Theory of Operation

An understanding of statistical variations in parameter values is needed for many waveform parameter measurements. Knowledge of the average, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation of the parameter may often be enough, but in many cases you may need a more detailed understanding of the distribution of a parameter's values.

Histograms allow you to see how a parameter's values are distributed over many measurements. They do this by dividing a range of parameter values into sub-ranges called *bins*. Maintained for each bin is a count of the number of parameter values — events — that fall within ranges of the bin itself.

While such a value range can be infinite, for practical purposes it need only be defined as large enough to include any realistically possible parameter value. For example, in measuring TTL high-voltage values a range of ±50 V is unnecessarily large, whereas one of 4 V ±2.5 V is more reasonable. It is the 5 V range that is then subdivided into bins. And if the number of bins used were 50, each would have a range of 5 V/50 bins or 0.1 V/bin. Events falling into the first bin would then be between 1.5 V and 1.6 V. While the next bin would capture all events between 1.6 V and 1.7 V, and so on.

After a process of several thousand events, the bar graph of the count for each bin — its histogram — provides a good understanding of the distribution of values. Histograms generally use the 'x' axis to show a bin's sub-range value, and the 'y' axis for the count of parameter values within each bin. The leftmost bin with a non-zero count shows the lowest parameter value measurement(s). The vertically highest bin shows the greatest number of events falling within its sub-range.

The number of events in a bin, peak or a histogram is referred to as its *population*. Figure 4.1 on the next page shows a histogram's highest population bin as the one with a sub-range of 4.3 to 4.4 V (which is to be expected of a TTL signal).

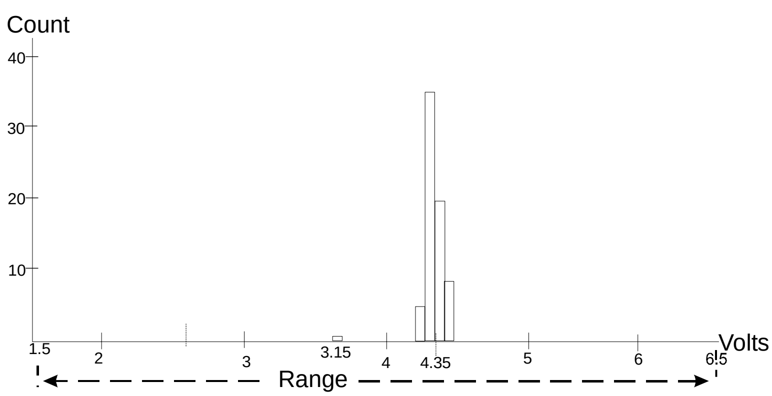

Figure 4.1

The lowest-value bin with events is that with a sub-range of 3.0 to 3.1 V. As TTL high voltages need to be greater than 2.5 V, the lowest bin is within the allowable tolerance. However, because of its proximity to this tolerance and the degree of the bin's separation from all other values, additional investigation may be required.

DSO PROCESS

The Waverunner digital storage oscilloscope (DSO) with WAVA generates histograms of the parameter values of input waveforms. But first, you must define the following:

1. The parameter to be histogrammed
2. The trace on which the histogram is to be displayed
3. The maximum number of parameter measurement values to be used in creating the histogram
4. The measurement range of the histogram
5. The number of bins to be used

Once these are defined, the oscilloscope is ready to make the histogram. The sequence for acquiring histogram data is as follows:

1. Trigger
2. Waveform acquisition
3. Parameter calculation(s)
4. Histogram update
5. Trigger re-arm.

If you set the timebase for non-segmented mode, a single acquisition occurs prior to parameter calculations. However, in Sequence mode an acquisition for each segment occurs prior to parameter calculations. If the source of histogram data is a memory, saving new data to memory effectively acts as a trigger and acquisition. Because updating the screen can take much processing time, it occurs only once a second, minimizing trigger dead time. Under remote control the display can be turned off to maximize measurement speed.

PARAMETER BUFFER

The oscilloscope maintains a circular parameter buffer of the last 20 000 measurements made, including values that fall outside the set histogram range. If the maximum number of events to be used for the histogram is a number 'N' less than 20 000, the histogram will be continuously updated with the last 'N' events as new acquisitions occur. If the maximum number is greater than 20 000, the histogram will be updated until the number of events is equal to 'N.' Then, if the number of bins or the histogram range is modified, the scope will use the parameter buffer values to redraw the histogram with either the last 'N' or 20 000 values acquired — whichever is the lesser. The parameter buffer thereby allows histograms to be redisplayed, using an acquired set of values and settings that produce a distribution shape with the most useful information.

In many cases the optimal range is not readily apparent. So the scope has a powerful range finding function. If required it will examine the values in the parameter buffer to calculate an optimal range and redisplay the histogram using it. Waverunner will also give a running count of the number of parameter values that fall within, below, or above the range. If any values fall below or above the range, the range finder can then recalculate to include these parameter values, as long as they are still within the buffer.

CAPTURE OF PARAMETER EVENTS

The number of events captured per waveform acquisition or display sweep depends on the parameter type. Acquisitions are initiated by the occurrence of a trigger event. Sweeps are equivalent to the waveform captured and displayed on an input channel (1, 2, or 3 or 4). For non-segmented waveforms an acquisition is identical to a sweep. Whereas for segmented waveforms an acquisition occurs for each segment and a sweep is equivalent to acquisitions for all segments. Only the section of a waveform between the parameter cursors is used in the calculation of parameter values and corresponding histogram events.

