IB Electromagnetism

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1 Introduction

1.1 Charges and Currents

Electric charge is a physical property of elementary particles. It is:

- Positive, negative or zero.
- Quantized (an integer multiple of the *elementary charge* e).
- Conserved (even if particles are created or destroyed).

By convention, the electron has charge $-e$, the proton has charge $+e$, and the neutron has charge 0.

On macroscopic scales, the number of particles is so large that charge can be considered to have continuous *electric charge density* $\rho(\mathbf{x}, t)$. The total charge in a volume V is then

$$Q = \int_V \rho \, \mathrm{d}V.$$

The *electric current density* $\mathbf{J}(\mathbf{x}, t)$ is the flux of electric charge per unit area. The current flowing through a surface S is

$$I = \int_S \mathbf{J} \cdot \mathrm{d}\mathbf{S}.$$

Consider a time-independent volume V with boundary S. Since charge is conserved, we have

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\mathrm{d}Q}{\mathrm{d}t} &= -I, \\ \frac{\mathrm{d}}{\mathrm{d}t} \int_V \rho \, \mathrm{d}V + \int_S \mathbf{J} \cdot d\mathbf{S} &= 0, \\ \int_V \left(\frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} + \nabla \cdot \mathbf{J} \right) \mathrm{d}V &= 0. \end{aligned}$$

Since this is true for any V, we must have

$$\frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} + \nabla \cdot \mathbf{J} = 0.$$

This *equation of charge conservation* has the typical form of a conservation law.

The discrete charge distribution of a single particle of charge q_i, and position vector $\mathbf{x}_i(t)$ is

$$\begin{aligned}\rho &= q_i \delta(\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_i(t)),\\ \mathbf{J} &= q_i \dot{\mathbf{x}}_i \delta(\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_i(t)).\end{aligned}$$

For N particles, it is

$$\begin{aligned}\rho &= \sum_{i=1}^{N} q_i \delta(\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_i(t)),\\ \mathbf{J} &= \sum_{i=1}^{N} q_i \dot{\mathbf{x}}_i \delta(\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_i(t)).\end{aligned}$$

We can verify that these distributions satisfy the charge conservation equation.

1.2 Fields and Forces

Electromagnetism is a *field theory*. Charged particles interact not directly, but by generating fields around them that are experienced by other charged particles.

In general, we have two time-dependent vector fields: the *electric field* $\mathbf{E}(\mathbf{x}, t)$, and the *magnetic field* $\mathbf{B}(\mathbf{x}, t)$.

The *Lorentz force* on a particle of charge q and velocity $\mathbf{v}$ is

$$\mathbf{F} = q(\mathbf{E} + \mathbf{v} \times \mathbf{B}).$$

1.3 Maxwell's equations

In this course we will explore some consequences of *Maxwell's equations*

$$\begin{aligned}\nabla \cdot \mathbf{E} &= \frac{\rho}{\epsilon_0}, & \nabla \cdot \mathbf{B} &= 0,\\ \nabla \times \mathbf{E} &= -\frac{\partial \mathbf{B}}{\partial t}, & \nabla \times \mathbf{B} &= \mu_0 \left(\mathbf{J} + \epsilon_0 \frac{\partial \mathbf{E}}{\partial t} \right).\end{aligned}$$

Some properties of Maxwell's equations are:

- They are coupled linear PDE's in space and time.
- They involve two positive constants: ϵ_0 (vacuum permittivity), and μ_0 (vacuum permeability).
- Charges (ρ) and currents ($\mathbf{J}$) are the sources of the electromagnetic fields.

- Each equation has an equivalent integral form, related via the divergence theorem of Stokes' theorem.
- These are the vacuum equations that apply on microscopic scales (or in a vacuum). A related macroscopic version applies in media (for examples air).
- The equations are consistent with each other and with charge conservation. For example, $\nabla \cdot (M3) = \frac{\partial}{\partial t}(M2)$, and

$$\frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} + \nabla \cdot \mathbf{J} = \frac{\partial}{\partial t}(\epsilon_0 \nabla \cdot \mathbf{E}) + \nabla \cdot \left(-\epsilon_0 \frac{\partial \mathbf{E}}{\partial t} + \frac{1}{\mu_0} \nabla \times \mathbf{B} \right) = 0.$$

1.4 Units

The SI unit of electric charge is the coulomb (C). The elementary charge is (exactly)

$$e = 1.602\,176\,634 \times 10^{-19}\,\mathrm{C}.$$

The SI unit of electric current is the ampere, or amp (A), equal to $1\,\mathrm{C\,s^{-1}}$.

