Electronics Tips: Soldering Techniques

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Better Soldering

(A COOPERTools Reprint)

Purpose

We hope this short manual will help explain the basics of Soldering. The emphasis will be on the care and use of equipment.

Overview

Soldering is accomplished by quickly heating the metal parts to be joined, and then applying a flux and a solder to the mating surfaces. The finished solder joint metallurgically bonds the parts - forming an excellent electrical connection between wires and a strong mechanical joint between the metal parts. Heat is supplied with a soldering iron or other means. The flux is a chemical cleaner which prepares the hot surfaces for the molten solder. The solder is a low melting point alloy of non ferrous metals.

Solder and Flux

Solder is a metal or metallic alloy used, when melted, to join metallic surfaces together. The most common alloy is some combination of tin and lead. Certain tin-lead alloys have a lower melting point than the parent metals by themselves. The most common alloys used for electronics work are 60/40 and 63/37. The chart below shows the differences in melting points of some common solder alloys.

NOTE! THIS NOT THE TEMP OF THE SOLDERING TIP!

Tin/Lead	Melting Point
40/60	460 degrees F (230 degrees C)
50/50	418 degrees F (214 degrees C)
60/40	374 degrees F (190 degrees C)
63/37	364 degrees F (183 degrees C)

95/5	434 degrees F (224 degrees C)

Most soldering jobs can be done with fluxcored solder (solder wire with the flux in a "core") when the surfaces to be joined are already clean or can be cleaned of rust, dirt and grease. Flux can also be applied by other means. Flux only cleans oxides off the surfaces to be soldered. It does not remove dirt, soot, oils, silicone, etc.

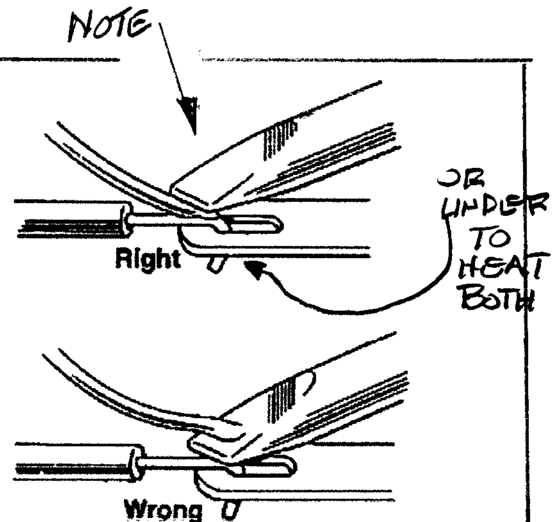
Base Material

The base material in a solder connection consists of the component lead and the plated circuit traces on the printed circuit board. The mass, composition, and cleanliness of the base material all determine the ability of the solder to flow and adhere properly (wet) and provide a reliable connection.

If the base material has surface contamination, this action prevents the solder from wetting along the surface of the lead or board material. Component leads are usually protected by a surface finish. The surface finishes can vary from plated tin to a solder - dipped coating. Plating does not provide the same protection that solder coating does because of the porosity of the plated finish.

The Correct Way to Solder

Some Reasons for Unwettability



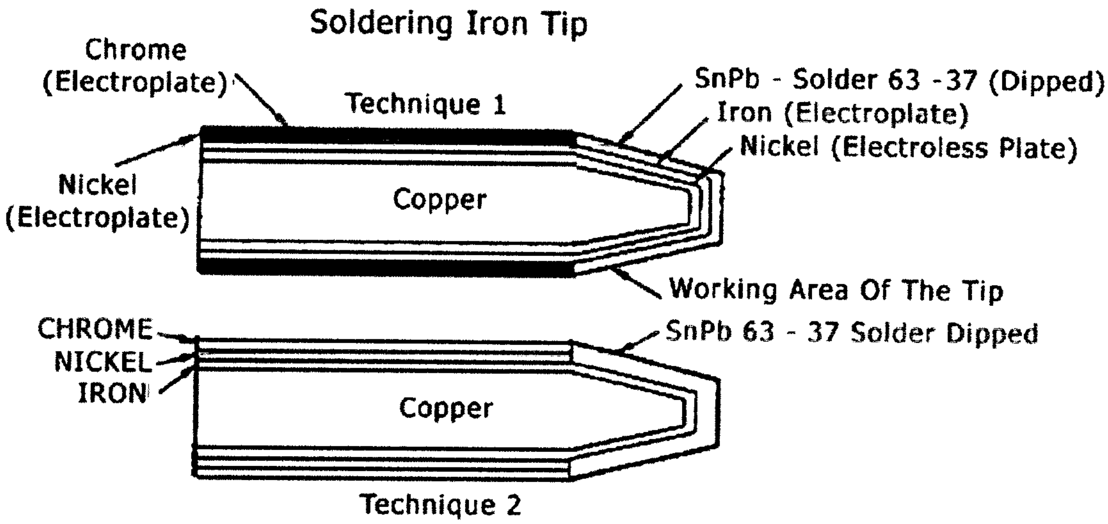
1. The selected temperature is too high. The tin coating is burnt off rapidly and oxidation occurs.
2. Oxidation may occur because of wrong or imperfect cleaning of the tip. E.G.: when other material is used for tip cleaning instead of the original damp Weller sponge.
3. Use of impure solder or solder with flux interruptions in the flux core.
4. Insufficient tinning when working with high temperatures over 665 degrees F (350 degrees C) and after work interruptions of more than one hour.
5. A "dry" tip, i.e. If the tip is allowed to sit without a thin coating of solder oxidation occurs rapidly.
6. Use of fluxed that are highly corrosive and cause rapid oxidation of the tip (e.g. water soluble flux).
7. Use of mild flux that does not remove normal oxides off the tip (e.g. no-clean flux).

The Soldering Iron Tip

The soldering iron tip transfers thermal energy from the heater to the solder connection. In most soldering iron tips, the base metal is copper or some copper alloy because of its excellent thermal conductivity. A tip's conductivity determines how fast thermal energy can be sent from the heater to the connection.

