

Electric Force

This activity covers topics in [Section 21.3 of Young and Freedman 2015, 14th Edition](#). If you need to review vectors, see [sections 1.6-1.8 of Young and Freedman 2015, 14th Edition](#) and [Vectors at Khan Academy](#).

1 Coulomb's Law

Magnitude

$$F_{1 \text{ on } 2} = F_{2 \text{ on } 1} = k \frac{|q_1 q_2|}{r^2}$$

where r is the distance between q_1 and q_2 . To simplify notation, we are using k in place of $1/4\pi\epsilon_0$. Note that by definition, the magnitude of a vector is positive, which is the reason for the use of the absolute value.

Direction: Along line that connects q_1 and q_2 . Direction depends on signs of q_1 and q_2 . (Likes repel, opposites attract.).

2 Example

Charge q_1 is at $(x, y) = (-a, -a)$ and charge q_2 is at (a, a) . Both charges have a charge of q .

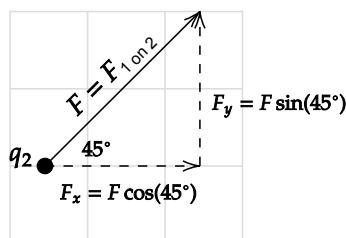
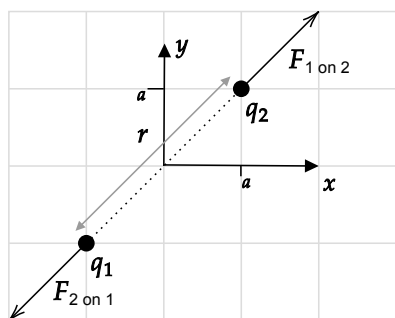
1. Find the magnitude and direction of the force of q_1 on q_2 .
2. Write the force of q_1 on q_2 in the form $\vec{F} = F_x \hat{i} + F_y \hat{j}$.
3. If the charges have opposite signs, how will your answers to 1. and 2. change?

Solution

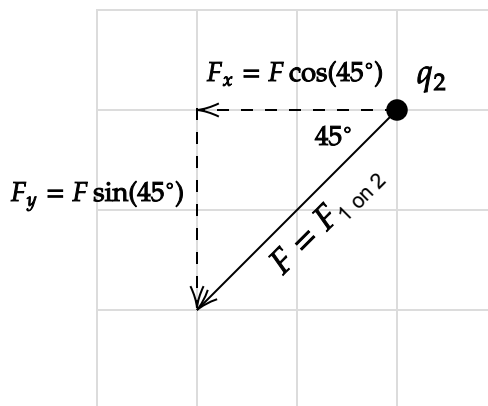
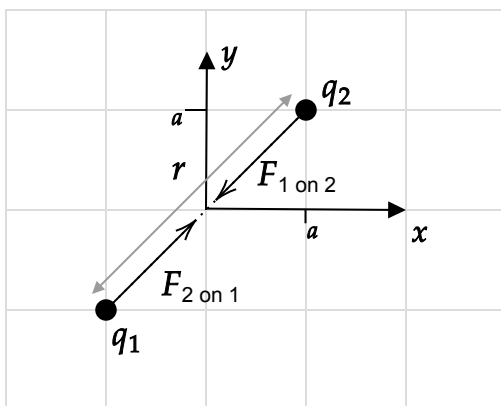
1. The distance between the charges is $r = \sqrt{(2a)^2 + (2a)^2} = \sqrt{8a^2}$, so

$$F_{1 \text{ on } 2} = k \frac{|q_1 q_2|}{r^2} = \frac{k|qq|}{(\sqrt{8a^2})^2} = \frac{kq^2}{8a^2}$$

The charges will repel each other, so the direction of forces of one on the other will be as shown in the left part of the following diagram.



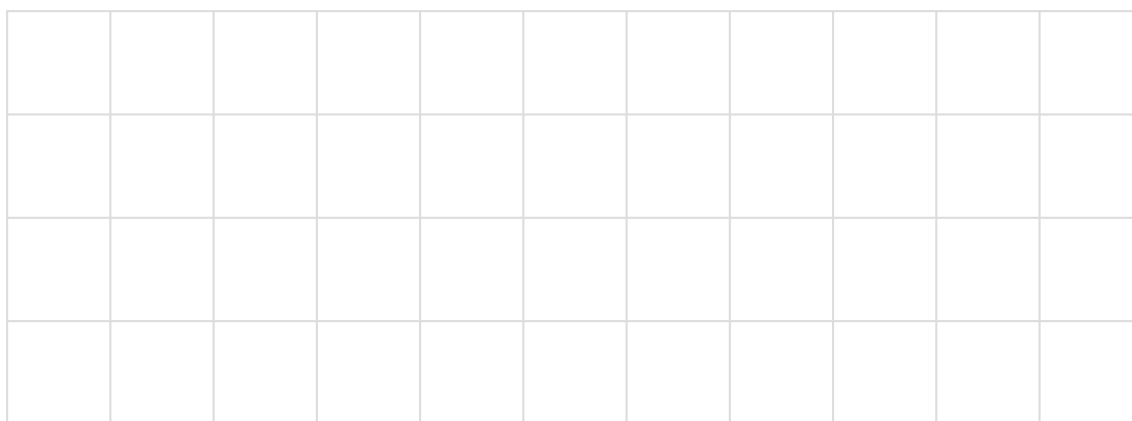
- Let $F = F_{1 \text{ on } 2}$ from part 1. to simplify notation. The right part of the above diagram shows the calculation of the components F_x and F_y , from which it follows that $\vec{F} = F \cos 45^\circ \hat{i} + F \sin 45^\circ \hat{j}$.
- The magnitude will not change (it is by definition a positive number). Assume “Opposite signs” means that one is positive and one is negative and still $|q_1| = |q_2| = q$. The force vectors will reverse direction as shown on the left in the following diagram. The diagram on the right shows the calculation of $\vec{F}_{1 \text{ on } 2}$, from which it follows that $\vec{F}_{1 \text{ on } 2} = -F \cos 45^\circ \hat{i} - F \sin 45^\circ \hat{j}$. Note that reversing the direction of a vector is the same as multiplying each of its components by -1 .