The following table provides a summary of the number of histogram events captured per acquisition or sweep for each parameter, and for a waveform section between the parameter cursors.

PARAMETERS (PLUS OTHERS, DEPENDING ON OPTIONS)	NUMBER OF EVENTS CAPTURED
data	All data values in the region analyzed.
duty, freq, period, width,	Up to 49 events per acquisition.
ampl, area, base, cmean, cmedian, crms, csdev, cycles, delay, dur, first, last, maximum, mean, median, minimum, nbph, nbpw, over+, over–, phase, pkpk, points, rms, sdev, Δdly, Δt@ lv	One event per acquisition.
f@ level, f80–20%, fall, r@ level, r20–80%, rise	Up to 49 events per acquisition.

HISTOGRAM PARAMETERS

Once a histogram is defined and generated, measurements can be performed on the histogram itself. Typical of these are the histogram's

average value, standard deviation

most common value (parameter value of highest count bin)

leftmost bin position (representing the lowest measured waveform parameter value)

rightmost bin (representing the highest measured waveform parameter value)

Histogram parameters are provided to enable these measurements. Available through selecting “Statistics” from the “Category” menu, they are calculated for the selected section between the parameter cursors (for a full description of each parameter, see Chapter 4):

avg	average of data values in histogram
fwhm	full width (of largest peak) at half the maximum bin
fwxx	full width (of largest peak) at xx% the maximum bin
hampl	histogram amplitude between two largest peaks
hbase	histogram base or leftmost of two largest peaks
high	highest data value in histogram
hmedian	median data value of histogram
hrms	rms value of data in histogram
htop	histogram top or rightmost of two largest peaks
low	lowest data value in histogram
maxp	population of most populated bin in histogram
mode	data value of most populated bin in histogram
pctl	data value in histogram for which specified ‘x’% of population is smaller
pks	number of peaks in histogram
range	difference between highest and lowest data values
sigma	standard deviation of the data values in histogram
totp	total population in histogram
xapk	x-axis position of specified largest peak

ZOOM TRACES AND SEGMENTED WAVEFORMS

Histograms of zoom traces display all events for the displayed portion of a waveform between the parameter cursors. When dealing with segmented waveforms, and when a single segment is selected, the histogram will be recalculated for all events in the displayed portion of this segment between the parameter cursors. But if “All Segments” is selected, the histogram for all segments will be displayed.

HISTOGRAM PEAKS

Because the shape of histogram distributions is particularly interesting, additional parameter measurements are available for analyzing these distributions. They are generally centered around one of several peak value bins, known, with its associated bins, as a histogram peak.

Example: In Figure 4.2, a histogram of the voltage value of a five-volt amplitude square wave is centered around two peak value bins: 0 V and 5 V. The adjacent bins signify variation due to noise. The graph of the centered bins shows both as peaks.

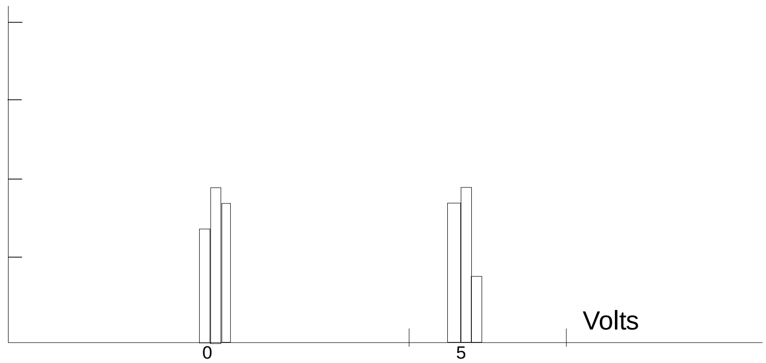

Figure 4.2

Determining such peaks is very useful because they indicate dominant values of a signal.

However, signal noise and the use of a high number of bins relative to the number of parameter values acquired, can give a jagged and spiky histogram, making meaningful peaks hard to distinguish. The scope analyzes histogram data to identify peaks from background noise and histogram definition artifacts such as small gaps, which are due to very narrow bins.

For a detailed description on how the scope determines peaks see the pks parameter description in Chapter 4.

BINNING AND MEASUREMENT ACCURACY

Histogram bins represent a sub-range of waveform parameter values, or events. The events represented by a bin may have a value anywhere within its sub-range. However, parameter measurements of the histogram itself, such as average, assume that all events in a bin have a single value. The scope uses the center value of each bin's sub-range in all its calculations. The greater the number of bins used to subdivide a histogram's range, the less the potential deviation between actual event values and those values assumed in histogram parameter calculations.

Nevertheless, using more bins may require that you perform a greater number of waveform parameter measurements, in order to populate the bins sufficiently for the identification of a characteristic histogram distribution.

In addition, very fine grained binning will result in gaps between populated bins that may make it difficult to determine peaks.

The oscilloscope's 20 000-parameter buffer is very effective for determining the optimal number of bins to be used. An optimal bin number is one where the change in parameter values is insignificant, and the histogram distribution does not have a jagged appearance. With this buffer, a histogram can be dynamically redisplayed as the number of bins is modified by the user. In addition, depending on the number of bins selected, the change in waveform parameter values can be seen.