



Introduction to Practical PCB Design

or

“Shadow of the Colossus.”

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23 March 2021

University of Queensland

But first...

A valuable message about safety...



But secondly...

Some house keeping

Calendar at a glance

You are
here →

Week	Dates	Lecture	Reviews	Demos	Assessment submissions
1	22/2 – 26/2	Introduction			
2	1/3 – 5/3	Principles of Mechatronic Systems design			Problem analysis
3	8/3 – 12/3	Previous years deconstruction case studies			
4	15/3 – 19/3	Professional Engineering Topics	Progress review 1		
5	22/3 – 26/3	PCB design tips			
6	29/3 – 2/4*	Your soldering is (probably) terrible			
Break	5/4* – 9/4				
7	12/4 – 16/4	Introduction to firmware design	Progress seminar	25% demo	
8	19/4 – 23/4	<i>No lecture!</i>			
9	26/4 – 30/4	<i>Q and A sessions</i>		50% demo	
10	3/5* – 7/5	<i>Q and A sessions</i>	Progress review		
11	10/5 – 14/5	<i>Q and A sessions</i>		75% demo	Preliminary report
12	17/5 – 21/5	<i>Q and A sessions</i>			
13	24/5 – 28/5	Closing lecture		Final testing	Final report and reflection

Meditations on progress reviews

- Most people got the message loud and clear
 - But not everyone... and not everyone passed.
 - If you missed it: GET STARTED OMG!
- PAFs
 - Mostly people were pretty balanced
 - Some of you were caustic – yikes!

Meditations on progress reviews

That said...

- DO NOT JUST DIVE IN MINDLESSLY
 - You MUST do analysis before you start building
 - You SHOULD get your design checked by a tutor before you start getting parts machined at the end of the semester
- If you show up without adequate analysis in your final report, you *will* fail this course.
 - I have chewed out teams about this, and I am *not* kidding.

Meditations on progress reviews

- There is some confusion about what analysis entails and how to get started
- Analysis is all about asking (and answering) questions:
 - What performance factors do you care about?
 - How will you measure that performance?
 - What possible solutions exist? (Not just a few, but *all* solutions)
 - What numbers can you use to choose between them?
 - How will you guarantee that performance is met?
- *You must justify every decision*

FAQ Roundup

- **OMG! How do we things built?**
 - You can submit your parts to the makerspace to get fabbed – they will make them as they can.
- **What if the workshop gets something being made for us wrong?**
 - We won't charge you for it – just get a revised one made.
- **But... won't we lose time waiting for a revised part to get made?**
 - Yep! Plan accordingly. You should be aware that things like this *can* and do happen in industry. And nobody gives you any credit for it.

Right.

Onwards to PCB design!

“Quick and dirty”

- Printed Circuit Board design is a huge topic and I am in the middle of writing a much longer lecture on all the intricacies of it.
- The complete monstrous shambling thing will probably be 200+ slides long and push the class to the brink of insanity.
 - *The Garhugeian Cometh...*

What is a PCB?

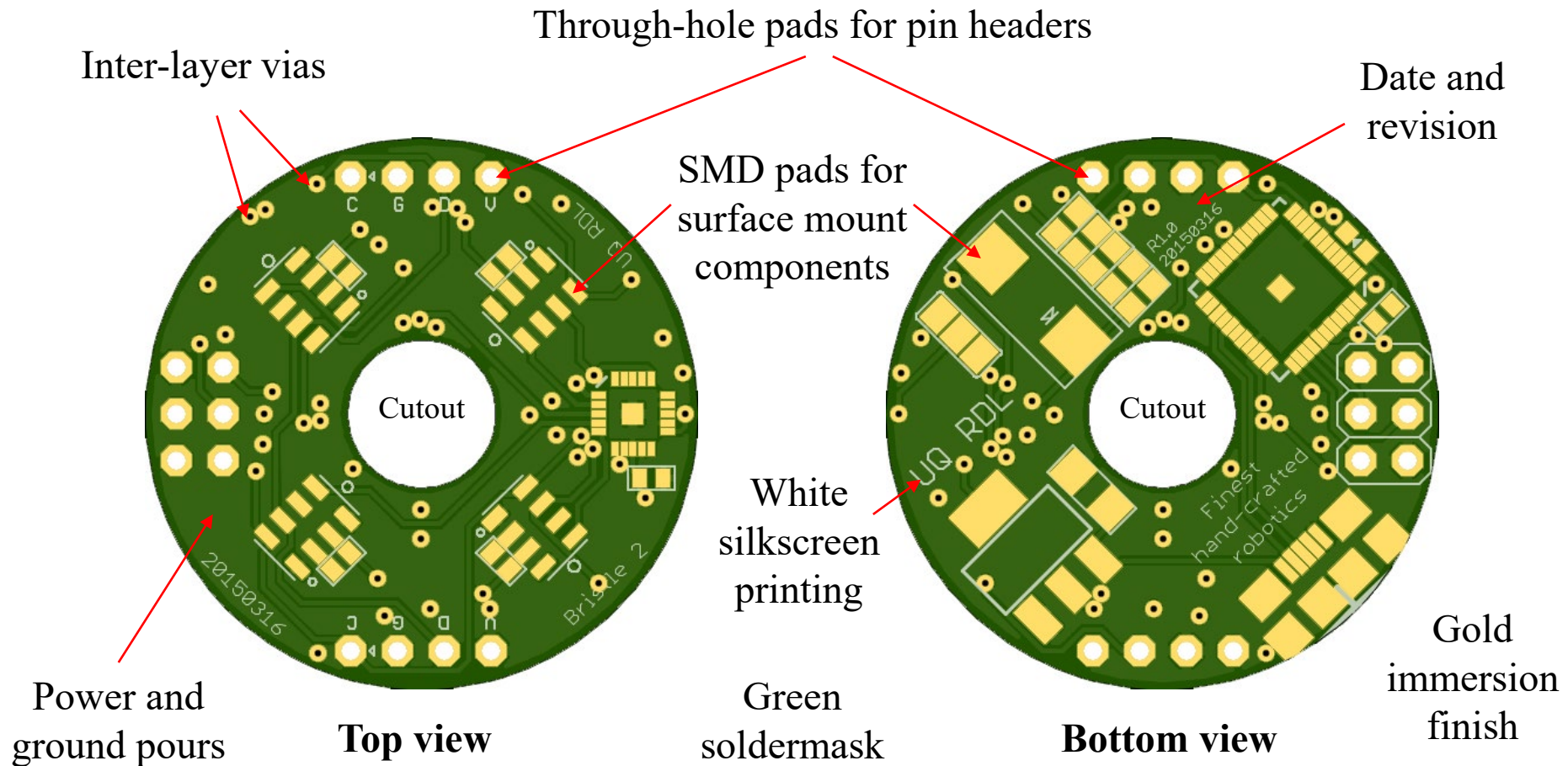
You should know what a PCB is/does.

But what goes into it? And how is it made?

And why would they even call it a “printed circuit board”, anyway?

PCB structure

- Stuff on a PCB – example 4 layer board

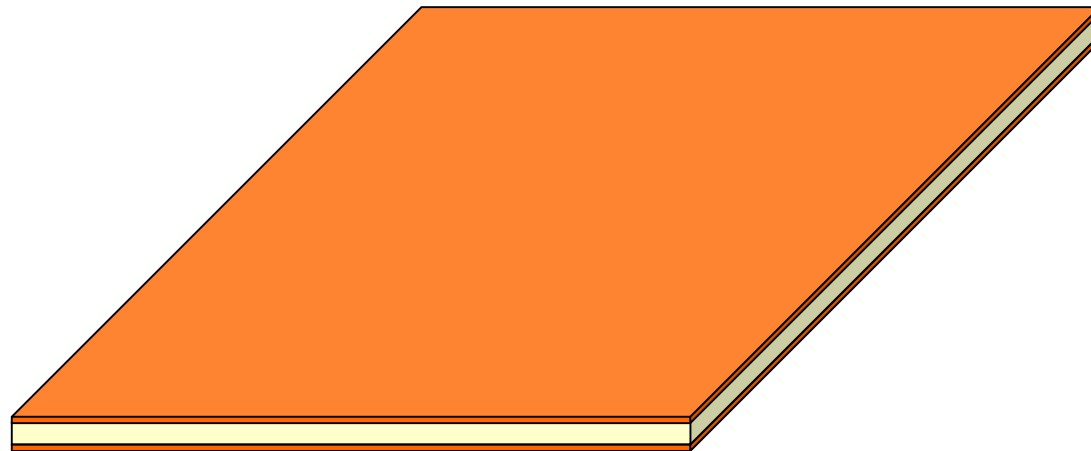


Handy summary of terms

- Layer: Horizontal sheet of conductive metal
- Substrate: Horizontal sheet of rigid insulator
- Soldermask: Resistive surface coating
- Silkscreen: Surface writing and graphics
- Track: Conductive line on a layer
- Pad: Solder point for component mounting
- Via: Vertical conductor for connecting layers
- PTH: Pin Through-Hole; parts with pins, leads, legs
- SMD: Surface Mount Device; flat mounting parts

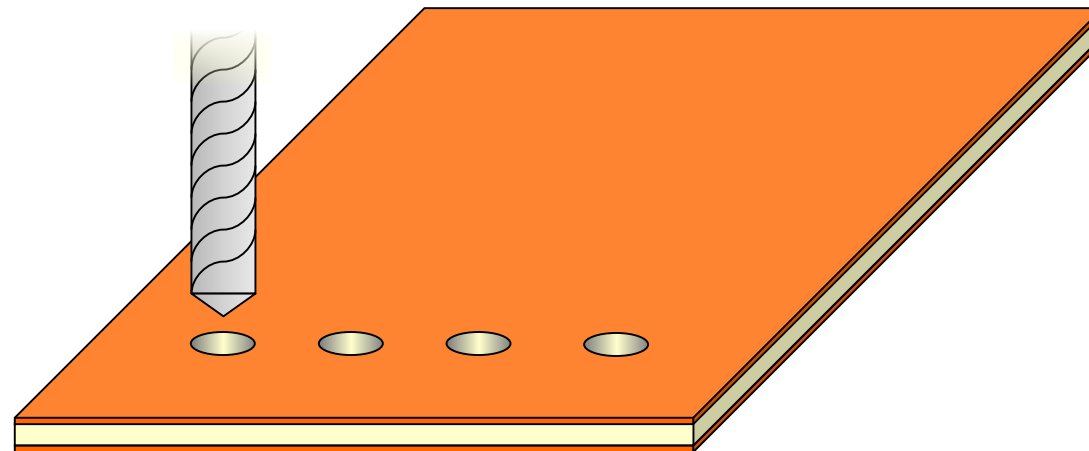
How a PCB is made

- Start with copper-clad prepreg sheet



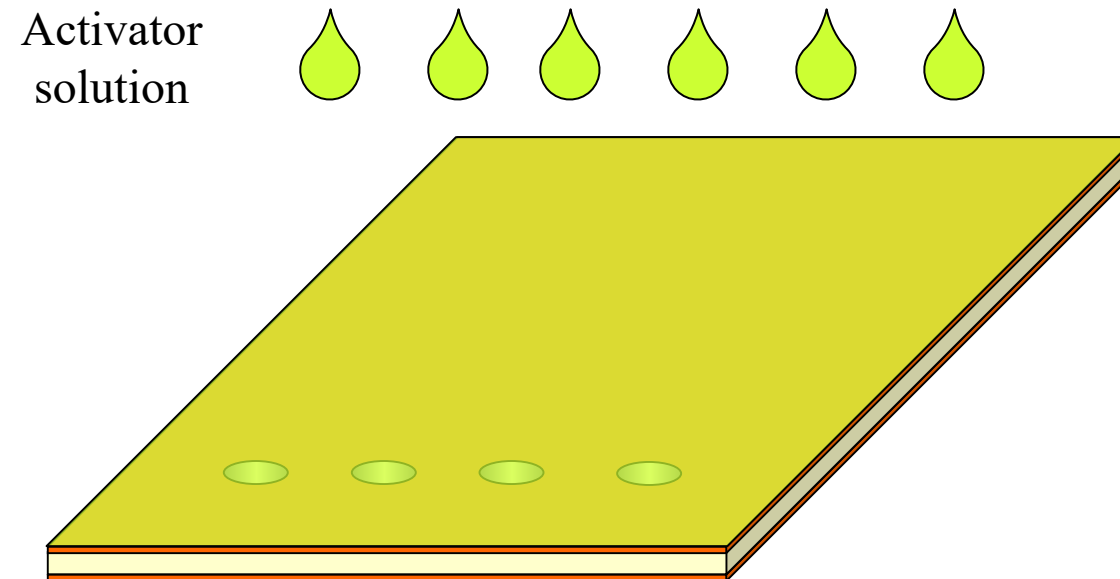
How a PCB is made

- Drill where holes will go



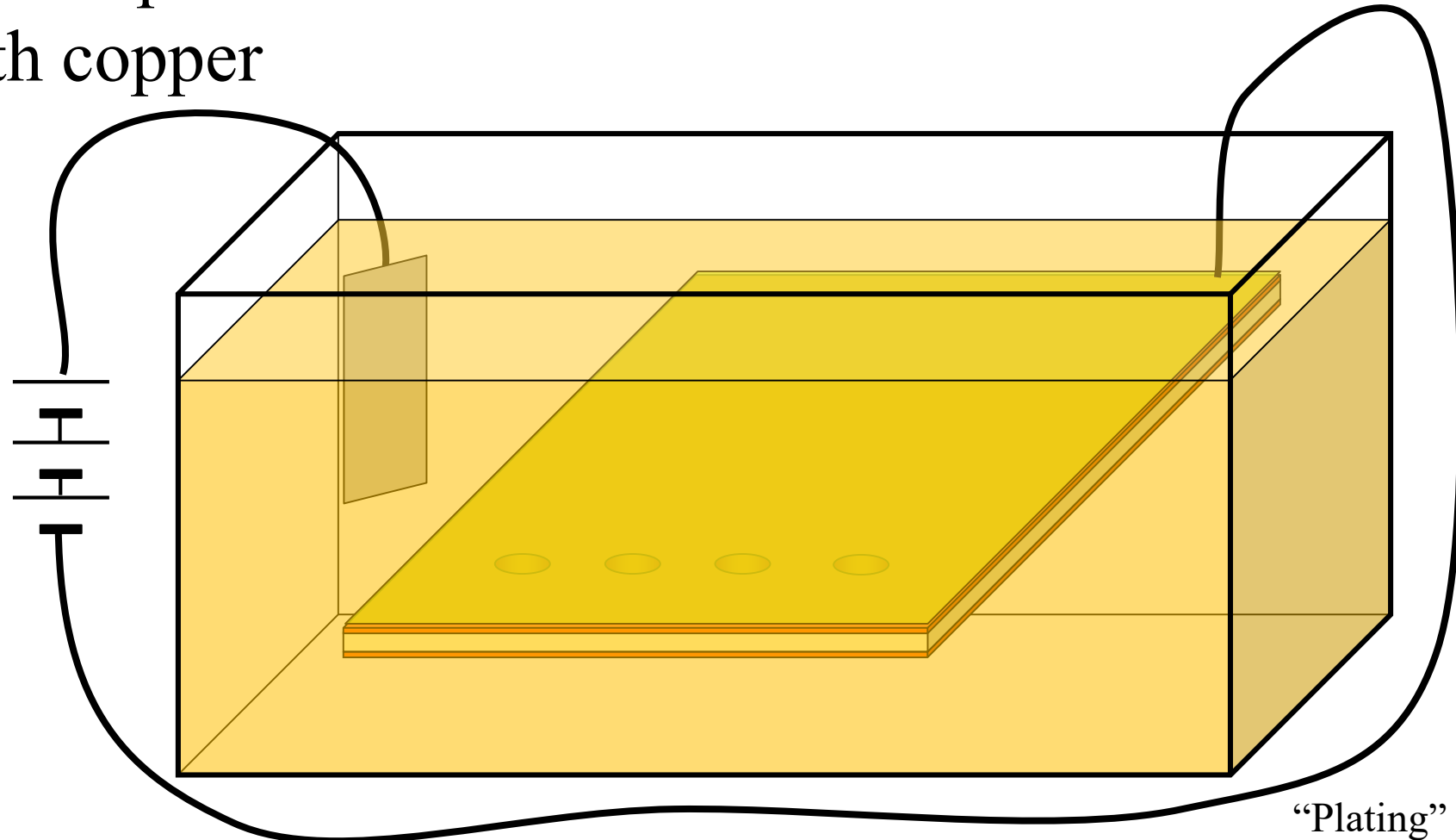
How a PCB is made

- Wash the board with an electrochemical activator solution



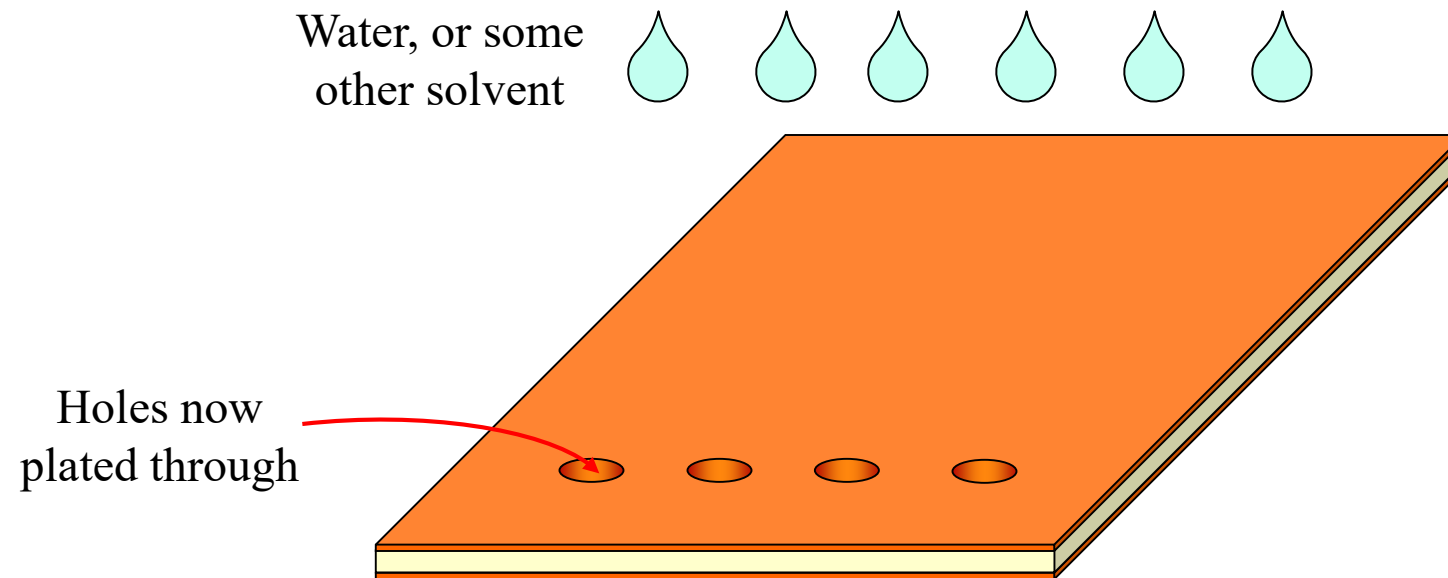
How a PCB is made

- PCB is placed in an electrochemical bath and electroplated with copper



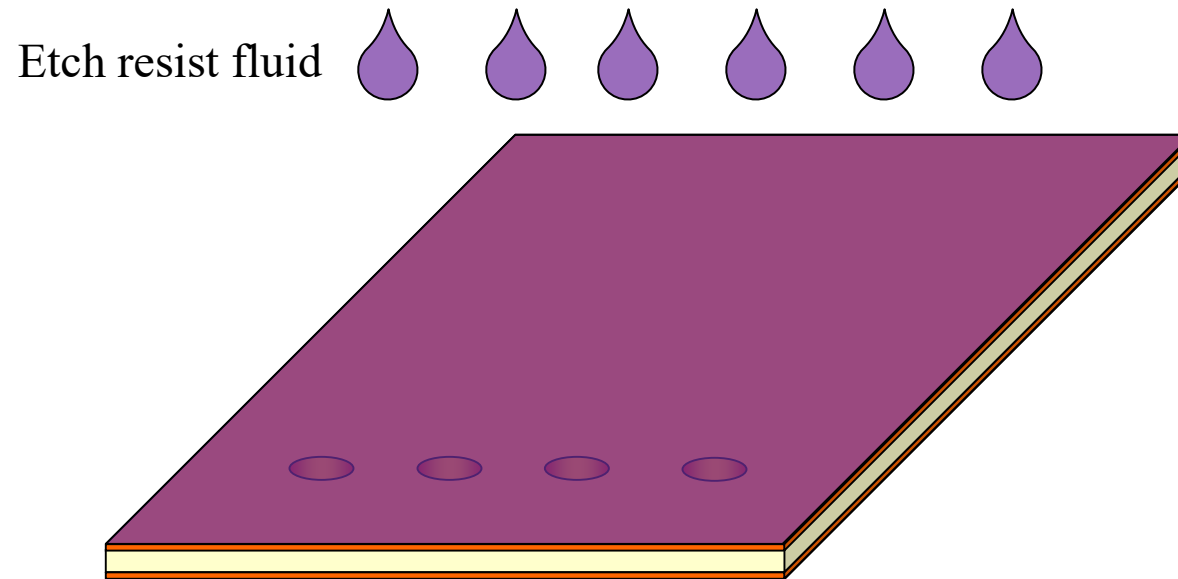
How a PCB is made

- PCB is removed from tank and washed



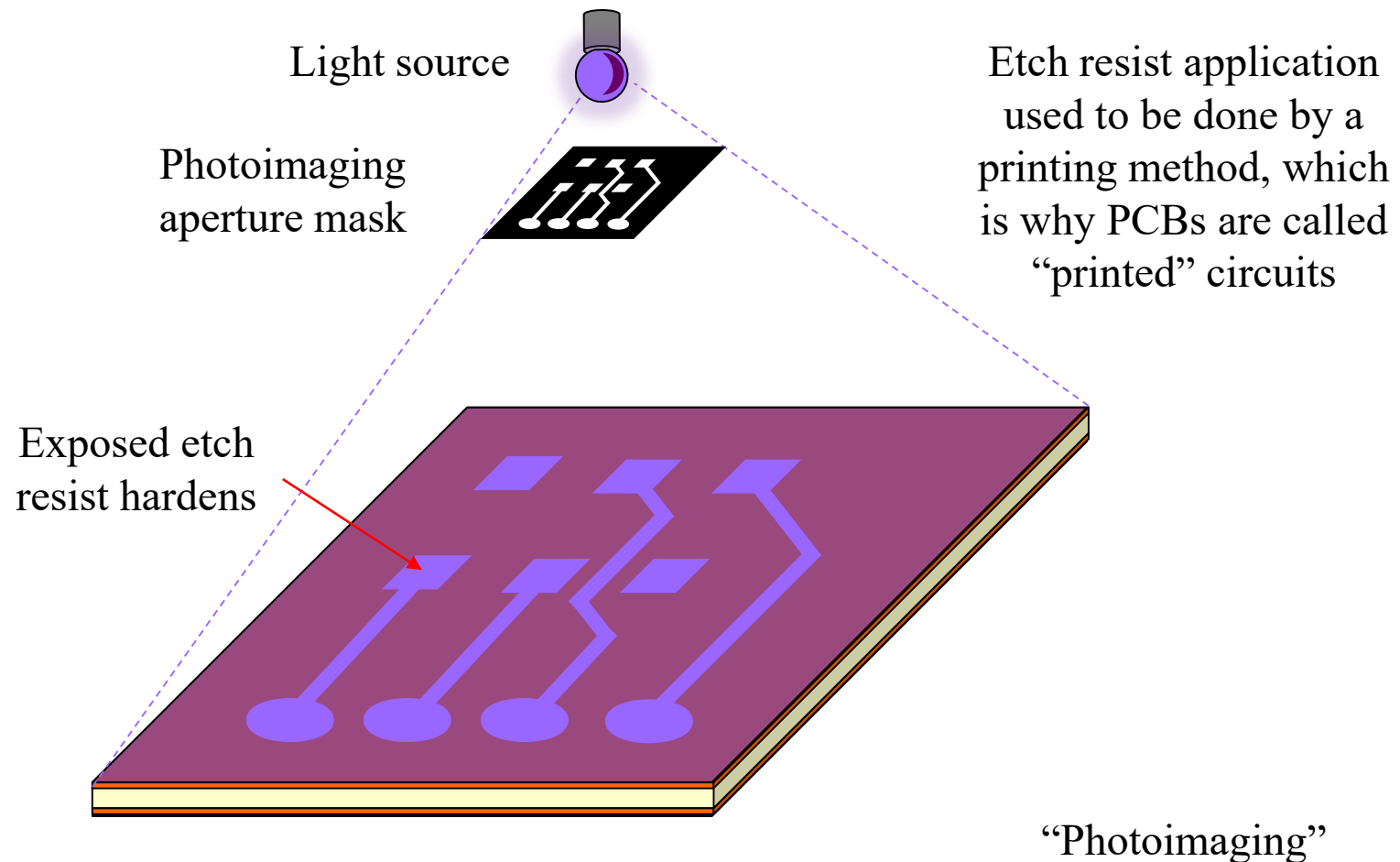
How a PCB is made

- Coat with photo-curing etch resist



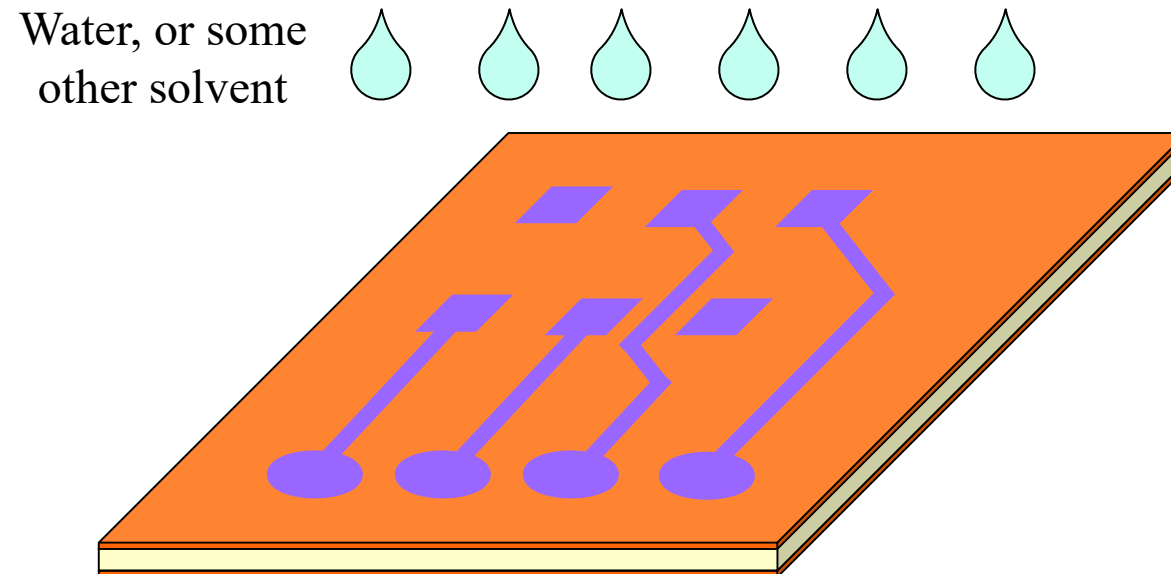
How a PCB is made

- Selectively expose to light (one or both sides)



