

600 Electrical System—General

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GENERAL

A brief description of the principal parts of the electrical system is presented here. Also covered here are basic electrical system troubleshooting tips.

Voltage and Polarity

The vehicle electrical system is a 12-volt direct current (DC) negative-ground system. A voltage regulator controls system voltage at approximately the 12-volt rating of the battery. All circuits are grounded by direct or indirect connection to the negative (–) terminal of the battery. A number of ground connections throughout the car connect the wiring harness to chassis ground. These circuits are completed by the battery cable or ground strap between the body and the battery negative (–) terminal.

Wiring, Fuses and Relays

Nearly all parts of the wiring harness connect to components of the electrical system with keyed, push-on connectors that lock into place. Notable exceptions are the heavy battery cables and the starter wiring. The wiring is color-coded for circuit identification.

With the exception of the battery charging system, most electrical power is routed from the ignition switch or the battery through the main fuse/relay panel, located in the left rear corner of the engine compartment. Fuses are color coded to indicate current capacities.

The relays and control units/modules are mounted in various places throughout the vehicle. See **610 Electrical Component Locations**.

Electrical System Safety Precautions

Please read the following warnings and cautions before doing any work on your electrical system.

WARNING —

- The cars covered by this manual are equipped with a Supplemental Restraint System (SRS) that automatically deploys one or more airbags. Each airbag unit houses an explosive powerful charge. Any work involving the SRS system should only be performed by an authorized BMW dealer. Making repairs without the proper knowledge and special test equipment may cause serious personal injury. See **721 Airbag System (SRS)**.
- The ignition system of the car operates at lethal voltages. People with pacemakers or weak hearts should not expose themselves to the ignition system. Extra caution must be taken when working on the ignition system or when servicing the engine while it is running or the key is on. See **120 Ignition System** for additional ignition system warnings and cautions.
- Before operating the starter without starting the engine (as when making a compression test), disable the ignition system as described in **120 Ignition System**.
- Keep hands, clothing and other objects clear of the electric radiator cooling fan when working on a warm engine. The fan may start at any time, even when the ignition is switched off.

GENERAL

CAUTION —

- Always turn off the engine and disconnect the negative (-) cable from the battery before removing any electrical components. Disconnecting the battery may erase fault code(s) stored in control module memory. Check for fault codes using special BMW diagnostic equipment.
- Prior to disconnecting the battery, read the battery disconnection cautions given at the front of this manual on page viii.
- Connect and disconnect ignition system wires, multiple connectors, and ignition test equipment leads only while the ignition is off.
- Do not disconnect the battery with engine running.
- Do not quick-charge the battery (for boost starting) for longer than one minute, and do not exceed 16.5 volts at the battery with the boosting cables attached. Wait at least one minute before boosting the battery a second time.
- Do not use a test lamp that has a normal incandescent bulb to test circuits containing electronic components. The high electrical consumption of these test lamps may damage the components.
- Do not use an analog meter. Use only a digital multimeter.
- Many of the solid-state modules are static sensitive. Static discharge will permanently damage them. Always handle the modules using proper static prevention equipment and techniques.
- To avoid damaging harness connectors or relay panel sockets, use jumper wires with flat-blade connectors that are the same size as the connector or relay terminals.
- Always switch a digital multimeter to the appropriate function and range before making test connections.
- Do not try to start the engine of a car which has been heated above 176°F (80°C), (for example, in a paint drying booth). Allow it to cool to normal temperature.
- Disconnect the battery before doing any electric welding on the car.
- Do not wash the engine while it is running, or anytime the ignition is switched on.

Electrical Test Equipment

Many of the electrical tests described in this manual call for measuring voltage, current or resistance using a digital multimeter (DMM). Digital meters are preferred for precise measurements and for electronics work because they are generally more accurate than analog meters. The numerical display is also less likely to be misread, since there is no needle position to be misinterpreted by reading at an angle.

An LED test light is a safe, inexpensive tool that can be used to perform many simple electrical tests that would otherwise require a digital multimeter. The LED indicates when voltage is present between any two test-points in a circuit.

