



NBS SPECIAL PUBLICATION

400-6

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE / National Bureau of Standards

*Semiconductor Measurement Technology:*

# Microelectronic Test Patterns: An Overview

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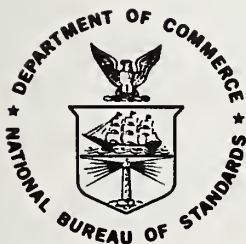
# *Semiconductor Measurement Technology:* **Microelectronic Test Patterns: An Overview**

Martin G. Buehler

U.S.  
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Electronic Technology Division  
Institute for Applied Technology  
National Bureau of Standards  
Washington, D.C. 20234

+ Special Publication no. 400-6

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The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency,  
The Defense Nuclear Agency, and  
The National Bureau of Standards



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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, Frederick B. Dent, *Secretary*  
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS, Richard W. Roberts, *Director*

Issued August 1974

## **Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data**

**Buehler, Martin G.**

**Microelectronic test patterns: An overview.**

(NBS Special Publication 400-6)

"Jointly sponsored by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, the Defense Nuclear Agency, and the National Bureau of Standards."

Supt. of Docs. No.: C 13.10:400.6

1. Integrated circuits—Testing. 2. Electronic apparatus and appliances—Testing. I. United States. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. II. United States. Defense Nuclear Agency. III. United States. National Bureau of Standards. IV. Title. V. Series: United States. National Bureau of Standards. Special Publication 400-6.

QC100.U57 No. 400-6 [TK7874] 389'.08s [621.381'73]

74-13001

## **National Bureau of Standards Special Publication 400-6**

**Nat. Bur. Stand. (U.S.), Spec. Publ. 400-6, 24 pages (Aug. 1974)**

**CODEN: XNBSAV**

**U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE**

**WASHINGTON: 1974**

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**For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402**  
**(Order by SD Catalog No. C13.10:400-6). Price 60 cents.**

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Martin G. Buehler

## ABSTRACT

The test patterns considered are those designed by the physical electronics engineer to evaluate fabrication processes rather than those designed by the microcircuit designer. The evaluation of fabrication processes can reveal if a process is under control and can indicate the stability and reliability of the resulting microcircuit. This evaluation is in essence an evaluation of a microcircuit's material characteristics, for process control and reliability depend ultimately on the right atoms being in the right places.

Various material analysis test structures are described, such as resistors, MOS capacitors, and gated  $p$ - $n$  junctions along with the material parameters that can be derived from each. These test structures are illustrated by the NBS-2 test pattern, and its use in process control is described. Examples are given which span the range from those structures which are amenable to production testing to those which require an advanced measurement capability. In addition test structures are discussed with regard to their usability; this encompasses their size, sensitivity, correlation, contacting schemes, testability, and packaging. Test structures must be properly designed so that desired parameters are measured. In this regard various design aspects such as metal taps and diffused taps are mentioned. Finally the role of NBS in evaluating and designing test patterns is discussed.

*Key words:* Integrated circuits; microelectronic test patterns.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Microelectronic test patterns are meant to facilitate the fabrication of more reliable and lower cost microcircuits [1,2,3,4,5]. If they are to be effective in meeting this objective, their presence must not impede the production of the microcircuits. They must allow the user to pin-point problem areas quickly so that timely corrective action can be taken. This means that test structures must be designed to consume a minimum of space, be easily fabricated, tested, and analyzed, and speak directly to problem areas. A significant effort is now planned by NBS to develop various test structures and encourage their implementation in production processes. The reason for this effort now is that test patterns can affect both the yield and reliability at the wafer level and they can be used to bridge the buyer/seller interface by giving the buyer confidence in the product he has purchased.

To effectively implement test patterns, the associated test apparatus, data acquisition and reduction systems, and mathematical models must be developed. In addition, the product engineer must be convinced to devote some of his precious space on the wafer to test patterns. This paper focuses on the use and design of test patterns and considers only in passing the total environment in which the pattern must function. In Section II, a description is given of the term, test pattern. Sections III and IV are devoted to how test patterns are used and the information that can be derived from them. A test pattern developed at NBS is described in Section V and two test structures from this pattern are discussed in detail to illustrate its various uses. The design and evaluation of test patterns is discussed in Section VI, and finally the response of NBS to the industrial need is described in Section VII.

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\*Based on a talk presented at the Mini-Symposium on Semiconductor Test Patterns sponsored by the ASTM Committee F-1 on Electronics in New Orleans, January 15, 1974.

## II. ATTRIBUTES OF TEST PATTERNS

Four arrangements of test structures on a wafer have been identified. The first arrangement consists of a test wafer completely covered with test structures and used for an experimental study of the process. The second arrangement consists of test structures placed on the periphery of every microcircuit chip and used for process control. In the last two categories the production wafer contains test chips which replace the entire microcircuit chip at selected points. These test chips allow across-the-wafer measurements or quadrant measurements as illustrated in figure 1. The third arrangement consists of a material analysis test chip used for process control and reliability analysis. The final arrangement consists of an expanded metallization test chip where the microcircuit metallization has been altered to allow access to circuit elements such as transistors and resistors. These chips are used in circuit design and yield analysis.

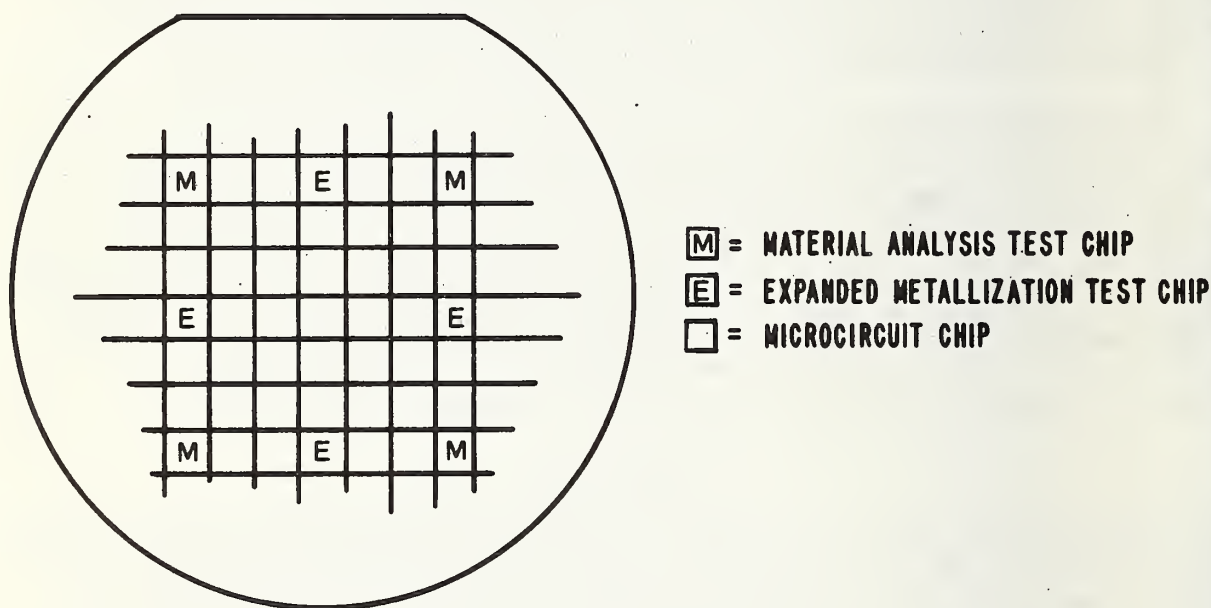


Figure 1. Test chips distributed among microcircuits on a production wafer.