Both geometric shape and size (mass) of the soldering iron tip affect the tip's performance. The tip's characteristics and the heating capability of the heater determines the efficiency of the soldering system. The length and size of the tip determines heat flow capability while the actual shape establishes how well heat is transferred from the tip to the connection.

There are various plating processes used in making soldering iron tips. These plating operations increase the life of the tip. The figure below illustrates the two types of plating techniques used for soldering iron tips. One technique uses a nickel plate over the copper. Then an iron electroplate goes over the nickel. The iron and the nickel create a barrier between the copper base material and tin used in the solder alloy. The barrier material prevents the copper and tin from mixing together. Nickel-chrome plating on the rear of the tip prevents solder from adhering to the back portion of the tip (which could cause difficulty in tip removal) and provides a controlled wetted area on the iron tip. Another plating technique is similar but omits the nickel electroless plating, leaving the iron to act as the barrier metal.



What is a Weller® Tip - How Does It Work?

A Weller tip is made of a copper corewhich is electro-plated with iron to extend the life of the tip. The non-working end of the tip is plated with nickel for protection against corrosion and then chrome plated to prevent the solder from adhering except where desired. The wettable part is tin covered.

The task of the tip is to store the heat which is produced by the heating element and to conduct a maximum amount of this heat to the working surface of the tip.

For fast and optimal heat transfer to the solder joint the tip mass should be as large as possible. When choosing a soldering tip always select the largest possible diameter and shortest reach. Use fine-point long reach tips only where access to the work piece is difficult.

How to Care For Your Tip

Because of the electro-plating Weller tips should never be filed or ground. Weller offers a large range of tips and there should be no need for individual shaping by the operator. If there is a need for a specific tip shape which is not in our standard range we can usually provide this on a special order basis.

Although Weller tips have a standard pretinnng (solder coating) and are ready for use, we recommend you pretin the tip with fresh solder when heating it up the first time. Any oxide covering will then disappear. Tip life is prolonged when mildly activated rosin fluxes are selected rather than water soluble or no-clean chemistries.

When soldering with temperatures over 665 degrees F (350 degrees C) and after long work pauses (more than 1 hour) the tip should be cleaned and tinned often, otherwise the solder on the tip could oxidize causing Unwettability of the tip. To clean the tip use the original synthetic wet sponges from Weller (no rags or cloths).

When doing rework, special care should be taken for good pretinnng. Usually there are only small amounts of solder used and the tip has to be cleaned often. The tin coating on the tip could disappear rapidly and the tip may become unwettable. To avoid this the tip should be retinned frequently.

Additional Tip and Tiplet Care Techniques

Listed below are suggestions and preventative maintenance techniques to extend life and wettability of tips and desoldering tiplets.

1. Keep working surfaces tinned, wipe only before using, and retin immediately. Care should be taken when using small diameter solder to assure that there is enough tin coverage on the tip working surface.
2. If using highly activated rosin fluxes or acid type fluxes, tip life will be reduced. Using iron plated tips will increase service life.
3. If tips become unwettable, alternate applying flux and wiping to clean the surface. Smaller diameter solders

may not contain enough flux to adequately clean the tips. In this case, larger diameter solder or liquid fluxes may be needed for cleaning. Periodically remove the tip from your tool and clean with a suitable cleaner for the flux being used. The frequency of cleaning will depend on the frequency and type of usage.

4. Filing tips will remove the protective plating and reduce tip life. If heavy cleaning is required, use a Weller WPB1 Polishing Bar available from your distributor.
5. Do not remove excess solder from a heated tip before turning off the iron. The excess solder will prevent oxidation of the wettable surface when the tip is reheated.
6. Anti-seize compounds should be avoided (except when using threaded tips) since they may affect the function of the iron. If seizing occurs, try removing the tip while the tool is heated. If this fails, it may be necessary to return the tool to Weller for service. Removing the tip from the tool on a regular basis will also help in preventing the tip from seizing.
7. We recommend using distilled water when wetting the cleaning sponge. The mineral content in most tap water may contaminate your soldering tips.
8. Storing tips after production use:
   -- Clean hot tip thoroughly with damp sponge.
   -- Apply coating of solder to tip.
   -- Turn unit off to allow tip to cool.
   -- Put tip away in proper storage or in iron holder

How to "Renew" Your Tip

Emery cloth may be carefully used to wipe away oxidation when the tip is hot. The tip should then be immediately retinned to prevent further oxidation. In extreme cases of tip oxidation or "tip burnout" they may be cleaned using a soft steel brush along with an active flux. Once again, retinning the tip immediately is important.

Soldering Iron Temperature Settings

In order to raise the temperature of solder above it's melting point, soldering tip temperatures are usually set between 700 degrees F and 800 degrees F. Why such a high temperature when the most commonly used solders have a melting point under 400 degrees F? Using a higher temperature stores heat in the tip which speeds up the melting process. The operator can then complete the solder connection without applying too much pressure on the joint. This practice also allows a proper formation of an intermetallic layer of the parts and solder. This is critical for reliable electrical and mechanical solder joints.

How Precise is the Indicated Tip Temperature?

Very fine long soldering tips have less heat conductivity than large short tips and therefore will run slightly cooler. Electronic control soldering stations have a tip temperature control accuracy of at least plus or minus 10 degrees F (6 degrees C) which is the current Mil Spec. Weller tips for electronic soldering tools are carefully designed to give accurate temperatures measured at the center of the solder wetted area. The specifications of the individual soldering stations are assured only if Weller tips are used. The sensor hole in these tips is very critical to their proper operation. Use of other than Weller tips may cause damage by overheating or tip freezing on the sensor or in the tool barrel.

Tip Temperature Measuring

Weller offers two methods for measuring tip temperature. One is a contact method which may yield low readings but is useful in verifying tip temperature stability and showing that the tip is within the desired range for soldering. The second method employs a welded thermocouple tip. This approach is based on using a standard calibration tip and results in much more accurate tip temperature measurements. Both methods require the use of the WA2000 Soldering Iron Analyzer. Please consult with your Cooper Tools representative or your local distributor for more information.

The Operator's Effect on The Process

The operator has a definite effect on the manual soldering process. The operator controls the factors during soldering that determine how much of the soldering iron's heat finally goes to the connection.

