

Sensors, Signals and Noise

COURSE OUTLINE

- Introduction
- Signals and Noise
- Filtering: OPF2 Optimum Filtering 2
- Sensors and associated electronics



Optimum Filtering for High-Impedance Sensors

- High impedance sensors and low-noise preamplifiers
- Noise whitening filter
- Matched filter
- Optimum filtering for measuring the charge of pulse signals
- Optimum Filtering with Finite Readout Time
- Practical approximations of the optimum filtering

and for those who want to gain a better insight

- Appendix 1 : Noise whitening filter in case of finite resistance

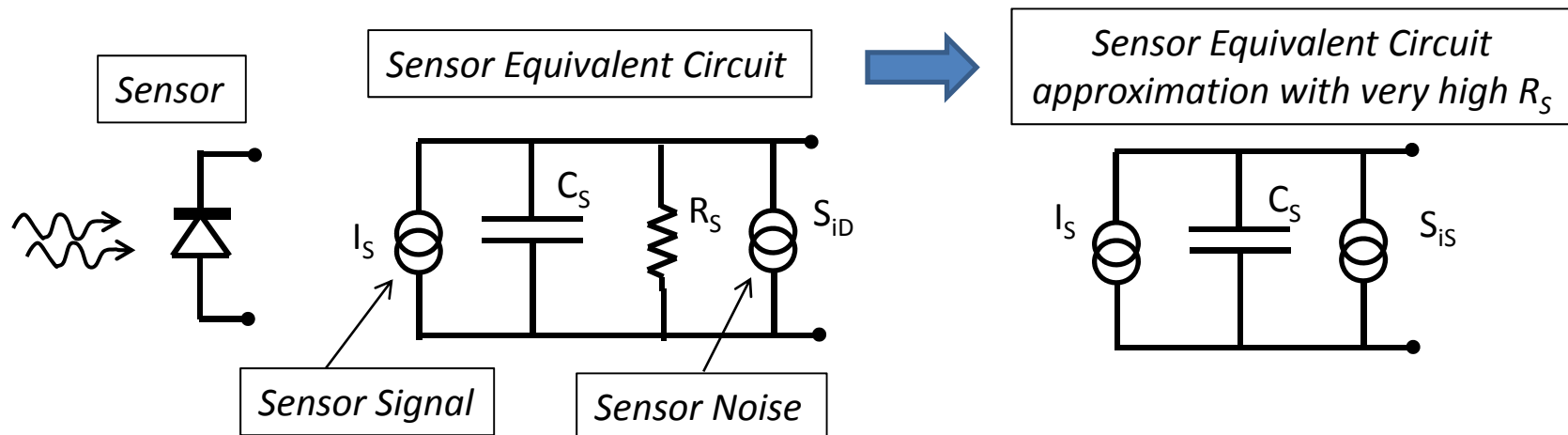


High Impedance Sensors and Low-Noise Preamplifiers

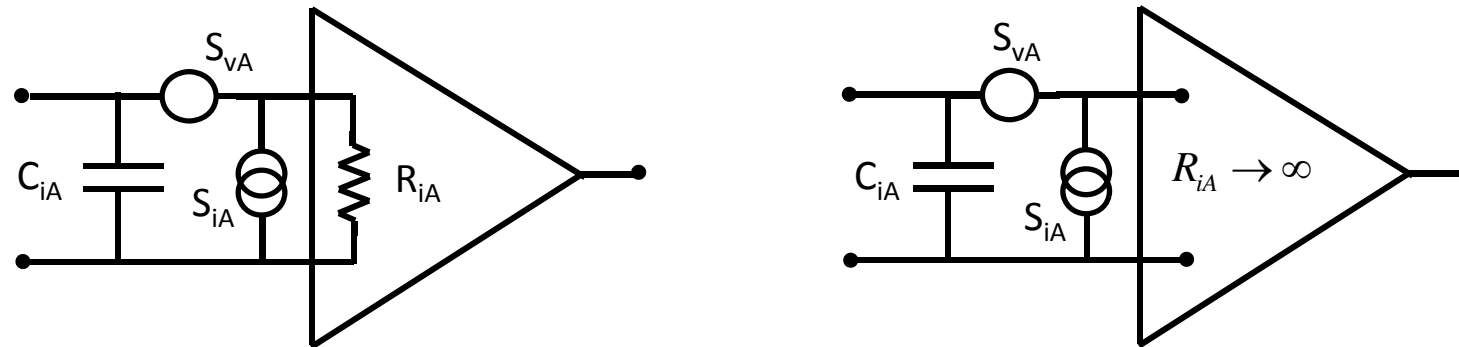


High-Impedance Sensors

- Let us consider sensors that are seen by the circuits connected to their terminals as generators of current signals with high internal impedance (typically a small capacitance C_S with a high resistance R_S in parallel)
- Typical examples are: p-i-n junction photodiodes and other photodetectors (CCDs, vacuum tube photodiodes, etc.); Detectors of Ionizing Radiation (semiconductor devices and gas-filled chambers); piezoelectric Force Sensors in quartz or other piezoelectric ceramic materials
- They have internal noise sources (e.g. shot current noise of a junction reverse current) modeled by a current noise generator in parallel to the signal generator



High-Impedance Sensors and Low-Noise Preamplifiers



Preamplifier equivalent circuit



Approximation with very high R_{iA}

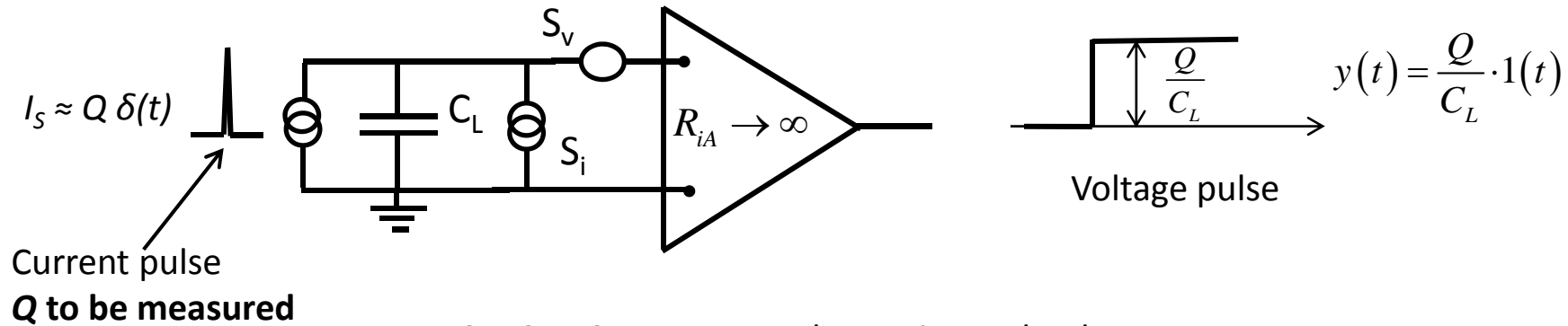
- R_{iA} = **true physical resistance** between the input terminals (NOT the dynamic input resistance modified by the feedback in the amplifier; e.g. not the low dynamic resistance of the virtual ground of an operational amplifier)
- Besides shot noise of bias currents, the S_{iA} includes Johnson resistor noise of R_{iA}

$$S_{iR} = \frac{4kT}{R_i}$$
- The current noise directly faces the sensor current signal I_s
if R_{iA} is small the S_{iR} is overwhelming (e.g. with $R_{iA} = 50 \Omega$ it is $\sqrt{S_{iR}} \approx 18 \text{ pA}/\sqrt{\text{Hz}}$) and other components of $\sqrt{S_{iA}}$ are much lower (about $1 \text{ pA}/\sqrt{\text{Hz}}$ or lower)
- Conclusion: for **low-noise** operation of **high-impedance sensors**, it is **mandatory to employ a preamplifier with high input resistance R_{iA}**



High-Impedance Sensors and Low-Noise Preamplifiers

Equivalent circuit of high-impedance Sensor and Preamplifier
(approximation valid for **very high** sensor resistance $R_S \rightarrow \infty$)



- $C_L = C_S + C_{iA}$ total capacitance load
- $S_v = S_{vA}$ voltage noise generator (wideband white spectrum)
- $S_i = S_{iD} + S_{iA}$ current noise generator (wideband white spectrum)

At the preamplifier output:

- The voltage noise spectrum S_n has two components, it is **NOT white**

$$S_n(\omega) = S_v + \frac{S_i}{\omega^2 C_L^2}$$

- The voltage signal is a step with amplitude Q/C_L



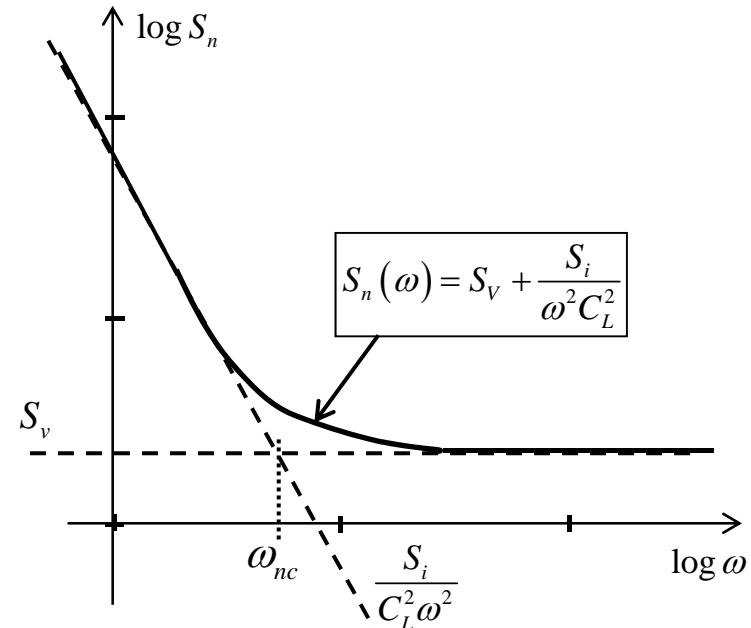
Noise Spectrum at Preamplifier Output

Crossing of the component defines ω_{nc} Noise-Corner angular frequency

$$S_v = \frac{S_i}{C_L^2 \omega_{nc}^2} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \boxed{\omega_{nc} = \frac{\sqrt{S_i}}{C_L \sqrt{S_v}}}$$