The SI base units needed in electromagnetism are:

second (s)

metre (m)

kilogram (kg)

ampere (A)

From the Lorentz force law, we can see that the units of $\mathbf{E}$ and $\mathbf{B}$ must be

$$\mathrm{kg\,m\,s^{-3}\,A^{-1}} \text{ and } \mathrm{kg\,s^{-2}\,A^{-1}}.$$

The latter is also called the tesla (T). From Maxwell's equations, we can work out the units of ϵ_0 and μ_0. The experimentally determined values are

$$\begin{aligned} \epsilon_0 &= 8.854 \cdots \times 10^{-12}\,\mathrm{kg^{-1}\,m^{-3}\,s^4\,A^2} \\ \mu_0 &= 1.256 \cdots \times 10^{-6}\,\mathrm{kg\,m\,s^{-2}\,A^{-2}} \\ &\approx 4\pi \times 10^{-7}\,\mathrm{kg\,m\,s^{-2}\,A^{-2}}. \end{aligned}$$

The speed of light is (exactly)

$$c = \frac{1}{\sqrt{\mu_0 \varepsilon_0}} = 299\,792\,458\,\mathrm{m\,s^{-1}} \approx 3 \times 10^8\,\mathrm{m\,s^{-1}}.$$

2 Electrostatics

In a time-independent situation, Maxwell's equations reduce to

$$\begin{aligned} \nabla \cdot \mathbf{E} &= \frac{\rho}{\epsilon_0}, & \nabla \times \mathbf{E} &= \mathbf{0}, \\ \nabla \cdot \mathbf{B} &= 0, & \nabla \times \mathbf{B} &= \mu_0 \mathbf{J}. \end{aligned}$$

Since $\mathbf{E}$ and $\mathbf{B}$ are decoupled, we can study them separately.

Electrostatics is the study of the electric field generated by a stationary charge distribution

$$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{E} = \frac{\rho}{\epsilon_0}, \nabla \times \mathbf{E} \qquad = \mathbf{0}.$$

2.1 Gauss' Law

Consider a closed surface S enclosing a volume V. Integrating (M1) over V and using the divergence theorem, we obtain *Gauss' law*

$$\int_S \mathbf{E} \cdot \mathrm{d}\mathbf{S} = \frac{Q}{\epsilon_0},$$

where $Q = \int_V \rho \, \mathrm{d}V$ is the total charge in V.

Gauss' law is the integral version of (M1) and is valid generally. This says that the electric flux of a closed surface is proportional to the total charge enclosed.

In special situations, we can use Gauss' law together with symmetry to deduce $\mathbf{E}$ from ρ. By choosing the *Gaussian surface* S appropriately.

2.1.1 Spherical Symmetry

Consider a spherically symmetric charge distribution, $\rho(r)$ in spherical polar coordinates, with total charge Q contained within an outer radius R.

To have spherical symmetry, the electric field should have the form

$$\mathbf{E} = E(r)\mathbf{e}_r.$$

This will satisfy (M3'), as required. To find $E(r)$, we apply Gauss' law to a sphere of radius r. If $r > R$, then

$$\int_S \mathbf{E} \cdot \mathrm{d}\mathbf{S} = E(r) \int_S \mathbf{e}_r \cdot \mathrm{d}\mathbf{S} = E(r) \int_S \mathrm{d}S = E(r)\, 4\pi r^2 = \frac{Q}{\epsilon_0}.$$

Thus, outside of the sphere of radius R,

$$\mathbf{E} = \frac{Q}{4\pi\epsilon_0 r^2}\mathbf{e}_r.$$

So the external electric field of a spherically symmetric body depends only on the total charge.