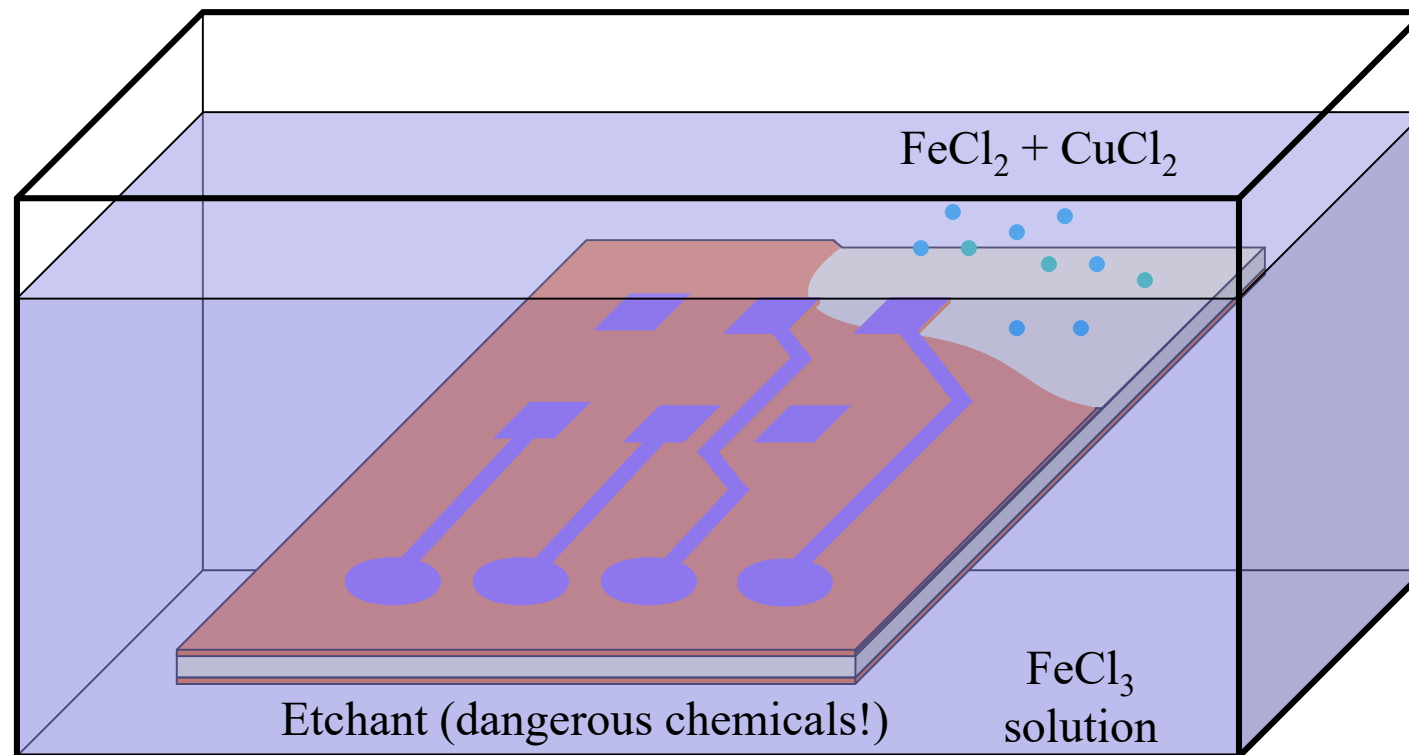
How a PCB is made

- Unhardened etch-resist is washed away, exposing uncoated copper



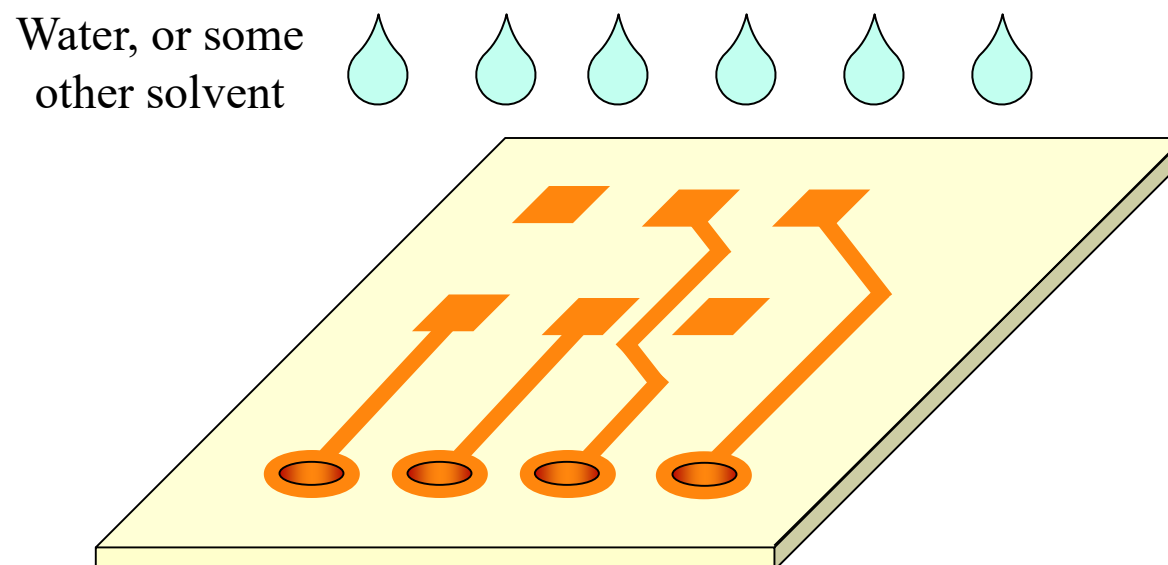
How a PCB is made

- PCB is placed in a chemical bath of etchant that reacts to dissolve exposed copper



How a PCB is made

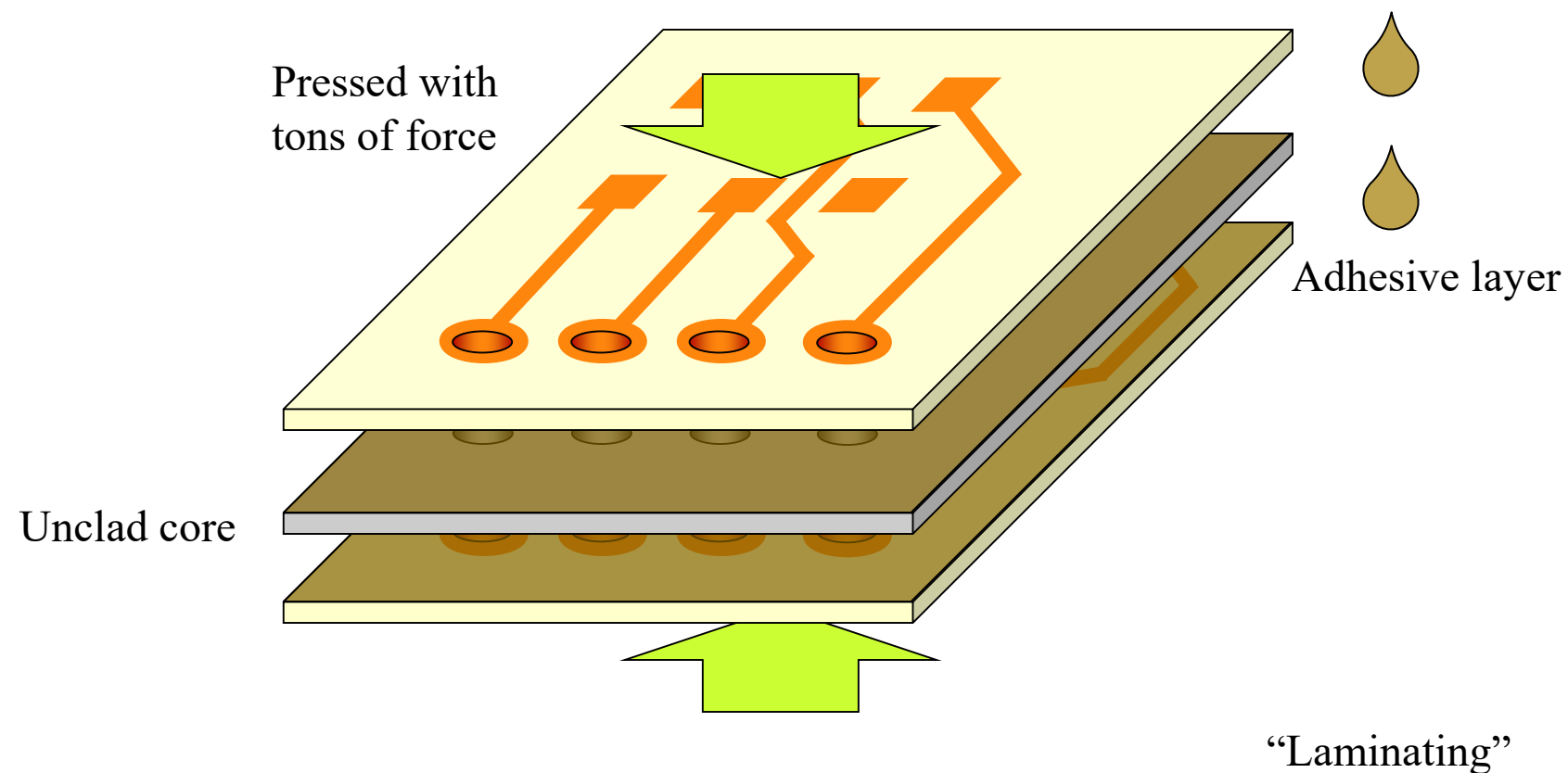
- Removed from etchant, washed, and the etch-resist is removed



Simple single-layer boards could stop here

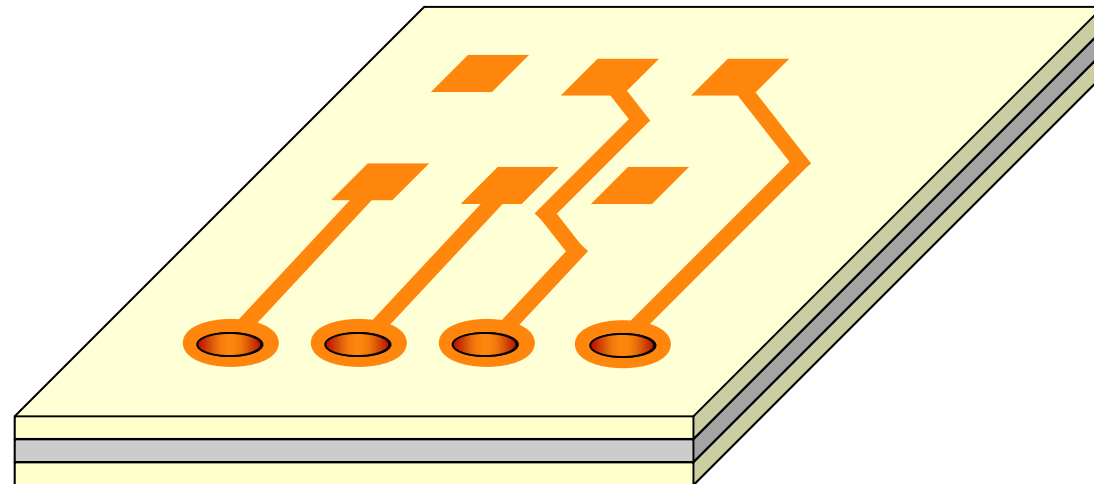
How a PCB is made

- Multilayer board layers are coated with glue, aligned and then pressed together



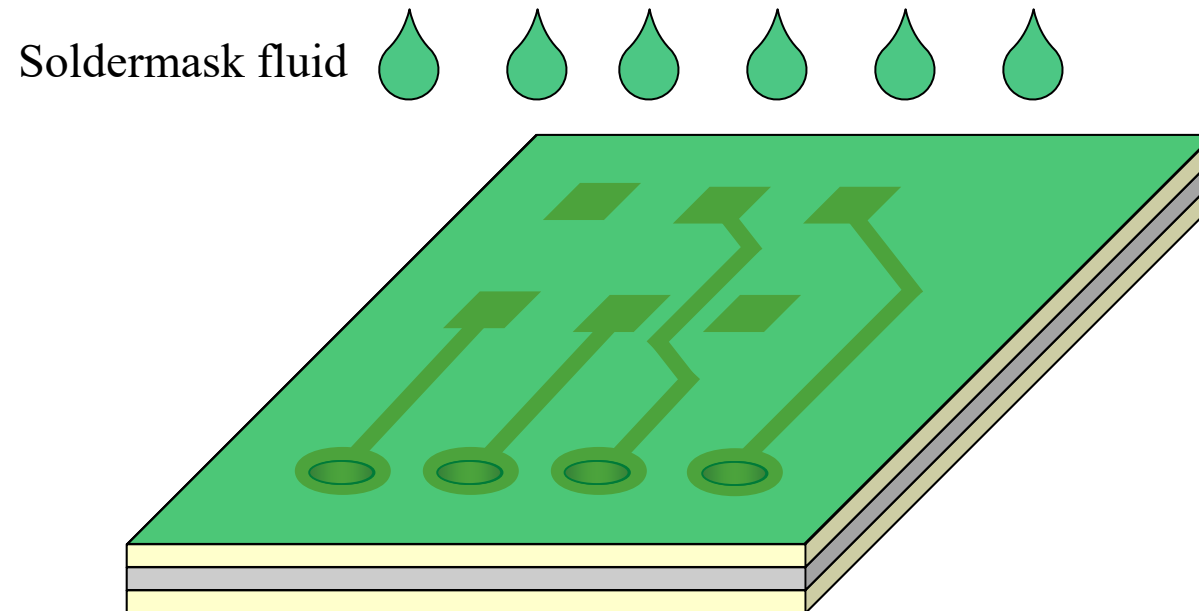
How a PCB is made

- The board stack is allowed to cure under pressure (may require application of heat)



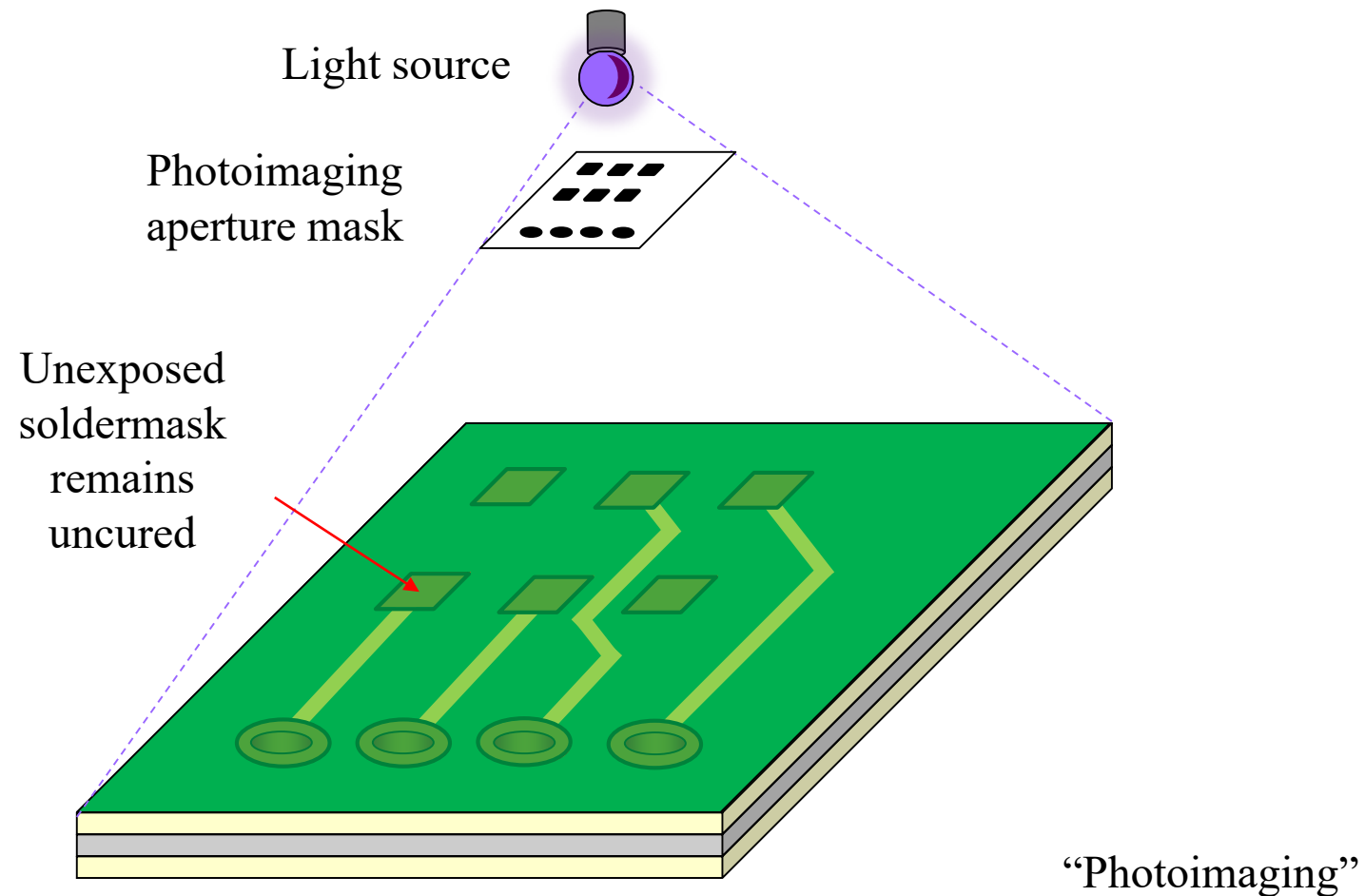
How a PCB is made

- The board is coated with liquid soldermask



How a PCB is made

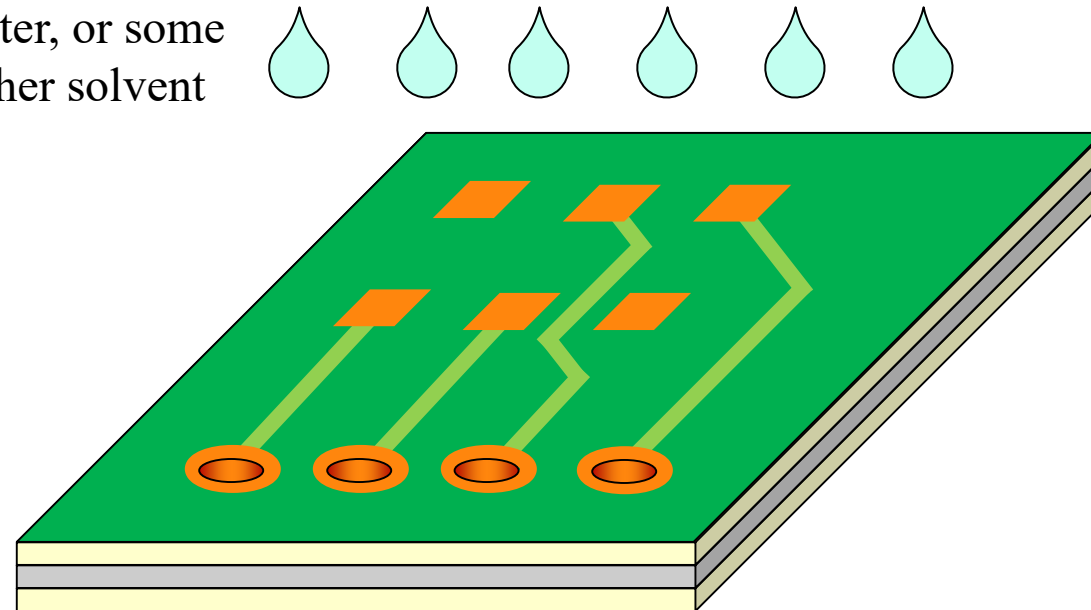
- Selectively expose to light (one or both sides)



How a PCB is made

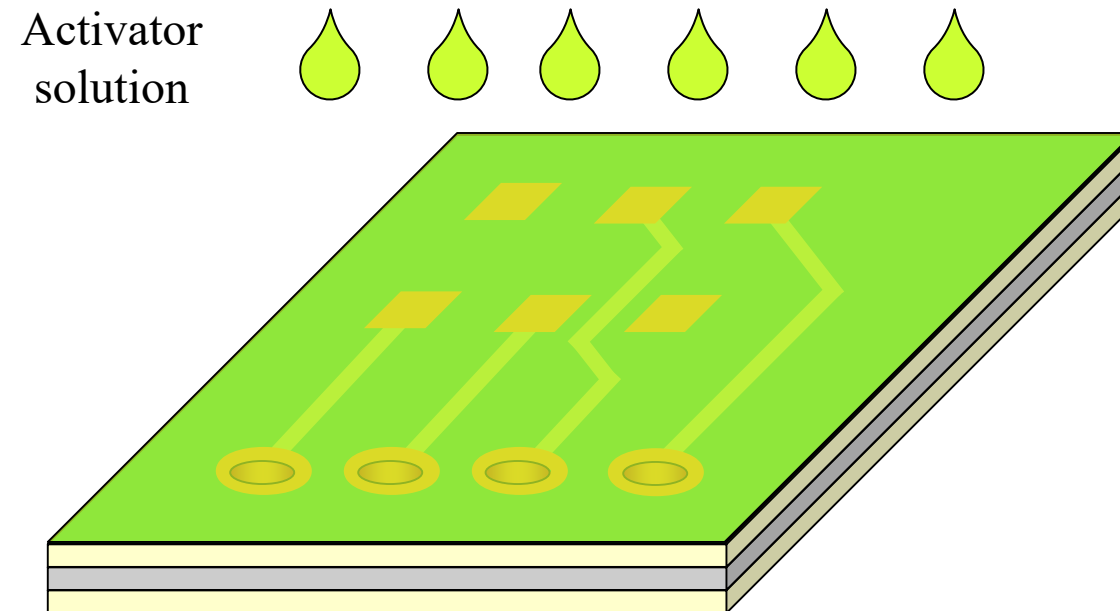
- Wash uncured soldermask away, exposing copper pads, vias and holes

