AN14798

System Oscillator Usage for MCX A series Rev. 2.0 — 24 September 2025

Application note

Document information

Information	Content
Keywords	AN14798, MCX A series, System Oscillator, SOSC, crystal
Abstract	This application note provides System Oscillator usage guide for MCX A series, describes how to choose the suitable crystal oscillator, how to design the PCB, meanwhile, some tests and code examples are provided for reference.



System Oscillator Usage for MCX A series

1 Introduction

The 50 MHz crystal oscillator module (named as System Oscillator, SOSC) in MCX A series is designed to handle off-chip crystals that have a frequency of 8 MHz~50 MHz. The output of the crystal oscillator can be used as a clock source for the System PLL (SPLL) clock (if available) and can also be selected as the clock source for system clocks.

This document contains an overview of the crystal model and operating principles. It also provides instructions on how to choose the suitable crystal and external components, including some PCB design guidelines. Finally, the document provides the SOSC configuration steps and test code. It is recommended that you follow the crystal specification and crystal PCB layout guidelines in this document to ensure the accuracy and stability of the system.

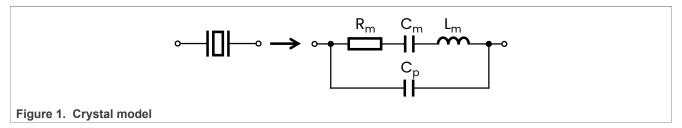
2 Crystal oscillator basics

A crystal oscillator is an electronic device that uses the piezoelectric effect of a quartz crystal to generate a high-precision oscillation frequency. The crystal oscillator is widely used in embedded systems because of its stability and ease of use.

NXP MCX A series MCUs are equipped with a 50 MHz crystal oscillator module (SOSC), which supports 8 MHz~50 MHz crystal and uses a Pierce oscillator structure.

2.1 Crystal model

The equivalent electrical model of the crystal can be simplified as follows:



The crystal model is based on the following components:

- R_m: Motional Resistance (approximately equal to Equivalent Series Resistance known as ESR)
- · C_m: Motional Capacitance
- L_m: Motional Inductance
- Cp: Shunt Capacitance

As shown in Figure 1, in the series branch, when the inductance (L_m) and capacitance (C_m) reach a balance, the L_m , and C_m can be seen as offset each other. The frequency at this point is called the series resonant frequency:

$$f_s = \frac{1}{2\pi\sqrt{L_m C_m}} \tag{1}$$

The shunt capacitance C_p can also achieve a balance with the series branch. Under this condition, the series branch behaves as inductance. The frequency at this point is called the parallel resonant frequency:

$$f_p = \frac{1}{2\pi\sqrt{L_m \frac{C_m C_p}{C_m + C_p}}} = f_s \sqrt{1 + \frac{C_m}{C_p}}$$
 (2)

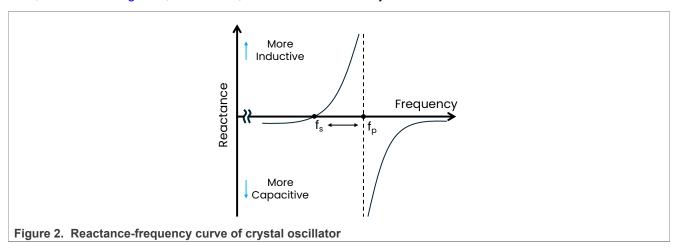
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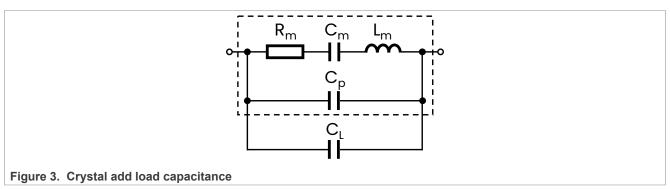
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For fundamental-mode crystal oscillator, it works between the f_s and f_p , also known as the parallel-resonant area, as shown in Figure 2, in this area, the reactance of the crystal is inductive.



