

## Chapter 08.04

### Runge-Kutta 4th Order Method for Ordinary Differential Equations

*After reading this chapter, you should be able to*

1. *develop Runge-Kutta 4<sup>th</sup> order method for solving ordinary differential equations,*
2. *find the effect size of step size has on the solution,*
3. *know the formulas for other versions of the Runge-Kutta 4<sup>th</sup> order method*

#### **What is the Runge-Kutta 4th order method?**

Runge-Kutta 4<sup>th</sup> order method is a numerical technique used to solve ordinary differential equation of the form

$$\frac{dy}{dx} = f(x, y), y(0) = y_0$$

So only first order ordinary differential equations can be solved by using the Runge-Kutta 4<sup>th</sup> order method. In other sections, we have discussed how Euler and Runge-Kutta methods are used to solve higher order ordinary differential equations or coupled (simultaneous) differential equations.

#### **How does one write a first order differential equation in the above form?**

##### **Example 1**

Rewrite

$$\frac{dy}{dx} + 2y = 1.3e^{-x}, y(0) = 5$$

in

$$\frac{dy}{dx} = f(x, y), y(0) = y_0 \text{ form.}$$

**Solution**

$$\frac{dy}{dx} + 2y = 1.3e^{-x}, y(0) = 5$$

$$\frac{dy}{dx} = 1.3e^{-x} - 2y, y(0) = 5$$

In this case

$$f(x, y) = 1.3e^{-x} - 2y$$

**Example 2**

Rewrite

$$e^y \frac{dy}{dx} + x^2 y^2 = 2 \sin(3x), y(0) = 5$$

in

$$\frac{dy}{dx} = f(x, y), y(0) = y_0 \text{ form.}$$

**Solution**

$$e^y \frac{dy}{dx} + x^2 y^2 = 2 \sin(3x), y(0) = 5$$

$$\frac{dy}{dx} = \frac{2 \sin(3x) - x^2 y^2}{e^y}, y(0) = 5$$

In this case

$$f(x, y) = \frac{2 \sin(3x) - x^2 y^2}{e^y}$$

The Runge-Kutta 4<sup>th</sup> order method is based on the following

$$y_{i+1} = y_i + (a_1 k_1 + a_2 k_2 + a_3 k_3 + a_4 k_4)h \quad (1)$$

where knowing the value of  $y = y_i$  at  $x_i$ , we can find the value of  $y = y_{i+1}$  at  $x_{i+1}$ , and

$$h = x_{i+1} - x_i$$

Equation (1) is equated to the first five terms of Taylor series

$$\begin{aligned} y_{i+1} = y_i &+ \frac{dy}{dx} \Big|_{x_i, y_i} (x_{i+1} - x_i) + \frac{1}{2!} \frac{d^2 y}{dx^2} \Big|_{x_i, y_i} (x_{i+1} - x_i)^2 + \frac{1}{3!} \frac{d^3 y}{dx^3} \Big|_{x_i, y_i} (x_{i+1} - x_i)^3 \\ &+ \frac{1}{4!} \frac{d^4 y}{dx^4} \Big|_{x_i, y_i} (x_{i+1} - x_i)^4 \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

Knowing that  $\frac{dy}{dx} = f(x, y)$  and  $x_{i+1} - x_i = h$

$$y_{i+1} = y_i + f(x_i, y_i)h + \frac{1}{2!} f'(x_i, y_i)h^2 + \frac{1}{3!} f''(x_i, y_i)h^3 + \frac{1}{4!} f'''(x_i, y_i)h^4 \quad (3)$$

