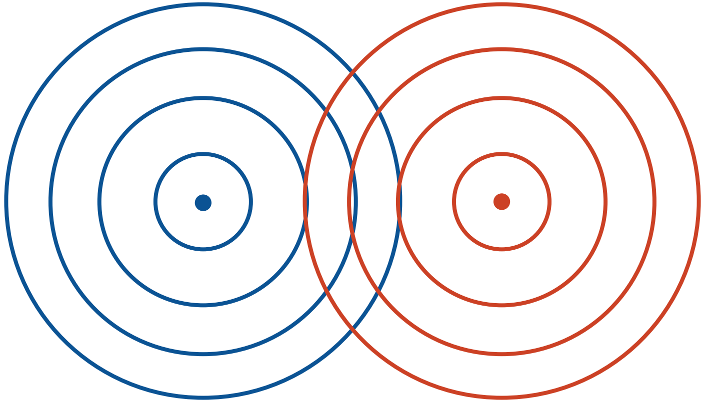


Lecture 24 (Wireless 1)

Wireless Links

Slides credit: CS168@UC Berkeley

Why is Wireless Different?

Lecture 24, Spring 2026

Why is Wireless Different?

- Shared Medium
- Attenuation
- Changing Environments
- Collision Detection

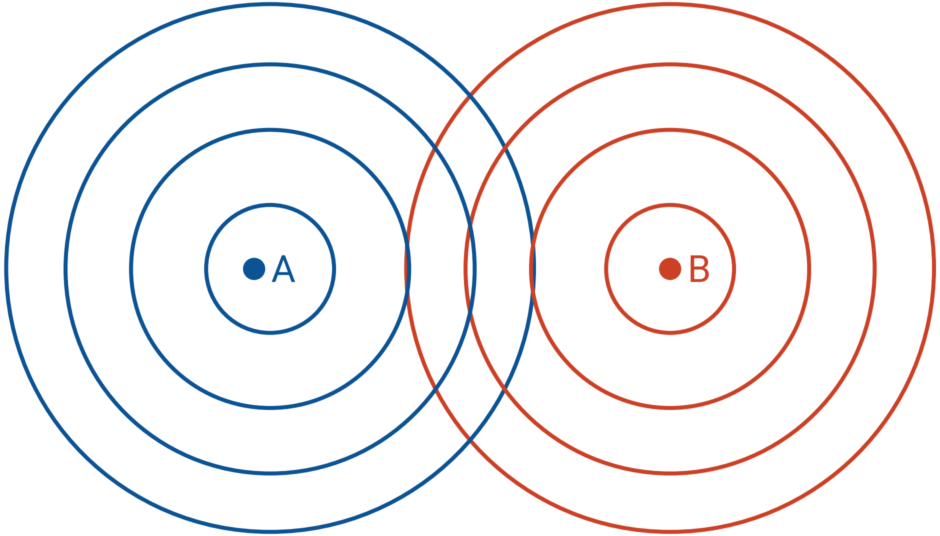
Wireless Signals

Wireless signals are waves that propagate in all directions.

- Analogy: Ripples in a pond.
- Waves interact with each other, and with the environment.

Differences mostly affect Layer 1 (Physical) and Layer 2 (Link).

1. Wireless is fundamentally a shared medium. *(Wired is not.)*
2. Wireless signals attenuate significantly with distance. *(Wired signals do not.)*
3. Wireless environments can change rapidly. *(Wired environments do not.)*
4. Wireless packet collisions are hard to detect. *(Wired packet collisions are not.)*

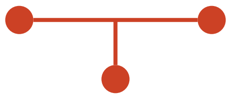


Difference: Wired vs. Wireless Links

Wired links:

- Point-to-point (private) by default.

- Creating multi-point buses requires work.



- Fairly easy to shield from external interference.

- Uses electrical signals to transmit data.

Wireless links:

- Broadcast (shared) by default.

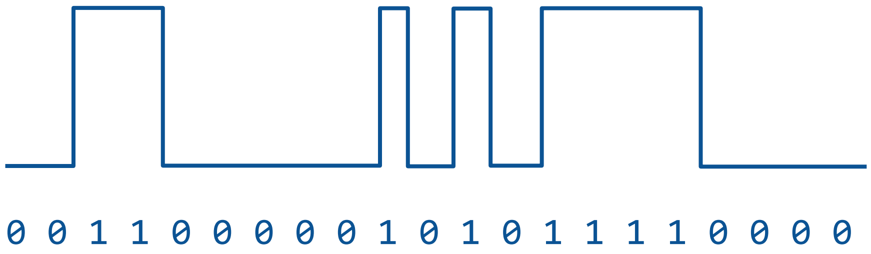
- Creating point-to-point private links requires work.
- Fairly hard to shield from external interference.
- Modulate electromagnetic fields to transmit data.

Wired link: Encode bits as electrical signals.

- High voltage = 1.
- Low voltage = 0.

Wireless link:

- Draw the bits as a wave?
- Problem: Resulting wave is low-frequency, and hard to transmit.



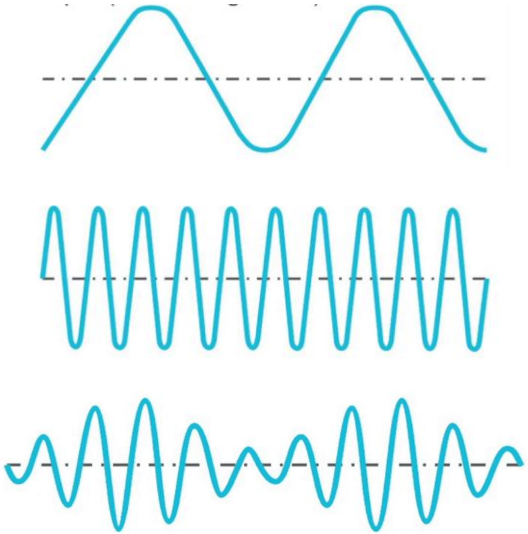
Modulation: Impose our data signal on top of a carrier signal.

- Carrier signal: A high-frequency, constant wave that contains no information.
- The combined wave is easy to transmit, and contains our data!

