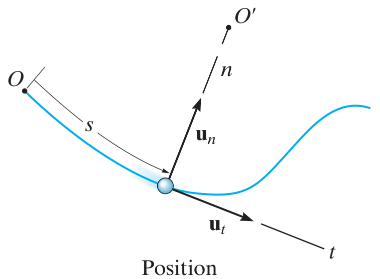
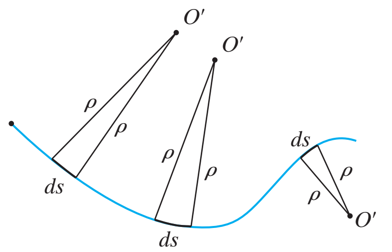
12.7 Curvilinear Motion: Normal and Tangential Components



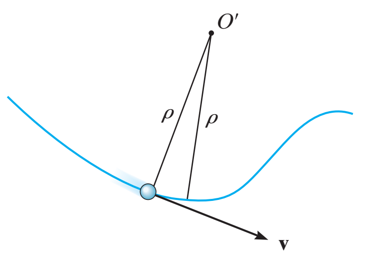
Position

(a)



Radius of curvature

(b)



Velocity

(c)

Fig. 12–24

When the path along which a particle travels is *known*, then it is often convenient to describe the motion using n and t coordinate axes which act normal and tangent to the path, respectively, and at the instant considered have their *origin located at the particle*.

Planar Motion. Consider the particle shown in Fig. 12–24*a*, which moves in a plane along a fixed curve, such that at a given instant it is at position s, measured from point O. We will now consider a coordinate system that has its origin on the curve, and at the instant considered this origin happens to *coincide* with the location of the particle. The t axis is *tangent* to the curve at the point and is positive in the direction of *increasing* s. We will designate this positive direction with the unit vector $\mathbf{u}_t$. A unique choice for the *normal axis* can be made by noting that geometrically the curve is constructed from a series of differential arc segments ds, Fig. 12–24*b*. Each segment ds is formed from the arc of an associated circle having a *radius of curvature* ρ (rho) and *center of curvature* O'. The normal axis n is perpendicular to the t axis with its positive sense directed *toward* the center of curvature O', Fig. 12–24*a*. This positive direction, which is *always* on the concave side of the curve, will be designated by the unit vector $\mathbf{u}_n$. The plane which contains the n and t axes is referred to as the embracing or *osculating plane*, and in this case it is fixed in the plane of motion.*

Velocity. Since the particle moves, s is a function of time. As indicated in Sec. 12.4, the particle's velocity $\mathbf{v}$ has a *direction* that is *always tangent to the path*, Fig. 12–24*c*, and a *magnitude* that is determined by taking the time derivative of the path function $s = s(t)$, i.e., $v = ds/dt$ (Eq. 12–8). Hence

$$\boxed{\mathbf{v} = v\mathbf{u}_t} \tag{12–15}$$

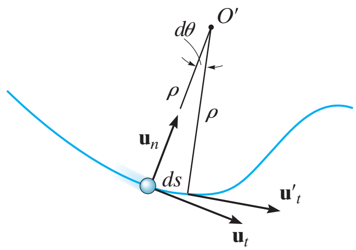
where

$$\boxed{v = \dot{s}} \tag{12–16}$$

*The osculating plane may also be defined as the plane which has the greatest contact with the curve at a point. It is the limiting position of a plane contacting both the point and the arc segment ds. As noted above, the osculating plane is always coincident with a plane curve; however, each point on a three-dimensional curve has a unique osculating plane.

Acceleration. The acceleration of the particle is the time rate of change of the velocity. Thus,

$$\mathbf{a} = \dot{\mathbf{v}} = \dot{v}\mathbf{u}_t + v\dot{\mathbf{u}}_t \tag{12–17}$$

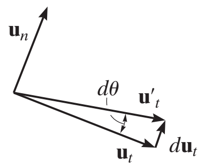


(d)

