Path Independence, Conservative Field, Potential Function & FFT

Saturday, 17 May 2025 11:15 am

TABLE 16.2 Different ways to write the work integral for $\mathbf{F} = M\mathbf{i} + N\mathbf{j} + P\mathbf{k}$ over the curve $C: \mathbf{r}(t) = g(t)\mathbf{i} + h(t)\mathbf{j} + k(t)\mathbf{k},\ a \le t \le b$

$W = \int_C \mathbf{F} \cdot \mathbf{T}\, ds$	The definition
$= \int_C \mathbf{F} \cdot d\mathbf{r}$	Vector differential form
$= \int_a^b \mathbf{F} \cdot \frac{d\mathbf{r}}{dt} dt$	Parametric vector evaluation
$=$	
$=$	

DEFINITIONS Let $\mathbf{F}$ be a vector field defined on an open region D in space, and suppose that for any two points A and B in D the line integral $\int_C \mathbf{F} \cdot d\mathbf{r}$ along a path C from A to B in D is the same over all paths from A to B. Then the integral $\int_C \mathbf{F} \cdot d\mathbf{r}$ is **path independent in** D and the field $\mathbf{F}$ is **conservative on** D.

Why Do We Care About Path-Independent, or Conservative, Vector Fields?

Many of the **fundamental vector fields of nature are path-independent**—for example, the **gravitational field and the electric field** of particles at rest. The fact that the gravitational field is path independent means that the **work done by gravity when an object moves depends only on the starting and ending points and not on the path taken**. For example, *the work done by gravity (computed by the line integral) on a bicycle being carried to a sixth-floor apartment is the same whether it is carried up the stairs in a zig-zag path or taken straight up in an elevator*.

When a vector field is path-independent, we can define the potential energy of a body.

Conservative Forces	Vs	Nonconservative Forces
Electric		Friction
Gravity		Applied Force
Elastic		Push / Pull
"path Independent"		Tension
		Path dependent

DEFINITION If $\mathbf{F}$ is a vector field defined on D and $\mathbf{F} = \nabla f$ for some scalar function f on D, then f is called a **potential function for F**.

Fundamental Theorem of Calculus

If $f'(x)$ is continuous on $[a, b]$

$$\int_a^b f'(x)dx = f(b) - f(a).$$

$\boxed{2}$ **Theorem** Let C be a smooth curve given by the vector function $\mathbf{r}(t)$, $a \leqslant t \leqslant b$. Let f be a differentiable function of two or three variables whose gradient vector ∇f is continuous on C. Then

$$\int_C \nabla f \cdot d\mathbf{r} = f(\mathbf{r}(b)) - f(\mathbf{r}(a))$$

EXAMPLE 1 Suppose the force field $\mathbf{F} = \nabla f$ is the gradient of the function

$$f(x, y, z) = -\frac{1}{x^2 + y^2 + z^2}.$$

Find the work done by $\mathbf{F}$ in moving an object along a smooth curve C joining (1, 0, 0) to (0, 0, 2) that does not pass through the origin.

Solution An application of Theorem 1 shows that the work done by $\mathbf{F}$ along any smooth curve C joining the two points and not passing through the origin is

$$\int_C \mathbf{F} \cdot d\mathbf{r} = f(0, 0, 2) - f(1, 0, 0) = -\frac{1}{4} - (-1) = \frac{3}{4}. \quad \blacksquare$$

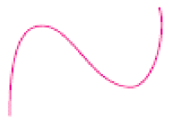
EXAMPLE 2 Find the work done by the conservative field

$$\mathbf{F} = yz\,\mathbf{i} + xz\,\mathbf{j} + xy\,\mathbf{k} = \nabla f, \quad \text{where} \quad f(x, y, z) = xyz,$$

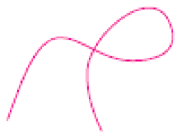
along any smooth curve C joining the point $A(-1, 3, 9)$ to $B(1, 6, -4)$.

