



Designation: E1106 – 07

# Standard Test Method for Primary Calibration of Acoustic Emission Sensors<sup>1</sup>

This standard is issued under the fixed designation E1106; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reappraisal. A superscript epsilon ( $\epsilon$ ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reappraisal.

## 1. Scope

1.1 This test method covers the requirements for the absolute calibration of acoustic emission (AE) sensors. The calibration yields the frequency response of a transducer to waves, at a surface, of the type normally encountered in acoustic emission work. The transducer voltage response is determined at discrete frequency intervals of approximately 10 kHz up to 1 MHz. The input is a given well-established dynamic displacement normal to the mounting surface. The units of the calibration are output voltage per unit mechanical input (displacement, velocity, or acceleration).

1.2 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

## 2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards:*<sup>2</sup>

[E114 Practice for Ultrasonic Pulse-Echo Straight-Beam Examination by the Contact Method](#)

[E494 Practice for Measuring Ultrasonic Velocity in Materials](#)

[E650 Guide for Mounting Piezoelectric Acoustic Emission Sensors](#)

[E1316 Terminology for Nondestructive Examinations](#)

## 3. Terminology

3.1 Refer to Terminology [E1316](#) for terminology used in this test method.

## 4. Significance and Use

4.1 *Transfer Standards*—One purpose of this test method is for the direct calibration of displacement transducers for use as secondary standards for the calibration of AE sensors for use in

nondestructive evaluation. For this purpose, the transfer standard should be high fidelity and very well behaved and understood. If this can be established, the stated accuracy should apply over the full frequency range up to 1 MHz.

NOTE 1—The stated accuracy applies only if the transfer standard returns to quiescence, following the transient input, before any wave reflected from the boundary of the calibration block returns to the transfer standard ( $\sim 100 \mu\text{s}$ ). For low frequencies with periods on the order of the time window, this condition is problematical to prove.

4.2 *Applications Sensors*—This test method may also be used for the calibration of AE sensors for use in nondestructive evaluation. Some of these sensors are less well behaved than devices suitable for a transfer standard. The stated accuracy for such devices applies in the range of 100 kHz to 1 MHz and with less accuracy below 100 kHz.

## 5. General Requirements

5.1 A primary difficulty in any calibration of a mechanical/electrical transduction device is the determination of the mechanical-motion input to the device. Using this calibration procedure, the motional input may be determined by two different means: theoretical calculation and measurement with an absolute displacement transducer.

5.2 *Theoretical Calculation*—Elasticity theory has been used to calculate the dynamic displacement of the surface of an infinite half-space due to a normal point-force step function in time. The solutions give the displacement of any point on the surface as a function of time, yielding a waveform for the displacement called the seismic surface pulse.

5.2.1 This calibration test method uses an approximation to this theoretical solution. See also Breckenridge<sup>3</sup> and Hsu and Breckenridge<sup>4</sup>. The half-space is approximated by a large metal block in the form of a circular cylinder and the pointforce step function is closely approximated by the breaking of a glass capillary against the plane surface of the block. The displacement as a function of time should be calculated for the location of the device under test (on the same surface of the block as the input). This calculation should be performed using a measured value of the step function force and the elastic constants that

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<sup>2</sup> For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, [www.astm.org](http://www.astm.org), or contact ASTM Customer Service at [service@astm.org](mailto:service@astm.org). For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

<sup>3</sup> Breckenridge, F. R., "Acoustic Emission Transducer Calibration by Means of the Seismic Surface Pulse," *Journal of Acoustic Emission* Vol 1, pp. 87–94.

<sup>4</sup> Hsu, N. N., and Breckenridge, F. R., "Characterization and Calibration of Acoustic Emission Sensors," *Materials Evaluation*, Vol 39, 1981, pp. 60–68.

are determined by speed of sound measurements on the block.