When considering the load capacitance (C_L), which is given in the manufacturer's data sheet, the model can be updated as shown in <u>Figure 3</u>, and the frequency of the system is:

$$f_r = \frac{1}{2\pi\sqrt{L_m \frac{C_m(C_p + C_L)}{C_m + C_p + C_L}}} = f_s \sqrt{1 + \frac{C_m}{C_p + C_L}}$$
(3)



By adjusting the load capacitance, the frequency of the system can be tuned.

Note: Due to the high Q value of the crystal, the area between f_s and f_p is small. For the crystal oscillator to operate at the nominal frequency, it is necessary to ensure that the actual load capacitance value is around the data given in the data sheet. For load capacitance calculation, refer to Section 3.4

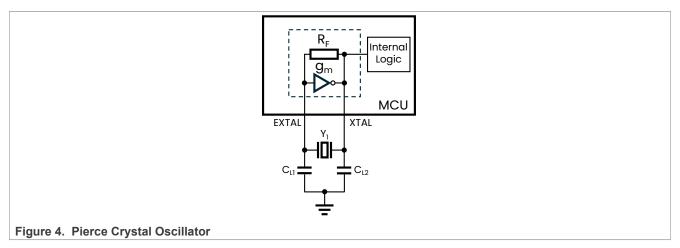
2.2 Pierce crystal oscillator

Pierce crystal oscillator is a widely used parallel resonant topology, which is also used in the NXP MCX A series. The structure of the Pierce oscillator is shown in <u>Figure 4</u> that consists of two parts:

- The active part, which is inside the MCU, mainly the inverter amplifier (g_m) and the feedback resistor (R_F).
- The passive part, which is connected externally, consists of a crystal oscillator (Y₁) and two load capacitors (C_{L1} and C_{L2}).

And EXTAL represents the crystal input pin on the MCU. XTAL represents the crystal output pin on the MCU.

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To make the crystal oscillate, follow the Barkhausen stability criterion:

Amplifier Gain ≥ 1

$$|\beta A_{\nu}| \ge 1 \tag{4}$$

Total phase shift across crystal = n * 360°

$$\angle \beta A_{\nu} = 0^{\circ}, \pm 360^{\circ} \dots \tag{5}$$

Note: This is a necessary condition for crystal oscillate.

For the first condition, the inverter amplifier provides the gain ≥ 1 .

For the second condition, the crystal and the load capacitors provide a 180° phase shift, and the inverter amplifier provides the other 180° phase shift, totally, the phase shift is 360°.

For a suitable oscillator circuit, through repeated amplification, the environmental noise can be amplified into stable oscillation signals.

3 Crystal selection

This section provides details on how to choose a suitable crystal oscillator based on key parameters.

The most important parameters that must be considered are:

- Oscillation mode
- Frequency
- · Frequency tolerance
- · Load capacitance
- · Equivalent Series Resistance (ESR)

3.1 Oscillation mode

For passive crystal oscillator, there are two oscillation modes: fundamental frequency oscillation mode and overtone oscillation mode.

It is recommended to operate the crystal oscillator in the fundamental frequency mode because the crystal oscillator in overtone oscillation mode requires an additional frequency selection circuit.

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3.2 Frequency

Frequency is the main parameter for selecting the crystal. For MCX A series MCU, 8 MHz~50 MHz are supported; choose the crystal within this frequency range and determine the final frequency based on the application.

3.3 Frequency tolerance

Usually, parts per million (ppm) is used as the unit of frequency tolerance, and the ppm can be calculated as:

$$ppm = \frac{f_r f_0}{f_0} * 10^6 \tag{6}$$

Where:

- fr: real frequency measured
- f₀: frequency given by the crystal manufacturer

For frequency tolerance, it is the frequency accuracy under nominal conditions.

Take the 10 MHz crystal as an example, if the frequency tolerance is ± 20 ppm, the frequency of it is 10 MHz \pm 200 Hz.

