

# Laplace Transform and Transfer Functions

## Control Theory, Lecture 4

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- Laplace Transform
- Laplace Transform of a derivative
- Transfer Functions
- State-Space to Transfer Function conversion
- Closed-loop
- Partial-fraction expansion

By definition, Laplace transform of a function  $f(t)$  is given as:

$$F(s) = \int_0^{\infty} f(t)e^{-st}dt \quad (1)$$

where  $F(s)$  is called an *image* of the function.

The study of Laplace transform is a separate mathematical field with applications in solving ODEs, which we won't cover.

However, we will consider transform of one case of interest - transform of a derivative.

# LAPLACE TRANSFORM OF A DERIVATIVE

Consider a derivative  $\frac{dx}{dt}$  and its transform:

$$\mathcal{L}\left(\frac{dx}{dt}\right) = \int_0^{\infty} \frac{dx}{dt} e^{-st} dt \quad (2)$$

we will make use of the integration by parts formula:

Integration by parts

$$\int v \frac{du}{dt} dt = vu - \int \frac{dv}{dt} u dt \quad (3)$$

In our case,  $\frac{du}{dt} = \frac{dx}{dt}$ ,  $u = x$ ,  $v = e^{-st}$ ,  $\frac{dv}{dt} = -se^{-st}$ :

$$\mathcal{L}\left(\frac{dx}{dt}\right) = [xe^{-st}]_0^{\infty} - \int_0^{\infty} -se^{-st} x dt \quad (4)$$

$$\mathcal{L}\left(\frac{dx}{dt}\right) = -x(0) + s\mathcal{L}(x) \quad (5)$$

Thus, assuming that  $x(0) = 0$  and denoting  $\mathcal{L}(x) = X(s)$ , we can obtain a *derivative operator*:

$$\mathcal{L}\left(\frac{dx}{dt}\right) = s\mathcal{L}(x) = sX(s) \quad (6)$$

This form of a derivative operator is very simple to use in practice.

Consider the following ODE, where  $u$  is an input (function of time that influences the solution of the ODE):

$$\ddot{y} + a\dot{y} + by = u \quad (7)$$

We can rewrite it using the derivative operator:

$$s^2Y(s) + asY(s) + bY(s) = U(s) \quad (8)$$

and then collect  $Y(s)$  on the left-hand-side:

$$Y(s) = \frac{1}{s^2 + as + b}U(s) \quad (9)$$

where expression  $\frac{1}{s^2+as+b}$  is called a *transfer function*. A transfer function maps an input signal to an output signal.

# TRANSFER FUNCTION

## Examples

### Example

Given ODE:  $2\ddot{y} + 5\dot{y} - 40y = 10u$

Its transfer function representation:  $Y(s) = \frac{10}{2s^3 + 5s - 40}U(s)$

### Example

Given ODE:  $2\dot{y} - 4y = u$

Its transfer function representation:  $Y(s) = \frac{1}{2s - 4}U(s)$

### Example

Given ODE:  $3\ddot{y} + 4y = u$

Its transfer function representation:  $Y(s) = \frac{1}{2s^3 + 4}U(s)$

Consider the following ODE:

$$2\ddot{y} + 3\dot{y} + 2y = 10\dot{u} - u \quad (10)$$

In the Laplace domain it takes form:

$$2s^2Y(s) + 3sY(s) + 2Y(s) = 10sU(s) - U(s) \quad (11)$$

$$(2s^2 + 3s + 2)Y(s) = (10s - 1)U(s) \quad (12)$$

The transfer function representation:

$$Y(s) = \frac{10s - 1}{2s^2 + 3s + 2}U(s) \quad (13)$$



Consider the control law:

$$u = -k_p y - k_d \dot{y} \quad (14)$$

Transfer function representation of this control law is:

$$U(s) = -(k_d s + k_p) Y(s) \quad (15)$$

# STATE-SPACE TO TRANSFER FUNCTION CONVERSION

Transfer functions are being used to study the relation between the input and the output of the dynamical system.

