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Electra Dough: Individual Kit #ELECDGH-IK

Warning:

- **Not a toy; use only in a laboratory or educational setting.**
- **California Proposition 65 Warning: This product can expose you to chemicals, including lead and nickel, which are known to the State of California to cause cancer, birth defects, or other reproductive harm. For more information go to www.P65Warnings.ca.gov.**



Introduction

Technical terms such as circuits, current, voltage, polarity, and parallel versus series circuits can sound intimidating when you first begin to explore electrical circuits. However, understanding the basic principles of electricity is a necessary foundation for higher level work in science and engineering. The Electra Dough Kit allows students to play with materials that are fun, non-threatening, and familiar, all while learning the basic concepts of electrical circuits.

The Electra Dough Individual Kit includes everything you need for one person to build an open circuit, a closed circuit, a parallel circuit, and a series circuits. You will light the LEDs and sound buzzers from the circuits you build out of the conducting and insulating dough. Experiment and have fun!

Key Concepts:

- An electrical circuit is a pathway for a current of electricity. The electrical current is used to do work such as light an LED.
- Conductors allow electrical current to flow through them.
- Insulators do not allow electrical current to flow through them.
- A circuit can be open or closed.
- A circuit can be parallel or series.



What you should know:

Electrical current is created by the flow of electrons through a conductive material. Metals are a common example of a conductive material, though some are better conductors than others. Electra Dough is conductive because of its salt content. Salt (Sodium Chloride, or NaCl) disassociates into sodium Na^+ and chlorine Cl^- ions, which gives it its conductive properties inside of the dough.

There are also materials that do not allow the flow of electricity called insulators. An insulator acts like a wall to electricity, causing it go around the insulator and find another path. Glass and rubber are good examples of insulating materials. The Electra Dough Kit includes a dough like substance made from a glass like polymer which is a good insulator of electricity.

All materials have a property called resistance, which tells you how easily it allows electricity to flow through it. Insulators have a high resistance while conductors have a low resistance. You can think of insulators as walls that block electricity and conductors as roads that allow electricity to travel along them.

A closed circuit is an electrical pathway for the flow of electricity. It's like an electrical race track. The circuit or electrical race track must have a continuous path for electricity to flow from the power source (battery), through a conductor (dough), into a device that uses the power (LED), and then back through another conductor to the power source. The Conducting Dough in the kit will act like our road or a wire. If the continuous path is broken anywhere on our electrical road, electricity will not flow and the light bulb will not work. This is called an open circuit. If the conductors in a closed circuit touch together, it forms an undesirable circuit called a short circuit. Electricity will flow through the wire (conducting dough) and not through the LED, causing it to not light up. The wire or dough has a lower resistance than the LED, and, because electricity is lazy, it would rather travel through the conductor than the LED. In other words, the LED resists the electricity more than the dough race track so the electricity takes the dough race track instead of traveling through the LED. The insulating dough is used to buffer the conducting dough by putting up a wall to block electricity and prevent a short circuit.



Electricity also likes to travel in a certain direction. It specifically travels from areas with a positive charge to areas with a negative charge. This means electrons travel from positive regions to negative regions. This difference between positive and negative charges is called polarity. An LED has one longer, positive leg and one shorter, negative leg. A battery has a positive terminal (+) and a negative terminal (-). When building your circuit, remember polarity. Attach the red (positive) lead wire to the positive side of the battery and the black (negative) lead wire to the negative side of the battery. When inserting the LED into the dough, insert the long, positive leg into the dough with the red lead and the short, negative leg into the dough with the black lead.



Let's build our first circuit! To begin, we need to become familiar with the materials in our Electra Dough Kit.

Included in your kit are the following materials:

- 1 Tub of Conducting Dough
- 1 Tub of Insulating Dough
 - Note: Insulating dough can dry up and break into small pieces during shipping. To fix this, squeeze all the pieces into a larger mass until they are successfully recombined into a mass of dough.
- 1 Pair Leads with Mini-Grabber and Spade Terminals
- 1 Each Battery Connectors for a 9 Volt Battery
- 4 Each LED's – Light Emitting Diodes
- 1 Each Buzzer

What you will need that is not included in the kit:

- 1 9V Battery

Let's build a basic circuit!

