

Class 8: Universal Gravitation

AP Physics (1, 2 and C)

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Olympiads School

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Files to Download

Please download/print the PDF file

If you have not done so already, please download the following files.

- 08-gravitation.pdf—This week's slides. I recommend printing 4 slides per page.
- 08-Homework.pdf This week's homework. (The file is not ready yet; it will be posted in the next day or two.)

Today's Plan

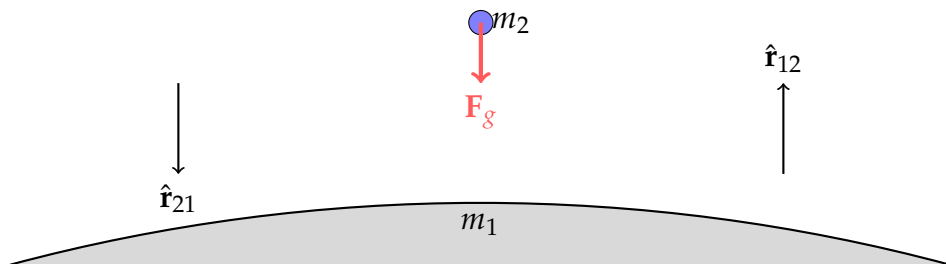
1. Take up (some) questions from Class 7
2. Go over this week's slides (hopefully it won't take too long)

Universal Gravitation

This topics we will discuss in this class are covered in AP Physics 1, 2 and C exams.

- Gravitational force (F_g)
- Gravitational field (g)
- Gravitational potential energy
- Kepler's laws of planetary motion

Newton's Law of Universal Gravitation



$$\mathbf{F}_g = -\frac{Gm_1m_2}{r^2}\hat{\mathbf{r}}_{12} = +\frac{Gm_1m_2}{r^2}\hat{\mathbf{r}}_{21}$$

where $G = 6.67 \times 10^{-11} \text{ N m}^2/\text{kg}^2$ is the universal gravitation constant, and $\hat{\mathbf{r}}_{12}$ and $\hat{\mathbf{r}}_{21}$ are *unit vectors* (length=1)

Universal Gravitation

- If m_1 exerts a gravitational force \mathbf{F}_g on m_2 , then m_2 also exerts a gravitational force $-\mathbf{F}_g$ on m_1 .
- The two forces are equal in magnitude and opposite in direction (Newton's 3rd law)
- Assumption: m_1 and m_2 are *point masses* that do not occupy any space. We have already shown that the forces acting on an ensemble of masses is the same as acting at its center of mass
- Therefore, for the universal gravitational equation to work:

$$r > (r_1 + r_2)$$

That is, the two objects hasn't collided into one another

Think Gravitational Field: What is g ?

We generally describe the force of gravity as

$$\mathbf{F}_g = m\mathbf{g}$$

To find the magnitude of g , we group the variables in Newton's universal gravitation equation:

$$F_g = \underbrace{\left[\frac{Gm_1}{r^2} \right]}_{=g} m_2 = m_2 g$$

On the surface of Earth, we use $m_1 = m_{\text{Earth}}$ and $r = r_{\text{Earth}}$ to compute $g = 9.81 \text{ m/s}^2$, or $g = 9.81 \text{ N/kg}$ (both units are equivalent)

Gravitational Field

The intensity of the **gravitational field** g generated by a source mass m_s is defined by:

$$g(m_s, r) = \frac{Gm_s}{r^2}$$

It's a mapping of how m_s influences the gravitational forces on other masses

Quantity	Symbol	SI Unit
Gravitational field intensity	g	N/kg
Universal gravitational constant	G	$\text{N m}^2/\text{kg}^2$
Mass of source (a point mass)	m_s	kg
Distance from centre of source	r	m

Relating Gravitational Field & Gravitational Force

g itself doesn't do anything until there is another mass m . At which point, m experiences a gravitational force related to g by:

$$g = \frac{F_g}{m}$$

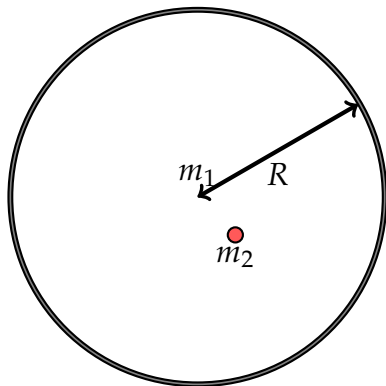
F_g and g are vectors in the same direction: toward the centre of the source mass that created the field, therefore all vector operations apply

Quantity	Symbol	SI Unit
Gravitational field	g	N/kg
Gravitational force on a mass	F_g	N
Mass inside the gravitational field	m	kg

What If You Are Inside Another Mass?