$T_{nc} = 1/\omega_{nc}$ Noise-Corner time constant

$$\boxed{T_{nc} = \frac{1}{\omega_{nc}} = \frac{\sqrt{S_v}}{\sqrt{S_i}} C_L}$$



T_{nc} and ω_{nc} are fundamental parameters of the optimum filter: we will see that T_{nc} rules the duration of the filter weighting and ω_{nc} the filter bandlimit

We define the **Noise Corner resistance** $\boxed{R_{nc} = \sqrt{S_v} / \sqrt{S_i}}$ so that $\boxed{T_{nc} = R_{nc} C_L}$

- with $\sqrt{S_v}$ a few nV/\sqrt{Hz} and $\sqrt{S_i}$ ranging from a few 0,1 to 0,01 pA/\sqrt{Hz}
 R_{nc} ranges from tens to hundreds of kOhms
- with C_L from 0,1 pF to a few pF
 T_{nc} ranges from a few nanoseconds to some hundreds of nanoseconds



Noise whitening filter



Noise-Whitening Filter

The noise spectrum has

- a pole at $\omega_p = 0$
- a zero at $\omega_z = \omega_{nc} = 1/T_{nc}$

$$S_n(\omega) = S_V \left(1 + \frac{S_i}{\omega^2 S_V C_L^2} \right) = S_V \left(1 + \frac{1}{\omega^2 T_{nc}^2} \right) = S_V \frac{1 + \omega^2 T_{nc}^2}{\omega^2 T_{nc}^2}$$

The noise whitening filter H_{nw} must

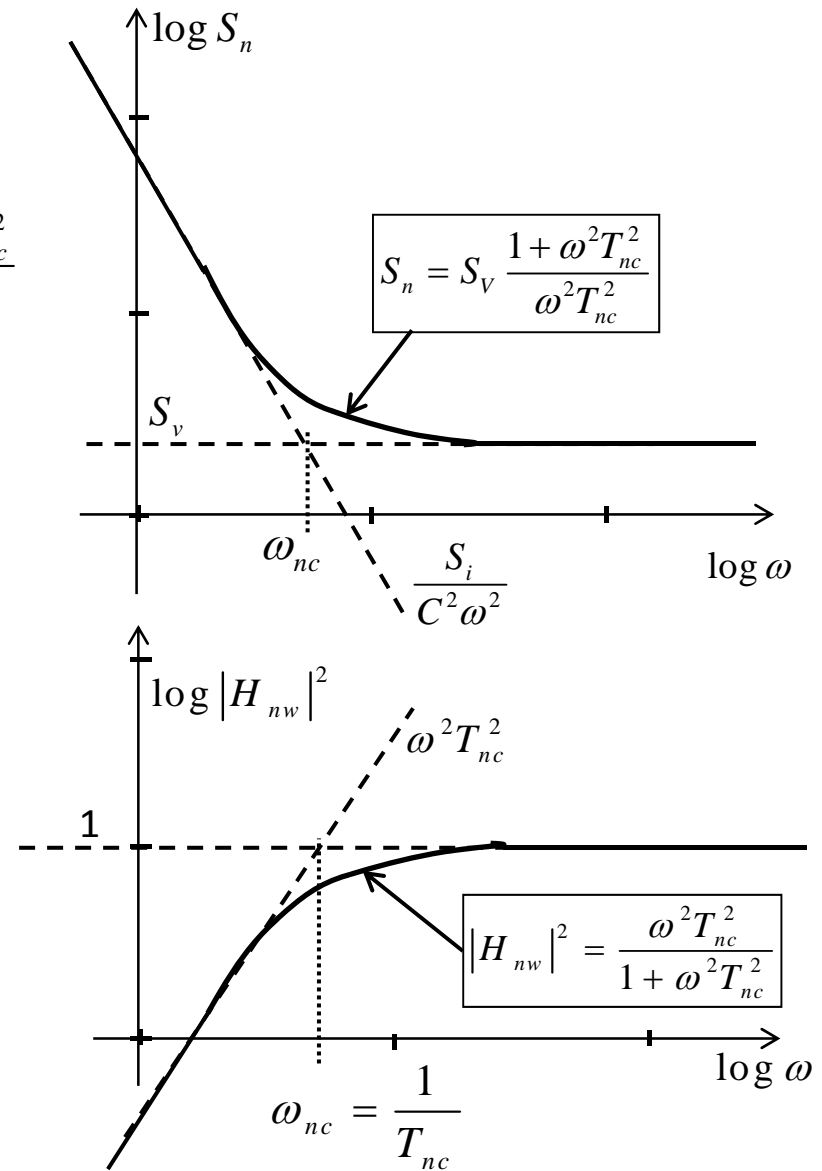
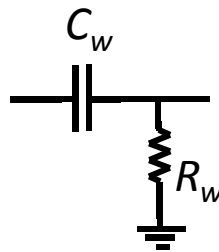
- cancel the pole with a zero at $\omega = 0$
- cancel the zero with a pole at $\omega = \omega_{nc} = 1/T_{nc}$

$$|H_{nw}(\omega)|^2 = \frac{\omega^2 T_{nc}^2}{1 + \omega^2 T_{nc}^2}$$

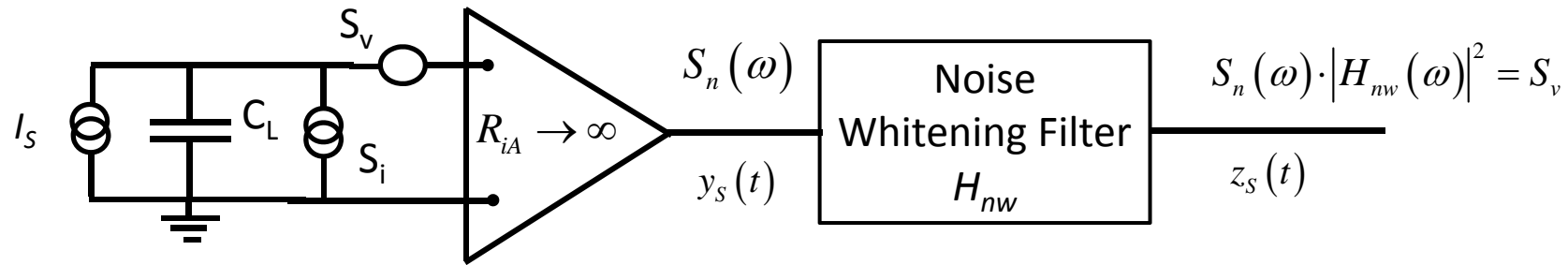
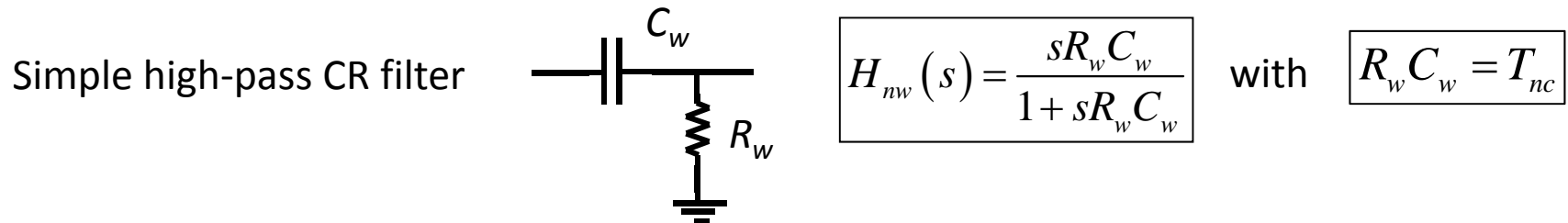
It is a simple high-pass filter