Based on equating Equation (2) and Equation (3), one of the popular solutions used is

$$y_{i+1} = y_i + \frac{1}{6} (k_1 + 2k_2 + 2k_3 + k_4)h \quad (4)$$

$$k_1 = f(x_i, y_i) \quad (5a)$$

$$k_2 = f\left(x_i + \frac{1}{2}h, y_i + \frac{1}{2}k_1h\right) \quad (5b)$$

$$k_3 = f\left(x_i + \frac{1}{2}h, y_i + \frac{1}{2}k_2h\right) \quad (5c)$$

$$k_4 = f(x_i + h, y_i + k_3h) \quad (5d)$$

### Example 3

A ball at 1200 K is allowed to cool down in air at an ambient temperature of 300 K. Assuming heat is lost only due to radiation, the differential equation for the temperature of the ball is given by

$$\frac{d\theta}{dt} = -2.2067 \times 10^{-12} (\theta^4 - 81 \times 10^8), \theta(0) = 1200 \text{ K}$$

where  $\theta$  is in K and  $t$  in seconds. Find the temperature at  $t = 480$  seconds using Runge-Kutta 4th order method. Assume a step size of  $h = 240$  seconds.

### Solution

$$\frac{d\theta}{dt} = -2.2067 \times 10^{-12} (\theta^4 - 81 \times 10^8)$$

$$f(t, \theta) = -2.2067 \times 10^{-12} (\theta^4 - 81 \times 10^8)$$

$$\theta_{i+1} = \theta_i + \frac{1}{6}(k_1 + 2k_2 + 2k_3 + k_4)h$$

For  $i = 0$ ,  $t_0 = 0$ ,  $\theta_0 = 1200 \text{ K}$

$$\begin{aligned} k_1 &= f(t_0, \theta_0) \\ &= f(0, 1200) \\ &= -2.2067 \times 10^{-12} (1200^4 - 81 \times 10^8) \\ &= -4.5579 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} k_2 &= f\left(t_0 + \frac{1}{2}h, \theta_0 + \frac{1}{2}k_1h\right) \\ &= f\left(0 + \frac{1}{2}(240), 1200 + \frac{1}{2}(-4.5579) \times 240\right) \\ &= f(120, 653.05) \\ &= -2.2067 \times 10^{-12} (653.05^4 - 81 \times 10^8) \\ &= -0.38347 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} k_3 &= f\left(t_0 + \frac{1}{2}h, \theta_0 + \frac{1}{2}k_2h\right) \\ &= f\left(0 + \frac{1}{2}(240), 1200 + \frac{1}{2}(-0.38347) \times 240\right) \\ &= f(120, 1154.0) \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
&= -2.2067 \times 10^{-12} (1154.0^4 - 81 \times 10^8) \\
&= -3.8954 \\
k_4 &= f(t_0 + h, \theta_0 + k_3 h) \\
&= f(0 + 240, 1200 + (-3.894) \times 240) \\
&= f(240, 265.10) \\
&= -2.2067 \times 10^{-12} (265.10^4 - 81 \times 10^8) \\
&= 0.0069750 \\
\theta_1 &= \theta_0 + \frac{1}{6} (k_1 + 2k_2 + 2k_3 + k_4) h \\
&= 1200 + \frac{1}{6} (-4.5579 + 2(-0.38347) + 2(-3.8954) + (0.069750)) 240 \\
&= 1200 + (-2.1848) \times 240 \\
&= 675.65 \text{ K}
\end{aligned}$$

$\theta_1$  is the approximate temperature at

$$\begin{aligned}
t &= t_1 \\
&= t_0 + h \\
&= 0 + 240 \\
&= 240 \\
\theta_1 &= \theta(240) \\
&\approx 675.65 \text{ K}
\end{aligned}$$

For  $i = 1, t_1 = 240, \theta_1 = 675.65 \text{ K}$

$$\begin{aligned}
k_1 &= f(t_1, \theta_1) \\
&= f(240, 675.65) \\
&= -2.2067 \times 10^{-12} (675.65^4 - 81 \times 10^8) \\
&= -0.44199 \\
k_2 &= f\left(t_1 + \frac{1}{2}h, \theta_1 + \frac{1}{2}k_1 h\right) \\
&= f\left(240 + \frac{1}{2}(240), 675.65 + \frac{1}{2}(-0.44199)240\right) \\
&= f(360, 622.61) \\
&= -2.2067 \times 10^{-12} (622.61^4 - 81 \times 10^8) \\
&= -0.31372 \\
k_3 &= f\left(t_1 + \frac{1}{2}h, \theta_1 + \frac{1}{2}k_2 h\right) \\
&= f\left(240 + \frac{1}{2}(240), 675.65 + \frac{1}{2}(-0.31372) \times 240\right) \\
&= f(360, 638.00) \\
&= -2.2067 \times 10^{-12} (638.00^4 - 81 \times 10^8)
\end{aligned}$$