The kinds of test regions may vary from clear areas for etch control to patterned areas utilized in various ways. Alignment and resolution patterns are used in photoresist operations and for etch control. Process control structures fall into two categories: those that can be probed before wafers are metallized and those probed after metallization. Those probed before metallization are used to provide rapid feedback to the process. For example, the gain of a transistor can be brought into specification by additional heat cycles prior to metallization. Those structures probed after metallization are used to monitor the process by giving overall trends and allowing for longer range corrective action. Such structures are typically sheet resistors, contact resistors, metal continuity resistors, test diodes and test transistors. These process control structures evaluate the material characteristics of microcircuits. In contrast, circuit and device oriented test structures are useful to the design engineer since they give him information relative to the overall design. They consist of the various resistors, capacitors, diodes, and transistors found in the microcircuit. The final category consists of reliability and failure analysis structures. They are special structures such as MOS capacitors and metal step coverage resistors. The testing environment for these structures is meant to induce failure modes. As such, extreme temperatures and extreme current pulses may be used.



### III. USE OF TEST PATTERNS

In high volume production, operating in a steady state mode, the use of test patterns traditionally plays a relatively minor role, for process control is achieved by other empirical means. However, in such an environment, test patterns can provide early warning that process controls may be deteriorating. In low volume production, where processes must be changed rapidly, they can help to quickly bring the process within specification. In the production of custom microcircuits [6], the process may remain the same, but different photomasks are used to suit customer circuit requirements. Here test patterns provide a common link between a variety of circuits insuring that process control has been maintained. The concept of control through test patterns also proves useful when comparing circuits fabricated at different facilities.

Test patterns can be used to judge the potential reliability of a microcircuit chip and to assess the causes of failure. The MOS capacitor bias-temperature stress test is an example [7] of how a test structure can be used to predict reliability. Test structures, such as test transistors located on the periphery of a microcircuit, can prove invaluable in diagnosing a returned circuit.

### IV. INFORMATION DERIVED FROM TEST PATTERNS

Typical information derivable from various test patterns is summarized below. The list progresses from the least sophisticated structures to advanced test structures, such as the charged coupled device (CCD) [8] and NAND gate. Material parameters such as sheet resistance, lifetime, and defect and dopant densities are listed along with various device parameters.

1. Sheet Resistor: sheet resistance.
2. Al/Si Contact Resistor: contact resistance.
3. Bulk Resistor: bulk resistivity, back side contact resistance.
4. Metallization Resistor: sheet resistance, step coverage resistance.
5. MOS Capacitor: dopant density, defect density, fixed oxide charge density, fast interface state density, carrier lifetime, defect identity, oxide dielectric constant, oxide thickness, oxide breakdown voltage.
6. Gated  $p$ - $n$  Junction: dopant density profile, defect density profile, surface recombination velocity, carrier lifetime, defect identity, breakdown voltage.
7. Bipolar Transistor: base width, effective base dopant density, saturation voltage, breakdown voltages, offset voltage.
8. MOSFET: threshold voltage, conduction factor, charge spreading activation energy.
9. CCD: fixed oxide charge density, fast interface state density.
10. NAND Gate: propagation delay.

This list illustrates the wealth of information that can be gleaned from these test structures.

# V. A TEST PATTERN USED AT NBS

The test pattern that NBS is currently using [9] is shown in figure 2; the dimensions of each test structure are given in the appendix. It consists mainly of sheet resistors, contact resistors, MOS capacitors, and gated  $p-n$  junctions which are listed in table 1.

Table 1 — Planar Test Structures

Number	Test Structure	Dimension, <sup>a</sup> mil
1	Gated circular base-collector junction with diffused channel stop	$D = 6$
2	Ungated circular base-collector junction with diffused channel stop	$D = 6$
3	Ungated square base-collector junction with diffused channel stop	$S' = 5$
4	Gated square base-collector junction with diffused channel stop	$S' = 18$
5	Ungated circular base-collector junction with diffused channel stop	$D = 20$
6	Gated circular base-collector junction with diffused channel stop	$D = 20$
7	Gated circular base-collector junction (small emitter) with diffused channel stop	$D = 20$
8	Gated circular base-collector junction (large emitter) with diffused channel stop	$D = 20$
9	Gated circular base-collector junction with diffused channel stop	$D = 60$
10	MOS capacitor over collector with field plate and diffused channel stop	$D = 6$
11	MOS capacitor over collector with field plate and diffused channel stop	$D = 20$
12	MOS capacitor over collector with distant field plate and diffused channel stop	$D = 20$
13	MOS capacitor over base without field plate and diffused channel stop	$D = 20$
14	Base sheet resistor	
15	Emitter sheet resistor	
16	Metal-to-base contact resistor	
17	Metal-to-emitter contact resistor	
18	Collector resistor	
19	Base-under-the-emitter sheet resistor (tetrode transistor)	
20	Hall effect pattern	
21	Alignment marker	

<sup>a</sup>  $D$  = diameter of a circle,  $S'$  = side of a square. Tolerances should be held to  $\pm 0.1$  mil. If metric dimensions are desired the diameters should be 0.15 mm (for structures numbered 1, 2, 10), 0.5 mm (5-8, 11-13), and 1.5 mm (9), and the sides should be 0.13 mm (3) and 0.46 mm (4); all tolerances should be held to  $\pm 0.002$  mm.



