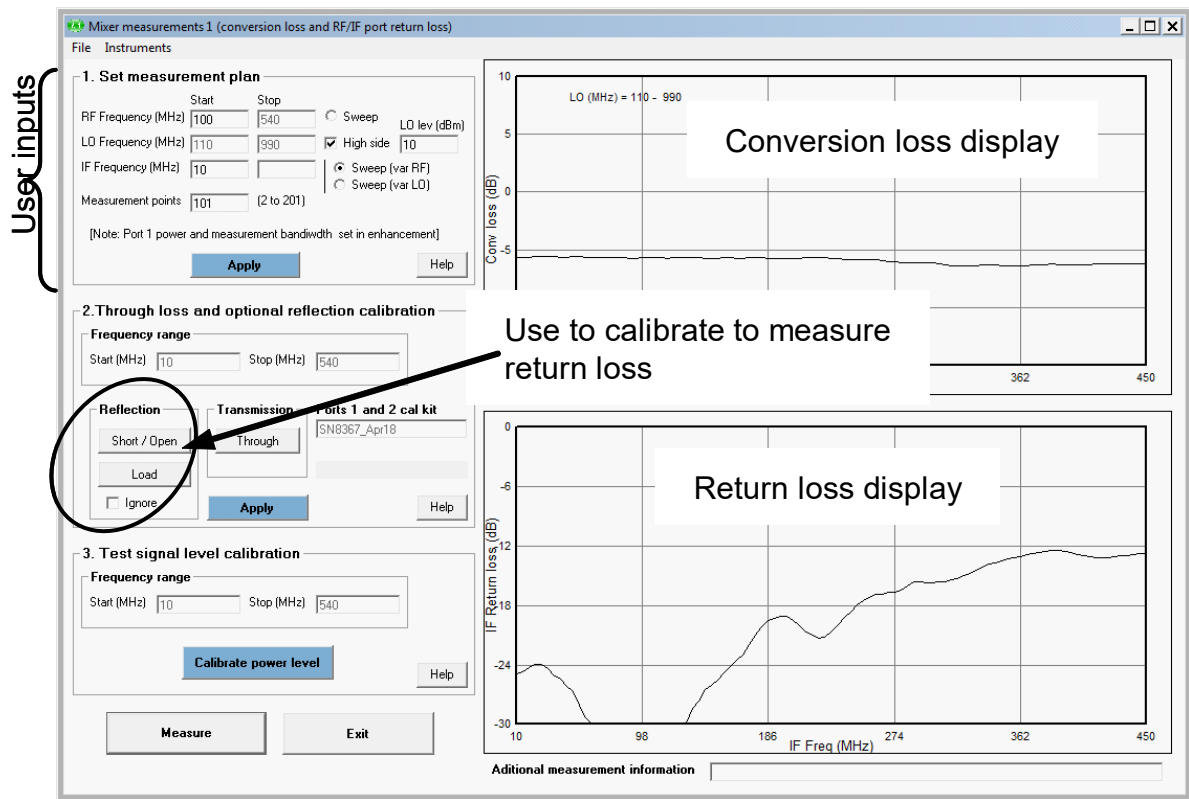
Conversion loss and return loss

This measurement is set up using the dialog shown above. It allows the frequency ranges to be set up as well as the LO power level.

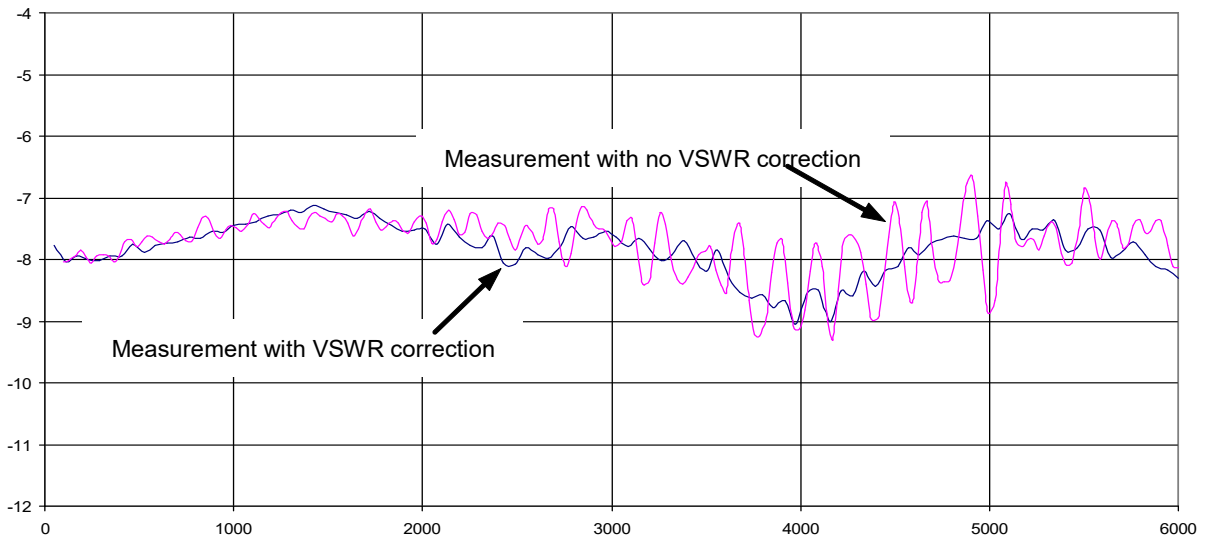
You can choose whether or not to measure return loss by means of the **Ignore** check box under the **Reflection calibration** buttons. If the button is left unchecked, the instrument will perform a standard SOLT calibration to allow corrected return loss values to be displayed.

Note: The return loss of either the RF port or the IF port will be measured and displayed. If the IF frequency is swept, then the IF port return loss is measured otherwise the RF port return loss is measured and displayed.

One important advantage of return loss calibration is that the measured conversion loss will be corrected for the effects, for example, of poor mixer return loss. This is sometimes referred to as VSWR correction and is illustrated in the second figure below.



Mixer measurement setup dialog

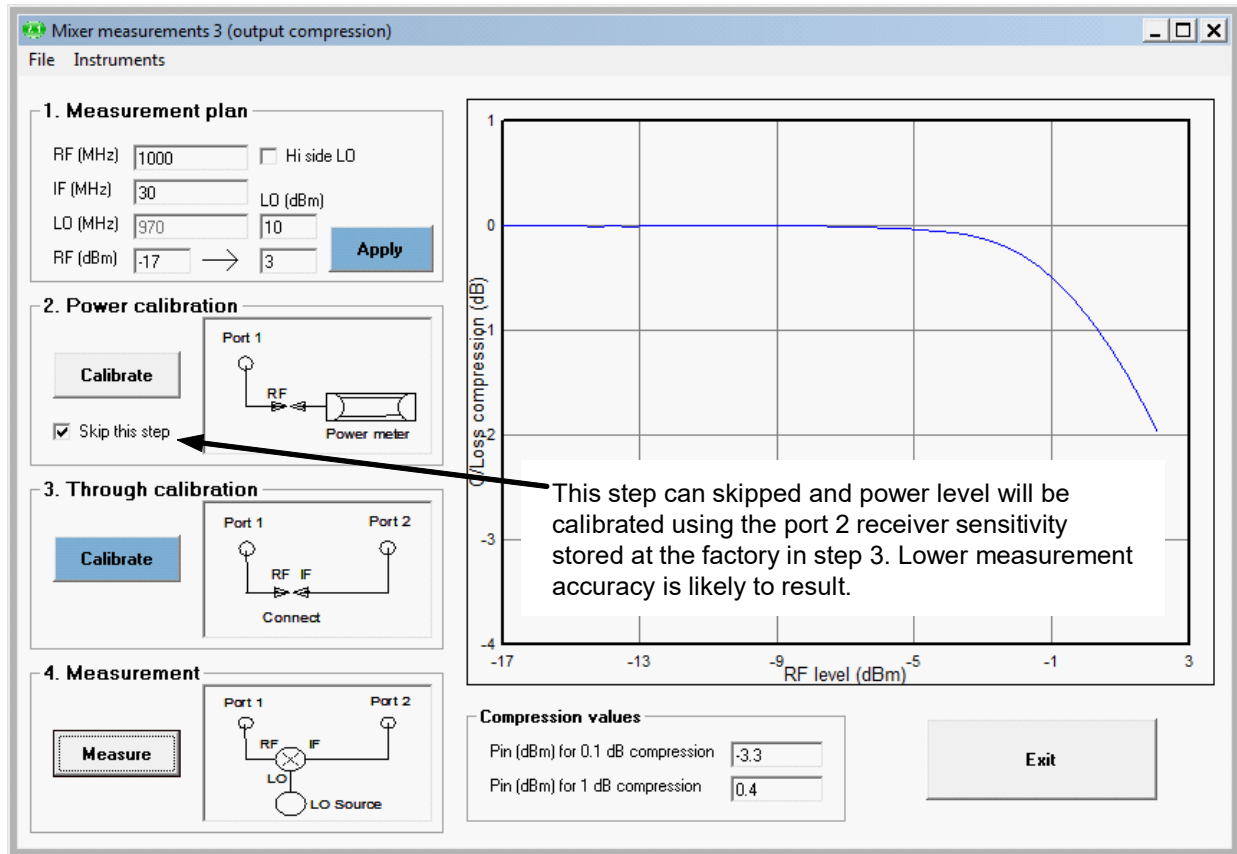


VSWR Correction can improve conversion loss uncertainty

Isolation and conversion loss compression

The other main measurement options are port to port isolation and conversion loss compression as shown under **Measurement Selection** above. Setting each of these up will require selection of the external instruments as described above under **External instrument selection**. The corresponding form for each of these set of measurements provides graphical indication of the calibration steps.

The figure below shows the conversion loss compression setup dialog. As indicated, the need for an external power meter can be bypassed albeit at the risk of reduced measurement accuracy. On completion of the measurement the variation of conversion loss with RF port power level and the 0.1 dB and 1 dB compression points are displayed.



Conversion loss compression measurement dialog

6.4 Reference plane extension and de-embedding

The *reference plane extension* facility on the PicoVNA 106 and 108 allows you to shift the measurement reference plane away from the value set during calibration. This can be useful in removing the effect of interconnecting cables or microstrip lines from measurements. The instrument allows independent reference plane extensions on each of the measurement parameters (S_{11} , S_{22} , S_{12} or S_{21}).