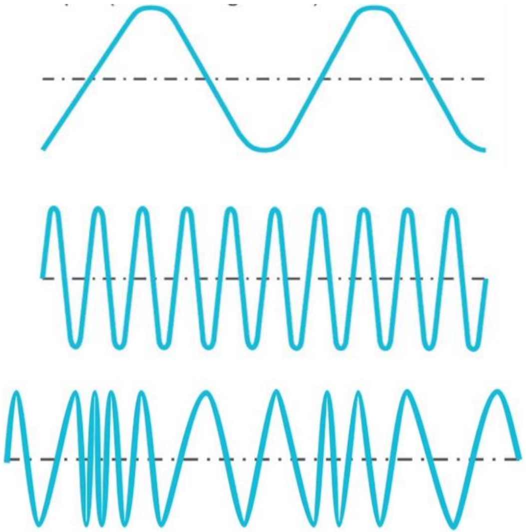
Original signal

+ Carrier signal

= Modulated signal



Amplitude Modulation (AM):
1 = Taller wave.
0 = Shorter wave.



Frequency Modulation (FM):
1 = Oscillate fast.
0 = Oscillate slow.

Other modulation strategies exist.

Measuring Noise and Interference – SINR

Shared medium → other signals can corrupt our data!

- **Noise**: Background, ambient signals.
- **Interference**: Another transmitter sending signals.

SINR (Signal to Interference and Noise Ratio) lets us measure connection quality:

$$\text{SINR} = \frac{P_{\text{signal}}}{P_{\text{interference}} + P_{\text{noise}}}$$

- Ratio of power to noise+interference at the the receiver.
- Higher SINR is better.
- If there's more noise+interference, the signal must be stronger.
- If signal is weak, can employ coding gain (error-correcting codes).

Measuring Noise and Interference – SINR

SINR is dimensionless (it's a ratio).

Decibels let us measure ratios on a logarithmic scale.

- Ratio is 10 times greater = increase of 10 dB.

Ratio	Ratio in dB
1	0 dB
10	10 dB
100	20 dB
1000	30 dB
10000	40 dB

SINR (measured in dB).

SINR formula.

$$\text{SINR}_{\text{dB}} = 10 \cdot \log_{10}\left(\frac{P_{\text{signal}}}{P_{\text{interference}} + P_{\text{noise}}}\right)$$

Measuring Noise and Interference – Noisy Channel Shannon Capacity

Shannon capacity: Theoretical limit of how much data can be sent on a noisy channel.

$$C = B \cdot \log_2(1 + \text{SINR})$$

- C: How much data can be sent? (bits/sec)
- B: Bandwidth of channel (range of frequencies we can use).
- SINR: Ratio of signal power to noise+interference.

- Higher bandwidth = can send more data.
- SINR increases = can send more data.
  - Stronger signal, or less noise+interference.

Example: The plain old telephone system:

- B = 3000 Hz. *(Telephones understand frequencies between 300 Hz and 3300 Hz.)*
- SINR = 100. *(20 dB signal-to-noise ratio.)*
- $C = 3000 \cdot \log_2(1 + 100) \approx 20000$ = 20 kbps.

Difference: Wireless Signals Attenuate

Lecture 24, Spring 2026

Why is Wireless Different?

- Shared Medium
- **Attenuation**
- Changing Environments
- Collision Detection

Difference: Attenuation

Wireless signals **attenuate** – they get much weaker over longer distances.

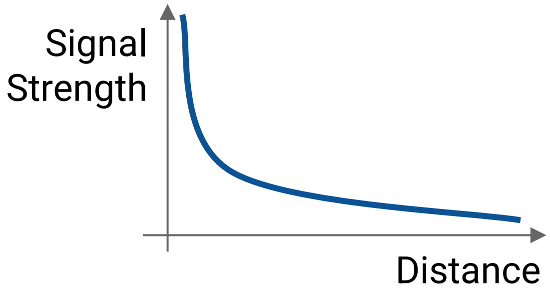
- Our design must account for attenuation.
- Wired signals also attenuate, but effect is far smaller.

Trade-off:

- Maximize performance: Accuracy, speed, range.
- Minimize resource use: Power, use less of the frequency spectrum (costs money).
- Trade-off: Better signal requires more resources.

Free-space model (aka **line-of-sight model**):

- Transmitter and receiver exist in empty space.
- No obstacles, not even Earth's surface.



In this model, the **inverse square law** applies.

- 10 times as far = signal is 100 times weaker.
- *k* times as far = signal is k^2 times weaker.

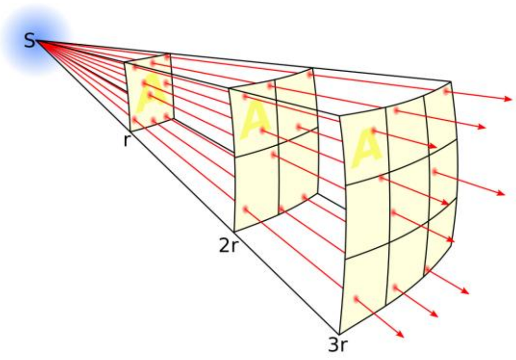
"is proportional to"

$$P_r \propto \frac{P_t}{d^2}$$

Transmitter power

d = distance between transmitter and receiver

Receiver power



Intuition: Signal propagates out like a sphere.
Signal power is spread over surface of sphere.
Surface area of sphere = $4\pi r^2$.

The **Friis equation** accounts for:

- Gain of the transmitter and receiver antennas.
- Aperture (area) of the receiver antenna. Proof omitted.
  - Intuition: Larger antenna can capture more signal.
- Distance between antennas (inverse-square law).

Receiver power | Transmitter power | Gains of antennas | Aperture of receiver antenna | Distance (inverse square law)

$$P_r = P_t \cdot \underbrace{G_t \cdot G_r}_{} \cdot \left(\frac{\lambda^2}{4\pi}\right)\left(\frac{1}{4\pi d^2}\right)$$

Measuring Attenuation – Friis Equation, Rewritten

The equation is sometimes written like this:

$$P_r = P_t \cdot G_t \cdot G_r \cdot \left(\frac{\lambda^2}{4\pi}\right)\left(\frac{1}{4\pi d^2}\right)$$

$$= P_t \cdot G_t \cdot G_r \cdot \left(\frac{\lambda}{4\pi d}\right)^2$$

Or in terms of decibels (logarithmic scale):

$$P_r^{\mathrm{dB}} = P_t^{\mathrm{dB}} + G_t^{\mathrm{dB}} + G_r^{\mathrm{dB}} + 20\log_{10}\left(\frac{\lambda}{4\pi d}\right)$$

Measuring Attenuation – Link Budget

How do we know if the link will actually work?

- Compute a **link budget**: Add all gains, subtract all losses.

