

IoT Labs: Exploring LoRa Technology

As defined by Semtech, [LoRa](#) is a wireless technology developed to create the low-power, wide-area networks (LPWANs) required for machine-to-machine (M2M) and Internet of Things (IoT) applications. The technology offers a very compelling mix of long range, low power consumption and secure data transmission and is gaining significant traction in IoT networks being deployed by wireless network operators.

In this lab, you will implement a prototype of LoRa communication between two wireless devices. This enables you to get hands-on experience with LoRa, assess the radio performance, and prepare future advanced prototypes and experimentations.



- What are the advantages of the LoRa modulation?
- How LoRa is compatible with LPWAN requirements and constraints?

-. Setting the Lab

-. Hardware Platform

In order to design and implement experiments with LoRa, you will use the following devices:

- Arduino Mega (x2).
- LoRa shields from [Dragino](#) (x2).



- Give the characteristics of the Arduino you are using: model, number of pins, type of pins, memory sizes, etc.
- Give the main characteristics of the LoRa shield from Dragino (www.dragino.com).
- What type of Antenna are you using? Explain the corresponding characteristics.
- Give an estimated cost of your platform.

-. Software Tools

Download the following software on your PC:

- RadioHead: The Packet Radio library for embedded microprocessors can be downloaded from <https://github.com/samerlahoud/RadioHead>.
- Arduino IDE: Specific OS versions can be downloaded from <https://www.arduino.cc/en/Main/Software>.

Unzip the RadioHead library and copy it to your sketchbook library folder as detailed in <https://www.arduino.cc/en/Guide/Libraries>.



Note well the location of the library folder on your computer. In the following, you will be required to modify source files located in this folder.

-. Installation

Start by plugging the Dragino shields on the Arduino devices and mounting the antennas as shown in Fig. 1.



Figure 1. Arduino with LoRa Dragino shield.

Connect the two Arduino devices to USB ports on your computer. If this is the first time you use Arduino IDE, make sure to install the necessary USB drivers by selecting Tools > Boards Manager and installing Arduino AVR boards.

Now, you have to choose the Board type as Arduino/Genuino Mega 2560 in the Tools menu and select the corresponding serial Port to start programming your Arduino.



For Arduino Mega 2560, additional drivers for Microsoft Windows can be installed from http://wch.cn/download/CH341SER_ZIP.html.

-. Theoretical Study

In this section, you will perform a theoretical assessment of the performance of LoRa modulation. You will later compare this theoretical results to the experimental ones as in a typical scientific study.



- What is the relation between processing gain and spreading factor in LoRa modulation? Explain.
- How does the spreading factor impact the coverage of a LoRa transmitter?
- For each of the three possible configurations of your LoRa device, what is the



transmission bit rate? Explain your computation.

- Compute the receiver sensitivity, assuming the following parameters: channel bandwidth = 125 kHz, spreading factor = 7, coding rate = 4/5, bit error rate (BER) target = 10^{-4} , and receiver noise figure = 6 dB. Refer to this article to determine the mapping between the BER and the SNR.
- Compare the computed sensitivity to that provided by the Semtech Application Note AN1200.22 for the same parameters.

In the remainder of this lab, you will conduct measurements to validate the obtained theoretical receiver sensitivity.

-. Configuring and Running the Lab

-. Modifying the Radio Parameters

[Download the](#)

[basic sketches](#)

that implement a simple LoRa communication between the two devices: a client and a server. Open the sketches with Arduino IDE. Make sure to choose the correct Board and Port in the Tools menu.

Take a look at the source code in `rf95_client.ino` and `rf95_server.ino`. Particularly, the following extract from the `setup` function configures the radio parameters of your LoRa devices:

- Central frequency
- Spreading Factor
- Bandwidth
- Coding Rate
- Transmit power

```
rf95.setFrequency(frequency);
// Setup Power, dBm
rf95.setTxPower(13);

// Setup Spreading Factor (6 ~ 12)
rf95.setSpreadingFactor(7);

// Setup BandWidth, option:
// 7800, 10400, 15600, 20800, 31250, 41700, 62500, 125000, 250000, 500000
// Lower BandWidth for longer distance.
rf95.setSignalBandwidth(125000);

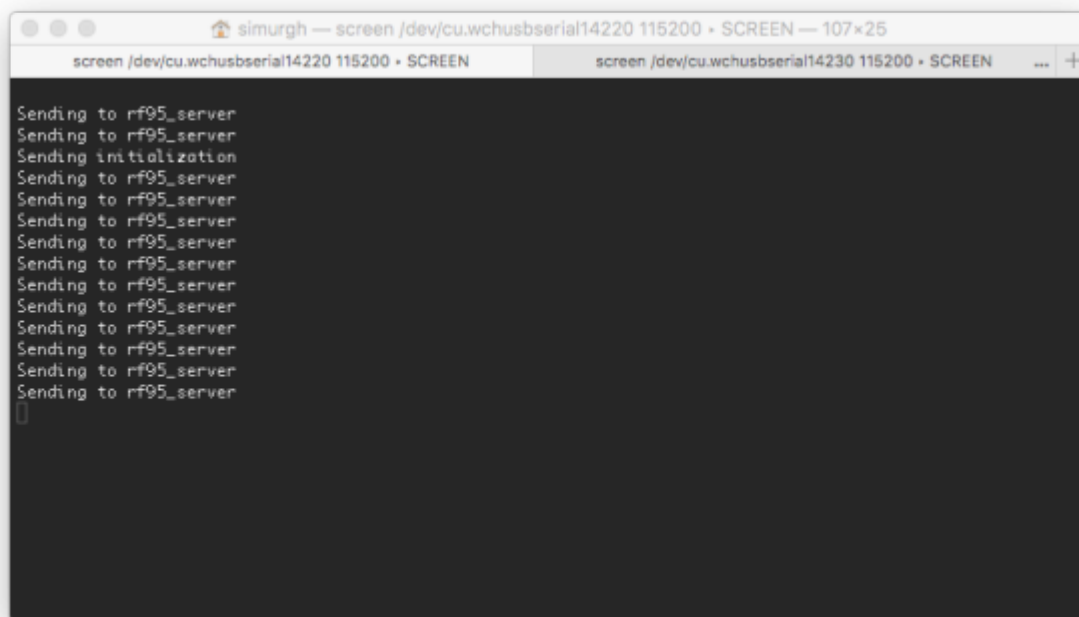
// Setup Coding Rate: 5(4/5), 6(4/6), 7(4/7), 8(4/8)
rf95.setCodingRate4(5);
```