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**5.3 Absolute Displacement Measurement**—An absolute measurement of the dynamic normal surface displacement of the block is required for this calibration test method. The transducer used for this measurement is a standard transducer against which the device under test is compared. The standard transducer should meet or exceed the performance of the capacitive transducer described by Breckenridge and Greenspan<sup>5</sup>. The important characteristics of the standard transducer include high fidelity, high sensitivity, and operating characteristics amenable to theoretical calculation. It should also present no appreciable dynamic loading to the surface it is measuring.

**5.3.1** For a calibration, the standard transducer and the device to be calibrated are both placed on the same surface of the block as the mechanical input and equidistant in opposite directions from it. This guarantees that both experience the same displacement-time history. Comparison of the output of the transfer standard or AE sensor with the output of the standard transducer yields a calibration of the device under test.

**5.3.2** Other relative geometries for the input and transducers are possible, but results from other geometries should only be used to supplement results from the “same surface” geometry. AE waves in structures are most frequently dominated by surface wave phenomena, and the calibration should be based on the transducer’s response to such waves.

**5.4 Units for the Calibration**—An AE sensor may be considered to respond to either stress or strain at its front face. The actual stress and strain at the front face of a mounted sensor depend on the interaction between the mechanical impedance of the sensor (load) and that of the mounting block (driver). Neither the stress nor the strain is amenable to direct measurement at this location. However, the free displacement that would occur at the surface of the block in the absence of the sensor can be inferred from either elasticity theory calculations or from measurements made elsewhere on the surface. Since AE sensors are used to monitor motion at a free surface of a structure and interactive effects between sensor and structure are generally of no interest, the free surface motion is the appropriate input variable. It is, therefore, recommended that the units of calibration should be voltage per unit of free motion; for example, volts per metre.

#### 5.5 Block Material:

**5.5.1** Since the calibration depends on the interaction of the mechanical impedance of the block and that of the AE sensor, a calibration procedure must specify the material of the block. Calibrations performed on blocks of different materials will yield transducer sensitivity versus frequency curves that are different in shape and in average magnitude. The amount by which such averages differ may be very large. A transducer calibrated on a glass or aluminum block will have an average sensitivity that may be from 50 to 100% of the value obtained on steel, and will have an average sensitivity that may be as little as 3 % of the value obtained on steel if calibrated on a

polymethyl methacrylate block. In general, the sensitivity will be less if the block is made of a less rigid or less dense material.

**5.5.2** The Rayleigh speed in the material of the block affects surface wave calibrations. For a sensor having a circular aperture (mounting face) with uniform sensitivity over the face, the aperture effect predicts nulls at the zeroes of  $J_1(ka)$ , where  $k = 2\pi f/c$ , and  $f$  = frequency,  $c$  = Rayleigh speed, and  $a$  = radius of the sensor face. Hence, the frequencies at which the nulls occur are dependent upon the Rayleigh speed.

## 6. Apparatus

**6.1** A typical basic scheme for the calibration is shown in Fig. 1. A glass capillary, *B*, of diameter about 0.2 mm, is squeezed between the tip of the loading screw, *C*, and the upper face of the large steel transfer block, *A*. When the capillary breaks, the sudden release of force is a step function whose risetime is of the order of 0.1  $\mu$ s. The magnitude of the force step is measured by the combination of the PZT disc, *D*, in the loading screw and a charge amplifier, *E*, connected to a storage oscilloscope, *F*. The standard capacitive transducer, *G*, and the device under test, *H*, are placed equally distant (usually 100 mm) from the source and in opposite directions from it. It is obvious from the symmetry that the surface displacements would be the same at the two transducer locations if it were not for the loading effects of the transducers. The loading effect of the standard capacitive transducer is negligible and the loading effect of the unknown sensor is part of its calibration.

**6.1.1** Voltage transients from the two transducers are recorded simultaneously by digital recorders, *I*, and the information is stored for processing by the computer, *J*.