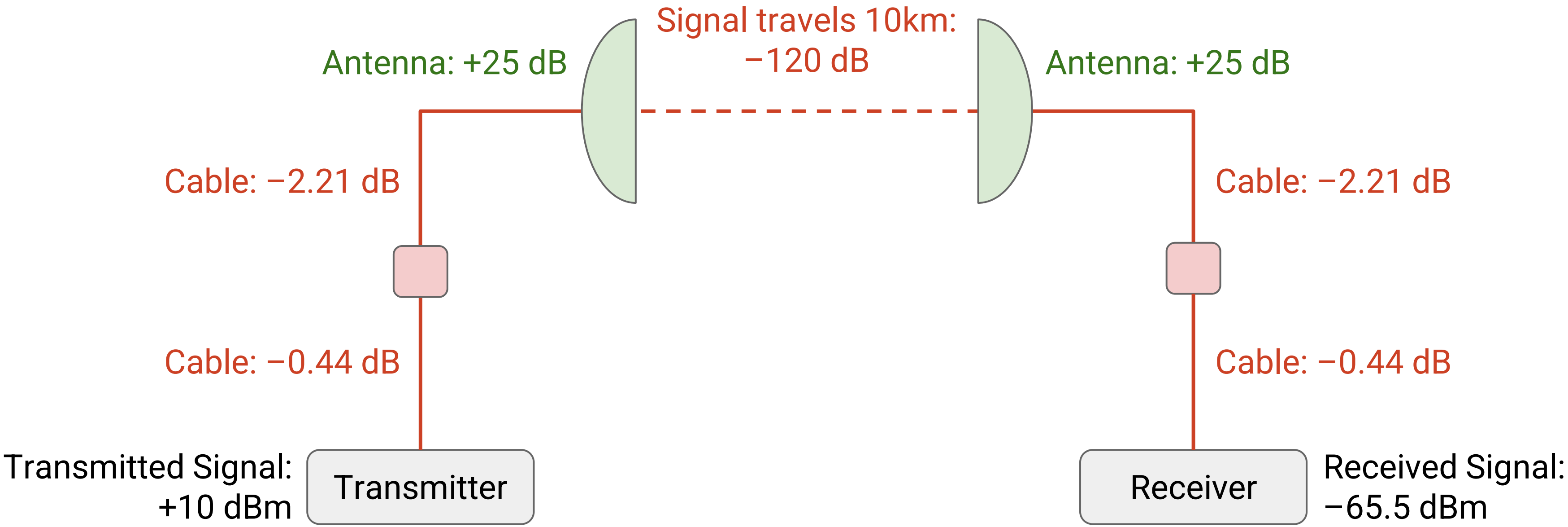
$$P_r^{\mathrm{dB}} = P_t^{\mathrm{dB}} + \sum \text{gains} - \sum \text{losses}$$

- Compare:
  - Signal power at receiver.
  - Receiver **sensitivity** (minimum signal the receiver can hear).
- If link budget is positive: P_r > Sensitivity. Link works!
- If link budget is negative: P_r < Sensitivity. Link doesn't work!

Link margin is difference between receiver signal and sensitivity.

- Bigger link margin = more robust signal.

Example of computing link budget:



Sensitivity: −80 dBm

Link margin = 14.5 dBm > 0.
Our connection works!

Note: dBm = Power relative to 1 milliwatt.

Difference: Changing Environments

Lecture 24, Spring 2026

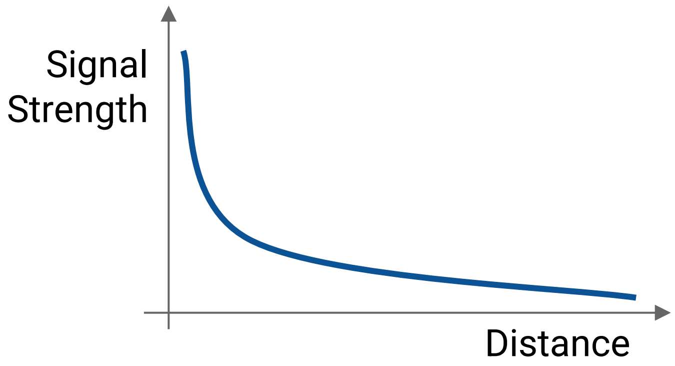
Why is Wireless Different?

- Shared Medium
- Attenuation
- **Changing Environments**
- Collision Detection

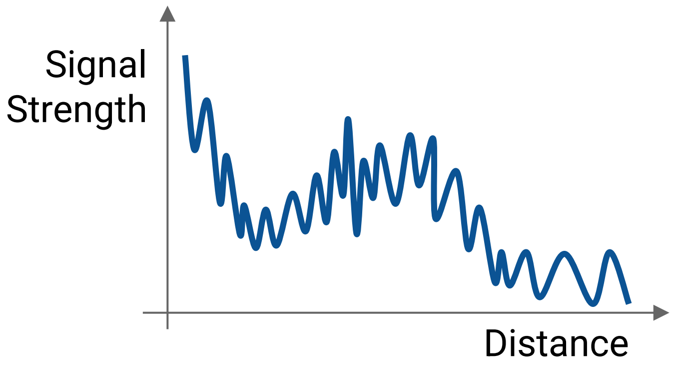
Difference: Environments Change

Wireless environments change rapidly.

- Devices move around.
- Signals reflect and refract off physical obstacles (e.g. buildings, Earth's surface).



Free-space model:
Signal weakens over distance.

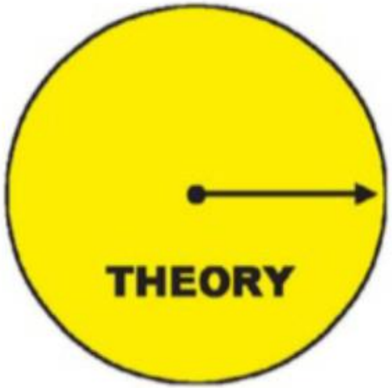


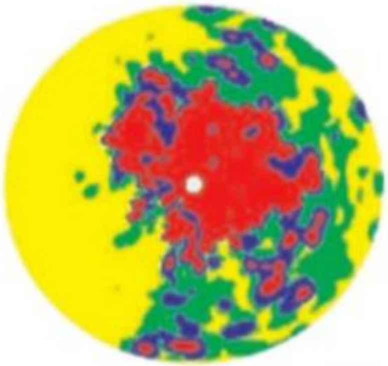
After accounting for obstacles:
Signal strength fluctuates!

Path Loss is Messy

Wireless propagation is messy.

- In theory: Signal propagates in all directions.
- In real life: Signal strength depends on environment.





Color = strength of signal.