Besides the soldering iron configuration and the shape of the iron's tip, the operator also affects the flow of heat from the tip to the connection. The operator can vary the iron's position and the time on the connection, and pressure of the tool against the pad and lead of the connection.

When the tip of the iron contacts the solder connection, the tip temperature decreases as thermal energy transfers from the tip to the connection. The ability of the soldering iron to maintain a consistent soldering temperature from connection to connection depends on the iron's overall ability to transfer heat as well as the operator's ability to repeat proper technique.

The Reliable Solder Connection

Two connection elements must properly function for a solder joint to be reliable. The solder within the connection must mechanically bond the component to the PCB. The connection must also provide electrical continuity between the device and board. The proper intermetallic layer assures both.

Mechanical

In surface mount and nonclinched through-hole technology, the solder provides the mechanical strength within the connection. Important factors for mechanical strength include the wetting action of the solder with the component and board materials, physical shape and composition of the connection, and the materials' temperature within the connection during the process. The connection temperature should not be too high, causing embrittlement, or too low, resulting in poor wetting action.

Electrical

If a solder connection is mechanically intact, it is considered to be electrically continuous. Electrical continuity is easily measured and quantified.

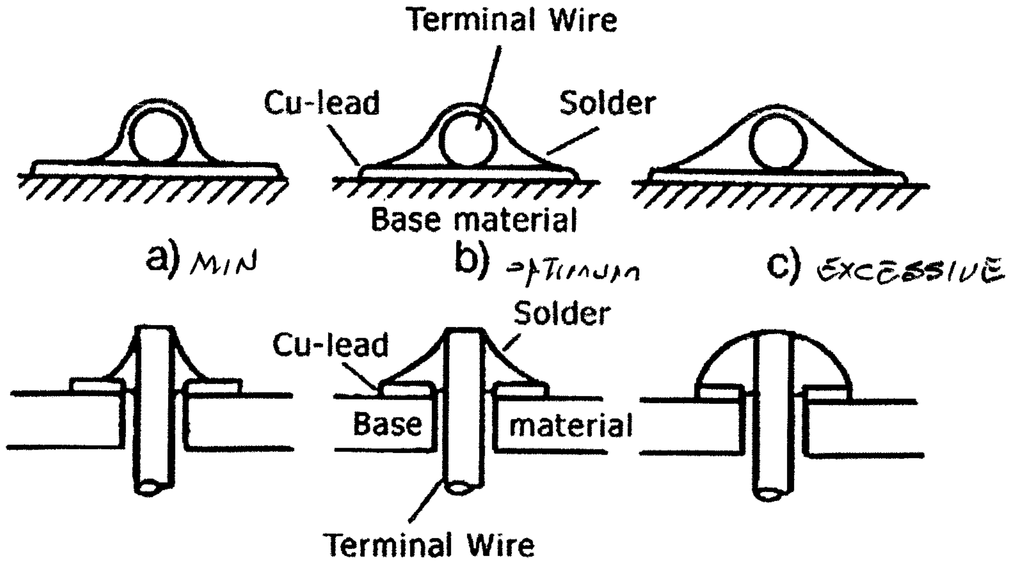
Recognizing the Reliable Solder Connection

Two easily measured indicators in the soldering process that can determine the reliability of the solder connection are the soldering iron's tip temperature and the solder's wetting characteristics. The tip's temperature during the soldering process is an indicator of the amount of heat being transferred from the tip to the connection. The optimum rate of heat transfer occurs if the soldering iron tip temperature remains constant during the soldering process.

Another indicator for determining reliability is the solder's wetting action with the lead and board materials. As operators transfer heat to the connection, this wetting characteristic can be seen visually. If the molten solder quickly wicks up the sides of the component on contact, the wetting characteristic is considered good. If the operator sees the solder is flowing or spreading quickly through or along the surface of the printed circuit assembly, the wetting is also characterized as good.

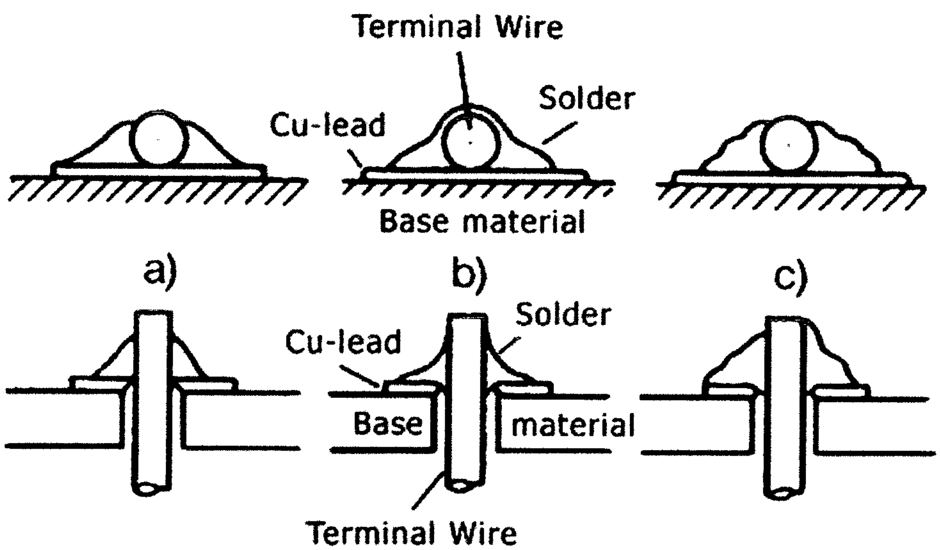
Right Amount of Solder

a) Minimum amount of solder
b) Optimal
c) Excessive solder



Solderability

a) Bad solderability of terminal wire
b) Bad soldering of PCB
c) Bad soldering of terminal wire and PCB



Key Points to Remember

1. Always keep the tip coated with a thin layer of solder.
2. Use fluxes that are as mild as possible but still provide a strong solder joint.
3. Keep temperature as low as possible while maintaining enough temperature to quickly solder a joint (2 to 3 seconds maximum for electronic soldering).
4. Match the tips size to the work.
5. Use a tip with the shortest reach possible for maximum efficiency.

