

Application Brief

Space-Grade, 100-krad, Voltage-Controlled Current Sink (0–200 mA) Circuit



Fadi Matloob

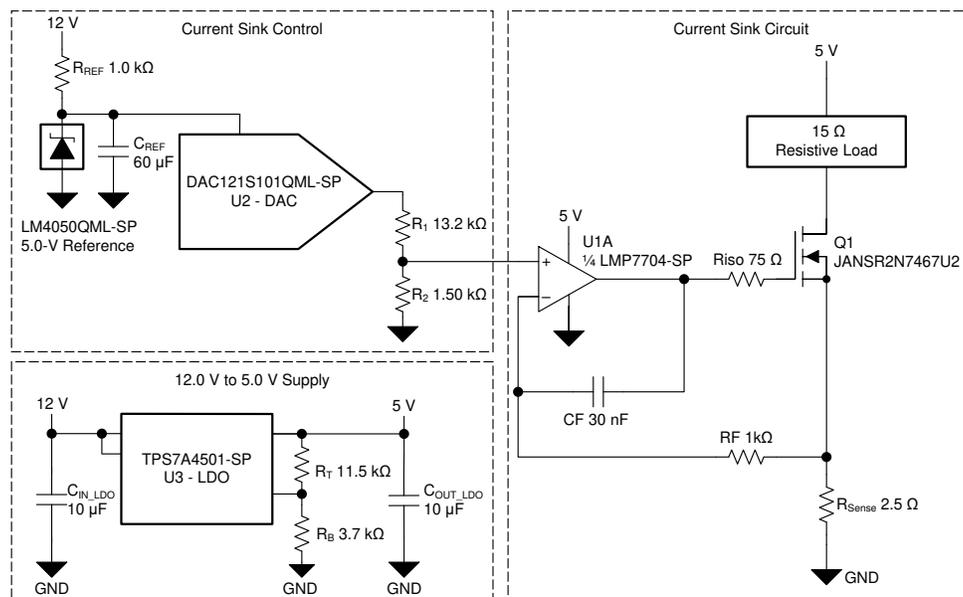
Design Goals

Parameter	Design Goal
Supply Voltage	Single Supply, 12V
DAC Output Range	0V–4.9V
Current Sink Control Voltage	0mV–500mV
Output Current Range	0mA–200mA
Uncalibrated Accuracy	±2% (±4mA)
Calibrated Accuracy	±1% (±2mA)
Total Ionizing Dose (TID)	100-krad(Si)
Single Event Latch-up (SEL) Immunity	85 MeV·cm ² /mg

Design Description

Voltage controlled current sinks are an integral part of many current-controlled space applications. One of its most popular applications is adjustable-current, laser diode drivers which are often used in laser communications systems (also known as optical inter-satellite links (OISL)). The circuit is also seen in other applications like LiDAR which might benefit from laser diodes. It consists of three main elements: the sense resistor (R_{Sense}), an N-channel MOSFET (Q1), and an operational amplifier (op amp) that controls the MOSFET.

The basic operating principle of the circuit starts with current flowing through the load from a voltage supply (in this case 5 V). As current flows through the load, a voltage is developed on R_{Sense} . The op amp uses the sensed voltage as feedback and drives its output until the sensed voltage is equal to the DAC output (non-inverting input). In this case, Q1 is operated in the linear region and serves as a voltage-controlled resistance. The components: Riso, CF, and RF are used to compensate the circuit and ensure stable operation.



Design Notes

- Use a high-precision and low-drift resistor for R_{Sense} .
- The R_{Sense} power rating should be considered to ensure that no failures occur at the desired current load.
- If a large resistive load is present, a separate high-voltage supply may be used for driving the current to the load.
- The [LMP7704-SP](#) supply voltage of 5V was selected according the derating specifications provided by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in document [EEE-INST-002](#) (April 2008) and the European Cooperation for Space Standardization (ECSS) in document [ECSS-Q-ST-30-11C Rev.1](#) (4 October 2011). The documents specify a derating of the absolute maximum supply voltage for linear ICs to at least 80% and 90%, respectively.
- For proper operation, the power supplies must be decoupled. For supply decoupling, TI recommends placing 10-nF to 1- μ F capacitors as close as possible to the op-amp power supply pins. For the single supply configuration shown, place a capacitor between the $V+$ and $V-$ supply pins. Bypass capacitors must have a low ESR of less than 0.1 Ω .

Design Steps

Component Selection

1. Identify the current sink specifications:

- Specifications for the circuit shown:
 - Input voltage range (DAC output): 0mV to 500mV
 - Resistive load: 15Ω
 - Load current range: 0mA to 200mA
 - Current error: ±4mA