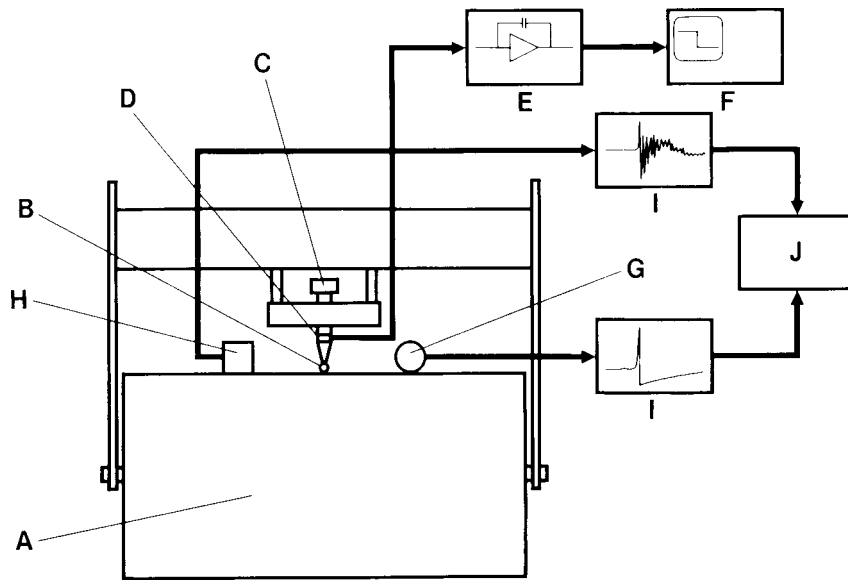
**6.1.2** With such a system, it is possible to do the necessary comparison between the signal from the unknown sensor and that from the standard transducer or with the displacement waveform calculated by elasticity theory. A similar result should be obtained either way.

**6.2 The Transfer Block**—The transfer block must be made from specially chosen material. It should be as defect-free as possible and should undergo an ultrasonic longitudinal examination at 2.25 MHz. The method described in Practice E114 should be used. The block should contain no flaws which give a reflection larger than 10 % of the first back wall reflection. The material should also be highly uniform as determined by pulse-echo time of flight measurements through the block at a minimum of 15 locations regularly spaced over the surface (see Practice E494). The individual values of the longitudinal and shear wave speed should differ from the average by no more than  $\pm 1$  part and  $\pm 3$  parts in  $10^3$ , respectively. A transfer block and calibration apparatus is shown in Fig. 2.

**6.3 The Step Function Source**—The step function force events are to be made by breaking glass capillary tubing (Fig. 3). The capillaries are drawn down from ordinary laboratory glass tubing made of borosilicate glass. Sizes of the capillary may range from about 0.1 mm to 0.3 mm outside diameter, with 0.2 mm being typical. A bore size equal to the wall thickness gives the best results. The force obtained is usually between 10 N and 30 N, with 20 N being typical.

**6.3.1** The capillary is to be laid horizontally on a piece of microscope cover glass (0.08 by 1.5 by 1.5 mm) which has

<sup>5</sup> Breckenridge, F. R., and Greenspan, M., “Surface-Wave Displacement: Absolute Measurements Using a Capacitive Transducer,” *Journal, Acoustic Society of America*, Vol 69, pp 1177–1185.



- A—steel transfer block
- B—capillary source
- C—loading screw
- D—PZT disc
- E—charge amplifier
- F—storage oscilloscope
- G—standard transducer
- H—transducer under test
- I—transient recorders
- J—computer