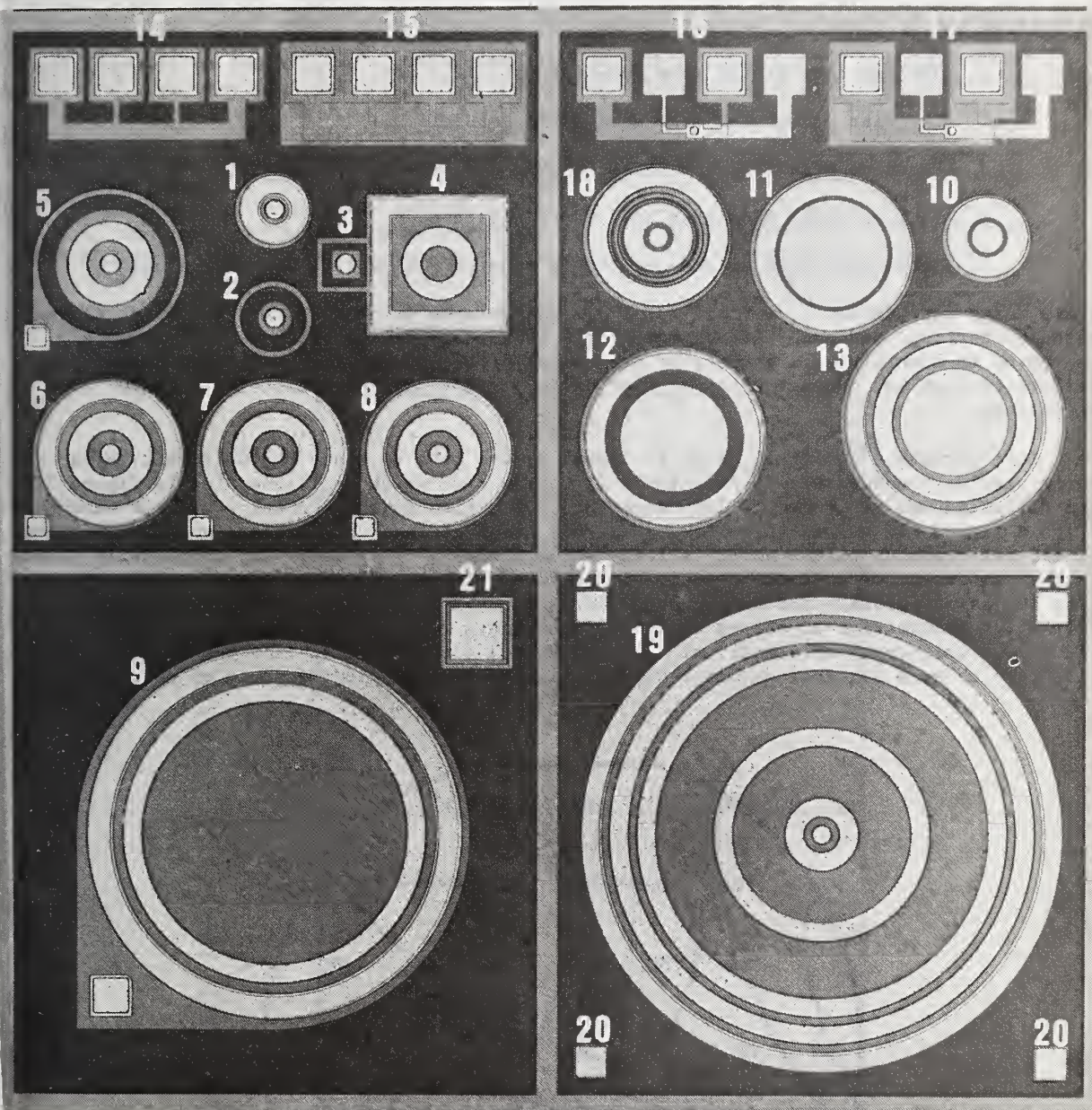


Figure 2. Test pattern, NBS-2, for characterizing the electrical properties of silicon MOS capacitors and  $p$ - $n$  junctions. (The 21 elements are identified in table 1. The overall pattern is 200 mils (5.08 mm) on a side.)

The design objectives of this pattern were two fold. First, it was intended to identify problem areas within our in-house fabrication facility. Second, it was intended to allow us to develop various measurement methods. For example,  $p-n$  junctions with various diameters have been used to develop the junction CV impurity profiling method. To meet these design objectives and to simplify the fabrication, the following four design rules were observed.

1. Minimum line widths were one-half mil (12.7  $\mu\text{m}$ ).
2. Circular geometries were used where possible.
3. Expanded metallization contacts were avoided where possible.
4. In-line probe pads were used where possible.
5. Metal pads were no smaller than a square, 4 mils (102  $\mu\text{m}$ ) on a side.

These rules were chosen to minimize problems encountered in bonding, probing, mask alignment pinhole shorting, and mathematical modeling. This test pattern has been of immediate use to us in identifying a variety of processing problems such as non-uniform diffusions, failure to etch out contact windows, poor oxide quality, and high backside contact resistance.

Test structure number 14, seen in figure 2, was used to study the uniformity of a boron nitride predeposition and drive-in diffusion [10] which is illustrated in figure 3. The diffusion was performed at 1000°C and had a junction depth of about 1  $\mu\text{m}$ . As shown in this figure the across-the-wafer variations are such that the sample standard deviation of all measurements on the wafer is less than 2 percent. This wafer map graphically illustrates the degree of control possible with a boron nitride diffusion source. Wafer mapping of various process and device parameters has proven to be of immense importance in developing fabrication processes which produce wafers with uniform electrical characteristics. The uniformity of electrical characteristics across a wafer is a key both to high yield and to such critical requirements as predictable radiation response of microcircuits.

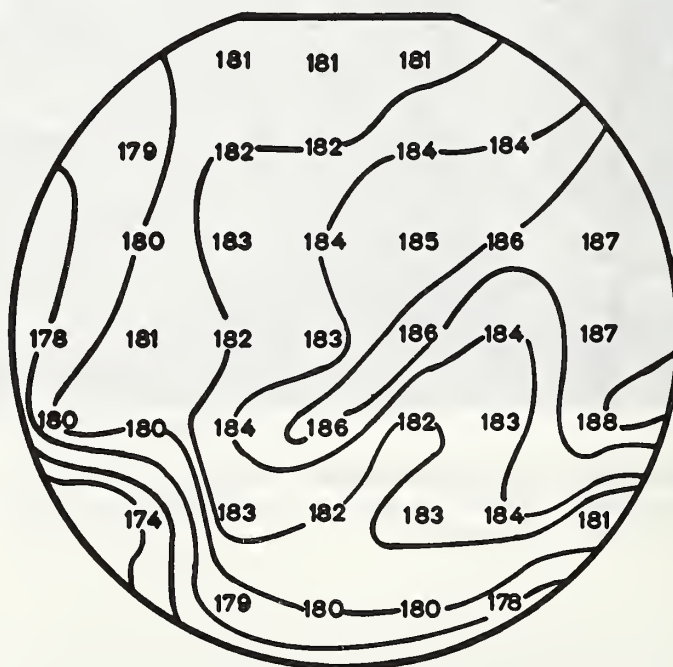


Figure 3. The base sheet resistance ( $\Omega/\square$ ) across a 1.5-inch (3.8-cm) diameter silicon wafer. Test structure number 14, shown in figure 2, was used.