2. Sense resistor selection (R_{Sense}):

- The selection of R_{Sense} comes down to power dissipation versus precision.
 - Smaller values of R_{Sense} yield smaller voltage drops for the same amount of current and ultimately dissipate less power. However, since the R_{Sense} voltage drop is smaller, higher precision components may need to be used to achieve the same error tolerance.
 - Higher values of R_{Sense} can be created by paralleling resistors to share the power dissipation.
- In the circuit shown, the R_{Sense} value is selected based on the maximum DAC output voltage (V_{DACMax}) and the maximum load current (I_{Max}) as shown:

$$R_{Sense} = \frac{V_{DACMax}}{I_{Max}}$$

$$R_{Sense} = 2.5\Omega = \frac{500mV}{200mA}$$

- In this case, the 2.5-Ω R_{Sense} produces a voltage of 10mV per 4mA of load current. Therefore, to meet the desired current error specification of ±4mA, the total voltage error should be less than 10mV (2.5Ω × 4mA). The total voltage error includes the offset voltage error from the op amp, the op amp input bias current error through resistor R_F , DAC output error, and the R_{Sense} resistor error.
 - Fortunately, the [LMP7704-SP](#) has great DC performance with a typical offset voltage of ±32μV and a typical input bias current of ±0.2pA. Calculate the error contribution as follows:

$$Error (mV) = (|V_{os}| + (|I_B| \times R_F)) \times 1000$$

$$Error (mV) = 0.032mV = (|\pm 32\mu V| + (|\pm 0.2pA| \times 1k\Omega)) \times 1000$$

- The DC error of the amplifier, as shown, is not a significant contributor to the allowed 10mV of error.
- In many cases, most of the error is observed from the R_{Sense} tolerance, R_{Sense} drift, and the DACs offset error, gain error, and drift.
- Use the [DAC121S101QML-SP](#) to achieve the circuit requirements and maintain the radiation performance.

3. Amplifier selection (U1A):

- The amplifier selection is rather straightforward. From the perspective of meeting the current error specifications, consider the offset voltage of the op amp and its input bias current (as shown previously in the [Sense Resistor Selection](#) section).
- The op amp should also have an input common-mode range that extends to the negative rail (GND in this case) to support the low output range of the DAC. However, there is a hidden criterion for selection under one or both of the following two conditions: (1) the MOSFET has a threshold voltage ($V_{GS(th)}$) close to the available supply rail, (2) the resistive load of the system is close to the maximum load the supply rail can handle.
- The hidden criterion is the output voltage swing of the op amp. Looking the circuit, the selected MOSFET Q1 has a maximum $V_{GS(th)}$ across TID exposure of 4V and the circuit supply rail is 5V. At peak current, the source voltage of the MOSFET is at 0.5V which is also the voltage across R_{Sense} (200mA × 2.5Ω). In this case, the op amp with the 5-V supply must be able to swing to at least (V+) – 0.5V or 4.5V to reach $V_{GS(th)}$. Similarly, in the case of condition (2) the op amp must be able to swing close to the positive rail to maximize the largest resistive load that can be driven.

- Calculate the largest resistive load as follows (assuming no voltage drop across Q1):

$$R_{LoadMax} = \frac{V_{CC} - I_{Max} \times R_{Sense}}{I_{Max}}$$

$$R_{LoadMax} = 22.5\Omega = \frac{5V - 200mA \times 2.5\Omega}{200mA}$$

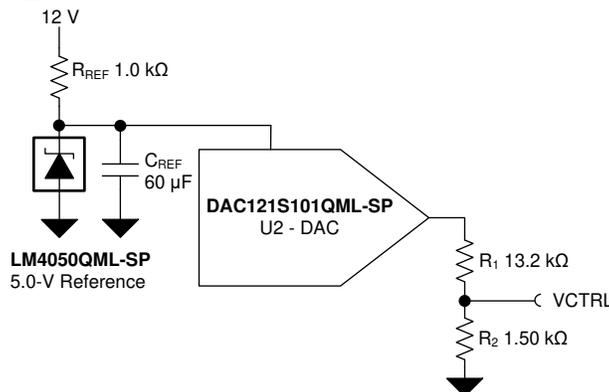
4. MOSFET selection:

- Ensure that the MOSFET $V_{GS(th)}$ can be driven by the op amp and that it can handle the power dissipation for the expected load resistance and maximum current:

$$P_{Q1} = V_{CC} \times I_{Max} - I_{Max}^2 \times (R_{Load} + R_{Sense})$$

$$P_{Q1} = 0.3W = 5V \times 200mA - (200mA)^2 \times (15\Omega + 2.5\Omega)$$

5. Current Sink Control Circuit



- The [DAC121S101QML-SP](#) can provide a means of adjusting the voltage used to control the current sink.
- The [LM4050QML-SP](#) provides a 5.0-V reference to the DAC. When $C_{REF} = 60\mu F$, the [LM4050QML-SP](#) is immune to SETs.
- Since the [DAC121S101QML-SP](#) is a 12-bit DAC, it could have errors in the range of 10s of millivolts, which would dominate the system error. Therefore, the output voltage is scaled down by a factor of 5/49, given a maximum DAC operating voltage of 4.9V:

$$V_{DAC(max)} = 4.9V \rightarrow V_{CTRL(max)} = 500mV \rightarrow I_{LOAD(max)} = 200mA$$