3 characteristics affect signal strength:

Free-space loss:

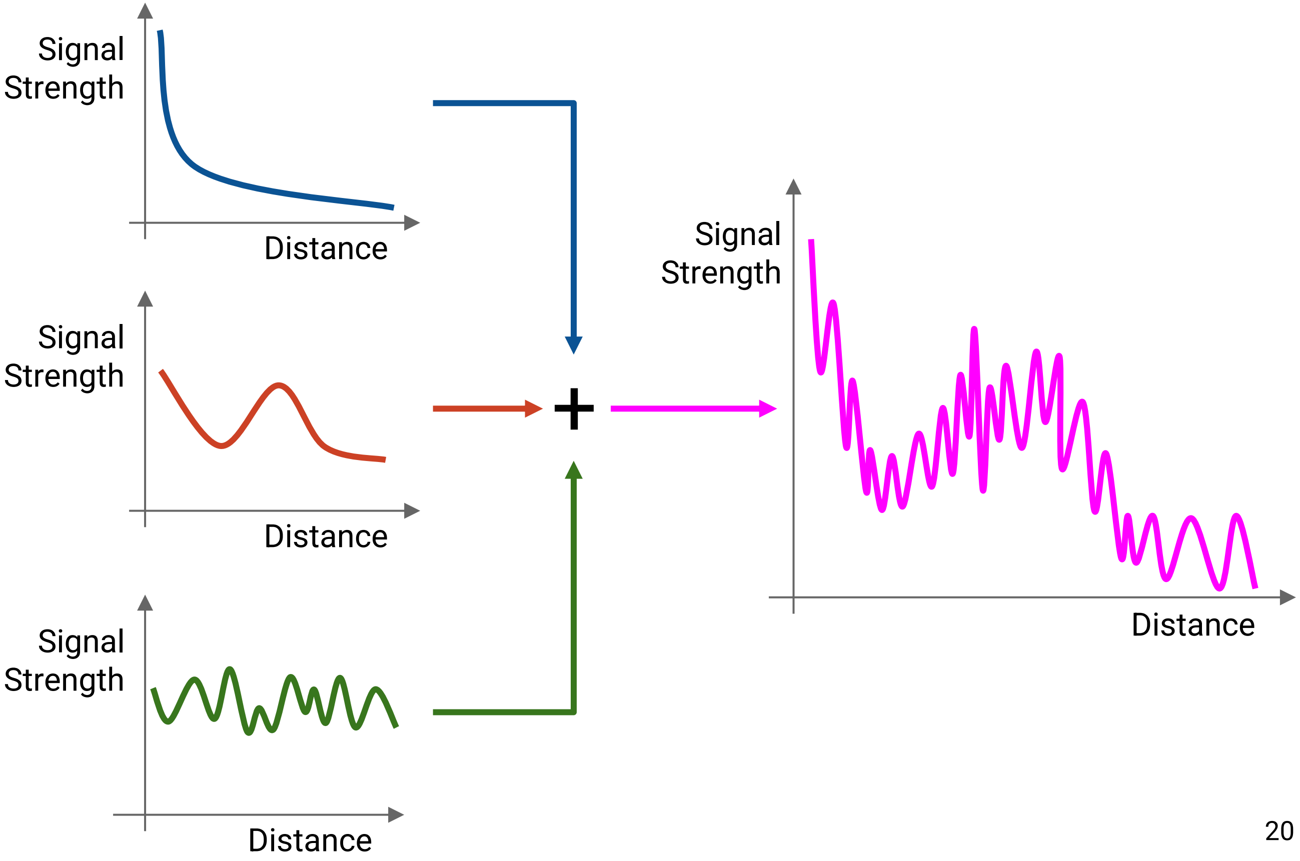
- Due to inverse square law.
- Fluctuates very slowly.

Shadowing:

- Due to obstructions.
- Fluctuates quickly.

Multipath fading:

- Due to signal colliding with itself.
- Fluctuates very quickly.

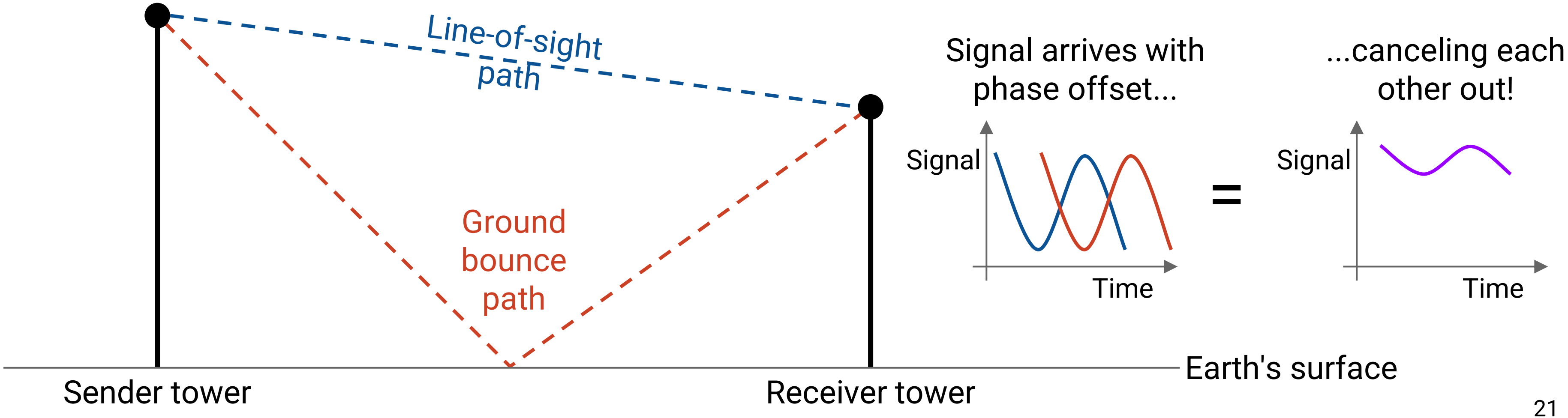


Two-ray model assumes the signal waves travel along two paths:

- Line-of-sight path: Wave arrives with no obstacles.
- Ground-bounce path: Wave reflects off the Earth's surface.

Assuming sender and receiver are far enough:

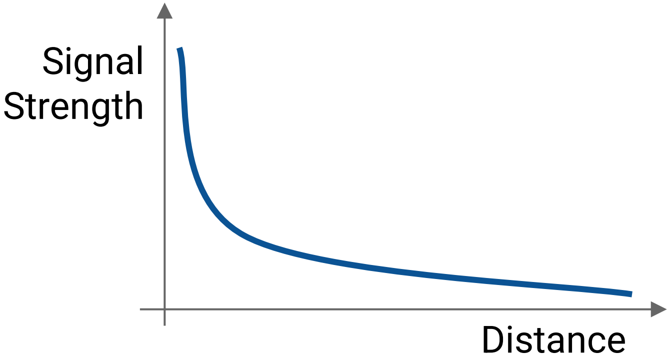
- Two waves arrive phase-shifted at the receiver, causing destructive interference.
- Signal strength ∝ $1/d^4$. Drops off much faster than inverse-square law!