The loss associated with any plane extension can be entered directly (see Fig. 6.6) in terms of the loss (in dB) at 1 GHz. The software assumes that the loss is 0 dB at dc and at other frequencies the magnitude of the loss is given by the following expression.

$$\text{Loss} = \text{Loss} (1 \text{ GHz}) \times \sqrt{(\text{Freq} / 1 \times 10^9)}$$

The **enhance option** in the **Auto Ref** facility allows the software to compute the loss as well as the optimum phase offset at each frequency in the sweep plan. This can be very useful to cancel out the effect of loss but note that some residual errors after using this feature will remain, for example mismatch errors.

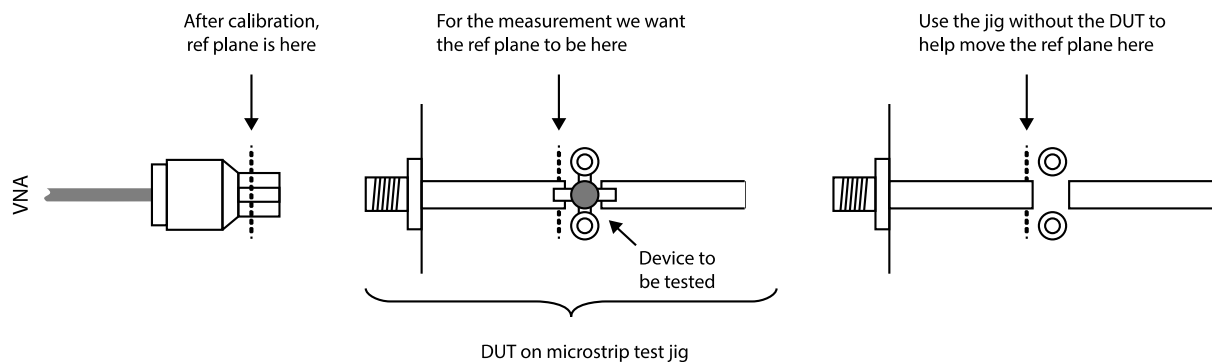
The **Auto Ref** feature assumes a perfect open for reflection measurements. That is, it tries to provide an offset to leave 0° reflection phase. Similarly, when dealing with transmission measurements, it assumes a perfect zero length through connection.

An example of an application requiring the use of reference plane extension is shown below. In this, it is desired to measure the S_{11} of a device mounted on a microstrip test jig with SMA connectors. In order to remove the effect of the interconnecting line to the input of the device, the following procedure may be followed:

- Perform an S_{11} calibration at the end of the N to SMA adaptor on Port 1
- Connect the test jig **without** the DUT mounted on it
- Display the phase of the S_{11} on active display channel
- Click **Auto Ref** in the **Enhancement** window
- Click **Apply** in the **Enhancement** window

The above steps will move the reference plane to the end of the microstrip line. This can be verified by noting that the displayed phase is close to 0° over the entire measurement band. Imperfections associated with the microstrip line and coaxial connector, such as loss and dispersion, will mean that some residual phase will remain. However, with careful design and employing good RF practice for the construction of the jig, this error should remain small.

After the above steps are completed, the DUT can be mounted on the jig and its S_{11} parameter measured.



Example of S_{11} measurement requiring reference plane extension

Note: The reference plane extension moves the reference plane for each parameter measurement independently. So, if required for example, different values can be used for S_{11} and S_{21} . A reference plane extension value entered, applies to the active channel measurement parameter (either reflection or transmission).

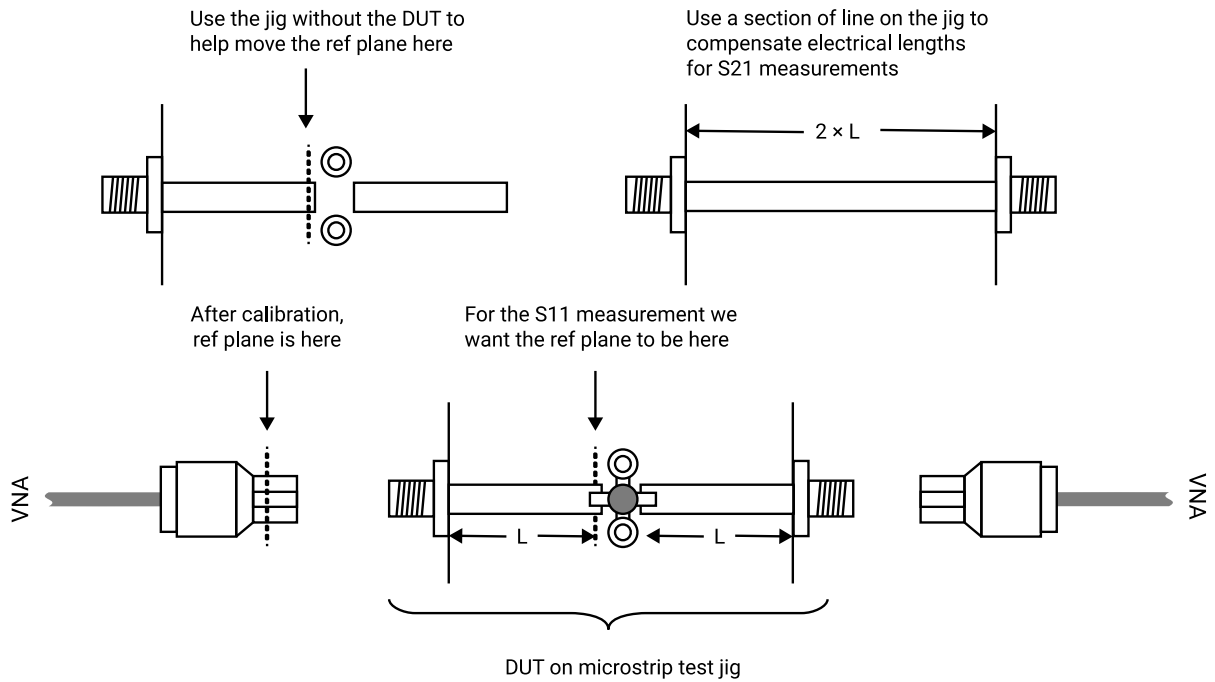
In the example above, correction was applied to the S_{11} phase but not S_{21} . An often-used way to correct the S_{21} phase is by using a calibration jig with length of microstrip line equal to the sum of the two sections of line used either side of the DUT jig (see figure below). Proceed as follows to make S_{11} and S_{21} measurements of the DUT.

Reference plane extension for S_{11} correction

- Perform a 12 term calibration (exclude test jig). Ensure that the test cable has connectors of different sex at each end. Adaptors may be needed to connect the DUT.
- Connect the input port of the test jig **without** the DUT mounted on it to Port 1
- Display the phase of the S_{11} on the **active** display channel
- Click **Auto Ref** in the **Enhancement** window
- Click **Apply** in the **Enhancement** window

Normalization for S_{21} correction

- Connect the through microstrip test line between Ports 1 and 2 of the VNA
- Display the phase of S_{21} on a non-active channel (keep active channel for S_{11})
- Start the measurement and store data on the S_{21} channel only to memory (use the memory window)
- Select **Data / Memory** for the math function in the **Memory** window
- Select the **Memory Math** display in the main window

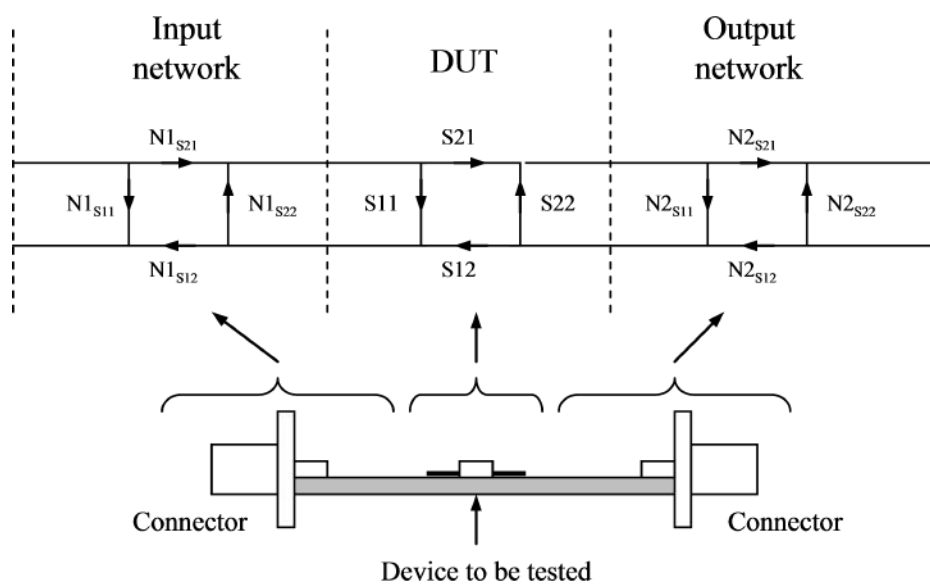


Correcting S_{21} and S_{11} phase measurements. Reference plane extension corrects S_{11} measurements and normalization to a test line corrects S_{21} .

The above steps will allow the DUT's S_{11} and S_{21} (or S_{22} and S_{12}) parameters to be measured with the right phase correction. In addition, the loss of the microstrip line will be accounted for. The same approach can be used to measure S_{12} and S_{22} . Note, however, that there will be an error on both measurements due to the imperfections of the microstrip line and connector interface. With careful design of the jig these can be kept acceptably small but further accuracy can be achieved by making use of the de-embedding facility described below.

De-embedding facility

A typical measurement jig, as shown below, includes input and output networks which introduce errors to the measured values of the device under test (DUT). For best measurement accuracy, these networks can be specified (in the form of 2 port s-parameter files) and then used to extrapolate the DUT's characteristics.



De-embedding allows the effects of the test jig's input and output networks to be removed.

The PicoVNA 106 and 108 allow you to specify S-parameter files (must be full 2-port data) for the input and output networks as shown in the figure above so that the de-embedding takes place automatically as the instrument measures the test jig. After first calibrating as usual, follow the steps below to enable de-embedding.