Case 1: A Spherical Shell of Radius R

- If a mass m_2 is *inside* a spherical shell of mass m_1 , the force of gravity it experiences is **zero**!

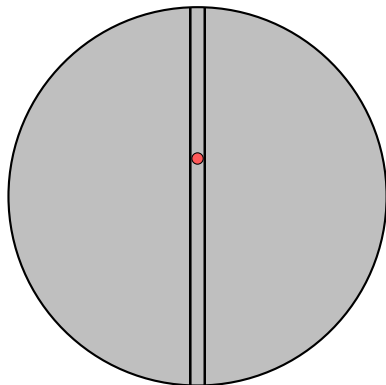


$$\mathbf{F}_g = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } r < R \\ Gm_1m_2/r^2\hat{\mathbf{r}} & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

- It also means that gravitational field is also **zero**
- There is a very similar case for a charged conducting sphere, where the electric field inside is also zero.

What If You Are Inside Another Mass?

Case 2: Uniform Mass of Radius R



Suppose you could drill a hole through the Earth and then drop into it. How long would it take you to pop up on the other side of the Earth?

Falling To the Center of the Earth

Your initial gravitational force on the surface is:

$$F_g = mg_{\text{surface}} \quad g_{\text{surface}} = 9.81 \text{ N/kg}$$

F_g becomes smaller as you approached the center, and when you reach the center, $F_g = 0$.

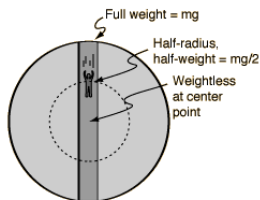
Let's assume that the Earth is uniform density. We will also neglect air friction and other factors. Let's look at the value of g as the person falls through Earth ($r < R$):

$$g(r) = \frac{GM(r)}{r^2} \quad M(r) = \frac{4}{3}\rho\pi r^3 \quad \rho = \frac{3M_{\text{Earth}}}{4\pi R^3}$$

Falling To the Center of the Earth

Now we have an expression for the gravitational field strength inside “Earth”:

$$g(r) = \frac{GM_{\text{Earth}}r}{R^3} = g_{\text{surface}} \frac{r}{R}$$



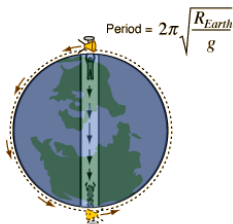
Gravitational field strength decreases linearly with r . At the center ($r = 0$), $g = 0$. Here's the interesting part, the gravitational force inside Earth is

$$F_g = -mg(r) = - \underbrace{\left[\frac{mg_{\text{surface}}}{R} \right]}_{\text{constant}} r = -kr$$

Falling To the Center of the Earth

So this poor guy is going to oscillate through Earth with a harmonic motion with a period of oscillation of:

$$T = 2\pi \frac{m}{k}$$



A satellite at the Earth's radius would have the same period as one falling through the Earth.

which for Earth, is $T = 5068 \text{ s}$. He would pop up on the opposite side after about 42 min.

Suppose a satellite is in a circular orbit just above the surface, and passes overhead just above the traveler as he popped up out of the hole. The period of such an orbit would be the same as oscillating traveler.

Gravitational Potential Energy

- The gravitational potential energy is defined as:

$$U_g = -\frac{Gm_1m_2}{r}$$

- We can obtain this expression by integrating F_g by a distance r to find the work done
- U_g is the work required to move two objects from r to ∞
- $U_g = 0$ at $r = \infty$ and *decrease* as r decreases

Relating Gravitational Potential Energy to Force

If you know vector calculus, you can easily see that gravitational force (\mathbf{F}_g) is the negative gradient of the gravitational potential energy (U_g):

$$\mathbf{F}_g = -\nabla U_g = -\frac{\partial U_g}{\partial r} \hat{\mathbf{r}}$$

The direction of \mathbf{F}_g always points from high to low potential

- A falling object is always decreasing in U_g
- “Steepest descent”: the direction of \mathbf{F} is the shortest path to decrease U_g
- Objects travelling perpendicular to \mathbf{F} has constant U_g

