IB Electromagnetism

Ishan Nath, Lent 2023

Based on Lectures by Prof. Gordon Ogilvie

February 2, 2023

Contents

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 **E** and **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

$$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{E} = \frac{\rho}{\epsilon_0}, \qquad \nabla \times \mathbf{E} = \mathbf{0},$$
$$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{B} = 0, \qquad \nabla \times \mathbf{B} = \mu_0 \mathbf{J}.$$

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

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

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

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

These equation apply to any surface charge (even if the surface is curved an non-uniform).

The first comes from applying Gauss' law to an infinitesimal Gaussian pillbox on the surface.

The second comes from considering an infinitesimal circuit that goes through the surface: in the limit, and by taking all orientations of loops, we can use Stokes' theorem to get the required result.

2.2 The Electrostatic Potential

For general $\rho(\mathbf{x})$, we cannot determine $\mathbf{E}(\mathbf{x})$ using Gauss' law alone.

Since $\nabla \times \mathbf{E} = \mathbf{0}$, we know that $\mathbf{E}$ can be written in terms of an *electrostatic potential* (or electric potential) $\Phi(\mathbf{x})$

$$\mathbf{E} = -\nabla\Phi.$$

The *potential difference* (or *voltage*) between two points $\mathbf{x}_1$ and $\mathbf{x}_2$ is

$$\Phi(\mathbf{x}_2) - \Phi(\mathbf{x}_1) = \int \mathrm{d}\Phi = -\int_{\mathbf{x}_1}^{\mathbf{x}_2} \mathbf{E}(\mathbf{x}) \cdot \mathrm{d}\mathbf{x},$$

and is path-independent because $\nabla \times \mathbf{E} = \mathbf{0}$.

The electric force on a particle of charge q is

$$\mathbf{F} = q\mathbf{E} = -q\nabla\Phi$$

is a conservative force associated with the potential energy

$$U(\mathbf{x}) = q\Phi(\mathbf{x}).$$

(M1) implies that Φ satisfies *Poisson's equation*

$$-\nabla^2\Phi = \frac{\rho}{\epsilon_0}.$$

The solution can be written as an integral (over all space, assuming decay at infinity)

$$\Phi(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{4\pi\epsilon_0}\int \frac{\rho(\mathbf{x}')}{|\mathbf{x}-\mathbf{x}'|}\,\mathrm{d}^3\mathbf{x}'.$$

This is the convolution of $\rho(\mathbf{x})$ with the potential of a unit point charge $\frac{1}{4\pi\epsilon_0|\mathbf{x}|}$, which is the solution of

$$-\nabla^2\Phi = \frac{\delta(\mathbf{x})}{\epsilon_0},$$

satisfying $\Phi \to 0$ as $|\mathbf{x}| \to \infty$.

Note that $\mathbf{E}$ is unaffected if we add an arbitrary constant to Φ. We usually choose this constant such that $\Phi \to 0$ as $|\mathbf{x}| \to \infty$. However if $\rho(\mathbf{x})$ does not decay sufficiently rapidly, this may not be possible. For example, a line charge has $E_r \propto \frac{1}{r}$, so $\Phi \propto \log r$, which does not decay.

2.2.1 Point Charge

The potential due to a point charge q at the origin is

$$\Phi(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{q}{4\pi\epsilon_0|\mathbf{x}|} = \frac{q}{4\pi\epsilon_0 r}.$$

2.2.2 Electric Dipole

This consists of two equal and opposite charge at difference positions. Without loss of generality, consider charges $-q$ at $\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{0}$ and $+q$ and $\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{d}$.

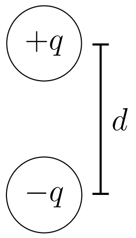
The potential due to the dipole will be

$$\Phi(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{q}{4\pi\epsilon_0}\left(-\frac{1}{|\mathbf{x}|} + \frac{1}{|\mathbf{x}-\mathbf{d}|}\right).$$

Applying Taylor's theorem to a scalar field, we get

$$f(\mathbf{x}+\mathbf{h}) = f(\mathbf{x}) + (\mathbf{h}\cdot\nabla)f(\mathbf{x}) + \frac{1}{2}(\mathbf{h}\cdot\nabla)^2 f(\mathbf{x}) + \mathcal{O}(|\mathbf{h}|^3),$$

