



Thank you for purchasing a Sky Quality Meter (SQM) from Unihedron!

Features

The SQM has the following features:

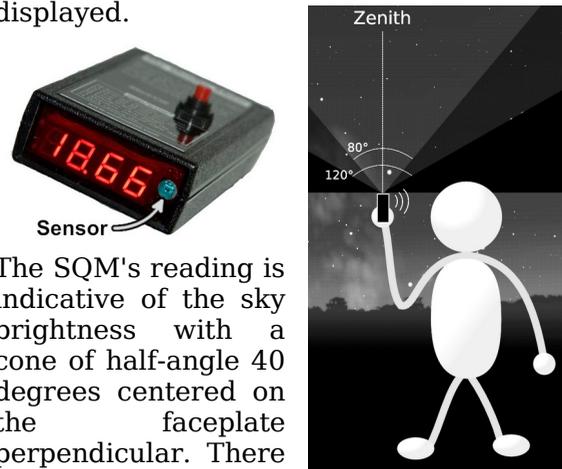
- ◆ It is sensitive only to visual light (there is a near-infrared blocking filter in front of the sensor).
- ◆ The effects of temperature on the "dark frequency" of the sensor are removed.
- ◆ The effects of temperature on the microcontroller oscillator are removed.
- ◆ It is protected against accidental reversal of battery polarity.
- ◆ Each SQM is calibrated using a NIST-traceable light meter. The absolute precision of each meter is believed to be $\pm 10\%$ (± 0.10 mag/arcsec²). The difference in zeropoint between each calibrated SQM is typically $\pm 10\%$ (± 0.10 mag/sq arcsec)
- ◆ The brightness of the numeric LED display has two (automatic) settings. Under dark skies, you won't have your dark adaption ruined by use of your SQM! Under urban skies, the display will be correspondingly brighter.
- ◆ A repeating audible beep indicates

- when a measurement is in progress.
- ◆ Any kind of 9V battery is usable. The SQM contains a voltage regulator to power the sensor, microcontroller and other components.
- ◆ After reading is taken and displayed, the meter automatically turns itself off.
- ◆ The Half Width Half Maximum (HWHM) of the angular sensitivity is $\sim 42^\circ$.
- ◆ The unit operates from a 9V battery.
- ◆ Size: 3.8 x 2.4 x 1 in. (97 x 61 x 25mm)
- ◆ Maximum light sampling time: 80 seconds.

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Quick Start

The SQM is very simple to use. Point the SQM so that sensor/faceplate points toward the zenith. Press the red button once and release. Under urban skies, a reading will be displayed almost immediately. Under the very darkest conditions (no moon in the sky, far from civilization) the SQM may take up to a minute to complete its measurement. Please ensure that you maintain the orientation of the SQM until the reading is displayed.



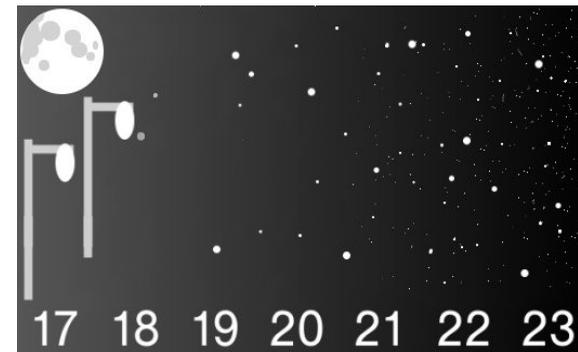
The SQM's reading is indicative of the sky brightness with a cone of half-angle 40 degrees centered on the faceplate perpendicular. There must be no direct illumination of the faceplate sensor by a terrestrial light source if the reading is to be meaningful.

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Typical Readings

Magnitudes per square arcsecond is a logarithmic measurement. Therefore large changes in sky brightness correspond to relatively small numerical changes. A difference of 1 magnitude is defined to be a factor of $(100)^{(1/5)}$ in received photons. Therefore a sky brightness 5.0 mag/arcsec² fainter corresponds to a reduction in photon arrival rate of a factor of 100.

