



Transferring digital data from place to place takes time. Like water flowing into a lake, the faster it flows the more rapidly the lake fills up and overflows. With computer data, we have a similar problem. You have probably had to do this yourself many times. Each time you copy your playlist from your PC to your portable music player, you will have to wait a certain length of time. The transfer rate is fixed, so the more songs you want to transfer the longer you have to wait. Here's how this works!

Problem 1 - Suppose you want to transfer 1000 songs from your PC collection to your music Player. Each 4-minute song takes up 4 megabytes on the PC, and the cable link from your computer to your Player can handle a transfer rate of 3 million bytes/second. How many minutes does it take to transfer all your songs to the Player?

Imagine a lake fed by one large slow-moving river that brings water to it, and a second small, fast-moving river that takes water from the lake. If the rates at which the water enters and leaves the lake are not in step, the lake's water level will overflow. The InSight lander has a similar problem. It is gathering data at one rate, but transmitting it to Earth at another rate. We don't want to lose any of the data, so the data has to be stored in a memory device called a buffer.

InSight has two instruments that generate constant streams of digital data. The SEIS seismometer produces 48 megabytes/hr and the HP3 produces 2 megabytes/hr. This data is stored in a 500 megabyte buffer. Every 2 hours, the data in the buffer is transmitted to Earth at a rate of 4 megabytes/sec.

Problem 2 - How long will it take to fill up the buffer with data?

Problem 3 - How long will be required to transmit the buffer data to Earth during each 2-hour transmission cycle?

Problem 4 – The receiver on Earth can be scheduled to contact the Lander as often as once every 2 hours. How large a buffer would you need so that you could gather as much data as 4 megabytes/sec over 2 hours? How long does it take the instruments to gather this much data?

Problem 1 - You want to transfer 1000 songs from your PC collection to your music Player. Each 4-minute song takes up 4 megabytes, and the cable link from your computer to your Player can handle a transfer rate of 3 million bytes/second. How many minutes does it take to transfer all your songs?

Answer: 4000 megabytes \times (1 second/ 3 megabytes) = 1333 seconds or about **22 minutes**.

The InSight lander has two instruments that generate constant streams of digital data. The SEIS seismometer produces 48 megabytes/hr and the HP3 produces 2 megabytes/hr which is stored in a 500 megabyte digital memory called a buffer. Every 2 hours, the data in the buffer is transmitted to Earth at a rate of 4 megabytes/sec.

Problem 2 - How long will it take to fill up the buffer with data?

Answer: The data enters the buffer at 50 megabytes/hr and the buffer contains 500 megabytes, so it can store data for 500 MBytes/(50Mbytes/hr) = **10 hours**.

Problem 3 - How long will be required to transmit the buffer data to Earth during each 2-hour transmission cycle?

Answer: In 2 hours at a data rate of 50 megabytes/hr you have 100 megabytes stored in the buffer. At a transmission rate of 4 megabytes/sec it takes 100 Mbytes/(4 Mbytes/sec) = **25 seconds** to transmit the 100 megabytes from the buffer to Earth.

Problem 4 – The receiver on Earth can be scheduled to contact the Lander as often as once every 2 hours. How large a buffer would you need so that you could gather as much data as 4 megabytes/sec over 2 hours? How long does it take the instruments to gather this much data?

Answer: 2 hours equals $2 \times 3600 = 7200$ seconds. At a transmission rate of 4 Mbytes/sec, this equals $7200 \text{ sec} \times 4 \text{ Mbytes/sec} = 28,800$ Megabytes or **28.8 Gigabytes**.

The instruments gather 50 Megabytes/hour, so it would take them $28,800 \text{ Megabytes}/(50 \text{ MB/hr}) = 576$ hours or 24 days to gather this much data.

What this says is that if you had a buffer this large (28.8 gigabytes) it could store 24 days of data from InSight and only take 2 hours to transmit to Earth. The danger of waiting so long to transmit data (every 24 days) is that something could happen to the lander and you would lose all this data! That's why scientists try to download their data as often as possible.