Modeling Path Loss – Two-Ray Model

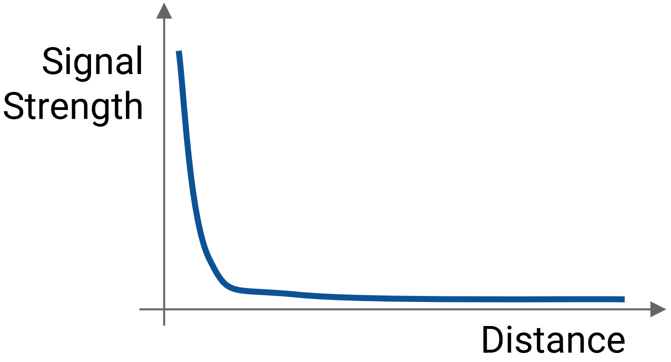
If sender and receiver are far enough:

- Waves arrive phase-shifted at the receiver, causing destructive interference.
- Signal strength ∝ $1/d^4$. Drops off much faster than inverse-square law!



Free-space model:

– Signal strength ∝ $1/d^2$.
– Idealized, no obstacles.



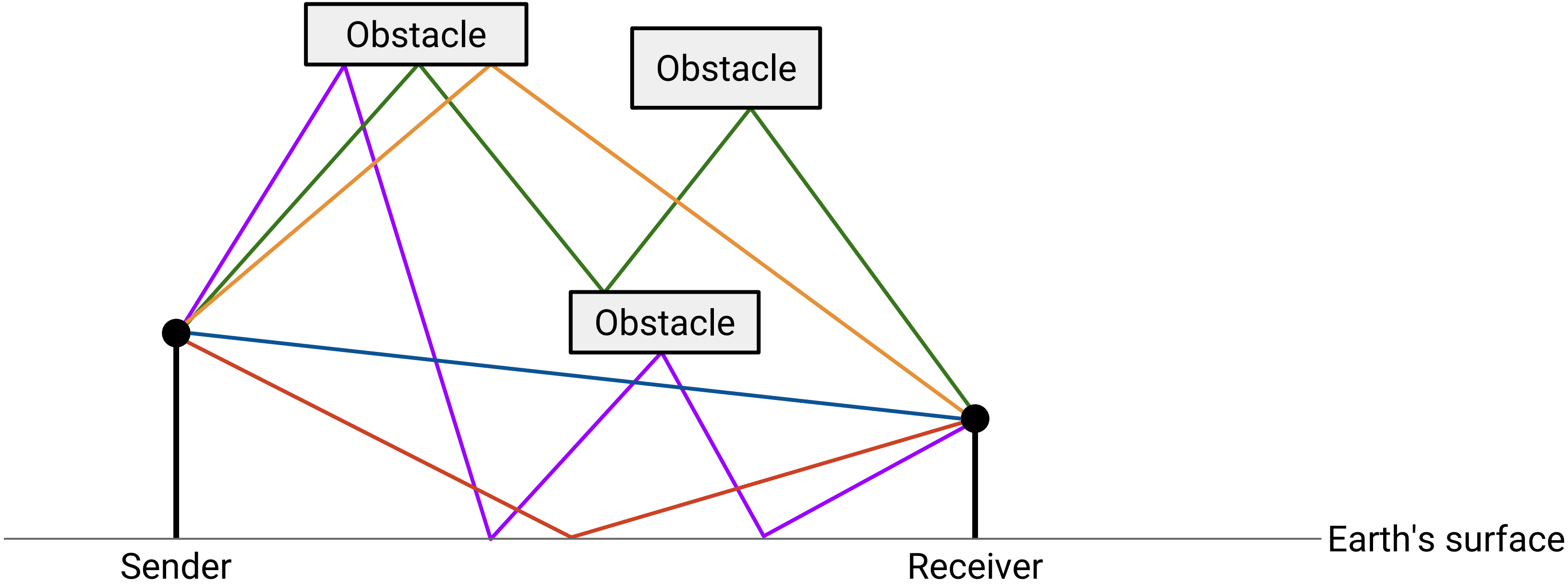
Two-ray model:

– Signal strength ∝ $1/d^4$.
– Signal bounces off ground.
Causes destructive interference.

Modeling Path Loss – General Ray Tracing Models

General **ray tracing** models account for other obstacles.

- Signals reflect, scatter, and diffract.
- Most signals arriving at receiver are reflections.
- Run simulations in software. Requires information about environment.



Modeling Path Loss – General Ray Tracing Models

Free-space model: Signal strength $\propto 1/d^2$.

Two-ray model: Signal strength $\propto 1/d^4$.

General ray tracing model:

Receiver power

Transmitter power

Distance

$$P_r = P_t K d^\gamma$$

K and γ are empirically determined by the model.

- Signal dominated by reflections.
- Exponent γ is determined empirically. Usually between −2 and −8.

Difference: Collision Detection

Lecture 24, Spring 2026

Why is Wireless Different?

- Shared Medium
- Attenuation
- Changing Environments
- **Collision Detection**

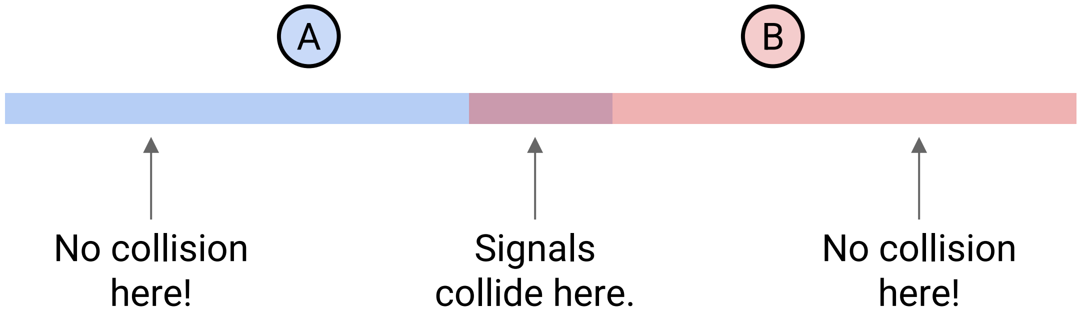
Difference: Collision Detection

Wired collisions are easy to detect.

- On a point-to-point link, collisions might not happen at all.
- There's just one signal on the wire to sense.

Wireless collisions are much harder to detect.