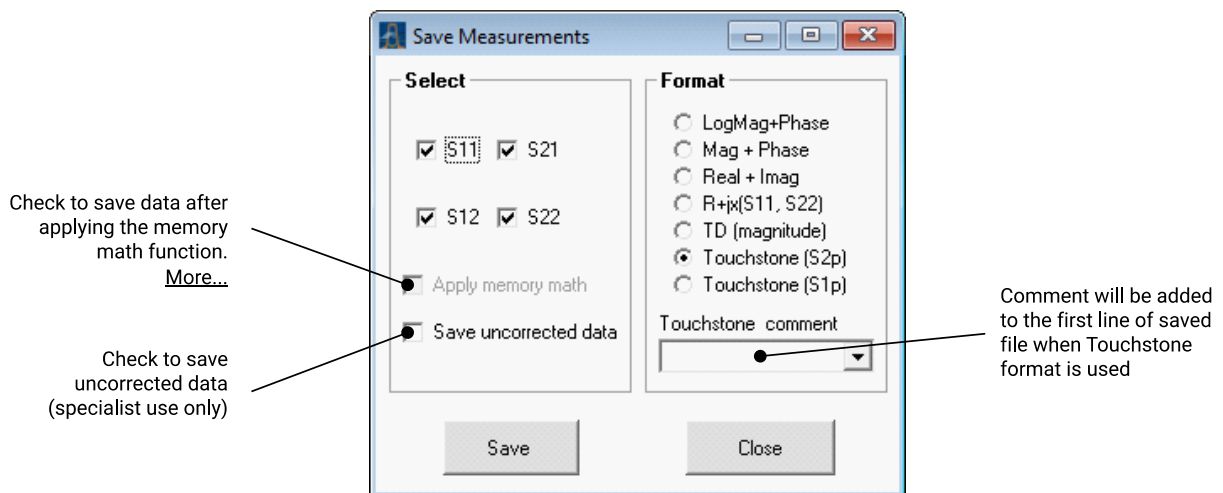
1. Select the S-parameter file(s) that represent the embedding network(s) by clicking on the embedding network check box(es) as shown in [Measurement enhancement](#). Check box **Port 1 Network** represents the input network as shown in the figures in [Reference plane extension and de-embedding](#), and **Port 2 Network** represents the output network. The files selected must be full 2-port S-parameter files in Touchstone format.
2. Click on the radio button in the [Measurement enhancement](#) window to enable de-embedding.

Once the above steps are completed, starting the measurement will display de-embedded results.

The de-embedding facility relies on S-parameter data for the input or output network (or both) being available. This data must be in the form of 2-port S-parameter files in Touchstone format.

6.5 Saving data

Measured data can be saved to a file by selecting **File > Save Measurements** in the main menu. Various formats are available as shown. In all cases, frequency is saved in megahertz. **Note that only the Touchstone format can later be read back into the instrument's memory trace.**



The Save Measurements window is used to save data

Note: For true compatibility with the Touchstone format, only 1-port or full 2-port S-parameters should be saved. For example, selecting S_{11} and S_{21} (but not S_{12} and S_{22}) is not Touchstone compliant.

If required, the data can be saved with the memory math function applied as described earlier under [Memory facility](#). In order to do this, check the **Apply Memory Math** box. Note that the memory math display function on the [main window](#) must be set otherwise the **Apply Memory Math** check box will be disabled.

When saving data in Touchstone format, ensure that you provide the file name extension when entering the file name. Typically, for 1-port networks, the extension ".s1p" is used and ".s2p" for 2-port networks. This will help when reading back the data files since, by default, only files with these extensions will be displayed.

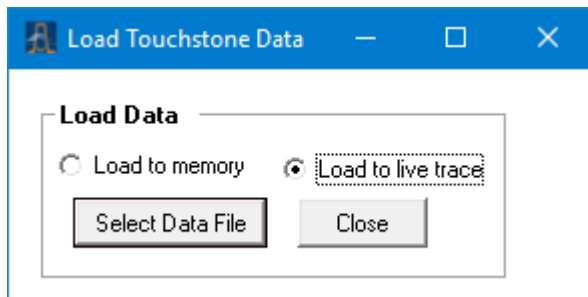
Note: Data will be saved with any system Z_0 conversion applied.

6.6 Loading data

Measured data (or data from a circuit simulator) can be read into the instrument's memory trace(s) or live trace. This can be done by selecting **File > Load Measurement** in the main menu. The file containing the data (in Touchstone) format is selected by clicking **Select Data File**.

The data will be read from the file and copied to the appropriate display channel(s). So, for example, assume you read a data file holding full 2-port data. Further, you have only two channels on display showing, say, S_{11} and S_{21} , so only the S_{11} and S_{21} data from the data file read will be copied to the memory traces of the displayed channels.

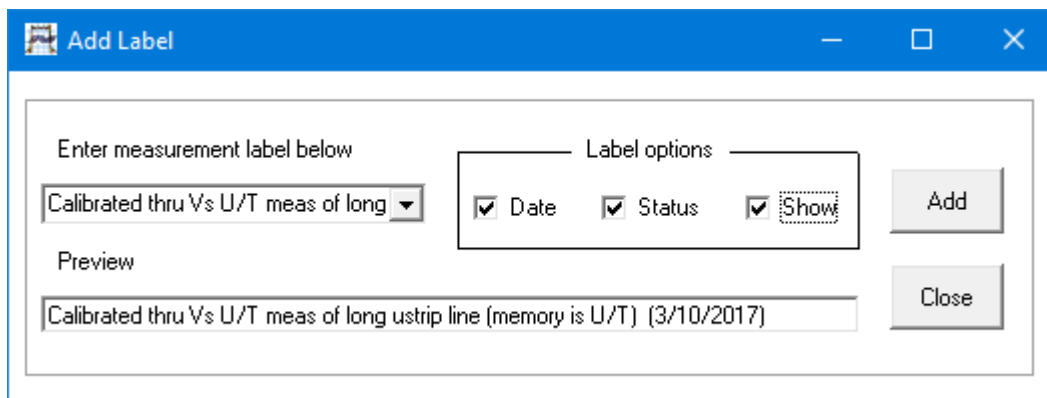
Note: system impedance conversion will apply if turned on in the [Measurement enhancement window](#).



Loading data is done with the File > Load Measurement menu command

6.7 Plotting graphics

You can plot the graphics displayed on the main window using the **File** menu. A printer setup window will appear from you can choose the desired printer and set its properties. If required, you can add a label to the plotted graphics by clicking **File > Print / Save Graphics Label**.



A label can be added when plotting or saving graphics

A similar plotting facility exists on the [P1dB](#) and [AM to PM](#) utilities' control windows.

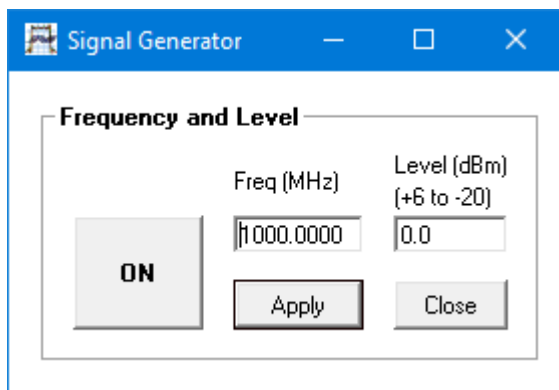
6.8 Saving graphics

The graphics shown on the [main window](#) can be saved in BMP, PNG, GIF, TIF or JPEG formats. This allows measurement results to be directly pasted into most electronic documents. The facility to save the graphics can be found under the main **File** menu. After clicking, a dialog box will appear allowing you to select the name of the file, its location and format from a drop-down box. As described in the previous section, a label can be added by clicking **File > Print / Save Graphics Label**.

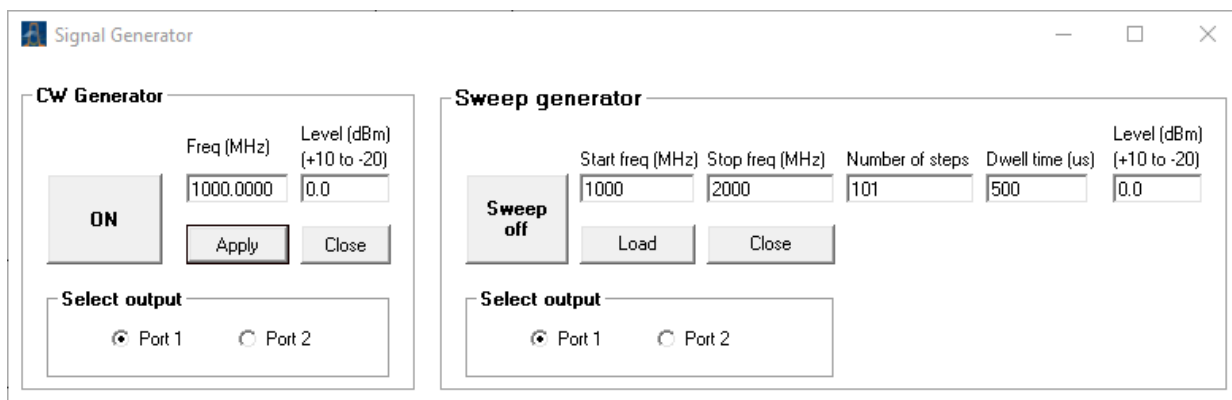
The save graphics facility is not available on the [P1dB](#) and [AM to PM](#) utilities. Instead, the graphics on these can be captured by pressing the **Alt+PrtScr** key combination. The image can then be pasted to the chosen document from the **Edit** menu.

6.9 Signal generator utility

This utility allows the instrument to act as a simple CW or sweep signal generator with variable output power. The output can be either port 1 or port 2. The VNA measurement sweep must be stopped first and the control window, shown below, called from the **Utilities** menu:



PicoVNA 2 signal generator utility control window



PicoVNA 3 signal generator utility control window

Maximum output level when using the generator utility: see [Performance specifications](#).

In sweep mode, the maximum number of points in the plan is 1001 with a dwell time range of between 250 and 60 000 μ s. Note that this dwell time excludes the time to program the synthesizers.

Trigger (PicoVNA 108 only)

The sweep generator mode supports the following trigger modes:

- Free running
- External rising edge
- External falling edge

These three modes can be selected from the main VNA dialog, in the **Trigger** selection box. Note that the **Manual** trigger mode is not supported by the sweep generator.

6.10 Output power at the 1 dB gain compression point utility

This utility allows the measurement of the power output at the 1 dB gain compression point (P_{1dB}) of active devices such as amplifiers. The measurement can be done at a single frequency or over the entire frequency plan specified at the last S-parameter measurement calibration. Start the utility from the **Utilities** menu in the main window.

P_{1dB} calibration

Calibration minimizes errors by removing small variations associated with the instrument's hardware. The procedure is simple, as shown below.