$$H_{nw}(\omega) = \frac{j\omega R_w C_w}{1 + j\omega R_w C_w}$$

with $R_w C_w = T_{nc}$

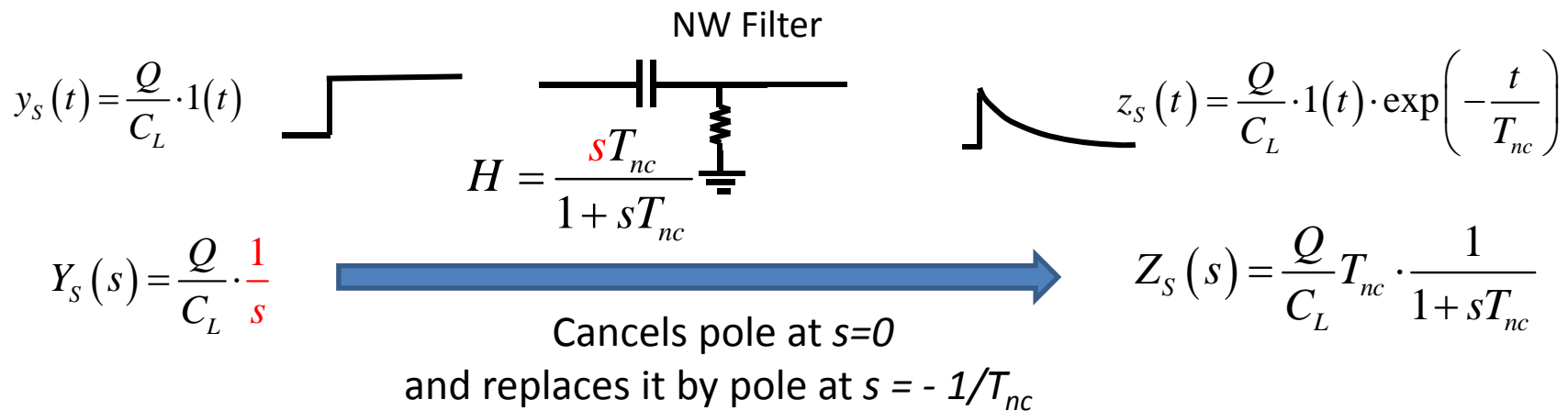


Action of the Noise-Whitening Filter

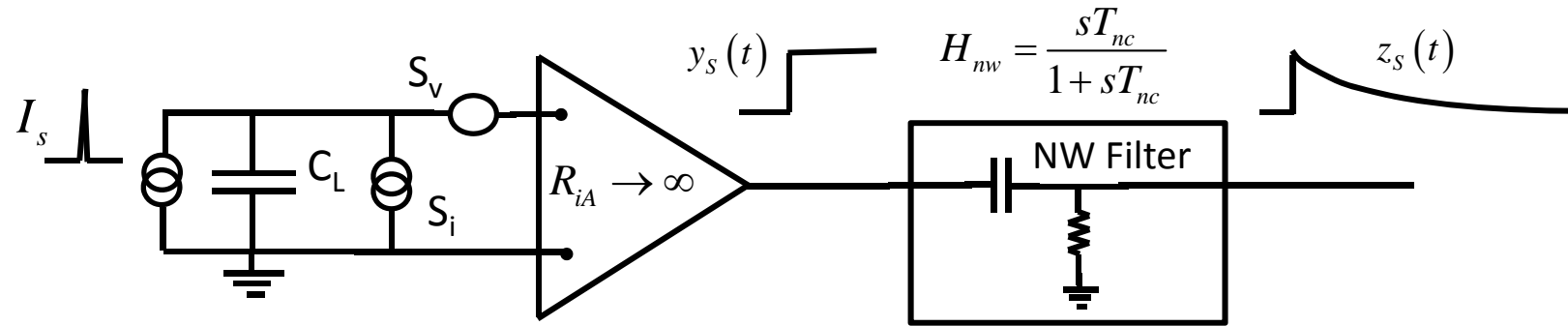



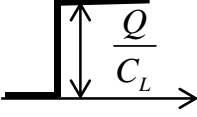
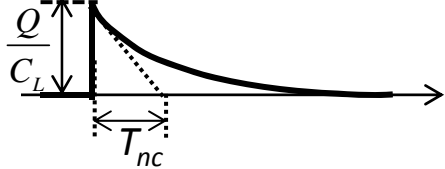
it makes **white** the noise at its **output**

and changes the signal into a short **exponential pulse with time-constant T_{nc}**



Signal at the output of the Noise-Whitening Filter



Input (current)	Preamp Output (voltage)	NW Filter Output (voltage)
δ - pulse 	Step pulse 	Exponential pulse 
$I_s(t) = Q \cdot \delta(t)$	$y_s(t) = \frac{Q}{C_L} \cdot 1(t)$	$z_s(t) = \frac{Q}{C_L} \cdot 1(t) \cdot \exp\left(-\frac{t}{T_{nc}}\right)$
$I_s(s) = Q$	$Y_s(s) = \frac{Q}{C_L} \cdot \frac{1}{s}$	$Z_s(s) = \frac{QT_{nc}}{C_L} \frac{1}{1 + sT_{nc}}$

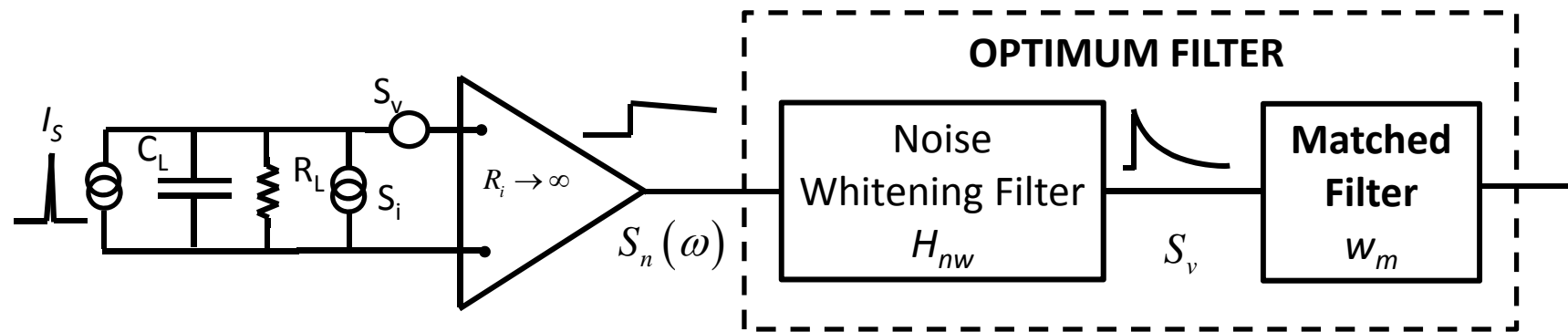
The **matched** filter has to be tailored to the signal at the whitening filter output, i.e. it must have **weighting function exponential with time constant T_{nc}**



Matched Filter



The Matched Filter completes the Optimum Filtering



The case with finite load resistance R_L is treated in Appendix 1 , showing that the whitening filter is different but the output signal produced is the same as with $R_L \rightarrow \infty$

$$z_s(t) = \frac{Q}{C_L} \cdot 1(t) \cdot \exp\left(-\frac{t}{T_{nc}}\right)$$

Therefore, the matched filter is the same in the two cases

$$w_M = 1(t) \cdot \frac{1}{T_{nc}} \exp\left(-\frac{t}{T_{nc}}\right)$$

and gives the same result

$$\eta_o^2 = \left(\frac{S}{N}\right)_{opt}^2 = \frac{\left[\int_{-\infty}^{\infty} z_s(\alpha) w_m(\alpha) d\alpha\right]^2}{S_v \cdot \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} w_m^2(\alpha) d\alpha} = \frac{Q^2 T_{nc}^2}{C_L^2 S_v} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} w_m^2(\alpha) d\alpha = \frac{Q^2}{C_L^2} \frac{1}{2} \frac{T_{nc}}{S_v}$$



Optimum Filtering

At the output of the optimum filter (i.e. of the matched filter) we have

$$\text{Signal} \quad s_o = \int_0^\infty z_s(\alpha) w_m(\alpha) d\alpha = \frac{Q}{C_L} \frac{1}{T_{nc}} \int_0^\infty \exp\left(-\frac{2\alpha}{T_{nc}}\right) d\alpha = \frac{1}{2} \frac{Q}{C_L}$$

$$\text{Noise} \quad \sqrt{n_o^2} = \sqrt{S_v} \cdot \sqrt{k_{ww}(0)} = \sqrt{S_v} \frac{1}{T_{nc}} \sqrt{\int_0^\infty \exp\left(-\frac{2\alpha}{T_{nc}}\right) d\alpha} = \sqrt{\frac{S_v}{2T_{nc}}}$$

$$\text{S/N} \quad \boxed{\eta_o = \frac{s_o}{\sqrt{n_o^2}} = \frac{1}{2} \frac{Q}{C_L} \sqrt{\frac{2T_{nc}}{S_v}}}$$

- The optimum filter theory specifies what is the best S/N physically obtainable and the kind of filter required for attaining it
- The optimum filter can be implemented in reality, but the filter design turns out to be quite complex
- Furthermore, the optimum filter takes infinite time (after the signal onset) to complete its action, which is not acceptable in practice
- It is possible, however, to consider and evaluate fairly simple filters that approximate the optimum filter and closely approach its performance



Optimized Noise Charge

We want measure the signal charge Q , so we consider the noise in terms of charge q_{no}^2

$$\eta_o^2 = Q^2 \frac{T_{nc}}{2C_L^2 S_v} = \frac{Q^2}{q_{no}^2}$$

We have

$$q_{no}^2 = \frac{2C_L^2 S_v}{T_{nc}}$$

Recalling $T_{nc} = C_L R_{nc} = C_L (\sqrt{S_v} / \sqrt{S_i})$ we can express q_{no}^2 in terms of the main parameters of the sensor and preamplifier

$$q_{no}^2 = 2C_L \cdot \sqrt{S_v} \cdot \sqrt{S_i}$$

q_{no}^2 is the charge pulse for which $S/N= 1$. It represents the minimum measurable pulse Q_{min} and the minimum difference between two distinguishable pulses.

The very small size of q_{no}^2 is better appreciated if expressed in number of electron charges (NB electron charge $e = 1,6 \cdot 10^{-19}$ C)

$$\sqrt{N_{eo}^2} = \frac{\sqrt{q_{no}^2}}{e} = \frac{\sqrt{2C_L \sqrt{S_v} \sqrt{S_i}}}{e} = 278 \cdot \sqrt{C_L [pF] \cdot S_v^{1/2} [nV/\sqrt{Hz}] \cdot S_i^{1/2} [pA/\sqrt{Hz}]}$$



Optimized Noise Charge Examples

It is instructive to evaluate and compare typical values of the optimized noise charge in typical cases of PIN photodiodes coupled to high-impedance preamplifiers.