The testing and probing apparatus used to acquire the data shown in figure 3 is quite simple. As an illustration of a more advanced measurement, consider the detection and identification of defect centers in a  $p$ - $n$  junction. These centers can govern the leakage current and carrier lifetime of semiconductor devices. We are currently developing a measurement method [11] that uses the thermally stimulated current and capacitance response of a  $p$ - $n$  junction to identify the atomic nature of defect centers and to determine their density [12]. As shown in figure 4, a reverse biased  $p^+$ - $n$  junction is heated rapidly from liquid nitrogen to room temperature and at the appropriate temperature, about 225 K, the junction begins to leak, in this case due to the presence of gold in the junction. The experiment was performed at three different heating rates as indicated on the figure. The particular shape of the current response identifies the defect center as gold. The shift in the capacitance response indicates that the density of gold atoms is about  $1 \times 10^{13} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ . Measurements of this kind are in an early stage of development, but show great promise of having considerable impact on process control and contamination analysis. Recently [13] we have shown that defects can be identified in MOS capacitors as well as in  $p$ - $n$  junctions. Automation of the measurements will allow wafer mapping of contaminants, which is a key to sophisticated process control.

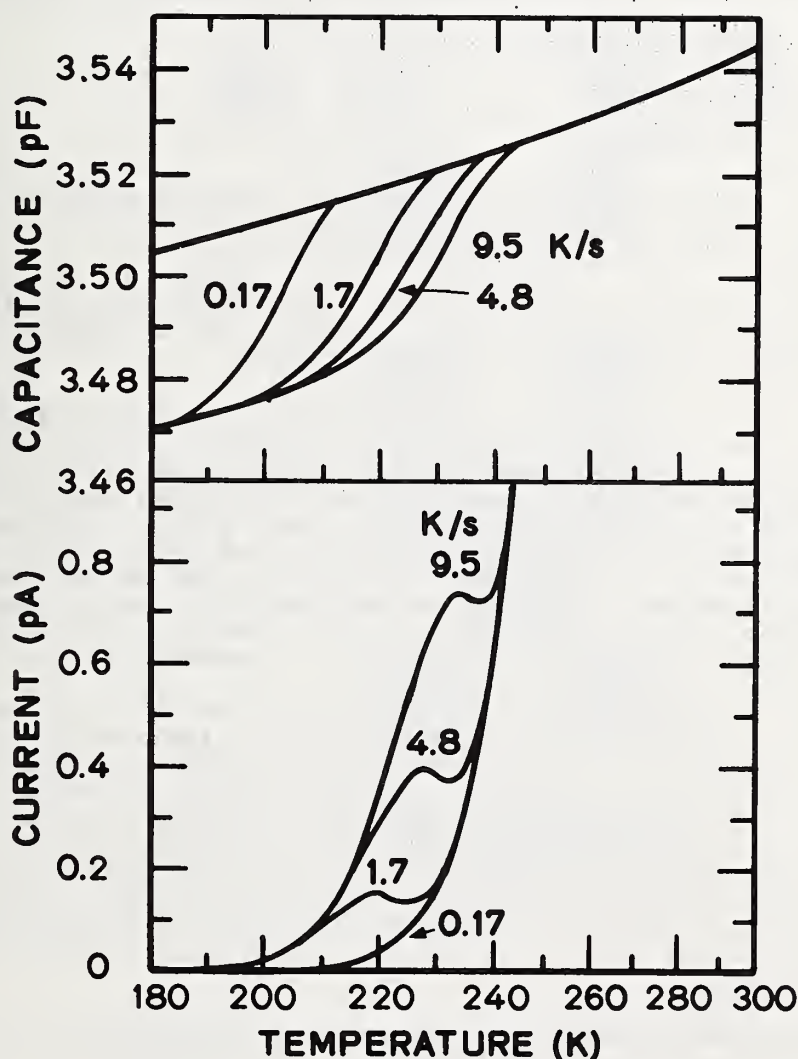


Figure 4. The thermally stimulated current and capacitance measurement of a gold doped  $p^+n$  silicon junction. Test structure number 6, shown in figure 2, was used.

## VI. DESIGN AND TESTING CONCERNS

When designing test patterns, the alignment tolerances and line widths should be as generous as possible to minimize fabrication problems. One does not want to make the fabrication of the test vehicle more difficult than the fabrication of the microcircuit. However, there are structures, such as the metal step coverage resistor, where line widths should be as small, if not smaller, than those used in the microcircuit so as to exaggerate failure modes.

Another concern is the size of the test pattern; the rule, *the smaller the better*, must generally be followed. But this must be tempered by other considerations such as sensitivity and the effect of the periphery [14] on measurements. Also the designer must consider various probe-contacting schemes such as a metal probe pad in direct contact with the silicon or a metal probe pad resting on top of the oxide. This latter scheme, known as an expanded contact, has stray capacitance and may induce an inversion layer in the silicon under the contact. These can be undesirable complications.

With regard to electrical testing, the kind of test structure chosen will depend on the nature of the test. Electrical testing can be categorized as follows:

1. DC, AC or functional,
2. Automatic or manual,
3. Wafer or package.

One would like to design a structure whose testing is simple and rapid. In addition the data reduction should be straightforward and uncomplicated. This calls for the development of simple structures and the appropriate mathematical models.

The correlation of test pattern results with characteristics of the microcircuit is an area that needs a great deal of work. A data base must be developed for each test structure to establish the viability of the test structure.

Shown in figure 5 is an example of one kind of test structure development that is needed. Various test structures are possible for measuring the sheet resistance of diffusion layers. The structure shown in figure 5A suffers because the metal taps act as shorting regions giving too low a sheet resistance. In addition the sheet resistance calculation depends on the L/W ratio. The structure shown in figure 5B is an improvement in that the sheet resistance is correctly determined, but the sheet resistance calculation again depends on the L/W ratio. The structure in figure 5C is a further improvement for now the L/W ratio is not needed to interpret the measurement [15]. Another advantage of this structure is that the main diffusion region can be the same size as the actual device. This means that the true sheet resistance value of a transistor base can be measured.

Measurements using the structures in figures 5A, 5B, and 5C are satisfactory for  $p$ -diffusions into  $n$ -substrates where the surfaces of the  $n$ -substrates are usually accumulated due to positive charge in the oxide and phosphorus pile-up effects during oxidization. However, when substrates are  $p$ -type, these structures may fail to provide correct sheet resistance values if the surfaces of the substrates are inverted (channeled) due to positive charge in the oxide and boron depletion effects during oxidization. To overcome the effect of channeling, the structure shown in figure 5C is first rearranged as shown in figure 5D and then a gate and channel stop are added as shown in figure 5E. A cross section of this structure is shown in figure 5F. In figure 5E the periphery of the main diffused region is covered by a gate resting on oxide. By adjusting the potential on this gate, surface channels can be eliminated.