Water, or some
other solvent



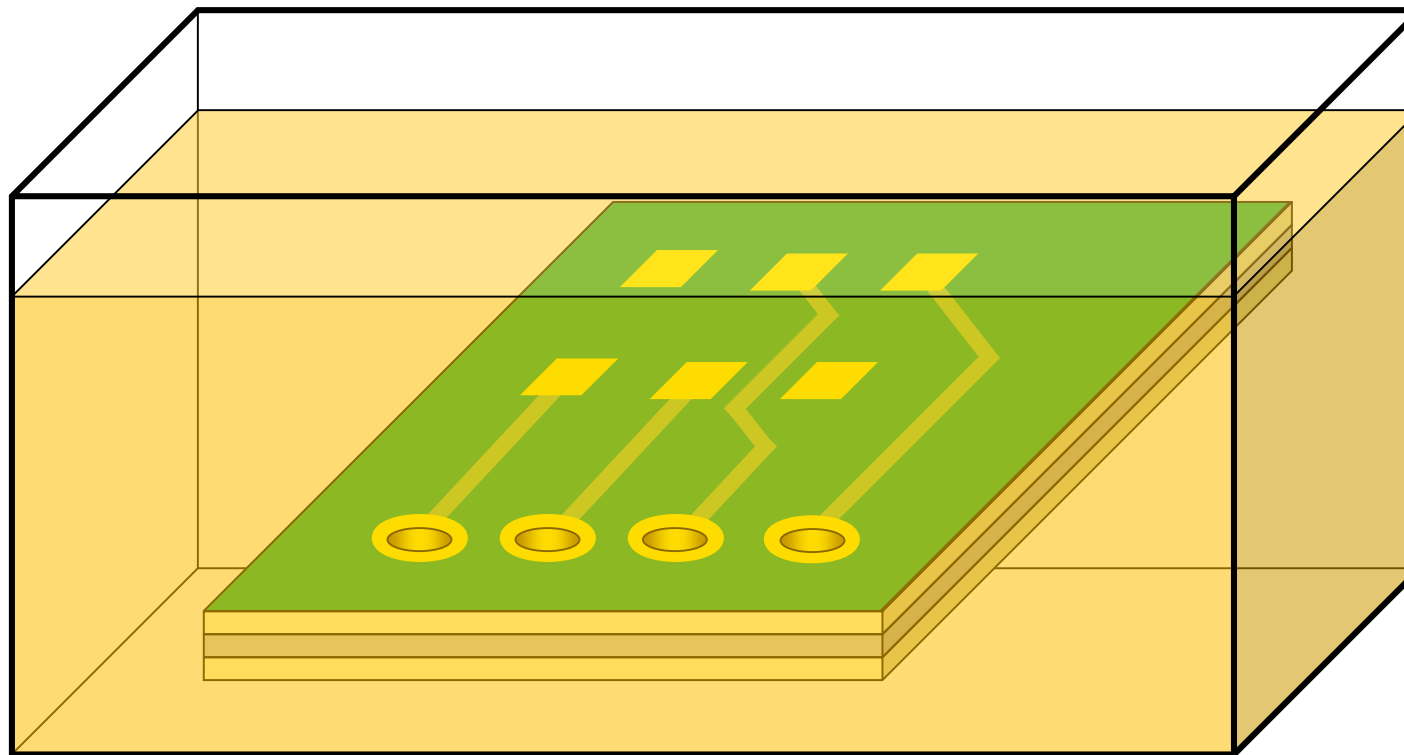
How a PCB is made

- Wash the board with an electrochemical activator solution



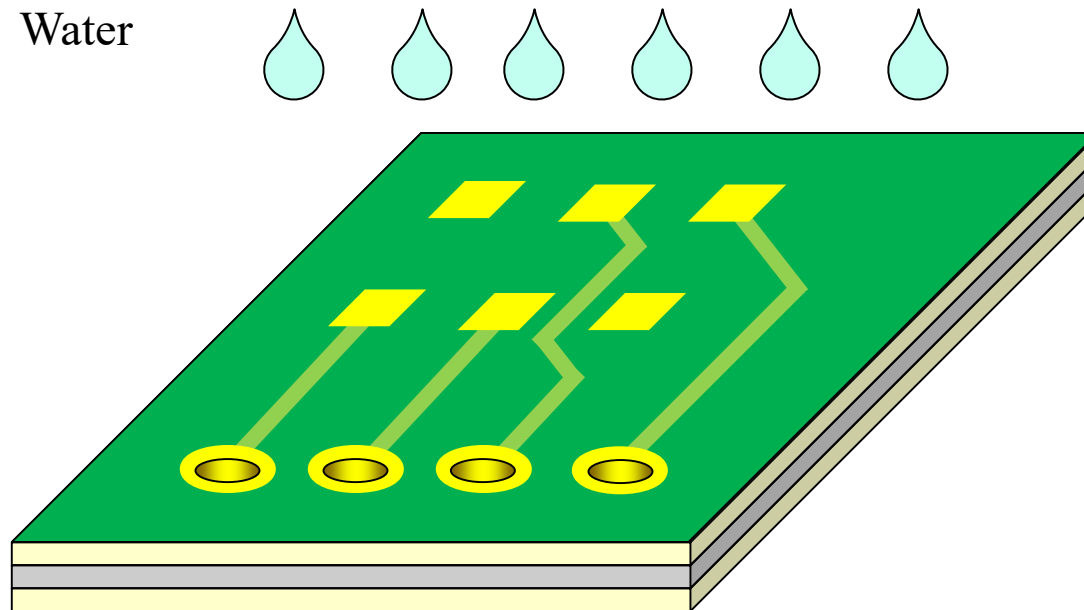
How a PCB is made

- PCB is placed in a chemical bath and plated with nickel, gold or other metals



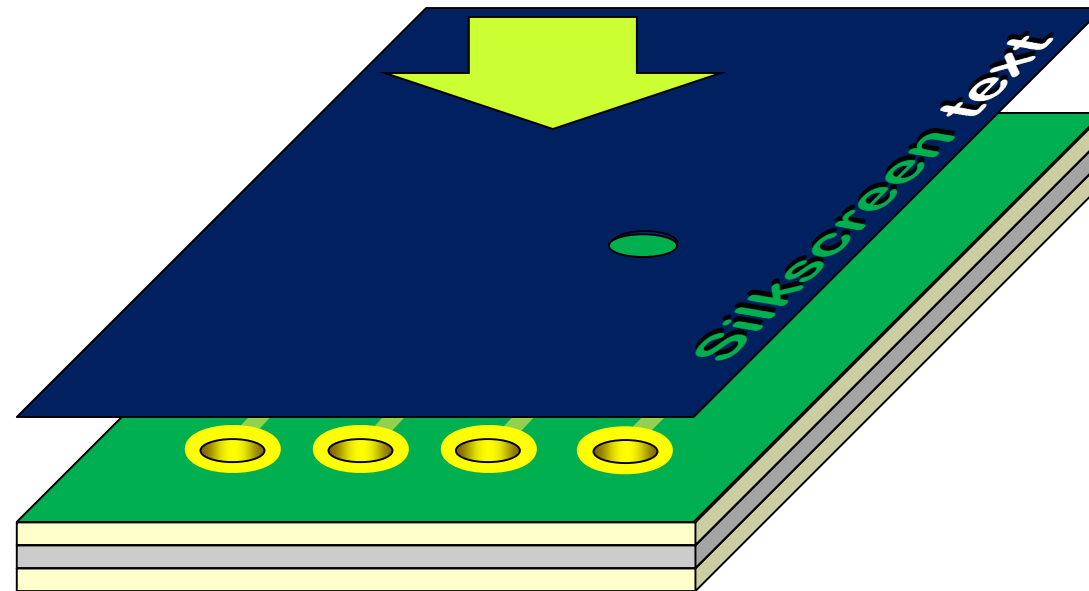
How a PCB is made

- PCB is washed clean of chemicals



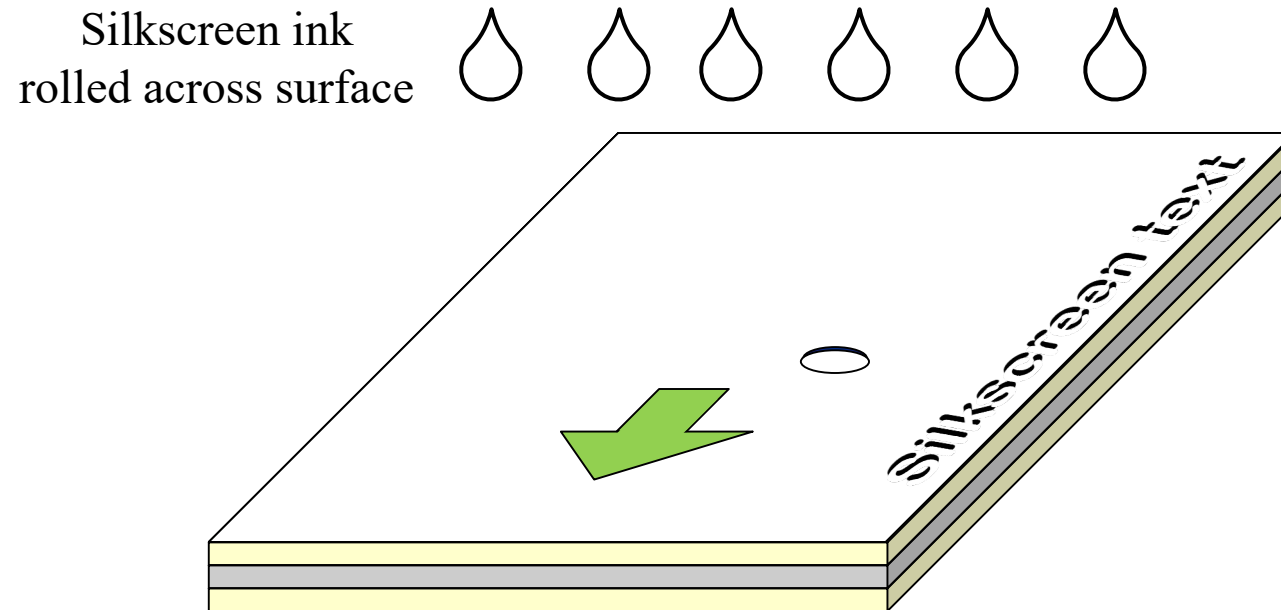
How a PCB is made

- Silkscreen stencil is laid on; made using a photo-cured emulsion



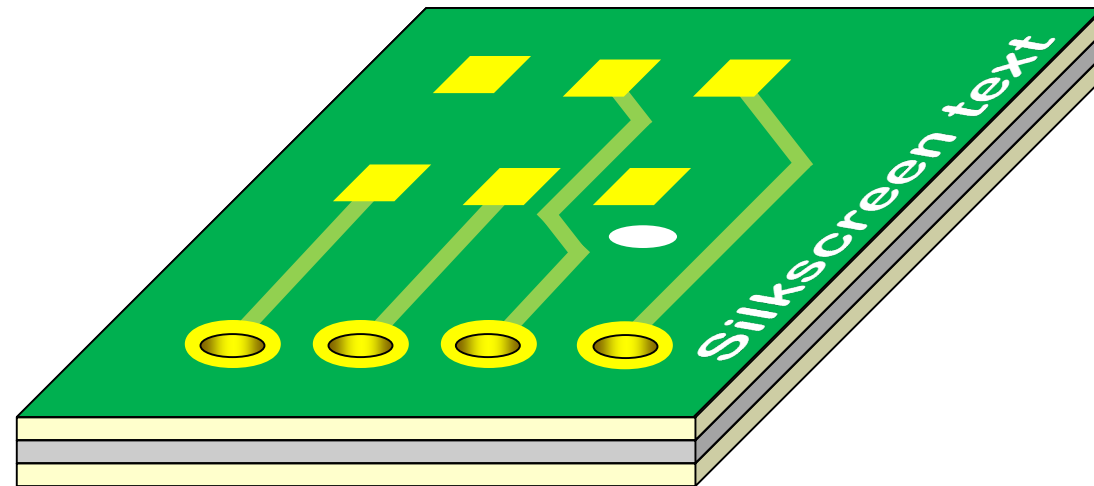
How a PCB is made

- Ink is applied to the stencil, filling the voids



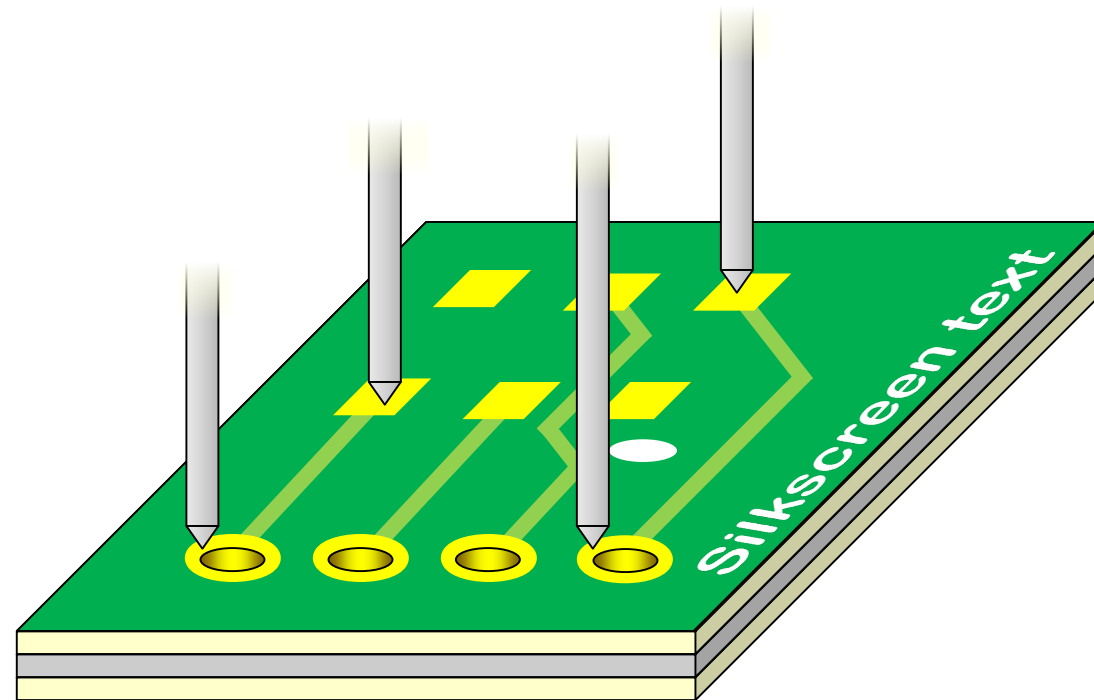
How a PCB is made

- Silkscreen stencil is removed and ink allowed to dry



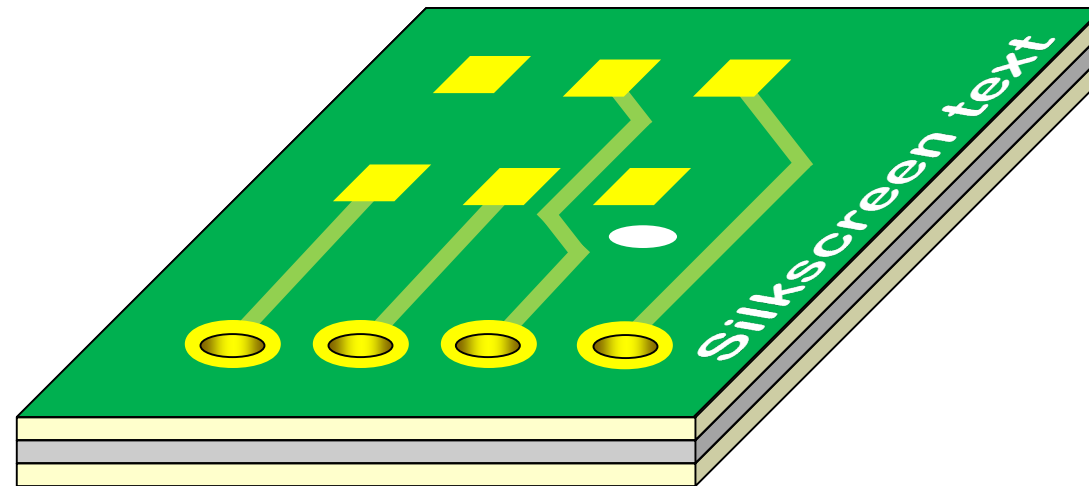
How a PCB is made

- Finally, the electrical connections are tested for continuity and shorts



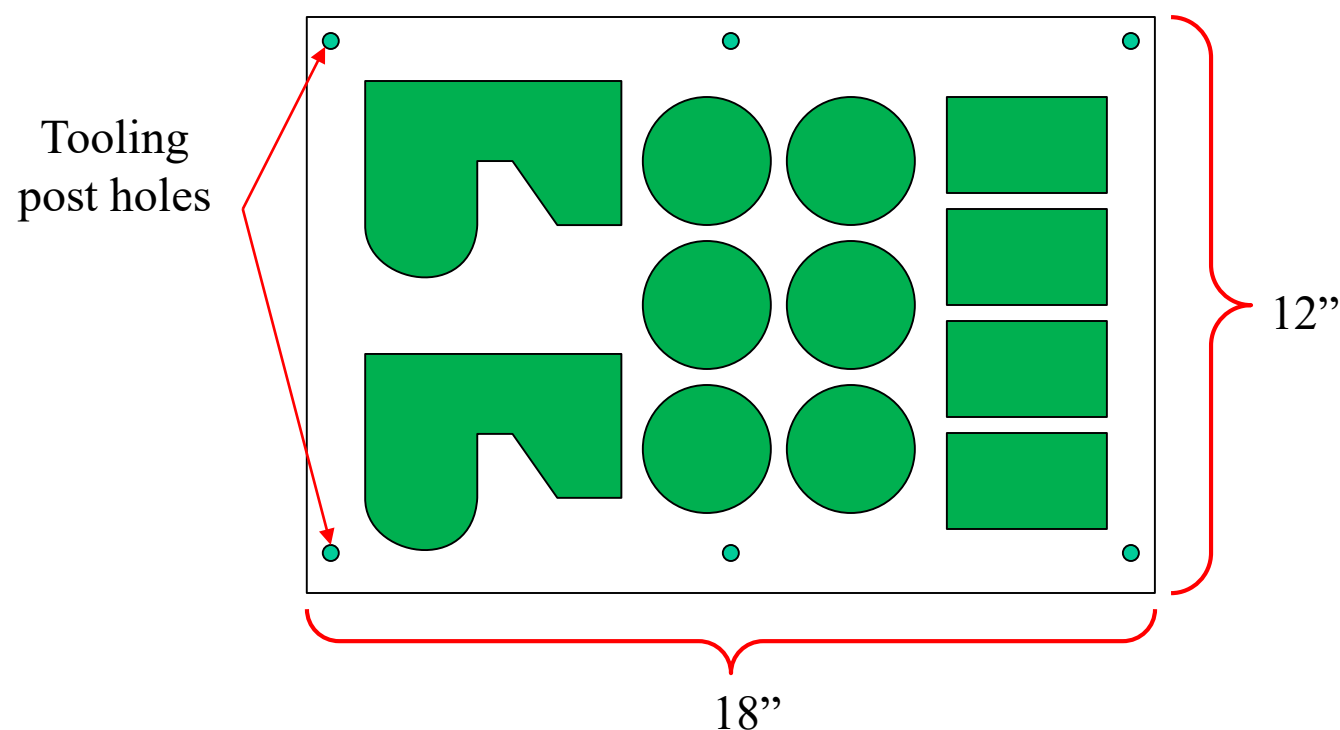
How a PCB is made

- Boards that pass all tests are complete



Panelisation

- A lot of work goes into each board!
- Virtually all boards are made in panels, with multiple units fabricated together



Critical design parameters

Stuff to know about your design:

- Thickness of copper layers and total lay-up
- Board material (typically FR4)
- Minimum track width and spacing
 - How thick is your smallest track? How much space between copper with different nets?
- Minimum drill diameter and via resting
- Clearance between copper and board edge

Common design specs

Spec	Easy	Typical	Hard
Layer	1-2	4	8+
Tracks	0.4 mm (16 mil)	0.2 mm (8 mil)	0.1 mm (4 mil)
Spacing	0.4 mm (16 mil)	0.2 mm (8 mil)	0.1 mm (4 mil)
Drills	0.6 mm (24 mil)	0.4 mm (16 mil)	0.3 mm (12 mil)
Annular ring	0.4 mm (16 mil)	0.2 mm (8 mil)	0.1 mm (4 mil)
Board thickness		1.6 mm (63 mil)	0.8 mm (63 mil)
Copper thickness		35 μm (1 Oz)	70 μm (2 Oz)
Board material		FR4	RF substrates

If your stack up is unusual, you'll need to specify it in detail – sometimes you'll even require a technical drawing just so there is no misunderstanding about what you want.

What specs do I need?

- It's hard to know what you need until you're actually layout out your design
 - But it's good to start laying out with close to the right size – can usually guesstimate how challenging your board will be to route

Generally, the more complex and cramped your board, the tighter your specs will be

On that note...

What stuff do you actually have to provide
the when you're submitting a PCB?

Anatomy of a PCB submission

- Spec sheet
- Mechanical layer (outline)
- Copper layers
- Stop layers (soldermask)
- Silkscreens
- Cream layers (solder paste stencil)
- Part origins
- Bill of materials (BOM)

Spec sheet

Part number: uq_samara_05

Rev: 1

Quantity: 10 min

Time Required: Fastest turnaround

Number of Layers: 4

Material: FR4

Board Thickness: <1 mm

Line width (min): 0.2mm

Line width (norm): 0.2mm

Line Spacing (min): 0.2mm

Line Spacing (norm): 0.2mm

Copper thickness: 35 um

Soldermask color: Any

Soldermask type: Photoimageable

Silkscreen color: White

Silkscreen sides: One side

File Type: Gerber

Gerber Information

Character Set: ASCII

Drill file: Excellon

Files:

uq_samara_05.cmp

uq_samara_05.102

uq_samara_05.103

uq_samara_05.sol

uq_samara_05.stc

uq_samara_05.sts

uq_samara_05.plc

uq_samara_05.pls

uq_samara_05.dri

Layer 1 - Top Signal

Layer 2 - Signal Layer

Layer 3 - Signal Layer

Layer 4 - Bottom Signal

Top soldermask

Bottom soldermask

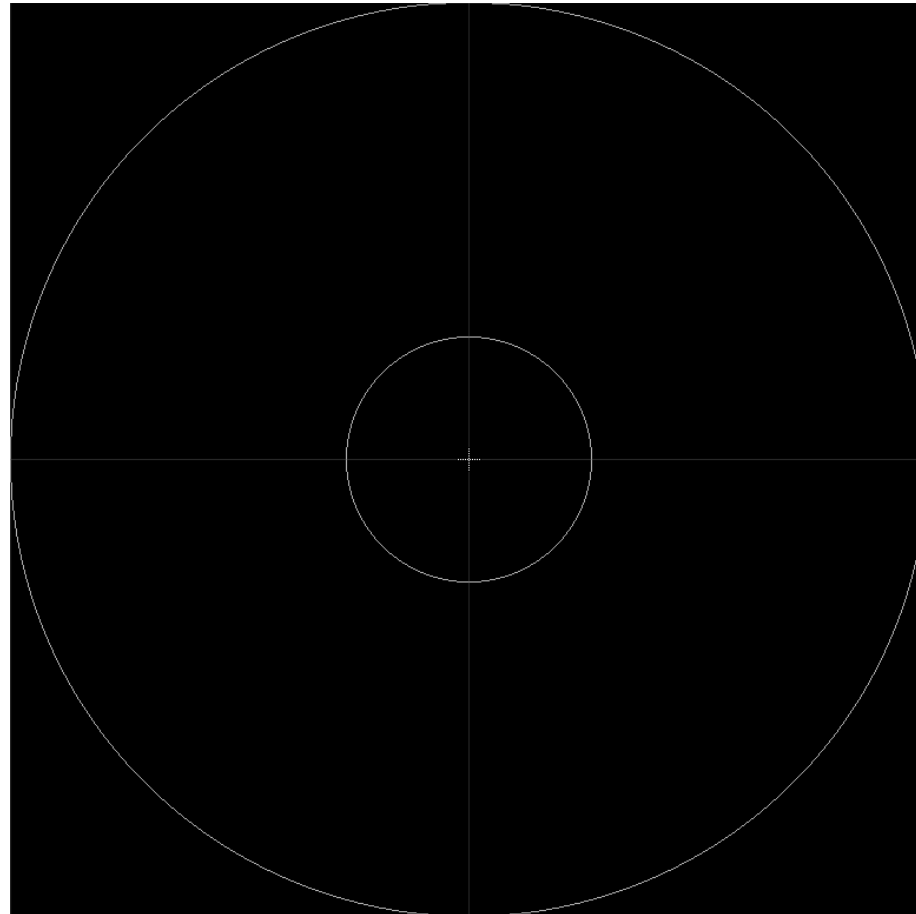
Top silkscreen

Bottom silkscreen (empty)