FIG. 1 Schematic Diagram of the Apparatus

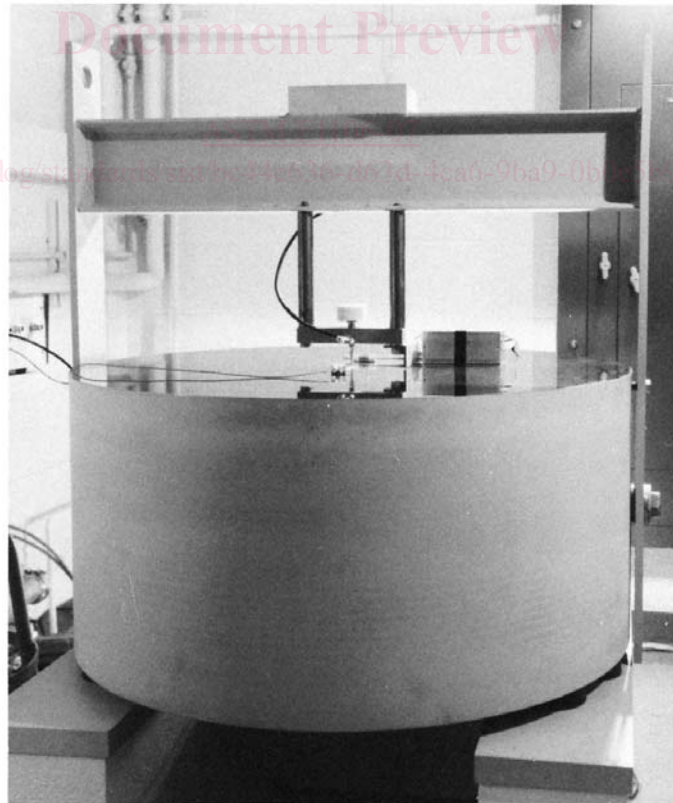


FIG. 2 Photograph of the Steel Block with the Calibration Apparatus in Place

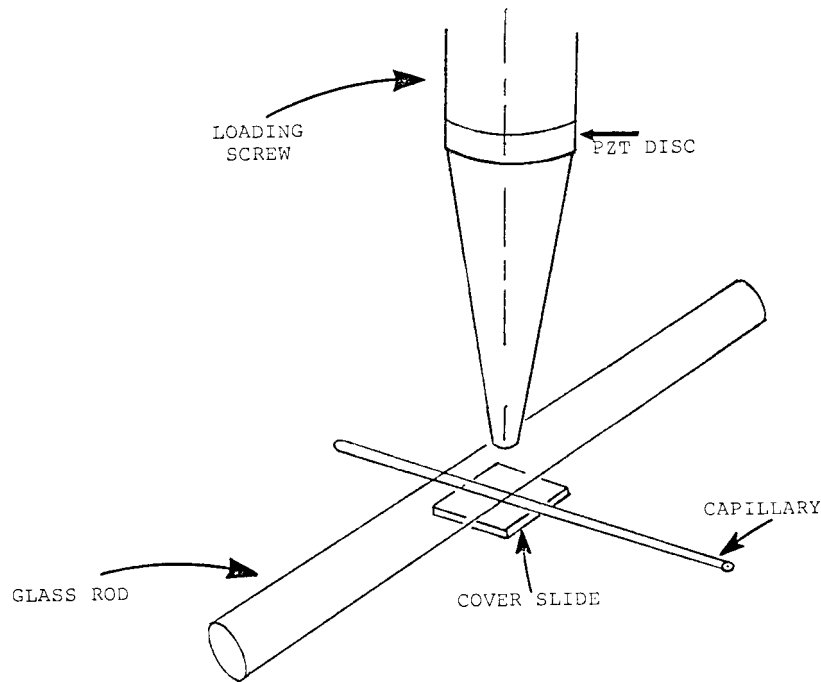


FIG. 3 Glass Capillary Source

been cemented to the top face of the steel block with salol (phenyl salicylate) or cyanoacrylate cement. The force is applied to the capillary by a solid glass rod (2 mm in diameter) which has been laid horizontally on top of the capillary and at right angles to it. The rod is forced downward by the loading screw until the capillary breaks. The loading screw is to be threaded through a yoke above the calibration surface. The loading screw should contain a ceramic force transducer which has been calibrated by dead weights. Thus, although the size of a source event cannot be predicted in advance, its magnitude may be measured and used for the elasticity theory calculation of the surface displacement.

