

SUPERCAPACITORS



Frequently Asked Questions

How will Supercapacitors, or EDLCs, help my product?

Supercapacitors have very high specific power which is largely unaffected by temperature through their operational range. When Supercapacitors are paired with high energy sources, the combined system peak power can increase dramatically.

How long will Supercapacitors last?

Supercapacitors have a design life of 10 years at rated voltage and 25°C. Reducing voltage and temperature can increase design life, while increasing temperature and voltage will shorten design life. Most applications will use cells at a lower nominal voltage to get longer design life at higher temperatures.

What is the output voltage of a Supercapacitor?

A Supercapacitor only provides energy as its voltage decreases and absorbs energy as its voltage increases. The output voltage is dependent on the state of charge. An upper and lower voltage limit has to be used to determine working voltage range.

To what voltage can the Supercapacitors be charged?

Supercapacitors can be charged from 0.0 VDC up to 2.7 VDC.

How much energy will a Supercapacitor provide? How long will my application run?

Supercapacitors store much more energy than other traditional capacitors, but substantially less than batteries. To determine the energy stored in an ideal capacitor, take the upper voltage and square that, then subtract the square of the lower voltage and multiply the result by one half the cell capacitance to obtain the energy transferred in joules:

$$E = 1/2C \times (V_{upper}^2 - V_{lower}^2)$$

How much power can Supercapacitors provide?

Supercapacitors are power limited only by their equivalent series resistance (ESR). KEMET Supercapacitors can be charged or discharged at currents up to 1000 A and can provide peak power densities in excess of 20 kW/kg.

How do I charge a Supercapacitor?

Supercapacitors follow strictly current-based charging rules. A supercapacitor cell will absorb as much current as is supplied to it, while its voltage increase is based on how much charge it has accumulated. Care must be taken in designs for charging Supercapacitors at a low state of charge, since they will act like a short circuit when their voltage is near zero.

What are the rules for connecting cells in series?

Most applications require cells to be connected in series to reach higher working voltages. For cells in series, it is best to derate the cells' rated voltages to reduce the impact of unbalanced cell voltages on system life. As identical cells are connected in series, ESR increases as a multiple of the number of cells and capacitance decreases by the quotient number of cells.

$$ESR_{Total} = ESR_{Cell} \times \# \text{ of cells}, C_{Total} = C_{Cell} / \# \text{ of cells}$$

What is leakage current?

Supercapacitors have a small amount of self discharge which is referred to as leakage current. Because of small variations in materials and manufacturing, the leakage current of cells can vary a small amount. Over time, as the cells are at a high state of charge, the small variations in leakage currents will cause cell voltages to spread apart. Cells with lower leakage current will increase in voltage and cells with high leakage current will decrease in voltage. Since leakage current increases with voltage, the cell voltages will eventually stop spreading apart when the individual leakage currents become equal. However, enough of a spread can exist which can cause the cells at higher voltages to degrade prematurely when the series-connected cell bank is at a nominal voltage.

What is cell balancing and do I need it?

Cell balancing is a way to reduce the voltage spread in cell voltages resulting from an imbalance in leakage currents, an imbalance in capacitance, or an imbalance in power losses from ESR. Cell balancing can range from a simple 1 percent tolerance resistor across the terminals of each cell, which is sized to dissipate 10 times the nominal cell leakage current to complex circuits which shuttle charge between cells. In general, it is a good idea to have cell balancing for applications requiring long cell life.

Can I replace battery XYZ with Supercapacitors?

Usually no, but there are certain low-energy applications such as short-term ride-through for generator starting, engine starting, and motor starting that can be powered by Supercapacitors without a battery. The use of high-efficiency DC-DC converters can greatly extend the working voltage range for increased energy extraction from cells while providing a regulated output.

What cell should I use in my application and how many cells do I need?

Correct sizing of Supercapacitors for an application takes into account many variables, but there are a few rules of thumb that can be used to estimate requirements. Determine the number of cells required in series by dividing the maximum voltage by the rated cell voltage (or derated voltage) and rounding up. Determine how much energy is required for discharge or how much capacitance based on constant current using the equation for capacitance $C = Q/V$ (Capacitance equals current in amps multiplied by time in seconds divided by voltage change in volts).

Example: 100 VDC to 70 VDC at 145 A, 10 Wh (36000 J) storage

Capacitance = $2 \times 10 \text{ Wh} \times 3600 \text{ s} / (100 - 70) = 14.1 \text{ F}$

Capacitance = $130 \text{ A} \times 3 \text{ s} / 30 \text{ V} = 13 \text{ F}$

of Cells = $100 / (2.7 \times 0.95) = 38.9 \text{ cells}$, round up to 39 cells

Cell size = $39 \times 14.1 \text{ F} = 550 \text{ F}$ or $39 \times 13 \text{ F} = 507$, round up to closest size: 600 F

Does KEMET have any prepackaged arrays of cells or modules?

Yes, we have several modules available. You can see some of these modules online at www.kemet.com/supercapacitors. Other modules may be available, but not on the website. If you have a specific module requirement, please contact your local KEMET sales representative.