

Technote 27 – Modbus/RS-485 Questions

What is Modbus? What is RS-485?

RS-485 is the hardware specification for the physical wiring and connections. Modbus is the protocol specification that each device uses to communicate over the RS-485 serial line.

Modbus is a protocol specification designed for building automation equipment used to interface with various devices over RS-485 serial and TCP/IP interfaces. More information on Modbus can be found at <http://www.Modbus.org>

RS-485 is a serial hardware specification over which most Modbus devices communicate. The AcquiSuite uses Modbus over RS-485 serial to communicate with the various Modbus devices such as the Veris H8036 power meter. More information on RS-485 can be found at National Semiconductor.

How many devices can be placed on a single Modbus/RS-485 loop?

It depends on the type of Modbus device you have. Many Modbus/RS-485 devices use the Maxim 487 chip (or similar) to interface with the Modbus loop. This chip supports up to 32 devices on a single RS-485 loop. All of the current Obvius products use the Maxim 487 chip. Other manufacturers' products may vary. Please check with the Modbus device manufacturer to confirm the number of devices with which it can share a Modbus loop.

The AcquiSuite counts as another Modbus device on the loop. The Modbus/RS-485 interface on the AcquiSuite contains a Maxim 487 chip, and draws power from the Modbus loop the same way any other attached device does. For installations, this means that you may have one AcquiSuite and 31 other devices on a loop. To increase the number of devices, consider using ModHoppers.

An external data converter (such as RS-232 to RS-485) that is *port-powered* (also called self-powered), causes an additional limitation. This type of converter draws power from the serial port, and does not have its own power supply. Because of this, it may only have enough power to drive 20 to 24 other devices on the Modbus loop. Consider using converters with independent power supplies if the installation requires more than 20 devices. USB-powered RS-485 devices are not typically affected by this issue. The port-powered converters typically look like an adapter, or a cable with extra hardware.

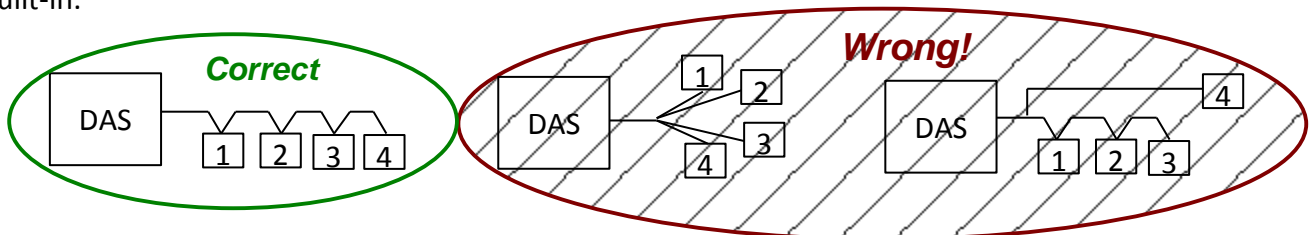
One other limitation to consider is the amount of data that the AcquiSuite logs from each device. For example, the Veris H8238 has 8 separate power meters on a single circuit board. This unit is only one Modbus device, however the AcquiSuite shows it as 8 separate power meters, and will log 8 times as much data as a single power meter. In theory, it would be possible to attach up to 31 of the H8238 Modbus devices to the Modbus loop, for a total of 248 power meters. Logging all that data, however, the AcquiSuite would run out of flash memory in only a few hours, and the log cycle would take many seconds to complete as the Modbus/RS-485 loop operates at 9600bps.

How long can a Modbus/RS-485 loop be?

Modbus/RS-485 loops may be up to 4000ft. Your results may vary depending on the baud rate, quality of wire, electrical noise, and the Modbus devices attached to the loop. Modbus repeaters may be used to extend the length of the loop, but introduce delay in the device response time. Using repeaters on slow devices may cause timeout problems. ModHoppers and Modbus over TCP/IP can extend length.

How should the Modbus/RS-485 loop be wired?

Daisy-chain the devices together. Do not use “spur” lines, or a star configuration. Terminating Resistors of 120 Ohms should be used on the ends of long Modbus/RS-485 loops. In the first example below, the terminator should be placed at the Modbus device 4. The AcquiSuite has one built-in.



What type of wire is required?

Twisted Pair is required. Short runs can be 24 gauge wire, unshielded. Longer runs (+100ft) should use 18 gauge wire with shield. Shielded twisted pair should also be used if electrical noise is present, from motors, relays, etc.

When running the Modbus loop into a breaker panel, one must observe the voltage present in the panel and use wire with appropriate insulation. For example, "Belden 1120A" (18 Gauge Shielded Twisted Pair) is rated for 600V, and may be used in 480V service panels. Always use wire materials and methods that conform to code requirements.

Are terminating resistors required?

The terminating resistor on each end of the RS-485 loop is designed to match electrical impedance characteristics of the twisted pair loop, to prevent signal echoes from corrupting data on the line. A 120 Ohm termination resistor should be installed on BOTH ends of the RS-485 loop. Short and medium length Modbus/RS-485 loops can operate without the resistor. Longer runs may require it. The AcquiSuite A8812 (and its predecessor, the A8811) have one terminating resistor built into the device. The R9120 Modhoppers have a termination resistor that can be enabled via dipswitch. Only one additional terminator is required at the *other* end of the Modbus loop.