In order to determine the time derivative $\dot{\mathbf{u}}_t$, note that as the particle moves along the arc ds in time dt, $\mathbf{u}_t$ preserves its magnitude of unity; however, its *direction* changes, and becomes $\mathbf{u}'_t$, Fig. 12–24*d*. As shown in Fig. 12–24*e*, we require $\mathbf{u}'_t = \mathbf{u}_t + d\mathbf{u}_t$. Here $d\mathbf{u}_t$ stretches between the arrowheads of $\mathbf{u}_t$ and $\mathbf{u}'_t$, which lie on an infinitesimal arc of radius $u_t = 1$. Hence, $d\mathbf{u}_t$ has a *magnitude* of $du_t = (1)\,d\theta$, and its *direction* is defined by $\mathbf{u}_n$. Consequently, $d\mathbf{u}_t = d\theta\mathbf{u}_n$, and therefore the time derivative becomes $\dot{\mathbf{u}}_t = \dot{\theta}\mathbf{u}_n$. Since $ds = \rho d\theta$, Fig. 12–24*d*, then $\dot{\theta} = \dot{s}/\rho$, and therefore

$$\dot{\mathbf{u}}_t = \dot{\theta}\mathbf{u}_n = \frac{\dot{s}}{\rho}\mathbf{u}_n = \frac{v}{\rho}\mathbf{u}_n$$

Substituting into Eq. 12–17, $\mathbf{a}$ can be written as the sum of its two components,



(e)

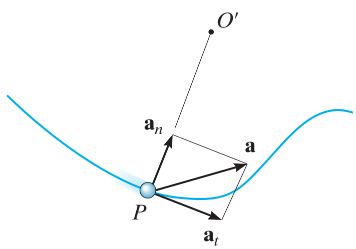
$$\boxed{\mathbf{a} = a_t\mathbf{u}_t + a_n\mathbf{u}_n} \tag{12–18}$$

where

$$\boxed{a_t = \dot{v}} \quad \text{or} \quad \boxed{a_t ds = v\,dv} \tag{12–19}$$

and

$$\boxed{a_n = \frac{v^2}{\rho}} \tag{12–20}$$



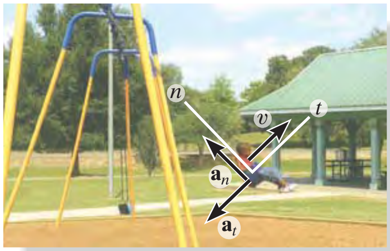
Acceleration

(f)

Fig. 12–24 (cont.)

These two mutually perpendicular components are shown in Fig. 12–24*f*. Therefore, the *magnitude* of acceleration is the positive value of

$$a = \sqrt{a_t^2 + a_n^2} \tag{12–21}$$



As the boy swings upward with a velocity $\mathbf{v}$, his motion can be analyzed using n–t coordinates. As he rises, the magnitude of his velocity (speed) is decreasing, and so a_t will be negative. The rate at which the direction of his velocity changes is a_n, which is always positive, that is, towards the center of rotation. (© R.C. Hibbeler)

To better understand these results, consider the following two special cases of motion.

1. If the particle moves along a straight line, then $\rho \to \infty$ and from Eq. 12–20, $a_n = 0$. Thus $a = a_t = \dot{v}$, and we can conclude that the *tangential component of acceleration represents the time rate of change in the magnitude of the velocity.*
2. If the particle moves along a curve with a constant speed, then $a_t = \dot{v} = 0$ and $a = a_n = v^2/\rho$. Therefore, the *normal component of acceleration represents the time rate of change in the direction of the velocity*. Since $\mathbf{a}_n$ *always* acts towards the center of curvature, this component is sometimes referred to as the *centripetal* (or center seeking) *acceleration*.

As a result of these interpretations, a particle moving along the curved path in Fig. 12–25 will have accelerations directed as shown.

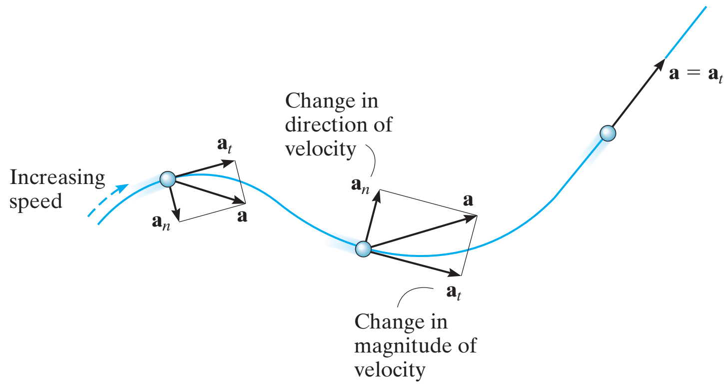


Fig. 12–25

Three-Dimensional Motion.