Drill file

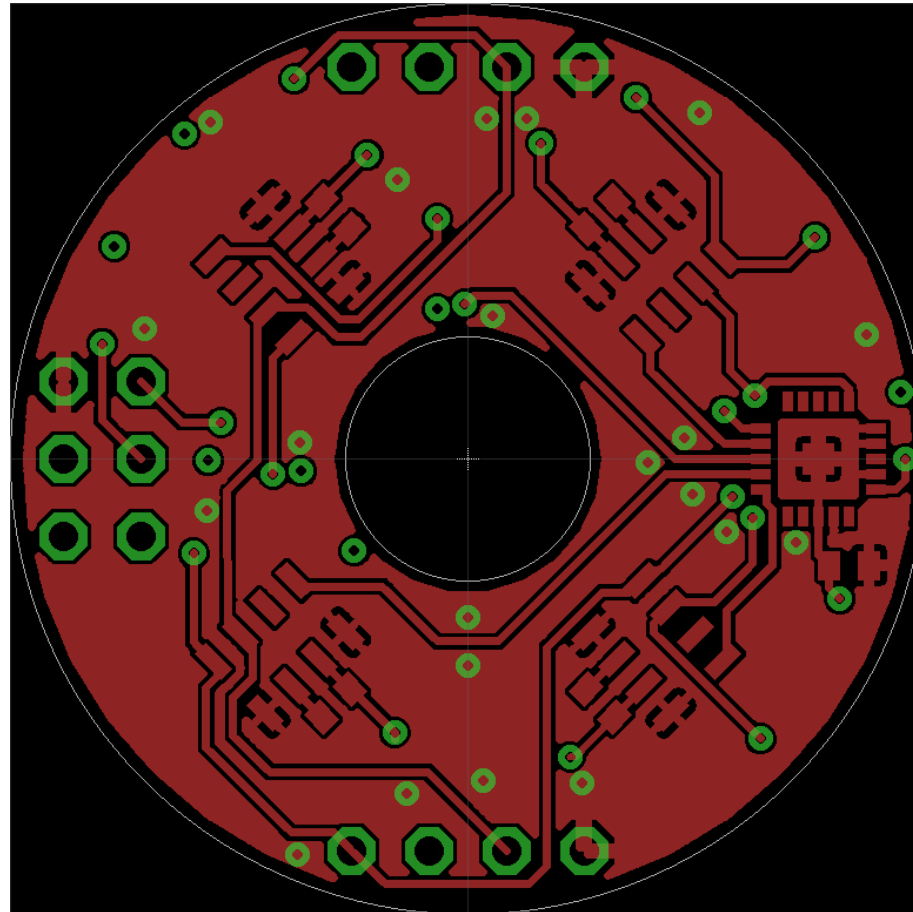
Mechanical layer

- Boring simple drawing of the board outline



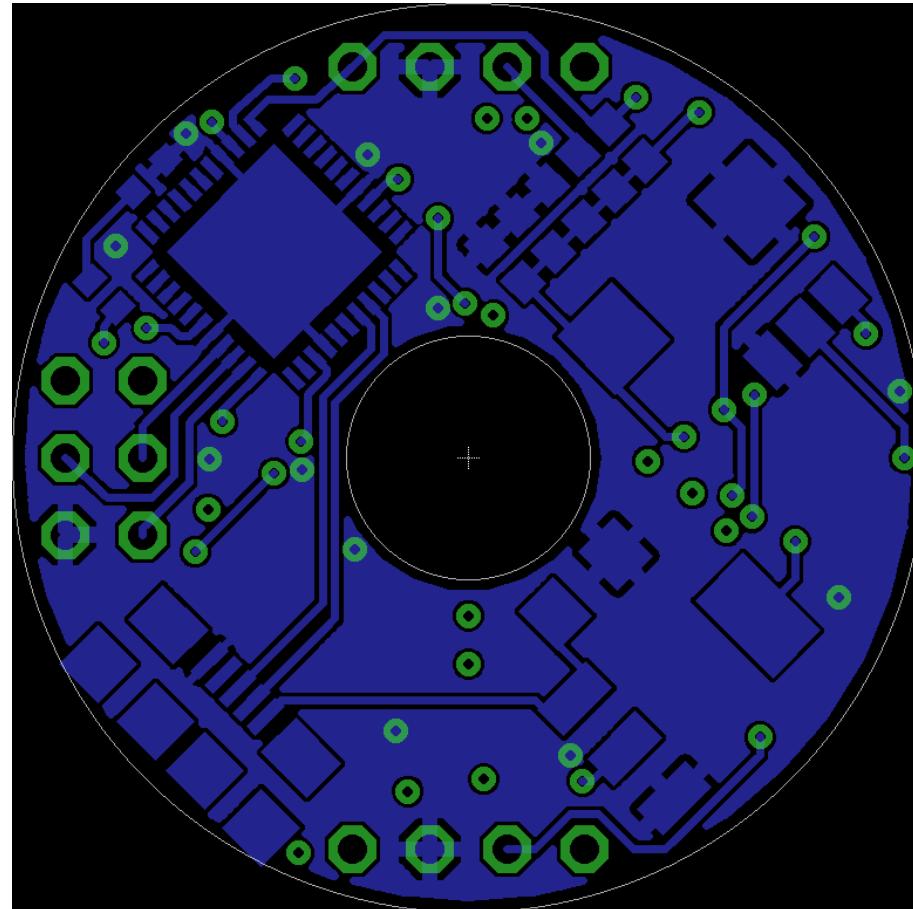
Top layer

- Aka “component side” – tracks plus pads, vias



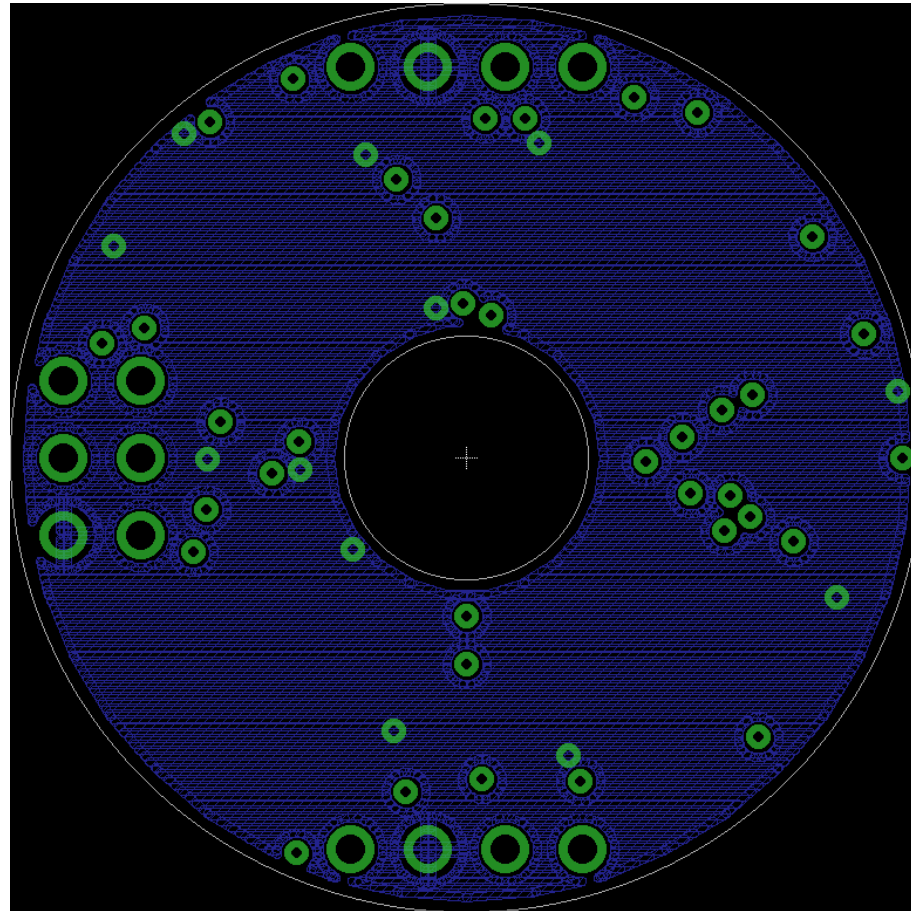
Bottom layer

- Aka “solder side” – tracks plus pads, vias



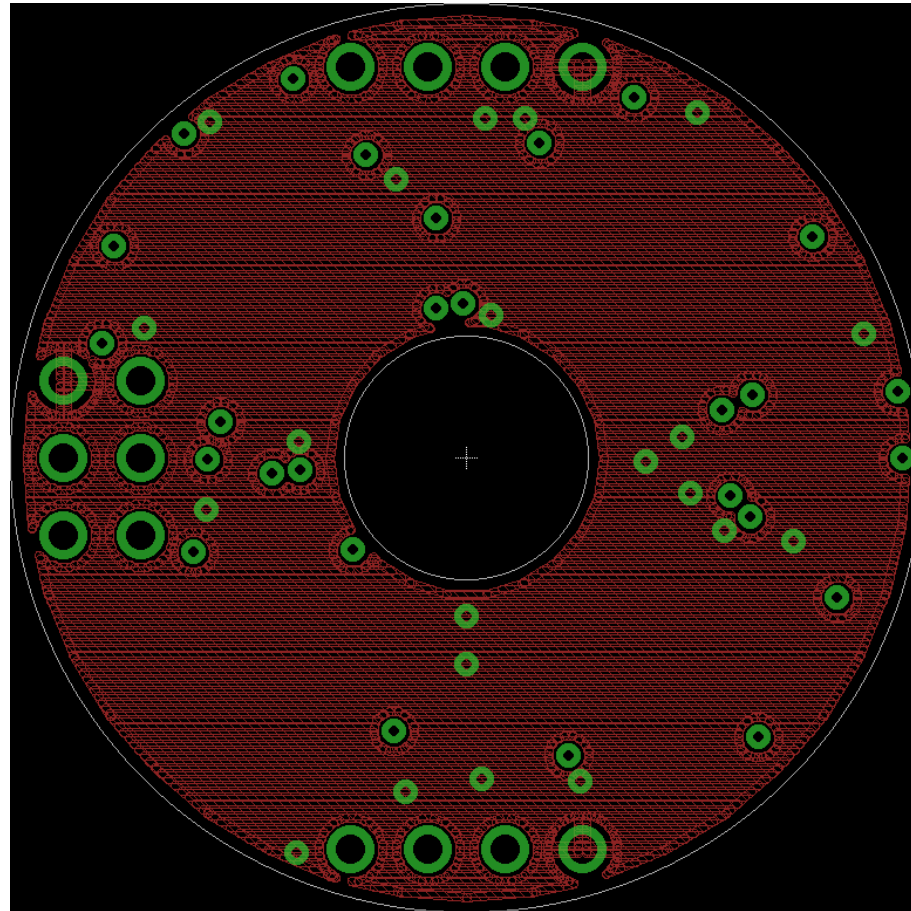
Inner layer 1

- Middle ground plane



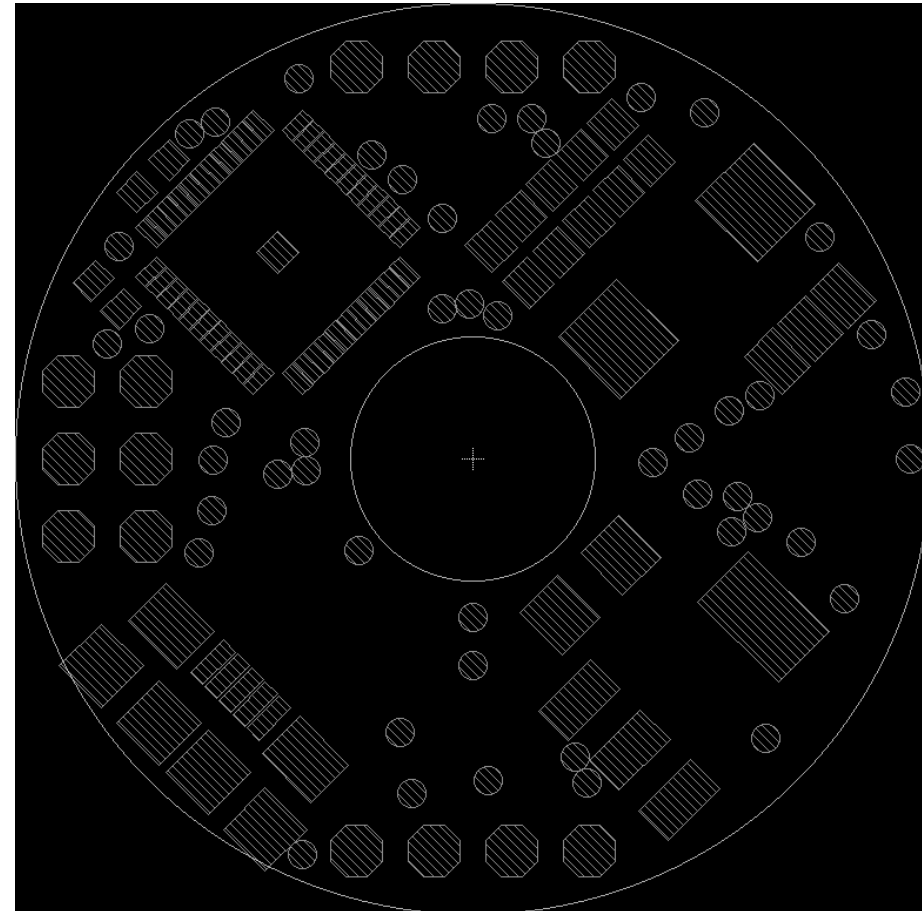
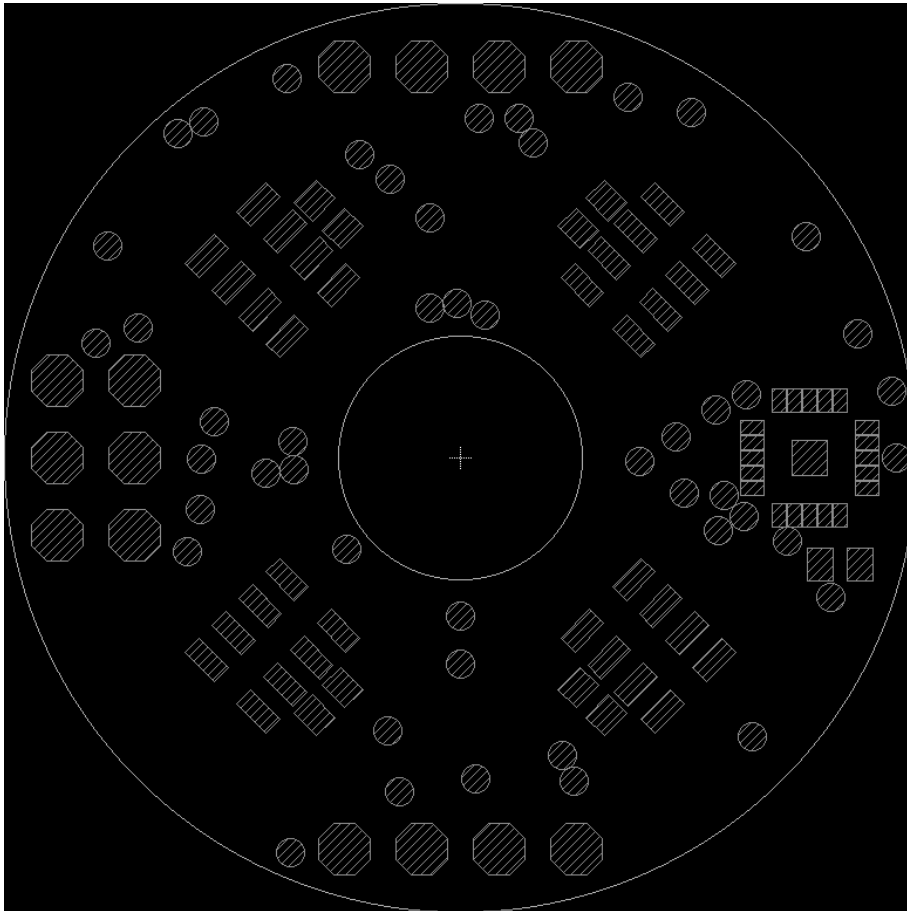
Inner layer 2

- Middle power plane



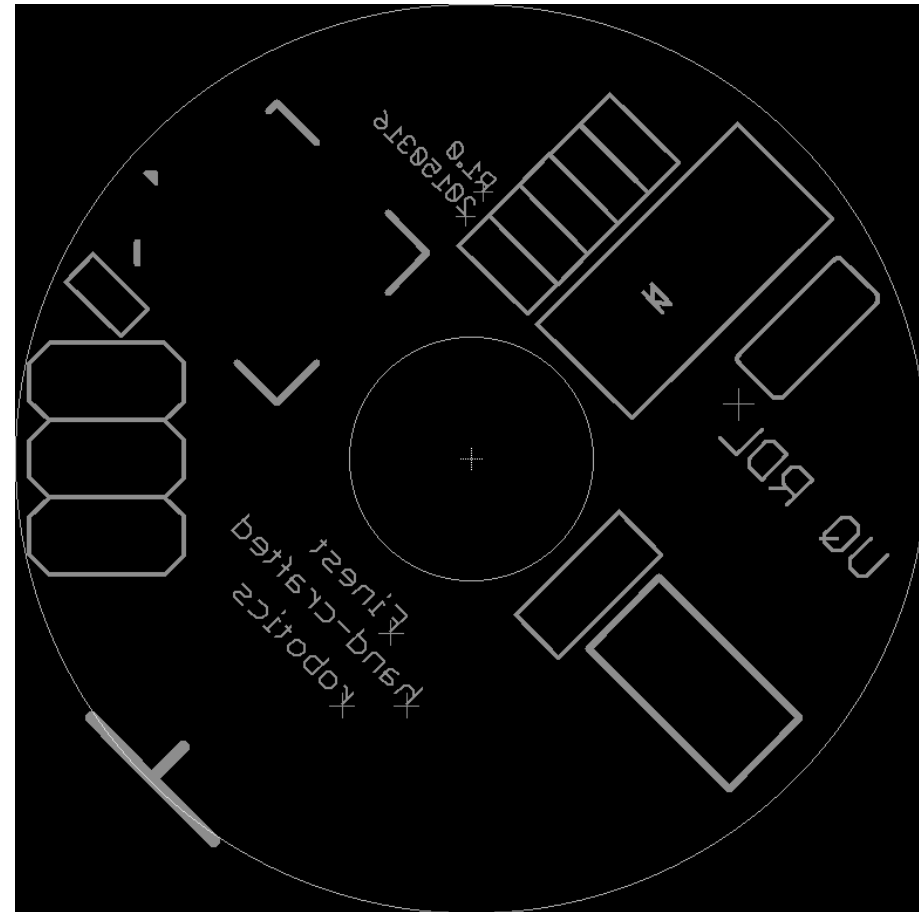
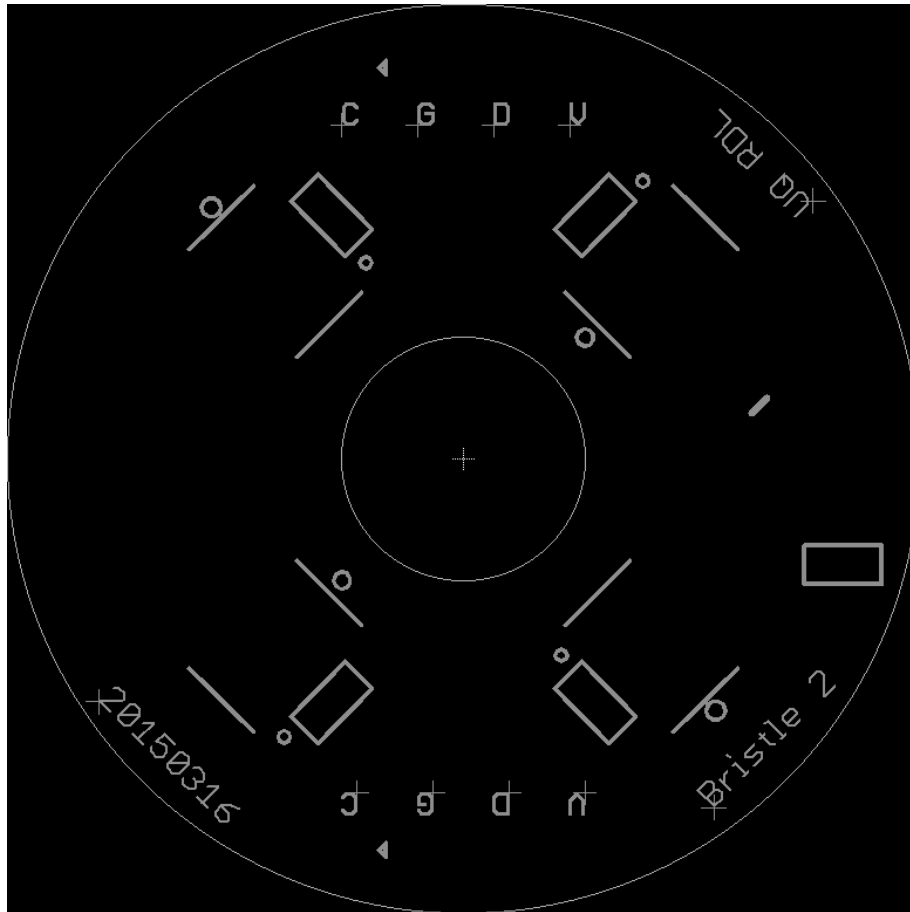
Top and bottom stop layers

- Soldermask apertures – places without mask



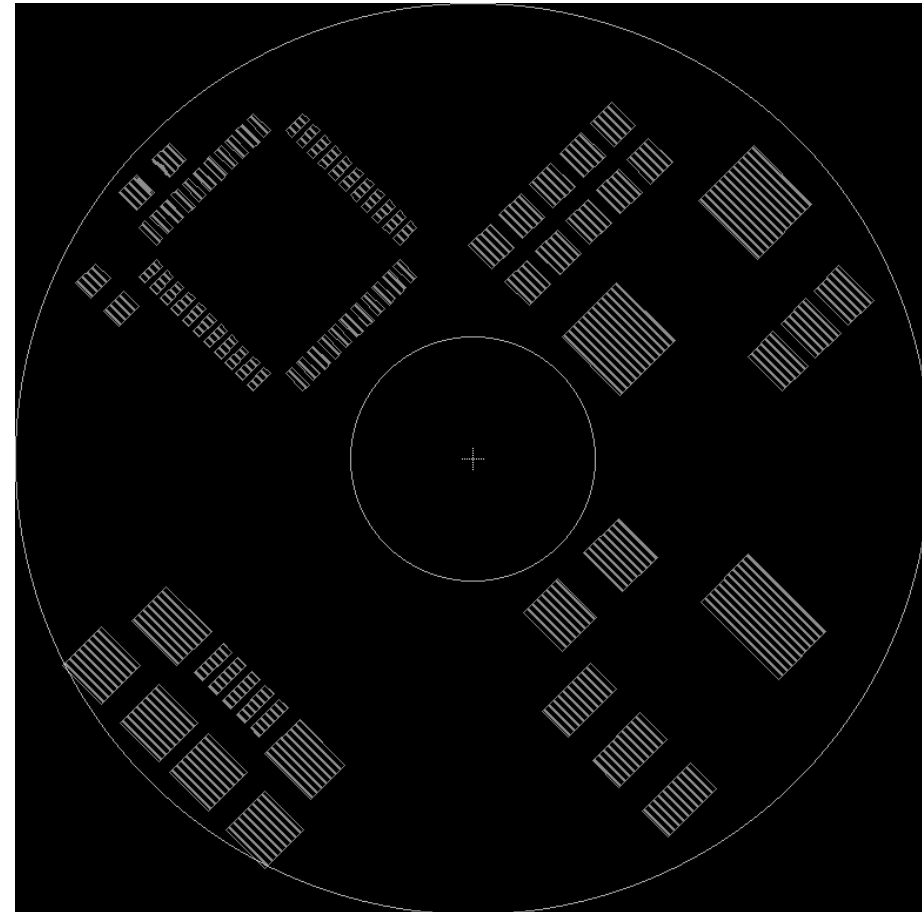
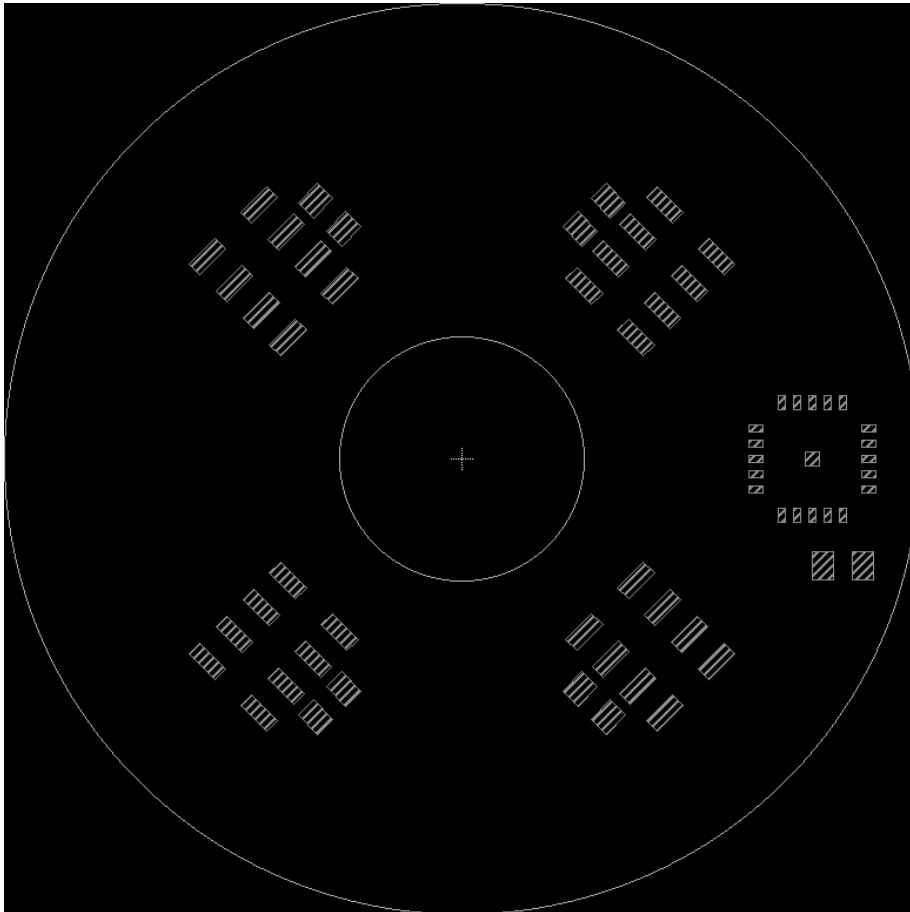
Top and bottom silkscreens