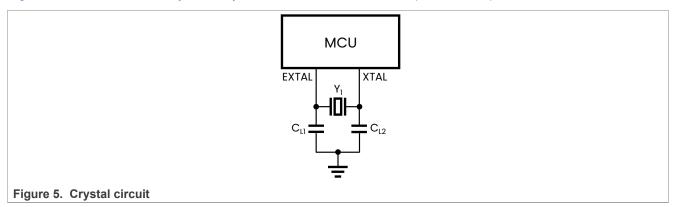
At the same time, the frequency stability over temperature characteristics is provided in the data sheet, pmm is also used as the unit. It represents the frequency change of the crystal within the operating temperature range.

3.4 Load capacitance

Load capacitance is an external parameter of the crystal used to tune the operating frequency of the crystal. The load capacitance provided by the crystal manufacturer is to make the crystal to operate at the nominal frequency.

To meet the load resistance requirements, ensure that the total capacitance in the crystal circuit matches the target load capacitance.

Figure 5 shows the commonly used crystal circuit, C_{L1} and C_{L2} are equal value capacitors.



 C_{L1} and C_{L2} are not the load capacitance provided by the manufacturer without considering parasitic capacitance. Assuming $C_{L1} = C_{L2}$, the below formula can be used to calculate the approximate load capacitance:

$$C_L = \frac{C_{L1} * C_{L2}}{C_{L1} + C_{L2}} = \frac{C_{L1}}{2} = \frac{C_{L2}}{2} \tag{7}$$

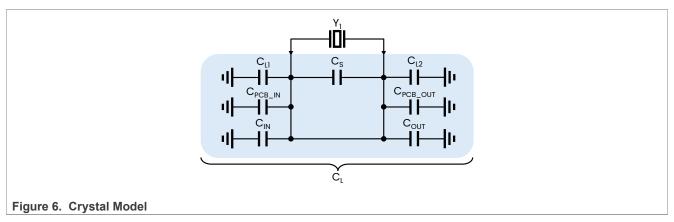
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However, it is under ideal conditions. When all parasitic capacitances in the circuit are considered, the model can be simplified to <u>Figure 6</u>. All the capacitances in the box constitute the actual load capacitance. The design goal is to make the load capacitance the same as the data provided by the manufacturer.



Where:

- C_L: nominal load capacitance given by the crystal manufacturer
- C_{I,1} and C_{I,2}: external load capacitors
- $C_{PCB\ IN}$ and $C_{PCB\ OUT}$: parasitic capacitance of the input and output PCB traces
- C_S: stray capacitance of the PCB
- C_{IN} and C_{OUT}: parasitic capacitance of the MCU EXTAL and XTAL pins

Then, the total capacitance of the crystal input to the ground is

$$C_{L1'} = C_{L1} + C_{PCB_IN} + C_{IN}$$
 (8)

The total capacitance of the crystal output to the ground is

$$C_{L2'} = C_{L2} + C_{PCB\ OUT} + C_{OUT} \tag{9}$$

Therefore, the load capacitance can be expressed as

$$C_L = \frac{(C_{L1'})^*(C_{L2'})}{(C_{L1'})^*(C_{L2'})} + C_S \tag{10}$$

Assuming that the input and output parameters are symmetric:

$$C_L = \frac{C_{L1'}}{2} + C_S = \frac{C_{L2'}}{2} + C_S$$
 (11)

C_{L1} and C_{L2} can be calculated as:

$$C_{L1} = C_{L2} = 2*(C_L - C_S) - C_{IN} - C_{PCB_IN}$$
 (12)

For example,

- C_I = 10 pF (provided by crystal data sheet)
- C_S is around 1 pF (estimated value, measured on board)
- C_{IN} and C_{OUT} are around 2 pF (provided by MCU data sheet)
- C_{PCB_IN} and C_{PCB_OUT} are around 1 pF (estimated value, measured on board)

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Note: Good PCB layout is important, otherwise the capacitance value will be larger.