In order to reduce collisions, configure the central frequency of your LoRa devices as indicated below:

Group Number	Frequency
1	866.7
2	866.9
3	867.1
4	867.3
5	867.5
6	867.7
7	867.9
8	868.1
9	868.3
10	868.5
11	868.7
12	868.9

-. Running Basic Sketches

Now you can compile and upload the client and server sketches on the two arduino devices, respectively. On the serial interfaces, you should obtain similar results as in Fig. 2 and Fig. 3. The client sends periodically a short message towards the server. The server outputs the RSSI (received power in dBm) for each received message.

A screenshot of a terminal window titled "simurgh — screen /dev/cu.wchusbserial14220 115200 • SCREEN — 107x25". The terminal shows a list of messages being sent to "rf95_server". The messages are: "Sending to rf95_server", "Sending to rf95_server", "Sending initialization", "Sending to rf95_server", "Sending to rf95_server", "Sending to rf95_server", "Sending to rf95_server", "Sending to rf95_server", "Sending to rf95_server", "Sending to rf95_server", "Sending to rf95_server", "Sending to rf95_server", "Sending to rf95_server", "Sending to rf95_server", "Sending to rf95_server". The terminal has a dark background and white text. The window title bar includes standard macOS window controls (red, yellow, green buttons) and a close button (X).


 Figure 2. Client serial monitor



Figure 3. Server serial monitor

-. Performance Evaluation

In the following, you will design and implement a set of scenarios that enable to evaluate the performance of the LoRa modulation. As you will deal with scientific assessment, you are required to use scientific tools to show the results. You have the choice between [gnuplot](#), [matplotlib](#) with Python, and MATLAB. Take some time to become familiar with one of these software as you will be required to use them in different occasions of your academic programme.

As we are in presence of variable radio conditions, some experiments should be repeated multiple times and results can be shown as probability distributions. Take a look at this excellent repository of data visualisation tools <https://www.data-to-viz.com>.

-. Time on Air

In this section, you will measure the Time on Air (ToA) that is given by the time necessary to transmit a message on the radio interface. You will assess the impact of the spreading factor, bandwidth, coding rate, and message size on the ToA.

Start by implementing a function on the client that measures the time necessary for sending a message. For example, you can use the [micros\(\)](#) function available in the arduino libraries. Now, you can modify one of the parameters (spreading factor, bandwidth, coding rate, message size) and record the impact on the ToA. Note well that you may need to repeat the experiment multiple times in order to obtain the statistical distribution.



- Describe the scenarios you used for assessing the impact of the different parameters on the ToA.



- Join commented extracts of your code and raw data in attached files.
- Visualise the experimental results by plotting the ToA as a function of each one of the different parameters.
- Analyze the obtained results and compare with the theoretical computations. You can superpose the theoretical results and the experimental ones on the same graph.

- Coverage

In this section, you will measure the coverage of LoRa under different radio configurations.

Start by identifying a set of five geographical locations or Test Points (TP). These TPs should be astutely chosen to explore the limits of LoRa coverage. Then, you should implement a function on the server that measures the ratio of successfully delivered packets or PDR (Packet Delivery Ratio). Now, you should run the experiment for three different radio configurations: such configurations should ensure different reliability levels (high, medium, and low reliability).



- Draw the test points on a map and motivate your choices.
- Describe the radio configurations you selected and their impact on the reliability of the transmission.
- Visualise the experimental results by plotting the PDR for each TP and each radio configuration.
- Analyze the obtained results.

- [Classroom activity] Collisions and Packet Delivery Ratio

In this section, you will measure the impact of the packet arrival rate on the collision rate and consequently the PDR.

The setting for this experiment is unique:

- Only one server is required in the classroom. This server should compute the ratio of successfully delivered packets or PDR.
- All groups are required to use the same frequency, spreading factor, and coding rate.
- On each client, packets will be generated following a Poisson process with the same average arrival rate for all groups.



- Draw the PDR as a function of the average arrival rate. Analyze your results.
- What type of mathematical model enables to theoretically compute the PDR? Verify the obtained results.

-. Coverage Challenge

In this section, you are required to establish a record of LoRa coverage. You can certainly unleash your scientific imagination, but some rules must be followed to validate the record:

- Direct transmission between the two devices is only considered.
- 3D distance is computed between devices.
- PDR must be higher than 10% as computed for 100 packets.



- Compute the Fresnel zone for your transmission.
- Provide the expression of the link budget and compute the received power using two different pathloss models.
- Compare the received power obtained experimentally with the theoretical results.
- Write an article (blog, wiki, ...) to describe your experiment.

-. Grading

	Exemplary	Accomplished	Developing	Beginning
Answer to questions				
Design experiments				
Analyse results				

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