- a) PIN with **wide** sensitive area (≈ 1 mm diameter) and discrete-component preamplifier with **moderately low-noise**. Fairly high capacitance of PIN & connections ($C_L \approx 10pF$) and not-so-low preamp noise (typical $S_v^{1/2} \approx 4 nV/\sqrt{Hz}$; $S_i^{1/2} \approx 1 pA/\sqrt{Hz}$) set a fairly high limit

$$\sqrt{N_{eo}^2} \approx 1800 \text{ electrons}$$

- b) PIN with **reduced** sensitive area ($\approx 100 \mu m$ diameter) and discrete-component preamplifier with **low-noise**. Reduced capacitance of PIN & connections ($C_L \approx 1pF$) and reduced preamp noise (typical $S_v^{1/2} \approx 2 nV/\sqrt{Hz}$; $S_i^{1/2} \approx 0,1 pA/\sqrt{Hz}$) bring a strong reduction

$$\sqrt{N_{eo}^2} \approx 120 \text{ electrons}$$

- c) PIN with **small** sensitive area ($\approx 20 \mu m$ diameter) **integrated** with a **very low-noise preamplifier**. Capacitance minimization by monolithic integration ($C_L \approx 0,1pF$) and very low preamp noise ($S_v^{1/2} \approx 2 nV/\sqrt{Hz}$; $S_i^{1/2} \approx 0,01 pA/\sqrt{Hz}$) bring further progress

$$\sqrt{N_{eo}^2} \approx 10 \text{ electrons}$$

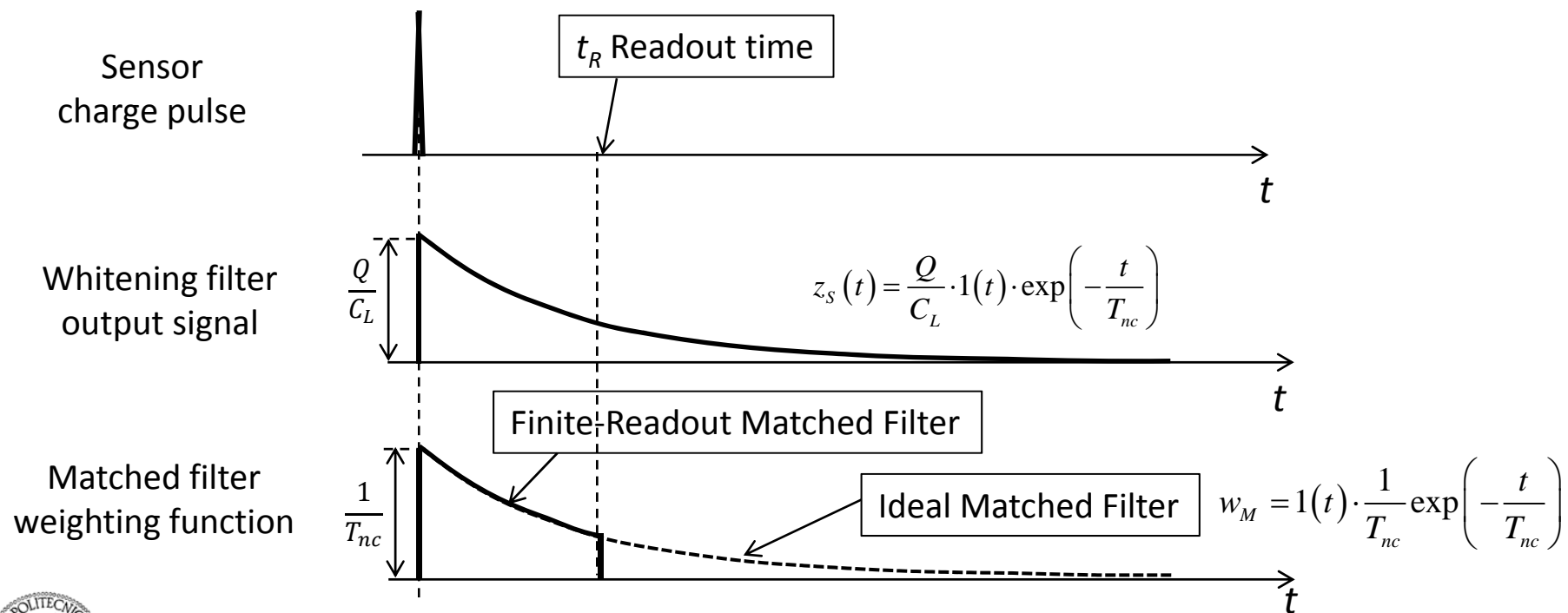


Optimum Filtering with Finite Readout Time



Optimum Filtering with Finite Readout Time

- The exponential weighting function $w(t)$ of the matched filter reaches zero only at $t \rightarrow \infty$, so that the measurement of the pulse in principle is available with infinite delay after the pulse onset.
- However, most of the weight of the matched filter is over a finite time interval of a few time constants T_{nc} . We can introduce the constraint of terminating the weight at a finite time t_R and evaluate the result of this finite-time-readout matched filter

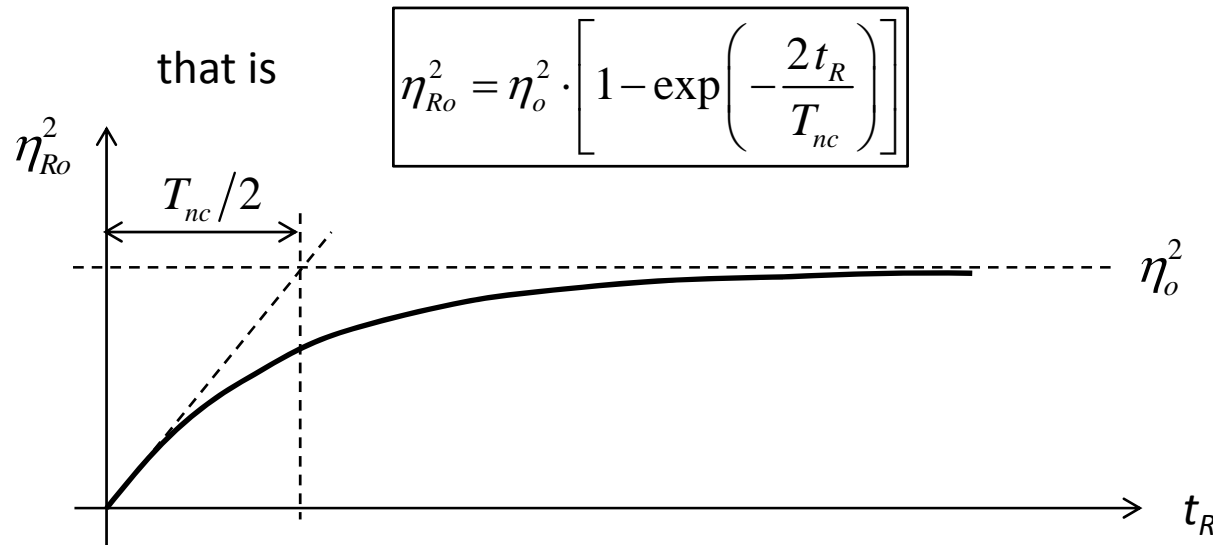


Optimum Filtering with Finite Readout Time

The constraint of ensuring a finite readout time t_R forces to terminate the weighting at t_R and leads to

$$\eta_R^2 = \left(\frac{S}{N}\right)_{opt,R}^2 = \frac{Q^2}{C_L^2} \frac{T_{nc}^2}{S_v} \int_{-\infty}^{t_R} w_m^2(\alpha) d\alpha = \frac{Q^2}{C_L^2} \frac{1}{S_v} \int_0^{t_R} \exp\left(-\frac{2\alpha}{T_{nc}}\right) d\alpha = \frac{Q^2}{C_L^2} \frac{T_{nc}}{2S_v} \left[1 - \exp\left(-\frac{2t_R}{T_{nc}}\right)\right]$$

NB: No more ∞ !!

