

PHY293: Waves and Modern Physics

Summary

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Disclaimer: A large portion of this document is and will be stolen from David Morin's [Waves](#) book, which is currently still a draft.

1 Dampened Harmonic Motion

1.1 Introduction

The Setup: An object undergoing dampened harmonic motion experiences a restoring force $-kx$ and a resistive force $-b\frac{dx}{dt}$. The differential equation is:

$$\frac{d^2x}{dt^2} + \gamma\frac{dx}{dt} + \omega_0^2x = 0 \quad (1)$$

where $\gamma = \frac{b}{m}$ and $\omega_0^2 = \frac{k}{m}$.

Warning: Most authors prefer to write the differential equation as

$$\frac{d^2x}{dt^2} + 2\gamma\frac{dx}{dt} + \omega_0^2x = 0$$

as it makes the solution less complicated (i.e. less fractions). Therefore, be very careful when trying to find equations online as we may not all be defining variables the same way.

Motivation for Solution: In general, a solution to a second order linear differential equation is a sum of exponentials, i.e. it is in the form of

$$x(t) = Ae^{\alpha_1 t} + Be^{\alpha_2 t}$$

where α_1, α_2 are solutions to a particular quadratic equation (see Appendix for details), where there are three options:

- Quadratic equation has 2 solutions \implies Then $x(t)$ is a sum of 2 exponential decays.
- Quadratic equation has 1 solution \implies Then $x(t)$ is a single exponential decay.
- Quadratic equation has 0 solutions \implies Then the roots are complex. Recall from ESC194 that complex exponents lead to sinusoidal functions, so $x(t)$ will have a sinusoidal component.

1.2 Underdamping ($\gamma < 2\omega_0$)

We can define

$$\omega^2 = \omega_0^2 - \frac{\gamma^2}{4}, \quad (2)$$

which will be the new angular frequency. *Damping reduces the frequency.*¹ The equation of motion is given by

$$x_{\text{underdamped}}(t) = Ae^{-\gamma t/2} \cos(\omega t + \phi) \quad (3)$$

where A and ϕ are determined by initial conditions.

¹However, this is mostly irrelevant, because if γ is large enough to make ω differ appreciably from ω_0 , then the motion becomes negligible after a few cycles anyways. For example, if ω differs from ω_0 by even 20%, then after just 2 cycles, the amplitude would have decreased to 0.01% of the initial.

1.3 Overdamping ($\gamma > 2\omega_0$)

If $\gamma > 2\omega_0$, then the equation of motion is given by

$$x_{\text{overdamped}}(t) = C_1 e^{-\mu_1 t} + C_2 e^{-\mu_2 t} \quad (4)$$

where we have²

$$\mu_1 = \frac{\gamma}{2} + \sqrt{\frac{\gamma^2}{4} - \omega_0^2} \quad (5)$$

$$\mu_2 = \frac{\gamma}{2} - \sqrt{\frac{\gamma^2}{4} - \omega_0^2} \quad (6)$$

and C_1, C_2 are determined by initial conditions.

1.4 Critical Damping ($\gamma = 2\omega_0$)

Critical damping occurs at $\gamma = 2\omega_0$, then the equation of motion is given by

$$x_{\text{critical}}(t) = (A + Bt)e^{-\omega_0 t} \quad (7)$$

where A and B are determined by initial conditions.

Importance of Critical Damping: Critically damped motion has the property that it *converges* to the origin in the quickest manner, that is, quicker than both the overdamped and underdamped motions.

²This shows why most physicists choose to use the 2γ factor, as it reduces a lot of fractions.

2 Appendix

2.1 Derivations

Guessing a solution of the form $x(t) = Ce^{\alpha t}$, and substituting it into the ODE gives the characteristic equation

$$\alpha^2 + \gamma\alpha + \omega_0^2 = 0 \quad (8)$$

which has the solution

$$\alpha = \frac{-\gamma \pm \sqrt{\gamma^2 - 4\omega_0^2}}{2} \quad (9)$$

The three cases for what the discriminant $\gamma^2 - 4\omega_0^2$ can be gives us the three cases of motion.

Underdamping: In this case, $\sqrt{\gamma^2 - 4\omega_0^2}$ is an imaginary number, so let us write: $\alpha = -\gamma/2 + i\sqrt{4\omega_0^2 - \gamma^2}/2$. We can define ω such that

$$\alpha = -\gamma/2 + i\omega. \quad (10)$$

Substituting this back into our original guess (and using a linear combination), we get:

$$x_{\text{underdamped}}(t) = C_1 e^{(-\gamma/2 + i\omega)t} + C_2 e^{(-\gamma/2 - i\omega)t} \quad (11)$$

$$= e^{-\gamma t/2} (C_1 e^{i\omega t} + C_2 e^{-i\omega t}) \quad (12)$$

Since $x(t)$ has to be real, the part inside the parentheses has to be real, which means the two terms are complex conjugates of each other. This means that if $C_1 = C e^{i\phi}$, then we must have $C_2 = C e^{-i\phi}$. Making this substitution leads to

$$x_{\text{underdamped}}(t) = 2C e^{-\gamma t/2} \cos(\omega t + \phi) \quad (13)$$

Overdamping: Note that μ_1 and μ_2 are simply the two solutions to the characteristic equation, so we are left with a simple sum of exponentials:

$$C_1 e^{-\mu_1 t} + C_2 e^{-\mu_2 t}, \quad (14)$$

obtained by straightforward substitution.

Critical Damping: There is only one root, so a naive guess may be that $x(t) = C e^{-\gamma/2 t}$, but this cannot be the case as there is only one parameter, C , which cannot satisfy two freely chosen initial conditions (i.e. initial position and velocity). It turns out (covered in ESC194) that another solution is $t e^{-\gamma/2 t}$, so the full solution is the linear combination

$$x_{\text{critically damped}}(t) = C_1 e^{-\gamma/2 t} + C_2 t e^{-\gamma/2 t} \quad (15)$$

$$= (C_1 + C_2 t) e^{-\gamma/2 t} \quad (16)$$