INSERTION LOSS MEASUREMENT

WHAT IS INSERTION LOSS?

An insertion loss (IL) measurement characterizes the light loss through a component or connection.
There are two accepted methods for measuring insertion loss, both of which may be found in reference document FOTP-171, published by the Electronic Industry Association (EIA).
Insertion loss measurements require a light source, an optical power meter, and a patch cable manufactured to precise tolerances, known as a reference cable.
In general, an insertion loss measurement is a two step process:

1) Establish a baseline power level measurement for the light source and reference cable in use. This is referred to as "referencing" or "calibration."

2) Connect the device under test and measure the difference between the measured power and the Reference power.

INSERTION LOSS MEASUREMENTS

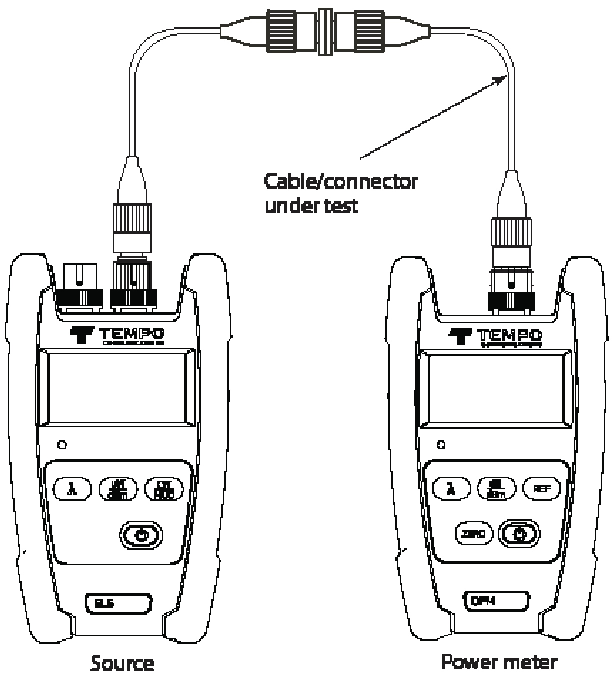
To measure the insertion loss of a connector/cable, do the following:

STEP 1: Connect an appropriate Tempo LED or laser source to the optical power meter using a suitable reference cable. The reference cable should be 2 to 3 meters in length. See the illustration.

STEP 2: Make sure the source is in continuous wave (CW) output mode. Set the optical power meter to the output wavelength of the source using the [λ] key and to dBm units using the [dBm] key. Note that the dBm output from the reference cable should be within acceptable limits.

STEP 3: Store the reference power level by pressing the [Rel] key for a few seconds. The main numerical display should read 00.00 dB.

STEP 4: Disconnect the reference cable from the optical power meter and insert the cable to be tested using an appropriate bulkhead adapter.



ABOUT dB, dBm, and WATTS

Fiber optic measurements are performed using decibel (dB) units.
The decibel is a logarithmic, relative, dimensionless unit it gives no indication of the absolute power level. Loss is always indicated using a minus (-) sign, and a gain is indicated by a plus (+) sign. Because dB units are relative and dimensionless, a correlation with an absolute unit of measure must be established to be useful. To indicate absolute power, logarithmic decibel units are referenced to linear Watt units: 0dBm = 1 milliwatt (mW).

To convert Watt units to dBm, the following formula is used: $P = 10 \log \left(\frac{Px}{1mW} \right) dBm$

The table on the right illustrates the relationship between absolute logarithmic dBm units and absolute linear Watt units: Absolute logarithmic dBm [P] Absolute linear Watts [Px]

dBm (P)	WATTS (Px)
+10dBm	10mW
+3dBm	2mW
0dBm	1mW
-3dBm	0.5mW
-10dBm	100μW
-20dBm	10μW
-30dBm	1μW
-40dBm	100nW
-50dBm	10nW
-60dBm	1nW
-70dBm	100pW
-80dBm	10pW
-90dBm	1pW

RETURN LOSS
MEASUREMENT METHODS

WHAT IS RETURN LOSS?

A return loss measurement characterises the strength of a reflection produced by variations in the refractive index along a fiber optic link, known as a back-reflection or Fresnel reflection. Quantified in decibel (dB) units, return loss is the logarithmic expression of the ratio of the reflected power over the incident power, that is, the intensity of light reflected back to the return loss meter over the intensity of the light injected into the fiber, expressed as a positive number.

If not controlled, back-reflections can degrade the performance of a fiber optic system by interfering with the operation of the laser transmitter, or by generating noise at the receiver.

A common source of back-reflections is the junction where two fiber optic connectors are mated. Because of this, a connector with high return loss, which sends very weak reflections back to the transmitter, is superior to a connector with low return loss that sends back strong reflections. When measuring connectors, extremely low return loss values usually indicate a defect, such as core misalignment, poor fiber end-face contact, scratches, breaks, or end-face contamination.

RETURN LOSS MEASUREMENT METHODS

OPTICAL TIME DOMAIN REFLECTOMETER (OTDR) METHOD

An Optical Time Domain Reflectometer (OTDR) launches a train of light pulses into the device under test and collects backscatter information as well as superimposed Fresnel reflections. The OTDR is optimised to accurately measure loss-per-distance based on the received backscatter level. An OTDR also gives an estimation of the strength of a reflection at a given distance based on its peak height.

RETURN LOSS DEFINED

Reflections—or more specifically Fresnel reflections—occur at the boundary between two media with different refractive indices. The percentage of the light reflected can be calculated if the refractive indices of both media are known.

The most commonly known percentage of reflected power, the 4% reflection, is caused by a glass-to-air boundary. Reflectance in general is the ratio of reflected power to incident power. When knowledge of a reflection at a discrete point is important, the term reflectance is preferred. Reflectance is expressed in negative decibels (dB). Optical return loss (ORL), often referred to as return loss, describes the ratio of reflected power over the incident power of a system as a whole. Similar in concept to reflectance, return loss is also expressed in decibels.

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