- Scaling down the voltage also means that any error introduced by the [DAC121S101QML-SP](#) or the [LM4050QML-SP](#) voltage reference are reduced by a factor of 5/49. Using a ratio of 5/49 also allows for the selection of standard 0.1% resistor values. The resistors introduce up to 0.179735% of error given the nominal resistor values and accounting for potential resistor value variation.
- A key consideration for the system accuracy is the error introduced by the DAC and other devices. The error is often referred to as the Total Unadjusted Error (TUE) and is relative to the control voltage (V_{CTRL}) which is the dominant source of error for the circuit. In the circuit, the following error sources must be considered:
 - [LM4050QML-SP](#) 5.0-V Voltage Reference: Initial Accuracy, Drift over temperature ($\Delta VR/\Delta T$)
 - [DAC121S101QML-SP](#) DAC: Zero Code Error (ZEC), Gain Error (GE), ZEC Drift, and GE Drift
 - Resistor Divider (R1 and R2) Tolerance Error
 - [LMP7704-SP](#): V_{OS} , I_{OS} , and I_{BIAS}

- In this circuit, both Beginning of Life (BOL) and temperature tolerances are considered for calculating the V_{CTRL} TUE. Root Sum Square (RSS) is used to represent the added error of all sources. Error contributions from the voltage reference and the DAC are scaled by 5/49 in the TUE calculation.

DAC	Data Sheet Specification	TUE T= 25°C	Data Sheet Specification	TUE $\Delta T = -55$ to 125°C	TUE + Gain Calibration $\Delta T = -55$ to 125°C
INL (V)	2.75 LSB	3.357E-3	8.0 LSB	9.766E-3	9.766E-3
DNL (V)	0.21 LSB	256.348E-6	1.0 LSB	1.221E-3	1.221E-3
ZCE (V)	4 mV	4.000E-3	10 mV	10.000E-3	10.000E-3
ZCE-Drift (V)			-20 $\mu\text{V}/^\circ\text{C}$	-3.6E-3	-3.600E-3
GE (V)	-0.11%	5.500E-3	1.00%	50.000E-3	1.221E-3
GE-Drift (V)			-1 ppm/ $^\circ\text{C}$	-900.0E-6	-900.000E-6
Volt. Ref.					
Initial Acc. (V)	0.23% at $I_R < 1\text{mA}$	11.500E-3	0.23% at $I_R < 1\text{mA}$	11.500E-3	9.000E-6
$\Delta\text{VR}/\Delta\text{T}$ (V)			34 ppm/ $^\circ\text{C}$	30.6E-3	30.600E-3
Op Amp					
V_{OS} (V)	$\pm 37 \mu\text{V}$	37.000E-6	$\pm 500 \mu\text{V}$	500.000E-6	500.000E-6
I_{BIAS} (A)	$\pm 200 \text{fA}$	200.000E-12	$\pm 400 \text{pA}$	400.000E-12	400.000E-12
$I_{BIAS} \times R_2$ (V)		300.000E-9		600.000E-9	600.000E-9
$V_{OS\text{Drift}}$ (V)			$\pm 5 \mu\text{V}/^\circ\text{C}$	900.000E-6	900.000E-6
Scaling Res.					
Resistor Div.		898.674E-6		898.674E-6	898.674E-6
V_{CTRL} RSS TUE (mV)		1.669E-3		6.420E-3	3.718E-3
V_{CTRL} RSS Error%		0.334%		1.284%	0.744%

- The first TUE calculation does not include drift over temperature and achieves less than 1% accuracy. The next TUE calculation accounts for the variation in temperature for $\Delta T = 180^\circ\text{C}$ (-55 to 125°C) as well as the extreme maximum and minimum values provided in each respective data sheet over temperature. Accounting for both extreme values as well as the effect of temperature drift on certain specifications, the second TUE calculation achieves less than 2% TUE.
- In the previous calculation the error is dominated by the Gain Error (GE) of the DAC, which over temperature and radiation can vary as much as 1.0%. The GE accounts for up to 50mV of error at the output of the DAC or 5.102mV when scaled by a factor of 5/49. Reduce this error, as well as the error introduced by the initial accuracy of the reference, by performing gain calibration. With gain calibration, the TUE is reduced to 3.718mV or 0.759% of V_{CTRL} . The calibration allows for the design to achieve 1.0% accuracy.

6. Compensation components selection:

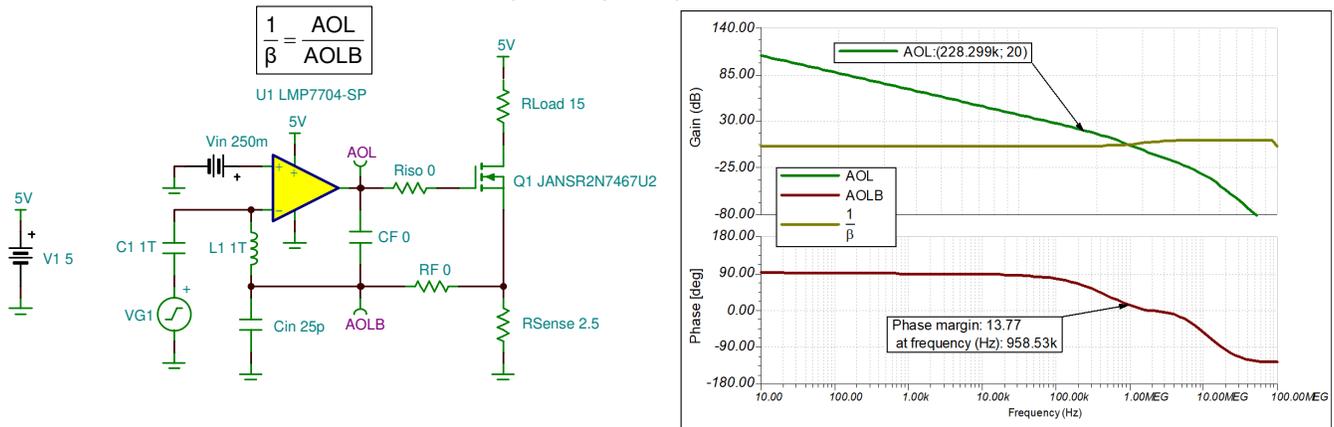
- Stability analysis is done in the frequency domain and circuit stability is verified by the small signal transient step response. The criterion to ensure stability is a minimum phase margin of 45 degrees or a rate-of-closure (ROC) of 20dB/decade at f_{cl} (loop gain, $AOLB = 0dB$) where the AOL curve intersects $1/\beta$.
- The following open-loop AC simulation breaks the loop at the input and the following equations are used to plot the relevant curves:

$$A_{OL} = V_o$$

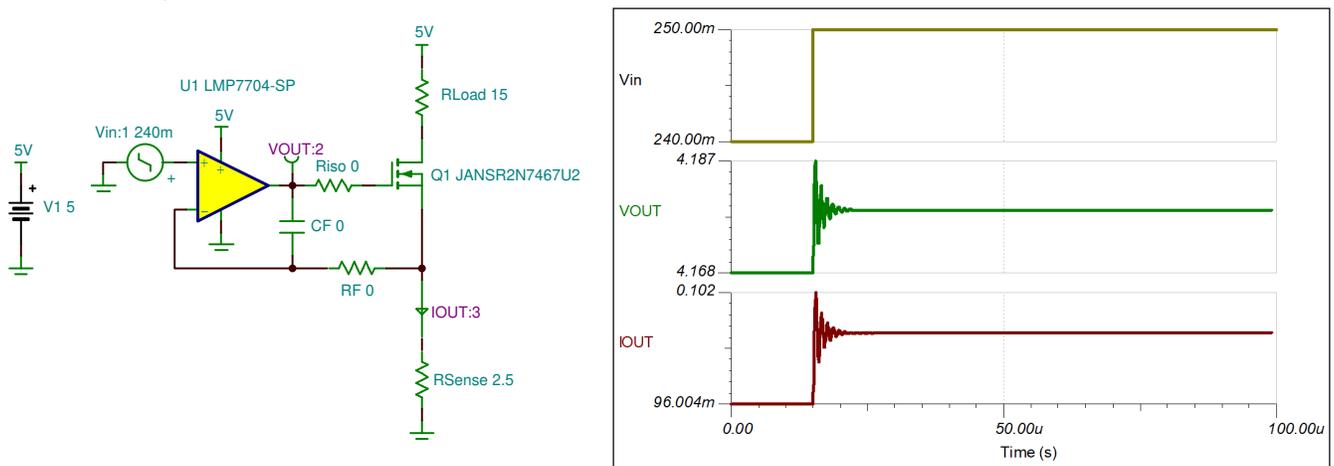
$$\frac{1}{\beta} = \frac{V_o}{V_{FB}}$$

$$A_{OL}\beta = V_{FB}$$

- The following figure shows the open-loop AC response of the circuit if R_{iso} , R_F , and C_F are all zero (not in the circuit). The $AOLB$ phase margin is 13.77° which indicates that the circuit is only marginally stable.
- C_{in} is the equivalent input capacitance of the **LMP7704-SP** and is added due to the inductor $L1$ breaking the interaction of $AOLB$ with the amplifier input capacitance.



- The AC simulation can be verified by the small signal step transient response. The small signal transient step response shows that the circuit has a long settling time with excessive ringing. Therefore, it is highly susceptible to oscillations.

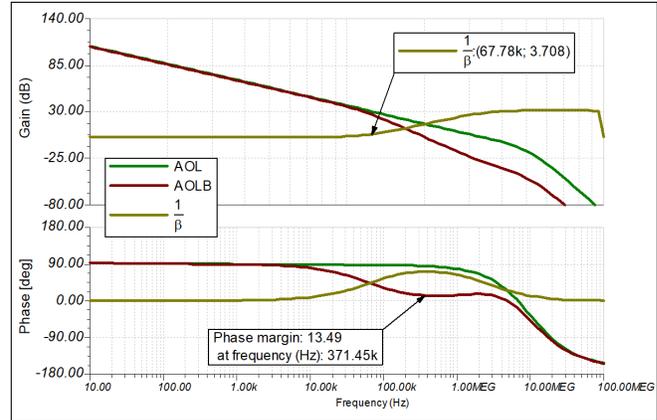
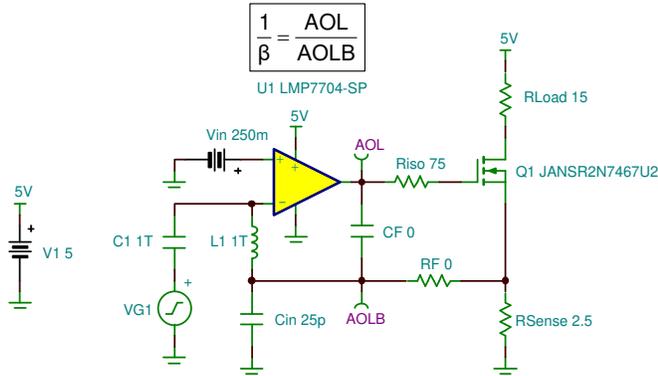