Summary

Operator training and experience will, over time, provide the consistency needed for excellent hand soldering results. Part of the training includes a proper understanding of solder characteristics, how a soldering iron works, how to maintain tips, correct techniques, recognizing good solder joints, and potential problems.

or both. Terminal lugs are available in different sizes. Use the appropriate size for your wire to get the best results.

Some common multipin connectors are shown in **Fig 22.12**. The connector in Fig 22.12A is often referred to as a "Cinch-Jones connector." It is frequently used for connections to power supplies from various types of equipment. Supplying from two to eight conductors, these connectors are keyed so that they go together only one way. They offer good mechanical and electrical connections, and the pins are large enough to handle high current. If your cable is too small for the strain relief fitting, build up the outer jacket with a few layers of electrical tape until the strain relief clamps securely. The strain relief will keep your wires from breaking away under flexing or from a sudden tug on the cable.

The plug in Fig 22.12B is usually called a "molex" connector. This plug consists of an insulated outer shell that houses the individual male or female "fingers." Each finger is individually soldered or crimped onto a conductor of the cable and inserted in the shell, locking into place. These connectors are used on many brands of amateur gear for power and accessory connections.

Fig 22.12C shows a DIN connector. Commonly having five to eight pins, these connectors are a European standard that have found favor with amateur equipment manufacturers around the world. They are generally used for accessory connections. A smaller version, the Miniature DIN, is becoming popular. It is most often used in portable gear but can be found on some full-size equipment as well.

Various types of phone plugs are shown in **Fig 22.14**. The 1/4-inch (largest) is usually used on amateur equipment for headphone and Morse key connections. They are available with plastic and metal bodies. The metal is usually a better choice because it provides shielding and is more durable.

Fig 22.14 also shows the 1/8-inch phone plug. These plugs, sometimes called miniature phone plugs, are used for earphone, external speaker, key and control lines. There is also a subminiature (3/32-inch) phone plug that is not common on amateur gear.

The phono, or RCA, plug shown in **Fig 22.15** is popular among amateurs. It is used for everything from amplifier relay-control lines, to low-voltage power lines, to low-level RF lines, to antenna lines. Several styles are available, but the best choice is the shielded type with the screw-on metal body. As with the phone plugs, the metal bodies provide shielding and are very durable.

Nowhere is there more variation than among microphone connectors. Manufacturers seem to go out of their way to use incompatible connectors! The most popular types of physical connectors are the four- and eight-pin microphone connectors shown in **Fig 22.16**. The simplest connectors provide three connections: audio, ground and push-to-talk (PTT). More complex connectors allow for such things as control lines from the microphone for frequency changes or power to the microphone for a preamplifier. When connecting a microphone to your rig, especially an after-market one, consult the manual. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for best results.

If the same microphone will be used for multiple rigs with incompatible connectors, one or more adapters will be necessary. Adapters can be made with short pieces of cable and the necessary connectors at each end.

RF Connectors

There are many different types of RF connectors for coaxial cable, but the three most common for amateur use are the *UHF*, *Type N* and *BNC* families. The type of connector used for a specific job depends on the size of the cable, the frequency of operation and the power levels involved.

The so-called UHF connector is found on most HF and some VHF equipment. It is the only connector many hams will ever see on coaxial cable. PL-259 is another name for the UHF male, and the female is also known as the SO-239. These connectors are rated for full legal amateur power at HF. They are poor for UHF work because they do not present a constant impedance, so the UHF label is a misnomer. PL-259 connectors are designed to fit RG-8 and RG-11 size cable (0.405-inch OD). Adapters are available for use with smaller RG-58, RG-59 and RG-8X size cable. UHF connectors are not weatherproof.

Fig 22.17 shows how to install the solder type of PL-259 on RG-8 cable. Proper preparation of the cable end is the key to success. Follow these simple steps. Measure back about 3/4-inch from the cable end and slightly score the outer jacket around its circumference. With a sharp knife, cut through the outer jacket, through the braid, and through the dielectric, right down to the center conductor. Be careful not to score the center conductor. Cutting through all outer layers at once keeps the braid from separating. Pull the severed outer jacket, braid and dielectric off the end of the cable as one piece. Inspect the area around the cut, looking for any strands of braid hanging loose and snip them off. There won't be any if your knife was sharp enough. Next, score the outer jacket about 5/16-inch back from the first cut. Cut through the jacket lightly; do not score the braid. This step takes practice. If

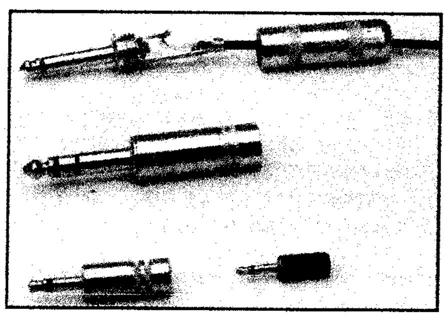


Fig 22.14—The phone-plug family. The 1/4-inch type is often used for headphone and key connections on amateur equipment. The three-circuit version is used with stereo headphones. The mini phone plug is commonly used for connecting external speakers to receivers and transceivers. A subminiphone plug is shown in the foreground for comparison. The shielded style with metal barrel is more durable than the plastic style.

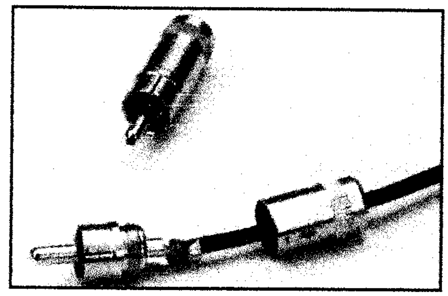


Fig 22.15—Phono plugs have countless uses around the shack. They are small and shielded; the type with the metal body is easy to grip. Be careful not to use too much heat when soldering the ground (outer) conductor—you may melt the insulation.