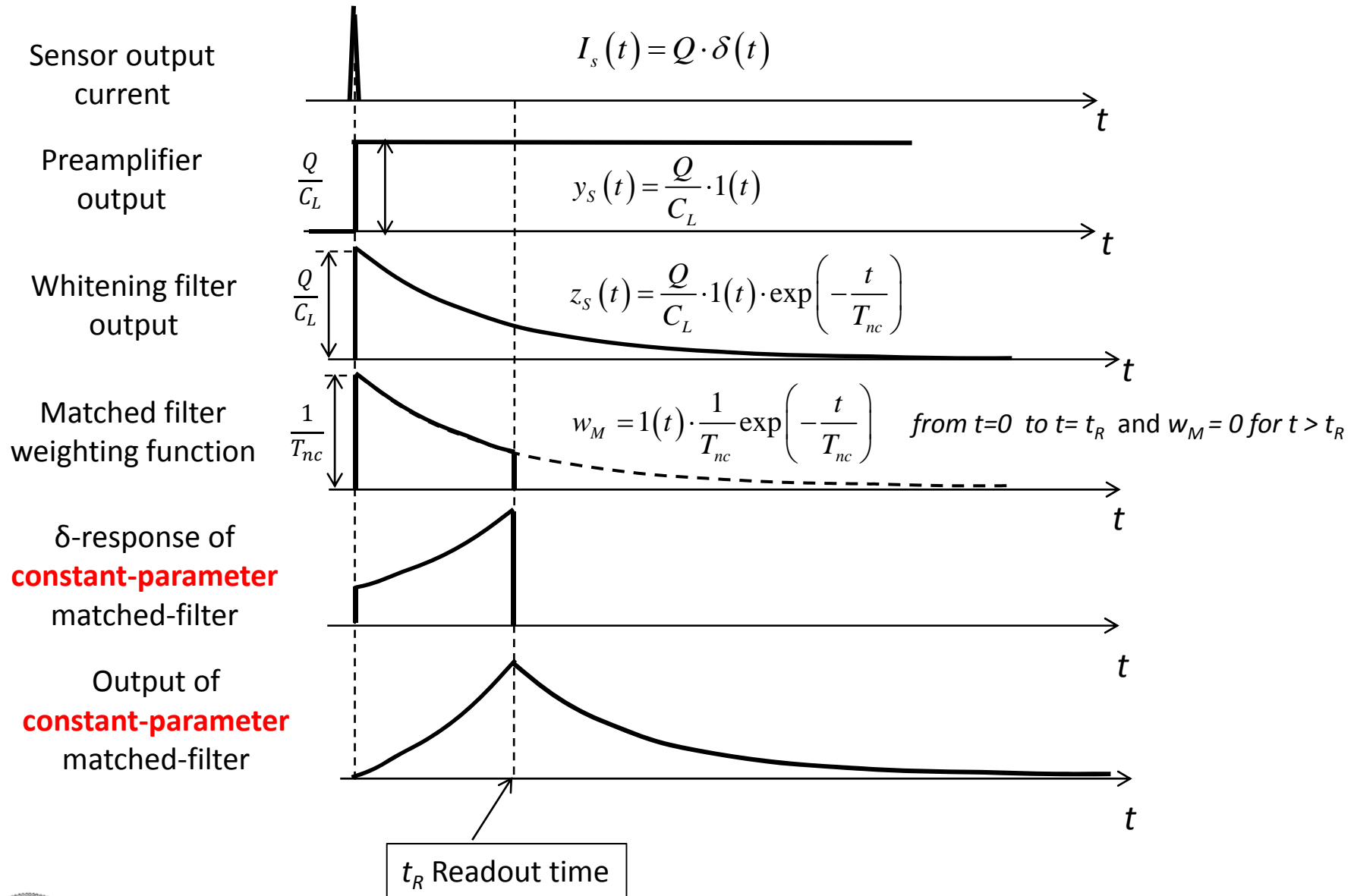


The absolute optimum η_o is closely approximated in a reasonable readout time t_R :

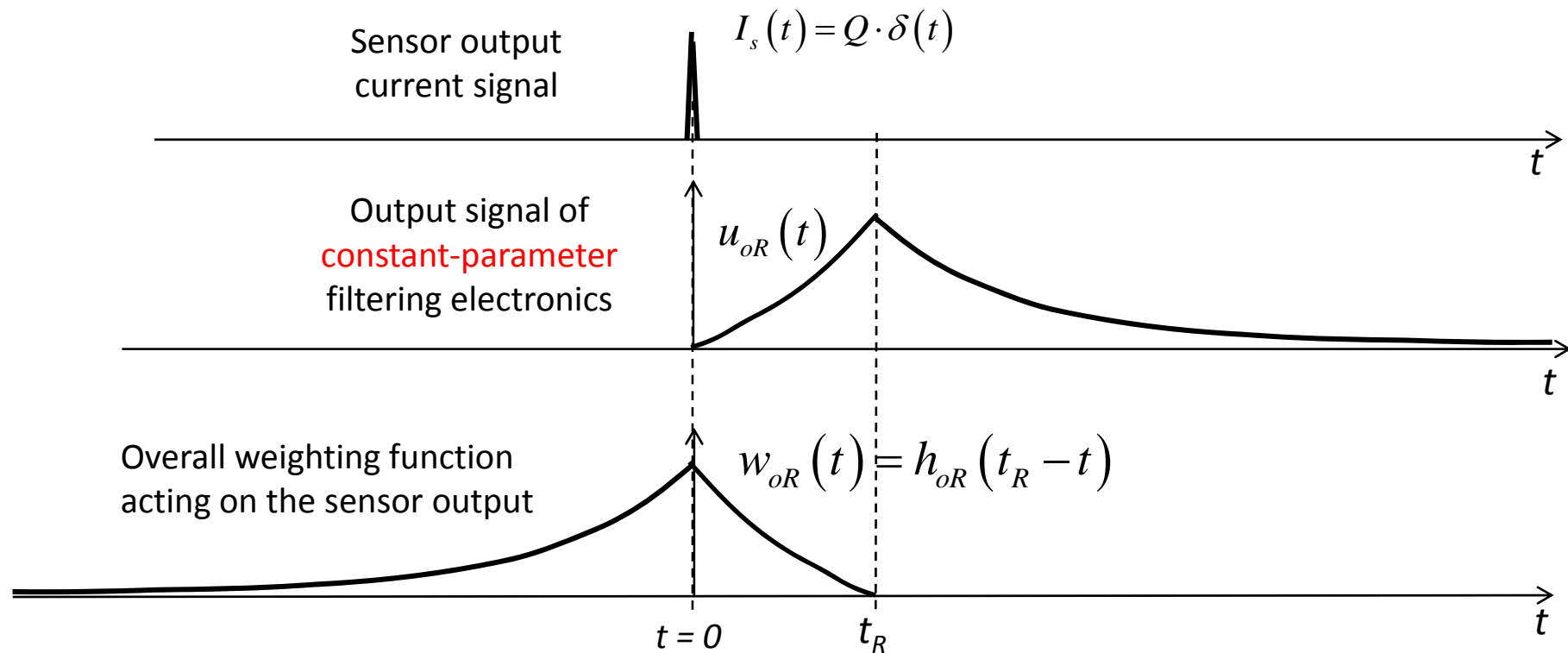
at $t_R \approx T_{nc}$	$\eta_{Ro} \approx \eta_o \cdot 0,929$	i.e. $\eta_{Ro} \approx 7\%$	lower than η_o
at $t_R \approx 2 T_{nc}$	$\eta_{Ro} \approx \eta_o \cdot 0,991$	i.e. $\eta_{Ro} \approx 1\%$	lower than η_o
at $t_R \approx 4 T_{nc}$	$\eta_{Ro} \approx \eta_o \cdot 0,9999$	i.e. $\eta_{Ro} \approx 0,01\%$	lower than η_o



Optimum Filtering with Finite Readout Time



Optimum Filtering with Finite Readout Time



Note that:

- The weight is maximum at $t = 0$, i.e. in correspondence to the sensor pulse
- Weighting is limited to t_R on the $t > 0$ side
- Weighting is not limited on the $t < 0$ side