Relating U_g , F_g and \mathbf{g}

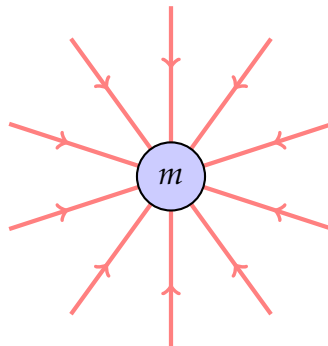
Knowing that F_g and \mathbf{g} only differ by a constant, we can also relate gravitational field to U_g by the gradient operator:

$$\mathbf{g} = \frac{\mathbf{F}_g}{m} = -\nabla \left(\frac{U_g}{m} \right) = -\frac{\partial}{\partial r} \left(\frac{U_g}{m} \right) \hat{\mathbf{r}}$$

We already know that the direction of \mathbf{g} is the same as F_g , i.e.

- The direction of \mathbf{g} is the shortest path to decrease U_g
- Objects travelling perpendicular to \mathbf{g} has constant U_g

Gravitational Field Lines



- The direction of g is towards the centre of the object that created it
- Field lines do not tell the intensity (i.e. magnitude) of g , only the direction

Celestial Mechanics & Kepler's Laws of Planetary Motion

In Physics 12, you studied briefly at the orbits of satellites around Earth, or the orbit of Earth and other planets around the Sun.

- Used your understanding of centripetal motion and gravity
- Assumed a circular orbit

Let's review some of those ideas.

Orbital Speed

Newton's Thought Experiment



When fired, a projectile will hit the ground



With more launch force, it will fly further



Eventually the curve of the projectile's path due to gravity will match the curvature of the Earth, and the projectile will never land (assuming no air friction)



When enough force is applied, the projectile will never return

So how fast is fast enough?

Orbital Speed

Relating Gravitational and Centripetal Force

- Assume a circular orbit (since we know it best)
- The centripetal force (required force) is equal to the gravitational force (supplied force):

$$\underbrace{\frac{GMm}{r^2}}_{F_g} = \underbrace{\frac{mv^2}{r}}_{F_c}$$

where r is the distance between the centres of the two objects

Orbital Speed

- Cancelling m , and r in both sides of the equation, and solving for v , we get:

$$v_{\text{orbit}} = \sqrt{\frac{GM}{r}}$$

- Orbital speed v_{orbit} is sometimes also called orbital velocity
- Does not depend on the mass of the object in orbit
- A 1.5×10^{-13} kg speck of cosmic dust and the 419 600 kg International Space Station both have the same v_{orbit} around Earth if they are at the same altitude

Escape Speed

An object can leave the surface of Earth at any speed. But when all the kinetic energy of that object is converted to gravitational potential, it'll return back to the surface of the earth. There is, however, a *minimum* velocity at which the object *would not* fall back to Earth because of gravity.

Escape Speed

- The gravitational potential energy of an object with mass m on the surface of a planet (with mass M and radius r) is

$$U_g = -\frac{GMm}{r}$$

- The most amount of work that you can do is to bring it to the other side of the universe $r = \infty$, where $U_g = 0$.
- If you start with *more* kinetic energy than required to do all the work, then the object has *escaped* the gravitational pull of the planet.

Escape Speed

- Set K to equal to $-U_g$:

$$\frac{1}{2}mv^2 = \frac{GMm}{r}$$

- We can then solve for escape speed $v = v_{\text{esc}}$:

$$v_{\text{esc}} = \sqrt{\frac{2GM}{r}}$$

- There is a simple relationship between orbital speed and escape speed:

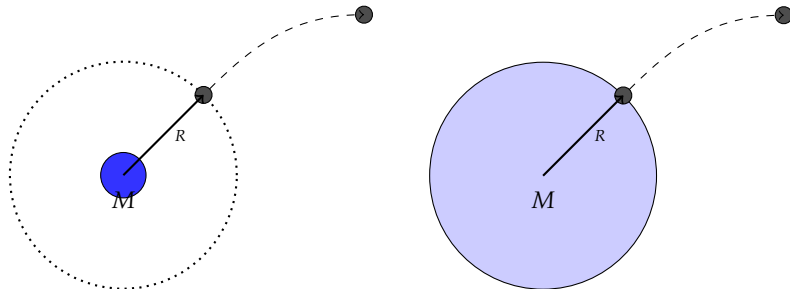
$$v_{\text{esc}} = \sqrt{2}v_{\text{orbit}}$$

Example Problem

Example: Determine the escape velocity and energy for a 1.60×10^4 kg rocket leaving the surface of Earth.

What if I'm not escaping from the surface?

