

Spin operators from scratch

By definition of expectation value we have

$$\langle S_x \rangle = \frac{\hbar}{2} \Pr\left(\frac{\hbar}{2}\right) + \left(-\frac{\hbar}{2}\right) \Pr\left(-\frac{\hbar}{2}\right)$$

Rewrite probability as amplitude squared.

$$\langle S_x \rangle = \frac{\hbar}{2} |\langle x_+ | s \rangle|^2 - \frac{\hbar}{2} |\langle x_- | s \rangle|^2$$

Equivalently

$$\langle S_x \rangle = \frac{\hbar}{2} \langle s | x_+ \rangle \langle x_+ | s \rangle - \frac{\hbar}{2} \langle s | x_- \rangle \langle x_- | s \rangle$$

Factor out spin state $|s\rangle$.

$$\langle S_x \rangle = \langle s | \left(\frac{\hbar}{2} |x_+ \rangle \langle x_+| - \frac{\hbar}{2} |x_- \rangle \langle x_-| \right) |s\rangle$$

Rewrite as

$$\langle S_x \rangle = \langle s | S_x | s \rangle$$

where

$$S_x = \frac{\hbar}{2} |x_+ \rangle \langle x_+| - \frac{\hbar}{2} |x_- \rangle \langle x_-|$$

From basis states

$$x_+ = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix}, \quad x_- = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ -1 \end{pmatrix}$$

we have outer products

$$|x_+ \rangle \langle x_+| = \frac{1}{2} \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 \end{pmatrix}, \quad |x_- \rangle \langle x_-| = \frac{1}{2} \begin{pmatrix} 1 & -1 \\ -1 & 1 \end{pmatrix}$$

Hence

$$S_x = \frac{\hbar}{4} \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 \end{pmatrix} - \frac{\hbar}{4} \begin{pmatrix} 1 & -1 \\ -1 & 1 \end{pmatrix} = \frac{\hbar}{2} \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

Repeat for S_y and S_z .