- Ensure that an S_{21} (or $S_{11} + S_{21}$, or 12-term) calibration has been carried out
- Connect Port 1 to Port 2 as shown on the left-hand side of the figure below
- Enter **Input Attenuation** and **Output Attenuation** values (or select **Read from file**)
- Enter the test frequency (or select **Use sweep plan**) and click **Calibrate**

P_{1dB} test

The basic connection arrangement is shown on the right hand side of the figure below. Note that the input and output attenuators should be carefully selected to ensure that the DUT compresses whilst preventing the power at Port 2 of the instrument exceeding the nominal limit of +10 dBm. It is recommended that the following guidelines are used to estimate the value of the input and output attenuators needed.

$$P_{1dB(DUT)} - G_{(DUT)} - 1 + A_{tt1} = -5 \pm 2 \text{ dBm}$$

$$P_{1dB(DUT)} - A_{tt2} + 5 < 10 \text{ dBm}$$

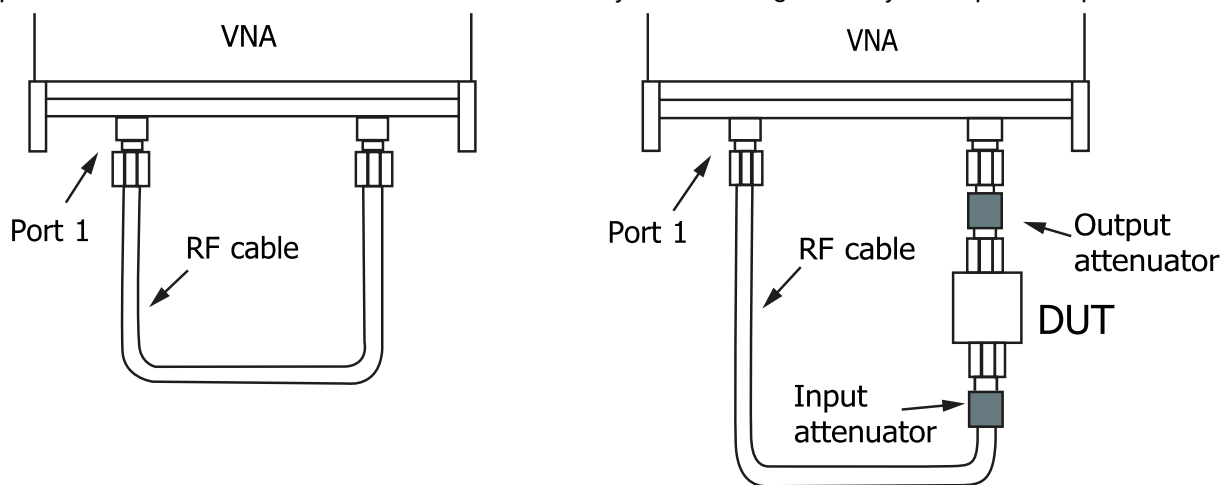
where:

$P_{1dB(DUT)}$ = output power of DUT at the 1 dB gain compression point

$G_{(DUT)}$ = linear gain of DUT

A_{tt1}, A_{tt2} = input and output attenuators

The P_{1dB} test relies on the internally stored factory calibration of the instrument's port 2 receiver sensitivity. This is used as a power sensor to calibrate the power available from port 1 as well as measuring the output power from the device under test. The test **does not** rely on the setting accuracy of the port 1 output level.



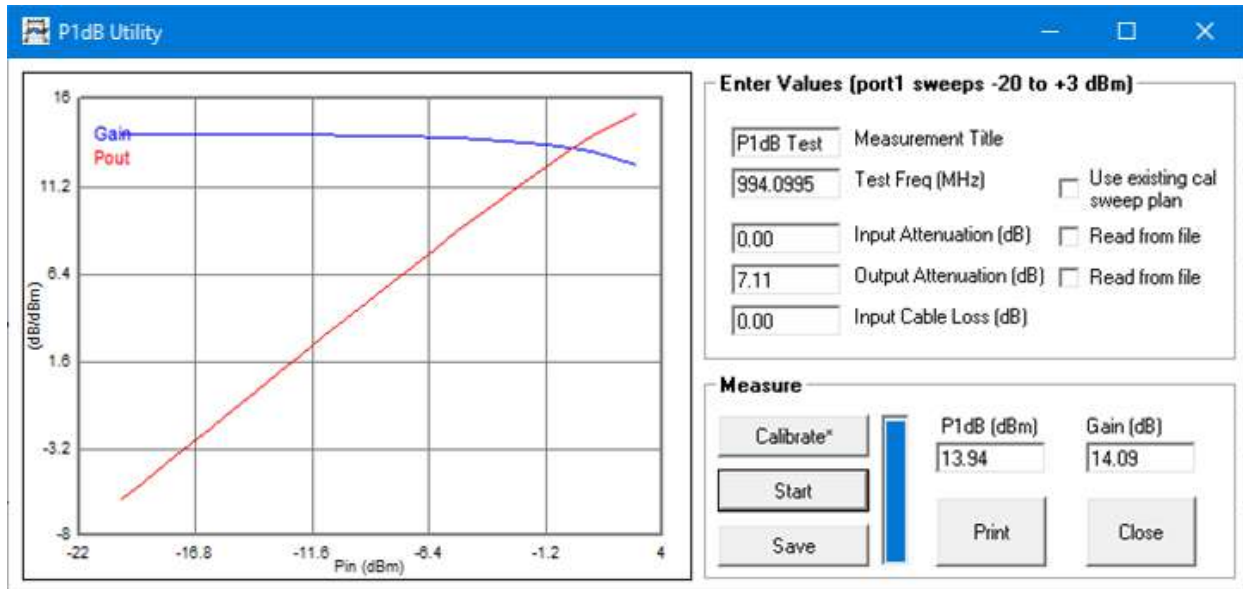
Basic connection guide for P1dB measurements. Calibration connection is shown on the left.

The instrument makes the measurement by setting the signal source (Port 1) frequency to the chosen value and then stepping its power from -20 to $+3$ dBm (PicoVNA 106) or to $+6$ dBm (PicoVNA 108) in 1 dB steps. The gain at each power setting is recorded. On completion of the power sweep, a second order curve is fitted over a narrow section centered on the point closest to the 1 dB gain compression point. The coefficients of this curve allow the actual P_{1dB} point to be calculated.

Note: Choose the input attenuator with care. Ensure that there is no gain compression at the start of the power sweep (-20 dBm at Port 1) and that at least 0.7 dB of gain compression is reached at the end of the sweep ($+3$ or $+6$ dBm at Port 1). A '?' will be displayed if insufficient compression has been achieved.

After the attenuator values have been established and the DUT is in place (and powered up as appropriate), enter the values into the P_{1dB} control window (figure below). Note that the output attenuation value directly affects the P_{1dB} value, so it is important to enter an accurate value that takes into account all losses in the output path, including any connecting cable that may have been used.

Clicking **Start** will perform the test, plot the gain and output power curves, and compute the P_{1dB} . This, together with the linear gain, will be displayed in the text boxes to the right of the **Start** button. The results can then be printed (the window as displayed will be printed) or saved as a text file by clicking **Print** or **Save**.



The P1dB measurement utility control window

Attenuation values from file

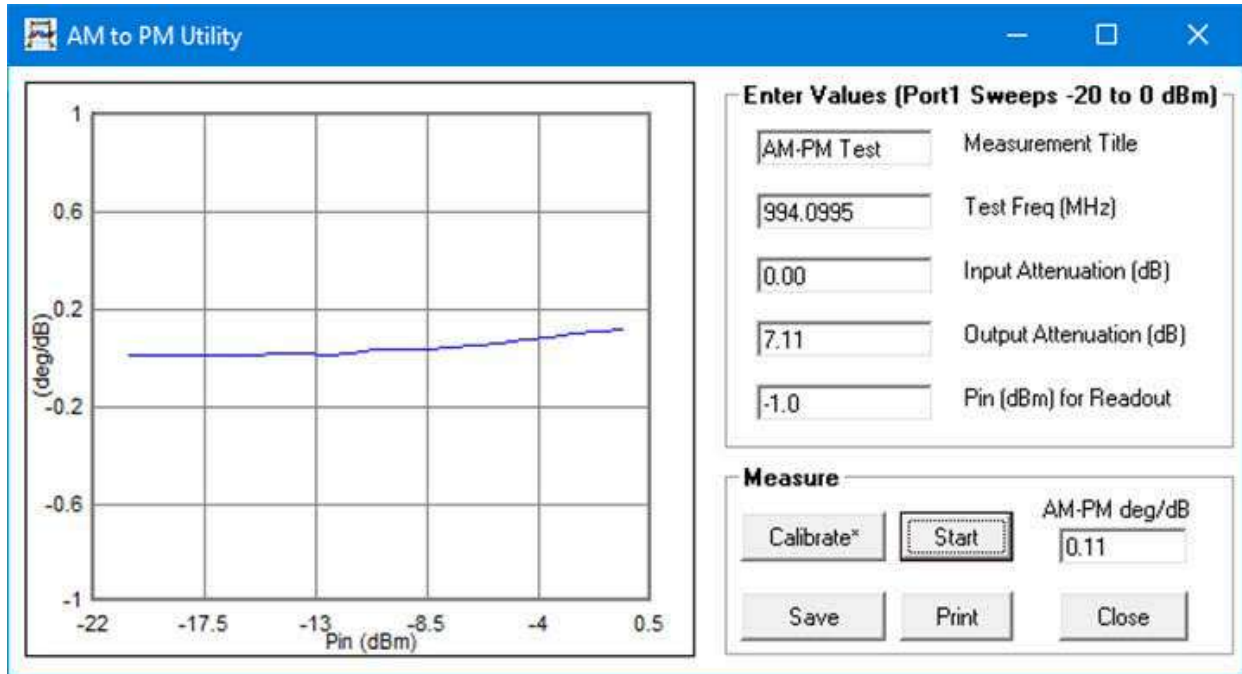
When measuring P_{1dB} using the frequency sweep plan, it is possible to read the input and output attenuation values from a file. The data is held in a simple text file with one line for each frequency point. The format must be as follows:

Frequency (MHz), magnitude (dB), phase (degrees)

Note: The number of lines in the file must match the number of sweep points in the sweep plan.

6.11 AM to PM conversion utility

This utility allows the measurement of the AM to PM conversion factor of a DUT. Generally, it is used for evaluating the linearity of active devices such as amplifiers. The utility is started from the main **Utilities** menu, shown below:



The AM to PM measurement utility control window

In order to use this facility an S_{21} calibration (or $S_{11}+S_{21}$, or 12-term) must have been carried out. For best results, some averaging (e.g. 16) should be used. Further, a second through calibration is suggested to remove residual phase variations. The steps are summarized as follows.

AM to PM utility (calibration)

- Perform a normal S_{21} calibration (or $S_{11}+S_{21}$, or 12-term); see left-hand connection diagram in [Quick start guide](#)
- Call up **AM to PM Utility** (window shown above)
- Enter frequency required (**Test Freq**) in megahertz
- Click **Calibrate** (connection as on left-hand side of figure below)

AM to PM utility (test)

- Connect DUT with attenuators as shown on right hand side of the figure below
- Enter attenuator values, input power at which result is required and measurement title
- Power up DUT if necessary
- Click **Start**

On completion of the AM to PM test, a graph of AM to PM as a function of input power at the DUT input will be plotted. In addition, the AM to PM factor at the specified input power entered will be displayed in the text box in the **Measure** section of the window.

