9 Pulse Characterization

9.1 Intensity Autocorrelation

9.2 Interferometric Autocorrelation (IAC)

9.3 Frequency Resolved Optical Gating (FROG)

9.4 Spectral Shearing Interferometry for Direct Electric Field Reconstruction (SPIDER)

9.5 2D-Spectral Shearing Interferometry (2DSI)

Follow partly Rick Trebino’s lecture at Georgia Tech
Ultrafast laser: the 4th element—mode locker

- Pulse duration $T$ (fs – ps)
- Pulse energy $E$ (pJ – mJ)
- Peak power $P_p$ (1 kW – 1 PW)
  \[ P_p \approx \frac{E}{T} \] (e.g., 1 nJ, 100 fs pulse leads to 10 kW peak power.)
- Repetition rate $f_R$ (10 MHz – 10 GHz)
- Average power $P$ (10 mW – 100 W)
  \[ P = E \times f_R \] (e.g., 1 nJ, 100 MHz rep-rate laser produces 100 mW average power.)
- Center wavelength $\lambda_0$ (700 nm – 2000 nm)
Measurement of pulse quantities using ‘meters’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical quantity</th>
<th>Measuring device</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average power</td>
<td>Power meter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition rate</td>
<td>RF spectrum analyzer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optical spectrum</td>
<td>Optical spectrum analyzer (OSA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optical pulse</td>
<td>Pulse meter (?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gain medium
Mode locker
Output mirror
Back mirror

Ultrafast laser

\[ \frac{1}{f_R} \]

\[ \lambda_0 \]
What information do we need to fully determine an optical pulse?

A laser pulse has the time-domain electric field:

$$E(t) \sim \text{Re} \left\{ I(t)^{1/2} \exp \left[ j\omega_0 t - j\phi(t) \right] \right\}$$

Equivalently, vs. frequency:

$$\tilde{E}(\omega) \sim I(\omega-\omega_0)^{1/2} \exp \left[ -j\phi(\omega-\omega_0) \right]$$

Can be measured by an optical spectrum analyzer.
Spectrum measurement by optical spectrum analyzer

\[ E(\omega) = \text{Re} \{ |(\omega - \omega_0)|^{1/2} \exp \left[ -j\varphi(\omega - \omega_0) \right] \} \]

Can be measured by an optical spectrum analyzer.

1. Spectral phase information is missing in the measurement.
2. Transform-limited pulse can be calculated from the measured spectrum.
Measure pulse in time domain using photo-detectors

Photo-detectors are devices that emit electrons in response to photons.

Examples: Photo-diodes, Photo-multipliers

Detectors have very slow rise and fall times: \( \sim 1 \text{ nanosecond} \).

As far as we’re concerned, detectors have infinitely slow responses. They measure the time integral of the pulse intensity from \(-\infty\) to \(+\infty\):

\[
V_{\text{detector}} \propto \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} |E(t)|^2 \, dt
\]

The detector output voltage is proportional to the pulse energy. By themselves, detectors tell us little about a pulse.
But photo-detector can ‘see’ the pulse train

Optical pulse train under diagnosis

Detector

Pulse train measured by oscilloscope

Zoom in to see the RF spectrum of at the rep-rate frequency.

Pulse train measured by RF spectrum analyzer
Pulse measurement by field autocorrelation

\[ V_{MI}(\tau) \propto \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} |E(t) - E(t - \tau)|^2 \, dt \]

\[ = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} |E(t)|^2 + |E(t - \tau)|^2 - 2 \text{Re}[E(t)E^*(t - \tau)] \, dt \]

\[ \Rightarrow V_{MI}(\tau) \propto 2\int_{-\infty}^{\infty} |E(t)|^2 \, dt - 2 \text{Re}\int_{-\infty}^{\infty} E(t)E^*(t - \tau) \, dt \]

\( \propto \) Pulse energy  \( \propto \) Field autocorrelation

\[ \text{Re}\int_{-\infty}^{\infty} E(t)E^*(t - \tau)dt = \text{Re} F^{-1}[E(\omega)E^*(\omega)] = \text{Re} F^{-1}[I(\omega)] \]

Field autocorrelation measurement is equivalent to measuring the spectrum.
Comments on field correlation measurement

The information obtained from measuring electric field correlation and measuring the optical power spectrum is identical.

The correlation time is roughly the inverse of the optical bandwidth.

Field correlation measurement gives no information about the spectral phase.

Field correlation measurement cannot distinguish a transform-limited pulse from a longer chirped pulse with the same bandwidth.