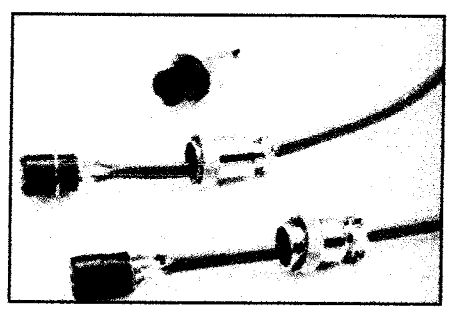


Fig 22.16—The four-pin mike connector is common on modern transmitters and receivers. More elaborate rigs use the eight-pin type. The extra conductors may be used for switches to remotely control the frequency or to power a preamplifier built into the mike case.

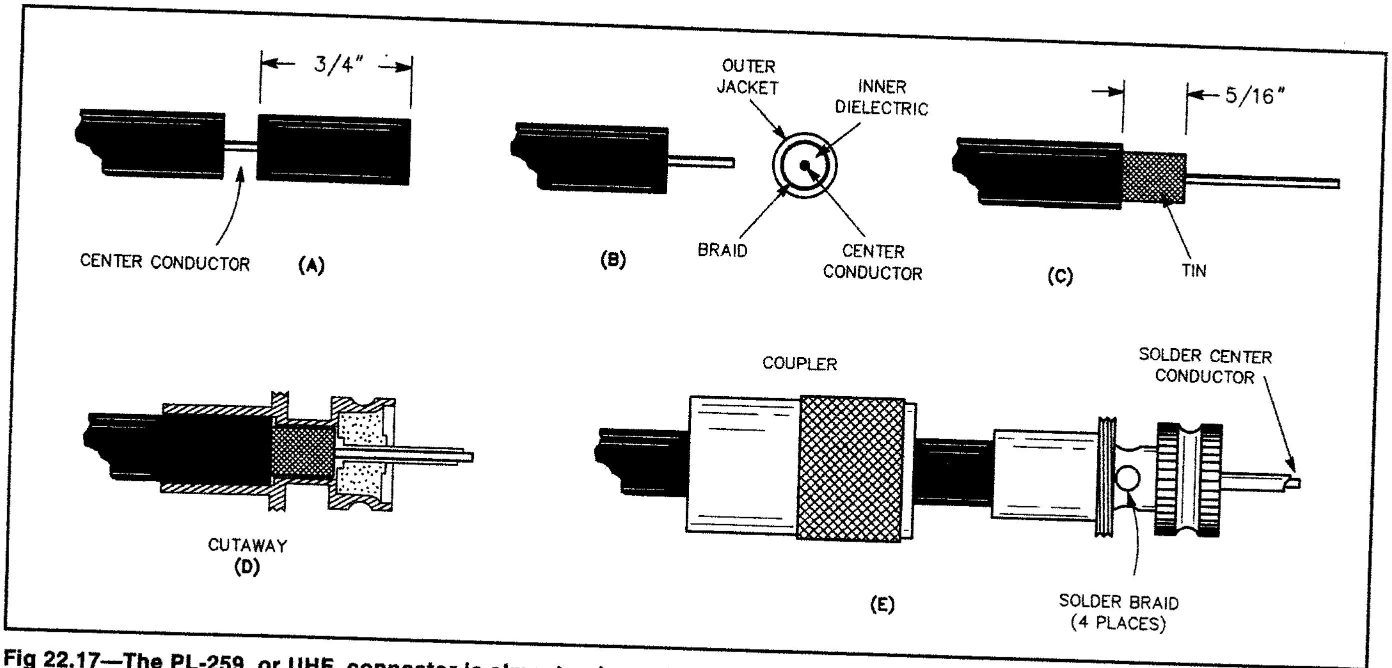


Fig 22.17—The PL-259, or UHF, connector is almost universal for amateur HF work and is popular for equipment operating in the VHF range. Steps A through E are described in detail in the text.

