

4.6 Liquid Crystal Display

1. Polarizing filter film with a vertical axis to polarize light as it enters.
2. Glass substrate with ITO electrodes. The shapes of these electrodes will determine the shapes that will appear when the LCD is turned ON. Vertical ridges etched on the surface are smooth.
3. Twisted nematic liquid crystal.
4. Glass substrate with common electrode film (ITO) with horizontal ridges to line up the horizontal filter.
5. Polarizing filter film with a horizontal axis to block/pass light.
6. Reflective surface to send light back to viewer. (In a backlit LCD, this layer is replaced with a light source.)

A liquid crystal display (LCD) is a thin, flat electronic visual display that uses the light modulating properties of liquid crystals (LCs). LCs do not emit light directly. It's shown in

They are used in a wide range of applications including: computer monitors, television, instrument panels, aircraft cockpit displays, signage, etc. They are common in consumer devices such as video players, gaming devices, clocks, watches, calculators, and telephones. LCDs have displaced cathode ray tube (CRT) displays in most applications. They are usually more compact, lightweight, portable, less expensive, more reliable, and easier on the eyes. They are available in a wider range of screen sizes than CRT and plasma display, and since they do not use phosphors, they cannot suffer image burn-in. LCDs are more energy efficient and offer safer disposal than CRTs.

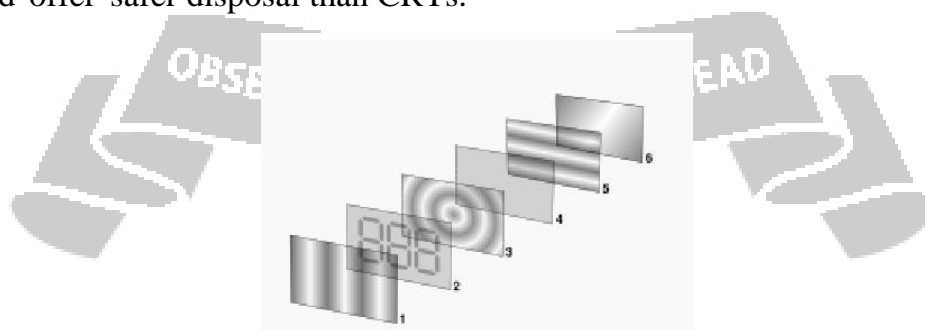


Fig 4.6 Reflective twisted Nematic liquid crystal display.

[Source: "Electrical & Electronic Measurements & Instrumentation" by "A.K. Sawhney, and Page: 528]

Overview:

Fig 4.6 LCD alarm clock

[Source: “Electrical & Electronic Measurements & Instrumentation” by “A.K. Sawhney, and Page: 530]

Each pixel of an LCD typically consists of a layer of molecules aligned between two transparent electrodes, and two polarizing filters, the axes of transmission of which are (in most of the cases) perpendicular to each other. With no actual liquid crystal between the polarizing filters, light passing through the first filter would be blocked by the second (crossed) polarizer. In most of the cases the liquid crystal has double refraction.

The surfaces of the electrodes that are in contact with the liquid crystal material are treated so as to align the liquid crystal molecules in a particular direction. This treatment typically consists of a thin polymer layer that is unidirectional rubbed using, for example, a cloth. The direction of the liquid crystal alignment is then defined by the direction of rubbing. Electrodes are made of a transparent conductor called Indium Tin Oxide (ITO).

Before applying an electric field, the orientation of the liquid crystal molecules is determined by the alignment at the surfaces of electrodes. In a twisted nematic device (still the most common liquid crystal device), the surface alignment directions at the two electrodes are perpendicular to each other, and so the molecules arrange themselves in a helical structure, or twist. This reduces the rotation of the polarization of the incident light, and the device appears grey. If the applied voltage is large enough, the liquid crystal molecules in the center of the layer are almost completely untwisted and the polarization of the incident light is not rotated as it passes through the liquid crystal layer. This light will then be mainly polarized perpendicular to the second filter, and thus be blocked and the pixel will appear black. By controlling the voltage applied across the liquid crystal layer in each pixel, light can be allowed to pass through in varying amounts thus constituting different levels of gray. This electric field also controls (reduces) the double refraction properties of the liquid crystal.



Fig 4.6 LCD

[Source: “Electrical & Electronic Measurements & Instrumentation” by “A.K. Sawhney, and Page: 531]

LCD with top polarizer removed from device and placed on top, such that the top and bottom polarizers are parallel.

The optical effect of a twisted nematic device in the voltage-on state is far less dependent on variations in the device thickness than that in the voltage-off state. Because of this, these devices are usually operated between crossed polarizers such that they appear bright with no voltage (the eye is much more sensitive to variations in the dark state than the bright state). These devices can also be operated between parallel polarizers, in which case the bright and dark states are reversed. The voltage-off dark state in this configuration appears blotchy, however, because of small variations of thickness across the device.

Both the liquid crystal material and the alignment layer material contain ionic compounds. If an electric field of one particular polarity is applied for a long period of time, this ionic material is attracted to the surfaces and degrades the device performance. This is avoided either by applying an alternating current or by reversing the polarity of the electric field as the device is addressed (the response of the liquid crystal layer is identical, regardless of the polarity of the applied field).

When a large number of pixels are needed in a display, it is not technically possible to drive each directly since then each pixel would require independent electrodes. Instead, the display is multiplexed. In a multiplexed display, electrodes on one side of the display are grouped and wired together (typically in columns), and each group gets its own voltage source. On the other side, the electrodes are also grouped (typically in rows), with each group getting a voltage sink. The groups are designed so each pixel has a unique, unshared combination of source and sink. The electronics or the software driving the electronics then turns on sinks in sequence, and drives sources for the pixels of each sink.