Coherent ultrashort pulse and continuous-wave incoherent light (i.e., noise) with the same optical spectra give the same result.
How to measure both pulse intensity profile and the phase?

Result: Using only time-independent, linear filters, complete characterization of a pulse is NOT possible with a slow detector.

Translation: If you don't have a detector or modulator that is fast compared to the pulse width, you CANNOT measure the pulse intensity and phase with only linear measurements, such as a detector, interferometer, or a spectrometer.

We need a shorter event, and we don’t have one. But we do have the pulse itself, which is a start. And we can devise methods for the pulse to gate itself using optical nonlinearities.
Background-free intensity autocorrelation

Crossing beams in an second-harmonic generation (SHG) crystal, varying the delay between them, and measuring the second-harmonic (SH) pulse energy vs. delay yields the **Intensity Autocorrelation**:

\[ E_{\text{SH}}(t, \tau) \propto E(t)E(t - \tau) \]

\[ I_{\text{AC}}(\tau) \propto \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} |E(t)E(t - \tau)|^2 dt \]

\[ I_{\text{AC}}(\tau) \propto \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} I(t)I(t - \tau)dt \]
Square pulse and its autocorrelation

Pulse

\[
I(t) = \begin{cases} 
1; & |t| \leq \Delta \tau_p^{FWHM} / 2 \\
0; & |t| > \Delta \tau_p^{FWHM} / 2
\end{cases}
\]

Autocorrelation

\[
A^{(2)}(\tau) = \begin{cases} 
1 - \left| \frac{\tau}{\Delta \tau_A^{FWHM}} \right|; & |\tau| \leq \Delta \tau_A^{FWHM} \\
0; & |\tau| > \Delta \tau_A^{FWHM}
\end{cases}
\]

\[
\Delta \tau_A^{FWHM} = \Delta \tau_p^{FWHM}
\]
Gaussian pulse and its autocorrelation

**Pulse**

\[ I(t) = \exp\left[-\left(\frac{2\sqrt{\ln 2}t}{\Delta \tau_p^{FWHM}}\right)^2\right] \]

**Autocorrelation**

\[ A^{(2)}(\tau) = \exp\left[-\left(\frac{2\sqrt{\ln 2}\tau}{\Delta \tau_A^{FWHM}}\right)^2\right] \]

\[ \Delta \tau_A^{FWHM} = 1.41 \Delta \tau_p^{FWHM} \]
Sech\(^2\) pulse and its autocorrelation

\[ I(t) = \text{sech}^2 \left( \frac{1.7627t}{\Delta t_p^{FWHM}} \right) \]

\[ A^{(2)}(\tau) = \frac{3}{\sinh^2 \left( \frac{2.7196\tau}{\Delta\tau_A^{FWHM}} \right)} \left[ \frac{2.7196\tau}{\Delta\tau_A^{FWHM}} \coth \left( \frac{2.7196\tau}{\Delta\tau_A^{FWHM}} \right) - 1 \right] \]

\[ \Delta\tau_A^{FWHM} = 1.54 \Delta\tau_p^{FWHM} \]

Theoretical models for passively mode-locked lasers often predict sech\(^2\) pulse shapes.
Lorentzian Pulse and Its Autocorrelation

Pulse

\[ I(t) = \frac{1}{1 + \left(\frac{2t}{\Delta \tau_p^{FWHM}}\right)^2} \]

Autocorrelation

\[ A^{(2)}(\tau) = \frac{1}{1 + \left(\frac{2\tau}{\Delta \tau_A^{FWHM}}\right)^2} \]

\[ \Delta \tau_A^{FWHM} = 2.0 \Delta \tau_p^{FWHM} \]
Properties of intensity autocorrelation

1) It is always symmetric, and assumes its maximum value at $\tau = 0$.

$$I_{AC}(\tau) \propto \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} I(t)I(t-\tau)dt$$

$$I_{AC}(\tau) = I_{AC}(-\tau)$$

2) Width of the correlation peak gives information about the pulse width.

3) Pulse phase information is missing from the background-free Intensity autocorrelation.

4) Intensity autocorrelation trace is broader than the pulse itself. To get the pulse duration, it is necessary to assume a pulse shape, and to use the corresponding deconvolution factor.

4) For short pulses, very thin crystals must be used to guarantee enough phase-matching bandwidth. This reduces the efficiency and hence the sensitivity of the device.

5) Conversion efficiency must be kept low, or distortions due to “depletion” of input light fields will occur.

6) The Intensity autocorrelation is not sufficient to determine the intensity profile.
Daily use of intensity autocorrelator: a case study

Oscillator → Pre-chirper → Amplifier → Compressor

Optimizing the amplifier system using intensity autocorrelation measurement

Autocorrelations of more complex intensities

Autocorrelations nearly always have considerably less structure than the corresponding intensity.