- These two situations have the same escape speed:



- The only difference is that an object already in orbit (left figure) already has orbital speed v_{orbit} , so escaping from that orbit requires an additional speed of

$$\Delta v = v_{\text{esc}} - v_{\text{orbit}}$$

Orbital Energies

- We can obtain the **orbital kinetic energy** by using the orbital speed in our expression of kinetic energy:

$$K_{\text{orbit}} = \frac{1}{2}mv_{\text{orbit}}^2 = \frac{1}{2}m \left(\sqrt{\frac{GM}{r}} \right)^2 = \boxed{\frac{GMm}{2r}}$$

- And we already have an expression for **gravitational potential energy**:

$$U_g = -\frac{GMm}{r} = -2K_{\text{orbit}}$$

- **Total orbital energy** is the sum of K and U_g !

$$E_T = K + U_g = -\frac{GMm}{2r} = -K_{\text{orbit}}$$

Houston, We Have a Problem!

As always, this understanding isn't completely correct!

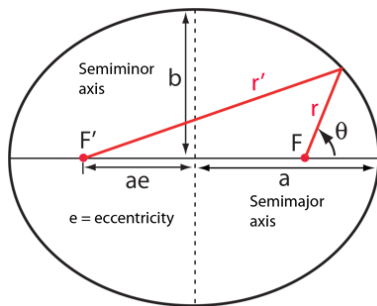
- Centripetal motion is based on rotation around a fixed point, but this is *not* the case for celestial mechanics!
- Just as Earth orbits around the Sun, the Sun also experiences a centripetal force and therefore “orbits” around Earth
- This problem is especially important when the two objects orbiting each other has similar masses (e.g. a binary star system)

Kepler's Laws of Planetary Motion

1. **Law of Ellipses:** The orbit of a planet is an ellipse with the Sun at one of the two foci.
2. **Law of Equal Areas:** A line segment joining a planet and the Sun sweeps out equal areas
3. **Law of Periods:** The square of the orbital period of a planet is proportional to the cube of the semi-major axis of its orbit.

Kepler's Law of Planetary Motion

To fully understand Kepler's laws, we have to first understand the ellipse, at least a little bit.



$$r' + r = 2a$$

- The area of the ellipse is $A = \pi ab$
- The relationship between r and θ given by:

$$r = \frac{a(1 - e^2)}{1 + e \cos \theta} \quad \text{where} \quad 0 \leq e < 1$$

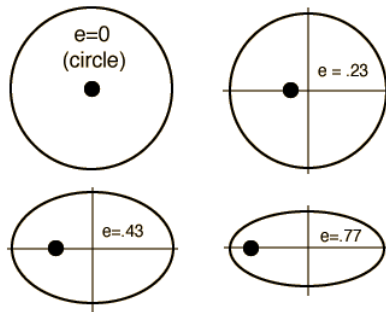
- when $e = 0$ it's a circle
- When $e = 1$ it's no longer an ellipse

Kepler's Law of Planetary Motion

Most of the planets have very small eccentricity, so their orbits are fairly close to being circular, but comets are much more eccentric

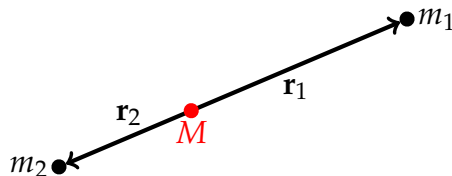
Object	e
Mercury	0.206
Venus	0.0068
Earth	0.0167
Mars	0.0934
Jupiter	0.0485
Saturn	0.0556
Uranus	0.0472
Neptune	0.0086
Pluto	0.25
Halley's Comet	0.9671
Comet Hale-Bopp	0.9951
Comet Ikeya-Seki	0.9999

Kepler's Law of Planetary Motion



Reduced Mass

Consider two objects orbiting each other. We know that the center of mass of the system is along the line between the two objects:



The vectors \mathbf{r}_1 and \mathbf{r}_2 are relative to the center of mass, and the relative position \mathbf{r} velocity \mathbf{v} and acceleration \mathbf{a} between m_1 and m_2 are therefore:

$$\mathbf{r} = \mathbf{r}_2 - \mathbf{r}_1 \quad \mathbf{v} = \mathbf{v}_2 - \mathbf{v}_1 \quad \mathbf{a} = \mathbf{a}_2 - \mathbf{a}_1$$

Reduced Mass

From Newton's Third Law, we know that the gravitational force exerted by m_1 on m_2 is opposite the force exerted by m_2 on m_1 :

$$m_1 \mathbf{a}_1 + m_2 \mathbf{a}_2 = 0$$

Substituting the expression for relative acceleration, now we have:

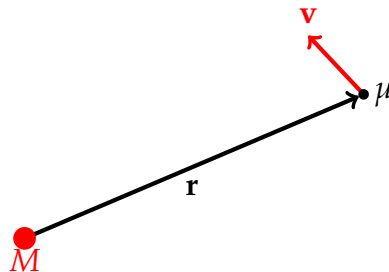
$$\mathbf{a} = \mathbf{F}_g \left[\frac{1}{m_1} + \frac{1}{m_2} \right] = \mathbf{F}_g \left[\frac{m_1 + m_2}{m_1 m_2} \right] = \frac{\mathbf{F}_g}{\mu}$$

We can now define a new concept called *reduced mass*:

$$\mu = \frac{m_1 m_2}{m_1 + m_2}$$

An Equivalent System

The orbit of one of the masses in a binary system is equivalent to the motion of the reduced mass orbiting around a point at relative distance r where the total mass M is placed. The magnitude of r is the same as the relative distance r in the development above.



Both systems have the same total angular momentum.

Gravity is a Central Force

- Gravity is called a *central force* in that
- Gravitational force \mathbf{F}_g is in the $-\hat{\mathbf{r}}$ direction, i.e. $\mathbf{F} \times \mathbf{r} = \mathbf{0}$
- Therefore gravity doesn't add torque
- No change in angular momentum: $\mathbf{L} = \text{constant}$
- This is true regardless of whether the orbit is circular or elliptical

Now The Complicated Math

To show that the orbit is an ellipse (or it can be an ellipse), we need to show that the relationship between r and θ is the one that we described earlier:

$$r = \frac{a(1 - e^2)}{1 + e \cos \theta}$$

The following steps will be shown *only once*, and it's not important to be able to follow/remember everything here.

Complicated Calculations

The acceleration of the reduced mass:

$$\mathbf{a} = -\frac{GM}{r^2}\hat{\mathbf{r}}$$

To find the expression for r , we first do a cross product of \mathbf{a} with \mathbf{L} :

$$\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{L} = -\frac{GM}{r^2}\hat{\mathbf{r}} \times \left(\mu r^2 \hat{\mathbf{r}} \times \frac{d\hat{\mathbf{r}}}{dt} \right) = GM\mu \hat{\mathbf{r}} \times \left(\hat{\mathbf{r}} \times \frac{d\hat{\mathbf{r}}}{dt} \right)$$

We then apply the vector identity $\mathbf{A} \times (\mathbf{B} \times \mathbf{C}) = (\mathbf{A} \cdot \mathbf{C})\mathbf{B} - (\mathbf{A} \cdot \mathbf{B})\mathbf{C}$ and the expression magically reduces to:

$$\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{L} = GM\mu \frac{d\hat{\mathbf{r}}}{dt}$$

Confused Yet?

Now we move on to another expression that is closer to where we need to be:

$$\frac{d}{dt} (\mathbf{v} \times \mathbf{L}) = \frac{d\mathbf{v}}{dt} \times \mathbf{L} + \mathbf{v} \times \cancel{\frac{d\mathbf{L}}{dt}} = \mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{L} = \frac{d}{dt} (GM\mu\hat{\mathbf{r}})$$

Integrating both sides with respect to t and we get:

$$\mathbf{v} \times \mathbf{L} = GM\mu\hat{\mathbf{r}} + \mathbf{D}$$

where \mathbf{D} is some constant of integration. Now we take the dot product with \mathbf{r}

$$\mathbf{r} \cdot (\mathbf{v} \times \mathbf{L}) = GM\mu r + \mathbf{r} \cdot \mathbf{D}$$

Just One More Slide!

We once again apply some vector identity: $\mathbf{A} \cdot (\mathbf{B} \times \mathbf{C}) = (\mathbf{A} \times \mathbf{B}) \cdot \mathbf{C}$ and we get:

$$(\mathbf{r} \times \mathbf{v}) \cdot \mathbf{L} = GM\mu r + rD \cos \theta$$

The final step is to recognize that if we define $e = D/GM\mu$, then we can express r as:

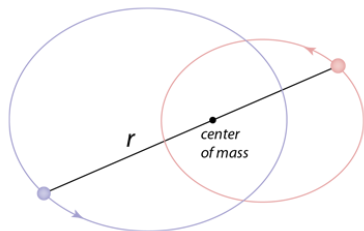
$$r = \frac{L^2 / \mu^2}{GM(1 + e \cos \theta)}$$

