

# Low-g Accelerometer

(Order Code LGA-BTA)



The Low-g Accelerometer can be used for a wide variety of experiments and demonstrations, both inside the lab and outside.

## Collecting Data with the Low-g Accelerometer

This sensor can be used with the following interfaces to collect data:

- Vernier LabQuest<sup>®</sup> as a standalone device or with a computer
- Vernier LabQuest<sup>®</sup> Mini with a computer
- Vernier LabPro<sup>®</sup> with a computer, TI graphing calculator, or Palm<sup>®</sup> handheld
- Vernier Go!<sup>®</sup>Link
- Vernier EasyLink<sup>®</sup>
- Vernier SensorDAQ<sup>®</sup>
- CBL 2<sup>™</sup>

Here is the general procedure to follow when using the Low-g Accelerometer:

1. Connect the Low-g Accelerometer to the interface.
2. Start the data-collection software<sup>2</sup>.
3. The software will identify the Low-g Accelerometer and load a default data-collection setup. You are now ready to collect data.

## Data-Collection Software

This sensor can be used with an interface and the following data-collection software.

- **Logger Pro 3** This computer program is used with LabQuest, LabQuest Mini, LabPro, or Go!Link.
- **Logger Pro 2** This computer program is used with ULI or Serial Box Interface.
- **Logger Lite** This computer program is used with LabQuest, LabQuest Mini, LabPro, or Go!Link.
- **LabQuest App** This program is used when LabQuest is used as a stand-alone device.
- **EasyData App** This calculator application for the TI-83 Plus and TI-84 Plus can be used with CBL 2, LabPro, and Vernier EasyLink. We recommend version 2.0 or newer, which can be downloaded from the Vernier web site, [www.vernier.com/easy/easydata.html](http://www.vernier.com/easy/easydata.html), and then transferred to the calculator.

<sup>2</sup> If you are using Logger Pro 2 with either a ULI or SBI, the sensor will not auto-ID. Open an experiment file for the Low-g Accelerometer in the Probes & Sensors folder.

See the Vernier web site, [www.vernier.com/calc/software/index.html](http://www.vernier.com/calc/software/index.html), for more information on the App and Program Transfer Guidebook.

- **DataMate program** Use DataMate with LabPro or CBL 2 and TI-73, TI-83, TI-84, TI-86, TI-89, and Voyage 200 calculators. See the LabPro and CBL 2 Guidebooks for instructions on transferring DataMate to the calculator.
- **Data Pro** This program is used with LabPro and a Palm handheld.
- **LabVIEW** National Instruments LabVIEW<sup>™</sup> software is a graphical programming language sold by National Instruments. It is used with SensorDAQ and can be used with a number of other Vernier interfaces. See [www.vernier.com/labview](http://www.vernier.com/labview) for more information.

**NOTE:** This product is to be used for educational purposes only. It is not appropriate for industrial, medical, research, or commercial applications.

## Specifications

Power:	30 mA @ 5 VDC
Range:	$\pm 50 \text{ m/s}^2$ ( $\pm 5 \text{ g}$ )
Accuracy:	$\pm 0.5 \text{ m/s}^2$ ( $\pm 0.05 \text{ g}$ )
Frequency Response:	0–100 Hz
Resolution	
13-bit (with SensorDAQ)	0.018 $\text{m/s}^2$
12-bit (with LabPro LabQuest, LabQuest Mini, Go!Link, ULI, or SBI)	0.037 $\text{m/s}^2$
10-bit (with CBL 2)	0.15 $\text{m/s}^2$
Stored Calibration	
Slope	22.924 $\text{m/s}^2/\text{V}$
Intercept	-51.751 $\text{m/s}^2$

## How the Accelerometer Works

The Low-g Accelerometer senses acceleration using an integrated circuit (IC) of a type originally designed to control the release of air bags in an automobile. This IC is micro-machined with very thin “fingers” carved in silicon. These fingers flex when accelerated. They are arranged and connected like the plates of a capacitor. As the fingers flex, the capacitance changes, and a circuit included in the IC monitors the capacitance, converting it into a voltage. An external op-amp circuit amplifies and filters the output from the IC.