An autocorrelation typically corresponds to more than one intensity. Thus the autocorrelation does not uniquely determine the intensity.
Even nice autocorrelations have ambiguities

These complex intensities have nearly Gaussian autocorrelations.

Conclusions drawn from an autocorrelation are unreliable.
Interferometric autocorrelation (IAC)

What if we use a **collinear beam geometry**, and allow the autocorrelator signal light to interfere with the SHG from each individual beam?

\[
E(t + \tau) = E(t + \tau) + E(t) = A(t + \tau)e^{j\omega c(t + \tau)}e^{j\phi_c} + A(t)e^{j\omega c t}e^{j\phi_c}
\]

Photo-detector (or photomultiplier) responds as

\[
I(\tau) \propto \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \left| E^2(t, \tau) \right|^2 dt
\]

Developed by J-C Diels

Some simple math

\[ I(\tau) \propto \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \left| (A(t + \tau)e^{j\omega_c(t+\tau)} + A(t)e^{j\omega_c t}) \right|^2 dt = I_{\text{back}} + I_{\text{int}}(\tau) + I_\omega(\tau) + I_{2\omega}(\tau) \]

**Background signal** \( I_{\text{back}} \):

\[ I_{\text{back}} = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \left( |A(t + \tau)|^4 + |A(t)|^4 \right) dt = 2 \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} I^2(t) \, dt \quad (9.13) \]

**Intensity autocorrelation** \( I_{\text{int}}(\tau) \):

\[ I_{\text{int}}(\tau) = 4 \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} |A(t + \tau)|^2 |A(t)|^2 \, dt = 4 \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} I(t + \tau) \cdot I(t) \, dt \quad (9.14) \]

**Coherence term oscillating with** \( \omega_c \): \( I_\omega(\tau) \):

\[ I_\omega(\tau) = 4 \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \text{Re} \left[ \left( I(t) + I(t + \tau) \right) A^*(t)A(t + \tau)e^{j\omega t} \right] \, dt \quad (9.15) \]

**Coherence term oscillating with** \( 2\omega_c \): \( I_{2\omega}(\tau) \):

\[ I_{2\omega}(\tau) = 2 \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \text{Re} \left[ A^2(t)(A^*(t + \tau))^2 e^{j2\omega t} \right] \, dt \quad (9.16) \]
Some special moments

\[ I_{IAC}(\tau) = 1 + \frac{I_{int}(\tau)}{I_{back}} + \frac{I_{\omega}(\tau)}{I_{back}} + \frac{I_{2\omega}(\tau)}{I_{back}} \]

At \( \tau = 0 \), all integrals are identical

\[ I_{back} \equiv 2 \int |A(t)|^4 dt \]

\[ I_{int}(\tau = 0) \equiv 2 \int |A^2(t)|^2 dt = 4 \int |A(t)|^4 dt = 2I_{back} \]

\[ I_{\omega}(\tau = 0) \equiv 2 \int |A(t)|^2 A(t)A^*(t) dt = 8 \int |A(t)|^4 dt = 4I_{back} \]

\[ I_{2\omega}(\tau = 0) \equiv 2 \int A^2(t)(A^2(t))^* dt = 2 \int |A(t)|^4 dt = I_{back} \]

\[ I_{IAC}(\tau)_{\text{max}} = I_{IAC}(0) = 8 \quad I_{IAC}(\tau \to \pm \infty) = 1 \quad I_{IAC}(\tau)_{\text{min}} \to 0 \]
The interferometric autocorrelation simply combines several measures of the pulse into one (admittedly complex) trace. Conveniently, however, they occur with different oscillation frequencies: $0$, $\omega$, and $2\omega$. 
Effects of second-order dispersion

Intensity of Input and Output Pulse

D2=10 fs^2

D2=100 fs^2

IAC after Dispersion

Indication of strong chirp
Effects of third-order dispersion

- $D_3=500 \text{ fs}^3$
- $D_3=1000 \text{ fs}^3$

---

**Graph 1:**
- Input (dashed blue)
- Output (solid blue)

**Graph 2:**
- Input (dashed blue)
- Output (solid blue)

---

**Graph 3:**
- Input (dashed blue)
- Output (solid blue)

**Graph 4:**
- Input (dashed blue)
- Output (solid blue)
Effects of self-phase modulation

10 fs Sech-pulse with Chirp $\beta=0$

Spectrum of Input and Output Pulse

After SPM

IAC after SPM
Pulses with similar IAC

Pulse #1

Interferometric Autocorrelations for Shorter Pulses #1 and #2

Pulse #2

The interferometric autocorrelation contains the full information of the pulse, however pulse retrieval is at times sensitive to noise.
Properties of IAC

1) It is always symmetric and the peak-to-background ratio should be 8.