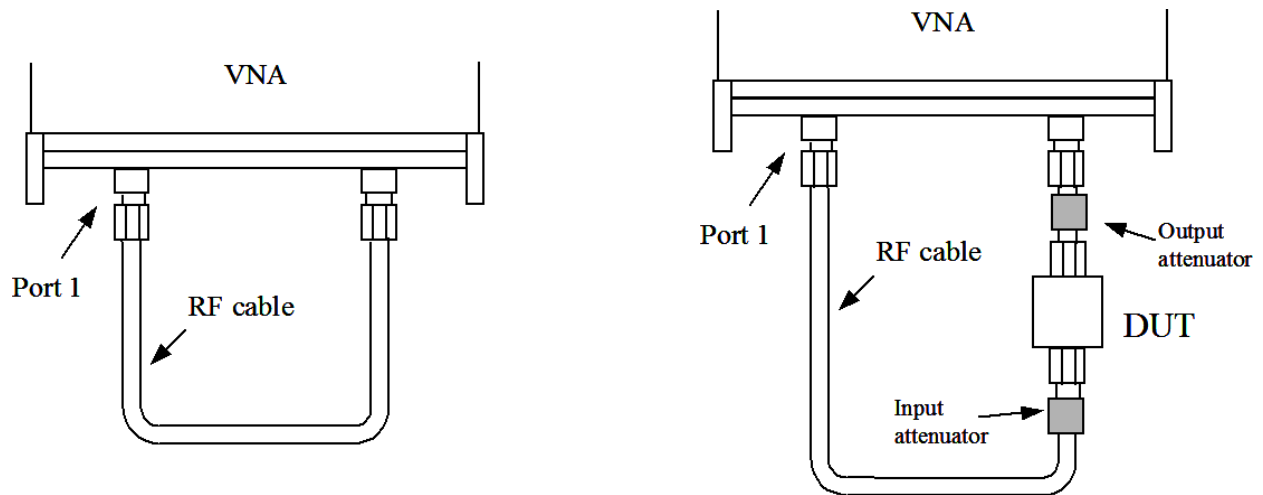


Figure: Calibration (left) and test (right) connections for AM to PM test

Note: For best AM-PM results apply some averaging (e.g. 16) and carry out an AM-PM calibration (left hand side of figure). A '?' will displayed if the requested P_{in} for readout is outside the available range.

6.12 Phase meter utility

This utility allows port 1 and port 2 of the instrument to be used purely as receivers to measure amplitude and relative phase. The control window for this utility is shown below. The key function on this is the control to set the frequency. The frequency range is 0.3 to 8500 MHz. Once it is set, the receivers will be capable of capturing input signals within ± 60 kHz (typically) of this value. The input level range of signals that the utility can work over is +10 to -46 dBm, typically.

Phase meter control window

Phase meter utility display resolution

The amplitude and phase displayed resolution is dependent on the receiver bandwidth selected as shown below.

| Bandwidth setting | Display resolution |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| > 1 kHz | 0.0 |
| > 10 Hz | 0.00 |
| 10 Hz | 0.000 |

Amplitude calibration

The phase meter utility uses the internally stored port 2 sensitivity. Unless otherwise corrected, the utility assumes that port 1 has the same sensitivity as port 2 which is likely to lead to a larger error than would otherwise be the case. To reduce this error in the port 1 level reading, click **Calibrate** and follow the instructions.

The amplitude calibration feature is a simple two-step process where the connections to ports 1 and 2 are swapped, allowing the software to make the necessary correction at the selected frequency. Note that some residual errors are likely to remain. These are associated with the impedance mismatch of the ports and accuracy of the stored port 2 sensitivity. If amplitude accuracy is critical to the measurement, you are advised to check the amplitude measurement error using an external dedicated power meter.

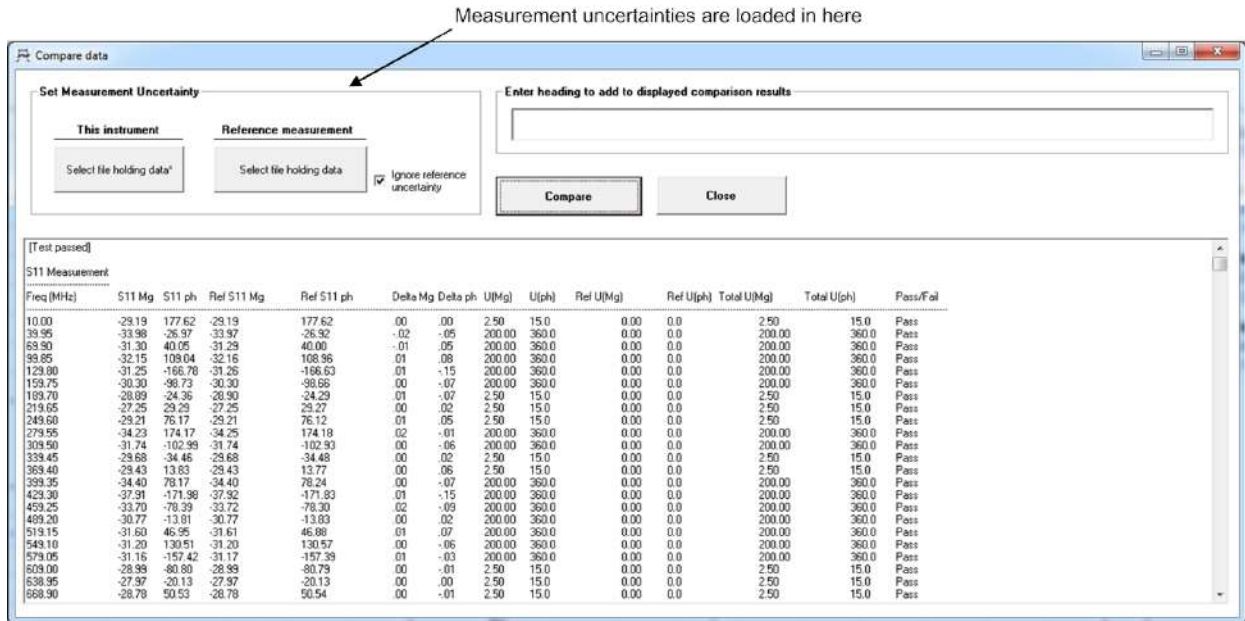
6.13 Compare data utility

The compare data utility provides a quick and simple way to compare two sets of full S-parameter measurements taking into account the instrument's measurement uncertainty and optionally, the uncertainty associated with the reference measurement. Typically this facility can be used to measure a Check Standard and compare the measurement values produced by the PicoVNA 106 or 108 with those supplied with the Check Standard. This is a simple and quick way of determining the adequacy of the calibration to be used.

The compare data utility can be found in the **Utility** drop-down menu. This brings up the dialog shown below.

To use the compare utility, follow these steps:

1. Perform a full S-parameter calibration for either an insertable or female non-insertable DUT.
2. Set display graph 1 to S11, 2 to S21, 3 to S12 and 4 to S22.
3. Measure the associated Check Standard.
4. Using **File > Load Measurements** command, load the reference measurement of the Check Standard (supplied with the standard) to the memory traces. This must be a full Touchstone S-parameter measurement - example file name:
`SN10000X.s2p`
5. Launch the compare data utility (**Utility > Compare Data**).
6. Load the PicoVNA 106 or 108 VNA uncertainty file. If all connections are made using PC3.5 test leads and cal kits, use:
`Instrument Uncertainty with Premium PC3.5 leads.dat`
Otherwise use:
`Instrument Uncertainty with Pico Standard SMA leads.dat`
7. Load the reference measurement uncertainty file:
`Check Standard Reference Measurement Uncertainty.dat`
8. Check the **Ignore reference uncertainty** check box only if comparing two measurements of the same Check Standard on the same VNA made at different times or in different environments.
9. Click the **Compare** button to perform the comparison and display the results.



Data comparison dialog

Defining uncertainties

Measurement uncertainty is defined by means of text file as illustrated below. The definition is made up of several segments. Each segment refers to reflection [REFLECTION] or transmission [TRANSMISSION] with an entry for the applicable range in dB followed by the frequency range (in MHz). After the frequency range entry, the magnitude uncertainty in dB is specified followed by the corresponding phase uncertainty in degrees.

One segment of the uncertainty definition

```
[Default uncertainty for LA19-13-04 6GHz VNA. Apr 2017]
[REFLECTION]
[RANGEDB]
-15, 0
[FREQ]
0, 1.99999
[MAGDB]
0.7
[PHASE]
8
[REFLECTION]
[RANGEDB]
-15, 0
[FREQ]
2, 6100
[MAGDB]
0.5
[PHASE]
4
[REFLECTION]
[RANGEDB]
```

The uncertainty definition is made up of several reflection and transmission segments. A reflection segment is highlighted above.

It is possible to define the uncertainty by a polynomial. To do this, follow the [MAGDB] keyword with the keyword [POLY]. Then, the uncertainty can be define by means of 3 coefficients, say, K_0 , K_1 , and K_2 . The uncertainty for given measured absolute magnitude value in dB, M , is given by:

$$U_p = K_0 + K_1M + K_2M^2$$

The same approach can be used to defining the phase uncertainty. That is, add the keyword [POLY] after the [PHASE] keyword.

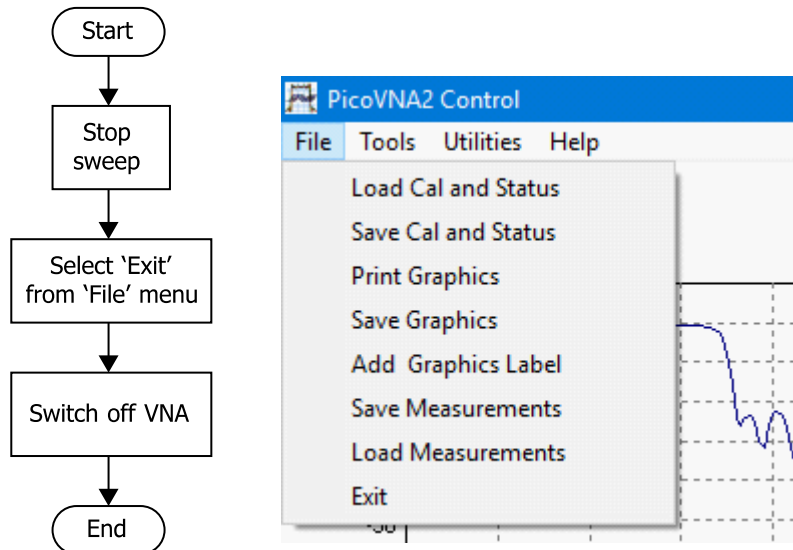
The data compare utility resolves the total combined uncertainty as follows:

$$U_C = \sqrt{U_I^2 + U_R^2}$$

In the above, U_i is the uncertainty associated with the PicoVNA unit and U_R is that provided with the reference Check Standard.