- Text and annotations (reversed on bottom)



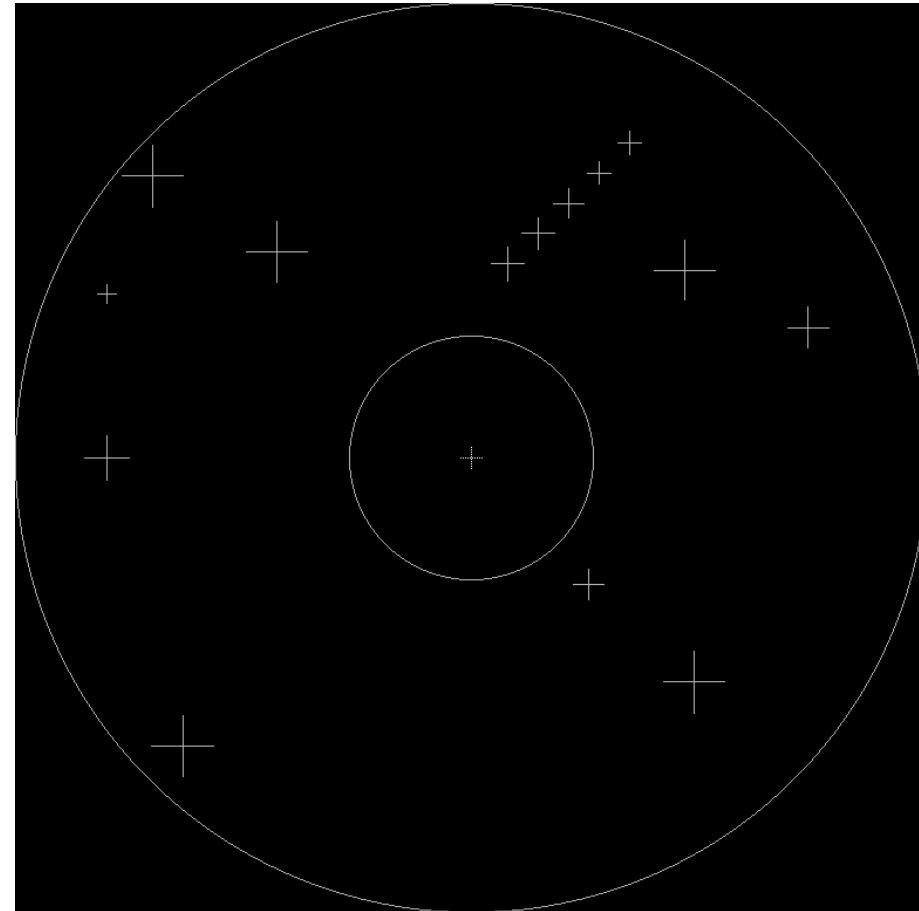
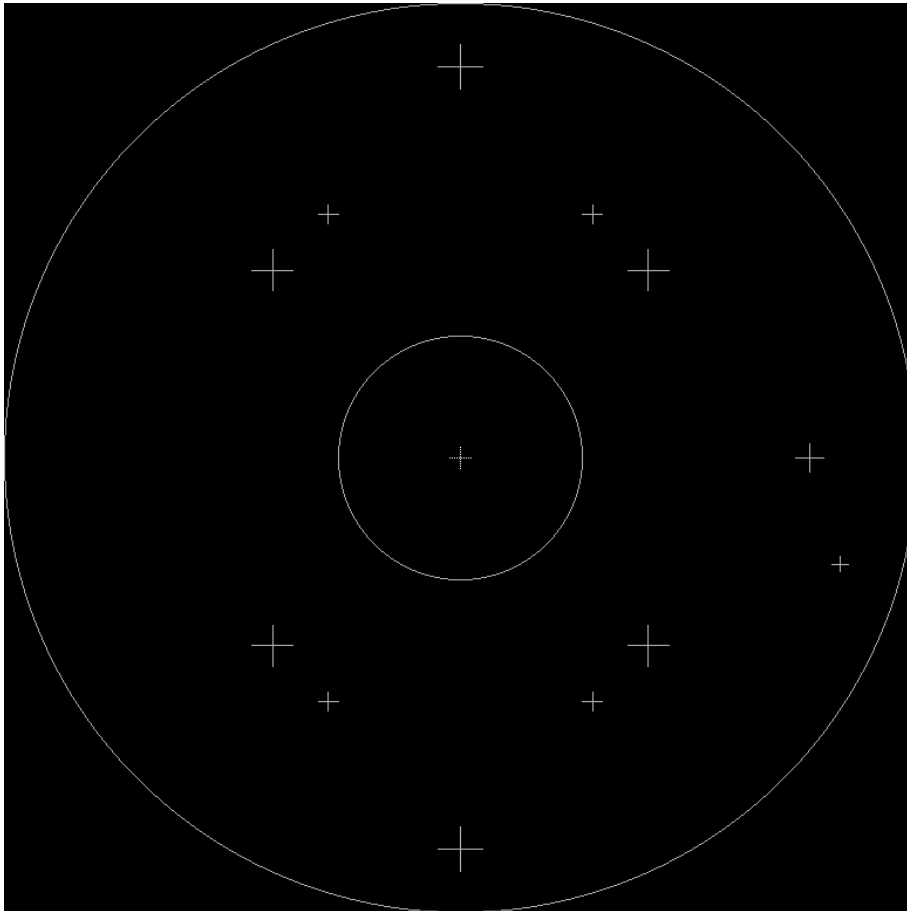
Cream layers

- All the places solder is deposited for SMD



Component origins

- Used for automatic board pick-and-place



Bill of materials

Partlist exported from K:/work/UQ/development/projects/bristle/circuit/bristle2.sch at 19/04/2016 1:49:57 AM

Assembly variant:

Part	Value	Device	Package	Description
01	MPL115	MPL115	MPL115	
02	MPL115	MPL115	MPL115	
03	MPL115	MPL115	MPL115	
04	MPL115	MPL115	MPL115	
3.3V	VREGAP1117	VREGAP1117	SOT223	
C01		CAP_CERAMIC0402	0402	Ceramic Capacitors
C02		CAP_CERAMIC0402	0402	Ceramic Capacitors
C03		CAP_CERAMIC0402	0402	Ceramic Capacitors
C04		CAP_CERAMIC0402	0402	Ceramic Capacitors
C06		CAP_CERAMIC0402	0402	Ceramic Capacitors
C10	1uF	CAP_CERAMIC0603	0603	Ceramic Capacitors
C11	.1uF	CAP_CERAMIC0603	0603	Ceramic Capacitors
C12	.01uF	CAP_CERAMIC0603	0603	Ceramic Capacitors
C52	470uF	CAP_TANTALUMD/7343_REFLOW	EIA7343-31/D-R	Tantalum Capacitors
C53	10uF	CAP_CERAMIC1206	1206	Ceramic Capacitors
CN1		USBMICROB	USB-MICROB	USB Connectors
JP1	4X1_PIN_HEADERPTH	4X1_PIN_HEADERPTH	PIN_HEADER_4_PTH	
JP2	4X1_PIN_HEADERPTH	4X1_PIN_HEADERPTH	PIN_HEADER_4_PTH	
JP3		PINHD-2X3	2X03	PIN HEADER
LED2	CHIPLED_0603S	CHIPLED_0603S	CHIPLED_0603	
R1	120o	RESISTOR0402	0402	Resistors
R2	4.7K	RESISTOR0603	0603	Resistors
R3	4.7K	RESISTOR0603	0603	Resistors
SJ2		SJ2W	SJ_2	SMD solder JUMPER
UC01	ATTINY24QFN	ATTINY24QFN	QFN20	
XM1		ATXMEGAXXA4U-MH	QFN-44	ATXMEGA A4U Series (XMEGA+USB)

A whole bunch of stuff...

Lots of technical specification in a PCB!

And if any one part of it is wrong, your
board probably won't work.

Easier than it used to be...

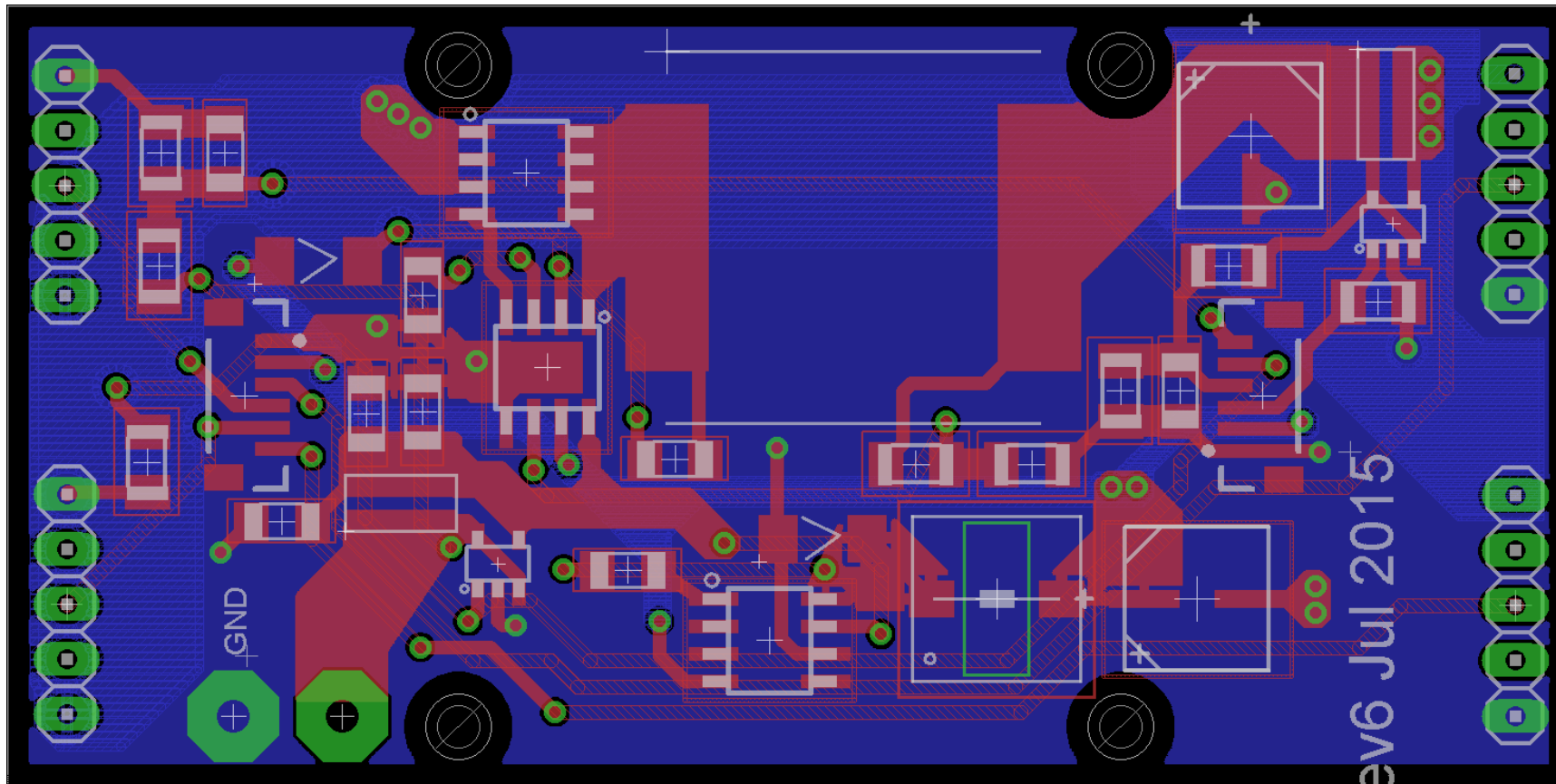
- These days, most manufacturers will simply take an Eagle, Altium or other board file and work from that
 - Great! Reduces uncertainty and confusion
- But a .brd file rarely has all the required information for sophisticated designs
 - Beware of “*assumptionitis*” in your fab
 - The true pros will take CAD drawings...

Hey, that's great...

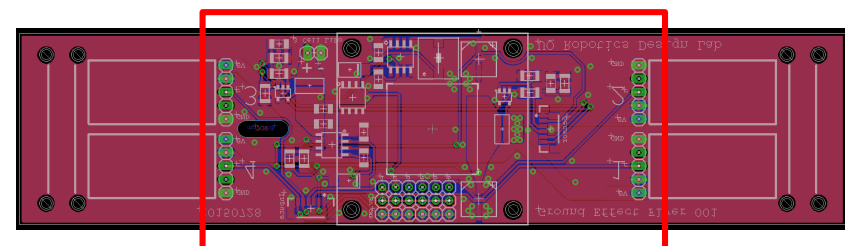
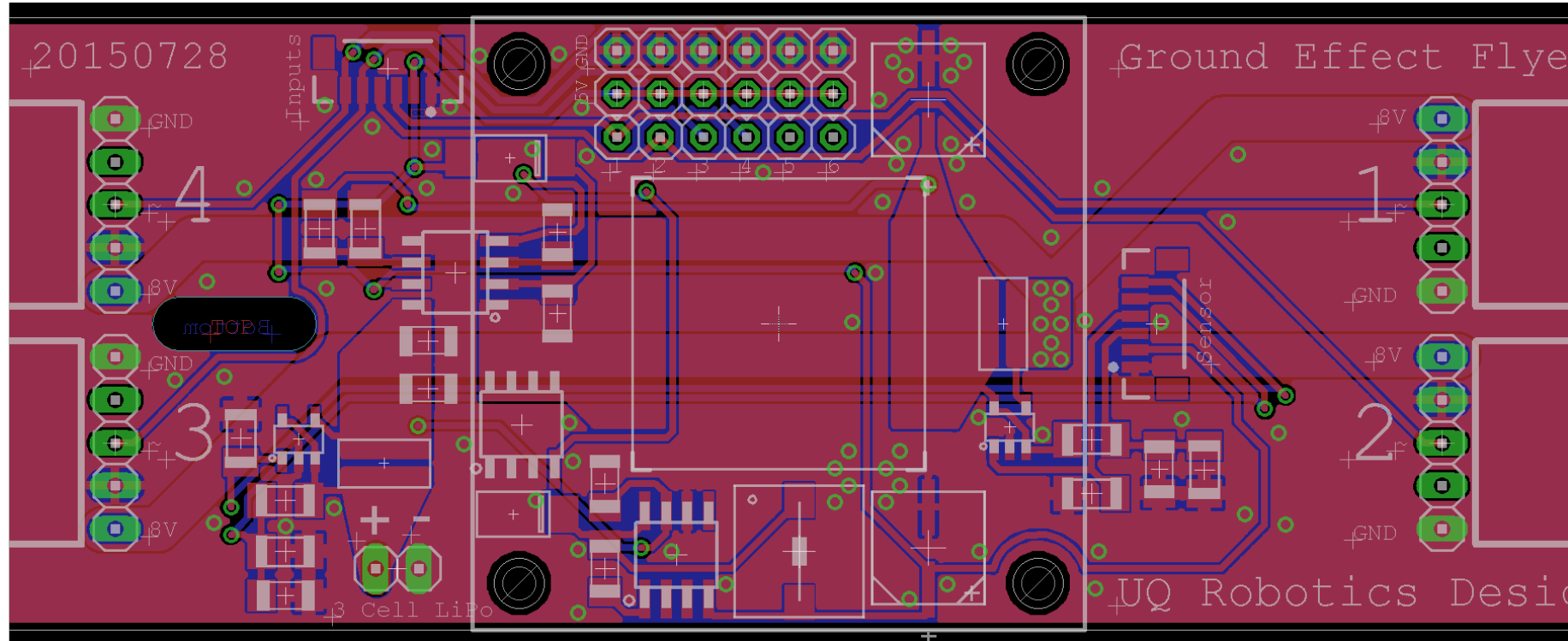
So what about actually designing a PCB?

How hard can it be?

Same designer with more experience



Experienced designer layout



Routing PCBs

- Laying out PCB is broadly called “routing”
 - Usually the hardest part of PCB design
 - Tight routing = less board space, more boards per panel, lower costs: take time to get it right!
- Finding optimal routing is a challenging task and machines are not very good at it

DO NOT WASTE YOUR TIME
OR MONEY WITH AUTO-ROUTING*

(*This is not as true as it used to be, but still not recommended)

Routing PCBs

- If you become very good at routing you will win the acclaim and respect of your peers!
- If you are lazy or terrible at it, you will be silently (or not so silently) cursed by anyone who has to deal with your awful designs...
- Pretty much any idiot with a BE can route a low-speed board (<1 MHz) and expect it to work

The performance gotcha

- But! There is no mercy in high-speed digital, low-voltage analog or RF *anything!*
 - *Mixed circuits?? Fetch the Necronomicon...*
- Obey all the rules or physics will punish you

Most boards you'll be making anytime soon will be pretty forgiving

Worth bearing in mind

- In general, the PCB and circuit design should be developed in parallel
 - It is quite easy to design circuits that are impossible to route
- If the circuit just won't work on the board as designed... try tweaking the circuit?
 - A small circuit design can drastically simplify the routing problem
 - You'd be surprised how often this works!

General routing process

Here is a set of guides for PCB layout

Do not adhere to them mindlessly

Not an excuse to stop thinking...

General routing process

1. Specify your board dimensions (if known)
2. Place constrained components first
 - Usually things like large parts and connectors
3. Route power, ground and major signal busses
 - High power, high frequency, high sensitivity
4. Shuffle components to reduce net complexity
5. Make connections between components
 - Revise layout on the fly

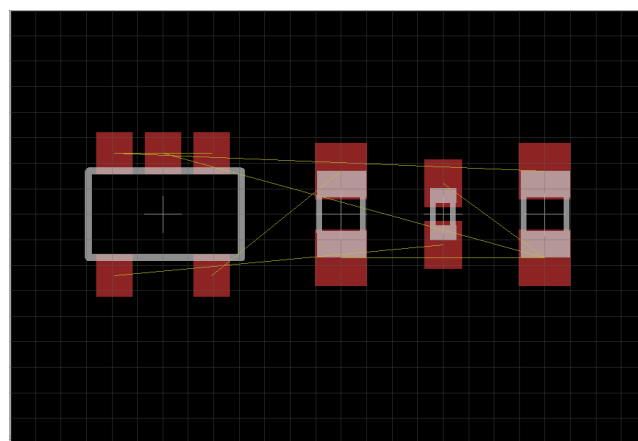
Guiding principles

- Minimise the number and variety of drills
- Maximise track width and spacing
- Preserve ground layers
- Preserve spacing between components
- Maximise clearance with the board edges
- Minimise turns and maximise corner angles

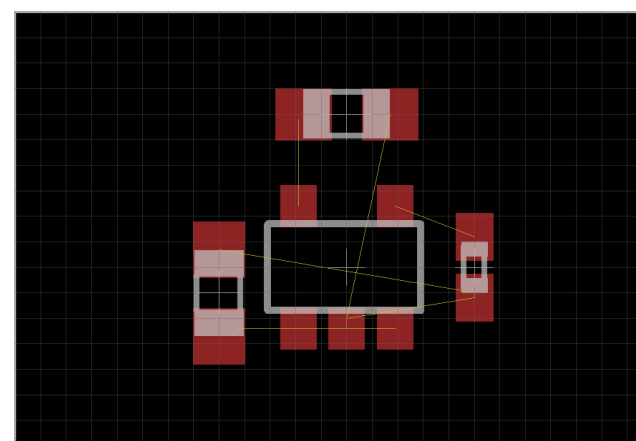
If it looks crap, it probably is crap. If it looks like somebody loved it, it's probably ok

Part placement

- Good part placement makes your life simple
- If you can see it all laid out, you can route it!
- Follow the reference design if available
 - Depart from the reference design at your peril!



Default part layout – not helpful!



Oh hey, that's where that goes...

Routing tracks

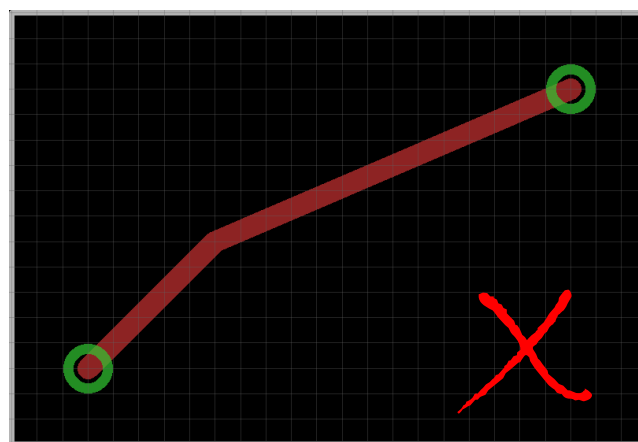
- Routing tracks refers specifically to laying out the individual traces of a PCB
- Most people do a mediocre job without trying too hard... some people make a mess

A few simple rules will get you
90% of the way there...

(The majority of my corrections to student PCBs consist of the following violations)

Routing tracks

- Adhere to the 45° routing rule
 - Why? Partly due to tradition, and partly because it makes for neater-looking circuits
 - If the track or space constraints require it, though, it's ok to route direct point-to-point



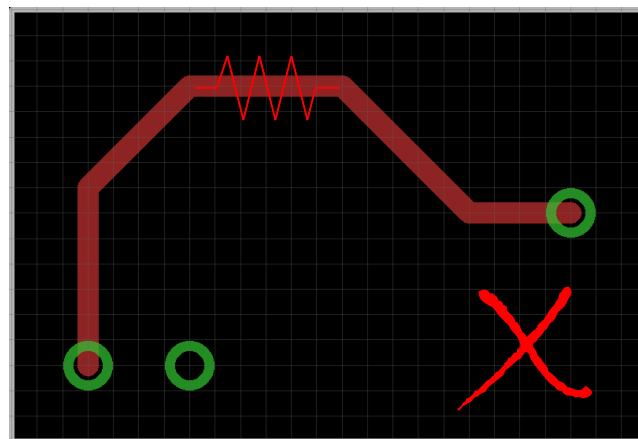
Looks sloppy and lazy



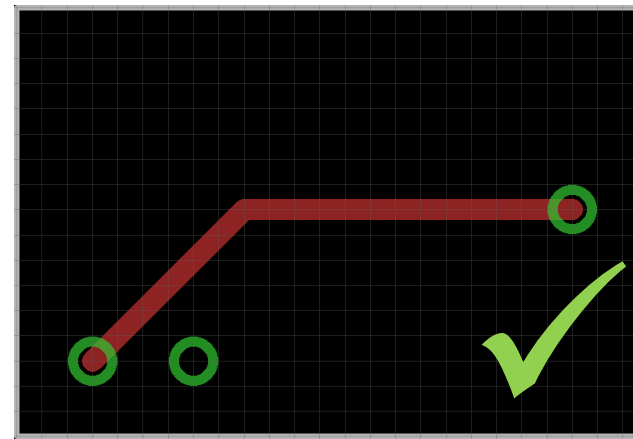
Looks like it's meant to be this way

Routing tracks

- All else being equal, take the shortest route
 - Reduces track resistance, capacitance etc.
 - Classic sign of someone who wasn't paying attention to what they were doing



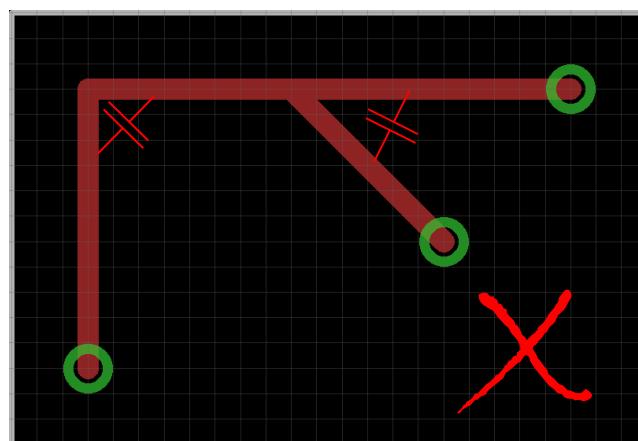
Circuitous circuit



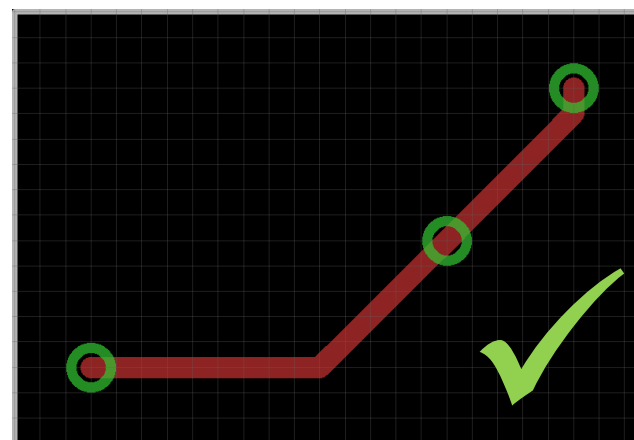
Short track better

Routing tracks

- Avoid acute and right angles; minimise the number of turns and kinks where possible
 - Adds extra capacitance in the path; can be a big problem in high-speed circuits
 - But mostly to prevent stress fractures in tracks!