- The reason for the instability is: the op amp output impedance interacts with the MOSFET input capacitance and creates a pole in the AOL curve that causes a 40-dB/decade ROC. To compensate the circuit, start by finding the value for the isolation resistor R_{iso} , needed to mitigate the problem. Two things are needed to find R_{iso} , (1) the frequency where AOL is 20dB ($f_{20dB AOL}$), previously shown in the figure as 228.3kHz, (2) the input capacitance of the MOSFET which is found in the data sheet as 9.11nF. Then, use the following equation:

$$R_{iso} = \frac{1}{2 \times \pi \times f_{20dB AOL} \times C_{load}}$$

$$R_{iso} = 75\Omega \approx \frac{1}{2 \times \pi \times 228.3kHz \times 9.11nF}$$

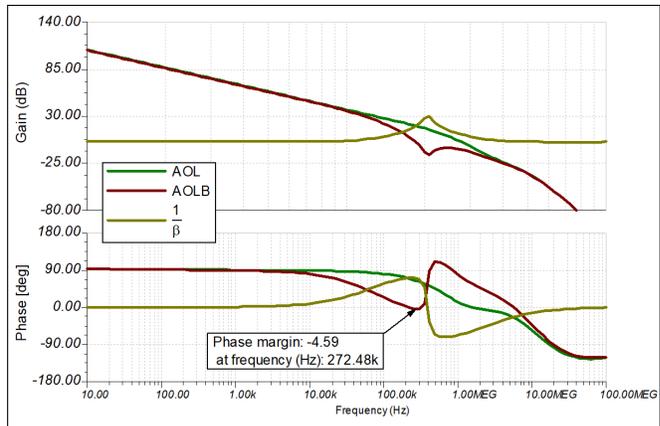
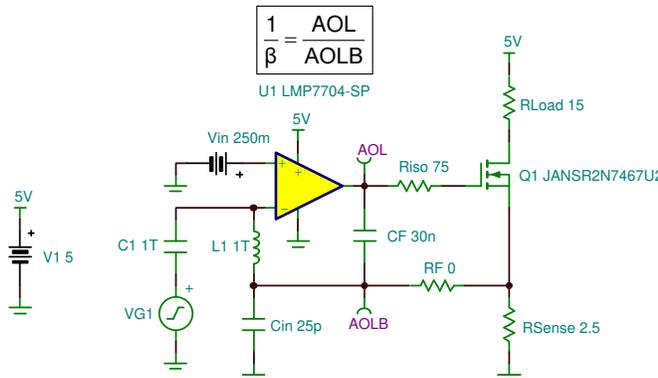
- For more details on R_{iso} and driving capacitive loads, see [TI Precision Labs - Op Amps: Stability - Capacitive loads](#).
- The new open loop AC response, after adding R_{iso} , is shown next. Even though the second pole in AOL was eliminated, the circuit remains only marginally stable due to a zero in $1/\beta$ caused by the delay from R_{iso} and the input capacitance of the MOSFET in the V-I loop.



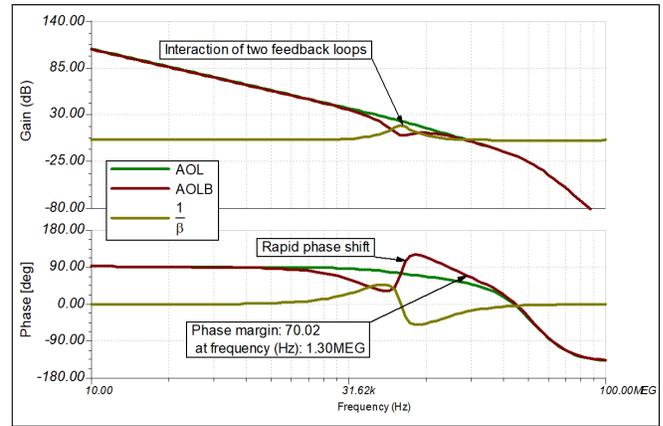
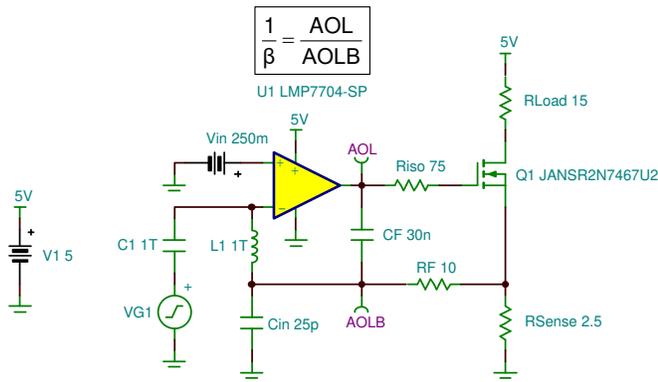
- The simple fix to this is to create a high frequency pole in $1/\beta$ and bypass the MOSFET at higher frequencies. By adding the capacitor CF, the amplifier returns to unity gain over the frequency range of interest. Calculate the value of CF by looking at the location of the $1/\beta$ zero ($f_{z1/\beta}$), shown in the previous figure as 67.78kHz. The value of CF is then calculated as:

$$CF = \frac{1}{2 \times \pi \times R_{iso} \times \left(f_{z\frac{1}{\beta}}\right)}$$