Figure 1: Electric Dipole



so applying this to our potential (and letting $|\mathbf{x}| = r$,)

$$\begin{aligned}\Phi(\mathbf{x}) &= \frac{q}{4\pi\epsilon_0}\left(-\frac{1}{r} + \frac{1}{r} - (\mathbf{d}\cdot\nabla)\frac{1}{r} + \mathcal{O}(|\mathbf{d}|^2)\right)\\ &= \frac{q}{4\pi\epsilon_0}\frac{\mathbf{d}\cdot\mathbf{x}}{|\mathbf{x}|^3} + \mathcal{O}(|\mathbf{d}|^2).\end{aligned}$$

In the limit $|\mathbf{d}| \to 0$ with $q\mathbf{d}$ finite, we obtain a *point dipole* with *electric dipole moment*

$$\mathbf{p} = q\mathbf{d},$$

with potential

$$\Phi(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{\mathbf{x}\cdot\mathbf{x}}{4\pi\epsilon_0|\mathbf{x}|^3}.$$

The electric field can be found as

$$\mathbf{E} = -\nabla\Phi = \frac{3(\mathbf{p}\cdot\mathbf{x})\mathbf{x} - |\mathbf{x}|^3\mathbf{p}}{4\pi\epsilon_0|\mathbf{x}|^5}.$$

In spherical polar coordinates aligned with $\mathbf{p} = p\mathbf{e}_z$,

$$\begin{aligned}\Phi &= \frac{p\cos\theta}{4\pi\epsilon_0 r^2},\\ E_r &= -\frac{\partial\Phi}{\partial r} = \frac{2p\cos\theta}{4\pi\epsilon_0 r^3},\\ E_\theta &= -\frac{1}{r}\frac{\partial\Phi}{\partial\theta} = \frac{p\sin\theta}{4\pi\epsilon_0 r^3},\\ E_\phi &= 0.\end{aligned}$$

Note that

- Φ and $\mathbf{E}$ are not spherically symmetric.
- They decrease more rapidly with r than for a point charge.

A point dipole $\mathbf{p}$ at the origin corresponds to

$$\begin{aligned}\rho(\mathbf{x}) &= -\mathbf{p}\cdot\nabla\delta(\mathbf{x}),\\ \Phi(\mathbf{x}) &= \mathbf{p}\cdot\nabla\left(\frac{1}{4\pi\epsilon_0|\mathbf{x}|}\right).\end{aligned}$$

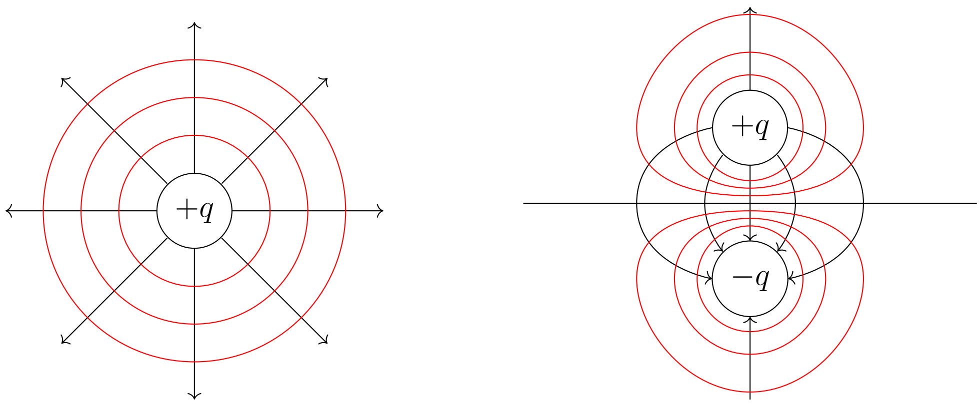
2.2.3 Field Lines and Equipotentials

Electric field lines are the integral curves of $\mathbf{E}$, being tangent to $\mathbf{E}$ everywhere.

Since $\nabla\cdot\mathbf{E} = \frac{\rho}{\epsilon_0}$, the field lines begin at positive charges and end on negative charges.