The Low-g Accelerometer measures acceleration along the line marked by the arrow on the label. Accelerations are normally measured in either meters per second per second ( $\text{m/s}^2$ ) or  $g$ 's. One  $g$  is the acceleration due to gravity at the Earth's surface, or  $9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$ . This Accelerometer will measure accelerations in the range of  $-5 \text{ g}$  ( $-49 \text{ m/s}^2$ ) to  $+5 \text{ g}$  ( $+49 \text{ m/s}^2$ ). This is a range of accelerations which a human body could experience without damage. Many collisions will produce much larger accelerations. In fact, dropping the Accelerometer on a hard surface from even a few centimeters can produce accelerations of a hundred  $g$ 's. The Low-g Accelerometer will not be damaged by accelerations up to 1000  $g$ 's.

Note that the Low-*g* Accelerometer also senses the effect of gravity. We use this to provide an easy way to calibrate the Accelerometer. Also, it allows you to use the Low-*g* Accelerometer as an “Inclinometer” to measure angles. Its reading will change as its orientation is changed from horizontal to vertical. You can measure angles to the nearest degree.

The Low-*g* Accelerometer is based on the LIS344ALH from STMicroelectronics. It is designed to measure small accelerations with minimal electronic noise. The noise is typically on the order of  $0.5 \text{ m/s}^2$  peak to peak. The offset voltage (voltage output at  $0 \text{ m/s}^2$ ) will drift somewhat with temperature.

Vernier produces two other accelerometers:

- 25-*g* Accelerometer (order code ACC-BTA). Use for collision experiments or for centripetal acceleration with larger accelerations.
- 3-Axis Accelerometer (order code 3D-BTA). Three Low-*g* units mounted at right angles in one small enclosure. Use for real-world collection such as amusement park rides.

This sensor is equipped with circuitry that supports auto-ID. When used with LabQuest, LabQuest Mini, LabPro, Go! Link, SensorDAQ, EasyLink, or CBL 2, the data-collection software identifies the sensor and uses pre-defined parameters to configure an experiment appropriate to the recognized sensor.

### Do I Need to Calibrate the Low-*g* Accelerometer?

You should not need to calibrate this sensor. Each sensor is calibrated prior to being shipped to you. The measurement being made by this sensor is complex and can be difficult to analyze, so be sure to read the Frequently Asked Questions below. In most experiments you can simply use the default calibration, but then use the software’s zeroing option and zero the sensor along the axes.

Most accelerometers, including this one, sense gravity as well as acceleration. This can make results more difficult to understand, but it provides an easy calibration method. Calibration may be done using the acceleration due to gravity. To calibrate the sensor for measuring acceleration in the horizontal direction, position the Accelerometer with the arrows pointing down for the first calibration point. Define this as  $-9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$  or  $-1 \text{ g}$ . Rotate the Accelerometer so the arrows point up and use the reading for the second calibration point. Define this as  $+9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$  or  $+1 \text{ g}$ . The Accelerometer will then read 0 with no acceleration when held horizontally. If you want to calibrate for measuring acceleration in the vertical direction, follow the procedure above, but define the first calibration point as  $0 \text{ g}$  or  $0 \text{ m/s}^2$  and the second point as  $2 \text{ g}$  or  $19.6 \text{ m/s}^2$ .

### Suggested Experiments

Some suggested activities in the laboratory are:

- Measure the acceleration of dynamics carts as a force is applied to them. If you have a force sensor, monitor the force at the same time and demonstrate Newton’s second law.
- Mount the Low-*g* Accelerometer on a mass that is hanging from a spring. Start it in simple harmonic motion and monitor the acceleration. If you have a force sensor, measure the force at the same time and study the relationship between acceleration and force.

- Use the Low-*g* Accelerometer to measure the tilt of an object. Since the Low-*g* Accelerometer senses the vertical component of gravity, its reading will change as its orientation is changed from horizontal to vertical. You can measure angles to the nearest degree.
- Measure acceleration as you swing the Low-*g* Accelerometer as a pendulum bob.
- Put the Low-*g* Accelerometer under your belt buckle and jump up and down. Measure the acceleration as you land, both with your knees flexed and with your knees held more stiffly.
- Collect data for acceleration vs. time and then integrate over time to determine change in speed. Compare with speed determined by another method.