3 Problem I

Charge q_1 is at $(x, y) = (-a, a)$ and charge q_2 is at $(a, -a)$. Both charges have a charge of q . Draw this charge configuration and then using the steps in the previous example,

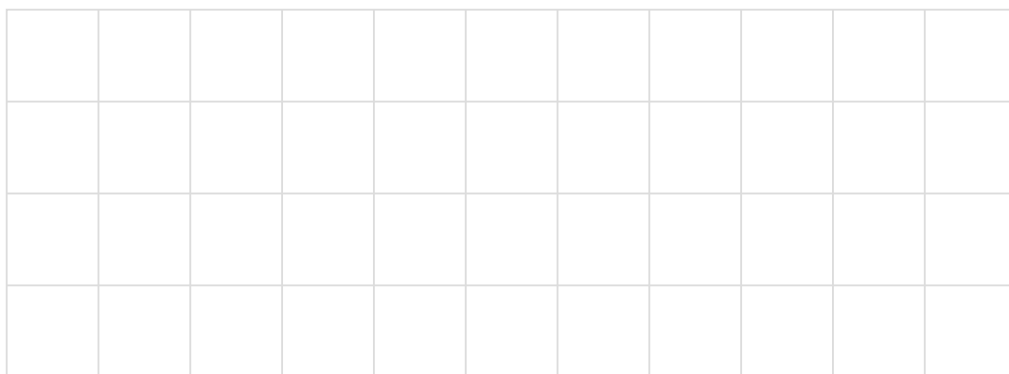
- Find the magnitude and direction of the force of q_1 on q_2 .
- Write the force of q_1 on q_2 in the form $\vec{F} = F_x \hat{i} + F_y \hat{j}$.
- If the charges have opposite signs, how will your answers to 1. and 2. change?



4 Problem II

Charge q_1 is at $(x, y) = (-a, a)$ and charge q_2 is at $(a, 0)$. Charge q_1 has a charge of $+q$. Charge q_2 has a charge of $+q$, where q is a positive number. Draw this charge configuration and then using the steps in the previous example,

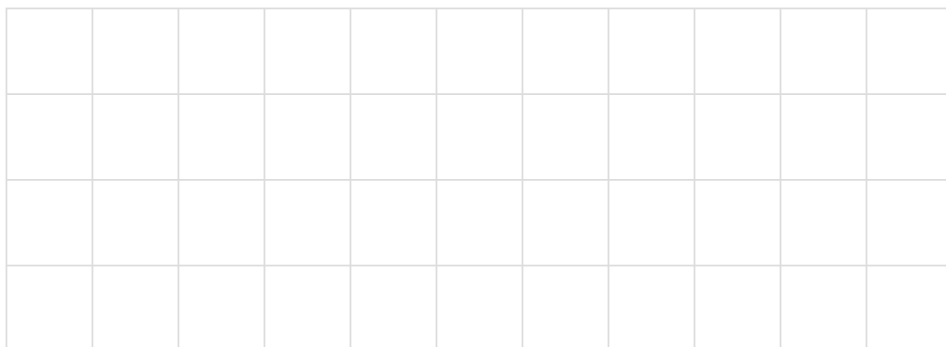
1. Find the magnitude and direction of the force of q_1 on q_2 .
2. Write the force of q_1 on q_2 in the form $\vec{\mathbf{F}} = F_x \hat{\mathbf{i}} + F_y \hat{\mathbf{j}}$.
3. If the charges have opposite signs, how will your answers to 1. and 2. change?



5 Problem III

Charge q_1 is at $(x, y) = (-a, 0)$ and charge q_2 is at $(0, 3a)$. Charge q_1 has a charge of $-q$. Charge q_2 has a charge of $+q$, where q is a positive number. Draw this charge configuration and then using the steps in the previous example,

1. Find the magnitude and direction of the force of q_1 on q_2 .
2. Write the force of q_1 on q_2 in the form $\vec{\mathbf{F}} = F_x \hat{\mathbf{i}} + F_y \hat{\mathbf{j}}$.
3. If the charges have opposite signs, how will your answers to 1. and 2. change?



6 Problem IV

Charge q_1 is at $(x, y) = (x_1, y_1)$ and charge q_2 is at (x_2, y_2) . Find the magnitude of the force of q_1 on q_2 .