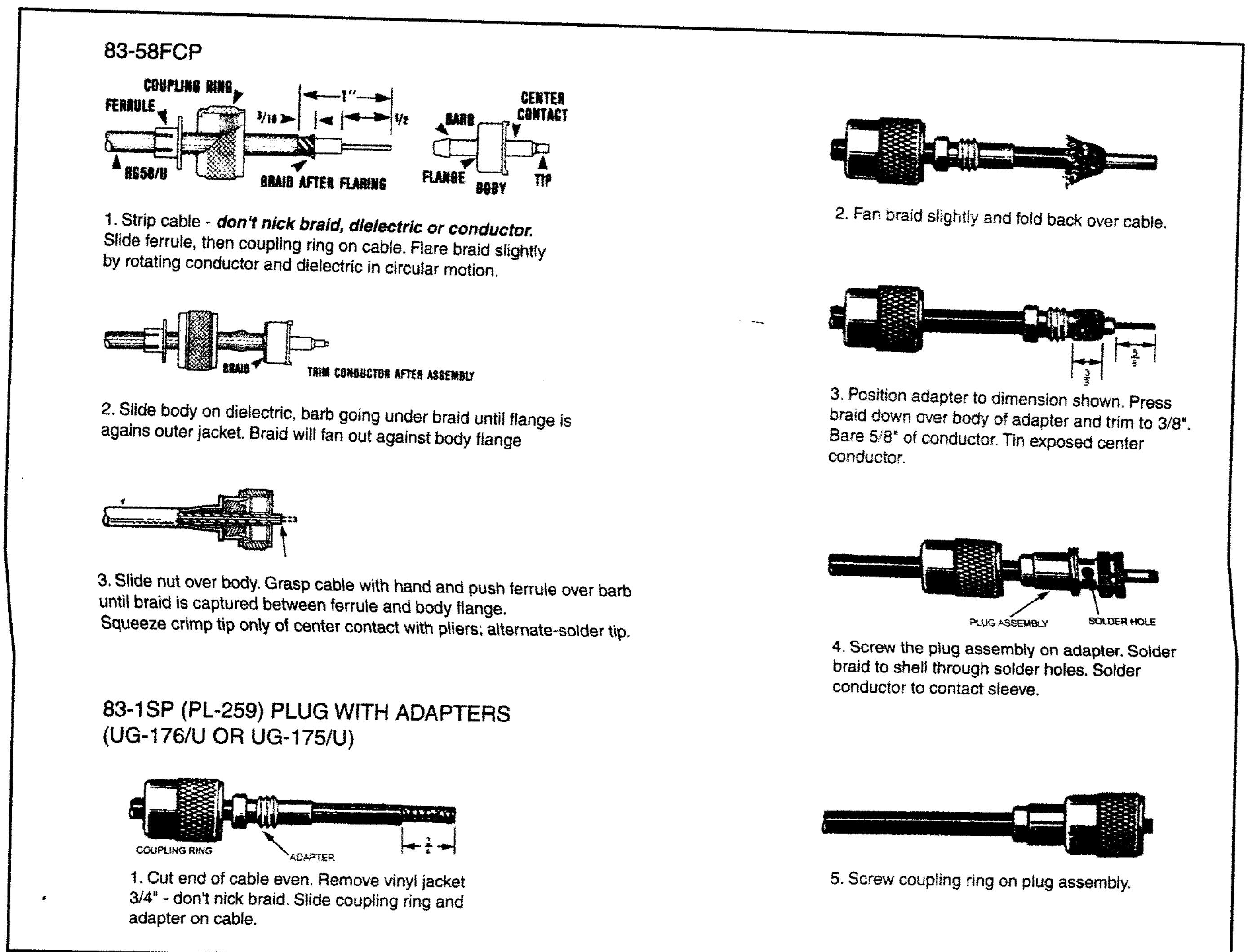


Fig 22.18—Crimp-on connectors and adapters for use with standard PL-259 connectors are popular for connecting to RG-58 and RG-59 type cable. ***(Courtesy Amphenol Electronic Components, RF Division, Bunker Ramo Corp)***

you score the braid, start again. Remove the outer jacket.

Tin the exposed braid and center conductor, but apply the solder sparingly and avoid melting the dielectric. Slide the coupling ring onto the cable. Screw the connector body onto the cable. If you prepared the cable to the right dimensions, the center conductor will protrude through the center pin, the braid will show through the solder holes, and the body will actually thread onto the outer cable jacket.

Solder the braid through the solder holes. Solder through all four holes; poor connection to the braid is the most common form of PL-259 failure. A good connection between connector and braid is just as important as that between the center conductor and connector. Use a large soldering iron for this job. With practice, you'll learn how much heat to use. If you use too little heat, the solder will bead up, not really flowing onto the connector body. If you use too much heat, the dielectric will melt, letting the braid and center conductor touch. Most PL-259s are nickel plated, but silver-plated connectors are much easier to solder and only slightly more expensive.

Solder the center conductor to the center pin. The solder should flow on the inside, not the outside, of the center pin. If you wait until the connector body cools off from soldering the braid, you'll have less trouble with the dielectric melting. Trim the center conductor to be even with the end of the center pin. Use a small file to round the end, removing any solder that built up on the outer surface of the center pin. Use a sharp knife, very fine sandpaper or steel wool to remove any solder flux from the outer surface of the center pin. Screw the coupling ring onto the body, and you're finished.