In this case:

$$C_{L1} = C_{L2} = 2*(10-1) - 2 - 1 = 15pF$$
 (13)

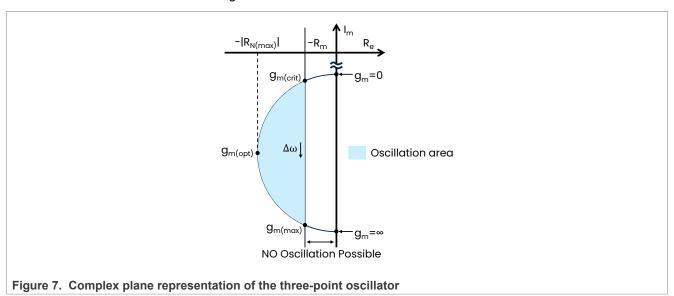
When choosing the capacitors, find a suitable value around the calculated value.

For details on how to measure these parameters on the PCB, refer to *Crystal Oscillator Design Guide* (document <u>AN14518</u>).

3.5 ESR and negative resistance

The ESR (R_m) and Negative resistance (R_N) are important parameters that must be considered in crystal selection that affects the reliable start of the oscillator and the oscillation stability.

<u>Figure 7</u> shows the complex plane representation of the three-point oscillator in the Pierce Crystal Oscillator, on the left side of the vertical line in the figure is the oscillation area.



The theoretical condition for a crystal oscillator is:

$$|R_N| = R_m \tag{14}$$

To ensure the stability of the system, there must be enough margin here, greater than 3~5 times. If a margin greater than 5 times is required, then

$$|R_N| > 5*R_m \tag{15}$$

The attachment provides the simulation results of the maximum ESR follow formula (15).

Note: These simulation results can guide users to select the appropriate ESR, but there may be some differences between the simulation results and the actual situation.

To measure the approximate negative resistance on the board, follow the below steps:

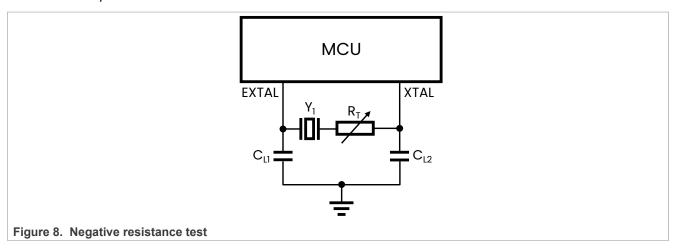
- Rework the board and connect a variable resistance R_T to the oscillation circuit, as shown in Figure 8.
- Set R_T to 0 Ω , observing the oscillation waveform of the crystal oscillator, see <u>Section 5</u> for details.

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- Gradually increase the value of R_T until the crystal oscillation stops.
- Gradually reduce the value of R_T until the crystal oscillator starts oscillating again after the board is repowered, then record the resistance value R_{T(max)} at this time.
- Ensure

$$\frac{R_{T(max)} + ESR}{ESR} > 5 \tag{16}$$

Note: The parasitic parameters of R_T affect the oscillation circuit. Use an SMD resistor for verification to minimize the impact.



If the test above indicates that the margin is insufficient, the following operations may help improve it:

- · Choose a crystal oscillator with lower ESR
- Change the value of C_{L1} and C_{L2}. Refer to the attached table for the impact of C_L on the trend of ESR changes.

Note: Change C_{L1} and C_{L2} can also affect the accuracy of the frequency.

• Optimize the PCB layout to reduce the C_S. Lower C_S leads to higher negative resistance.

3.6 Other parameters

There are other parameters that must be considered. There are different requirements for these parameters in different applications.

- Startup time: it defines the time between the crystal being turned on and reaching a certain oscillation amplitude.
- Drive level: it defines the power dissipation of the crystal.
- · Footprint: it affects the crystal size and price.