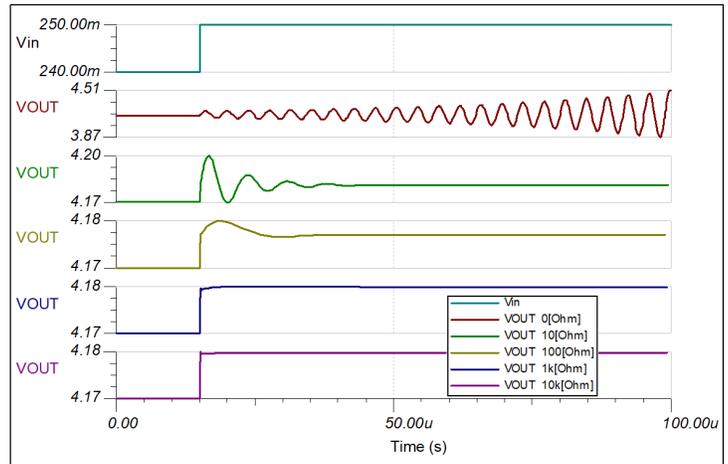
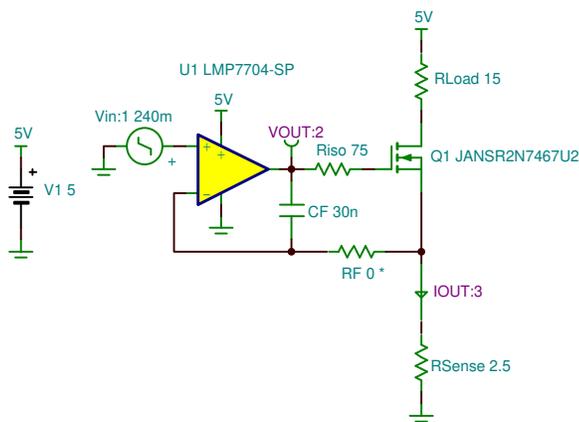
- With CF added, the new open loop AC response looks like the following:



- CF successfully formed the pole in $1/\beta$; however, there is peaking in $1/\beta$ that causes instability. This occurs when CF interacts with the transconductance of the MOSFET. The effect of the interaction is two feedback loops to the amplifier. In this case, both feedback loops interact with each other around the resonant frequency. Adding a small value for RF (10Ω) can isolate the two feedback loops. With an RF of 10Ω, the circuit seems to have 70° of phase margin at fcl; however, in reality, it is still not stable. The next figure shows the instability through the rapid phase shifts in AOLB and the peaking in $1/\beta$.



- This may be confirmed by looking at the small signal transient step response which shows oscillation at the resonant frequency of about 170kHz for small values of RF.

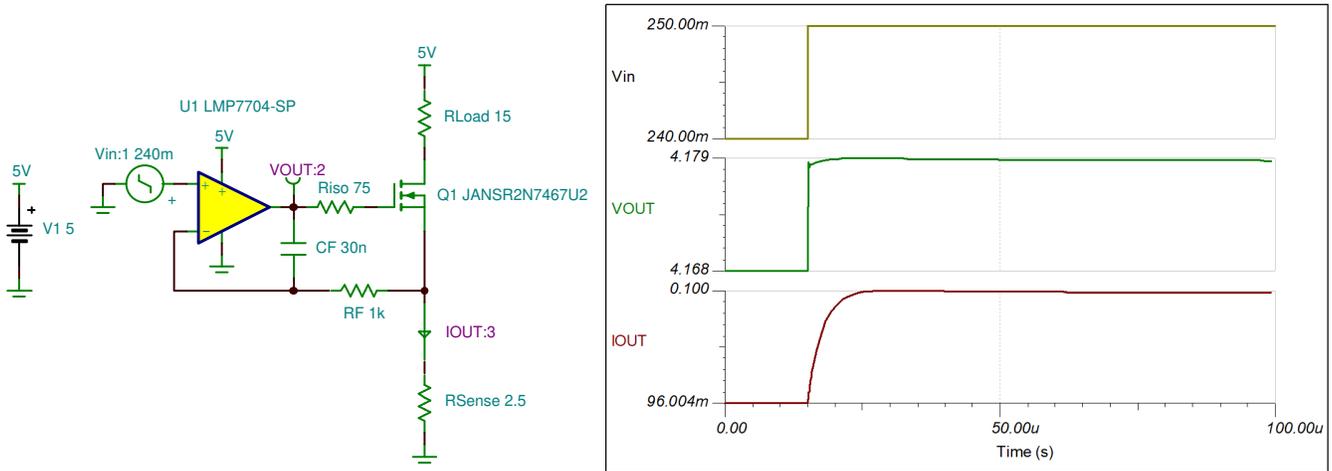


- The final step to stabilizing the circuit is to add a sufficiently large resistor (RF) to flatten out $1/\beta$ and fully isolate CF from the MOSFET. Obtain the final value of RF through trial-and-error until the desired small signal step response is achieved. Typically, RF is in the range of 1kΩ to 10kΩ. The final open loop AC response is seen in the [AC Simulation Results](#) section. As seen from the previous simulation, different RF values yield different small signal step responses. With a zero or small RF value, oscillations and overshoot is observed. A value of 1kΩ for RF is sufficient to give the desired small signal transient response.

