

How does the moment of inertia affect the period of Maxwell's Wheel?

Physics HL Internal Assessment

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July 7, 2025

1 Introduction and background knowledge

Back in ancient Greece (around 220 B.C.), Archimedes has laid solid foundation for rigid body statics by discovering and formalizing the equilibrium requirement for levers. People studied Archimedes's work and developed concepts like torque after then, but it was not until Issac Newton (1643-1727) formulated Newton's Laws of Motion that humans are well equipped for rigid body dynamics (Farber, 1961). With the assistance of advanced mathematical tools, Leonhard Euler (1707-1783) successfully formalized the dynamics of rigid bodies and derived the concepts of moment of inertia and principal axes (Marquina, Marquina, Marquina, & Hernández-Gómez, 2016).

Just like inertia (which is determined by mass) in translational motion, the moment of inertia evaluates a body's ability to resist angular acceleration. Generally speaking, the further away the mass is distributed from its axis of rotation, the larger the body's moment of inertia is. Objects with large moment of inertia are good at storing rotational kinetic energy, which makes them suitable for objects like flywheels, while objects with small moment of inertia can rotate faster.

Maxwell's wheel is commonly used as an instrument to illustrate the conservation of energy and the concept of rotational kinetic energy in physics education. It can also be utilized to measure the moment of inertia of a disk-shaped object. This experiment aims at discovering the significance of the moment of inertia in a Maxwell's wheel experiment.

Research question: How does the moment of inertia affect the period of Maxwell's Wheel?

2 Hypothesis and reasoning

As is shown in Figure 1, the Maxwell's wheel mainly consists of three parts: a wheel of radius R , an axle of radius r , and a string. Aside from friction, two forces are acting on the pendulum: the tension from the string and the gravitational force. During the entire process, the gravitational potential energy converts to kinetic energy of the wheel.

The downward movement and the upward movement is basically symmetric, so only the downward reaction needs algebraic analysis.

Since the wheel is not in equilibrium, its hard to analyze the magnitude of tension T . However, the problem can be tackled using conservation of energy.

Due to the negligibility of friction, we can assume that all the gravitational potential energy lost is converted to the kinetic energy. Or more specifically, the sum of the translational kinetic energy and rotational kinetic energy should equal to the loss in gravitational potential energy. Or formally,

$$mg\Delta h = \frac{1}{2}mv^2 + \frac{1}{2}I\omega^2 \quad (1)$$

where I is the moment of inertia of the entire wheel.

Moreover, using the definition of velocity and angular velocity, the following identities can be derived,

$$\frac{d\Delta H}{dt} = v \quad (2)$$

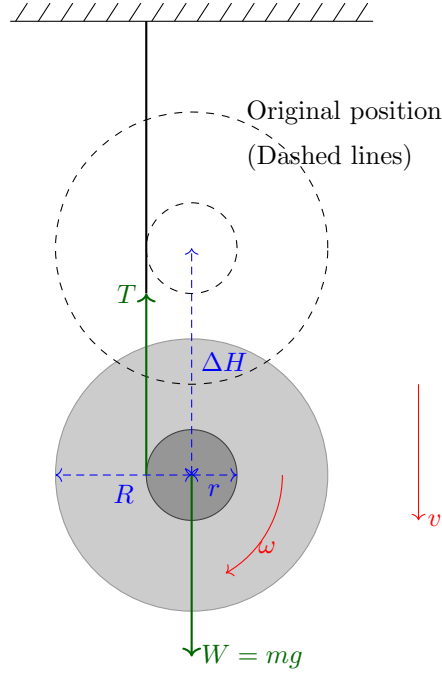


Figure 1: Model of a Maxwell's Wheel

$$\omega r = v \quad (3)$$

$$\Delta H(0) = 0 \quad (4)$$

Therefore

$$mg\Delta H = \frac{1}{2}mv^2 + \frac{1}{2}\frac{I}{r^2}v^2 \quad (5)$$

After moving and combining the terms

$$\frac{2mg\Delta H}{m + \frac{I}{r^2}} = \left(\frac{d\Delta H}{dt}\right)^2 \quad (6)$$

Moving $d\Delta H/dt$ to the left side and make its index 1,

$$\frac{d\Delta H}{dt} = \sqrt{\frac{2mg}{m + \frac{I}{r^2}}} \Delta H^{0.5} \quad (7)$$