Various other test structures need to be explored in a similar manner keeping in mind the various design trade-offs already discussed.

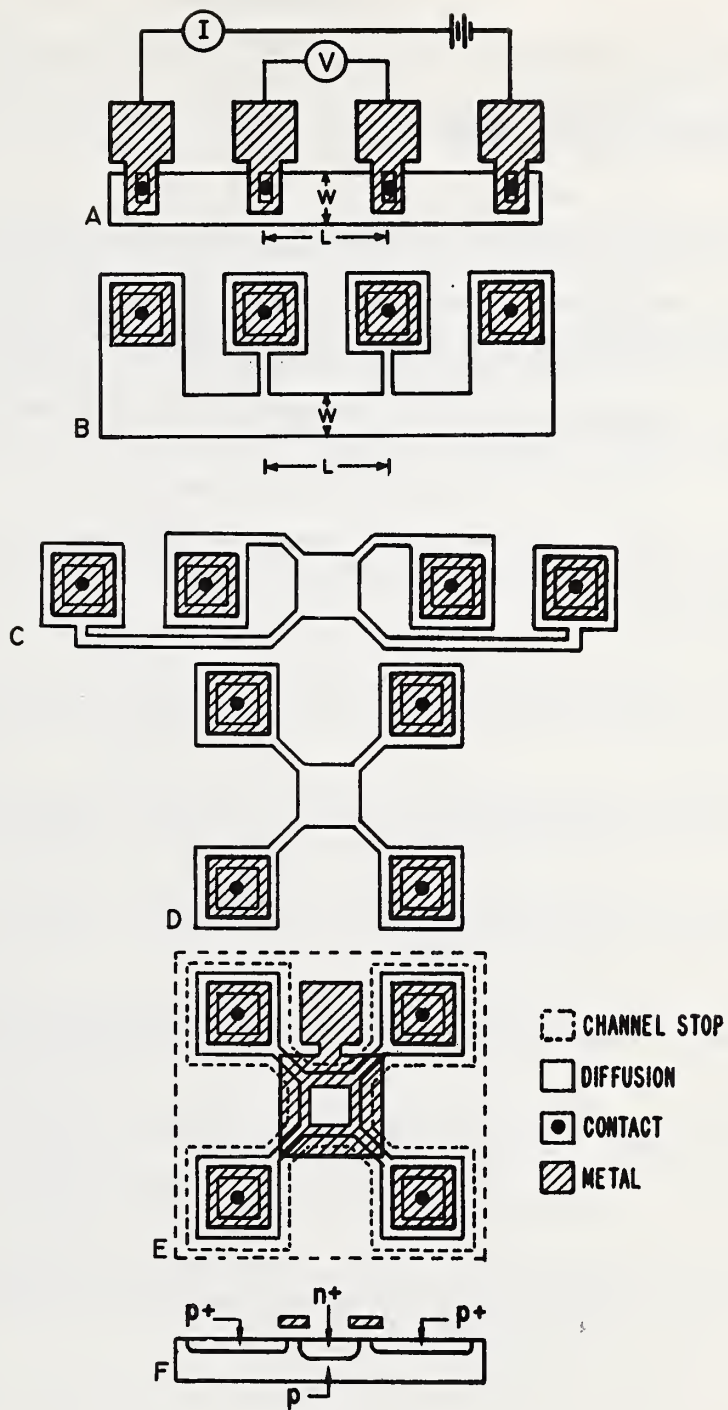


Figure 5. Various diffused layer sheet resistors having a variety of Kelvin contact schemes.

## VII. THE RESPONSE OF NBS TO THE NEED

To assist the industry in the timely and effective application of test patterns, NBS has undertaken an effort to review and evaluate test structures for use in the production of cost effective, highly reliable microelectronic components. Specific goals established for this effort include:

1. Identification of those structures useful in process control.
2. Analysis and intercomparison of selected structures.
3. Development of measurement methods for use with these structures.
4. Development of miniature test structures.
5. Correlation of results from test structures with microcircuit characteristics.
6. Development of test structure catalogs.

Among other benefits, this effort is intended to enable NBS to advise the industry and government agencies regarding the trade-offs encountered in using a particular class of test structures.



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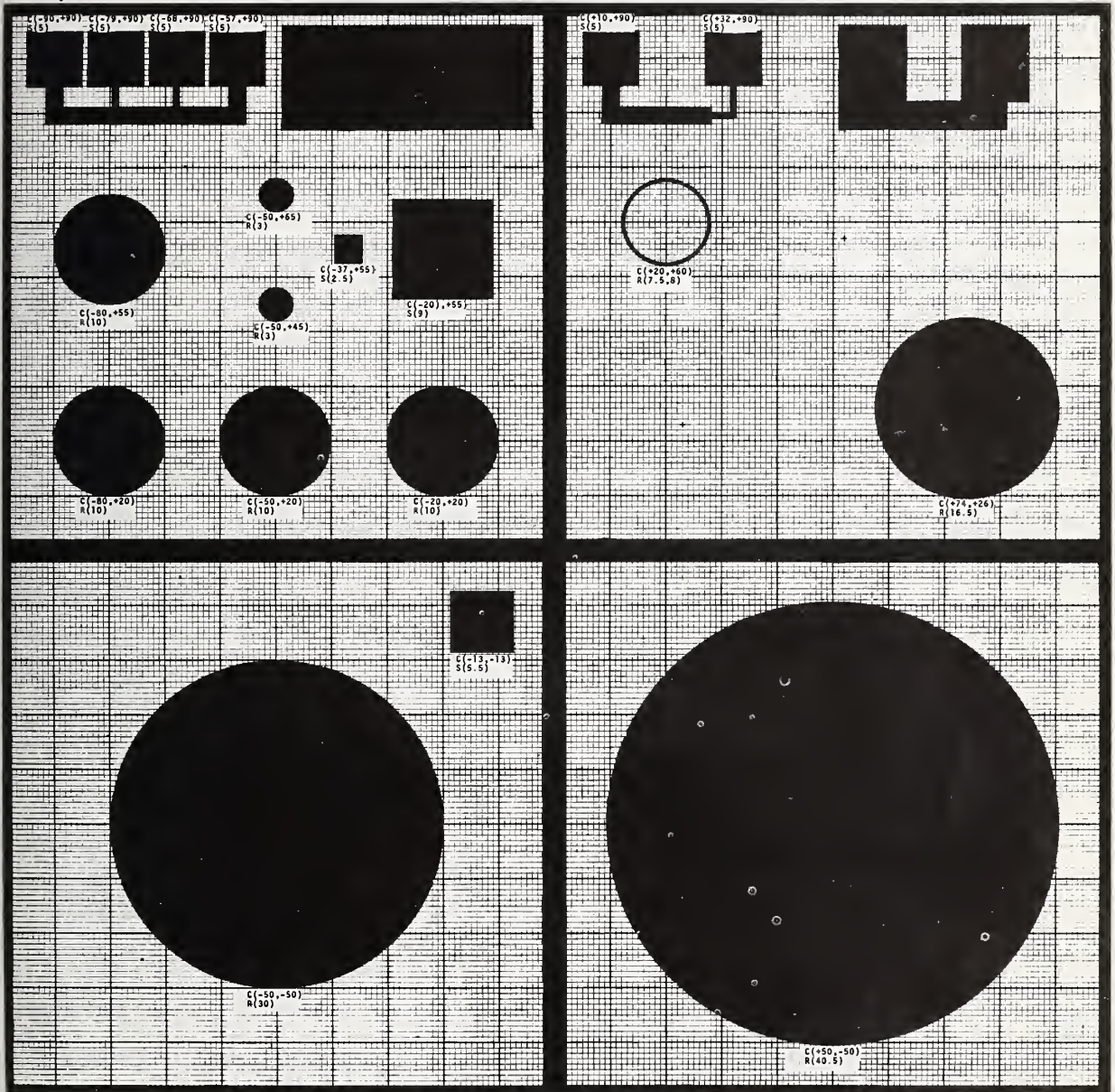
## APPENDIX