Design Simulations

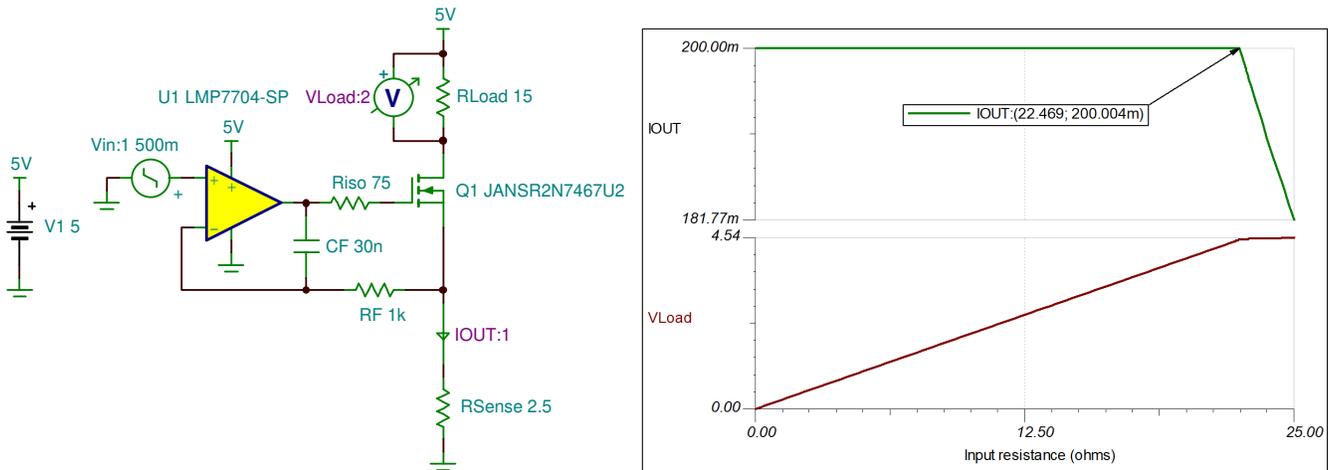
Transient Simulation – Small Signal Step Response

The following figure shows the small signal transient step response has minimal overshoot and indicates that the circuit is stable and has adequate phase margin.



Compliance Voltage

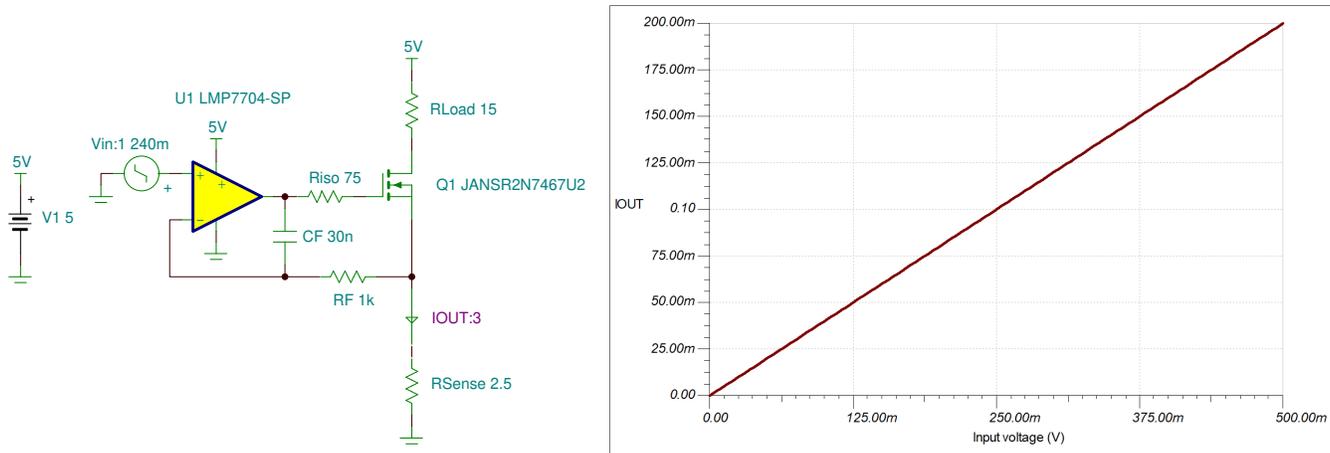
The following figure shows where the circuit saturates as the load resistance is varied. The maximum supported load is 22.47Ω which is almost exactly as anticipated by the previous maximum load calculation.