CAUTION —

- Choose test equipment carefully. Use a digital multimeter with at least 10 megaohm input impedance, or an LED test light. An analog meter (swing-needle) or a test light with a normal incandescent bulb may draw enough current to damage sensitive electronic components.
- An ohmmeter must not be used to measure resistance on solid state components such as control units or time delay relays.
- Always disconnect the battery before making resistance (ohm) measurements on the circuit.

WIRING DIAGRAMS

The wiring diagrams shown in **Electrical Wiring Diagrams** have been specially designed to enable quick and efficient diagnosis and troubleshooting of electrical malfunctions.

Wiring Codes and Abbreviations

A lot of information is included in each wiring diagram if you know how to read them. Wire colors in the diagrams are abbreviated. Combined color codes indicate a multi-colored wire. For example the code BLU/RED indicates a Blue wire with a Red stripe.

Many electrical components, connectors, fuses, and ground locations are identified using a unique number. Each of these numbers corresponds to a particular part in the circuit commonly found in **Electrical Wiring Diagrams**.

NOTE —

Sometimes the color of an installed wire may be different than the one on the wiring diagram. Don't be concerned. Just be sure to confirm that the wire connects to the proper terminals.

Wire color codes

• BLU	Blue
• BRN	Brown
• YEL	Yellow
• GRN	Green
• GRY	Gray
• ORG	Orange
• RED	Red
• BLK	Black
• VIO	Violet
• WHT	White

Most terminals are identified by numbers on the components and harness connectors. The terminal numbers for major electrical connections are shown in the diagrams. Though many terminal numbers appear only once, several other numbers appear in numerous places throughout the electrical system and identify certain types of circuits. Some of the most common circuit numbers are listed below in **Table a**.

Table a. Terminal and Circuit Numbers

Number	Circuit description
1	Low voltage switched terminal of coil
4	High voltage center terminal of coil
+X	Originates at ignition switch. Supplies power when the ignition switch is in the PARK, RUN, or START position
15	Originates at ignition switch. Supplies power when ignition switch is in RUN or START position
30	Battery positive (+) voltage. Supplies power whenever battery is connected. (Not dependent on ignition switch position, unfused)
31	Ground, battery negative (–) terminal
50	Supplies power from battery to starter solenoid when ignition switch is in START position only
+54	Originates at ignition switch. Supplies power when ignition switch is in the RUN position only
85	Ground side (–) of relay coil
86	Power-in side (+) of relay coil
87	Relay actuated contact
D	Alternator warning light and field energizing circuit

Additional abbreviations shown in the wiring diagrams are given below.

Abbreviations

• ABS	antilock brakes
• A/C	air conditioning
• AST/ASC+T	all season traction
• CONV	convertible
• DME	digital motor electronics
• ECM	electronic control module
• EWS/EWS II	coded driveaway protection
• SRS	supplemental restraint system-airbag
• TCM	transmission control module
• ZKE (94-98 models)	central body electronics
• ZVM (92-93 models)	central locking

ELECTRICAL TROUBLESHOOTING

Four things are required for current to flow in any electrical circuit: a voltage source, wires or connections to transport the voltage, a load or device that uses the electricity, and a connection to ground. Most problems can be found using a digital multimeter (volt/ohm/amp meter) to check for voltage supply, for breaks in the wiring (infinite resistance/no continuity), or for a path to ground that completes the circuit.

Electric current is logical in its flow, always moving from the voltage source toward ground. Electrical faults can usually be located through a process of elimination. When troubleshooting a complex circuit, separate the circuit into smaller parts. The general tests outlined below may be helpful in finding electrical problems. The information is most helpful when used with the wiring diagrams.

Be sure to analyze the problem. Use the wiring diagrams to determine the most likely cause. Get an understanding of how the circuit works by following the circuit from ground back to the power source.

When making test connections at connectors and components, use care to avoid spreading or damaging the connectors or terminals. Some tests may require jumper wires to bypass components or connections in the wiring harness. When connecting jumper wires, use blade connectors at the wire ends that match the size of the terminal being tested. The small internal contacts are easily spread apart, and this can cause intermittent or faulty connections that can lead to more problems.