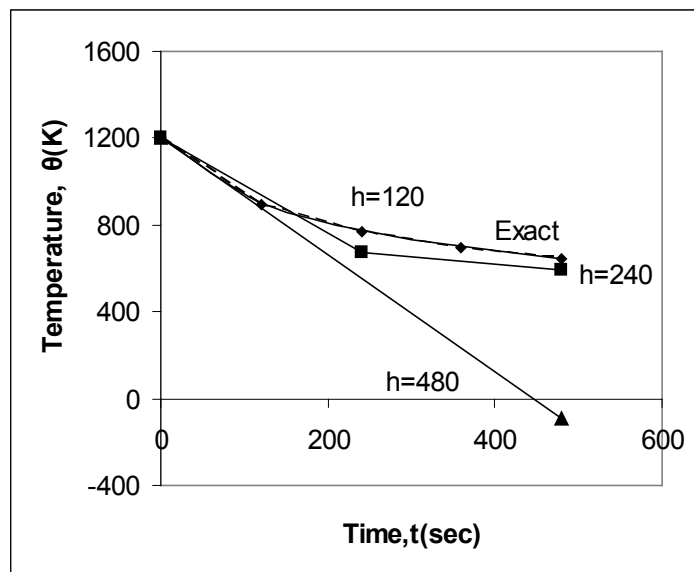
$$\begin{aligned}
 &= -0.34775 \\
 k_4 &= f(t_1 + h, \theta_1 + k_3 h) \\
 &= f(240 + 240, 675.65 + (-0.34775) \times 240) \\
 &= f(480, 592.19) \\
 &= 2.2067 \times 10^{-12} (592.19^4 - 81 \times 10^8) \\
 &= -0.25351 \\
 \theta_2 &= \theta_1 + \frac{1}{6} (k_1 + 2k_2 + 2k_3 + k_4) h \\
 &= 675.65 + \frac{1}{6} (-0.44199 + 2(-0.31372) + 2(-0.34775) + (-0.25351)) \times 240 \\
 &= 675.65 + \frac{1}{6} (-2.0184) \times 240 \\
 &= 594.91 \text{ K}
 \end{aligned}$$

$\theta_2$  is the approximate temperature at

$$\begin{aligned}
 t &= t_2 \\
 &= t_1 + h \\
 &= 240 + 240 \\
 &= 480
 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 \theta_2 &= \theta(480) \\
 &\approx 594.91 \text{ K}
 \end{aligned}$$

Figure 1 compares the exact solution with the numerical solution using the Runge-Kutta 4th order method with different step sizes.

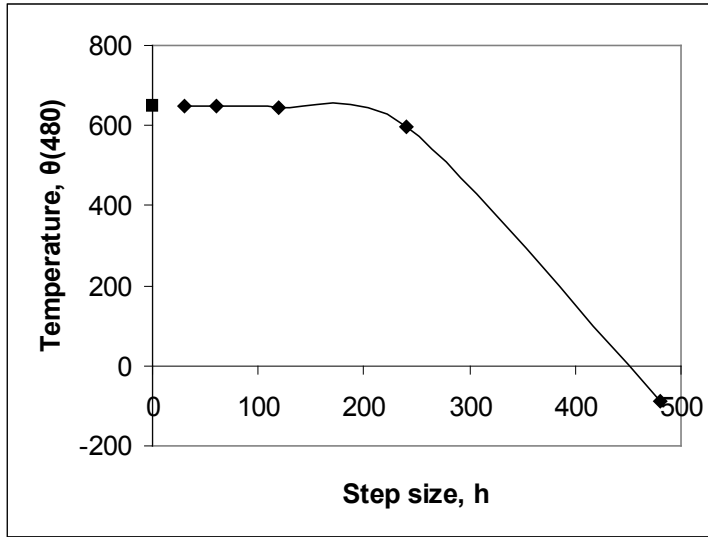


**Figure 1** Comparison of Runge-Kutta 4th order method with exact solution for different step sizes.

Table 1 and Figure 2 show the effect of step size on the value of the calculated temperature at  $t = 480$  seconds.