Furthermore, in electrostatics $\mathbf{E} = -\nabla\Phi$, so the field lines are perpendicular to the equipotential surface $\Phi =$ constant.

Figure 2: Electric Field Lines



(a) Point charge (b) Dipole

2.2.4 Dipole in an External Field

Consider a dipole $\mathbf{p}$ in an external electric field $\mathbf{E} = -\nabla\Phi$ generated by distinct charges. If the dipole has charge $-q$ at $\mathbf{x}$ and $+q$ at $\mathbf{x}+\mathbf{d}$, then the potential energy of the dipole due to the external field is

$$U = -q\Phi(\mathbf{x}) + q\Phi(\mathbf{x}+\mathbf{d}) = q(\mathbf{d}\cdot\nabla)\Phi(\mathbf{x}) + \mathcal{O}(|\mathbf{d}|^2).$$

In the limit of a point dipole,

$$U = \mathbf{p}\cdot\nabla\Phi = -\mathbf{p}\cdot\mathbf{E}.$$

This is minimized when $\mathbf{p}$ is aligned with $\mathbf{E}$.

2.2.5 Multipole Expansion

For a general charge distribution $\rho(\mathbf{x})$ confined to a ball $\{V \mid |\mathbf{x}| < \ell\}$, then

$$\Phi(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{4\pi\epsilon_0}\int_V \frac{\rho(\mathbf{x}')}{|\mathbf{x}-\mathbf{x}'|}\,\mathrm{d}^3\mathbf{x}'.$$

For an external potential with $|\mathbf{x}| > R$, we can expand

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{1}{|\mathbf{x}-\mathbf{x}'|} &= \frac{1}{r} - (\mathbf{x}'\cdot\nabla)\frac{1}{r} + \frac{1}{2}(\mathbf{x}'\cdot\nabla)^2\frac{1}{r} + \mathcal{O}(|\mathbf{x}'|^3)\\ &= \frac{1}{r}\left[1 + \frac{\mathbf{x}'\cdot\mathbf{x}}{r^2} + \frac{3(\mathbf{x}'\cdot\mathbf{x})^2 - |\mathbf{x}'|^2|\mathbf{x}|^2}{2r^4} + \mathcal{O}\left(\frac{R^3}{r^3}\right)\right].\end{aligned}$$

This leads to the *multipole expansion* of the potential

$$\Phi(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{4\pi\epsilon_0}\left(\frac{Q}{r} + \frac{\mathbf{p}\cdot\mathbf{x}}{r^3} + \frac{1}{2}\frac{Q_{ij}x_ix_j}{r^5} + \cdots\right).$$

The first three multipole moments are the:

- total charge (or monopole moment) - a scalar, where
$$Q = \int_V \rho(\mathbf{x})\,\mathrm{d}^3\mathbf{x}.$$
- electric dipole moment - a vector, where
$$\mathbf{p} = \int_V \mathbf{x}\rho(\mathbf{x})\,\mathrm{d}^3\mathbf{x}.$$
- electric quadrupole moment - a traceless, symmetric second order tensor
$$Q_{ij} = \int_V (3x_ix_j - |\mathbf{x}|^2\delta_{ij})\rho(\mathbf{x})\,\mathrm{d}^3\mathbf{x}$$

For $r \gg R$, Φ and $\mathbf{E}$ look increasingly like those of a point charge Q unless $Q = 0$, in which case they look like those of a point dipole, unless $\mathbf{p} = 0$, etc.

2.3 Electrostatic Energy

The work done against the electric force $\mathbf{F} = q\mathbf{E}$ in bringing a particle of charge q from infinity (where we assume $\Phi = 0$) to $\mathbf{x}$ is

$$-\int_\infty^{\mathbf{x}} \mathbf{F}\cdot\mathrm{d}\mathbf{x} = +q\int_\infty^{\mathbf{x}} \nabla\Phi\cdot\mathrm{d}\mathbf{x} = q\Phi(\mathbf{x}).$$

Consider assembling a configuration of N point charges one by one. Particle i of charge q_i is brought from ∞ to $\mathbf{x}_i$, while the previous particles remain fixed.

Particle 1. There is no work involved, so $W_1 = 0$.