Fig 22.18 shows two options available

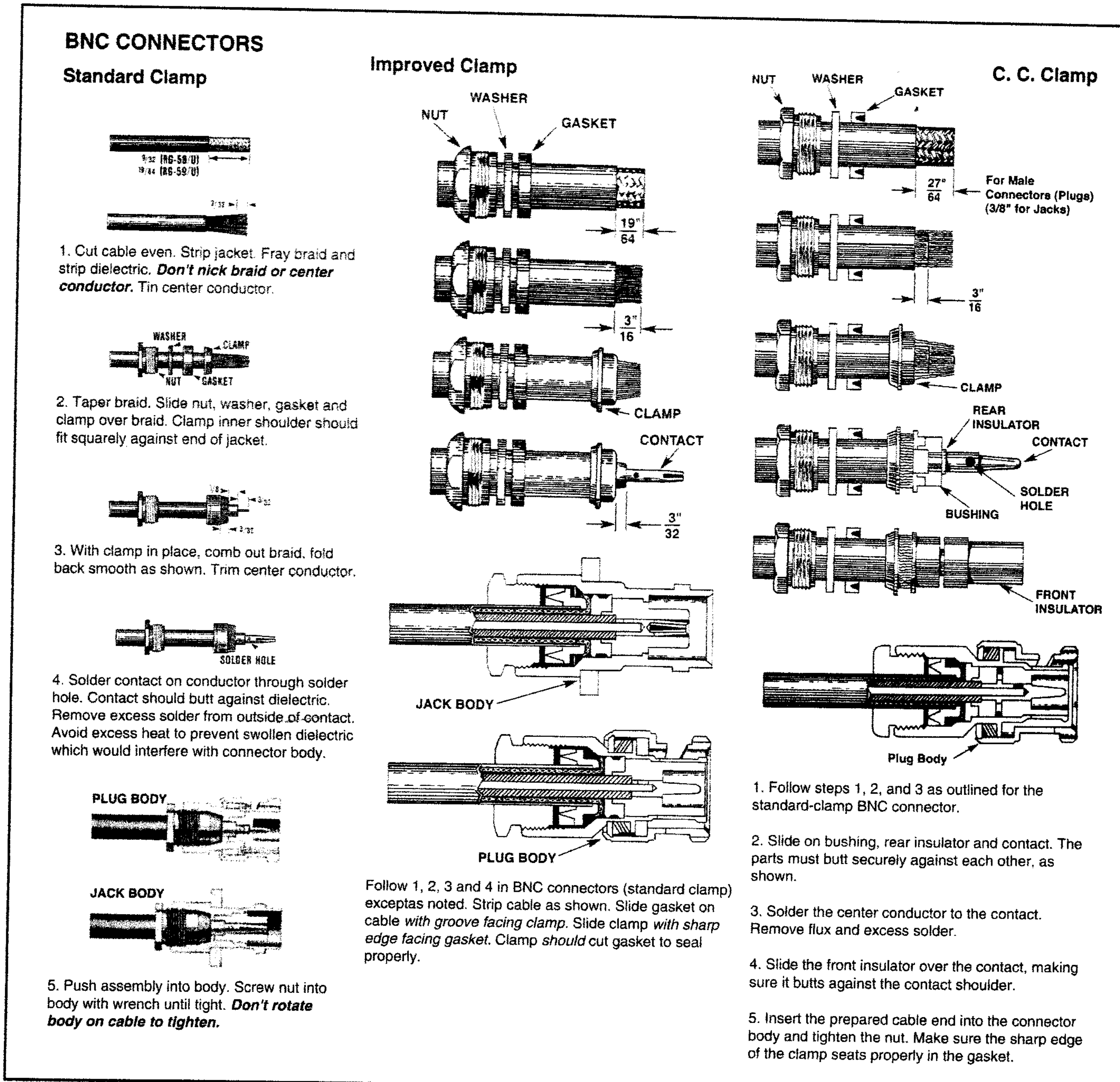
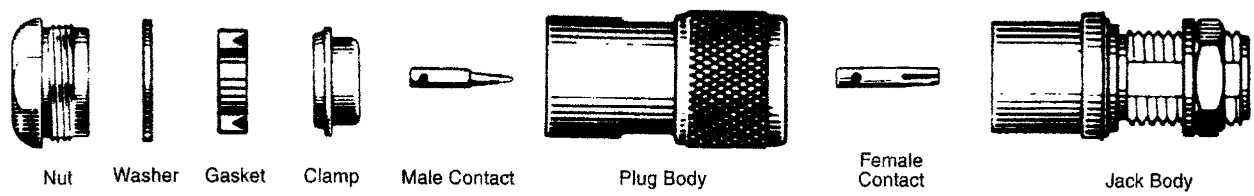
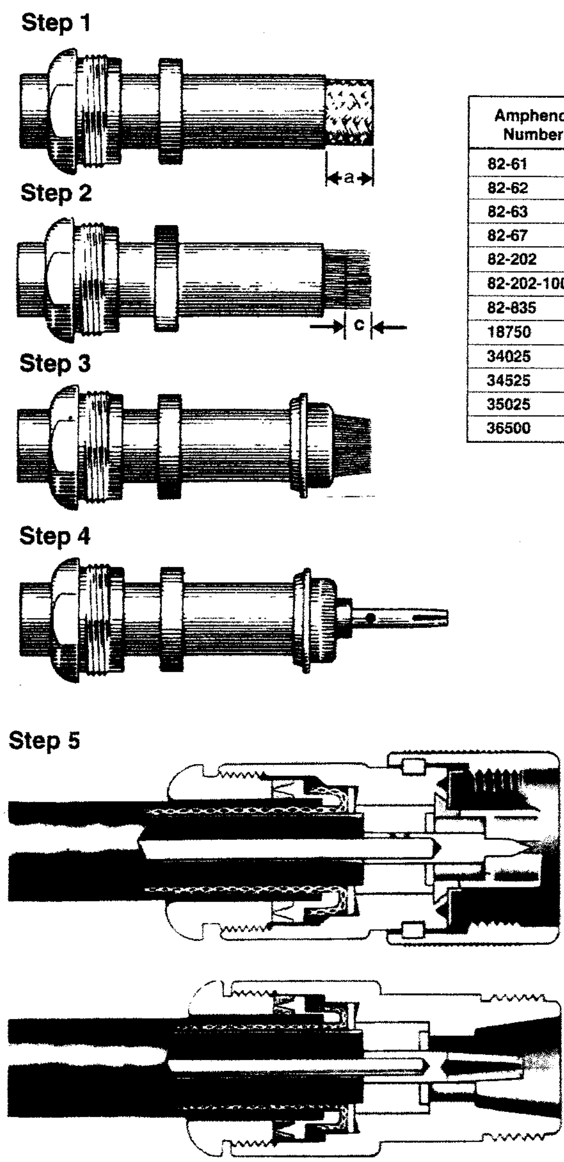


Fig 22.19—BNC connectors are common on VHF and UHF equipment at low power levels. ***(Courtesy Amphenol Electronic Components, RF Division, Bunker Ramo Corp)***

if you want to use RG-58 or RG-59 size cable with PL-259 connectors. The crimp-on connectors manufactured specially for the smaller cable work very well if installed correctly. The alternative method involves using adapters for the smaller cable with standard RG-8 size PL-259s. Prepare the cable as shown. Once the braid is prepared, screw the adapter into the PL-259 shell and finish the job as you would a PL-259 on RG-8 cable.

The BNC connectors illustrated in **Fig 22.19** are popular for low power levels at VHF and UHF. They accept RG-58 and RG-59 cable, and are available for cable





Amphenol Number	Connector Type	Cable RG-/U	Strip Dims., inches (mm)	
			a	c
82-61	N Plug	8, 9, 144, 165, 213, 214, 216, 225	0.359(9.1)	0.234(6.0)
82-62	N Panel Jack	8, 9, 87A, 144, 165, 213, 214, 216, 225	0.312(7.9)	0.187(4.7)
82-63	N Jack		0.281(7.1)	0.156(4.0)
82-67	N Bulkhead Jack			
82-202	N Plug	8, 9, 144, 165, 213, 214, 216, 225	0.359(9.1)	0.234(6.0)
82-202-1006	N Plug	Belden 9913	0.359(9.1)	0.234(6.0)
82-835	N Angle Plug	8, 9, 87A, 144, 165, 213, 214, 216, 225	0.281(7.1)	0.156(4.0)
18750	N Angle Plug	58, 141, 142	0.484(12.3)	0.234(5.9)
34025	N Plug		0.390(9.9)	0.203(5.2)
34525	N Plug	59, 62, 71, 140, 210	0.410(10.4)	0.230(5.8)
35025	N Jack	58, 141, 142	0.375(9.5)	0.187(4.7)
36500	N Jack	59, 62, 71, 140, 210	0.484(12.3)	0.200(5.1)

Step 1 Place nut and gasket, with "V" groove toward clamp, over cable and cut off jacket to dim. **a**.

Step 2 Comb out braid and fold out. Cut off cable dielectric to dim. **c** as shown.

Step 3 Pull braid wires forward and taper toward center conductor. Place clamp over braid and push back against cable jacket.

Step 4 Fold back braid wires as shown, trim braid to proper length and form over clamp as shown. Solder contact to center conductor.

Step 5 Insert cable and parts into connector body. Make sure sharp edge of clamp seats properly in gasket. Tighten nut.