Right angle and acute corners



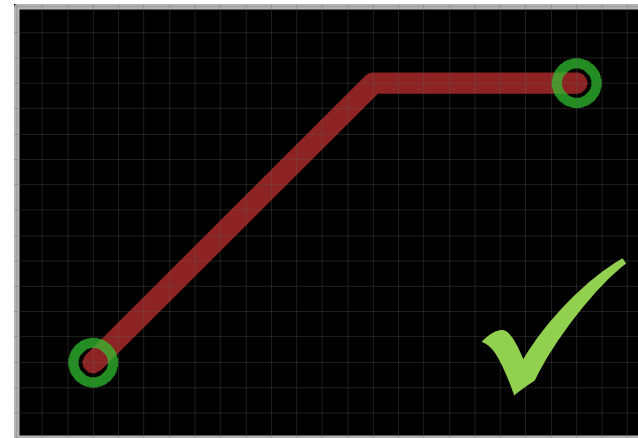
Obtuse corners best

Routing tracks

- Keep an eye out for the ‘dogs leg’
 - Easy to fix...
 - Just take the time to be thorough



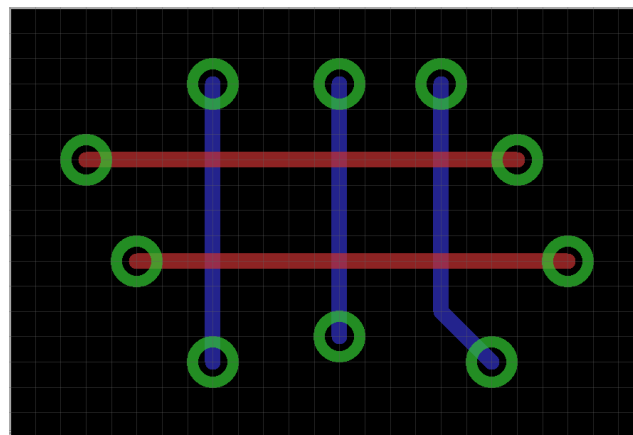
Dog leg track



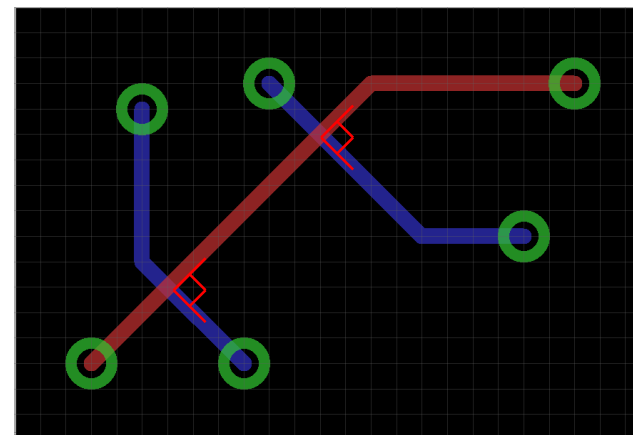
Single kink track

Routing tracks

- Useful to route left-right, up-down on different layers
 - Try to make your digital lines cross at 90 deg on high-speed multilayer boards



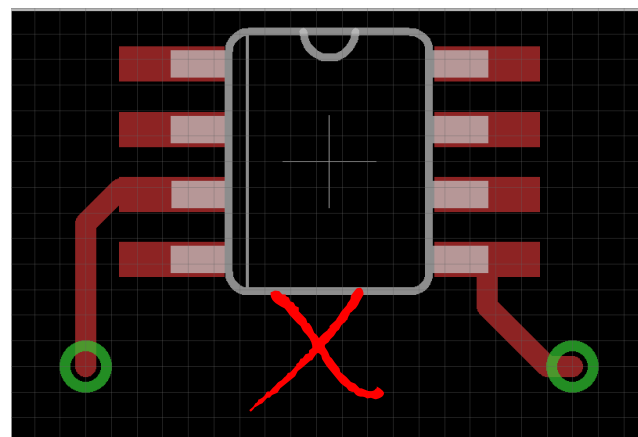
Different layer track directions



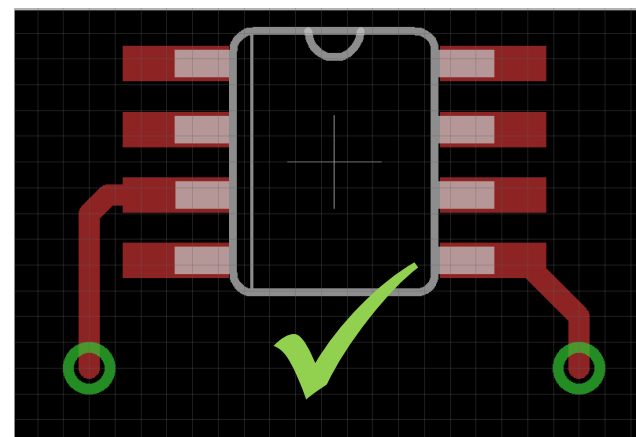
90° high-freq crossings

Routing tracks

- Enter surface mount pads cleanly
 - Right angles on edges or 45° through corners
 - Avoid acute break-outs from pad edges
 - Can't always be achieved in practice, though...



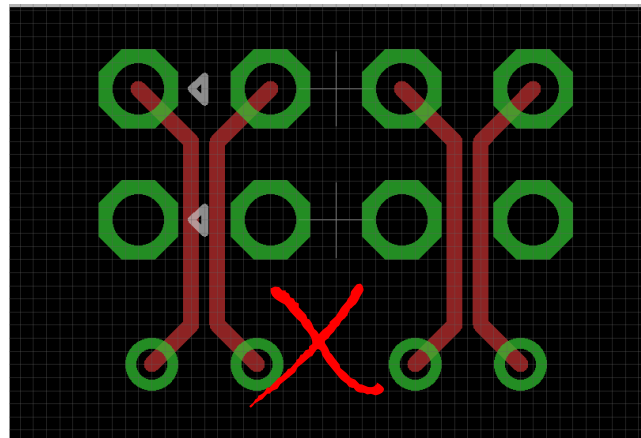
Crappy SMD pad exits



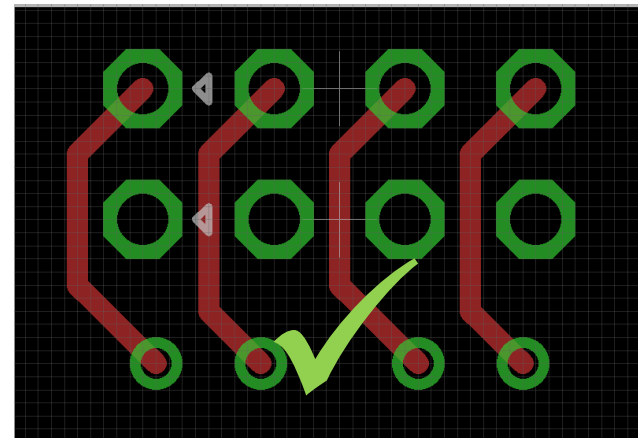
Nice SMD pad exits

Routing tracks

- Don't try to cram stuff through too small a gap... go around if at all possible
 - Maybe you need to rethink your overall part layout or structure?



Avoid cramped buses



Clearance is your friend

Routing tracks

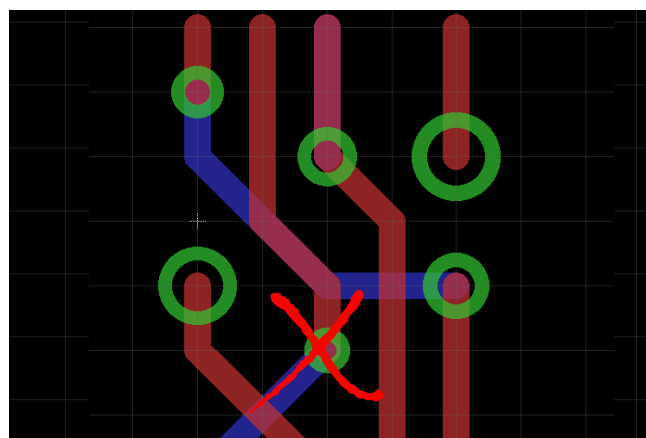
- Higher currents need bigger tracks
 - Lots of online calculators for track size
- Track width rules of thumb for 35 μm
 - Small signal: <0.2 mm
 - 1 A: 0.4 mm external layer (1.0 mm internal)
 - 2 A: 1.0 mm external layer (2.5 mm internal)
 - 5 A: 2.5 mm external layer (9.0 mm internal)
- 40 A is the max current a 70 μm board typically can achieve (without bus bars)

Pads and vias

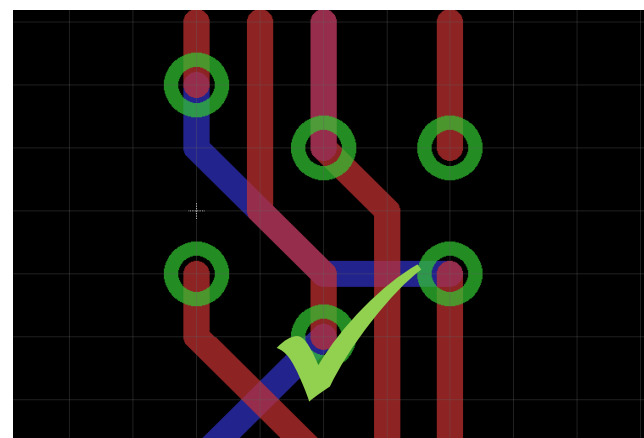
- Veee-ahs or Vye-ahs?
- Drilling is the most costly fabrication step
 - Reduce the total number and variety of drills
- Skinny drills break!
 - Max depth:width ratio no more than 10:1
- Give pads sufficient annular rings to stop pull-through
 - Aim for no less than $\sim 25\%$ of hole diameter

Via sizes

- Don't use dozens of different drill sizes
 - Use the same size as often as possible
 - Economy of scale: “Two of one thing is cheaper than one of two things”
 - Tool changes cost money



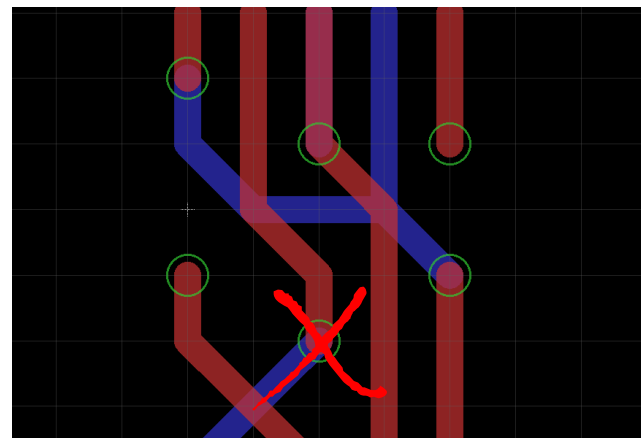
A million different sizes



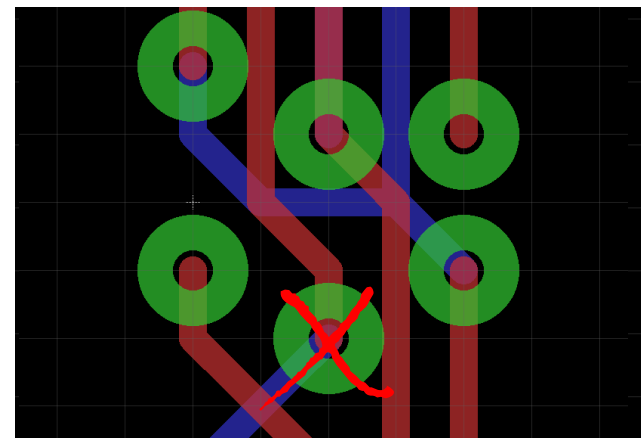
One drill, no tool changes

Via sizes

- Make the via restring proportionally sized
 - Restring: annulus of copper around the drill hole
- Allows misaligned drills to still have copper contact with plated area



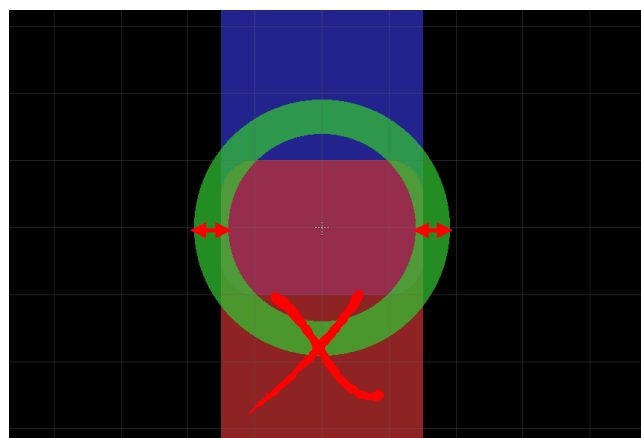
Too small: unreliable



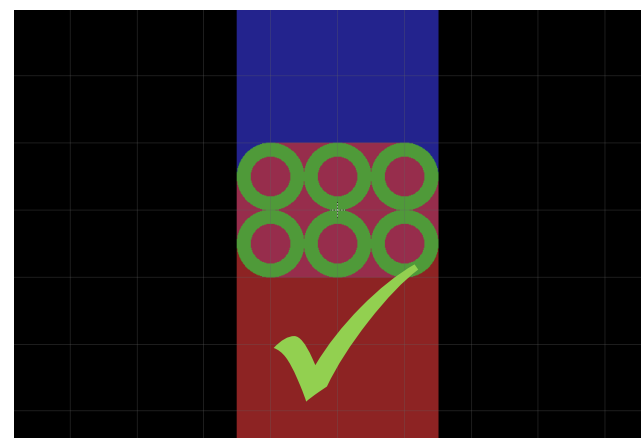
Too large: bad thermals

Via sizes

- Drilled out track section does not carry current across it
- Many small vias give more copper and less resistance than one large via



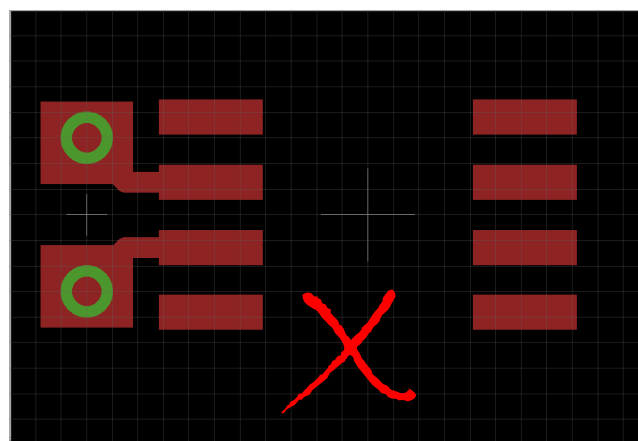
Little actual conductive surface



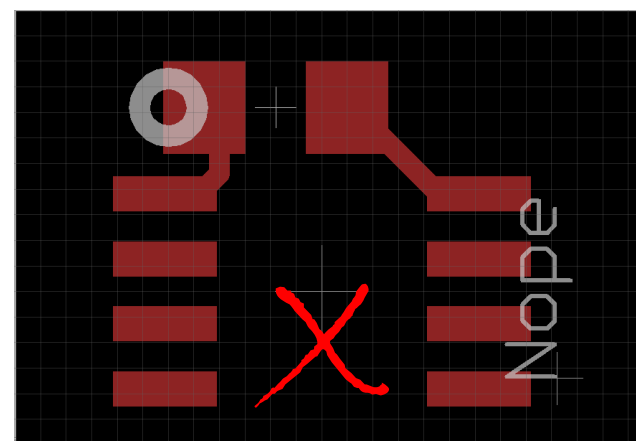
Lots of copper surface area

Pads and vias

- Don't put vias in pads (usually)
 - Solder will wick down the hole => dry joints
 - Vias at corners sometimes used for heat sinking
- Don't silkscreen over pads



Avoid vias in pads



Watch where the silkscreen goes



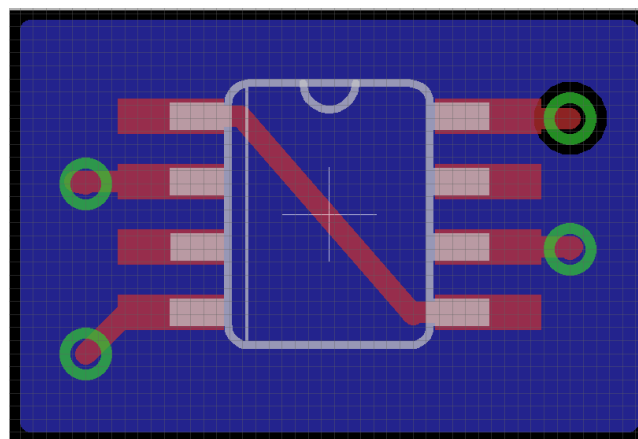
Zwischenspiel.

Pours and ground layers

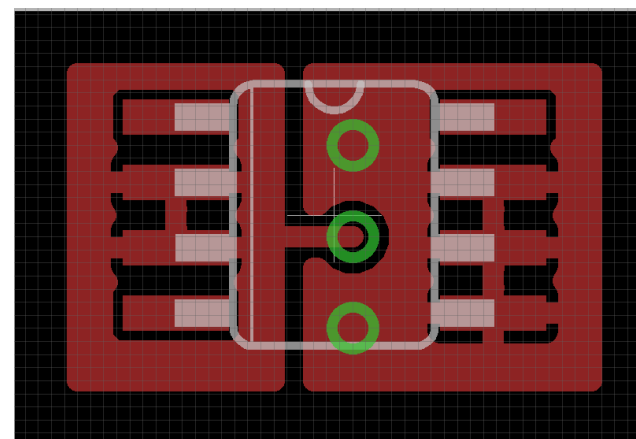
- Pours are large, contiguous copper areas, typically used for ground and power
- So many advantages!
 - Greatly simplify the routing problem
 - Good for buffering power draw and adding thermal relief
 - Ground layer capacitance can help quieten or isolate noisy parts of a circuit

Pours and ground layers

- Very common configurations:
 - Ground pours on both top and bottom layers
 - Power and ground on alternating layers
 - Different signal values pours in different parts of the circuit



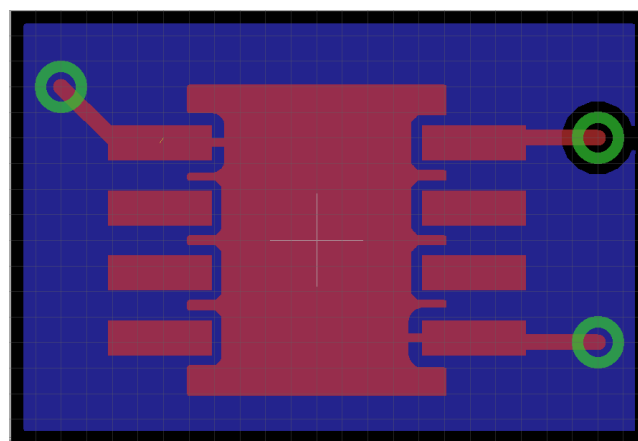
Easy routing of backplane signals



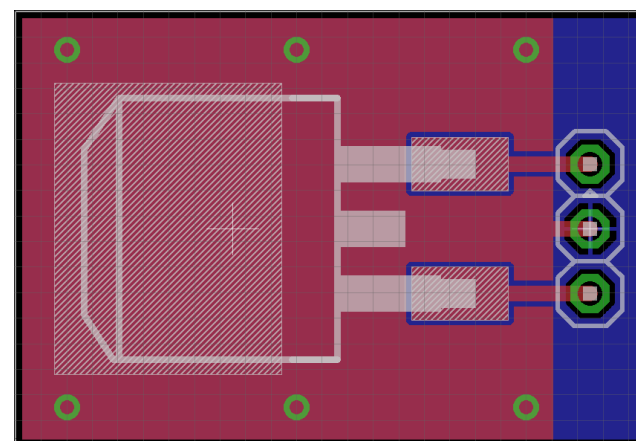
Two different pour nets

Pours and ground layers

- Ground planes are very common under microprocessors
 - Sometimes required and strictly specified!
- Also very common for power supply thermal and noise management



IC mounted over ground plane

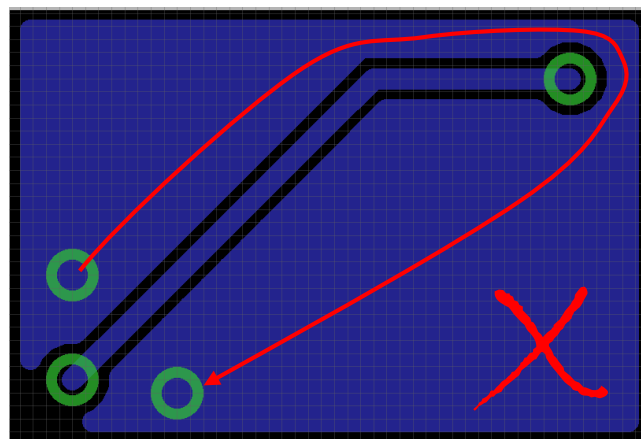


Regulator with thermal pads

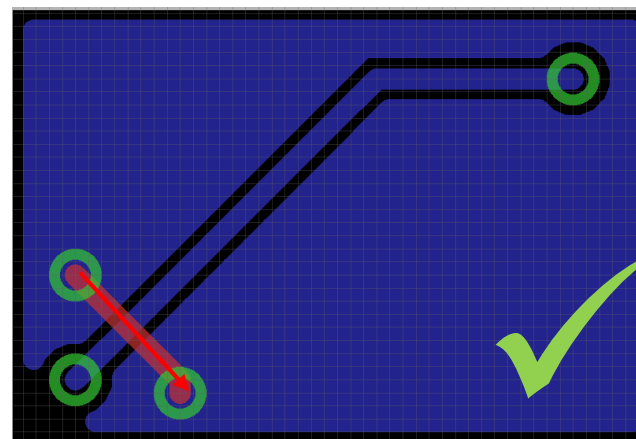
Pours and ground layers

Things to look out for:

- Big areas of copper absorb heat, so use thermal reliefs to make soldering easier
- Add cross-flow “bridges” to prevent large circuitous detours in power/ground planes



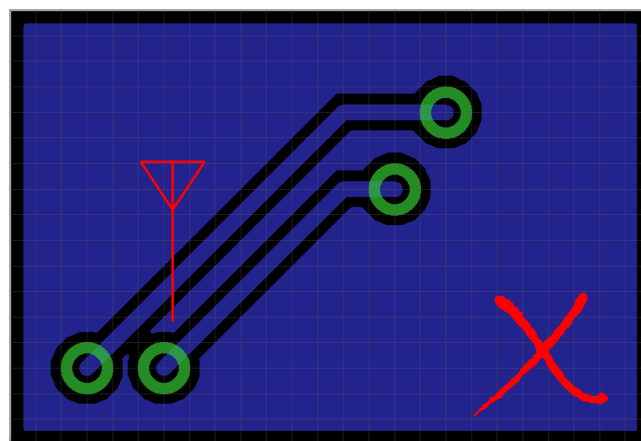
Long current detour “ground loop”



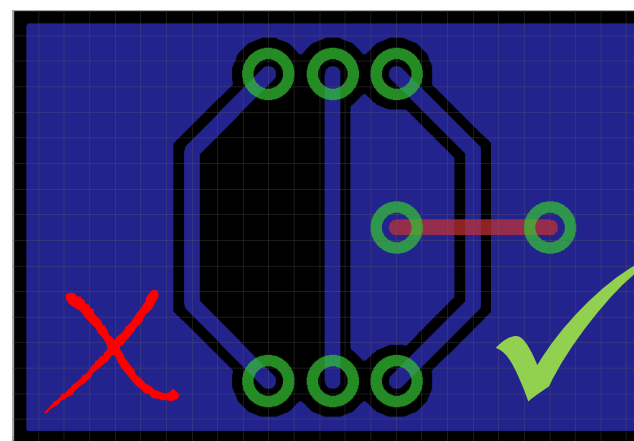
Shortcut ‘bridge’

Pours and ground layers

- Avoid dead copper and stems
 - Stems act like RF antennas and inject noise into your signal – right on the ground plane!
- Bridge island fills if you can



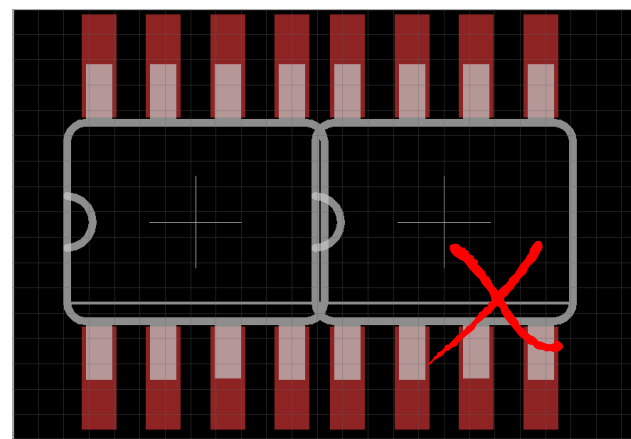
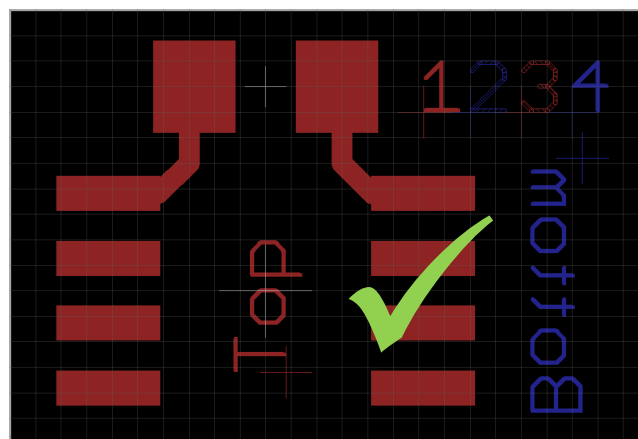
Avoid pour antennas



Island fills, with and without bridge

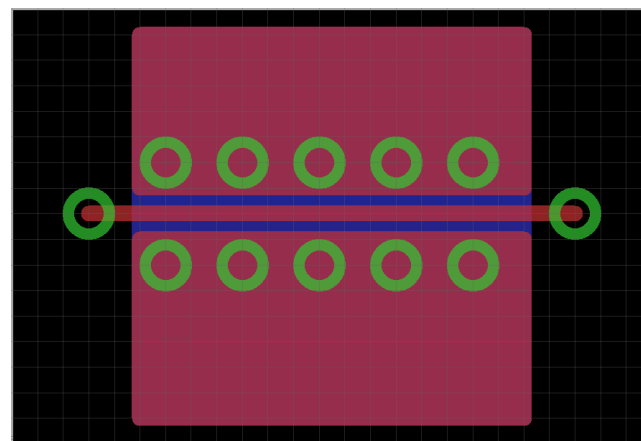
Other copper layer-y things

- Include top/bottom and numbered layer callouts when submitting separate layer files
- If the fab tech is unsure, they won't ask
 - They'll just give you "something"
 - Or worse... exactly what you asked for!