Consider standard form state-space dynamical system:

$$\begin{cases} \dot{\mathbf{x}} = \mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} + \mathbf{B}\mathbf{u} \\ \mathbf{y} = \mathbf{C}\mathbf{x} + \mathbf{D}\mathbf{u} \end{cases} \quad (16)$$

We can rewrite it using the derivative operator:

$$\begin{cases} s\mathbf{I}\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{B}\mathbf{u} \\ \mathbf{y} = \mathbf{C}\mathbf{x} + \mathbf{D}\mathbf{u} \end{cases} \quad (17)$$

and then collect  $\mathbf{x}$  on the left-hand-side:  $\mathbf{x} = (s\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{A})^{-1}\mathbf{B}\mathbf{u}$   
and finally, express  $\mathbf{y}$  out:

$$\mathbf{y} = (\mathbf{C}(s\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{A})^{-1}\mathbf{B} + \mathbf{D}) \mathbf{u} \quad (18)$$

Consider a linear ODE, and its equivalent representations as a state space equation and as a transfer function:

$$a_n y^{(n)} + \dots + a_1 \dot{y} + a_0 y = b_m u^{(m)} + \dots + b_1 \dot{u} + b_0 u \quad (19)$$

$$\begin{cases} \dot{\mathbf{x}} = \mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} + \mathbf{B}\mathbf{u} \\ \mathbf{y} = \mathbf{C}\mathbf{x} + \mathbf{D}\mathbf{u} \end{cases} \quad (20)$$

$$Y(s) = G(s)U(s) \quad (21)$$

We can call it a *system*  $\mathcal{G}$  to avoid referencing particular representation.

Open-loop system representation is  $Y(s) = G(s)U(s)$ . Let us propose a control law (in time domain):

$$u(t) = k_p(v(t) - y(t)) + k_d(\dot{v}(t) - \dot{y}(t)) \quad (22)$$

where  $v(t)$  is a control reference. Laplace transform of this control law takes form:

$$U(s) = (k_p + k_d s)(V(s) - Y(s)) \quad (23)$$

Defining  $H(s) = k_p + k_d s$  the closed loop system takes form:

$$Y(s) = G(s)H(s)(V(s) - Y(s)) \quad (24)$$

$$Y(s) = -G(s)H(s)Y(s) + G(s)H(s)V(s) \quad (25)$$

$$(1 + G(s)H(s))Y(s) = G(s)H(s)V(s) \quad (26)$$

$$Y(s) = \frac{G(s)H(s)}{1 + G(s)H(s)}V(s) \quad (27)$$

Alternatively, we can define a new reference signal  $r(t)$ :

$$r(t) = k_p v(t) + k_d \dot{v}(t) \quad (28)$$

The previous control law takes form:

$$u(t) = -k_p y(t) - k_d \dot{y}(t) + r(t) \quad (29)$$

Laplace transform of this control law:

$$U(s) = -H(s)Y(s) + R(s) \quad (30)$$

The closed loop system:

$$Y(s) = -G(s)H(s)Y(s) + G(s)R(s) \quad (31)$$

$$Y(s) + G(s)H(s)Y(s) = G(s)R(s) \quad (32)$$

$$Y(s) = \frac{G(s)}{1 + G(s)H(s)} R(s) \quad (33)$$

# LAPLACE TRANSFORM OF SIMPLE FUNCTIONS

Below are a few functions and their Laplace transform:

$$f(t) = e^{at} \qquad F(s) = \frac{1}{s - a}$$

$$f(t) = \cos(\omega t) \qquad F(s) = \frac{s}{s^2 + \omega^2}$$

$$f(t) = \sin(\omega t) \qquad F(s) = \frac{\omega}{s^2 + \omega^2}$$

$$f(t) = e^{at}(A \cos(\omega t) + B \sin(\omega t)) \qquad F(s) = \frac{A(s - a) + B\omega}{(s - a)^2 + \omega^2}$$