Solution With $f(x, y, z) = xyz$, we have

$$\begin{aligned}
\int_C \mathbf{F} \cdot d\mathbf{r} &= \int_A^B \nabla f \cdot d\mathbf{r} && \mathbf{F} = \nabla f \text{ and path independence} \\
&= f(B) - f(A) && \text{Theorem 1} \\
&= xyz|_{(1,6,-4)} - xyz|_{(-1,3,9)} \\
&= (1)(6)(-4) - (-1)(3)(9) \\
&= -24 + 27 = 3.
\end{aligned}$$



simple,
not closed



not simple,
not closed

simple,
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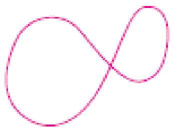
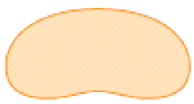
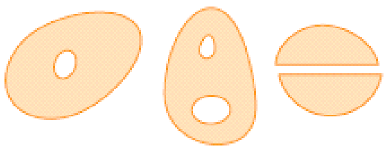


**not simple,
closed**



simply-connected region



regions that are not simply-connected

$\boxed{3}$ **Theorem** $\int_C \mathbf{F} \cdot d\mathbf{r}$ is independent of path in D if and only if $\int_C \mathbf{F} \cdot d\mathbf{r} = 0$ for every closed path C in D.

$\boxed{4}$ **Theorem** Suppose $\mathbf{F}$ is a vector field that is continuous on an open connected region D. If $\int_C \mathbf{F} \cdot d\mathbf{r}$ is independent of path in D, then $\mathbf{F}$ is a conservative vector field on D; that is, there exists a function f such that $\nabla f = \mathbf{F}$.

$\boxed{6}$ **Theorem** Let $\mathbf{F} = P\,\mathbf{i} + Q\,\mathbf{j}$ be a vector field on an open simply-connected region D. Suppose that P and Q have continuous first-order derivatives and

$$\frac{\partial P}{\partial y} = \frac{\partial Q}{\partial x} \qquad \text{throughout } D$$

Then $\mathbf{F}$ is conservative.

V EXAMPLE 2 Determine whether or not the vector field

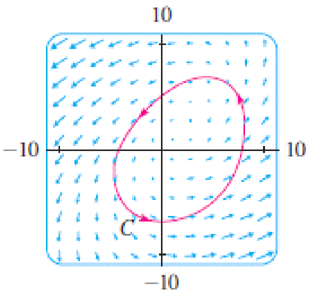
$$\mathbf{F}(x, y) = (x - y)\,\mathbf{i} + (x - 2)\,\mathbf{j}$$

is conservative.

SOLUTION Let $P(x, y) = x - y$ and $Q(x, y) = x - 2$. Then

$$\frac{\partial P}{\partial y} = -1 \qquad \frac{\partial Q}{\partial x} = 1$$

Since $\partial P/\partial y \neq \partial Q/\partial x$, $\mathbf{F}$ is not conservative by Theorem 5.



V EXAMPLE 3 Determine whether or not the vector field

$$\mathbf{F}(x, y) = (3 + 2xy)\,\mathbf{i} + (x^2 - 3y^2)\,\mathbf{j}$$

is conservative.

SOLUTION Let $P(x, y) = 3 + 2xy$ and $Q(x, y) = x^2 - 3y^2$. Then

$$\frac{\partial P}{\partial y} = 2x = \frac{\partial Q}{\partial x}$$

Also, the domain of $\mathbf{F}$ is the entire plane ($D = \mathbb{R}^2$), which is open and simply-connected. Therefore we can apply Theorem 6 and conclude that $\mathbf{F}$ is conservative.

EXAMPLE 3 Show that $\mathbf{F} = (e^x \cos y + yz)\mathbf{i} + (xz - e^x \sin y)\mathbf{j} + (xy + z)\mathbf{k}$ is co servative over its natural domain and find a potential function for it.

Solution The natural domain of $\mathbf{F}$ is all of space, which is open and simply connecte We apply the test in Equations (2) to

$$M = e^x \cos y + yz, \qquad N = xz - e^x \sin y, \qquad P = xy + z$$

and calculate

$$\frac{\partial P}{\partial y} = x = \frac{\partial N}{\partial z}, \qquad \frac{\partial M}{\partial z} = y = \frac{\partial P}{\partial x}, \qquad \frac{\partial N}{\partial x} = -e^x \sin y + z = \frac{\partial M}{\partial y}.$$

EXAMPLE 4 Show that $\mathbf{F} = (2x - 3)\mathbf{i} - z\mathbf{j} + (\cos z)\mathbf{k}$ is not conservative.

Solution We apply the Component Test in Equations (2) and find immediately that

$$\frac{\partial P}{\partial y} = \frac{\partial}{\partial y}(\cos z) = 0, \qquad \frac{\partial N}{\partial z} = \frac{\partial}{\partial z}(-z) = -1.$$

The two are unequal, so $\mathbf{F}$ is not conservative. No further testing is required. ■

Example 3 Show that the vector field $\vec{F}(x, y) = y\cos x\vec{i} + (\sin x + y)\vec{j}$ is path-independent.