1. Using the Conducting Dough, make two round balls about the size of a golf ball.
2. Using the Insulating Dough, make one ball about the same size.
3. Place the Insulating Dough ball between the two Conducting Dough balls and make a ball sandwich.
4. Attach the battery connector to the top of a 9 volt battery.
5. Using the lead wires with the Mini-Grabber and Spade Terminal, attach the Mini-Grabber end of the lead wire to the battery adapter. Insert the spade terminal end of the lead into the Conducting Dough balls – one in each ball.
6. Next take the LED and bend the wires so they look like legs with a little bend at the knees.
7. Insert the long leg into the ball with the positive lead wire and the short leg into the ball with the negative lead wire. You should have light!

If your LED is not glowing, think about what you have learned thus far and try and determine the cause of the problem. Think about the parts of a closed circuit. Is your insulating dough wall up and preventing electricity from flowing between your two conducting balls? Think about polarity. Are your wires positive to positive and negative to negative? What about the LED? Is the long positive leg of the LED in the positively charged conducting ball?

Now let's talk about types of closed circuits: parallel and series circuits.

A **series circuit** only allows one path for electricity to flow through. You can think of it as water flowing out of your garden hose. The water flows in one direction through the hose. The same is true with a series circuit, as electricity flows in one direction. You can build a series circuit with the electricity flowing in one direction with your Electra Dough Circuit Kit.

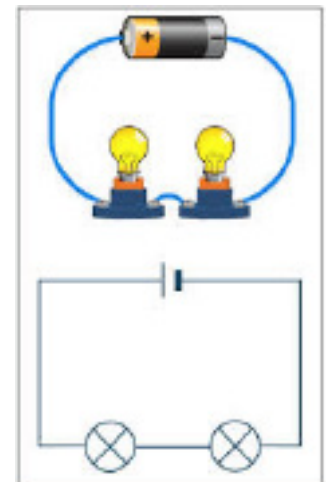
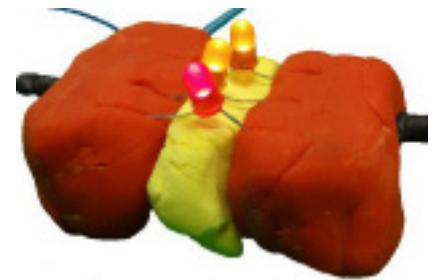
A series circuit will have a series of LEDs connected in a row with insulating dough between each block of conducting dough. As additional LEDs are added to the series, the light will get dimmer because there is less electricity available to power them. If one LED is removed, the circuit is broken and all the lights will go out.

A more common type of circuit is a **parallel circuit**. A parallel circuit allows multiple paths for electricity to flow through. You can think of this circuit like a bath tub full of water with a hole in the bottom of the tub. Water will flow through the hole in the bottom of the tub, but, if you added more holes, the water would flow more quickly. Electricity in a parallel circuit is like the water flowing from the holes in the tub.

LEDs are connected to the dough each in their own circuit. Since the electricity flows through each LED independently, if one LED is removed, the others will continue to shine.

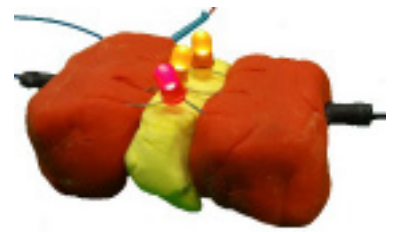
Let's build a series circuit!

