

Scattering of Photons

Marcus Allen Denslow

2026-01-14

Contents

Chapter 1	Scattering of Photons	Page 2
1.1	Scattering of Photons	2

Chapter 1

Scattering of Photons

1.1 Scattering of Photons

In the scattering of photons, for example from an atom, an initial state photon with wave-number \vec{k} and polarization $\hat{\epsilon}$ is absorbed by the atom and a final state photon with wave-number \vec{k}' and polarization $\hat{\epsilon}'$ is emitted. The atom may remain in the same state (elastic scattering) or it may change to another state (inelastic). Any calculation we will do will use the matrix element of the interaction Hamiltonian between initial and final states.

$$\mathbf{H}_{ni} = \left\langle n; \vec{k}' \hat{\epsilon}'^{(\alpha')} | \mathbf{H}_{int} | i; \vec{k} \hat{\epsilon}^{(\alpha)} \right\rangle$$

$$\mathbf{H}_{int} = -\frac{e}{mc} \vec{A}(x) \cdot \vec{p} + \frac{e^2}{2mc^2} \vec{A} \cdot \vec{A}.$$

The scattering process clearly requires terms in \mathbf{H}_{int} that annihilate one photon and create another. The order does not matter. The $\frac{e^2}{2mc^2} \vec{A} \cdot \vec{A}$ is the square of the Fourier decomposition of the radiation field so it contains terms like $a_{k',\alpha'}^\dagger a_{k,\alpha}$, which are just what we want. The $-\frac{e}{mc} \vec{A} \cdot \vec{p}$ term has both creation and annihilation operators in it but not products of them. It changes the number of photons by plus or minus one, not by zero as required for the scattering process. Nevertheless this part of the interaction could contribute in second order perturbation theory, by absorbing one photon in a transition from the initial atomic state to an intermediate state, then emitting another photon and making a transition to the final atomic state. While this is higher order in perturbation theory, it is the same order in the electromagnetic coupling constant e , which is what really counts when expanding in powers of α . Therefore, we will need to consider the $\frac{e^2}{2mc^2} \vec{A} \cdot \vec{A}$ term in first order and the $-\frac{e}{mc} \vec{A} \cdot \vec{p}$ term in the second order perturbation theory to get an order α calculation of the matrix element. Start with the first order perturbation theory term. All the terms in the sum that do not annihilate the initial state photon and create the final state photon give zero. We will assume that the wavelength of the photon's is long compared to the size of the atom so that $e^{i\vec{k} \cdot \vec{r}} \approx 1$

$$A_\mu(x) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{V}} \sum_{k\alpha} \sqrt{\frac{\hbar c^2}{2\omega}} \epsilon_\mu^{(\alpha)} \left(a_{k,\alpha}(0) e^{ik_p x_p} + a_{k,\alpha}^\dagger(0) e^{-ik_p x_p} \right)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{e^2}{2mc^2} \left\langle n; \vec{k}' \hat{\epsilon}'^{(\alpha')} | \vec{A} \cdot \vec{A} | i; \vec{k} \hat{\epsilon}^{(\alpha)} \right\rangle &= \frac{e^2}{2mc^2} \frac{1}{V} \frac{\hbar c^2}{2\sqrt{\omega'\omega}} \epsilon_\mu^{(\alpha)} \epsilon_\mu^{(\alpha')} \left\langle n; \vec{k}' \hat{\epsilon}'^{(\alpha')} \left| \left(a_{k,\alpha} a_{k',\alpha'}^\dagger + a_{k',\alpha'}^\dagger a_{k,\alpha} \right) e^{i(k_p - k'_p)x_p} \right| i; \vec{k} \hat{\epsilon}^{(\alpha)} \right\rangle \\ &= \frac{e^2}{2mc^2} \frac{1}{V} \frac{\hbar c^2}{2\sqrt{\omega'\omega}} \epsilon_\mu^{(\alpha)} \epsilon_\mu^{(\alpha')} e^{-i(\omega - \omega')t} \left\langle n; \vec{k}' \hat{\epsilon}'^{(\alpha')} | 2 | i; \vec{k} \hat{\epsilon}^{(\alpha)} \right\rangle \\ &= \frac{e^2}{2mc^2} \frac{1}{V} \frac{\hbar c^2}{2\sqrt{\omega'\omega}} \epsilon_\mu^{(\alpha)} \epsilon_\mu^{(\alpha')} e^{-i(\omega - \omega')t} 2 \langle n | i \rangle \\ &= \frac{e^2}{2mc^2} \frac{1}{V} \frac{\hbar c^2}{\sqrt{\omega'\omega}} \epsilon_\mu^{(\alpha)} \epsilon_\mu^{(\alpha')} e^{-i(\omega - \omega')t} \delta_{ni}. \end{aligned}$$