Voltage and Voltage Drops

The wires, connectors, and switches that carry current are designed with very low resistance so that current flows with a minimum loss of voltage. A voltage drop is caused by higher than normal resistance in a circuit. This additional resistance actually decreases or stops the flow of current. A voltage drop can be noticed by problems ranging from dim headlights to sluggish wipers. Some common sources of voltage drops are corroded or dirty switches, dirty or corroded connections or contacts, and loose or corroded ground wires and ground connections.

A voltage drop test is a good test to make if current is flowing through the circuit, but the circuit is not operating correctly. A voltage drop test will help to pinpoint a corroded ground strap or a faulty switch. Normally, there should be less than 1 volt drop across most wires or closed switches. A voltage drop across a connector or short cable should not exceed 0.5 volts.

NOTE —

- A voltage drop test is generally more accurate than a simple resistance check because the resistances involved are often too small to measure with most ohmmeters. For example, a resistance as small as 0.02 ohms would result in a 3 volt drop in a typical 150 amp starter circuit. ($150 \text{ amps} \times 0.02 \text{ ohms} = 3 \text{ volts}$).
- Keep in mind that voltage with the key on and voltage with the engine running are not the same. With the ignition on and the engine off (battery voltage), voltage should be approximately 12.6 volts. With the engine running (charging voltage), voltage should be approximately 14.0 volts. Measure voltage at the battery with the ignition on and then with the engine running to get exact measurements.

Voltage, measuring

1. Connect digital multimeter negative lead to a reliable ground point on car.

NOTE —

The negative (–) battery terminal is always a good ground point.

2. Connect digital multimeter positive lead to point in circuit you wish to measure. See Fig. 1. If a reading is obtained, current is flowing through circuit.

NOTE —

The voltage reading should not deviate more than 1 volt from the voltage at the battery. If the voltage drop is more than this, check for a corroded connector or loose ground wire.

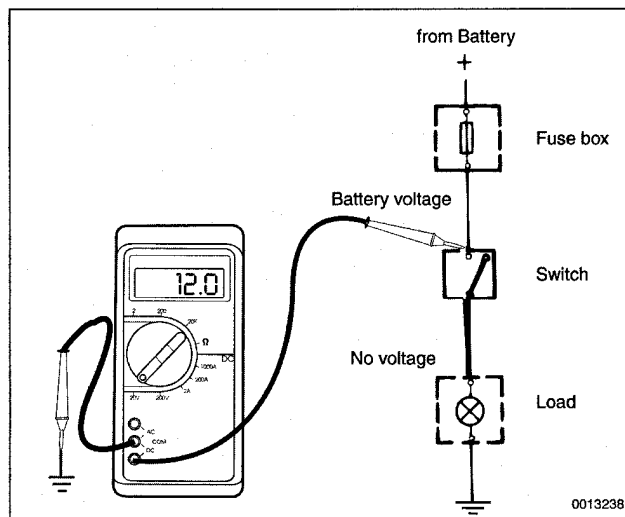


Fig. 1. Digital multimeter being used to test voltage.

Voltage drop, testing

Voltage drop can only be checked when current is running through the circuit, such as by operating the starter motor or turning on the headlights. A digital multimeter should be used to ensure accurate readings.

1. Connect digital multimeter positive lead to positive (+) battery terminal or a positive power supply close to battery source.
2. Connect digital multimeter negative lead to other end of cable or switch being tested. See Fig. 2.
3. With power on and circuit working, meter shows voltage drop (difference between two points). This value should not exceed 1 volt.

NOTE —

The maximum voltage drop in an automotive circuit, as recommended by the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE), is as follows: 0 volts for small wire connections; 0.1 Volts for high current connections; 0.2 volts for high current cables; and 0.3 volts for switch or solenoid contacts. On longer wires or cables, the drop may be slightly higher. In any case, a voltage drop of more than 1.0 volt usually indicates a problem.