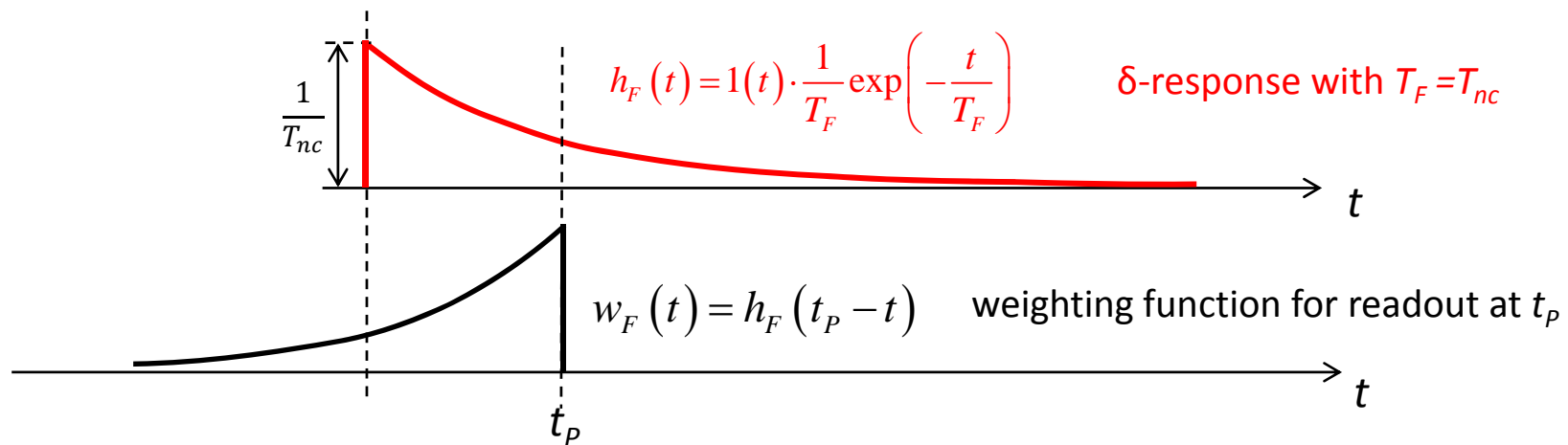


Practical approximations of the optimum filtering



RC integrator Approximation of the Matched Filter

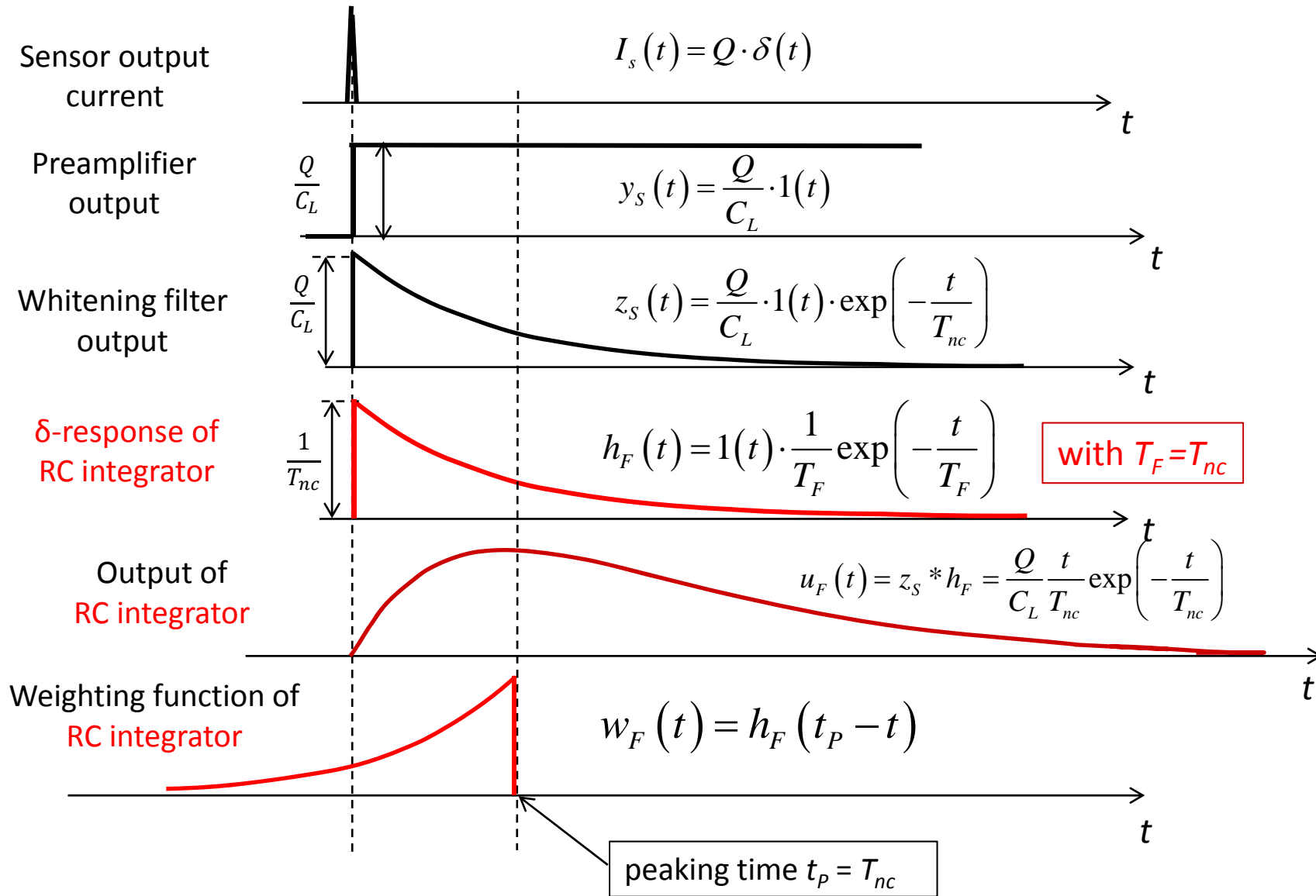
- The whitening filter is simple and easily and exactly implemented. For completing the optimum filter it is sufficient to find out how to approximate the matched filter.
- The features of the matched filter weighting function observed in time and in frequency point out that it is a low-pass filter
- A simple **RC integrator** (single-pole low-pass filter) can be an **approximation** of the matched filter. With $RC = T_{nc}$ its δ -response $h_F(t)$ is identical to the weighting function $w_M(t)$ of the matched filter. The **RC weighting** $w_F(t)$ has the same shape as $w_M(t)$ of the matched filter, but it's not fully correct because it is **reversed in time!**



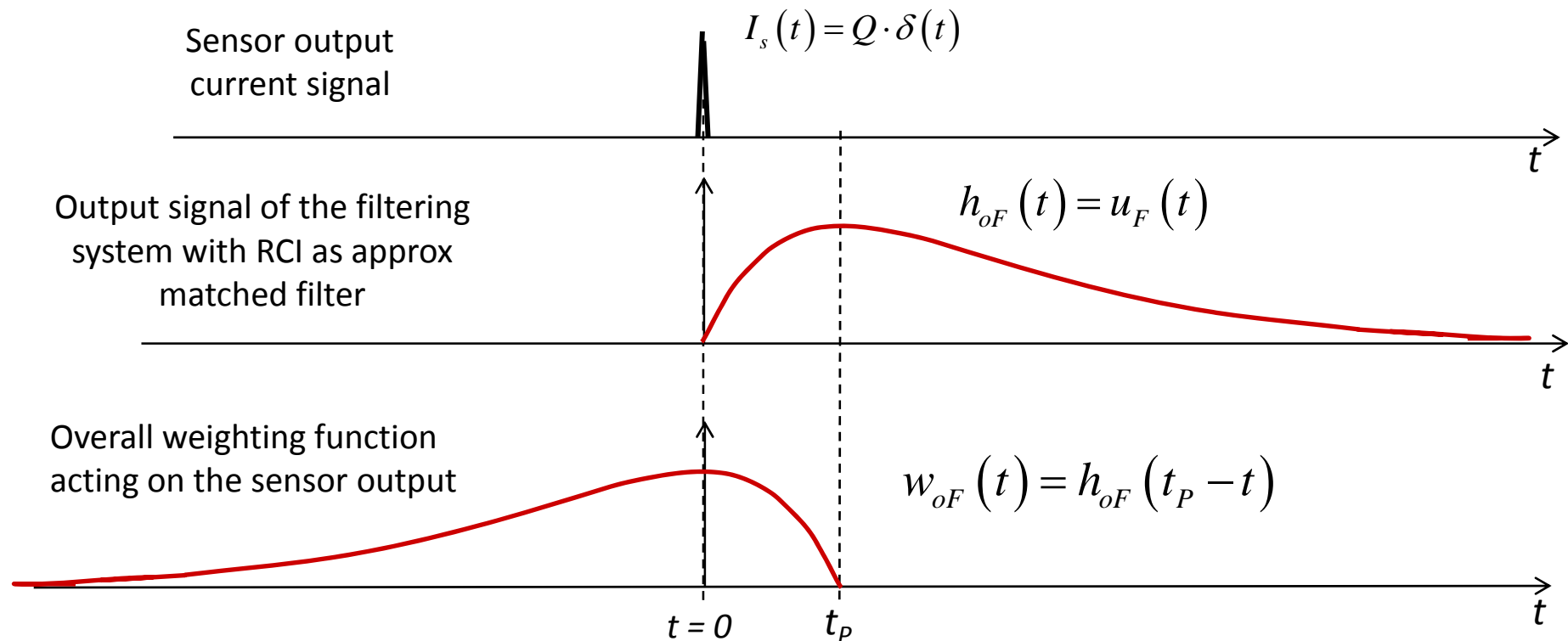
- **Noise** filtering is **equal to the matched filter**, since it is unaffected by time-inversion; the output is white noise with band-limit set by a simple pole with time-constant T_F .
- **Signal** filtering is **different** from the matched filter, since it is modified by time-inversion



RC integrator Approximation of the Matched Filter



Filtering system with RC as approx matched filter



Note that:

- The weight is maximum at $t = 0$, i.e. in correspondence to the sensor pulse
- Weighting is limited to t_p on the $t > 0$ side
- Weighting is not limited on the $t < 0$ side

(see for comparison the optimum filtering in slide 26)



RC integrator Approximation compared to the Optimum Filter

The RC output signal waveform is $u_F(t) = \frac{Q}{C_L T_{nc}} t \exp\left(-\frac{t}{T_{nc}}\right)$

Signal peak value (at $t = T_{nc}$) $s_F = u_F(T_{nc}) = \frac{1}{e} \frac{Q}{C_L}$

Noise $\sqrt{n_F^2} = \sqrt{S_v} \cdot \sqrt{k_{hh}(0)} = \sqrt{\frac{S_v}{2T_{nc}}}$

S/N $\eta_F = \frac{s_F}{\sqrt{n_F^2}} = \frac{1}{e} \frac{Q}{C_L} \sqrt{\frac{2T_{nc}}{S_v}}$

Comparing the RC approximation with the ideal optimum filter system we see that

$$s_F = \frac{2}{e} s_o \approx 0,736 \cdot s_o \quad \text{the signal is lower}$$

$$\sqrt{n_F^2} = \sqrt{n_o^2} \quad \text{the noise is equal}$$

$$\eta_F = \frac{2}{e} \eta_o \approx 0,736 \cdot \eta_o \quad \text{the S/N is lower}$$

the performance of the filter system with RC approximation of matched filter is about 27% worse than the absolute optimum.