6.14 Closing down the software

You should formally shut down the user interface window before switching off the VNA. This allows the software to save the calibration and status and update the instrument's log file. The sequence is shown below:



Formally closing down the software saves the current calibration

Closing the program by clicking the top right-hand X button will end the program without saving anything. A warning will be issued.

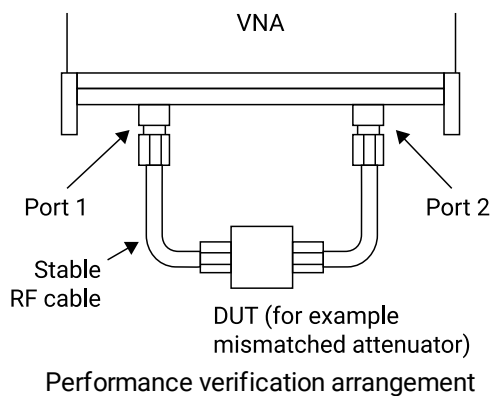
7 Performance verification and maintenance

We recommend that the instrument is checked periodically for safety (chassis grounding, fan operation, clear ventilation grilles and operator markings) and compliance with the stated electrical specification. The table below shows suggested parameters that should be checked as part of the calibration process. Note that the ventilation inlets should be checked as described later.

| Measurement | DUT | Conditions | Calibration type |
|---|---|--|------------------|
| S_{21} and S_{12} , magnitude and phase | 20 dB attenuator | 51 points sweep 0.3–6000 or 8500 MHz 1 kHz BW +3 dBm test level | 12-term |
| S_{11} and S_{22} , magnitude and phase | A known mismatch at ports 1 and 2 (–16 dB or worse return loss) | 51 points sweep 0.3–6000 or 8500 MHz 1 kHz BW +3 dBm test level | 12-term |
| or | | | |
| S_{11} , S_{21} , S_{22} and S_{12} , magnitude and phase | Mismatched attenuator (> 10 dB attenuation and –16 dB or worse return loss) | 51 points sweep 0.3–6000 or 8500MHz 1 kHz BW +3 dBm test level | 12-term |

Suggested annual instrument verification / calibration schedule

We recommended that you compare the measured results with the values provided with the standards and verify that they are within the combined uncertainty of the instrument and the provided reference measurements. The frequency should be set to agree with those available(s) for the standard used. The recommended test arrangement is shown below. The results should be within the instrument's quoted uncertainty as detailed in the following section. Allowance should also be made for the uncertainty of the standard reference values.



Tip: A data compare utility is provided in the PicoVNA 2 and 3 software that can be used to compare the measurements, taking into account the uncertainty of the instrument.

Note: The Pico TA430 and TA431 check standards can be used in this verification but they have too much uncertainty to make a confident verification to the full performance specification of the PicoVNAs. Nonetheless, the uncertainty of the verification, given in the result from the compare utility, may be low enough for the application. If sufficient, the use of either TA430 or TA431 of course significantly reduces ownership costs and increases the regularity at which a verification can be made.

7.1 Measurement uncertainty

The measurement uncertainty figures below are based on calibration (12-term, insertable device, with -3 dBm test power and using 10 Hz bandwidth) using the premium PC3.5 mm calibration kits optionally supplied with the instrument. The figures for S_{21} and S_{12} assume that the DUT has a value of S_{11} or S_{22} of less than 0.2. Similarly, the figures for S_{11} and S_{22} assume the DUT has a value of S_{21} or S_{12} of less than 0.2. Other external factors such as connector and cables effects are excluded.

| Power | Frequency | Magnitude | Phase |
|------------------|--------------|-----------|-------|
| -15 dB to 0 dB | Freq < 2 MHz | 0.7 | 8° |
| | Freq > 2 MHz | 0.5 | 4° |
| -25 dB to -15 dB | Freq < 2 MHz | 0.8 | 10° |
| | Freq > 2MHz | 1.0 | 6° |
| -30 dB to -25 dB | Freq < 2MHz | 3.0 | 20° |
| | Freq > 2MHz | 2.5 | 15° |

Reflection (S_{11} , S_{22}) measurement uncertainty

| Power | Frequency | Magnitude | Phase |
|--------------------|--------------|-----------|-------|
| +0 dBm to +6 dBm | Freq < 2 MHz | 0.4 | 6° |
| | Freq > 2 MHz | 0.2 | 2° |
| -40 dBm to 0 dBm | Freq < 2 MHz | 0.3 | 2° |
| | Freq > 2 MHz | 0.1 | 1° |
| -60 dBm to -40 dBm | Freq < 2 MHz | 0.5 | 8° |
| | Freq > 2 MHz | 0.3 | 4° |
| -80 dBm to -60 dBm | Freq < 2 MHz | 2.0 | 15° |
| | Freq > 2 MHz | 1.5 | 12° |

Transmission (S_{21} , S_{12}) measurement uncertainty

7.2 Routine maintenance

Ventilation grilles

Check that all ventilation grilles are clear of any debris, dust or any other material that may impede the flow of air. Particularly, check the vents in the bottom panel of the instrument. It is advisable to brush these to remove any gradual build up of dust.

Failure to clean the ventilation grilles may lead to overheating and eventual failure of the instrument.

Front panel connectors

Routinely inspect the Port 1 and Port 2 N-type connectors for signs of damage or dirt. Use connector-saver adaptors (male to female through) where frequent connection and disconnection are likely.

8 Performance specification

The instrument's performance specification is given below. Unless otherwise stated, the figures apply with 10 Hz resolution bandwidth, at -3 dBm test power, 12-term calibration (for insertable DUT) using the enhanced isolation option, at an ambient temperature of 23 ± 1 °C and 60 minutes after power up.

| Measuring functions | |
|----------------------|--|
| Measuring parameters | S_{11} , S_{21} , S_{22} , S_{12} P_{1dB} (power at 1 dB gain compression) AM-PM conversion factor PicoVNA 108 only: Mixer conversion loss, return loss, compression and port isolation. |
| Error correction | 12 term 8 term (<i>unknown thru</i> calibration) S_{11} (1 port correction) S_{21} (normalize, normalize + isolation) S_{21} (source match correction + normalize + isolation) Averaging, smoothing, Hann and Kaiser–Bessel filtering on time-domain measurements, Electrical length compensation (manual) Electrical length compensation (auto) De-embed (2 embedding networks may be specified) Impedance conversion |
| Display channels | 4 channels (CH1, CH2, CH3, CH4) |
| Traces | 2 traces / channel |
| Display formats | Amplitude (logarithmic and linear), phase, group delay, VSWR, real, imaginary, Smith chart, polar, time domain |
| Memory trace | One per channel |
| Limit lines | 6 segments per channel (overlap allowed) |
| Markers | 8 markers |
| Marker functions | Normal, Δ marker, fixed marker, peak / min, 3 dB and 6 dB bandwidth |

| Signal source characteristics | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Frequency range | PicoVNA 106: 300 kHz to 6.02 GHz PicoVNA 108: 300 kHz to 8.50 GHz |
| Frequency setting resolution | 10 Hz |
| Frequency accuracy | ± 10 ppm (23 ± 3 °C) |
| Frequency temperature stability | ± 0.5 ppm/°C (15 to 35 °C) |
| Harmonics (-3 dBm output level) | -20 dBc |
| Non-harmonic spurious (typical) | -40 dBc |
| Phase noise (10 kHz) | -90 dBc/Hz (0.3 MHz to 1000 MHz) -80 dBc/Hz (1000 MHz to 4000 MHz) -76 dBc/Hz (> 4000 MHz) |
| Output power | PicoVNA 106 Up to 4 GHz: +6 to -20 dBm > 4 GHz: +3 to -20 dBm PicoVNA 108 Up to 6 GHz: +10 to -20 dBm > 6 GHz: +6 to -20 dBm |
| Power setting resolution | 0.1 dB (nominal) |
| Output power accuracy | ± 1.5 dB |
| Reference input frequency | 10 MHz ± 6 ppm |
| Reference input level | 0 ± 3 dBm |

| Signal source characteristics | | | |
|---|--|---|--------------------------------|
| Reference output level | 0 ±3 dBm | | |
| Sweep functions | | | |
| Sweep type | Linear sweep, CW sweep (timed sweep) Power sweep (P_{1dB} utility) | | |
| Trigger modes Option to capture up to 1024 sweeps of data in all modes except free run. | Free run Positive trigger Negative trigger Manual trigger | | |
| Sweep time 10 MHz to 6 or 8.5 GHz, 201-point trace length. For other lengths and bandwidths the sweep time is approximately: $T_{SWP}(s) = N \times (T_{MIN} + F_{BW} / R_{BW})$ where: N = number of frequency points $T_{MIN}(s)$ = minimum time / point (s2p: 167 µs; s1p: 85 µs) F_{BW} = bandwidth settle factor (s2p: 1.91; s1p: 0.956) R_{BW} = resolution bandwidth (Hz) For sweep repetition period, add software rearm time: T_{ARM} = average 6.5 ms or worst case 50 ms For markers on, increase T_{ARM} by 39 ms | Bandwidth | S_{11} , S_{21} , $S_{11}+S_{21}$ calibration | Full 12- or 8-term calibration |
| | 140 kHz | 19 ms (PicoVNA 106) 20 ms (PicoVNA 108) | 38 ms |
| | 10 kHz | 37 ms | 72 ms |
| | 1 kHz | 0.21 s | 0.42 s |
| | 100 Hz | 1.94 s | 3.87 s |
| | 10 Hz | 19.2 s | 38.4 s |
| | LF Adder (for each low-frequency point < 2.5 MHz) | 1.25 ms/pt | 2.5 ms/pt |
| Number of points | 51, 101, 201, 401, 801, 1001, 1024, 2001, 4001, 9001, 10001 | | |