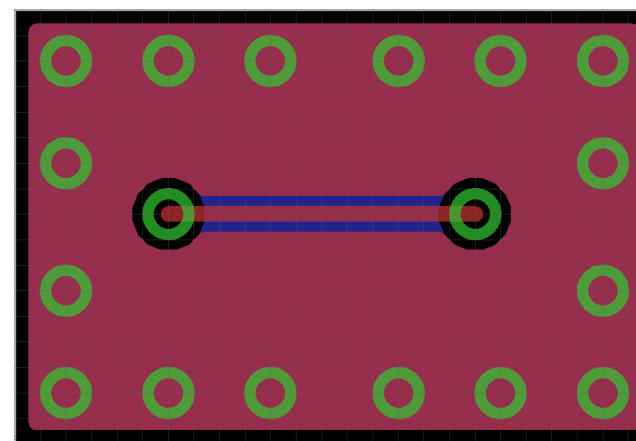


Other copper layer-y things

- RF stitching is a thing: string of vias around ground fill and traces
 - Create waveguides; avoids HF ground loops
- Guard trace around periphery of the board to protect against EMI



Stitched RF wave guide



EMI guard loop

Specifying board dimensions

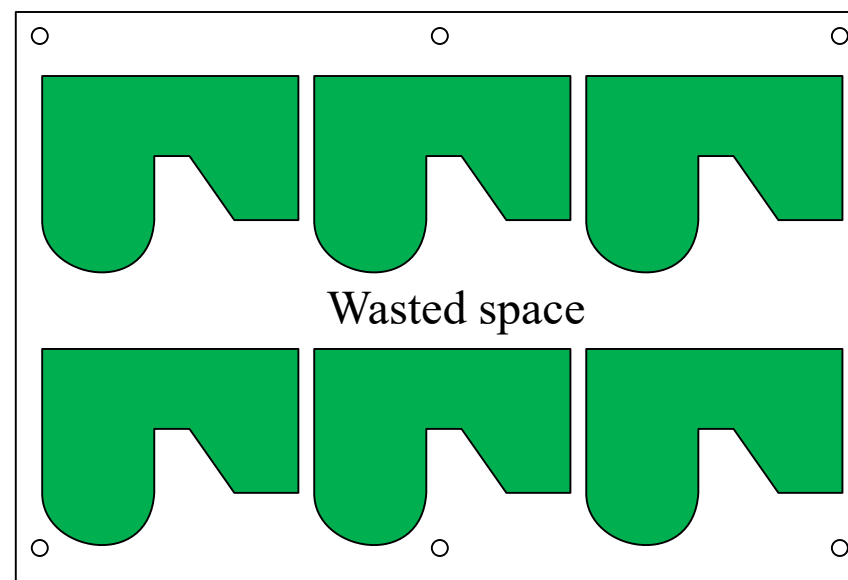
- How big should your board be, anyway?

As small as possible!

- Less copper, shorter signal traces, less parasitic resistance/capacitance/inductance, etc, and thus better performance
- Boards smaller than 10 x 10 mm or larger than 610 x 450 mm require specialist fabs
 - Largest I've ever seen was 1000 mm long!
 - Also, large/thin boards sag under their weight

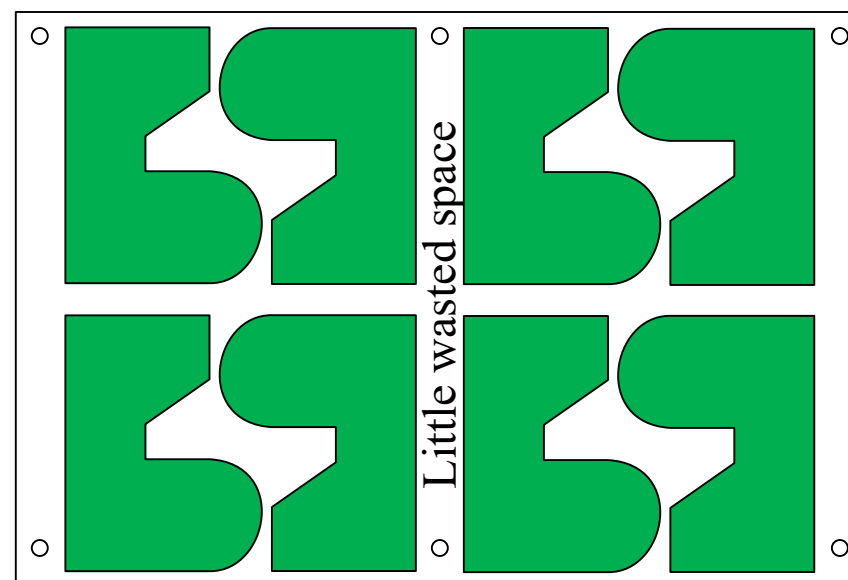
Panelisation

- Awkward outlines can make panelisation difficult and leads to wasted panel space
 - Plan for panelisation when choosing an outline



Panelisation

- Careful board design, clever panelisation and panel sharing can dramatically increase yield and reduce costs per board

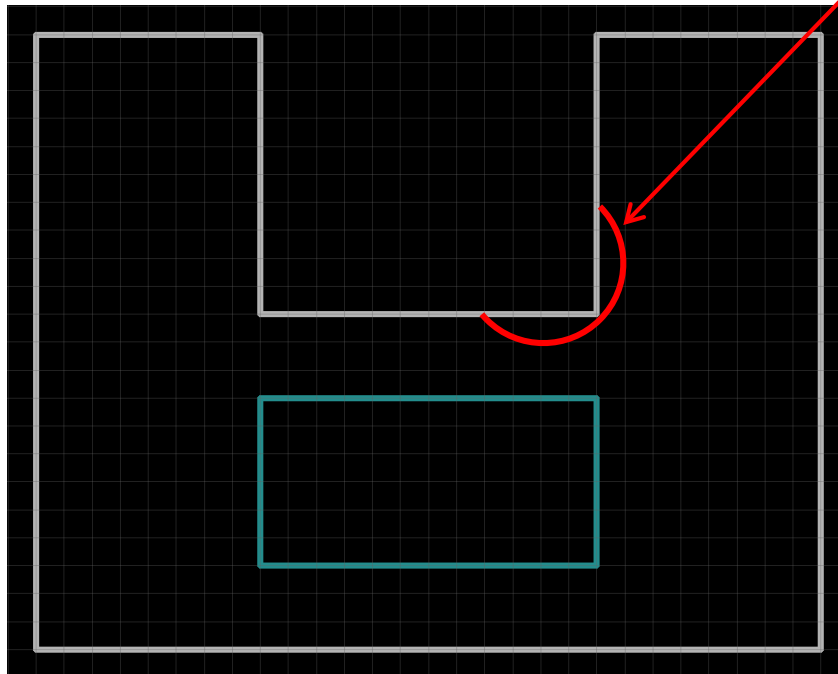


Milling

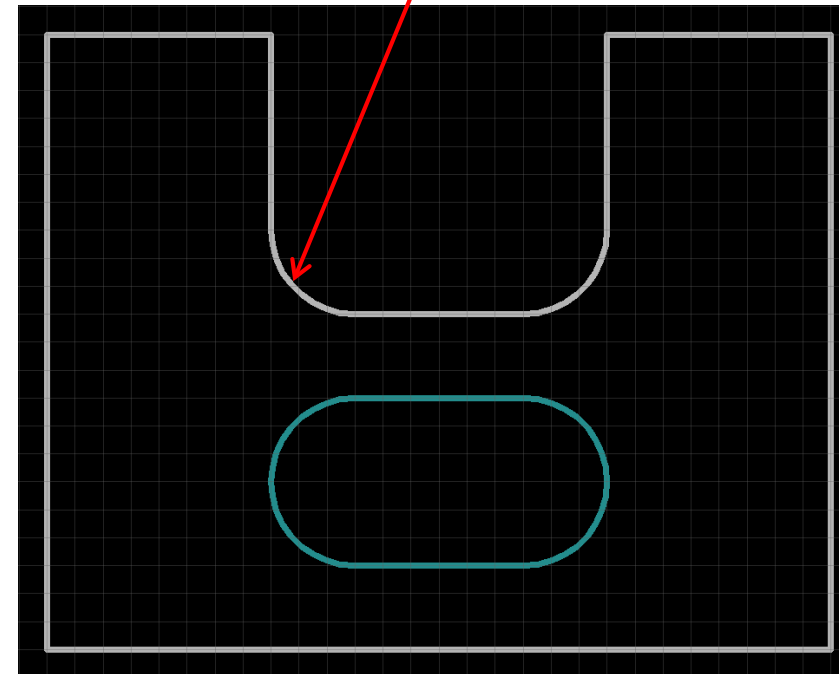
- Individual circuit boards are separated from the panel by milling
 - Milling is also used to produce slots and cutouts
- The smallest milling bit is typically about 0.2 mm diameter
 - Don't expect perfect 90° corners
 - If you specify a realistic radius, you might get it
 - If you specify a right angle, you'll get whatever they feel like giving you (probably 1 mm)

Milling

- If you do it wrong...



What you ask for (unrealistic)

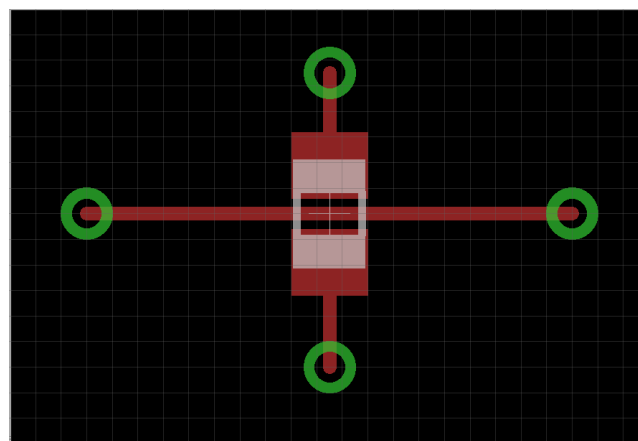


What you will actually get

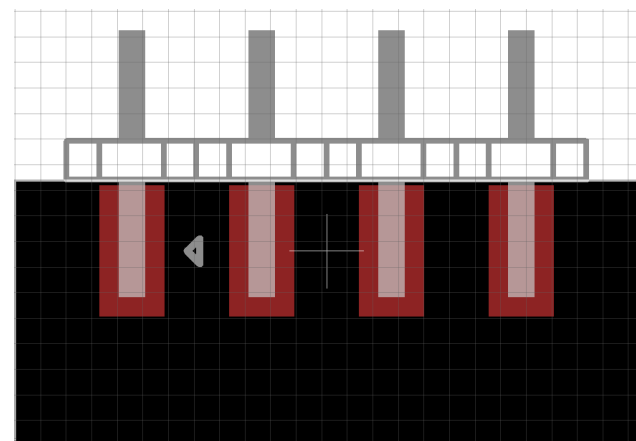
Go for the biggest mill you can get away with

Cute tricks

- 0 Ohm resistor bridge
 - Super compact way of adding a jumper
- Side-mount a pin header for a low-profile, low board footprint edge connector



0 Ohm jumper



Pin header connector on edge

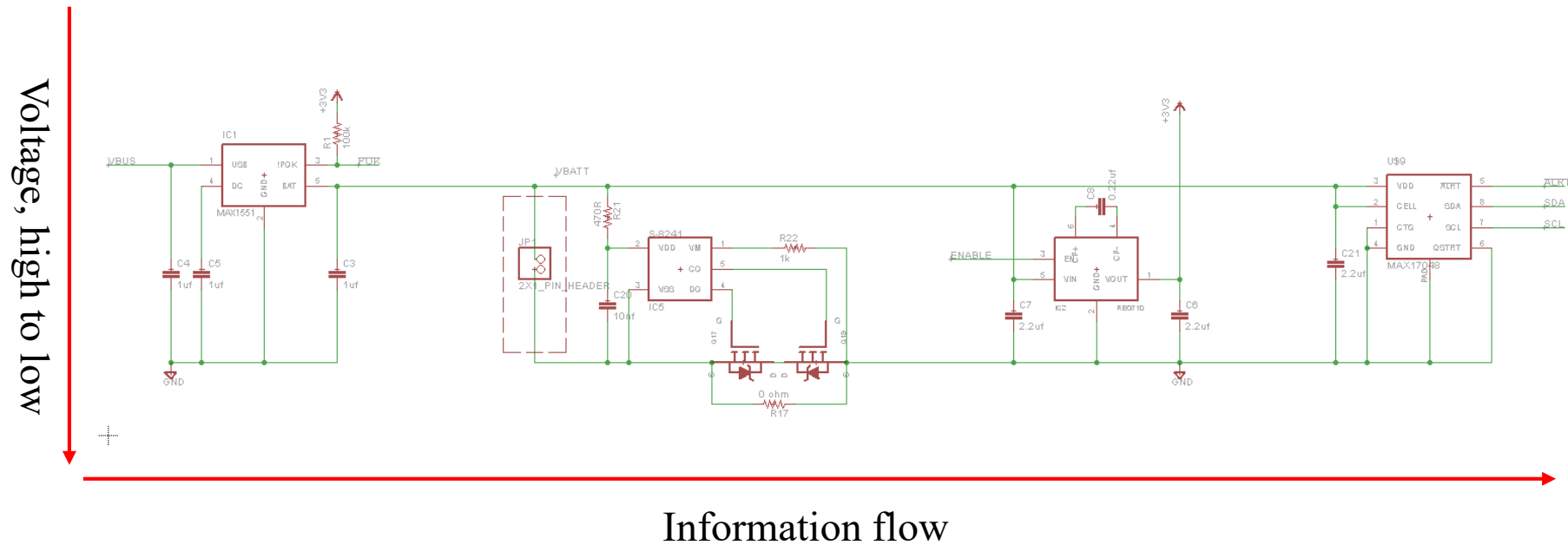
Some comments on schematics

Dishonourable mention:

- Terrible layout of circuit diagrams and schematics is almost as much trouble as poorly laid out boards
- Your circuit schematic and its associated board are tightly coupled
 - One should complement the other

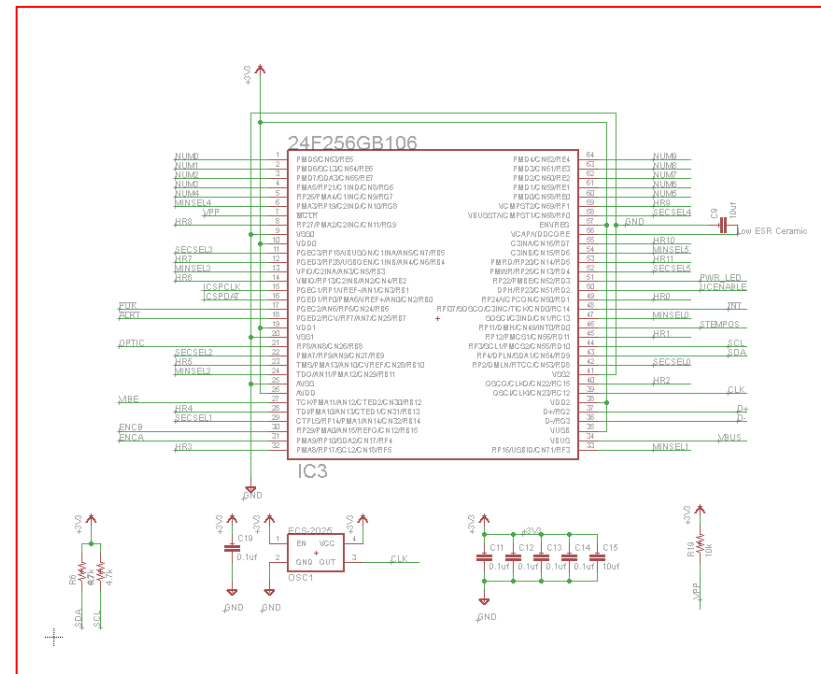
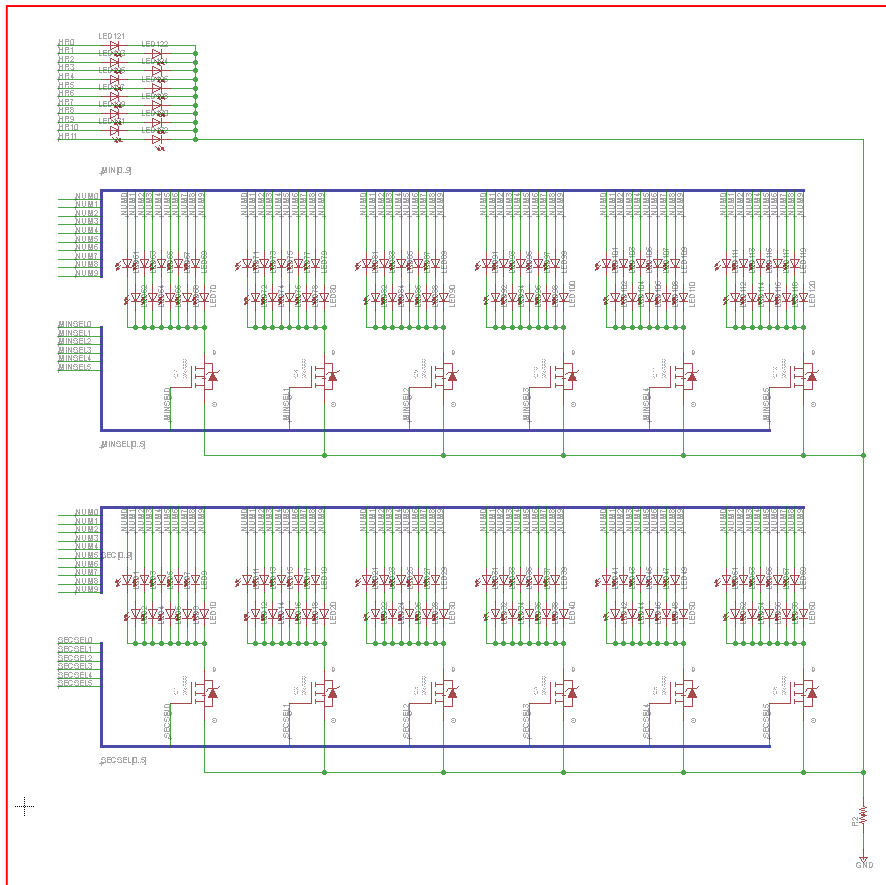
Some comments on schematics

- Logical flow left to right
- Voltages up to down



Some comments on schematics

- Split into modules; divide by sheet



Tip of the iceberg

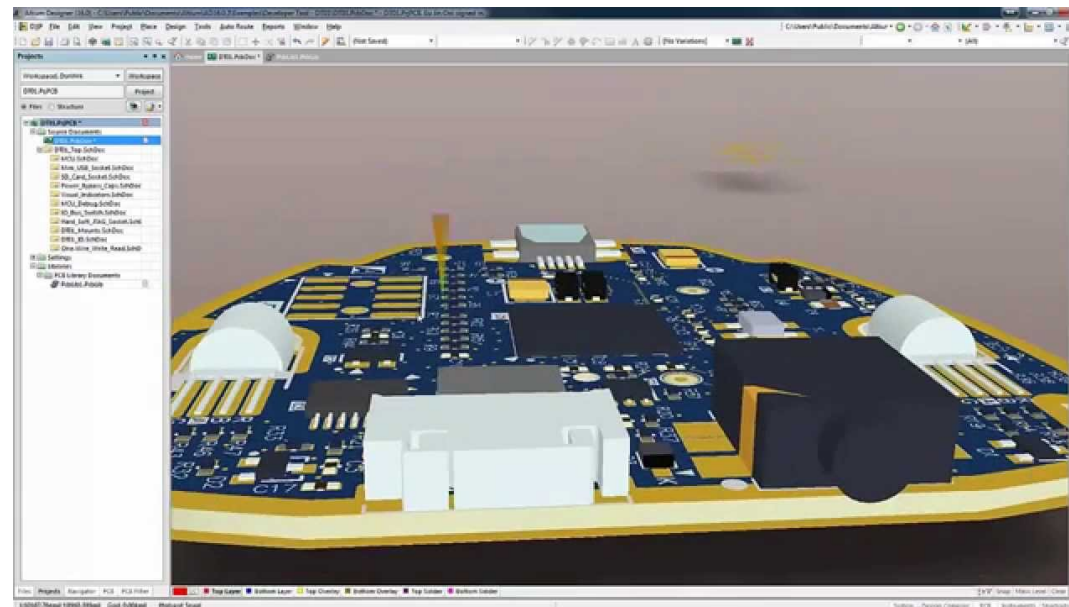
- Again... PCB design is one of those things you can spend a career perfecting
- I've made scores of PCBs and I *still* find new and innovative ways of screwing it up!
 - Make a list of all your mistakes over time so you don't keep repeating them!
- Open up high quality products and look at the PCBs inside
 - you can *see* the love

Whirlwind intro to CAD packages

- Lots of different ones
 - Most will get the job done;
 - But some are more useful/common than others
- At some point in your career, someone will insist that you use a CAD package you hate
 - You poor, poor soul
- Here is a quick list of common/uncommon PCB design CAD packages

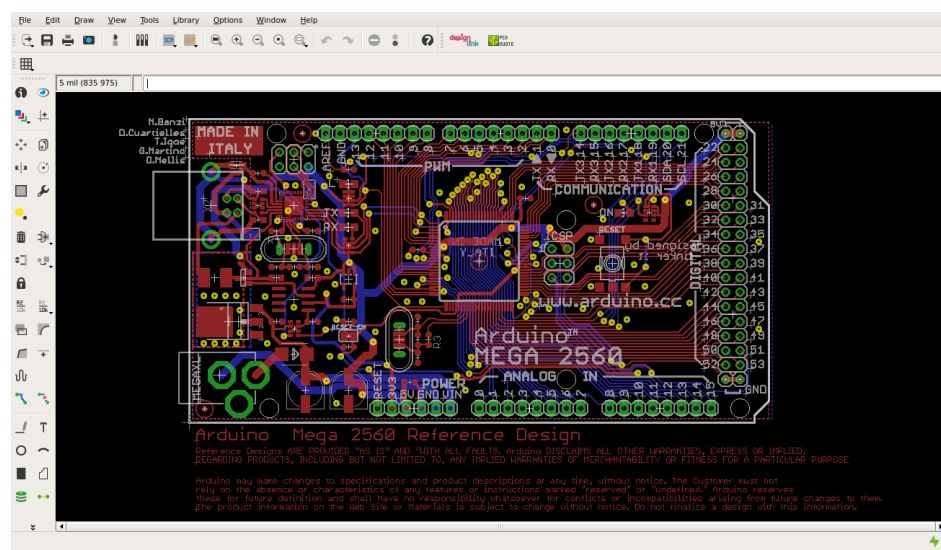
Altium

- Weapon of choice for many professionals
 - Lots of powerful tools: 3D view, flexible fills, track impedance control, circuit duplication...
 - But gawdawful to learn its intricacies