### TEST PATTERN NBS-2

Note: All dimensions in mils. Center of mask is taken as (0,0); horizontal coordinate is given first followed by vertical coordinate. One square equals one mil. Lines not on grid lines are halfway between grid lines. C = Center. R = Radius. S = Distance from center C to one side of square.

# BASE MASK

(For positive photoresist black areas are clear on final mask)



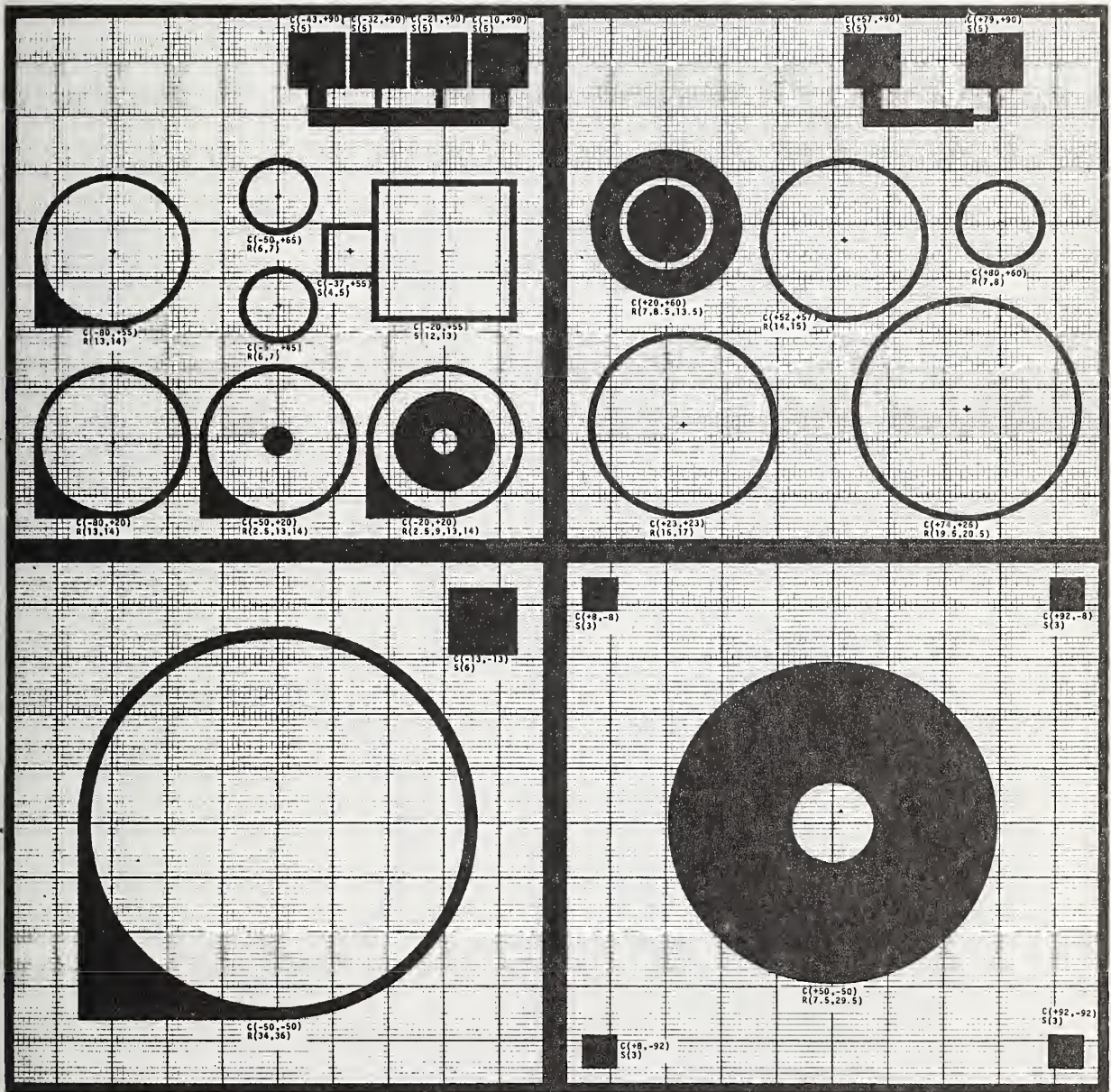






# EMITTER MASK

(For positive photoresist black areas are clear on final mask)







# CONTACT MASK

(For positive photoresist black areas are clear on final mask)