| Receiver characteristics | | | |
|---|---|--|---------|
| Resolution bandwidth | 140 kHz, 70 kHz, 35 kHz, 15 kHz, 10 kHz, 5 kHz, 1 kHz, 500 Hz, 100 Hz, 50 Hz, 10 Hz | | |
| Averaged displayed noise floor (dB): S_{21} calibration 10 Hz bandwidth 16 averages Test ports terminated as during isolation calibration step | Band | Typ. | Max. |
| | PicoVNA 106 | | |
| | 0.3 to 10 MHz | -110 | -100 |
| | 10 MHz to 4 GHz | -118 | -108 |
| | 4 to 6 GHz | -110 | -100 |
| | PicoVNA 108 | | |
| | 0.3 to 1 MHz | -100 | -90 |
| 1 MHz to 6 GHz | -124 | -110 | |
| 6 to 8.5 GHz | -120 | -100 | |
| Dynamic range (dB) Bandwidth 10 Hz 16 averages Test ports terminated as during the isolation calibration step. Isolation calibration refreshed as described in Calibration for best dynamic range. | See figure below | | |
| Temperature stability (typical) | 0.02 dB/°C (f < 4 GHz) 0.04 dB/°C (f ≥ 4 GHz) | | |
| Trace noise (dB RMS) Full band Test level 0 dB 201-point sweep | Bandwidth | Typical | Maximum |
| | 10 kHz | PicoVNA 106: 0.000 8 PicoVNA 108: 0.000 6 | 0.002 |
| | 70 kHz | 0.003 | 0.005 |
| | 140 kHz | PicoVNA 106: 0.005 PicoVNA 108: 0.006 | 0.01 |

| Test port characteristics | | | |
|--|---|---------|---------|
| Load match | Corrected: 40 dB min., 46 dB typ. Uncorrected: 16 dB (PicoVNA 106), 15 dB (PicoVNA 108) typ. | | |
| Source match | Corrected: 40 dB min., 46 dB typ. Uncorrected: 16 dB (PicoVNA 106), 15 dB (PicoVNA 108) typ. | | |
| Directivity (using PC3.5 cal kit) | Corrected: 40 dB min., 47 dB typ. | | |
| Crosstalk (dB, corrected) Test ports terminated with short circuits. Value is average displayed noise level. | Band | Typical | Maximum |
| | PicoVNA 106 | | |
| | 0.3 kHz to 2 MHz | -110 | -90 |
| | 2 MHz to 4 GHz | -110 | -90 |
| | 4 GHz to 6 GHz | -100 | -90 |
| | PicoVNA 108 | | |
| | 0.3 kHz to 2 MHz | -100 | -90 |
| | 2 MHz to 6 GHz | -110 | -90 |
| 6 GHz to 8.5 GHz | -100 | -90 | |
| Main test ports maximum input level (1 dB compression) | +10 dBm | | |
| Main test ports maximum input level (no damage) | +20 dBm | | |
| Main test ports connectors | Type N (female) | | |
| Bias-T maximum current | 250 mA | | |
| Bias-T maximum DC voltage | +15 V | | |
| Bias-T current protection | Built-in resettable fuse | | |
| Bias-T DC port connectors | SMB (female on front panel) | | |
| Sweep trigger input voltage | Low: -0.1 to +1.0 V High: +2.0 to +4 V | | |

| Mixer measurements (PicoVNA 108 only) | |
|--|---|
| Frequency range | 0.3 to 8500 MHz |
| Input power sweep range | -17 to +10 dBm (6 dBm for F > 6 GHz) |
| Input power sweep step | 0.5 dB (nominal) |
| LO source | External, required |
| Power level calibration | External power sensor supported with option to use internal receivers with reduced accuracy |
| Measurements | Conversion loss, return loss, isolation and compression |
| Accuracy (conversion loss with return loss correction applied) | 0.2 dB (typical) |
| Display format | Graphical, conversion loss, return loss, isolation and compression |

| P1dB utility | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Frequency range | 0.3 to 6020 MHz or 8500 MHz |
| Input power sweep range | PicoVNA 106: -20 to +3 dBm PicoVNA 108: -20 to +6 dBm |
| Input power sweep step | 1 dB (nominal) |
| P1dB calculation method | 2 nd order curve fit |
| Display format | Graphical, gain and output power |
| Accuracy | 0.5 dB (typical) |

| AM to PM utility | |
|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Frequency range | 0.3 to 6020 MHz or 8500 MHz |

| AM to PM utility | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Input power sweep range | -20 to 0 dBm |
| Input power sweep step | 1 dB (nominal) |
| AM to PM point calculation method | 2 nd order curve fit |
| Display format | Graphical, phase conversion (deg / dB) |
| Accuracy (Port 2 power +5 to -20 dBm) | 1° (typical) |

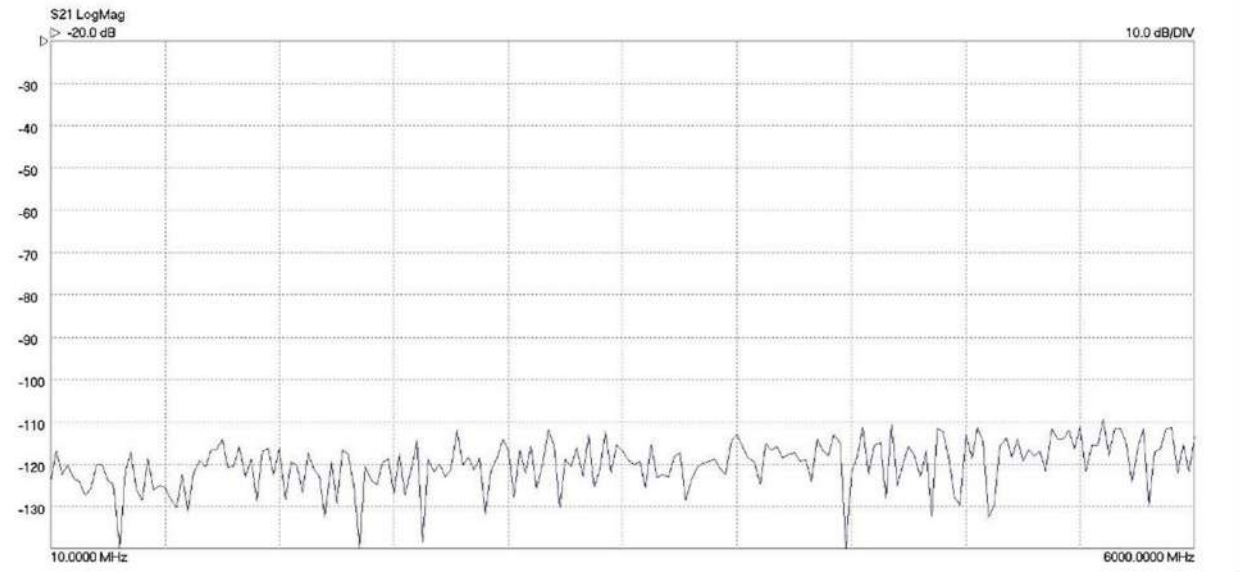
| Signal generator utility | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Frequency range | 0.3 to 6020 MHz or 8500 MHz |
| Output power | PicoVNA 106: -20 to +3 dBm PicoVNA 108: -20 to +10 dBm |
| Setting resolution | 0.1 dB |
| Output power accuracy | ±1.5 dB max |

| Group delay | |
|---|---|
| Range (180° maximum phase shift per frequency step) | $\tau = \frac{0.5}{\Delta f}$ where Δf is the aperture frequency |
| Aperture frequency | Frequency sweep step size |
| Accuracy | $\Delta\tau = \frac{PhaseError}{360 \cdot \Delta f}$ |

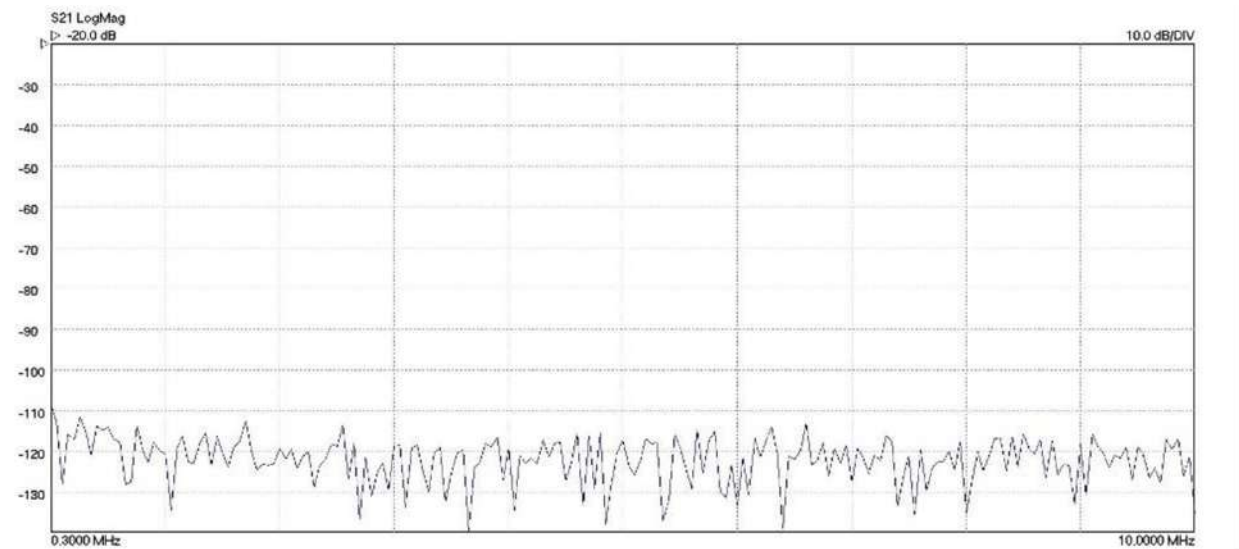
| Data handling | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Calibration data | Store / Recall on disk |
| Calibration kit data | Store / Recall on disk |
| Print measured data (graphics) | To any printer installed on host PC |
| Save measured data (graphics) | To disk |
| Measured data | Store on disk |
| Measured data (Touchstone format) | Store on disk |
| Measured data (Touchstone format) | Recall to memory trace from disk |
| Statement of Volatility: No user data, calibration data or user settings are stored on the device. | |

| Miscellaneous | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| PC data interface | USB |
| PC minimum requirements | Pentium 4 (3 GHz) or equivalent 2 GB RAM 200 MB hard disk storage on C: partition Windows 7, 8 or 10 Display resolution of 1280 x 720 to run PicoVNA software |
| External dimensions (L x W x H) | 286 x 174 x 61 mm |
| Weight | 1.85 kg |
| Temperature range (operating) | +5 °C to +40 °C |
| Temperature range (storage) | -20 °C to +50 °C |
| Humidity | 80% max. (non-condensing) |
| Power source | DC, 12 to 15 V PicoVNA 106: 1.85 A peak, 22 W max. PicoVNA 108: 2.1 A peak, 25 W max. |

Dynamic range (PicoVNA 106)