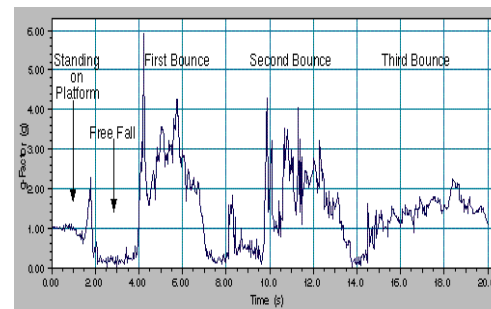
If you have a lab interface that allows you to collect data away from the lab, you might try to measure acceleration:

- on elevators
- on amusement park rides
- on playground apparatus, such as merry-go-rounds
- on remote-control toy cars
- of sky divers or bungee jumpers, etc.
- measure centripetal acceleration on a turntable
- in a car

### Using Multiple Accelerometers

You may want to simultaneously measure the signals from two or three accelerometers mounted at right angles. Two Accelerometers mounted at right angles allow you to study acceleration in a plane. This works well, for example, in an automobile. You can mount three Accelerometers at right angles, or better yet use our 3-Axis Accelerometer, to study acceleration in every direction. This would be good for some amusement park rides and for bungee jumping. Calibrate each Accelerometer for measuring horizontal acceleration. Mount them at right angles. Create a “New Column” using your lab interface program to calculate the square root of the sum of the squares of the accelerations. This value will be equal to  $1 \text{ g}$  when the combination Accelerometer has no acceleration, and zero when it is in free fall. The orientation of the combination Accelerometer does not matter.

Here is a sample graph made using three Accelerometers mounted at right angles and taken on a bungee jump.



## Frequent Questions on Accelerometer Measurements

Since the accelerometer is sensitive to both acceleration and the Earth's gravitational field, interpreting accelerometer measurements is complex. A useful model for understanding accelerometer measurements is a spring-based scale with a reference mass (or object) attached to the scale. If the scale is pointing upward (the usual orientation for such a device) the weight of the mass causes the spring to compress, and you get a non-zero reading. If you were to turn the scale upside down, the spring will be extended, instead of compressed, and we get a reading of the opposite sign. If you turn the scale so it points sideways, and keep it motionless, then the spring will just be at its relaxed length, and the reading will be zero. If you accelerated the scale toward the mass, then the spring would compress. If you accelerate the scale away from the mass the spring would stretch. In each case the scale is reading a value corresponding to the normal force on the mass. This reading can be made relative by dividing out the mass, giving units of N/kg, which is the same as  $\text{m/s}^2$ .

### Q: What does an accelerometer measure?

A: Normal force per unit mass.

Note that it's not the net force per unit mass (which would be acceleration), but it is the normal force per unit mass. This somewhat unusual quantity corresponds with what a rider on a roller coaster feels during the turns. This interpretation is useful even for the scalar total acceleration value, which is  $9.8 \text{ N/kg}$  for a three-axis accelerometer at rest, zero for one in free fall, and greater than  $9.8$  for one making a corner.

This normal force interpretation works even for a one-axis accelerometer being accelerated in a horizontal direction. The reading is non-zero as the test mass inside the device has to have a force applied to accelerate it. That's just a normal force that happens to be horizontal.

When discussing the accelerometer reading, we can call it the Normal Force per Unit Mass, with units of N/kg.

### Q: I thought the Accelerometer measured acceleration!

A: Here we are being very careful to not call something an acceleration when it is not a kinematic acceleration. For example, an "acceleration" of  $9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$  for an object that remains at rest is clearly a problematic interpretation, yet that's what the accelerometer reads.

You can correct the Accelerometer reading to get a true acceleration by adding the component of the gravitational acceleration field along the direction of the sensor arrow. For example, if the axis of the accelerometer is pointing upward, then the gravitational component is  $-9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$ . The Accelerometer reads  $9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$  when the arrow is upward and the device is at rest. By adding  $-9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$ , we get zero, which is the correct acceleration. If the arrow is horizontal, then the reading is zero, but the gravitational component is zero, and we still have zero for the true acceleration.

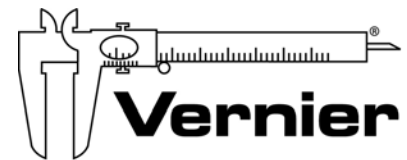
### Q: What about g-force measurements?

A: We avoid the term g-force because the quantity doesn't have units of force. Instead, *g*-factor can be used as a simplified label for Normal Force per Unit Mass in axis labels and discussions.

You can see that the *g*-factor is then 1 for an object sitting at rest on a table, zero in free fall, etc. The *g*-factor is dimensionless. If the Normal Force is a vector, then so is the *g*-factor. *g*-factor is completely optional—it is just a shortcut to avoid a long name.

### Warranty

Vernier warrants this product to be free from defects in materials and workmanship for a period of five years from the date of shipment to the customer. This warranty does not cover damage to the product caused by abuse or improper use.



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