3.7 Selection example

Here is an example for crystal selection:

- 1. Select a crystal of the desired frequency and footprint, make sure that the frequency is 8 MHz ~ 50 MHz and works in fundamental frequency oscillation mode.
- 2. Download the data sheet of selected crystal and evaluate relevant parameters. Below is a table from a crystal data sheet:

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Table 1. Crystal specifications

Parameter	Symbol	Min.	Тур.	Max.	Unit	Conditions/Remarks
Nominal frequency	f_nom	-	16.000000	-	MHz	Fundamental
Frequency tolerance	f_tol	-10	-	+10	X10 ⁻⁶	@+25°C
Frequency Stability over temperature	f_tem	-12	-	+12	X10 ⁻⁶	-20°C to +75°C
Operating temperature	T_use	-20	-	+75	°C	
Level of drive	DL	10	-	100	μW	
Load capacitance	CL	-	9	-	pF	
Motional resistance(ESR)	R1	-	-	80	Ω	
Motional capacitance	C1	-	1.88	-	fF	
Motional inductance	L1	-	52.65	-	mH	
Shunt capacitance	C0	-	0.84	-	pF	
Frequency aging	f_age	-1	-	+1	x10 ⁻⁶ /year	@+25°C, First year

As shown above, it contains many of the parameters mentioned above, the frequency of the crystal is 16 MHz (Fundamental), which meets the requirements mentioned in step 1.

- 3. Frequency tolerance, frequency stability over temperature, operating temperature depend on the needs of the current application and can be checked according to the actual conditions.
- 4. Besides frequency, a critical parameter in the selection is ESR, the maximum value here is 80 Ω (shown in Table 1), and the attachment can be used to determine whether the selected crystal is suitable.
- · Frequency, load capacitance, and shunt capacitance are the main parameters that determine maximum ESR.
- In Table 1, Frequency = 16 MHz, load capacitance = 9 pF, shunt capacitance = 0.84 pF.
- Open the attachment, select sheet Freq_16MHz. Find the row where C_p = 1 pF and C_L = 9 pF, shown as below:

Table 2. ESR selection table

Frequency	Ср	SOSCCFG[RANGE]	CL	Max ESR
16 MHz	1 pF	00b (8-16 MHz)	9 pF	62 Ω
16 MHz	1 pF	01b (16-25 MHz)	9 pF	164 Ω

When SOSCCFG[RANGE] = 01b, the maximum ESR is 164 Ω , and the maximum ESR of the selected crystal is 80 Ω , which meets the requirements.

Note: The maximum ESR in the table is given according to the principle of formula (15), which ensures the stability of the system. When the ESR of the selected crystal is greater than the value given in the table, the crystal usually works normally, but it is still recommended to leave enough margin based on the application.

4 PCB design guidelines

Through the previous theoretical analysis of the crystal oscillator, it is shown that a good PCB design is important because the PCB design affects the frequency and stability of the crystal oscillator.

It is recommended to follow the following specifications for PCB design:

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- Connect the crystal and external load capacitors on the PCB as close as possible to the oscillator input and output pins of the chip.
- The length of traces in the oscillation circuit should be as short as possible and must not cross other signal lines.
- Ensure that the load capacitors have a common ground plane.
- Loops must be made as small as possible to minimize the noise coupled in through the PCB and to keep parasitic effects as small as possible.
- · Lay out the ground (GND) pattern around the traces and under the crystal unit.
- Do not lay out other signal lines under crystal unit for a multilayered PCB.

5 SOSC configuration and test

The module used for external crystal in MCX A series is called System Oscillator (SOSC). This section introduces the steps for SOSC configuration and provides sample code for startup time test and clock output test.

Note: The module also supports an external reference clock as the selected clock by setting the register SOSCCFG[EREFS] (0b for external reference clock, 1b for crystal oscillator).