1. Using the Conducting Dough, make three round balls about the size of a golf ball.
2. Using the Insulating Dough, make two balls about the same size.
3. Place the Insulating Dough ball between the three Conducting Dough balls and make a ball sandwich.
4. Attach the battery connector to the top of a 9 volt battery.
5. Using the lead wires with the Mini-Grabber and Spade Terminal, attach the Mini-Grabber end of the lead wire to the battery adapter. Insert the spade terminal end of the lead into the Conducting Dough balls – one in each of the balls on the ends.
6. Next take the LED and bend the wires so they look like legs with a little bend at the knees.
7. Insert the long leg into the ball with the positive lead wire and the short leg into the ball with the negative lead wire.
8. Using additional LEDs repeat step 7. Be sure to remember polarity and continue the pattern by connecting the conducting dough in a series of positive to negative using the LEDs.
9. What happens if you add more balls, alternating with conducting dough and insulating dough and connecting them in series with the LEDs? Does the light grow dimmer?



Let's build a parallel circuit!

Follow steps 1-7 for the series circuit, but this time add at least 3 LEDs each with the positive leg (long leg of LED) in the conducting dough with the positive lead and the negative leg (short leg of LED) in the conducting dough with the negative lead. Arrange the LEDs in the dough as illustrated.

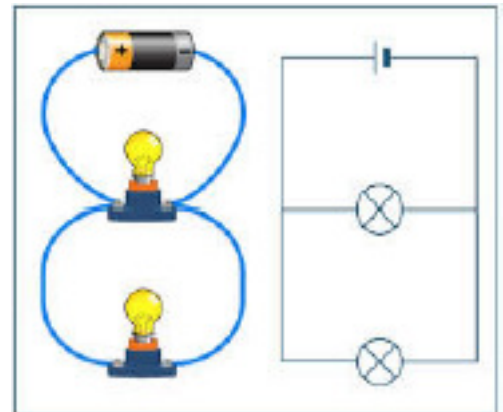


You can build other types of parallel circuits, like the round circuit in the illustration. Be creative and enjoy creating your own circuit designs!

Let's build a circuit to demonstrate resistance!

Adding a playful, but noisy, addition to the circuit will demonstrate resistance! We do this by adding a buzzer to the circuit. The conducting dough which acts as our wire in the closed circuit is also a resistor. You will be able to hear the resistance!

1. Make two long, snake-like pieces with your conducting dough.
2. Make a small ball of insulating dough and place it between the snake-like conducting dough sections.
3. Using the lead wires, connect the battery holder with the Mini-Grabbers.
4. Insert the spade terminal end of the lead into the ends of your snakes; one spade terminal in each snake.
5. Using your buzzer, insert the black, negative wire into the negatively charged snake and the red, positive wire into the positively charged snake.
6. Is your buzzer sounding off loud and clear?
7. Now, stretch either snake making the conducting dough (wire) thinner and thinner. What happens? Is the sound growing faint? This is because you are increasing the resistance by reducing the size of the wire. You can also break the circuit and re-connect it. Breaking the circuit will quiet the buzzer.



Tips, tricks, and safety:

- Don't connect the 9V battery directly to the LED, as it may burn the LED out. LEDs can pop, so please wear eye protection.
- Try not to mash the two types of dough into each other because they are difficult to separate.
- Don't cross the wires on the battery connectors. This will short out the battery, and it may heat up and explode.
- Due to the high salt content in the conducting dough, corrosion of the spade connector, LEDs, and buzzer wires occurs very quickly if not wiped off after each use.
- This normal occurrence of corrosion is a great opportunity to teach how corrosion can create resistance in a circuit. If your connectors do corrode, they can be easily cleaned with some sandpaper, steel wool, or sometimes just a piece of cloth.
- Warn students to always be careful when experimenting with electricity. High voltages and high current can be deadly. For example, they should never stick wires or other objects into wall sockets. It's best to always do these activities with adult supervision.

Resources:

- Thomas Polsenberg Ph.D. AnnMarie, University of St. Thomas. Squishy Circuits. <http://courseweb.stthomas.edu/apthomas/SquishyCircuits/index.htm>
- Johnson-Roth, Perry Y Nguyen Chris, Beam UCLA. http://beam.ucla.edu/sites/default/files/docs/Squishy_Circuits.pdf