This is a simple ODE, with the help of formula (4), we can get that,

$$\Delta H(t) = \frac{mg}{2m + \frac{2I}{r^2}} t^2 \quad (8)$$

The downward movement terminates when $\Delta H(t) = l$, which means

$$t_{down} = \sqrt{\frac{(2m + \frac{2I}{r^2})l}{mg}} \quad (9)$$

The entire period of the Maxwell's Wheel is

$$T = 2t_{down} = 2\sqrt{\frac{(2m + \frac{2I}{r^2})l}{mg}} \quad (10)$$

which can be re-written as

$$T^2 = 8l \frac{(m + \frac{I}{r^2})}{mg} \quad (11)$$

Or

$$T^2 = \frac{8l}{mgr^2}I + \frac{8l}{g} \quad (12)$$

From this formula, the hypothesis can be derived: **T increases as I increases. T^2 and I has a linear relationship.**

3 Experiment design

3.1 Variables

- Independent variable: Moment of inertia (manipulated by changing the distance from the magnets to the pivot: 2.5, 3.5, 4.5, 5.5, 6.5, 7.5, 8.5cm).
- Dependent variable: "Period" of the Maxwell's Wheel (Time between two lowest positions).
- Controlled variables: The material, mass and size of the plate and magnets. The length of the string. The mass, radius and length of the axle, etc.

3.2 Materials

- * 2 Iron stands (height \approx 50 cm)
- * 2 Cotton strings (length \approx 70 cm)
- * 1 Acrylic disc (radius \approx 10 cm, mass \approx 110 g)
- * 16 Magnets (radius \approx 3.0 cm, mass \approx 23 g)
- * 1 Force gauge (50 N)
- * 1 Tape rule
- * 1 Electric balance
- * 1 Vernier caliper
- * 1 Hot glue gun

3.3 Setup diagram

The apparatus is set up by hanging the Maxwell's Wheel between two iron stands using cotton string, as is shown in Figure 2.

