

An airplane, flying at 450 km/hr at a constant altitude of 5 km is approaching a camera mounted on the ground. Let θ be the angle of elevation above the ground at which the camera is pointed.

1. Draw a well labeled picture of this situation and define all variables you will be using.

The figure was drawn in class and omitted here. Suppose the camera is at point C , and the plane is vertically above point B . Let x be the distance between B and C .

2. When $\theta = \pi/3$, how fast does the camera have to rotate in order to keep the plane in view?

We know that $\frac{dx}{dt}$ is -450 km/hr, and want to find out what is $\frac{d\theta}{dt}$. To answer this, we need to understand how x is related to θ .

First we know, $\tan \theta = 5/x$.

Differentiating $\tan \theta = 5/x$ with respect to t and with chain rule, we have

$$\frac{1}{\cos^2 \theta} \frac{d\theta}{dt} = -5x^{-2} \frac{dx}{dt}$$

We want to calculate $\frac{d\theta}{dt}$ when θ is $\frac{\pi}{3}$. At that moment $\cos \theta = 1/2$, $\tan \theta = \sqrt{3}$, so $x = \frac{5}{\sqrt{3}}$.

Substituting gives

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{1}{(1/2)^2} \frac{d\theta}{dt} &= -5\left(\frac{5}{\sqrt{3}}\right)^{-2} \times (-450), \\ \frac{d\theta}{dt} &= -20\left(\frac{5}{\sqrt{3}}\right)^{-2} \times (-450) \text{ radians/hr} \end{aligned}$$

So the camera needs to rotate $-20\left(\frac{5}{\sqrt{3}}\right)^{-2} \times (-450)$ radians per hour.