Second Order Equations

The most important equation in mechanics is $my'' + by' + ky = 0$. The first term is the mass m times the acceleration $a = y''$. This term ma balances the force F (that is *Newton's Law*). The force includes the damping $-by'$ and the elastic force $-ky$, proportional to distance moved. This is a second-order equation because it contains the second derivative $y'' = d^2y/dt^2$. It is still linear with constant coefficients m, b, k.

In a differential equations course, the method of solution is to substitute $y = e^{\lambda t}$. Each derivative of y brings down a factor λ. We want $y = e^{\lambda t}$ to solve the equation:

$$\boldsymbol{m\,\frac{d^2y}{dt^2} + b\,\frac{dy}{dt} + ky = 0} \quad \text{becomes} \quad \boldsymbol{(m\lambda^2 + b\lambda + k)\,e^{\lambda t} = 0}. \tag{8}$$

Everything depends on $m\lambda^2 + b\lambda + k = 0$. This equation for λ has two roots λ_1 and λ_2. Then the equation for y has two pure solutions $y_1 = e^{\lambda_1 t}$ and $y_2 = e^{\lambda_2 t}$. Their combinations $c_1y_1 + c_2y_2$ give the complete solution unless $\lambda_1 = \lambda_2$.

In a linear algebra course we expect matrices and eigenvalues. Therefore we turn the scalar equation (with y'') into a *vector equation for y and y'*: first derivative only. Suppose the mass is $m = 1$. Two equations for $\boldsymbol{u} = (y,\ y')$ give $d\boldsymbol{u}/dt = A\boldsymbol{u}$:

$$\begin{aligned} \boldsymbol{dy/dt} &= \boldsymbol{y'} \\ \boldsymbol{dy'/dt} &= \boldsymbol{-ky - by'} \end{aligned} \quad \text{converts to} \quad \frac{d}{dt}\begin{bmatrix} y \\ y' \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} \boldsymbol{0} & \boldsymbol{1} \\ \boldsymbol{-k} & \boldsymbol{-b} \end{bmatrix}\begin{bmatrix} y \\ y' \end{bmatrix} = A\boldsymbol{u}. \tag{9}$$

The first equation $dy/dt = y'$ is trivial (but true). The second is equation (8) connecting y'' to y' and y. Together they connect $\boldsymbol{u}'$ to $\boldsymbol{u}$. So we solve $\boldsymbol{u}' = A\boldsymbol{u}$ by eigenvalues of A:

$$A - \lambda I = \begin{bmatrix} -\lambda & 1 \\ -k & -b-\lambda \end{bmatrix} \quad \text{has determinant} \quad \lambda^2 + b\lambda + k = 0.$$

The equation for the λ's is the same as (8)! **It is still $\boldsymbol{\lambda^2 + b\lambda + k = 0}$, since $m = 1$.** The roots λ_1 and λ_2 are now *eigenvalues of A*. The eigenvectors and the solution are

$$\boldsymbol{x}_1 = \begin{bmatrix} 1 \\ \lambda_1 \end{bmatrix} \qquad \boldsymbol{x}_2 = \begin{bmatrix} 1 \\ \lambda_2 \end{bmatrix} \qquad \boldsymbol{u}(t) = c_1e^{\lambda_1 t}\begin{bmatrix} 1 \\ \lambda_1 \end{bmatrix} + c_2e^{\lambda_2 t}\begin{bmatrix} 1 \\ \lambda_2 \end{bmatrix}.$$

The first component of $\boldsymbol{u}(t)$ has $y = c_1e^{\lambda_1 t} + c_2e^{\lambda_2 t}$—the same solution as before. It can't be anything else. In the second component of $\boldsymbol{u}(t)$ you see the velocity dy/dt. The vector problem is completely consistent with the scalar problem. The 2 by 2 matrix A is called a *companion matrix*—a companion to the second order equation with y''.

Example 3 *Motion around a circle with* $y'' + y = 0$ *and* $y = \cos t$

This is our master equation with mass $m = 1$ and stiffness $k = 1$ and $d = 0$: no damping. Substitute $y = e^{\lambda t}$ into $y'' + y = 0$ to reach $\boldsymbol{\lambda^2 + 1 = 0}$. *The roots are* $\boldsymbol{\lambda = i}$ *and* $\boldsymbol{\lambda = -i}$. Then half of $e^{it} + e^{-it}$ gives the solution $y = \cos t$.

As a first-order system, the initial values $y(0) = 1$, $y'(0) = 0$ go into $\boldsymbol{u}(0) = (1, 0)$:

$$\textbf{Use } \boldsymbol{y'' = -y} \qquad \frac{d\boldsymbol{u}}{dt} = \frac{d}{dt}\begin{bmatrix} y \\ y' \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} \mathbf{0} & \mathbf{1} \\ \mathbf{-1} & \mathbf{0} \end{bmatrix}\begin{bmatrix} y \\ y' \end{bmatrix} = A\boldsymbol{u}. \tag{10}$$

The eigenvalues of A are again the same $\lambda = i$ and $\lambda = -i$ (no surprise). A is antisymmetric with eigenvectors $\boldsymbol{x}_1 = (1, i)$ and $\boldsymbol{x}_2 = (1, -i)$. The combination that matches $\boldsymbol{u}(0) = (1, 0)$ is $\frac{1}{2}(\boldsymbol{x}_1 + \boldsymbol{x}_2)$. Step 2 multiplies the x's by e^{it} and e^{-it}. Step 3 combines the pure oscillations into $\boldsymbol{u}(t)$ to find $y = \cos t$ as expected:

$$\boldsymbol{u}(t) = \frac{1}{2}e^{it}\begin{bmatrix} 1 \\ i \end{bmatrix} + \frac{1}{2}e^{-it}\begin{bmatrix} 1 \\ -i \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} \cos \boldsymbol{t} \\ -\sin \boldsymbol{t} \end{bmatrix}. \qquad \text{This is } \begin{bmatrix} y(t) \\ y'(t) \end{bmatrix}.$$

All good. The vector $\boldsymbol{u} = (\cos t, -\sin t)$ goes around a circle (Figure 6.3). The radius is 1 because $\cos^2 t + \sin^2 t = 1$.