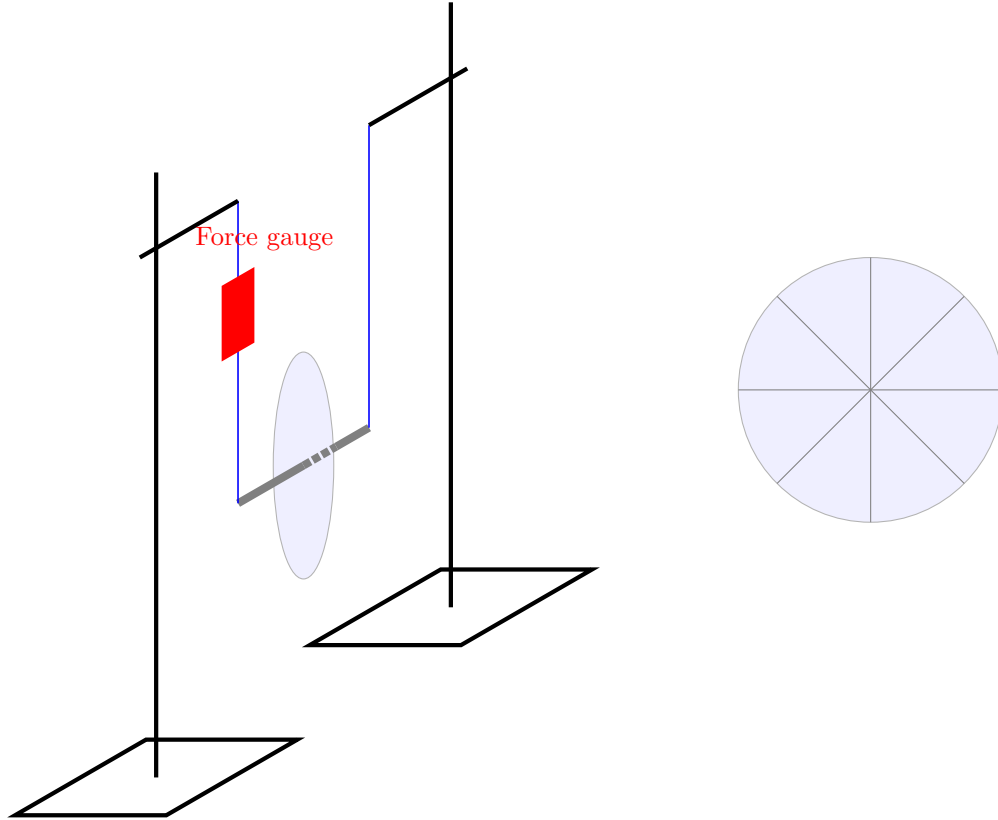


Figure 2: Setup diagram

3.4 Procedure

1. Measure the total mass of the magnets, mass of the acrylic plate, radius of the acrylic plate, radius of the axle and maximum vertical displacement after setting up the apparatus as is shown in Figure 2
2. Find a pair of diameters of the acrylic plane that is perpendicular to each other. This can be done by drawing the perpendicular bisector of an arbitrary pair of perpendicular chords.
3. Calibrate both axis with the assistance of a ruler. Make sure the center of the circle is scaled zero.
4. Attach four pairs of magnets to the plane.
5. Adjust the position of the magnets to make the distance for the magnets' centers of mass are $r = 8.5$ cm. This can be done by placing the magnet

(with radius $r' = 3$ cm) between $r = 10$ cm mark and $r = 7$ cm mark, while touching the both marks.

6. Fix the magnets with glue guns.
7. Swirl up the axle until it reaches the designated point, start the forcemeter and release the wheel.
8. Record the time for the first and second time where the forcemeter reading reaches local maxima ¹
9. Repeat Steps 7 and 8 for 4 additional trials.
10. Repeat Steps 5 to 9 with $r = 7.5, 6.5, 5.5, 4.5, 3.5$ cm.

4 Results

4.1 Raw data

Raw data is collected as follows:

- Total mass of the magnets M_m : 193.70 ± 0.01 g
- Total mass of the acrylic plate M_a : 193.17 ± 0.01 g
- Radius of the acrylic plate R_a : 10.0 ± 0.05 cm
- Radius of the axle r : 4.0 ± 0.1 mm
- Maximum vertical displacement H : 20 ± 0.5 cm
- Other data is shown in Table 1.

4.2 Processed data

4.3 Sample processing

5 Discussion and conclusion

6 Evaluation

The experiment was conducted successfully, gathering sufficient data and supporting the initial hypothesis. However, there are some uncertainties in the experiment that can be improved.

- **Defect in modelling** It is assumed in the hypothesis that the wheel do not swing horizontally and the string is always vertical, but small horizontal movement is inevitable during the experiment process.

¹This is done with the assistance of a program. If the first local maximum is not clear, the second and the third local maxima is used instead.

Table 1: Raw Data

Experiments 1-4					Experiments 5-7				
No.	$r(\text{cm})$ $\pm 0.1 \text{ cm}$	Trial	$t_1(\text{s})$ $\pm 0.01 \text{ s}$	$t_2(\text{s})$ $\pm 0.01 \text{ s}$	No.	$r(\text{cm})$ $\pm 0.1 \text{ cm}$	Trial	$t_1(\text{s})$ $\pm 0.01 \text{ s}$	$t_2(\text{s})$ $\pm 0.01 \text{ s}$
1	2.5	1	2.28	6.68	5	6.5	1	3.58	9.48
		2	2.25	6.63			2	9.28	15.23
		3	2.48	7.03			3	3.45	9.48
		4	6.73	11.28			4	3.53	9.43
		5	2.33	6.78			5	9.28	15.23
2	3.5	1	2.73	7.23	6	7.5	1	10.43	17.68
		2	7.03	11.53			2	3.93	10.68
		3	2.78	7.63			3	4.08	11.03
		4	2.58	7.38			4	4.23	11.13
		5	2.83	7.33			5	4.03	10.53
3	4.5	1	2.88	8.13	7	8.5	1	4.08	11.78
		2	3.18	8.63			2	11.68	18.33
		3	3.08	8.53			3	11.48	18.38
		4	2.88	7.88			4	12.03	20.58
		5	3.03	8.28			5	11.78	18.63
4	5.5	1	3.28	8.93			6	4.13	11.63
		2	3.23	8.73					
		3	3.23	8.83					
		4	3.18	8.73					
		5	3.48	9.23					

- **Screw-threaded axle** For an ideal Maxwell's Wheel, the radius of the small axle should be constant. However, a screw-threaded axle is utilized to ensure better installation of the wheel, making the string swirl around the thread with inconsistent radius. This can be improved by using an axle that has screw thread only in the middle point.
- **String attaching** When attaching the wire to the axle, some adhesive (hot glue) is used to ensure connection stability. This also contributed to inconsistent radius. Opt for an axle with a hole for attachment to avoid the use of hot-melt adhesive.
- **Horizontal movement** The hypothesis is based on negligible horizontal movement, but in the real experiment horizontal movement is inevitable because the wheel is controlled and released by hand. Using a plumb line to adjust the string before releasing can minimize the horizontal deflection.

References

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