Fig 22.20—Type N connectors are a must for high-power VHF and UHF operation. ***(Courtesy Amphenol Electronic Components, RF Microwave Operations)***

mounting in both male and female versions. Several different styles are available, so be sure to use the dimensions for the type you have. Follow the installation instructions carefully. If you prepare the cable to the wrong dimensions, the center pin will not seat properly with connectors of the opposite gender. Sharp scissors are a big help for trimming the braid evenly.

The Type N connector, illustrated in Fig 22.20, is a must for high-power VHF and UHF operation. N connectors are available in male and female versions for cable mounting and are designed for RG-8 size cable. Unlike UHF connectors, they are designed to maintain a constant impedance at cable joints. Like BNC connectors, it is important to prepare the cable to the right dimensions. The center pin must be positioned correctly to mate with the center pin of connectors of the opposite gender. Use the right dimensions for the connector style you have.

Computer Connectors

As if the array of connectors related to amateur gear were not enough, the prevalence of the computer in the shack has brought with it another set of connectors to consider. Most connections between computers and their peripherals are made with some form of multiconductor cable. Examples include shielded, unshielded and ribbon cable. Common connectors used are the 9- and 25-pin D-Subminiature connector, the DIN and Miniature DIN and the 36-pin Amphenol connector. Various edge-card connectors are used internally (and sometimes externally) on many computers. **Fig 22.21** shows a variety of computer connectors. See the **References** chapter for other computer-connector pinout diagrams.

EIA-232 Serial Connections

The serial port on a computer is arguably the most used, and often most troublesome, connector encountered by the amateur. The serial port is used to connect modems, TNCs, computer mice and some printers to the computer. As the name implies, the data is transmitted serially.

The EIA-232-D (commonly referred to as RS-232) standard defines a system used to send data over relatively long distances. It is commonly used to send data anywhere from a few feet to 50 feet or more. The standard specifies the physical connection and signal lines. The serial ports on most computers comply with the EIA-232-D standard only to the degree necessary to operate with common peripherals. **Fig 22.22** shows the two most common connectors used for computer serial ports. A 9-pin connector can be adapted to a 25-pin by

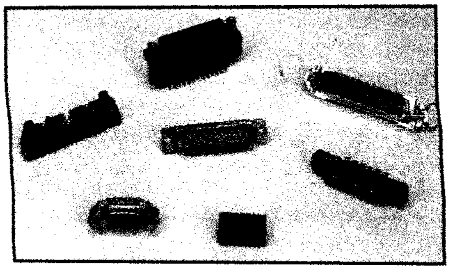
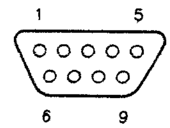
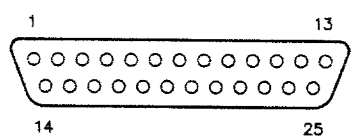


Fig 22.21—Various computer connectors.



Pin	Direction	Description
1	I	Data Carrier Detect (DCD)
2	I	Receive Data (RX)
3	O	Transmit Data (TX)
4	O	Data Terminal Ready (DTR)
5	GND	Signal Ground (GND)
6	I	Data Set Ready (DSR)
7	O	Request To Send (RTS)
8	I	Clear To Send (CTS)
9	I	Ring Indicator (RI)

(A)



Pin	Direction	Description
1	GND	Earth Ground
2	O	Transmit Data (TX)
3	I	Receive Data (RX)
4	O	Request To Send (RTS)
5	I	Clear To Send (CTS)
6	I	Data Set Ready (DSR)
7	GND	Signal Ground (GND)
8	I	Data Carrier Detect (DCD)
20	O	Data Terminal Ready (DTR)
22	I	Ring Indicator (RI)

(B)

Fig 22.22—The two most common implementations of EIA-232-D serial connections on personal computers use 9- and 25-pin connectors.

connecting like signals. Earth ground is not provided in the 9-pin version.

Equipment connected via EIA-232-D is usually classified in one of two ways: DTE (data terminal equipment) or DCE (data communication equipment). Terminals and computers are examples of DTE, while modems and TNCs are DCE.

The binary data is represented by specific voltage levels on the signal line. The EIA-232-D standard specifies that a binary one is represented by a voltage ranging from −3 to −25 V. A binary zero ranges from 3 to 25 V. ±12 V is a common level in many types of equipment, but anything within the specified ranges is just as valid.

The RTS (request to send), CTS (clear to send), DTR (data terminal ready) and DSR (data set ready) lines are used for handshaking signals. These signals are used to coordinate the communication between the DTE and DCE. The RTS and DTR line are used by the DTE to indicate to the DCE that it is ready to receive data from the DCE. The DCE uses the CTS DSR lines to signal the DTE as to whether or not it is ready to accept data. DCD (data carrier detect) is also sometimes used by the DCE to signal the DTE that an active carrier is present on the communication line. A +12-V signal represents an active handshaking signal. The equipment "drops" the line to −12 V when it is unable to receive data.

You may notice that the name "ready to send" is sort of a misnomer for the DTE since it actually uses it to signal that it is ready to receive. This is a leftover from when communication was mostly one-way—DTE to DCE. Note also that the signal names really only make sense from the DTE point of view. For example, pin 2 is called TD on both sides, even though the DCE is receiving data on that pin. This is another example of this one-way terminology.

It would be much too simple if all serial devices implemented all of the EIA-232-D specifications. Some equipment ignores some or all of the handshaking signals. Other equipment expects handshaking signals to be used as specified. Connecting these two types of equipment together will result in a frustrating situation. One side will blindly send data while the other side blindly ignores all data sent to it!

Fig 22.23 shows the different possible ways to connect equipment. Fig 22.23A shows how to connect a "normal" DTE/DCE combination. This assumes both sides correctly implement all of the handshaking signals. If one or both sides ignore handshaking signals, the connections shown in Fig 22.23B will be necessary. In this scheme, each side is sending the handshaking signals to itself. This little bit of deceit will almost always work, but handshaking signals that are present will be ineffective.

Null Modem Connections

Some equipment does not fall completely in the DTE or DCE category. Some serial printers, for example, act as DCE