**Table 1** Value of temperature at time,  $t = 480$  s for different step sizes

| Step size, $h$ | $\theta(480)$ | $E_t$      | $ \varepsilon_t  \%$ |
|----------------|---------------|------------|----------------------|
| 480            | -90.278       | 737.85     | 113.94               |
| 240            | 594.91        | 52.660     | 8.1319               |
| 120            | 646.16        | 1.4122     | 0.21807              |
| 60             | 647.54        | 0.033626   | 0.0051926            |
| 30             | 647.57        | 0.00086900 | 0.00013419           |



**Figure 2** Effect of step size in Runge-Kutta 4th order method.

In Figure 3, we are comparing the exact results with Euler's method (Runge-Kutta 1st order method), Heun's method (Runge-Kutta 2nd order method), and Runge-Kutta 4th order method.

The formula described in this chapter was developed by Runge. This formula is same as Simpson's 1/3 rule, if  $f(x, y)$  were only a function of  $x$ . There are other versions of the 4<sup>th</sup> order method just like there are several versions of the second order methods. The formula developed by Kutta is

$$y_{i+1} = y_i + \frac{1}{8}(k_1 + 3k_2 + 3k_3 + k_4)h \quad (6)$$

where

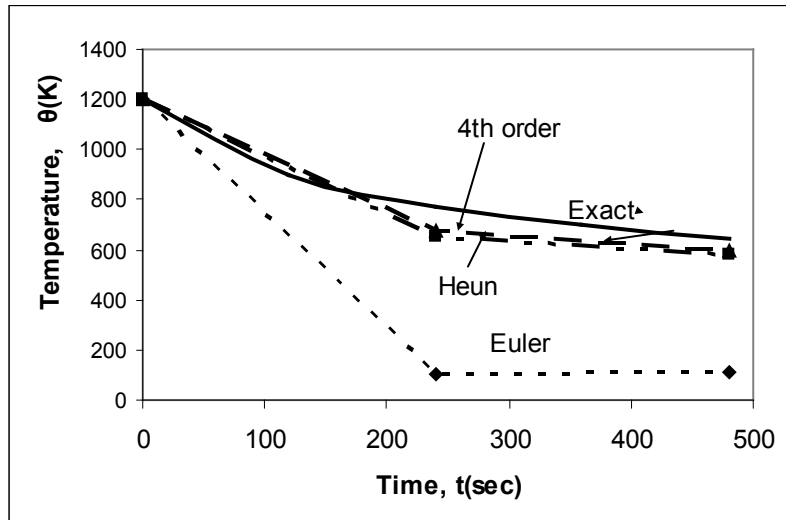
$$k_1 = f(x_i, y_i) \quad (7a)$$

$$k_2 = f\left(x_i + \frac{1}{3}h, y_i + \frac{1}{3}hk_1\right) \quad (7b)$$

$$k_3 = f\left(x_i + \frac{2}{3}h, y_i - \frac{1}{3}hk_1 + hk_2\right) \quad (7c)$$

$$k_4 = f(x_i + h, y_i + hk_1 - hk_2 + hk_3) \quad (7d)$$

This formula is the same as the Simpson's 3/8 rule, if  $f(x, y)$  is only a function of  $x$ .



**Figure 3** Comparison of Runge-Kutta methods of 1<sup>st</sup> (Euler), 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> order.

| ORDINARY DIFFERENTIAL EQUATIONS |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Topic                           | Runge-Kutta 4th order method  |
| Summary                         | Textbook notes on the Runge-Kutta 4th order method for solving ordinary differential equations. |
| Major                           | General Engineering   |
| Authors                         | Autar Kaw   |
| Last Revised                    | October 13, 2010  |
| Web Site                        | <a href="http://numericalmethods.eng.usf.edu">http://numericalmethods.eng.usf.edu</a>           |