



## 1 | Setup

The ball launcher problem involves an energetic optimization to figure, given the situation as shown in the above image, the parameters  $h_o$  and  $\theta_o$  that would best create a maximum launch distance  $x_f$ .

In this problem, we will define the axis such that the "lower-left" corner of the wood block (corner sharing  $x$  value of the starting position of the marble, but on the "ground") as  $(-w, 0)$ , where  $w$  is the width of the wooden block. Therefore, we derive the  $x$ -value of the location of the launch of the projectile as  $x = 0$ . We define the direction towards which the marble is launching as positive- $x$ , so as the marble rolls, its position's  $x$  value increases. We will define the location of the marble before starting as positive  $y$ , and as the marble decreases in height, its position's  $y$  value decreases.

We define the start of the experiment as time  $t_0$ , the moment the marble leaves the track and travels as a projectile as  $t_1$ , and the end — in the moment when the marble hits the ground — as  $t_f$ . We will call the marble  $m_0$ .

## 2 | Figuring the Velocity at $t_1$

In order to expedite the process of derivation, we will leverage an energetic argument instead of that of kinematics for figuring the velocity at launch. The change-in-height that  $m_0$  experiences before  $t_1$  is  $\Delta h = H - h_0$ . Therefore, the potential energy expenditure is  $\Delta PE_{grav} = mg\Delta h = m_0g(H - h_0)$ . Assuming that the marble starts out with 0 kinetic energy, we deduct that, at the moment of it finishing its descent, it will possess kinetic energy  $KE = 0 + m_0g(H - h_0) = m_0g(H - h_0)$ .

For this derivation, for now, we ignore  $KE_{rotational}$ , hence, we could roughly deduct the statement that  $KE_{translational} \approx m_0g(H - h_0)$ .

Creating this statement, we could deduct a statement that we could leverage to solve for the velocity at  $t_1$  named  $\vec{v}_0$ .

$$m_0g(H - h_0) = \frac{1}{2}m_0\vec{v}_0^2 \quad (1)$$

$$g(H - h_0) = \frac{1}{2}\vec{v}_0^2 \quad (2)$$

$$2g(H - h_0) = \vec{v}_0^2 \quad (3)$$

$$\vec{v}_0 = \sqrt{2g(H - h_0)} \quad (4)$$

This velocity vector could be easily split into its two constituent parts. Namely:

$$\begin{cases} v_{0x} = \sqrt{2g(H - h_0)}\cos(\theta_0) \\ v_{0y} = \sqrt{2g(H - h_0)}\sin(\theta_0) \end{cases}$$

## 3 | Figuring the Maximum Possible Travel Distance

Here, we devise an function for  $x_f$  w.r.t.  $v_{0y}$ ,  $v_{0x}$ ,  $h_0$ ,  $m_0$ .

### 3.1 | Setup for Kinematics

We first will leverage the parametric equations for position in kinematics in order to ultimately result in a function for  $x_f$ .

$$\begin{cases} x(t) = \frac{1}{2}a_{0x}t^2 + v_{0x}t + x_0 \\ y(t) = \frac{1}{2}a_{0y}t^2 + v_{0y}t + y_0 \end{cases}$$

Given the situation of our problem, we could modify the pair as follows:

$$\begin{cases} x(t) = v_{0x}t \\ y(t) = -\frac{1}{2}gt^2 + v_{0y}t + h_0 \end{cases}$$

as...

- there are no acceleration in the x-direction at the point of launch
- the only acceleration in the y-direction is that due to gravity
- the start x-position of the marble at launch is, as defined above,  $x = 0$
- the start y-position of the marble at launch is, as defined above,  $y = h_0$

### 3.2 | Solving for $\frac{dx_f}{d\theta_0}$

We need to maximize  $\frac{dx_f}{d\theta_0}$  as one out of two components to optimize for. Once we figure that value, we then supply the corresponding maximum value then optimize again for  $\frac{h_0}{d\theta_0}$ . The position equations above could be leveraged to figure a value for  $x_f$ .

#### 3.2.1 | Setup for Solution

We first create a set of equations modeling the location of the marble at  $t_f$ .

$$\begin{cases} x(t_f) = x_f = v_{0x}t_f = t_f\sqrt{2g(H-h_0)}\cos(\theta_0) \\ y(t_f) = 0 = \frac{-1}{2}gt_f^2 + v_{0y}t_f + h_0 = \frac{-1}{2}gt_f^2 + t_f\sqrt{2g(H-h_0)}\sin(\theta_0) + h_0 \end{cases}$$

We first solve for  $t_f$ , and supply it to the first equation.

$$t_f = \frac{x_f}{\sqrt{2g(H-h_0)}\cos(\theta_0)} \quad (5)$$

Finally, we substitute the definition of  $t_f$  into  $y(t_f)$ .

$$y(t_f) = 0 = \frac{-1}{2}g\left(\frac{x_f}{\sqrt{2g(H-h_0)}\cos(\theta_0)}\right)^2 + \frac{x_f}{\sqrt{2g(H-h_0)}\cos(\theta_0)}\sqrt{2g(H-h_0)}\sin(\theta_0) + h_0 \quad (6)$$

We will now proceed to simplify the expression further

$$0 = \frac{-1}{4}\frac{-x_f^2}{(H-h_0)\cos^2(\theta_0)} + x_f\tan(\theta_0) + h_0 \quad (7)$$

$$= \frac{-1}{4}\frac{-x_f^2}{(H-h_0)}\cos^{-2}(\theta_0) + x_f\tan(\theta_0) + h_0 \quad (8)$$

$$= \frac{-1}{4}\frac{-1}{(H-h_0)}x_f^2\cos^{-2}(\theta_0) + x_f\tan(\theta_0) + h_0 \quad (9)$$

#### 3.2.2 | Finding $\frac{dx_f}{d\theta_0}$

We leverage implicit differentiation to figure a value for  $\frac{dx_f}{d\theta_0}$ . We set  $x_f$  as a differentiable function, and  $h_0$  and  $H$  as both constants.

$$0 = \frac{-1}{4}\frac{-1}{(H-h_0)}x_f^2\cos^{-2}(\theta_0) + x_f\tan(\theta_0) + h_0 \quad (10)$$

$$\Rightarrow \frac{d}{d\theta_0}0 = \frac{d}{d\theta_0}\left(\frac{-1}{4}\frac{-1}{(H-h_0)}x_f^2\cos^{-2}(\theta_0) + x_f\tan(\theta_0) + h_0\right) \quad (11)$$