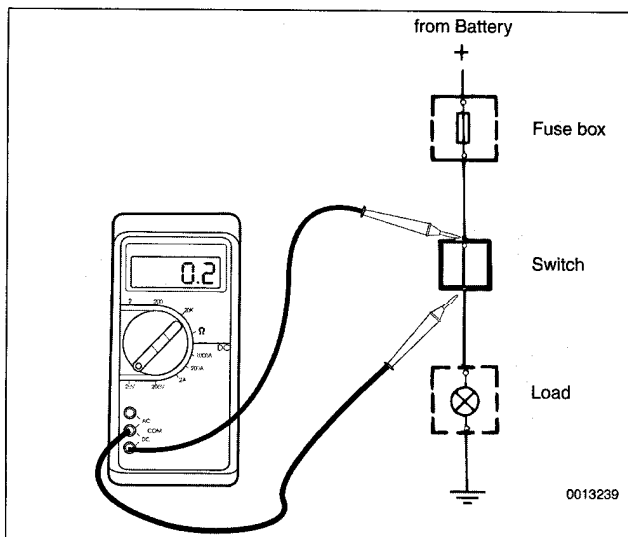


Fig. 2. Digital multimeter being used to check for voltage drop across a switch.

Continuity, checking

The continuity test can be used to check a circuit or switch. Because most automotive circuits are designed to have little or no resistance, a circuit or part of a circuit can be easily checked for faults using an ohmmeter. An open circuit or a circuit with high resistance will not allow current to flow. A circuit with little or no resistance allows current to flow easily.

CAUTION —

Use only a high quality digital ohmmeter having high input impedance when checking electronic components. The internal power source used in most analog (swing-needle) meters can damage solid state components.

When checking continuity, the ignition should be off. On circuits that are powered at all times, the battery should be disconnected. Using the appropriate wiring diagram, a circuit can be easily tested for faulty connections, wires, switches, relays, and engine sensors by checking for continuity. For a continuity check on a brake light switch, see Fig. 3..

Short Circuits

A short circuit is exactly what the name implies. The circuit takes a shorter path than it was designed to take. The most common short that causes problems is a short to ground where the insulation on a positive (+) wire wears away and the metal wire is exposed. When the wire rubs against a metal part of the car or other ground source, the circuit is shorted to ground. If the exposed wire is live (positive battery voltage), a fuse will blow and the circuit may possibly be damaged.

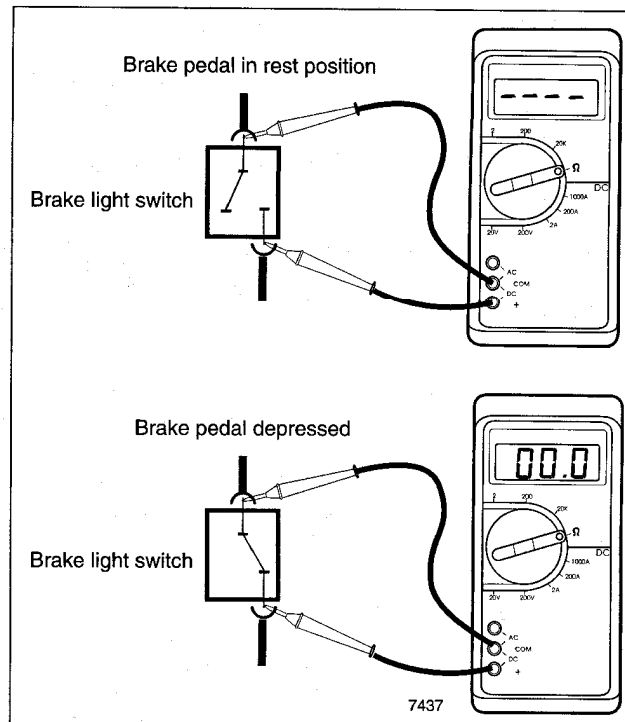


Fig. 3. Brake light switch being tested for continuity. With brake pedal in rest position (switch open) there is no continuity (infinite ohms). With pedal depressed (switch closed) there is continuity (zero ohms).

Shorts to ground can be located with a digital multimeter. Short circuits are often difficult to locate and may vary in nature. Short circuits can be found using a logical approach based on the current path.