DC Simulation Results

Load Current

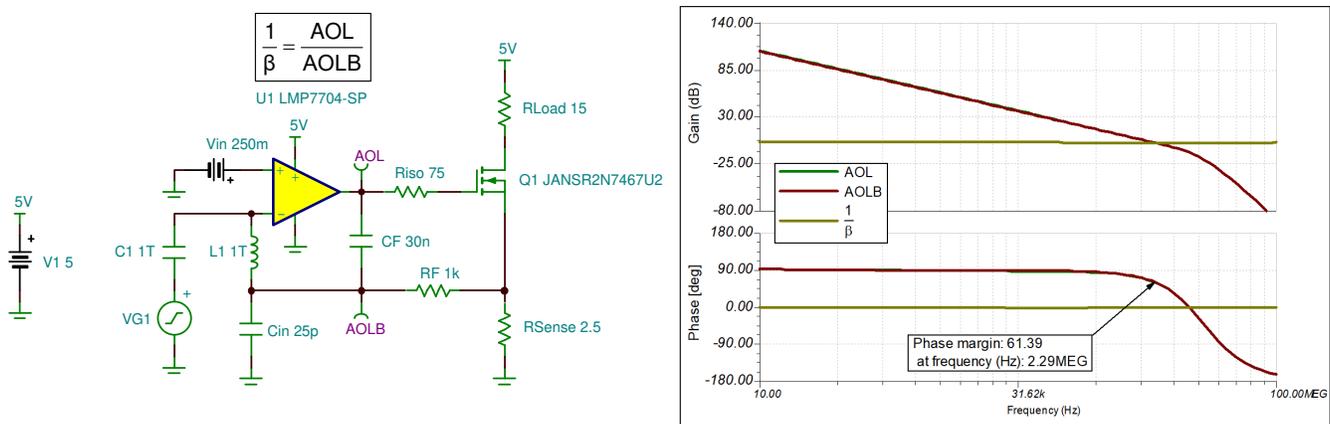
The following plot shows the load current as a function of the input voltage (DAC output voltage). The current goes from 0mA to 200mA as the input voltage changes from 0mV to 500mV. This meets the design specifications.



AC Simulation Results

Stability

The following plot shows the open-loop, AC, gain and phase plot of the circuit. The phase margin is found to be $\approx 62^\circ$. The rate-of-closure at fcl (AOLB = 0dB) is 20dB/decade between AOL and $1/\beta$. As discussed previously, components R_{iso} , R_F , and C_F compensate the circuit and ensure stability. For more details, see [TI Precision Labs - Op Amps: Stability - Introduction](#).



Design References

1. Sahu, K., and Leidecker, H. (April 2008). *EEE-INST-002: Instructions for EEE Parts Selection, Screening, Qualification, and Derating*. Retrieved from https://nepp.nasa.gov/DocUploads/FFB52B88-36AE-4378-A05B2C084B5EE2CC/EEE-INST-002_add1.pdf
2. European Cooperation for Space Standardization. (October 2011). *ECSS-Q-ST-30-11C Rev.1 – Derating – EEE components*. Retrieved from <https://ecss.nl/standard/ecss-q-st-30-11c-rev-1-derating-eee-components-4-october-2011>

Design Featured Op Amp

LMP7704-SP	
V_{SS}	2.7V to 12V
V_{inCM}	Rail-to-rail
V_{out}	Rail-to-rail
V_{os}	$\pm 32\mu V$
I_q	2.9mA
I_b	$\pm 0.2pA$
UGBW	2.5MHz
SR	1V / μs
#Channels	4
Total Ionizing Dose (TID)	100-krad(Si)
Single Event Latch-up (SEL) Immunity	85 MeV·cm ² /mg
https://www.ti.com/product/LMP7704-SP	

Design Alternate Op Amp

LM124AQL-SP	
V_{SS}	3V to 32V
V_{os}	2mV
I_b	45nA
UGBW	1MHz
SR	0.1V / μs
#Channels	4
Total Ionizing Dose (TID)	100-krad(Si)
SEL Immunity	SEL Immune (Bipolar process)
https://www.ti.com/product/LM124AQL-SP	

IMPORTANT NOTICE AND DISCLAIMER

TI PROVIDES TECHNICAL AND RELIABILITY DATA (INCLUDING DATA SHEETS), DESIGN RESOURCES (INCLUDING REFERENCE DESIGNS), APPLICATION OR OTHER DESIGN ADVICE, WEB TOOLS, SAFETY INFORMATION, AND OTHER RESOURCES "AS IS" AND WITH ALL FAULTS, AND DISCLAIMS ALL WARRANTIES, EXPRESS AND IMPLIED, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION ANY IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY, FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE OR NON-INFRINGEMENT OF THIRD PARTY INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS.

These resources are intended for skilled developers designing with TI products. You are solely responsible for (1) selecting the appropriate TI products for your application, (2) designing, validating and testing your application, and (3) ensuring your application meets applicable standards, and any other safety, security, regulatory or other requirements.

These resources are subject to change without notice. TI grants you permission to use these resources only for development of an application that uses the TI products described in the resource. Other reproduction and display of these resources is prohibited. No license is granted to any other TI intellectual property right or to any third party intellectual property right. TI disclaims responsibility for, and you will fully indemnify TI and its representatives against, any claims, damages, costs, losses, and liabilities arising out of your use of these resources.

TI's products are provided subject to [TI's Terms of Sale](#) or other applicable terms available either on ti.com or provided in conjunction with such TI products. TI's provision of these resources does not expand or otherwise alter TI's applicable warranties or warranty disclaimers for TI products.

TI objects to and rejects any additional or different terms you may have proposed.

Mailing Address: Texas Instruments, Post Office Box 655303, Dallas, Texas 75265
Copyright © 2022, Texas Instruments Incorporated