The Lorentz force on a particle of charge q in $r > R$ is

$$\mathbf{F} = q\mathbf{E} = \frac{Qq}{4\pi\epsilon_0 r^2}\mathbf{e}_r.$$

This is the *Coulomb force* between charged particles. The force is repulsive if the charges have the same sign ($Qq > 0$) and attractive if they have opposite signs ($Qq < 0$).

If we take the limit $R \to 0$, we obtain the electric field of a *point charge* Q, corresponding to

$$\rho = Q\delta(\mathbf{x}).$$

There is a close analogy between the Coulomb force and the gravitational force between massive particles,

$$\mathbf{F} = -\frac{GMm}{r^2}\mathbf{e}_r.$$

Both involve an inverse-square law, and the product of the charges/masses. However,

- While gravity is always attractive, electric forces can be repulsive or attractive.
- Gravity is very much weaker than the Coulomb force, e.g. for two protons the ratio of the electric to gravitational forces is

  $$\frac{e^2}{4\pi\epsilon_0 G m_p^2} \approx 10^{36}.$$

  On the atomic scale, gravity is irrelevant. But positive and negative charges balance so accurately that on the planetary scale, gravity is dominant.

2.1.2 Cylindrical Symmetry

Consider a cylindrically symmetric charge distribution $\rho(r)$ in cylindrical polar coordinates, with total charge λ per unit length, contained within an outer radius R.

To have cylindrical symmetry,

$$\mathbf{E} = E(r)\mathbf{e}_r.$$

To find $E(r)$ we apply Gauss' law to a cylinder of radius r and arbitrary length L. Again, we consider $r > R$. Then, since only the curved part of the cylinder contributes to the flux,

$$\int_S \mathbf{E} \cdot \mathrm{d}\mathbf{S} = E(r) \int_S \mathbf{e}_r \cdot \mathrm{d}\mathbf{S} = E(r) \int_S \mathrm{d}S = E(r) 2\pi r L = \frac{\lambda L}{\epsilon_0}.$$

Thus, we get

$$\mathbf{E} = \frac{\lambda}{2\pi\epsilon_0 r}\mathbf{e_r}.$$

In the limit $R \to 0$, we obtain the electric field of a *line charge* λ per unit length, corresponding to

$$\rho = \lambda\delta(x)\delta(y).$$

2.1.3 Planar Symmetry

We consider a planar charge distribution $\rho(z)$ in Cartesian coordinates, with total charge σ per unit area, contained within a region $-d < z < d$ of thickness $2d$. We assume reflectional symmetry, so $\rho(z)$ is even.

To have planar symmetry, we need

$$\mathbf{E} = E(z)\mathbf{e}_z,$$

which will satisfy (M3'). Reflectional symmetry implies $E(-z) = -E(z)$. To find $E(z)$ for $z > 0$, apply Gauss' law to a "Gaussian pillbox" of height $2z$ and arbitrary area A. If $z > d$, then

$$\int_S \mathbf{E} \cdot \mathrm{d}\mathbf{S} = E(z)A - E(-z)A = 2E(z)A = \frac{\sigma A}{\epsilon_0}.$$

Thus,

$$\mathbf{E} = \begin{cases} \frac{\sigma}{2\epsilon_0}\mathbf{e}_z & z > d, \\ -\frac{\sigma}{2\epsilon_0}\mathbf{e}_z & \text{z ¡ -d.} \end{cases}$$

In the limit $d \to 0$, we obtain the electric field of a *surface charge* σ per unit area, corresponding to

$$\rho = \sigma\delta(z).$$

2.1.4 Surface Charge and Discontinuity

Let $\mathbf{n}$ be a unit vector normal to the charged surface, pointing from region 1 to region 2. In our example, $\mathbf{n} = \mathbf{e}_z$.

The discontinuity in $\mathbf{E}$ is given by

$$[\mathbf{n} \cdot \mathbf{E}] = \frac{\sigma}{\epsilon_0},$$

where σ is the surface charge density, and

$$[X] = X_2 - X_1$$

denotes a discontinuity. The tangential components are continuous (they are both 0), so

$$[\mathbf{n} \times \mathbf{E}] = \mathbf{0}.$$

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