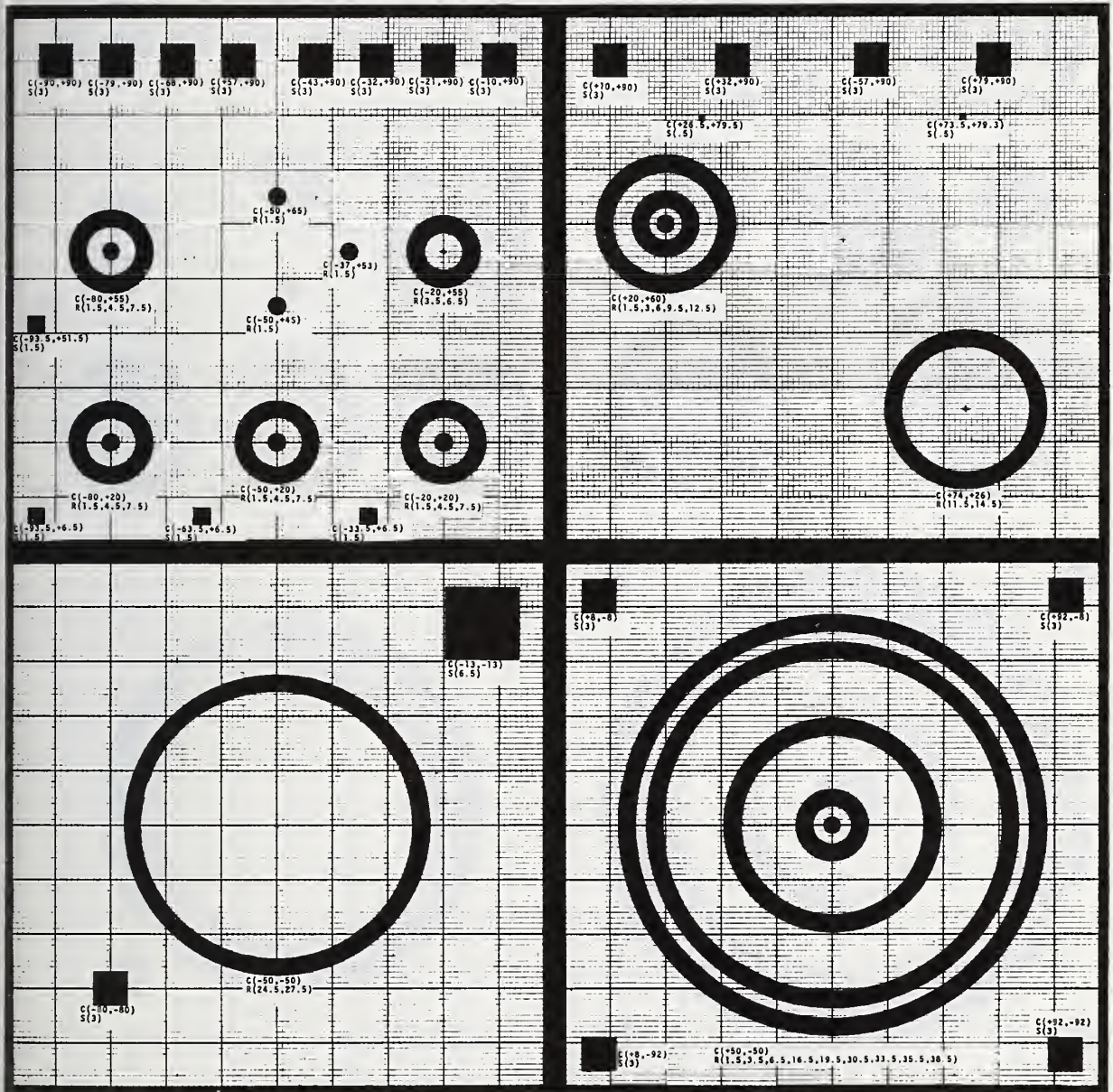
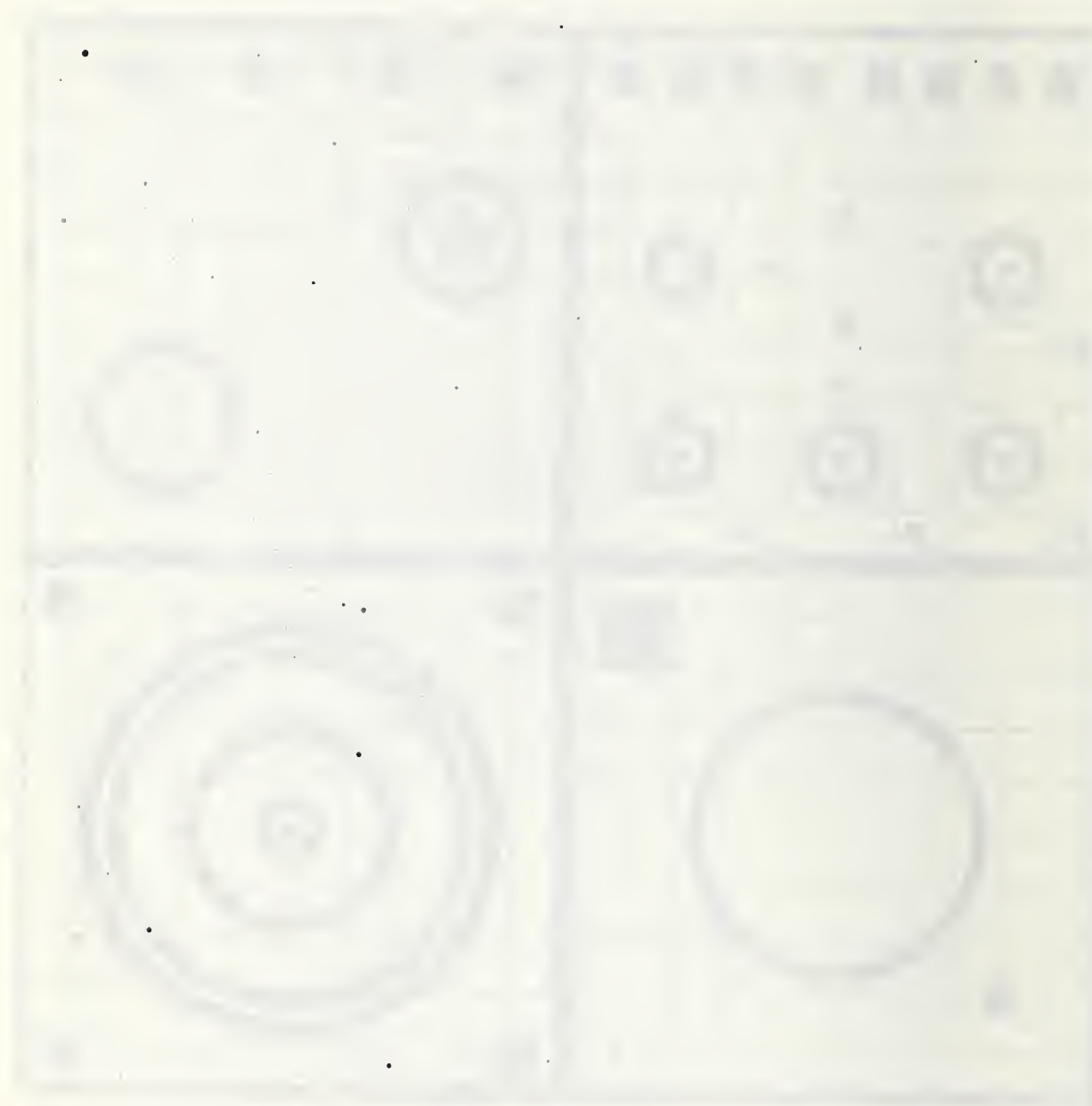