Note that the loss is due to bad exploitation of the signal



RC integrator Approximation compared to Finite-Readout Optimum Filter

- The filter system with RC approximation of the matched filter has finite readout time $t_R = T_{nc}$ (the output pulse peak amplitude is measured at $t = T_{nc}$).
- The ideal optimum filter has infinite readout time.
- A more objective assessment of the RC approximation is obtained by taking as reference the optimum filter with the constraint of finite readout time $t_R = T_{nc}$.
- The optimum filter with the constraint of finite readout time t_R gives

$$\eta_{Ro}(t_R) = \eta_o \cdot \sqrt{1 - \exp\left(-\frac{2t_R}{T_{nc}}\right)}$$

- in our case with $t_R = T_{nc}$ it is

$$\eta_{Ro}(T_{nc}) = \eta_o \cdot 0,929$$

- In conclusion $\eta_F = \frac{2}{e} \eta_o \approx 0,736 \cdot \eta_o = 0,79 \cdot \eta_{Ro}(T_{nc})$

the performance of the RC approximation is about 21% worse than the optimum filter with the constraint of finite readout time $t_R = T_{nc}$

- This performance is remarkably lower than the optimum, but the RC is just a crude approximation: better results can be obtained with more sophisticated filter design



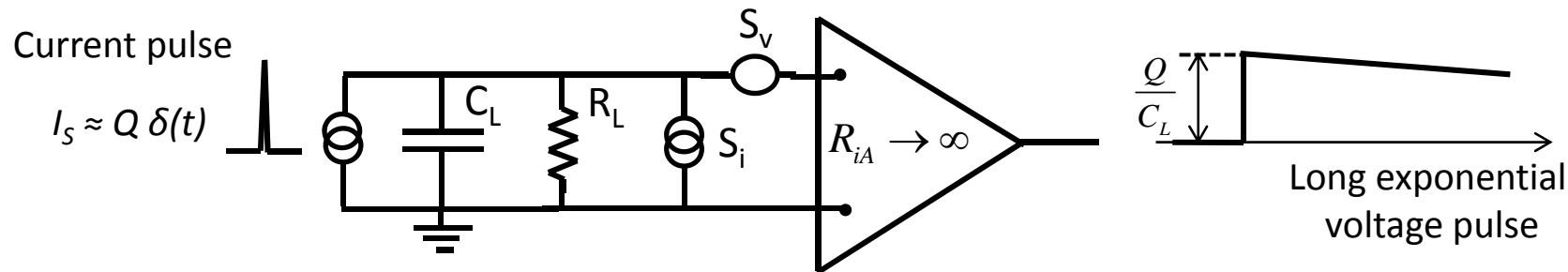
Appendix 1

Noise whitening filter: case with finite load resistance



High-Impedance Sensor and Preamplifier

Equivalent circuit of a high-impedance Sensor and Preamplifier configuration with finite load resistance R_L



R_L = total resistance of sensor and load

$T_L = R_L C_L$ time constant of the load

At the preamplifier output:

- The voltage noise spectrum S_n has two components and is **NOT white**

$$S_n(\omega) = S_v + S_i \frac{R_L^2}{1 + \omega^2 R_L^2 C_L^2} = S_v + S_i \frac{R_L^2}{1 + \omega^2 T_L^2}$$

- The output voltage signal is an exponential pulse with long time constant $T_L = R_L C_L$

$$y(t) = \frac{Q}{C_L} \cdot 1(t) \cdot \exp\left(-\frac{t}{T_L}\right)$$

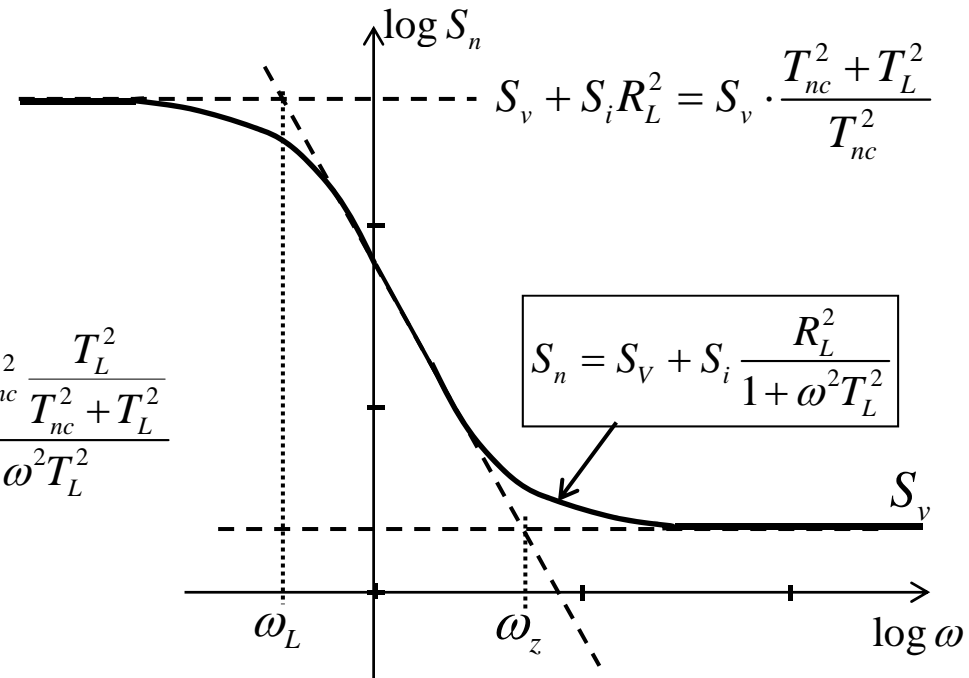


Noise Spectrum at Preamplifier Output

$$S_n = S_v + S_i \frac{R_L^2}{1 + \omega^2 T_L^2}$$

recalling $T_{nc} = C_L \cdot (\sqrt{S_v} / \sqrt{S_i}) = C_L R_{nc}$

$$S_n = S_v \left(1 + \frac{1}{T_{nc}^2} \frac{T_L^2}{1 + \omega^2 T_L^2} \right) = S_v \cdot \frac{T_{nc}^2 + T_L^2}{T_{nc}^2} \cdot \frac{1 + \omega^2 T_{nc}^2 \frac{T_L^2}{T_{nc}^2 + T_L^2}}{1 + \omega^2 T_L^2}$$



The **noise spectrum** has

- a pole at $\omega_L^2 = 1/T_L^2$
- a zero at $\omega_z^2 = \frac{1}{T_z^2} = \frac{1}{T_{nc}^2} \left(1 + \frac{T_{nc}^2}{T_L^2} \right)$



$$S_n = S_v \frac{T_L^2}{T_z^2} \cdot \frac{1 + \omega^2 T_z^2}{1 + \omega^2 T_L^2}$$

With **high load resistance** R_L , namely with $R_L/R_{nc} = T_L/T_{nc} > 10$, the zero is practically the same as with infinite load resistance

$$\omega_z^2 \approx \frac{1}{T_{nc}^2} = \omega_{nc}^2$$



Noise Spectrum at Preamplifier Output

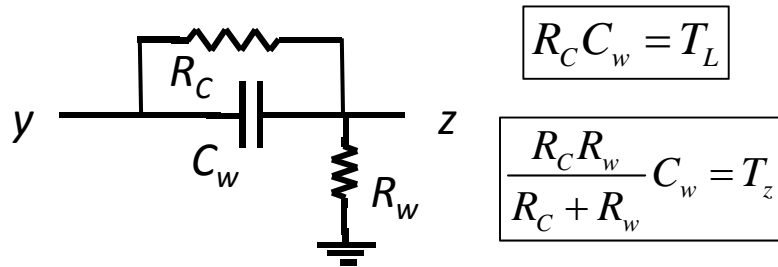
$$S_n = S_v \frac{T_L^2}{T_z^2} \cdot \frac{1 + \omega^2 T_z^2}{1 + \omega^2 T_L^2}$$

with $T_z^2 = T_{nc}^2 \frac{T_L^2}{T_{nc}^2 + T_L^2}$ and $T_L = R_L C_L$

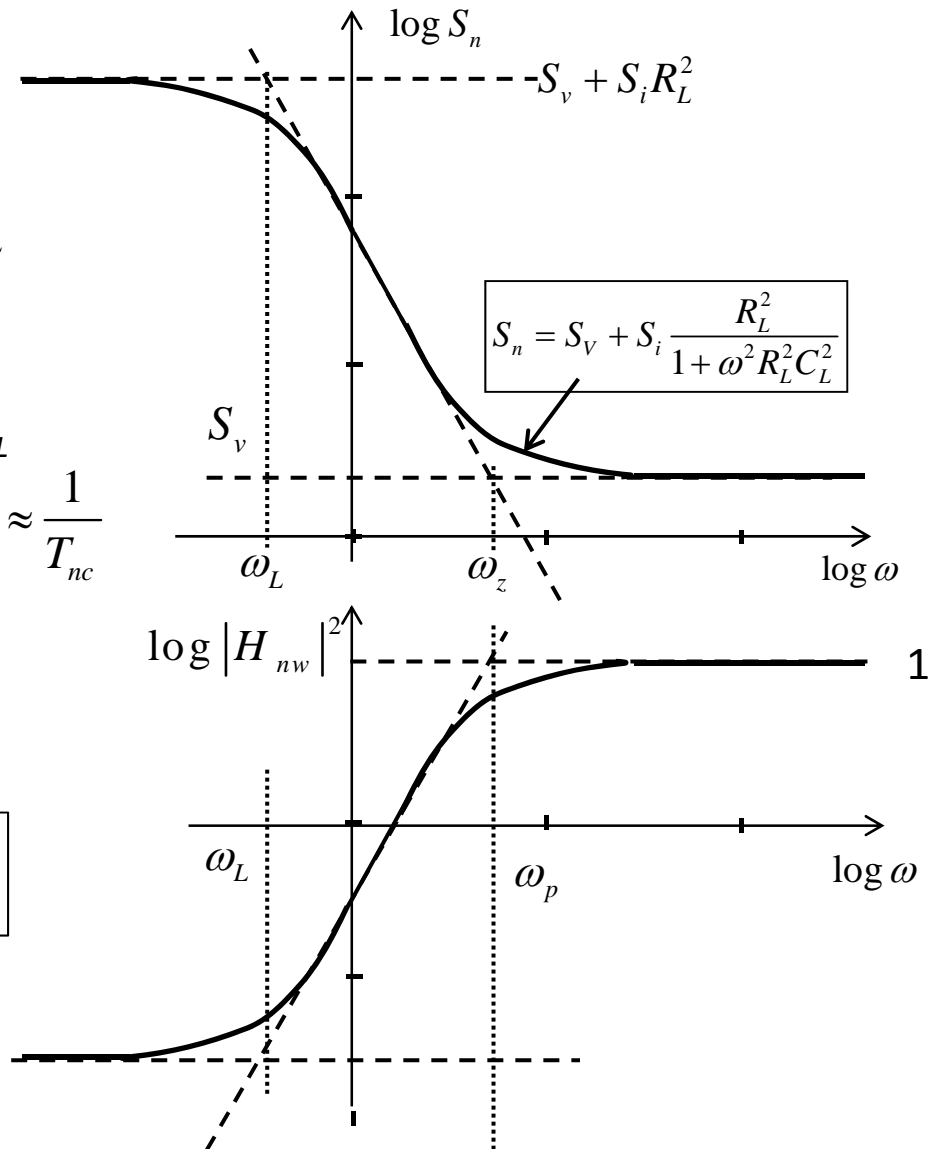
The noise **whitening filter** H_{nw} must