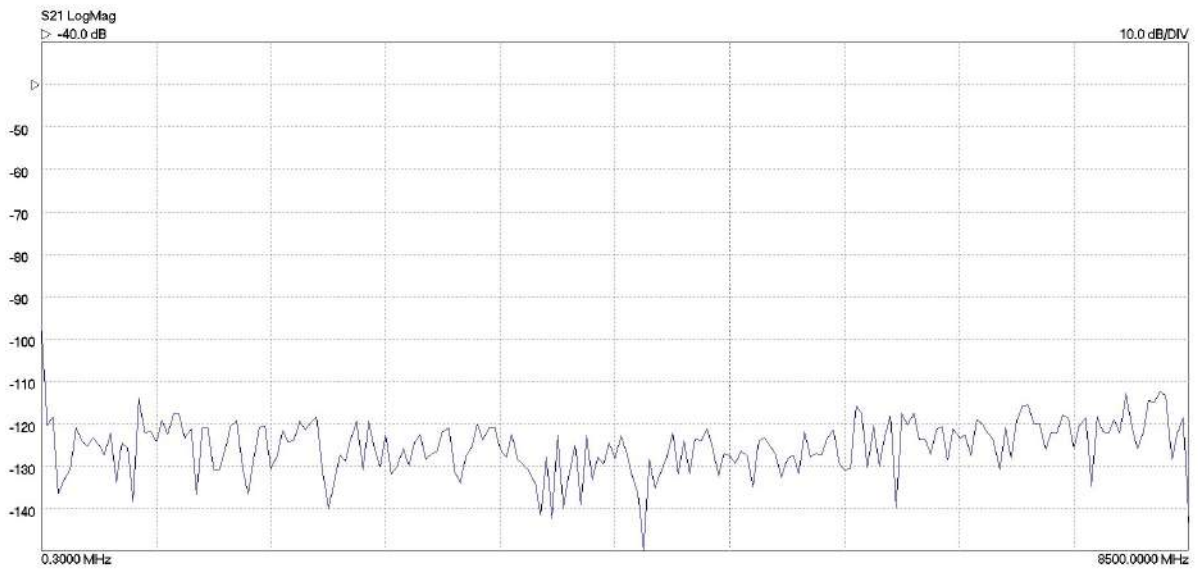
Dynamic range 10 MHz to 6 GHz



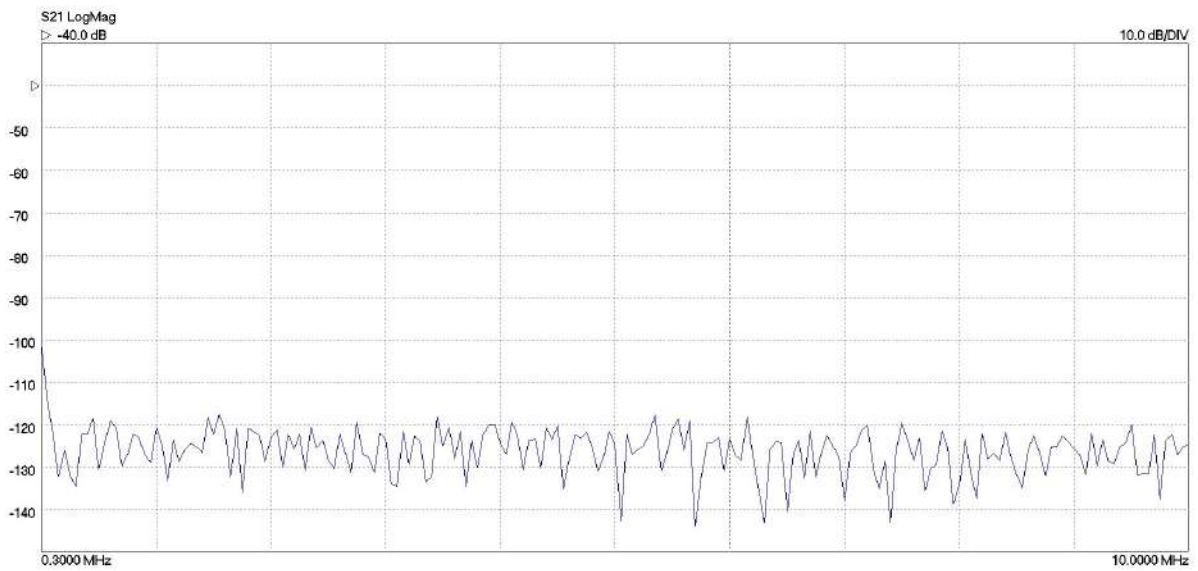
Dynamic range 0.3 to 10 MHz

Typical system dynamic range ($P_{test} = +6$ dBm, BW = 10 Hz)

Dynamic range (PicoVNA 108)



Dynamic range 10 MHz to 8.5 GHz



Dynamic range 0.3 to 10 MHz

Typical system dynamic range ($P_{test} = +10$ dBm, BW = 10 Hz)

9 Troubleshooting guide



CAUTION

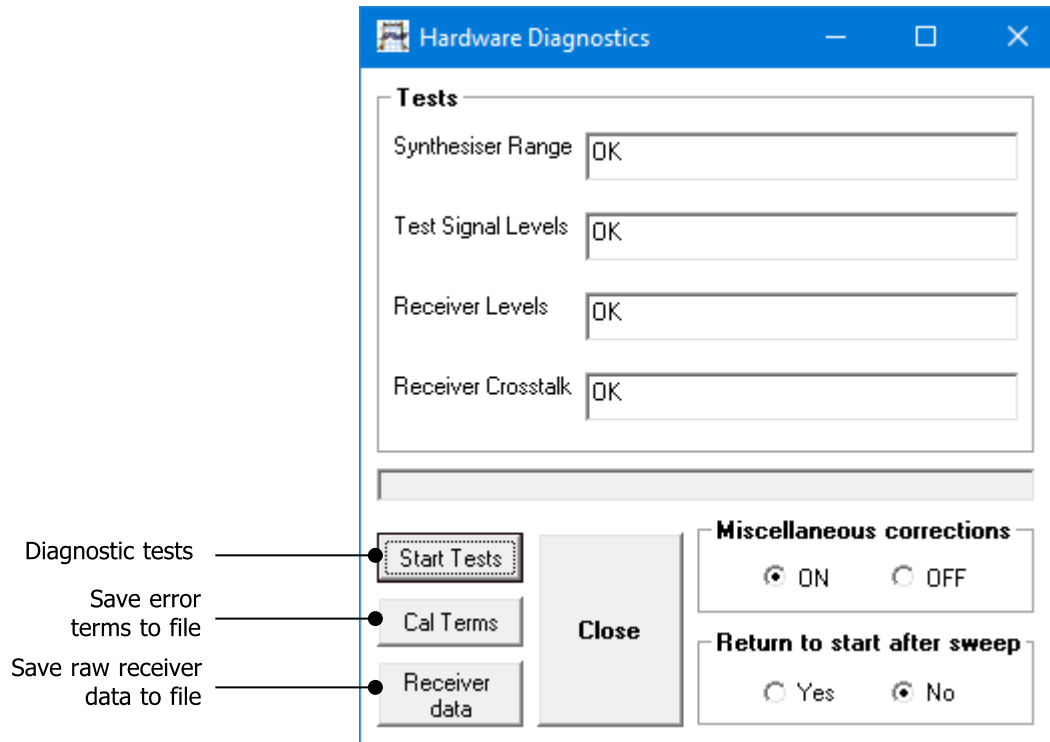
The product and accessories contain no user-serviceable parts. Repair, servicing and calibration require specialized test equipment and must only be performed by Pico Technology or an approved service provider.

| Symptom | Possible Cause | Solution |
|---|---|--|
| Instrument does not power up | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Power not applied Incorrect supply | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check DC connection Check external supply |
| PicoVNA 2 or PicoVNA 3 software unable to communicate with the instrument | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Driver not installed Link interrupted | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> See Switching on Restart instrument and software |
| Instrument sweeping but display not refreshing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data link interrupted | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restart instrument and software |
| 'Last Calibration not found' message on power up | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> C:\User\Public\Documents\PicoVNA2 (or ...PicoVNA3) directory deleted or corrupted | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restore folder. Set up display and calibrate. Exit the software using File > Exit menu command. This will save the current calibration in a file named defaultcal.cal. |
| Diagnostics Tests (under Tools menu) fail | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data corruption | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restart instrument and software. Ensure that test cable used is in good condition. |
| Error reading data files | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invalid format Too many lines Leading space(s) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check for correct format / '#' line 10 001 lines maximum Remove leading spaces from data lines |

Diagnostics tests

It is possible to run self-check tests on the instrument. This facility (Diagnostic Tests) is available from the **Tools** menu shown above. In order to complete the tests a low loss cable is required to link Port 1 to Port 2. The tests carry out the following checks.

- Synthesizers: test that they remain in lock over the frequency range
- Test signal: test the level range and step size
- Receiver levels: test that the receiver is operating at normal signal levels
- Receiver crosstalk: test that raw crosstalk remains below limit
- Receiver DC offset: test that this is at normal level



The Diagnostics Tests perform internal checks on key components

If any of the tests returns an error, check connectors and linking cable. If this does not resolve it, restart the instrument and the software. After pressing reset, wait until the front-panel channel activity indicators have stopped flashing to continue with the tests.

Calibration error terms and raw receiver data

The diagnostic tests dialog (figure above) also provides the facility for retrieving the calibration error terms and raw receiver data. The latter can be helpful for users wishing to carry out their own calibration procedure.

Back up/restore EEPROM

This facility allows the internal ROM (read-only memory) of the instrument to be backed up or restored. This facility should only be required by service or repair personnel.

10 Warranty

Pico Technology warrants upon delivery, and for a period of three years unless otherwise stated from the date of delivery, that the Goods will be free from defects in material and workmanship.

Pico Technology shall not be liable for a breach of the warranty if the defect has been caused by fair wear and tear, willful damage, negligence, abnormal working conditions or failure to follow Pico Technology's spoken or written advice on the storage, installation, commissioning, use or maintenance of the Goods or (if no advice has been given) good trade practice; or if the Customer alters or repairs such Goods without the written consent of Pico Technology.

UK headquarters:

Pico Technology
James House
Colmworth Business Park
St. Neots
Cambridgeshire
PE19 8YP
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 1480 396 395

sales@picotech.com
support@picotech.com

www.picotech.com

North America office:

Pico Technology
320 N Glenwood Blvd
Tyler
TX 75702
United States

Tel: +1 800 591 2796

sales@picotech.com
support@picotech.com

Asia-Pacific office:

Pico Technology
Room 2252, 22/F, Centro
568 Hengfeng Road
Zhabei District
Shanghai 200070
PR China

Tel: +86 21 2226-5152

pico.asia-pacific@picotech.com