

Conclusion

This final problem set wraps up some loose ends and points out a way forward.

1 Partial Derivatives

In **T2**, we mentioned a few more advanced rules for using partial derivatives. In this section we'll consider some problems that require them.

- [2] **Problem 1.** For a function $f(x, y)$ with differential

$$df = f_x dx + f_y dy$$

prove that the identity

$$\left. \frac{\partial f_x}{\partial y} \right|_x = \left. \frac{\partial f_y}{\partial x} \right|_y$$

must be satisfied. Conversely, if you are given a differential that doesn't satisfy this, you can be sure that it's not the differential of *any* function. For an ideal gas, write down the differential dQ in terms of dT and dV , and use it to prove that Q is not a state function.

- [2] **Problem 2.** Starting from the differential $dU = -P dV + T dS$, show that

$$-\left. \frac{\partial P}{\partial S} \right|_V = \left. \frac{\partial T}{\partial V} \right|_S.$$

This is an example of a Maxwell relation.

- [3] **Problem 3** (Blundell 12.2). Consider a gas with the equation of state $PV = f(T)$. Show that

$$\left. \frac{\partial P}{\partial T} \right|_V = \frac{1}{V} \frac{df}{dT}, \quad \left. \frac{\partial V}{\partial T} \right|_p = \frac{1}{p} \frac{df}{dT}.$$

Also show that

$$\left. \frac{\partial Q}{\partial V} \right|_P = C_P \left. \frac{\partial T}{\partial V} \right|_P, \quad \left. \frac{\partial Q}{\partial P} \right|_V = C_V \left. \frac{\partial T}{\partial P} \right|_V.$$

In an adiabatic process, we have $dQ = 0$. By taking the differential with respect to dp and dV , show that PV^γ is constant, thus generalizing the rule for adiabatic processes for ideal gases.

- [3] **Problem 4** (Kardar). We know from kinetic theory and the equipartition theorem that the energy of an ideal gas depends only on the temperature. However, this can also be deduced from pure thermodynamics. Starting from $dE = T dS - P dV$, show that $PV = Nk_B T$ implies that E can only depend on T . You will have to use a Maxwell relation.

- [3] **Problem 5.**  [INPhO 2020, problem 1.](#)

2 Extra Problems

In **W1** through **W3**, we studied waves that were described by linear equations. There are many subtle new features that appear when we allow for nonlinearity. Unfortunately, they're so subtle that the vast majority of university physics degrees never cover *any* of this subject. (For example, at my institution, Stanford, there aren't any physics courses that cover nonlinear waves even at the graduate level; you have to go to other departments to find them.) So if you solve the below problems, you'll know more about them than almost all physicists!

[5] **Problem 6.** ⌚ [GPhO 2017, problem 3](#). A pedagogical question on shock waves, a nonlinear wave effect. For background, see chapter 32 of Blundell.

[5] **Problem 7.** ⌚ IPhO 2008, problem 2. On Cherenkov radiation, a famous shock wave effect.

The following questions contain applied physics topics. They were not included in the main problem sets mostly because they used a variety of topics about equally, but they're great review practice.

[5] **Problem 8.** ⌚ IPhO 2013, problem 2. A rather long but straightforward problem, with many numerical calculations, illustrating a real practical setup in detail. Use the data sheet of physical constants provided in the folder.

[5] **Problem 9.** ⌚ IPhO 2013, problem 3. A solid question on an ice sheet, using thermo and data analysis. Use the data sheet of physical constants provided in the folder.

[5] **Problem 10.** ⌚ [IZhO 2022, problem 2](#). A practical problem on estimating the greenhouse effect.

[5] **Problem 11.** ⌚ IPhO 2018, problem 3. Some models in biophysics, using fluids and thermo.

[5] **Problem 12.** ⌚ IPhO 2021, problem 1. The basics of geophysics, using fluids and waves.

[4] **Problem 13.** ⌚ [GPhO 2022, problem 2](#). Some simple estimates involving renewable energy.

[5] **Problem 14.** ⌚ APhO 2014, problem 1. A very hard problem on atmospheric convection.

[5] **Problem 15.** ⌚ APhO 2012, problem 3. A somewhat technical problem that combines polarization and interference, to derive a neat effect called a "geometric phase".

3 Extra Olympiads

If you’ve made it this far, you’re probably training for the IPhO. I’ve reserved questions from a few Olympiads you can take as full-length exams for practice. Note that NBPhO exams are usually 2 days long, with 5 hours per day. However, they include experimental questions that you can’t do at home, and they’re somewhat easier than the IPhO, APhO, or EuPhO, so I’ve adjusted the time limits accordingly.

- [8] **Problem 16.** 🕒 USAPhO 2003.
- [8] **Problem 17.** 🕒 USAPhO 2005.
- [10] **Problem 18.** 🕒 USAPhO 2001.
- [10] **Problem 19.** 🕒 USAPhO 2000.
- [12] **Problem 20.** 🕒 [NBPhO 2021](#).
- [12] **Problem 21.** 🕒 [NBPhO 2019](#).
- [12] **Problem 22.** 🕒 [GPhO 2019](#).
- [15] **Problem 23.** 🕒 IPhO 2015.
- [15] **Problem 24.** 🕒 [NBPhO 2022](#).
- [18] **Problem 25.** 🕒 [EuPhO 2020](#).
- [18] **Problem 26.** 🕒 APhO 2017.
- [20] **Problem 27.** 🕒 IPhO 2019.
- [20] **Problem 28.** 🕒 [EuPhO 2021](#).
- [20] **Problem 29.** 🕒 APhO 2019.

Once you finish this and get your IPhO medal, you’ve definitely outgrown Olympiad physics. The stuff covered in Olympiads *is* real physics – the rough estimates and calculations a physicist would do when exploring a new idea actually resemble what you see in IPhO and APhO problems. But the IPhO and APhO are restricted by a syllabus that assumes very little mathematical background. There is a whole lot more beautiful, fascinating stuff you can do once you pick up vector calculus and linear algebra, the two most important pieces of the physicist’s toolkit. For more advice on what you can do next, see my [second advice file](#). You have a lot of options, and you’ve earned it.