2) This device is difficult to align; there are five very sensitive degrees of freedom in aligning two collinear pulses, but alignment shows up in result.

3) Dispersion in each arm must be the same, so it is necessary to insert a compensator plate in one arm.

4) Using optical spectrum and background-free intensity autocorrelator can determine the presence or absence of strong chirp. The interferometric autocorrelation serves as a clear visual indication of moderate to large chirp.

5) It is difficult to distinguish between different pulse shapes and, especially, different phases from interferometric autocorrelations (maybe).

6) Like the intensity autocorrelation, it must be curve-fit to an assumed pulse shape and so should only be used for rough estimates (wrong).
How to measure both pulse intensity profile and the phase?

1) A pulse can be represented by two arrays of data with length N, one for the amplitude/intensity and the other for the phase. Totally we have 2N degrees of freedom (corresponding to the real and imaginary parts for the electric field).

2) Intensity autocorrelator provides only one array of data with length N. Optical spectrum measurement can provide another array of data with length N. However some information, especially about phase, is missing from both measurements.

3) Need to have more data, providing enough redundancy to recover the both the amplitude and phase.

How to generate more data (information) from intensity autocorrelation measurement?
Pulse gating in background-free intensity autocorrelation

Varying the delay yields varying overlap between the two replicas of the pulse. The intensity autocorrelation is only nonzero when the pulses overlap.

How about measuring the spectrum of the autocorrelation pulse at each delay?
Frequency-Resolved Optical Gating (FROG): SHG-FROG

Background-free intensity autocorrelator + optical spectrum analyzer

\[ E_{SH}(t, \tau) \propto E(t)E(t - \tau) \]

\[ I_{FROG}(\omega, \tau) \propto \left| \int E(t)E(t - \tau)e^{j\omega t} dt \right|^2 \]

Now we have \( N \times N \) data points. Iterative algorithm can retrieve both the amplitude and phase of the measured optical pulse.
SHG FROG traces are symmetrical with respect to delay

SHG FROG has an ambiguity in the direction of time, but it can be removed.
SHG FROG measurements of a 4.5-fs pulse

Agreement between the experimental and reconstructed FROG traces provides a nice check on the measurement.

The spectrogram tells the color and intensity of $E(t)$ at the time, $\tau$.

We must compute the spectrum of the product: $E(t) \ g(t-\tau)$
If $E(t)$ is the waveform of interest, its spectrogram is:

$$\Sigma_E(\omega, \tau) \equiv \left| \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} E(t) \ g(t - \tau) \ exp(-i\omega t) \ dt \right|^2$$

where $g(t-\tau)$ is a variable-delay gate function and $\tau$ is the delay.

Without $g(t-\tau)$, $\Sigma_E(\omega, \tau)$ would simply be the spectrum.

The spectrogram is a function of $\omega$ and $\tau$. It is the set of spectra of all temporal slices of $E(t)$. 
Properties of spectrogram

1) Algorithms exist to retrieve $E(t)$ from its spectrogram.

2) The spectrogram essentially uniquely determines the waveform intensity, $I(t)$, and phase, $\phi(t)$.
   
   There are a few ambiguities, but they’re “trivial.”

3) The gate need not be—and should not be—much shorter than $E(t)$.
   
   Suppose we use a delta-function gate pulse:

   $$\left| \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} E(t) \delta(t - \tau) \exp(-i\omega t) \, dt \right|^2 = \left| E(\tau) \exp(-i\omega \tau) \right|^2$$

   $$= \left| E(\tau) \right|^2 \text{ = The Intensity.}$$

   No phase information!

The spectrogram resolves the dilemma! It doesn’t need the shorter event! It temporally resolves the slow components and spectrally resolves the fast components.
FROG involves gating the pulse with a variably delayed replica of itself in an instantaneous nonlinear-optical medium and then spectrally resolving the gated pulse vs. delay.

\[ E_{\text{sig}}(t, \tau) = E(t) |E(t-\tau)|^2 \]

Use any ultrafast nonlinearity: Second-harmonic generation, etc.
The gating is more complex for complex pulses, but it still works. And it also works for other nonlinear-optical processes.
PG-FROG traces for linearly chirped pulses

Like a musical score, the FROG trace visually reveals the pulse frequency vs. time—for simple and complex pulses.
Ultrashort pulses measured using FROG

Data courtesy of Profs. Bern Kohler and Kent Wilson, UCSD.
What information do we need to fully determine an optical pulse?