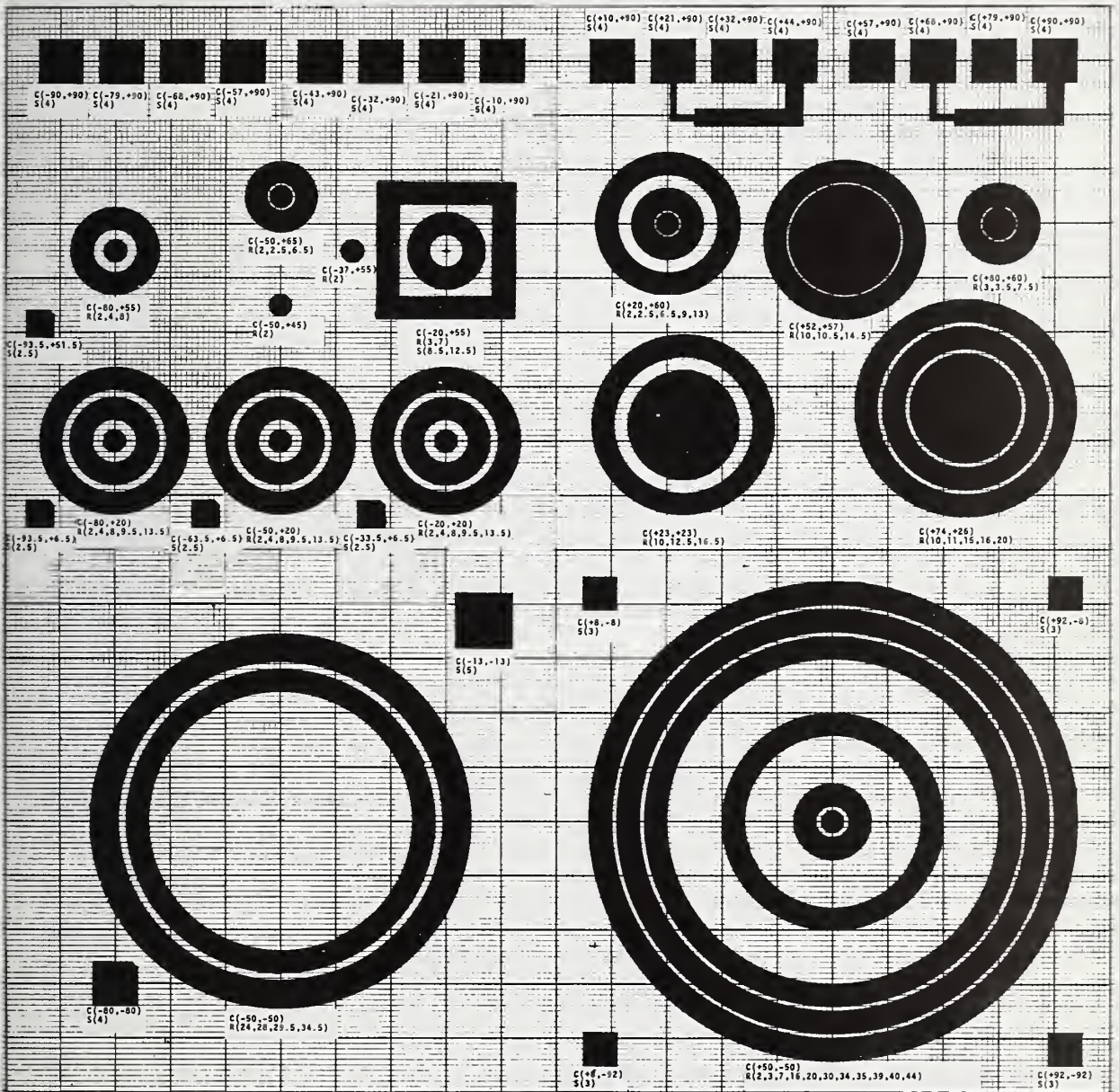
Diagram illustrating the structure of the human eye and the path of light rays entering the eye.





# METAL MASK

(For positive photoresist black areas are black on final mask)



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4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE  Microelectronic Test Patterns: An Overview			5. Publication Date August 1974	
			6. Performing Organization Code	
7. AUTHOR(S) Martin G. Buehler			8. Performing Organ. Report No.	
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS  NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON, D.C. 20234			10. Project/Task/Work Unit No.	
			11. Contract/Grant No.	
12. Sponsoring Organization Name and Complete Address (Street, City, State, ZIP) Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency - 1400 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, Virginia 22209 Defense Nuclear Agency - Washington, D. C. 20305 National Bureau of Standards, Washington, D. C. 20234			13. Type of Report & Period Covered Summary Report	
			14. Sponsoring Agency Code	
15. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES  Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 74-13001				
16. ABSTRACT (A 200-word or less factual summary of most significant information. If document includes a significant bibliography or literature survey, mention it here.)  The test patterns considered are those designed by the physical electronics engineer to evaluate fabrication processes rather than those designed by the micro-circuit designer. The evaluation of fabrication processes can reveal if a process is under control and can indicate the stability and reliability of the resulting micro-circuit. This evaluation is in essence an evaluation of a microcircuit's material characteristics, for process control and reliability depend ultimately on the right atoms being in the right places.  Various material analysis test structures are described, such as resistors, MOS capacitors, and gated $p-n$ junctions along with the material parameters that can be derived from each. These test structures are illustrated by the NBS-2 test pattern, and its use in process control is described. Examples are given which span the range from those structures which are amenable to production testing to those which require an advanced measurement capability. In addition test structures are discussed with regard to their usability; this encompasses their size, sensitivity, correlation, contacting schemes, testability, and packaging. Test structures must be properly designed so that desired parameters are measured. In this regard various design aspects such as metal taps and diffused taps are mentioned. Finally the role of NBS in evaluating and designing test patterns is discussed.				
17. KEY WORDS (six to twelve entries; alphabetical order; capitalize only the first letter of the first key word unless a proper name; separated by semicolons)  Integrated circuits; microelectronic test patterns.				
18. AVAILABILITY  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unlimited  <input type="checkbox"/> For Official Distribution. Do Not Release to NTIS  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Order From Sup. of Doc., U.S. Government Printing Office Washington, D.C. 20402, SD Cat. No. C13.10:400-6  <input type="checkbox"/> Order From National Technical Information Service (NTIS) Springfield, Virginia 22151		19. SECURITY CLASS (THIS REPORT)  UNCLASSIFIED		21. NO. OF PAGES  24
		20. SECURITY CLASS (THIS PAGE)  UNCLASSIFIED		22. Price  60 cents

USCOMM-DC 29042-P74



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