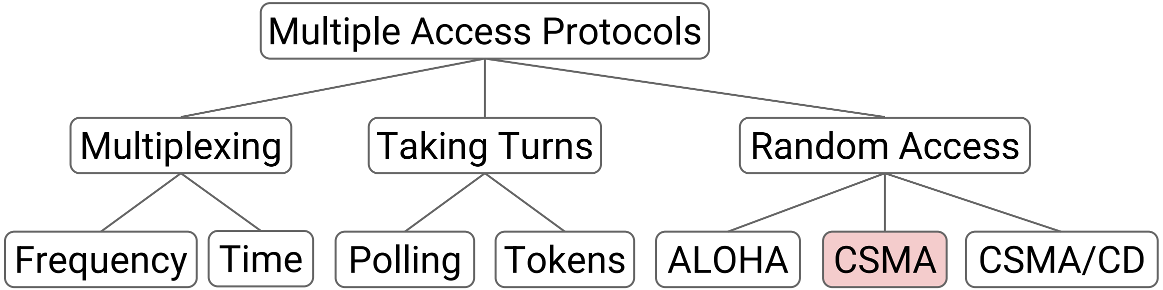
- There's a spatial aspect to collisions.
- Signals can collide in one place, but not another place.



Recall: Multiple Access Protocols

Recall: Many ways for devices to share a link.

- Let's start with CSMA: Listen, and transmit when it's quiet.
- Then we'll design some protocols for wireless networks.



If pairs are well-separated, no problem!

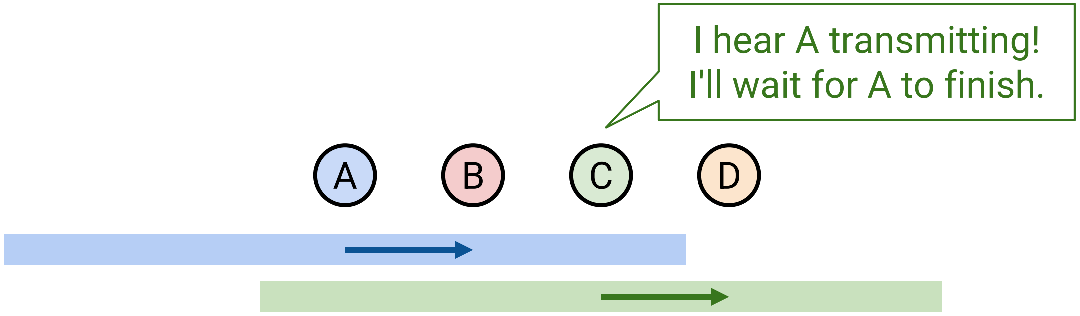
- Goal: A→B and C→D.
- A transmits to B.
- C transmits to D at the same time.
- No collisions!

Notice: Signals propagate in all directions (not just toward the destination).

- Arrows are just drawn for convenience.

If pairs are in range of each other, no problem!

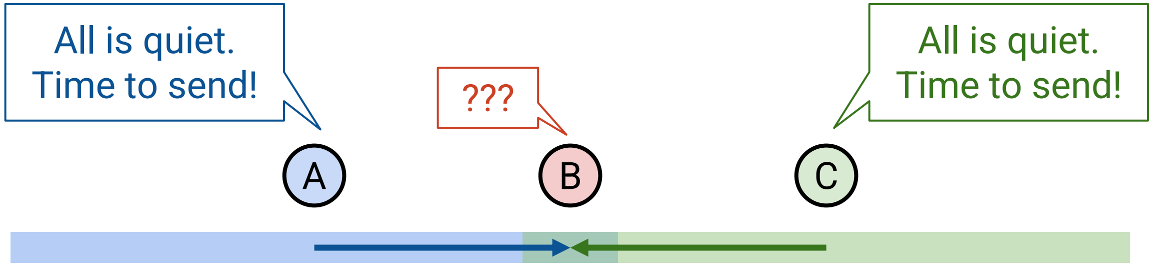
- Goal: A→B and C→D.
- A transmits to B.
- C detects transmission. Must wait to transmit to D.
- No collisions! A–B and C–D take turns.



Hidden terminal problem:

- Goal: A→B and C→B.
- A senses quiet, and starts transmitting.
- C senses quiet, and starts transmitting.
- Collision at B!

Problem: A and C are out-of-range. They can't detect each other sending.

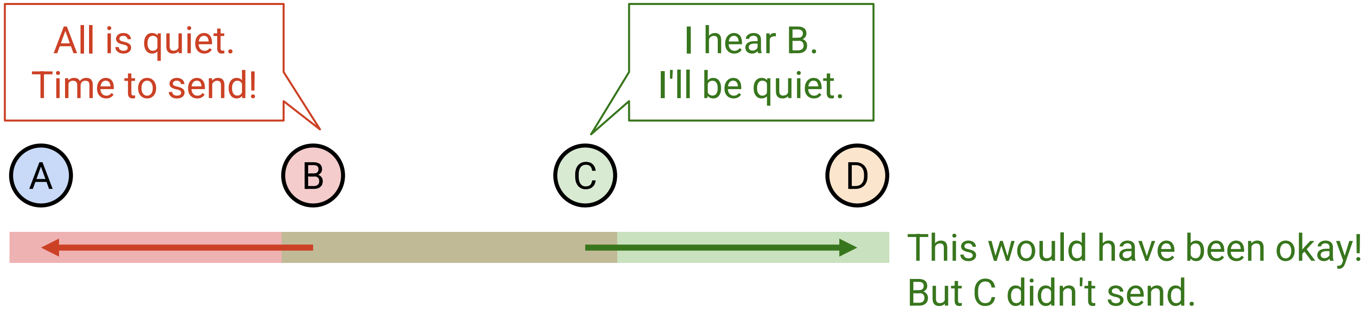


Exposed terminal problem:

- Goal: B→A and C→D.
- B senses quiet, and starts transmitting.
- C senses a collision and doesn't send.

Notice: We could have actually sent simultaneously.

- Some areas have collision, but we don't care. No collisions at the receivers.



MACA (Multiple Access with Collision Avoidance)

Key problem: CSMA detects collisions at the *sender*.

- But we only care about collisions at the *receiver*.