5.1 SOSC configuration steps

Below is the SOSC configuration example:

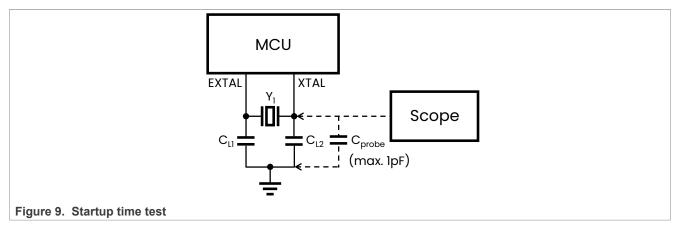
- 1. Write 1 to LDOCSR[LDOEN] to enable LDO
- 2. Write 1 to SOSCCFG[EREFS] to select SOSC source (crystal oscillator)
- 3. Write 0 to SOSCCFG[RANGE] to configure the SOSC range (based on the selected crystal oscillator)
- 4. Write 0 to SOSCCSR[LK] to unlock SOSCCSR
- 5. Write 1 to SOSCCSR[SOSCCM] to enable SOSC clock monitor
- 6. Write 1 to SOSCCSR[SOSCSTEN] to enable SOSC in Deep Sleep mode if needed
- 7. Write 1 to SOSCCSR[SOSCEN] to enable SOSC
- 8. Read SOSCCSR[SOSCVLD] until it returns 1, indicating SOSC is valid
- 9. Read SOSCCSR[SOSCERR] to ensure that it returns 0
- 10. Write 1 to RCCR[SCS] to switch the main clock to SOSC if needed
- 11. Read CSR[SCS] until it returns 1, indicating the switch is complete

5.2 Startup time test and code

As shown in Figure 9, a scope is used to measure the startup time.

Note: For startup time test, an active low capacitance single-ended probe (max. 1pF) is recommended to be used for measurement because the capacitance of the probe can affect the measurement results. When measuring, it is best to measure directly close to the test point and not to use long wires to minimize the measurement uncertainties as much as possible.

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At the same time, the startup process can also be marked with a GPIO, and timed by a timer. If only the startup time is to be measured, this is a simpler approach and does not affect the circuit.

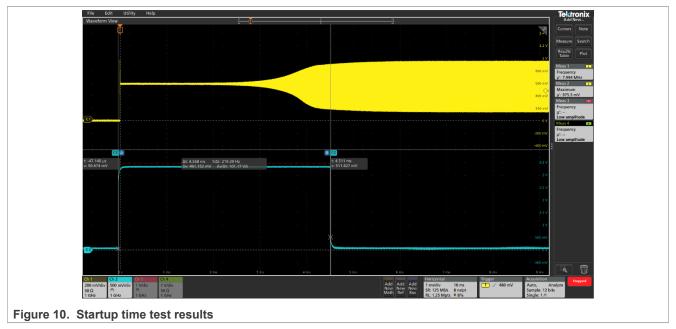
Below is the example code for startup time test on FRDM-MCXA346, P1 1 is used as the test GPIO.

```
int main (void)
{
    char ch;
    /* Init board hardware. */
    BOARD InitHardware();
    if (SysTick Config(SystemCoreClock / 1000000U)) // 1us interrupt set
        while (1)
        {
   PRINTF("hello world.\r\n");
   ch = GETCHAR(); // getchar before crystal oscillator start
   app SoscSet();
    PRINTF("SOSC WORK\r\n");
    PRINTF("Startup time: %f ms\r\n", g count/1000.0);
    while (1)
}
* @brief app SoscSet SOSC set
* @param NULL
* @return NULL
void app SoscSet(void)
  /* De-initializes the SCG SOSC */
 SCG0->SOSCCSR = SCG SOSCCSR SOSCERR MASK;
  /* Enable LDO */
 SCG0->LDOCSR |= SCG LDOCSR LDOEN MASK;
  /* Select SOSC source (crystal oscillator) and Configure SOSC range */
  SCG0->SOSCCFG = SCG SOSCCFG EREFS MASK | SCG SOSCCFG RANGE(0);
  /* Unlock SOSCCSR *7
```