This is the matrix element $\mathbf{H}_{ni}(t)$. The amplitude to be in the final state $|n; \vec{k}' \hat{\epsilon}^{(\alpha')}\rangle$ is given by first order time dependent perturbation theory.

$$\begin{aligned} c_n^{(1)}(t) &= \frac{1}{i\hbar} \int_0^t e^{i\omega_{ni}t'} \mathbf{H}_{ni}(t') dt' \\ c_{n; \vec{k}' \hat{\epsilon}^{(\alpha')}}^{(1)}(t) &= \frac{1}{i\hbar} \frac{e^2}{2mc^2} \frac{1}{V} \frac{\hbar c^2}{\sqrt{\omega' \omega}} \epsilon_\mu^{(\alpha)} \epsilon_\mu^{(\alpha')} \delta_{ni} \int_0^t e^{i\omega_{ni}t'} e^{-i(\omega - \omega')t'} dt' \\ &= \frac{e^2}{2imV\sqrt{\omega' \omega}} \hat{\epsilon}^{(\alpha)} \cdot \hat{\epsilon}^{(\alpha')} \delta_{ni} \int_0^t e^{i(\omega_{ni} + \omega' - \omega)t'} dt'. \end{aligned}$$

Recall that the absolute square of the time integral will turn into $2\pi t \delta(\omega_{ni} + \omega' - \omega)$. We will carry along the integral for now, since we are not yet ready to square it.

Now we very carefully put the interaction term into the formula for second order time dependent perturbation theory, again using $e^{i\vec{k} \cdot \vec{x}} \approx 1$. Our notation is that the intermediate state of atom and field is called $|I\rangle = |j, n_{\vec{k}, \alpha}, n_{\vec{k}', \alpha'}\rangle$ where \mathbf{j} represents the state of the atom and we may have zero or two photons, as indicated in the diagram.

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{V} &= -\frac{e}{mc} \vec{A} \cdot \vec{p} \equiv -\frac{e}{mc} \frac{1}{\sqrt{V}} \sum_{\vec{k}, \alpha} \sqrt{\frac{\hbar c^2}{2\omega}} \hat{\epsilon}^{(\alpha)} \cdot \vec{p} \left(a_{\vec{k}, \alpha} e^{-i\omega t} + a_{\vec{k}, \alpha}^\dagger e^{i\omega t} \right) \\ c_n^{(2)}(t) &= -\frac{1}{\hbar^2} \sum_{j, \vec{k}, \alpha} \int_0^t dt_2 \mathcal{V}_{nI}(t_2) e^{i\omega_{nj}t_2} \int_0^{t_2} dt_1 e^{i\omega_{ji}t_1} \mathcal{V}_{Ii}(t_1) \\ c_{n; \vec{k}' \hat{\epsilon}^{(\alpha')}}^{(2)}(t) &= -\frac{e^2}{m^2 c^2 \hbar^2} \sum_I \frac{1}{V} \frac{\hbar c^2}{2\sqrt{\omega' \omega}} \int_0^t dt_2 \langle n; \vec{k}' \hat{\epsilon}^{(\alpha')} | \left(\hat{\epsilon}^{(\alpha)} a_{\vec{k}, \alpha} e^{-i\omega t_2} + \hat{\epsilon}^{(\alpha')} a_{\vec{k}', \alpha'}^\dagger e^{i\omega' t_2} \right) \cdot \vec{p} | I \rangle e^{i\omega_{nj}t_2} \\ &\quad \times \int_0^{t_2} dt_1 e^{i\omega_{ji}t_1} \langle I | \hat{\epsilon}^{(\alpha)} a_{\vec{k}, \alpha} e^{-i\omega t_1} + \hat{\epsilon}^{(\alpha')} a_{\vec{k}', \alpha'}^\dagger e^{i\omega' t_1} \cdot \vec{p} | i; \vec{k} \hat{\epsilon}^{(\alpha)} \rangle. \end{aligned}$$

We can understand this formula as a second order transition from state $|i\rangle$ to state $|n\rangle$ through all possible intermediate states. The transition from the initial state to the intermediate state takes place at time t_1 . The transition from the intermediate state to the final state takes place at time t_2 .

The space-time diagram below shows the three terms in $c_n(t)$. Time is assumed to run upwards in the diagrams.

Diagram (c) represents the A^2 term in which one photon is absorbed and one emitted at the same point. Diagrams (a) and (b) represent two second order terms. In diagram (a) the initial state photon is absorbed at time t_1 , leaving the atom in an intermediate state which may or may not be the same as the initial (or final) atomic state. This intermediate state has no photons in the field. In diagram (b), the atom emits the final state photon at time t_1 , leaving the atom in some intermediate state. The intermediate state $|I\rangle$ includes two photons in the field for this diagram. At time t_2 the atom absorbs the initial state photon.

Looking again at the formula for the second order scattering amplitude