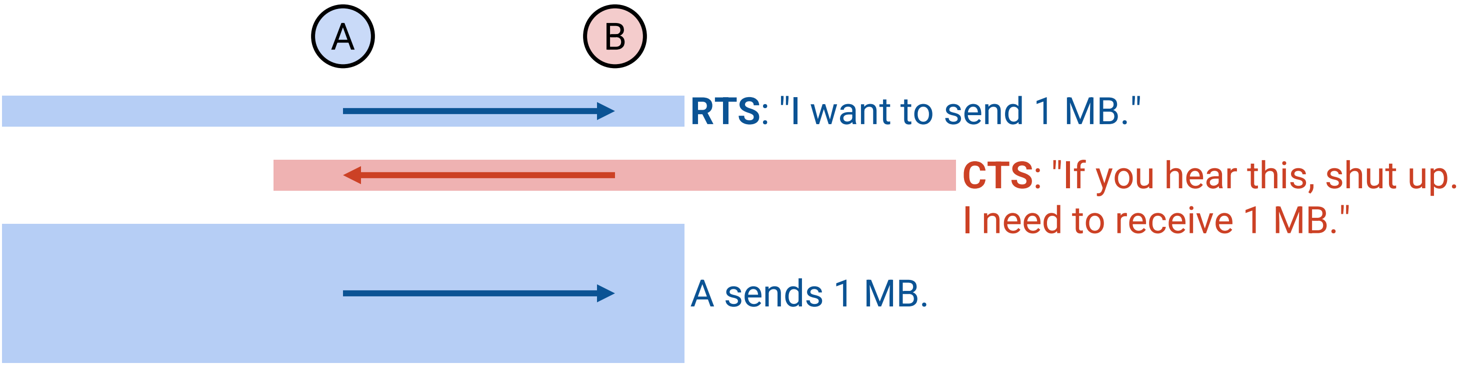
Solution: Let's have the receiver announce if it detects collisions.

- New protocol for shared medium:
  MACA (Multiple Access with Collision Avoidance).
- Note: No carrier sense.

MACA (Multiple Access with Collision Avoidance)

To communicate over MACA:

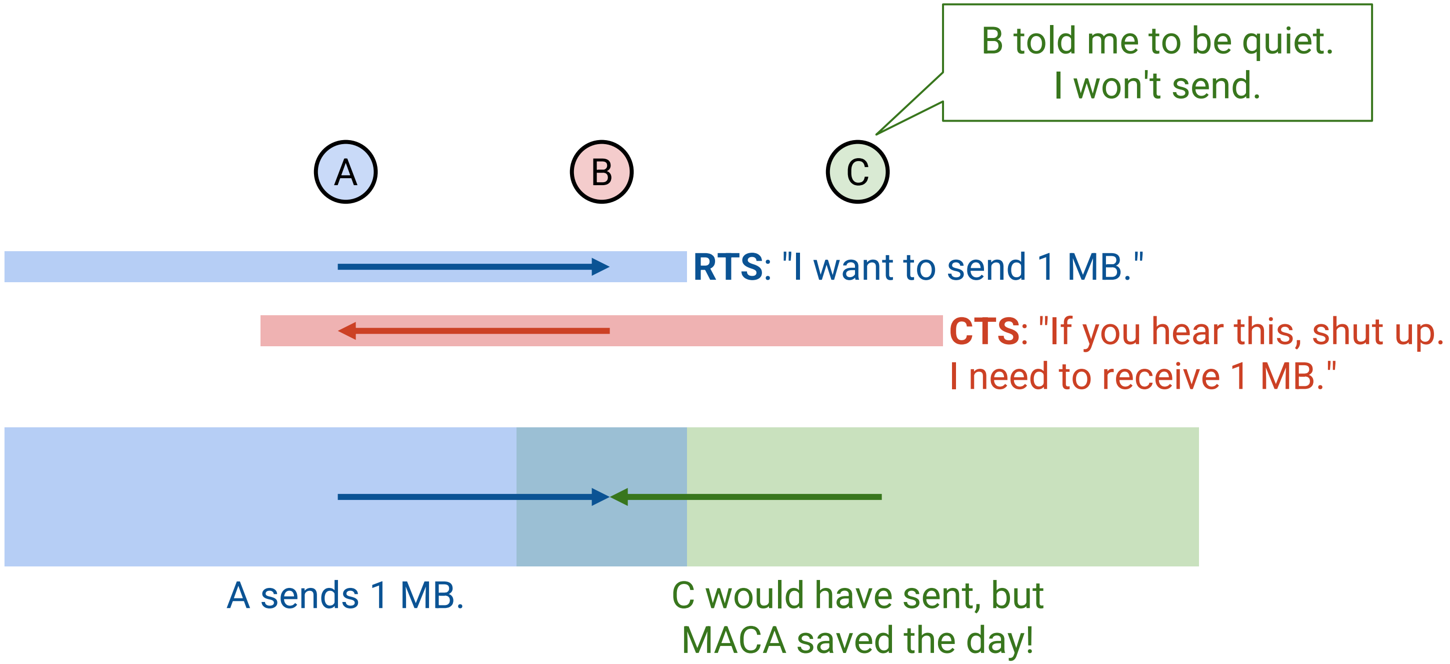
1. Sender transmits **Request to Send (RTS)** with length of data.
2. Receiver transmits a **Clear to Send (CTS)** with length of data.
   - This tells sender that it's safe to send. No collisions at receiver.
   - This tells everyone in receiver's range to be quiet.



MACA (Multiple Access with Collision Avoidance) – Solving Hidden Terminal Problem

MACA solves the hidden terminal problem.

- Goal: A→B, C→B.
- B now tells everyone in its range to be quiet, using the CTS.
- C won't send anymore. Collision avoided!



MACA (Multiple Access with Collision Avoidance) – Rules

If you hear a CTS, be quiet until the data is sent.

- CTS contains length of data.
- You can use data length to estimate how long you need to wait.