The following schematic gives a rough idea of how to interpret the readings:



At the darkest sites, natural variations in conditions such as airglow and the brightness of the zodiacal light are limiting factors.

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Temperature, Model, Serial number

The temperature in °C then °F are displayed when you press and hold the button a second time. Also, the model and serial number are displayed if you hold the button longer. Some serial numbers include hexadecimal values:



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Care of your SQM

The SQM is a fairly simple and robust device. Avoid dropping, immersing, and compressing it and it will give you years of dependable service. Keep the faceplate clean and ensure that the battery still has useful capacity. If you have left your SQM for a long period of time (i.e. years) and see a white, powdery substance around one of the battery contacts, your battery will need to be replaced and the contacts cleaned before you can expect reliable operation.

The SQM should not be negatively affected by dew during normal operation EXCEPT for the reduction in received light by the sensor. Make sure that the sensor faceplate has been wiped before making measurements.

During storage, make sure that the push-button is not being continuously pressed since the meter will draw current from the battery and drain it in that situation. The protective plastic pushbutton sleeve that was shipped with the meter can be removed during use and re-installed during storage.

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Troubleshooting

After I push the button, no reading is displayed.

Are you in a very dark location?

Yes → The Sky Quality Meter may take up to a minute to acquire a reading when the sky is very dark. If your meter is operating properly, you will here a soft beeping sound while the measurement is in progress. When complete, the sky brightness will be displayed for a fixed number of seconds.

No → Your 9V battery may need to be replaced.

OR

The connector to your 9V battery may be loose.

If, after you have checked for both of these possibilities and your SQM still won't display a reading under normal operating conditions, contact Unihedron for further information and a possible replacement.

I don't know how to make sure the SQM is off.

The SQM functions in such a way that it is only temporarily on and turns itself off automatically. This is a design feature to maximize battery life.

The readings don't repeat exactly.

Are you pointing the SQM in the same direction each time? Under dark conditions, you must keep the SQM pointed in the same direction until the reading appears on the LED display.

Your SQM must be pointed at an altitude greater than 40 degrees above the horizon or you may detect light directly from surface light sources (cars, buildings, streetlights). It is normally the zenith sky brightness which is measured.

The readings do not change when pointing to various parts of the night sky.

Each SQM reading must be initiated by pressing the button. The displayed reading will stay on for 10 seconds before shutting down. After the unit has shut down, press the button to initiate another reading.

The readings are lower (brighter) than expected.

Make sure that no stray light from street lights or other sources is getting into the sensor, the sensor has a full-angle response of 120°.

Also, check that the IR filter is in place. This light blue glass can be seen from the display side. A missing filter will reveal the clear sensor.

*When I use the meter during the day, all I see is a **nnnn** on the display.*

The SQM has a fantastically large range over which it will report accurate sky brightnesses. However, to be sensitive in the darkest conditions, it is necessary to sacrifice the ability to record daytime sky surface brightnesses. Normal lux meters can be used in such circumstances once the effective solid angle for the lux meter's sensor is known. The **nnnn** indicates that the sensor is saturated.

*All I see is a **UUUU** on the display.*

The **UUUU** indicates that the sensor was unable to produce a reading. This can occur in a light-tight dark room or if the sensor is faulty.

Sometimes the first reading is different.

As the temperature of the unit changes slightly due to being powered up, the very first reading may be slightly higher than the following readings. Ignore this first reading and average the following ones for the most accurate value.

Other scales

To convert the SQM mag/arcsec² reading to cd/m², use the following formula:
[cd/m²] = 10.8 × 10⁴ × 10^(-0.4*[mag/arcsec²])

Unanswered Questions

Help us to inform you and other customers better by contacting us through unihedron.com with your unanswered questions about the SQM and measuring light pollution.

Further Information

Check the Unihedron.com website for updates and additional information.

Mailing List

Join the SQM mailing list for notifications and to share experiences with other users. Details are listed on the SQM page at unihedron.com

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Contact Information

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Unihedron supports the goals of the International Dark-Sky Association (www.ida.org). Please consider joining to help preserve the beauty of the night sky for future generations.

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Warranty

Unihedron warrants this product 1 year.

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Last updated: October 10, 2021