A laser pulse has the time-domain electric field:

\[ E(t) \sim \text{Re} \{ I(t)^{1/2} \exp \left[ j \omega_0 t - j \phi(t) \right] \} \]

Equivalently, vs. frequency:

\[ \tilde{E}(\omega) \sim I(\omega - \omega_0)^{1/2} \exp \left[ -j \phi(\omega - \omega_0) \right] \]

Can be measured by an optical spectrum analyzer.
Fourier transform spectral interferometry

\[ E_I(t) = E_R(t) + E_S(t - \tau) \]

\[ \hat{S}(\omega) = \left| \int_{-\infty}^{+\infty} E_I(t)e^{-j\omega t} dt \right|^2 = \left| \hat{E}_R(\omega) + \hat{E}_S(\omega)e^{-j\omega \tau} \right|^2 \]

\[ = \hat{S}_{DC}(\omega) + \hat{S}(-)(\omega)e^{j\omega \tau} + \hat{S}(+)(\omega)e^{-j\omega \tau} \]

\[ \hat{S}(+)(\omega) = \hat{E}_R^*(\omega)\hat{E}_S(\omega) \]

\[ \hat{S}(-)(\omega) = \hat{S}(+)^*(\omega) \]
Inversion algorithm for FTSI

What if we do not have a well-characterized reference pulse?
SPIDER (Self-Referencing Spectral Interferometry for Direct Electric-field Reconstruction)

The phase \( \psi(\omega) = \arg[\hat{S}(+(\omega)e^{-j\omega\tau}] \) derived from the isolated positive spectral component is

\[
\psi(\omega) = \varphi(\omega - \omega_s - \Omega) - \varphi(\omega - \omega_s) - \omega \tau
\]

The linear phase \( \omega \tau \) can be subtracted off after independent determination of the time delay.
1. A Michelson-type interferometer generates two unchirped replicas.

2. A third replica is strongly chirped (e.g. from 5 fs to 6 ps).

3. The spectrally sheared copies of the pulse are generated by sum-frequency generation (SFG) with the strongly chirped replica.

Instantaneous frequency of the strongly chirped replica

$$\omega_{inst} = \frac{d}{dt} \omega_c(t + t^2/(2D_{glass})) = \omega_c + t/D_{glass} \quad (9.64)$$

Due to SFG with the chirped pulse the spectral shear is related to the delay between both pulses and give by

$$\Omega = -\tau/D_{glass}. \quad (9.66)$$
Measurement Results

(a) Spider interferogram (dB)

(b) Spectral power density (dB)

(c) GDD (fs²)

(d) FWHM = 4.8 fs
2DSI (Two Dimensional Spectral Shearing Interferometer)

The technique does not suffer from the calibration sensitivities of SPIDER nor the bandwidth limitations of FROG or interferometric autocorrelation (IAC).

\[
I(\omega, \tau_{cw}) = |A(\omega)|^2 + |A(\omega - \Omega)|^2 + 2|A(\omega)A(\omega - \Omega)| \times \cos[\omega_{cw}\tau_{cw} + \phi(\omega) - \phi(\omega - \Omega)]
\]

\[
\tau_g(\omega)\Omega + O[\Omega^2]
\]
2DSI analysis

Relative fringe phase is what matters, so the delay scan does not need to be calibrated

\[ I(\omega, \tau_{cw}) = |A(\omega)|^2 + |A(\omega - \Omega)|^2 + 2|A(\omega)A(\omega - \Omega)| \]
\[ \times \cos[\omega_{cw}\tau_{cw} + \phi(\omega) - \phi(\omega - \Omega)] \]
\[ \tau_g(\omega)\Omega + O[\Omega^2] \]
Absolute accuracy

Sub/Two-Cycle or \(~5\) fs pulse
Other measurement techniques we did not cover

Intensity correlation measurements using two-photon absorption

STRUT: Spectrally and Temporally Resolved Upconversion Technique

2DSI: Two Dimensional Spectral Shearing Interferometer

Believe it or not, many animals appear in this field…

TURTLE: Tomographic Ultrafast Retrieval of Transverse Light E fields

SPIDER: Spectral Phase Interferometry for Direct Electric Field Reconstruction

FROG CRAB: Frequency-Resolved Optical Grating for Complete Reconstruction of Attosecond Bursts

TADPOLE: Temporal Analysis by Dispersing a Pair Of Light E-fields

GRENOUILLE: Grating-Eliminated No-nonsense Observation of Ultrafast Incident Laser Light E-fields