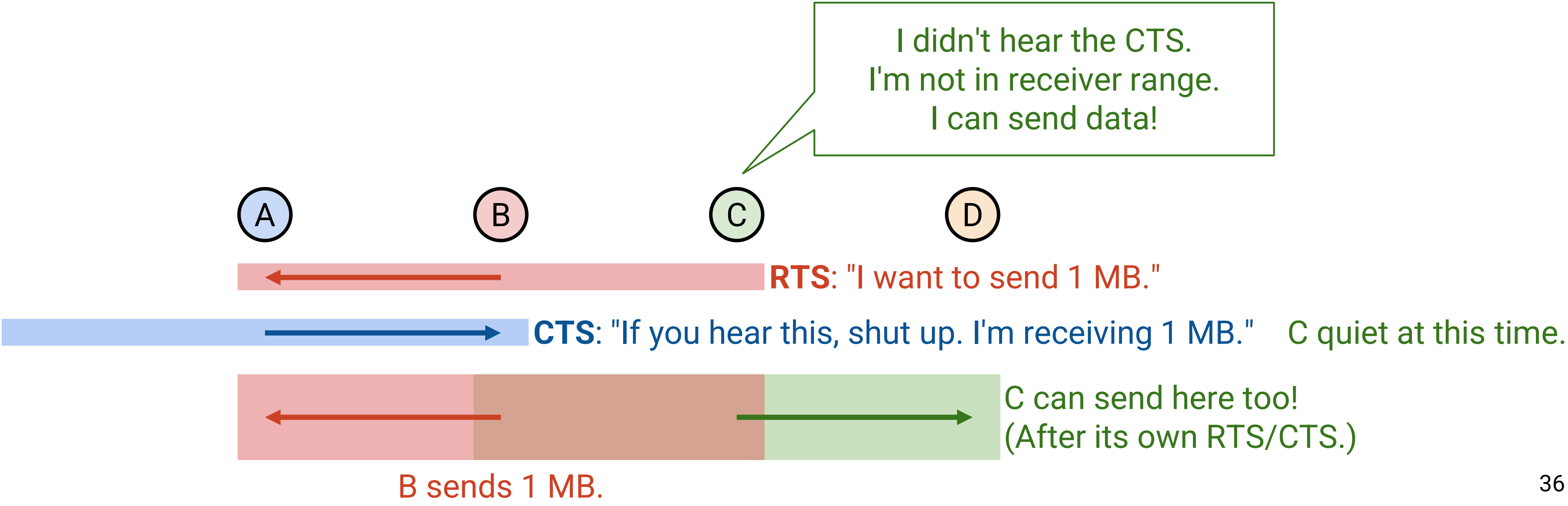
If you hear an RTS, be quiet for one time slot.

- Give the receiver time to send the CTS.
  - If you don't be quiet, you might clobber out the CTS.
- After waiting:
  - If you hear the CTS: You're in receiver range. Be quiet.
  - If you don't hear the CTS: You're not in receiver range. You can send again.

MACA (Multiple Access with Collision Avoidance) – Solving Exposed Terminal Problem

MACA solves the exposed terminal problem, under certain assumptions.

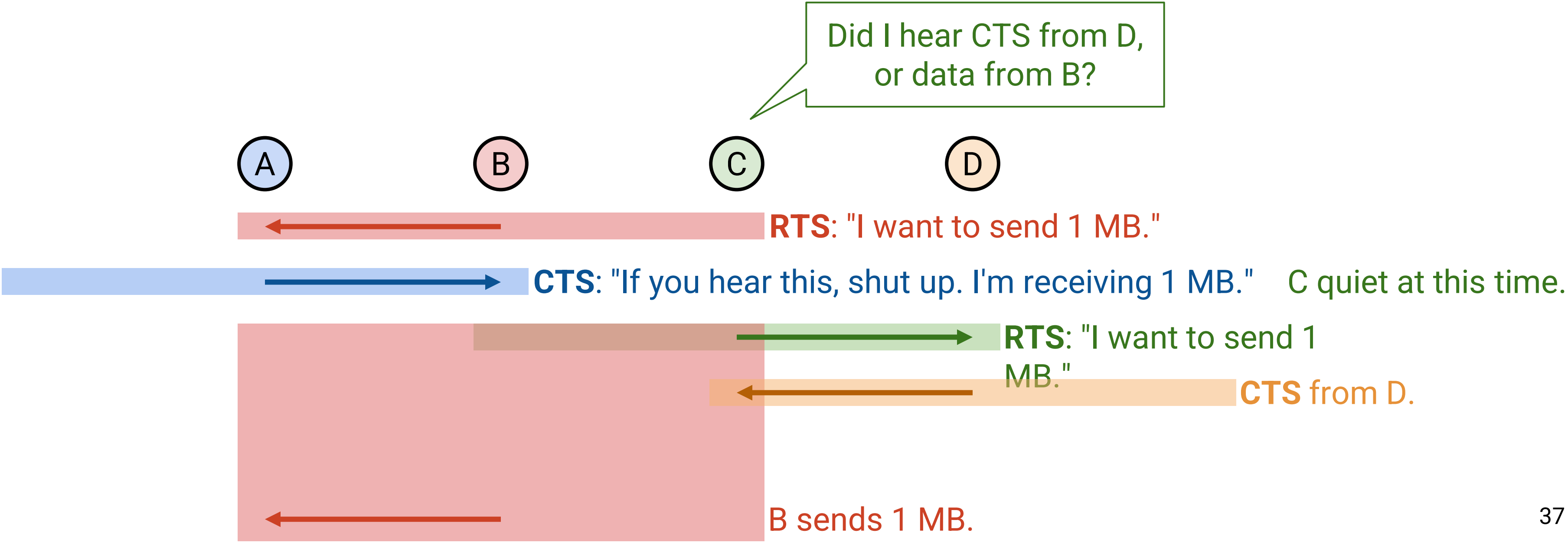
- Goal: B→A and C→D.
- C hears the RTS and defers for one time slot.
- C doesn't hear the CTS, so it's out-of-range of the other receiver, and can send.



MACA (Multiple Access with Collision Avoidance) – Solving Exposed Terminal Problem

MACA solves the exposed terminal problem, **under one assumption**.

- Assumes that C can hear the CTS from D over B's data.
- Key problem: MACA requires the sender to listen (for the CTS).
    - Contrast with CSMA: Sender just sends.



MACA (Multiple Access with Collision Avoidance) – Collisions

If we send RTS, but don't hear CTS, that means there was a collision!

Apply *exponential backoff* and wait up to twice as long before sending another RTS.

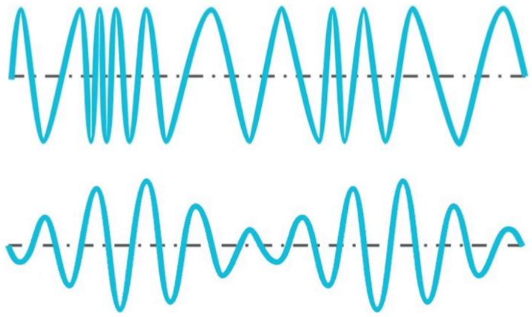
- Each device maintains a *CW* (Contention Window) value.
- Pick a random number in [0, *CW*]. Wait that long before re-sending RTS.

Rules for adjusting *CW*:

- Minimum value: *CW* = 2.
- Maximum value: *CW* = 64.
- On successful RTS/CTS: Set $CW \leftarrow 2$.
- On failed RTS/CTS: Set $CW \leftarrow 2 \times CW$, clamped at 64.

Wireless is different!

- Shared medium by default
- Attenuation due to distance and obstacles
- Rapidly shifting environments
- Collision detection is different



Use MACA instead of CSMA for collision detection at receivers.

Modulation reference:

- https://www.taitradioacademy.com/topic/how-does-modulation-work-1-1/