Laplace transform is a linear operation. If  $F(s) = \mathcal{L}(f(t))$  and  $G(s) = \mathcal{L}(g(t))$ , then:

$$\mathcal{L}(af(t) + bg(t)) = aF(s) + bG(s) \qquad (34)$$

# PARTIAL-FRACTION EXPANSION, 1

Consider a transfer function  $G(s)$  which is a rational fraction:

$$G(s) = \frac{N(s)}{D(s)} = \frac{b_ms^m + \dots + b_1s + b_0}{a_ns^n + \dots + a_1s + a_0} \quad (35)$$

If the denominator polynomial  $D(s)$  has purely real non-repeating roots  $p_i$  (called *poles*) we can re-write it as:

$$G(s) = \frac{N(s)}{(s - p_1)(s - p_2) \dots (s - p_n)} \quad (36)$$

If the degree of  $D(s)$  is higher than the degree of  $N(s)$ , then we can perform a partial-fraction expansion:

$$G(s) = \frac{N(s)}{(s - p_1)(s - p_2) \dots (s - p_n)} = \frac{r_1}{s - p_1} + \frac{r_2}{s - p_2} + \dots + \frac{r_n}{s - p_n}$$

where constants  $r_i$  are called *residues*.

Let us consider  $G(s)$  after the expansion:

$$G(s) = \frac{r_1}{s - p_1} + \frac{r_2}{s - p_2} + \dots + \frac{r_n}{s - p_n}$$

We know that  $F(s) = \frac{r_i}{s - p_i}$  is a Laplace image of the time domain function  $f(t) = r_i e^{p_i t}$ . Hence, the *inverse Laplace transform* of  $G(s)$  is given as:

$$y(t) = r_1 e^{p_1 t} + \dots + r_n e^{p_n t},$$

As we can see, the Laplace transform and its inverse, paired with partial-fraction expansion allow us to solve ordinary differential equations.



## PARTIAL-FRACTION EXPANSION, 3

If the denominator polynomial  $D(s)$  has both real and imaginary roots we can re-write it as:

$$G(s) = \frac{N(s)}{(s - p_1) \dots (s - p_k)(s^2 + \alpha_1 s + \beta_1) \dots (s^2 + \alpha_l s + \beta_l)} \quad (37)$$

If the degree of  $D(s)$  is lower or equal to that of  $N(s)$  we can divide the numerator by the denominator:

$$G(s) = R(s) + \frac{M(s)}{(s - p_1) \dots (s^2 + \alpha_l s + \beta_l)}$$

where degree of  $M(s)$  is less than that of  $D(s)$ . We can then perform a partial-fraction expansion:

$$G(s) = R(s) + \frac{r_1}{s - p_1} + \dots + \frac{r_k}{s - p_k} + \frac{q_1 s + h_1}{s^2 + \alpha_1 s + \beta_1} + \dots + \frac{q_l s + h_l}{s^2 + \alpha_l s + \beta_l}$$

Note that the Laplace domain function  $F(s) = \frac{qs+h}{s^2+\alpha s+\beta}$  is an image of the time function:

$$e^{at}(A \cos(\omega t) + B \sin(\omega t)) = \mathcal{L}^{-1} \left( \frac{qs + h}{s^2 + \alpha s + \beta} \right)$$

Partial-fraction expansion can be performed using MATLAB or Python:

- In MATLAB `[r,p,k] = residue(b,a)`
- In Python `r,p,k = scipy.signal.residue(b,a)`

In both cases, **a** are the coefficients of the denominator and **b** are the coefficients of the numerator.

- Nise, N.S. Control systems engineering. John Wiley & Sons. (Chapter 2 Modeling in the Frequency Domain)
- Matthew M. Peet; Systems Analysis and Control - Lecture 7: The Partial Fraction Expansion
- Chapter 6 Transfer Functions
- Control Systems Lectures - Transfer Functions, by Brian Douglas
- The Laplace Transform - A Graphical Approach, by Brian Douglas

Lecture slides are available via Github:

[github.com/SergeiSa/Control-Theory-2025](https://github.com/SergeiSa/Control-Theory-2025)