- cancel the pole with a zero at $\omega_L = 1/T_L$
- cancel the zero with a pole at $\omega_p = \frac{1}{T_z} \approx \frac{1}{T_{nc}}$

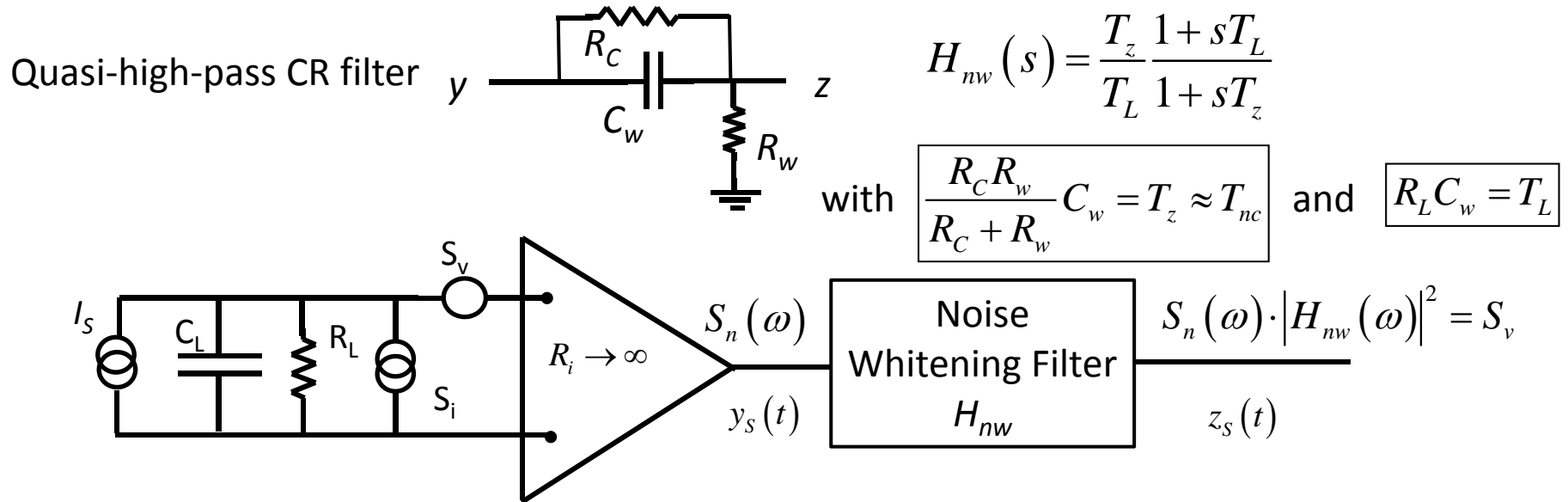
It's a quasi-high-pass CR with finite DC attenuation



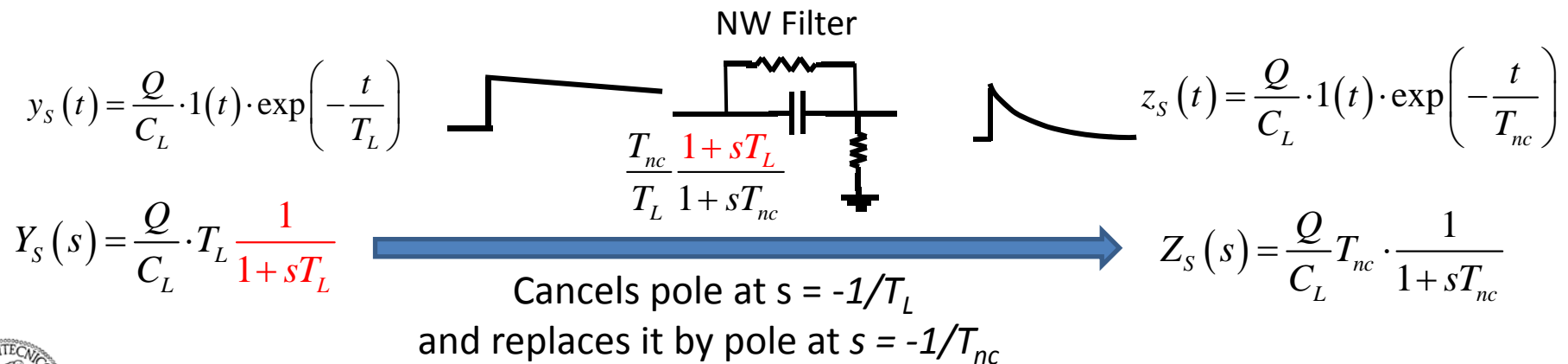
$$H_{nw}(\omega) = \frac{T_z}{T_L} \frac{1 + j\omega T_L}{1 + j\omega T_z} \approx \frac{T_{nc}}{T_L} \frac{1 + j\omega T_L}{1 + j\omega T_{nc}}$$



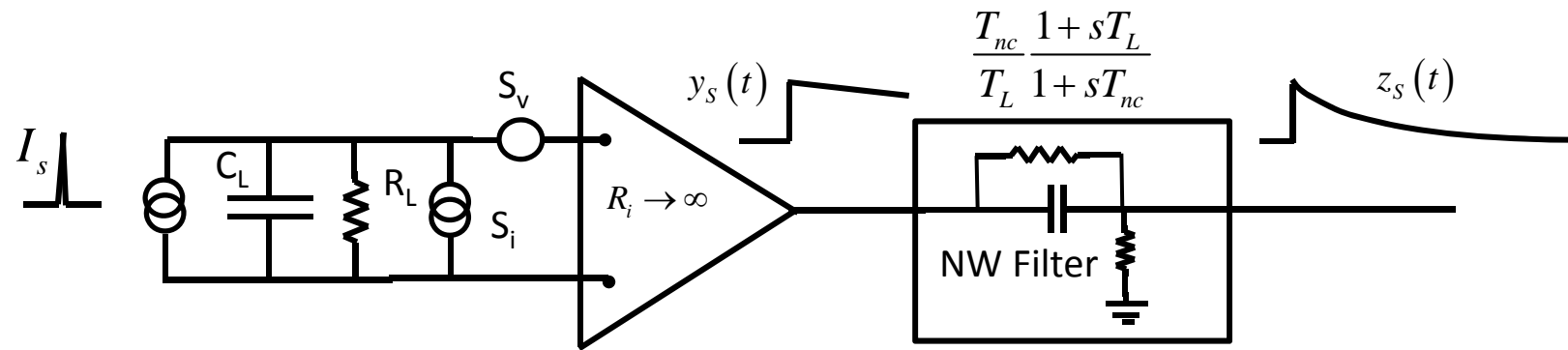
Action of the Noise-Whitening Filter


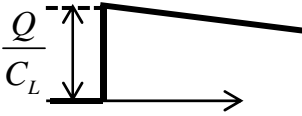
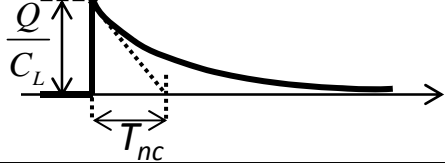


- a) it makes **white** the noise at its **output** and
 - b) it changes the signal into a short **exponential pulse with time-constant T_{nc}** .
- Note that this **«post-whitening» signal is the same found with $R_L \rightarrow \infty$**



Signal at the Noise-Whitening Filter Output



Input (current)	Preamp Output (voltage)	NW Filter Output (voltage)
δ - pulse 	Long exponential pulse 	Short exponential pulse 
$I_s(t) = Q \cdot \delta(t)$	$y_s(t) = \frac{Q}{C_L} \cdot 1(t) \cdot \exp\left(-\frac{t}{T_L}\right)$	$z_s(t) = \frac{Q}{C_L} \cdot 1(t) \cdot \exp\left(-\frac{t}{T_{nc}}\right)$
$I_s(s) = Q$	$Y_s(s) = \frac{QT_L}{C_L} \frac{1}{1 + sT_L}$	$Z_s(s) = \frac{QT_{nc}}{C_L} \frac{1}{1 + sT_{nc}}$

The **matched** filter has to be tailored to the signal at the whitening filter output, i.e. it must have **weighting function exponential with time constant T_{nc}**