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```
SCG0->SOSCCSR &= ~SCG SOSCCSR LK MASK;
  /* Enable SOSC clock monitor and Enable SOSC */
  SCGO->SOSCCSR |= (SCG SOSCCSR SOSCCM MASK | SCG SOSCCSR SOSCEN MASK);
  {\tt GPIO\_PortSet} \, ({\tt GPIO1, 1u} \, << \, 1{\tt U}) \, ; \quad // \, {\tt SOSC \, enable \, signal} \,
  g_start_flag = 1; // Start timing
  /* Wait for SOSC clock to be valid. */
  while ((SCG0->SOSCCSR & SCG SOSCCSR SOSCVLD MASK) == 0U)
  GPIO_PortClear(GPIO1, 1u << 1U); // SOSC valid signal
g_stop_flag = 1; // Stop timing</pre>
 * @brief SysTick Handler System tick interrupt
* @param NULL
* @return NULL
void SysTick Handler(void)
    if(g stop flag == 1) // Stop timing
      g stop flag = 0;
      g_{start_flag} = 0;
    if (g start flag == 1) // Start timing
       g count ++; // Counting result
}
```

Figure 10 shows the startup time test results.



Where:

- CH1 is the waveform from MCU XTAL pin

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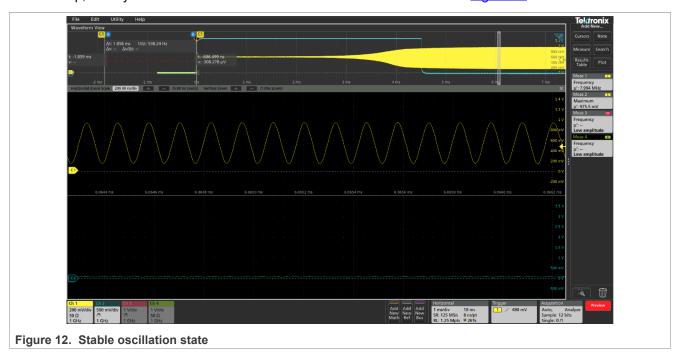
- CH2 is the waveform from P1_1 (test GPIO)

P1_1 is low before SOSC is enabled. It jumps from low to high when SOSC is enabled and jumps from high to low when the clock signal is valid. The startup time shown in this figure is 4.558 ms.

The waveform at the moment of crystal oscillator startup is shown in <u>Figure 11</u>, after enabling the register (SOSCCSR[SOSCEN]) and a short delay, the output voltage of XTAL pin changes indicating that the crystal oscillator entered the startup state.



After startup, the crystal oscillator enters a stable oscillation state as shown in Figure 12.



The startup time can also be printed by the UART, as shown in <u>Figure 13</u>, the startup time recorded by timer is 4.567 ms. It is consistent with the test waveform.

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Note: Set PRINTF_FLOAT_ENABLE and PRINTF_ADVANCED_ENABLE to 1 to ensure that the printing of float variables works properly.

```
hello world.
SOSC WORK
Startup time: 4.567000 ms

Figure 13. UART printed result with probe
```

5.3 Clock output test and code

The MCX A series MCU provides a clock output function, a useful function for clock observation. Not to affect the crystal oscillator circuit, observe the oscillation frequency through the clock output function instead of measuring it directly on the crystal oscillator pin. Below are the steps to enable the crystal oscillator clock output:

- 1. Configure the IO as a CLKOUT function (there are several IOs that can be configured as CLKOUT, refer to the reference manual for details, here take P4 2 of MCXA346 as an example).
- 2. Write 0 to CLKUNLOCK[UNLOCK] to unlock the clock configuration registers.
- 3. Write 2 to MRCC_CLKOUT_CLKSEL[MUX] to select CLK_IN as the clock source.
- 4. Write 7 to MRCC_CLKOUT_CLKDIV[DIV] to set the divider value to 8 (for an 8 MHz crystal oscillator, a 1 MHz clock output can be obtained here).
- 5. Write 1 to CLKUNLOCK[UNLOCK] to lock the clock configuration registers.

The core code for clock output configuration is as follows:

```
/**
* @brief BOARD InitCLKOUT Pins
                                  Initialization of the CLKOUT pin
* @param NULL
* @return NULL
void BOARD InitCLKOUT Pins (void)
    /* PORT4: Peripheral clock is enabled */
    CLOCK EnableClock(kCLOCK GatePORT4);
    /* PORT4 peripheral is released from reset */
    RESET ReleasePeripheralReset(kPORT4 RST SHIFT RSTn);
    const port pin config t port4 2 config = {
           /* Internal pull-up resistor is enabled */
           .pullSelect = kPORT PullUp,
           /* Low internal pull resistor value is selected. */
           .pullValueSelect = kPORT LowPullResistor,
           /* Fast slew rate is configured */
           .slewRate = kPORT_FastSlewRate,
/* Passive input filter is disabled */
           .passiveFilterEnable = kPORT PassiveFilterDisable,
           /* Open drain output is disabled */
           .openDrainEnable = kPORT OpenDrainDisable,
           /* Low drive strength is configured */
           .driveStrength = kPORT LowDriveStrength,
           /* Normal drive strength is configured */
           .driveStrength1 = kPORT NormalDriveStrength,
           /* Pin is configured as CLKOUT */
           .mux = kPORT MuxAlt1,
           /* Digital input enabled */
           .inputBuffer = kPORT InputBufferEnable,
```

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```
/* Digital input is not inverted */
           .invertInput = kPORT_InputNormal,
           /* Pin Control Register fields [15:0] are not locked */
           .lockRegister = kPORT UnlockRegister);
    /* PORT4 2 is configured as CLKOUT */
    PORT SetPinConfig(PORT4, 2U, &port4 2 config);
}
/**
* @brief app_ClockOut clock output set, to observe clock signal
 @param NULL
 @return NULL
void app_ClockOut(void)
    /* Unlock the register */
    SYSCON -> CLKUNLOCK = SYSCON CLKUNLOCK UNLOCK(OU);
    /* Select CLK_IN as the clock out source */
   MRCC0 -> MRCC_CLKOUT_CLKSEL = MRCC_MRCC_CLKOUT_CLKSEL_MUX(2U);
    /* Set the clock divider, divider value = (DIV+1) */
   MRCCO -> MRCC CLKOUT CLKDIV = MRCC MRCC CLKOUT CLKDIV DIV(7U);
    /* Lock the register */
   SYSCON -> CLKUNLOCK = SYSCON CLKUNLOCK UNLOCK(1U);
}
```

Figure 14 shows the clock out test result in this example, it is 1.000 MHz.

Note: It is recommended to use a ground spring for measurement to minimize the loop area, otherwise high-frequency noise is coupled in.



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6 Conclusion

This application note is intended to help users optimize their use of the SOSC module on the MCX A series. It includes an analysis of crystal oscillator principles, recommendations for selecting appropriate crystal oscillators, PCB design guidelines, and illustrative test examples.

7 References

- 1. Using the 16 MHz Crystal Oscillator MC9328MX1, MC9328MXL, and MC9328MXS (document AN2500)
- 2. Crystal Oscillator Design Guide (document AN14518)
- 3. MCX A345/346 Reference Manual (document MCXAP144M240F60RM)
- 4. MCX A345/346 data sheet (document MCXAP144M240F60)
- 5. Design of Electrical Parameter Measurement System of Quartz Crystal Oscillator, IEEE
- 6. A Study of Low-Power Crystal Oscillator Design, IEEE
- 7. High-performance crystal oscillator circuits: theory and application, IEEE

8 Revision history

Table 3. Revision history

Document ID	Release date	Description
AN14798 v.2.0	24 September 2025	Minor updates
AN14798 v.1.0	16 September 2025	Initial version

9 Note about the source code in the document

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System Oscillator Usage for MCX A series

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