If the particle moves along a space curve, Fig. 12–26, then at a given instant the t axis is uniquely specified; however, an infinite number of straight lines can be constructed normal to the tangent axis. As in the case of planar motion, we will choose the positive n axis directed toward the path's center of curvature O'. This axis is referred to as the *principal normal* to the curve. With the n and t axes so defined, Eqs. 12–15 through 12–21 can be used to determine $\mathbf{v}$ and $\mathbf{a}$. Since $\mathbf{u}_t$ and $\mathbf{u}_n$ are always perpendicular to one another and lie in the osculating plane, for spatial motion a third unit vector, $\mathbf{u}_b$, defines the *binormal axis b* which is perpendicular to $\mathbf{u}_t$ and $\mathbf{u}_n$, Fig. 12–26.

Since the three unit vectors are related to one another by the vector cross product, e.g., $\mathbf{u}_b = \mathbf{u}_t \times \mathbf{u}_n$, Fig. 12–26, it may be possible to use this relation to establish the direction of one of the axes, if the directions of the other two are known. For example, no motion occurs in the $\mathbf{u}_b$ direction, and if this direction and $\mathbf{u}_t$ are known, then $\mathbf{u}_n$ can be determined, where in this case $\mathbf{u}_n = \mathbf{u}_b \times \mathbf{u}_t$, Fig. 12–26. Remember, though, that $\mathbf{u}_n$ is always on the concave side of the curve.

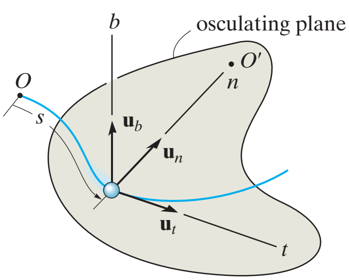


Fig. 12–26

Procedure for Analysis

Coordinate System.

- Provided the *path* of the particle is *known*, we can establish a set of n and t coordinates having a *fixed origin*, which is coincident with the particle at the instant considered.
- The positive tangent axis acts in the direction of motion and the positive normal axis is directed toward the path's center of curvature.

Velocity.

- The particle's *velocity* is always tangent to the path.
- The magnitude of velocity is found from the time derivative of the path function.

$$v = \dot{s}$$

Tangential Acceleration.

- The tangential component of acceleration is the result of the time rate of change in the *magnitude* of velocity. This component acts in the positive s direction if the particle's speed is increasing or in the opposite direction if the speed is decreasing.
- The relations between a_t, v, t, and s are the same as for rectilinear motion, namely,

$$a_t = \dot{v} \qquad a_t\,ds = v\,dv$$

- If a_t is constant, $a_t = (a_t)_c$, the above equations, when integrated, yield

$$s = s_0 + v_0 t + \tfrac{1}{2}(a_t)_c t^2$$
$$v = v_0 + (a_t)_c t$$
$$v^2 = v_0^2 + 2(a_t)_c(s - s_0)$$

Normal Acceleration.

- The normal component of acceleration is the result of the time rate of change in the *direction* of the velocity. This component is *always* directed toward the center of curvature of the path, i.e., along the positive n axis.
- The magnitude of this component is determined from

$$a_n = \frac{v^2}{\rho}$$

- If the path is expressed as $y = f(x)$, the radius of curvature ρ at any point on the path is determined from the equation

$$\rho = \frac{[1 + (dy/dx)^2]^{3/2}}{|d^2y/dx^2|}$$

The derivation of this result is given in any standard calculus text.

Once the rotation is constant, the riders will then have only a normal component of acceleration. (© R.C. Hibbeler)

Motorists traveling along this cloverleaf interchange experience a normal acceleration due to the change in direction of their velocity. A tangential component of acceleration occurs when the cars' speed is increased or decreased. (© R.C. Hibbeler)