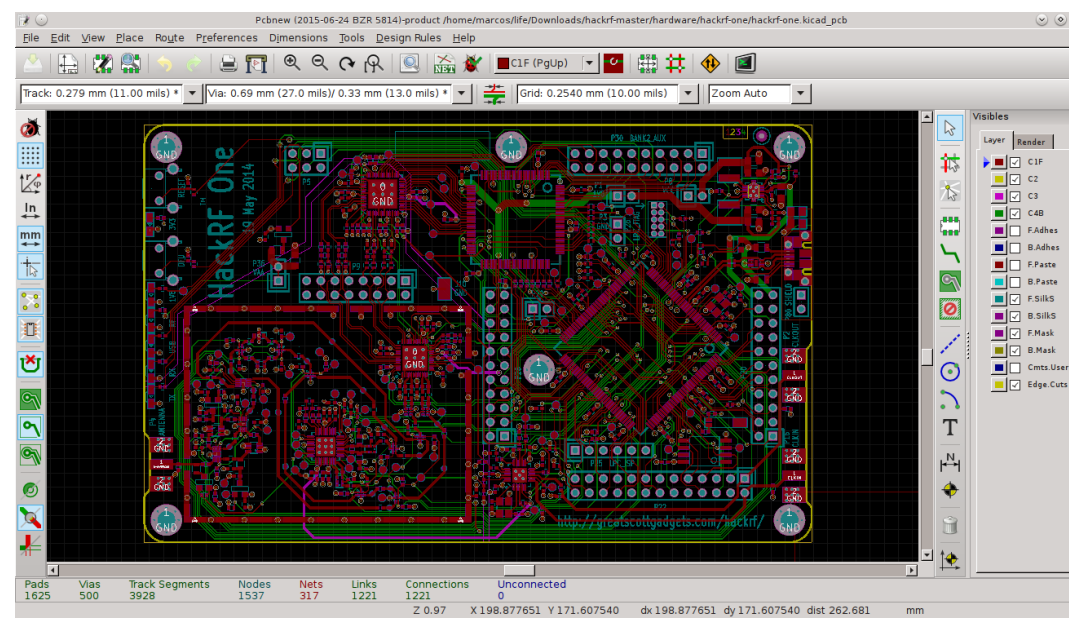
Cadsoft Eagle

- (Previously) the hobbyist's choice
 - Tons of library support and lots of references
 - Easy to learn and dive right in
 - ...but lacks ~~many~~ some of Altium's advanced features
 - Owned (ruined?) by Autocad; subscription licensing *sucks*



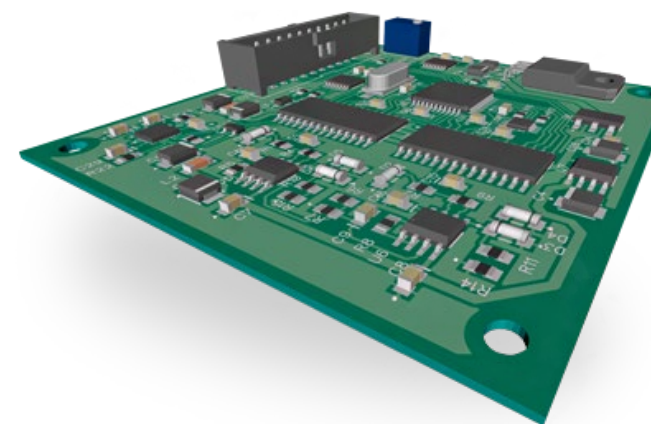
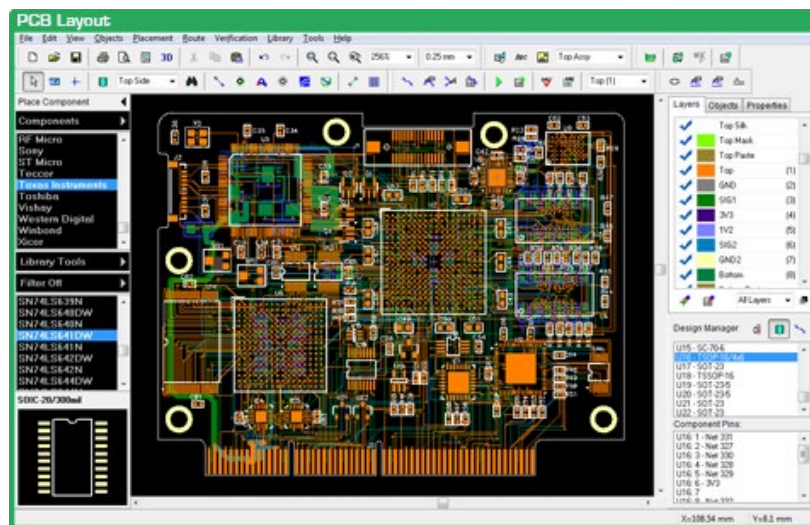
Kicad

- New contender for the hobbiest throne
 - Harder to use than Eagle but Free™
 - Functional alternative – watch this space
 - Rhymes with “I had”



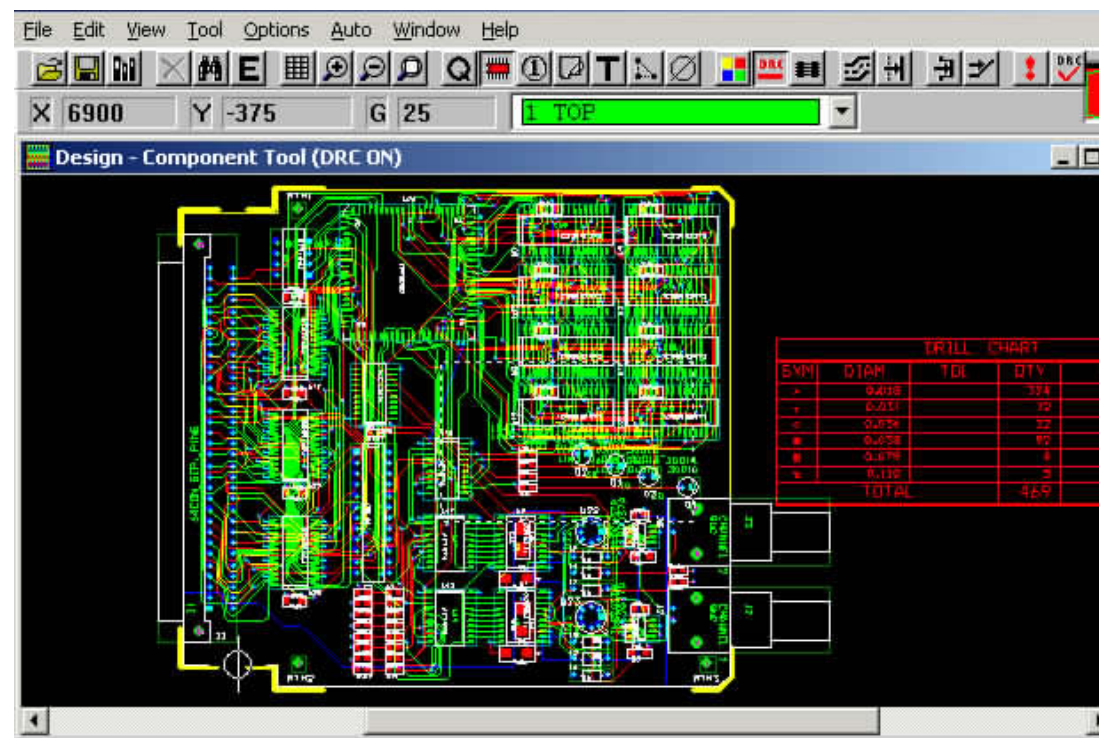
Diptrace

- Not as popular as the others, but strong support by its adherents
 - Rapidly growing new advanced features...
 - Maybe a replacement for Eagle?



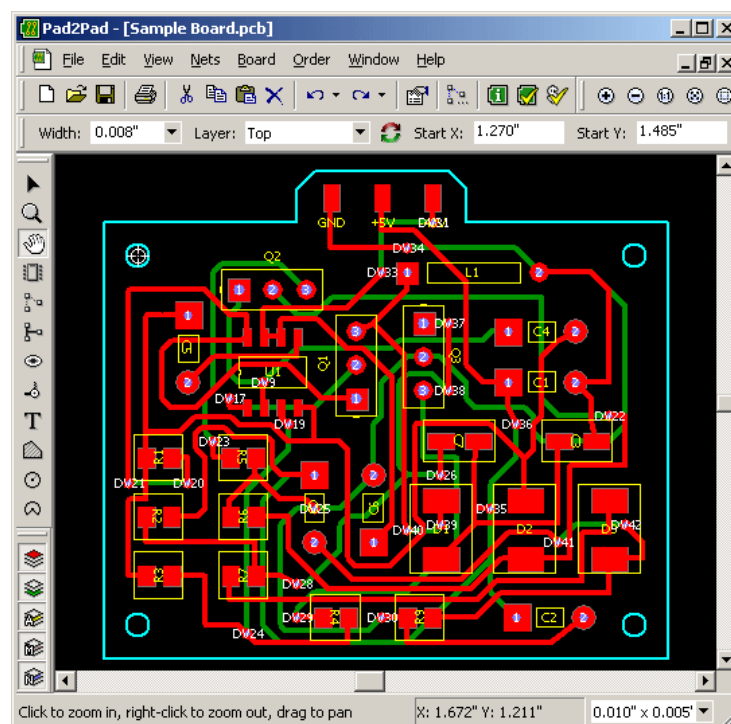
OrCAD

- Somewhat old now
 - Not a lot of userbase, but still exists



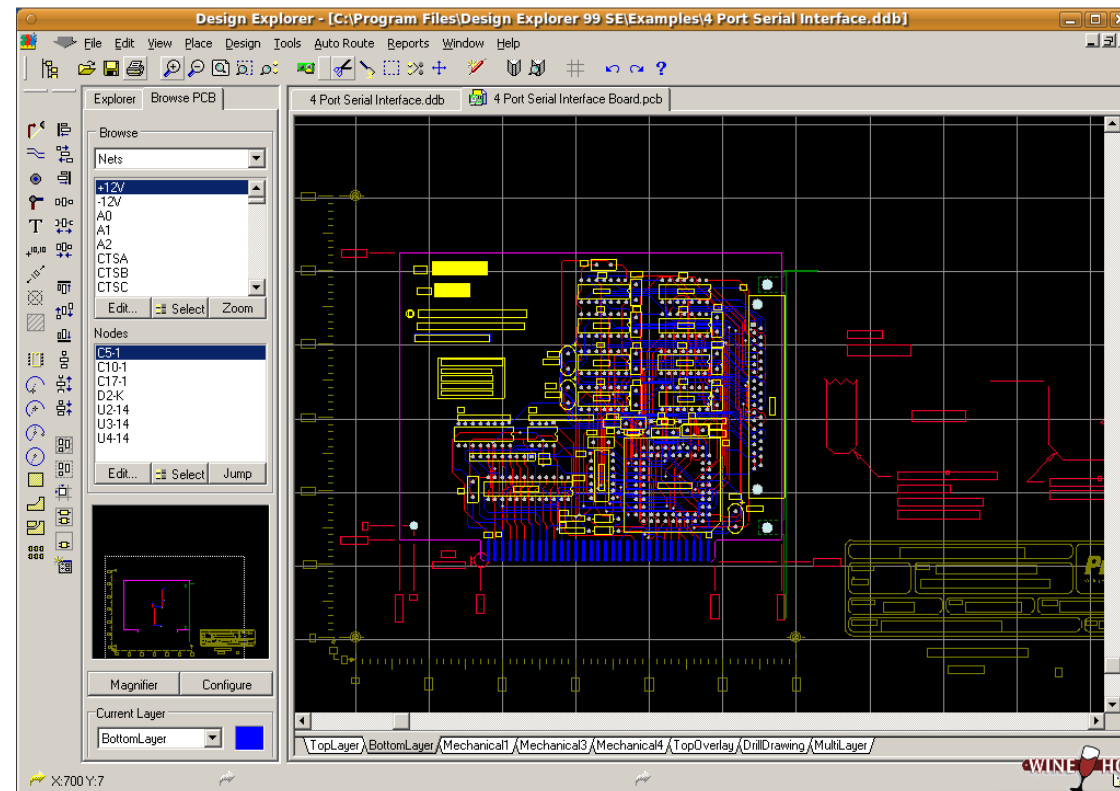
Pad2pad

- Online integrated vendor-specific software
 - A lot like eMachineShop, if you know what it is
 - Ehh.... Ok – but vendor lock-in sucks



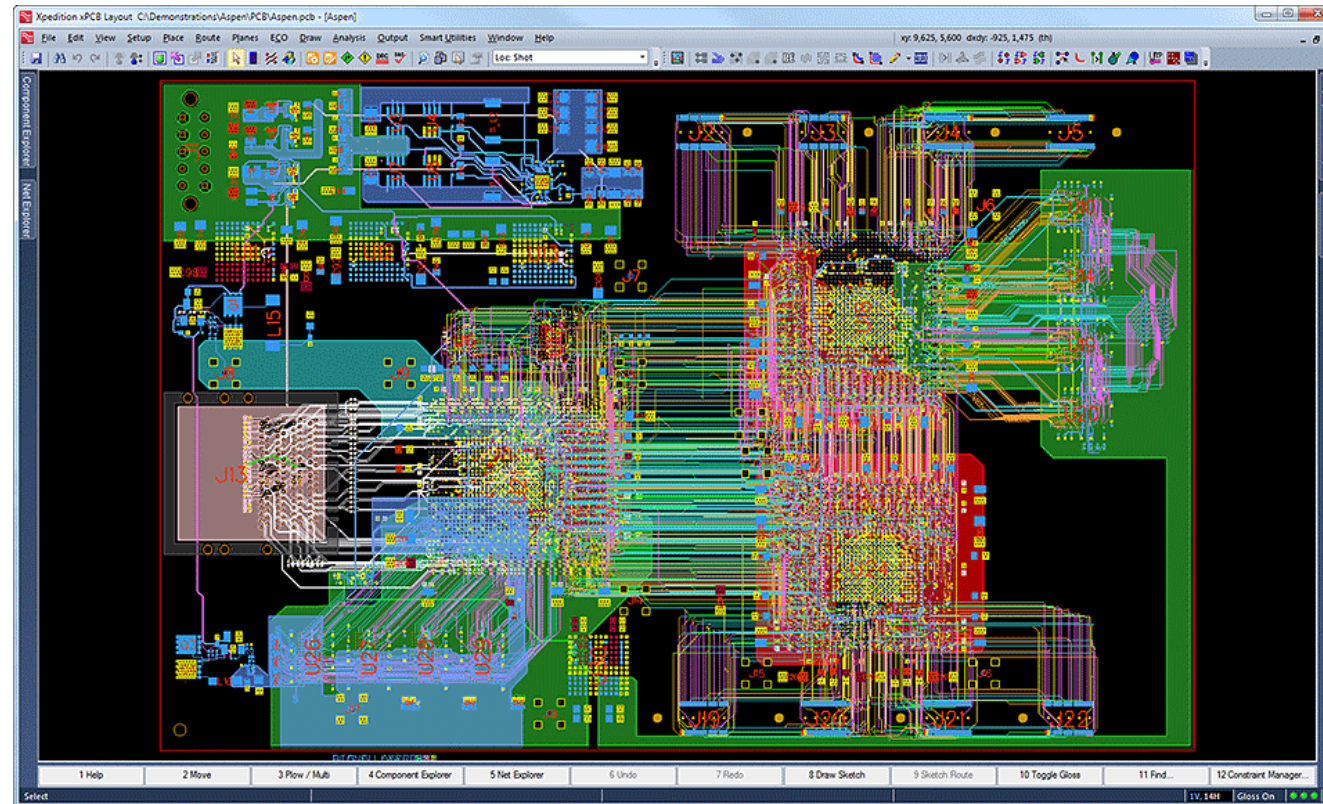
Protel

- What eventually became Altium
 - Your grand dad's PCB CAD tool...



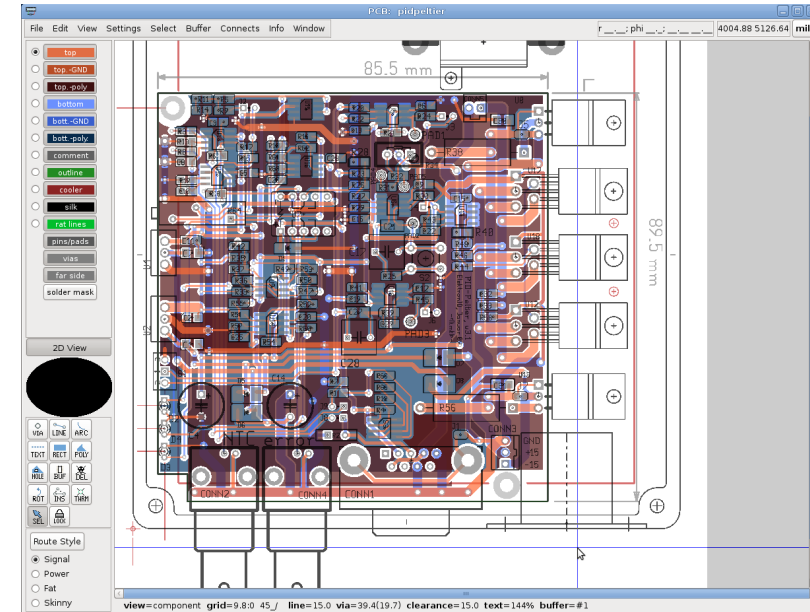
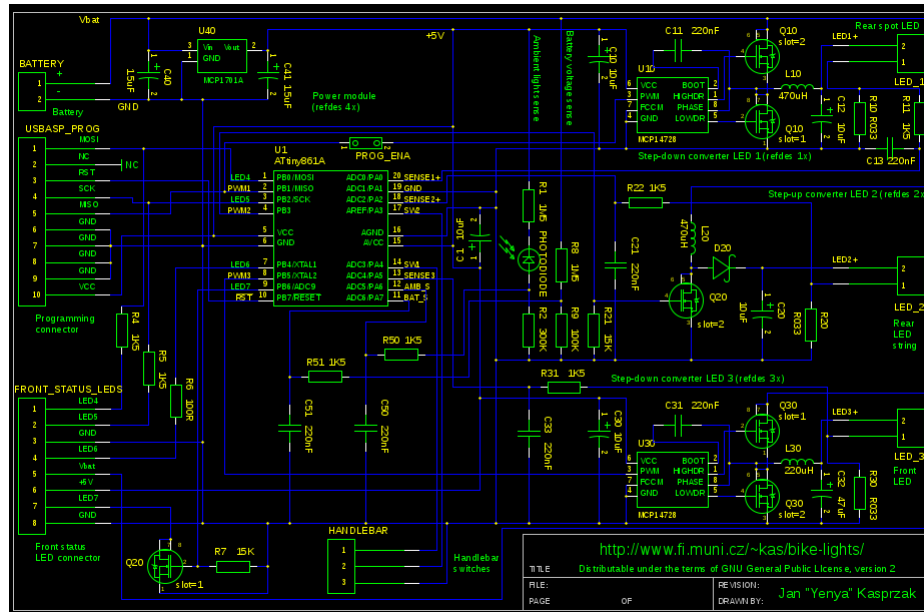
Mentor Graphics

- Ancient, but very capable package
 - What they used to make motherboards with



gSchem, gEDA/PCB

- The classic Linux packages
 - Nobody without a neckbeard uses either of these anymore



And others besides!

- Seems a new CAD program comes out every month
 - Many are terrible, some less so
- No one sits on the PCB throne as supreme reigning god-emperor of circuit CAD
 - Crippled by terrible interfaces, irrational business decisions, free software malaise, or geriatric irrelevancy.

Circuit Fab Houses

- Fabrication houses are a bit like artisans
 - Huge range from hacks to master craftspeople
 - The same files and specs sent to a dozen fab houses will produce a dozen different outputs of varying quality
- Finding a manufacturer you –trust– is very important to your career as a PCB designer

Top of the heap

- The high-tech houses
 - *VERY* expensive, but results are always excellent
 - Often cater to defence/aerospace/spooks clients
 - Do *ALL* their own fabrication in-house and never, ever outsource
- Examples:
 - Lintek (Queanbeyan/Canberra)
 - Minco

Quality Professionals

- Have a real ‘Name’ that they defend
 - Usually do their own stuff (often assemble too!) but sometimes outsource to China
 - *But*, they care about quality and confidentiality, so usually very reliable and litigatable.
 - Range from quite small to HUGEMONGOUS
- Examples
 - Entech (Melbourne), BEC (Brisbane), Circuit Labs (NZ), Elecrow, Foxconn, etc.

Lower tier professionals

- “Average” quality and reliability
 - Liberal in interpreting your specs to save money
 - More variability and cost-cutting than you’d really like – cheaper materials, finishes
 - Very often outsource to cheaper fabs overseas
 - Confidentiality problems not unknown – see your design on the streets of Hong Kong! 😊
- Examples
 - None I’ll mention in print!

Low-end hobbyist grade

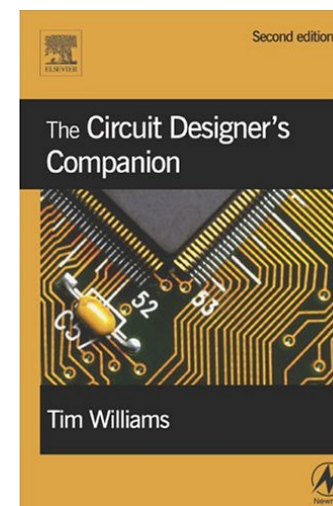
- Focus on cheap and quick
 - Typically not the highest precision/performance, but can't beat the price!
 - Often excellent web-portal integration
 - Sometimes eccentric design limitations?
- Examples
 - PCB Zone, Seeed Studio
 - OSH Park (nice online preview tools!)
 - Many others

Integrated fab/assembly houses

- Upload your design plus BOM and have it fabbed and populated all at the same place!
 - And at an affordable price! OMG
 - Only limited range of capabilities for now, but this is going to change the industry
- Examples
 - Macrofab – seriously, check these guys out!
(Depressingly, their recent UX interface upgrade sucks but is slowly improving)

Useful references

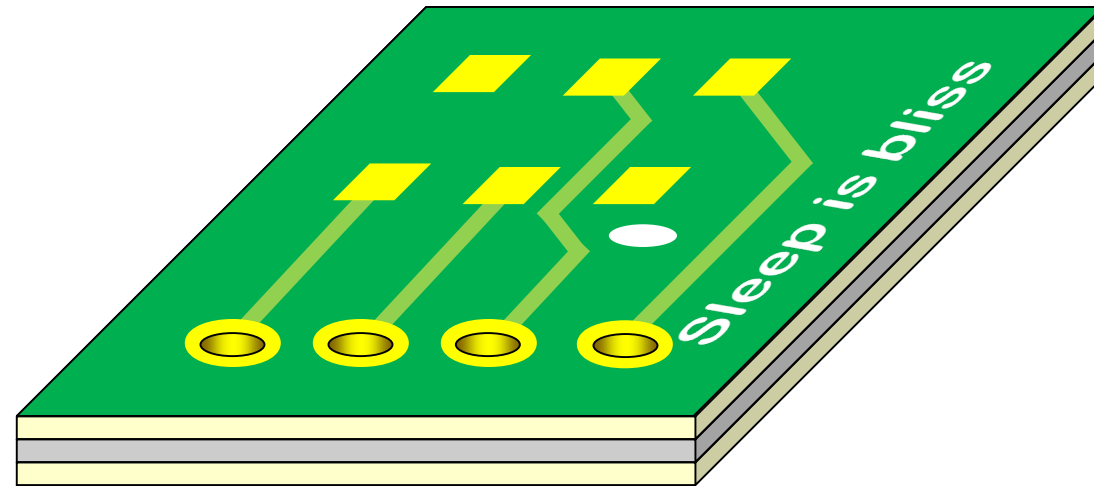
- “The Circuit Designer’s Companion”, Tim Williams
- “Practical Electronics for Inventors”, Scherz and Monk
- Also check out:
 - sparkfun.com
 - pololu.com
 - adafruit.com
 - hackaday.com



Moral of the story

- There is SO much to learn about being a good electronics designer/engineer
- The best way to learn is to do it, and it's never been cheaper!
 - \$740 in 2007 vs \$15 in 2017!
- Learn the tools and give it a shot
 - This is what I do for fun! 😊

Questions?



Tune-in next time for...

Your Soldering is Terrible (probably)

or

“How I learned to stop worrying and love the flux”

Fun fact: 98% of humans have parasites.