This is an expression for an ellipse!

$$r = \frac{a(1 - e^2)}{1 + e \cos \theta} \quad \text{if} \quad L = \mu \sqrt{GMa(1 - e^2)}$$

Kepler's First Law: Law of Orbits

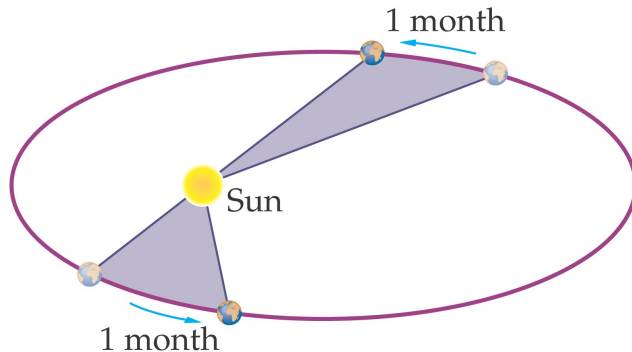
For a bound binary orbit, each object will follow an elliptical orbit about the center of mass of the system. The center of mass will be at one focus of each ellipse



- This is of course *slightly* different from Kepler's conclusion!
- But if one of the mass is very large compared to the other one, i.e. $m_1 \gg m_2$, then the center of gravity is essentially at m_1 and m_2 is orbiting around m_1 in an ellipse

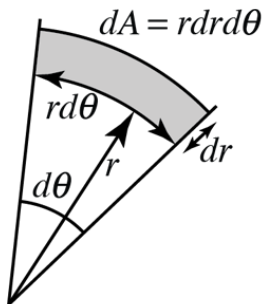
Kepler's 2nd Law: The Law of Equal Areas

Second Law: A line segment joining a planet and the Sun sweeps out equal areas during equal intervals of time



Kepler's 2nd Law: The Law of Equal Areas

Second Law: A line segment joining a planet and the Sun sweeps out equal areas during equal intervals of time



- The infinitesimal area swept out by an object in orbit is given by

$$dA = \frac{1}{2} r^2 d\theta$$

- Take the time derivative of both sides, and we have an expression for *areal velocity* (yes, that's a real word in celestial mechanics):

$$\frac{dA}{dt} = \frac{1}{2} r^2 \frac{d\theta}{dt} = \frac{1}{2} r^2 \omega$$

Kepler's 2nd Law: The Law of Equal Areas

- But hurray! We know that the angular component of velocity (\mathbf{v}_θ) is related to the angular velocity ω , so:

$$v_\theta = r\omega \quad \longrightarrow \quad \frac{dA}{dt} = \frac{1}{2}r(r\omega) = \frac{1}{2}rv_\theta$$

- Hurray again! Because we know that

$$rv_\theta = |\mathbf{r} \times \mathbf{v}_\theta| = \left| \frac{\mathbf{L}}{\mu} \right| = \frac{L}{\mu} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \boxed{\frac{dA}{dt} = \frac{L}{2\mu}}$$

- Since we know that angular momentum is conserved (i.e. L is constant), areal velocity is a constant, therefore it sweeps out equal areas in equal intervals of time

Kepler's Third Law: The Law of Periods

Law of Periods: The square of the orbital period of a planet is proportional to the cube of the semi-major axis of its orbit.

Kepler's Third Law: The Law of Periods

- Now that we have an expression for areal velocity (a constant!), we can integrate with respect to time, from $t = 0$ to $t = T$ to get the period:

$$\int_0^T \frac{dA}{dt} dt = \frac{L}{2\mu} \int_0^T dt \quad \longrightarrow \quad A = \frac{L}{2\mu} T$$

- But we know that the area of an ellipse is given by:

$$A = \pi ab \quad \text{and} \quad b^2 = a^2(1 - e^2)$$

where e is the eccentricity of the ellipse

- Combine that also with the expression for angular momentum:

$$L = \mu \sqrt{GMa(1 - e^2)}$$

where M is the total mass of the two celestial objects

Kepler's Third Law: The Law of Periods

- After some algebra, we end up with this equation

$$T^2 = \underbrace{\left[\frac{4\pi^2}{GM} \right]}_{\text{constant}} a^3$$

- Remember that M is the total mass of the two objects. For the case where one object (e.g. sun) is much more massive than the other (e.g. Earth), i.e. $m_1 \gg m_2$, we can just use $M \approx m_1$

Kepler's Third Law: The Law of Periods