6.3.2 Ideally, the capillary should rest directly on the steel with no cover glass interposed. It may be found necessary to use the cover slide to prevent damage to the block surface. The presence of the cover glass does alter the waveform very slightly; a slight ringing occurs due to reflections at its boundaries. The ringing contains only frequencies above 2 MHz. Furthermore, the effects on both standard transducer and unknown sensor are the same; therefore, the calibration is not affected.

6.4 *The Standard Transducer*—The standard transducer to be used for the absolute measurement of displacement in the calibration is to have characteristics at least as good as the capacitive transducer described by Breckenridge and Greenspan.<sup>5</sup> This device, shown in Figs. 4 and 5, essentially consists of an inertial mass (about 40 g) mounted on compliant supports and separated from the top surface of the steel block by an air gap of about 4 μm. This gap is determined by measuring the capacitance between the transducer and the transfer block using a three-terminal ratio arm bridge as described by Breckenridge and Greenspan.<sup>5</sup> The inertial mass is a brass cylinder with its axis horizontal. When the block surface moves at frequencies above the natural resonance of

the mass on its compliant supports (approximately 1 kHz), the brass cylinder remains approximately stationary. The brass cylinder is polarized to 100 Vdc through a large valued resistor. The large resistance causes the capacitor to operate essentially in a fixed charge condition so that the voltage varies inversely with capacitance for the frequencies of interest.

6.4.1 For use as a primary standard, it is essential that the sensitivity of the transducer be calculable. To make the calculations tractable, the cylinder is treated as a section of an infinite cylinder. Electrical guards are attached to each end to eliminate end effects that would otherwise be severe.

6.4.2 The sensing area of the transducer is 12.4 mm long and effectively less than 1 mm wide. The long axis of this area is tangent to an advancing wavefront from the capillary source.

6.4.3 The sensitivity of the transducer is approximately  $12 \times 10^6$  V/m and the minimum detectable rms displacement is  $4 \times 10^{-12}$  m. The calculated frequency response of the transducer based on its effective aperture width and its deviation from the curvature of the wavefronts is shown in Fig. 6. At 1 MHz the amplitude is down by less than 10 % and the phase lag is about 8°. Expressions in Breckenridge and Greenspan<sup>5</sup> can be used to calculate the response at frequencies of interest. The total estimated uncertainty in the displacement measurements is approximately ±5 %. Displacement measurements made by the transducer are in agreement with displacements calculated by elasticity theory within 5 %. See Breckenridge and Greenspan.<sup>5</sup>

6.4.4 The standard transducer and the device under test are to be placed  $100 \pm 1$  mm from the source unless otherwise stated in each report of calibration results.

6.5 *Data Recording and Processing Equipment*—Two synchronized channels of transient recording equipment are necessary for capturing the waveforms from the standard transducer and the transducer under test. They should be capable of