CAUTION —

- On circuits protected with high rating fuses (25 amp and greater), the wires or circuit components may be damaged before the fuse blows. Always check for damage before replacing fuses of this rating.
- When replacing blown fuses, use only fuses having the correct rating. Always confirm the correct fuse rating printed on the fuse/relay panel cover.

Short circuit, testing with ohmmeter

1. Remove blown fuse from circuit and disconnect cables from battery.
2. Disconnect harness connector from circuit's load or consumer.
3. Using an ohmmeter, connect one test lead to load side of fuse terminal (terminal leading to circuit) and the other test lead to ground. See Fig. 4.

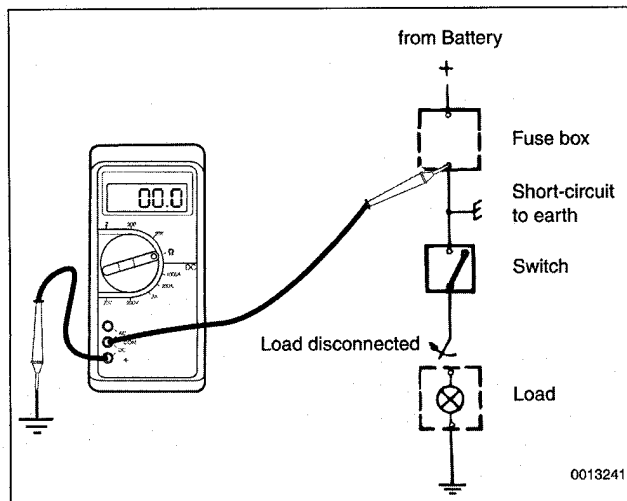


Fig. 4. Digital multimeter being used as an ohmmeter to find short circuit.

4. If there is continuity to ground, there is a short to ground.
5. If there is no continuity, work from wire harness nearest to fuse/relay panel and move or wiggle wires while observing meter. Continue to move down harness until meter displays a reading. This is the location of short to ground.

Visually inspect the wire harness at this point for any faults. If no faults are visible, carefully slice open the harness cover or the wire insulation for further inspection. Repair any faults found.

Short circuit, testing with voltmeter

1. Remove blown fuse from circuit.
2. Disconnect harness connector from circuit's load or consumer.

NOTE —

Most fuses power more than one consumer. Be sure all consumers are disconnected when checking for a short circuit.

3. Using a voltmeter, connect test leads across fuse terminals. See Fig. 5. Make sure power is present in circuit. If necessary turn key on.

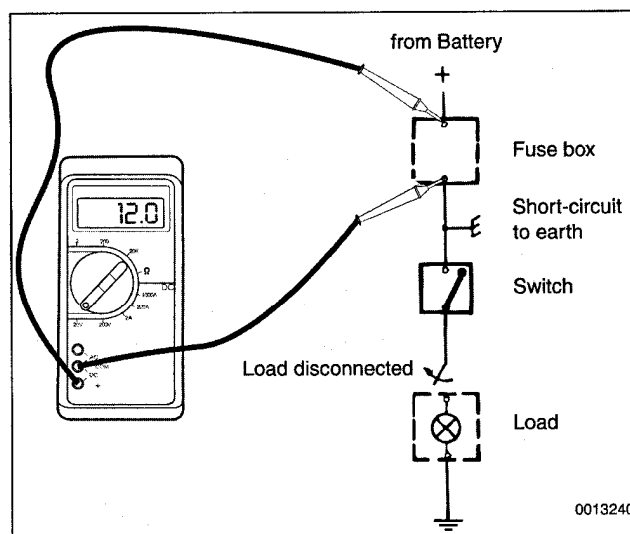


Fig. 5. Digital multimeter being used as a voltmeter to find short circuit.

4. If voltage is present at voltmeter, there is a short to ground.
5. If voltage is not present, work from wire harness nearest to fuse/relay panel and move or wiggle wires while observing meter. Continue to move down harness until meter displays a reading. This is the location of short to ground.
6. Visually inspect wire harness at this point for any faults. If no faults are visible, carefully slice open harness cover or wire insulation for further inspection. Repair any faults found.