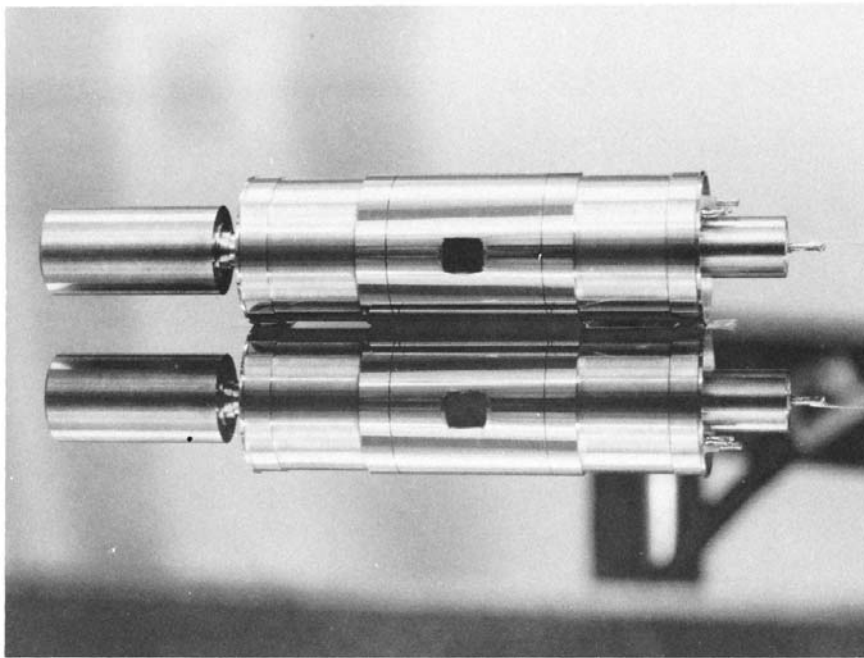
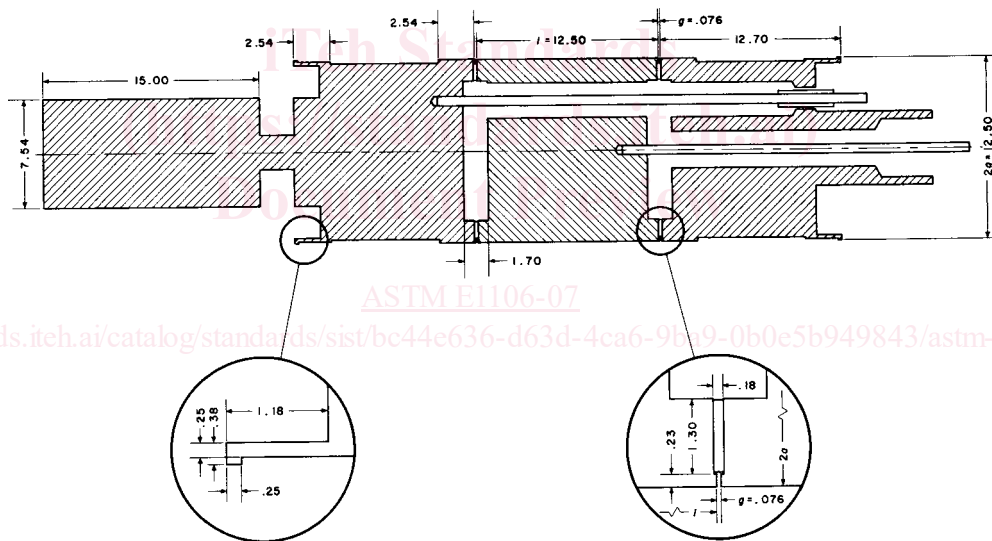


FIG. 4 Photograph of the Capacitive Transducer and its Reflection in the Steel Block



NOTE 1—All dimensions are given in millimetres. Here  $l$  is the length of the active electrode,  $2a$  is its diameter, and  $g$  is the width of the guard gap.

FIG. 5 Longitudinal Section Through the Transducer

at least 8 bit accuracy and a sampling rate of 20 MHz or at least 10 bit accuracy and a sampling rate of 10 MHz and should be capable of recording for at least 102.4  $\mu$ s. The data so recorded should be transferred to a minicomputer for data processing and should also be stored on a permanent device such as a floppy disc for a permanent record.

### 7. Procedure

7.1 The following notation is used to describe the treatment of data to obtain calibration results.

- $n$  = total number of samples in one channel,
- $\Delta t$  = sampling time interval in  $\mu$ s,
- $T = n\Delta t$  = total record time in  $\mu$ s,
- $s_j$  = the  $j$ th sample value in the standard channel,
- $u_j$  = the  $j$ th sample value in the unknown channel,
- $j = 0, 1, 2, \dots, n - 1.$

The units of  $s_j$  and  $u_j$  are volts multiplied by an arbitrary constant which depends on the specific electronic equipment configuration.