Particle 2.

$$W_1 = q_2\left(\frac{q}{4\pi\epsilon_0|\mathbf{x}_2 - \mathbf{x}_1|}\right).$$

Particle 3.

$$W_3 = q_3\left(\frac{q_1}{4\pi\epsilon_0|\mathbf{x}_3 - \mathbf{x}_1|} + \frac{q_2}{4\pi\epsilon_0|\mathbf{x}_3 - \mathbf{x}_2|}\right),$$

and so on. The total work done is

$$U = \sum_{i=1}^{N} W_i = \sum_{i=2}^{N}\sum_{j=1}^{i-1} \frac{q_i q_j}{4\pi\epsilon_0|\mathbf{x}_i - \mathbf{x}_j|}.$$

This can be rewritten as

$$U = \frac{1}{2}\sum_{i=1}^{N}\sum_{\substack{j=1 \\ j\neq i}}^{N} \frac{q_i q_j}{4\pi\epsilon_0|\mathbf{x}_i - \mathbf{x}_j|},$$

or

$$U = \frac{1}{2}\sum_{i=1}^{N} q_i \Phi(\mathbf{x}_i).$$

Generalizing to a continuous charge distribution $\rho(\mathbf{x})$, occupying a finite volume V,

$$U = \frac{1}{2}\int_V \rho(\mathbf{x})\Phi(\mathbf{x})\,\mathrm{d}^3\mathbf{x} = \frac{1}{2}\int_V \rho\Phi\,\mathrm{d}V.$$

Using (M1) we have

$$\begin{aligned} U &= \frac{1}{2}\int_V (\epsilon_0 \nabla\cdot\mathbf{E})\Phi\,\mathrm{d}V = \frac{\epsilon_0}{2}\int_V (\nabla\cdot(\Phi\mathbf{E}) - \mathbf{E}\cdot\nabla\Phi)\,\mathrm{d}V \\ &= \frac{\epsilon_0}{2}\int_S \phi\mathbf{E}\cdot\mathrm{d}\mathbf{S} + \int_V \frac{\epsilon_0|\mathbf{E}|^2}{2}\,\mathrm{d}V. \end{aligned}$$

Let $S = \partial V$ be a sphere of radius $R \to \infty$. Then $\Phi = \mathcal{O}(R^{-1})$, and $\mathbf{E} = \mathcal{O}(R^{-2})$ on S, while the area of S is $\mathcal{O}(R^2)$, so the area integral is $\mathcal{O}(R^{-1})$ and goes to zero as $R \to \infty$. Thus,

$$U = \int \frac{\epsilon_0|\mathbf{E}|^2}{2}\,\mathrm{d}V,$$

integrated over all space.

This implies that energy is stored in the electric field, even in a vacuum.

Any of the expression for U suggest that the self-energy of a point charge is infinite. We can discard this as it is unchanging and causes no force.

2.4 Conductors

In an *conductor* such as a metal, some charges (usually electrons) can move freely. In electrostatics we require

$$\mathbf{E} = \mathbf{0}, \qquad \Phi = \text{constant}$$

inside a conductor, hence $\rho = 0$. Otherwise free charges would move in response to the electric force and a current would flow.

A surface charge density ρ can exist on the surface of a conductor, which is an equipotential.

Taking a normal $\mathbf{n}$ to the point of the conductor, the condition

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

immediately outside the conductor.

The constant potential of a conductor can be set by connecting it to a battery or another conductor. An *earthed* (or *grounded*) conductor is connected to the ground, usually taken as $\Phi = 0$.

To find $\Phi(\mathbf{x})$ and $\mathbf{E}(\mathbf{x})$ due to a charge distribution $\rho(\mathbf{x})$ in the presence of conductors with surfaces S_i and potentials Φ_i, we solve Poisson's equation

$$-\nabla^2 \Phi = \frac{\rho}{\epsilon_0},$$

with Dirichlet boundary conditions $\Phi = \Phi_i$ on S_i. The solution depends linearly on ρ and $\{\Phi_i\}$.

Example 2.1.

Consider a point charge q at position $(0, 0, h)$ in a half-space $z > 0$, bounded by an earthed conducting wall ($\Phi = 0$ on $z = 0$).

By the method of images, the solution in $z > 0$, is identical to that of a dipole, with image charge $-q$ at $(0, 0, -h)$.

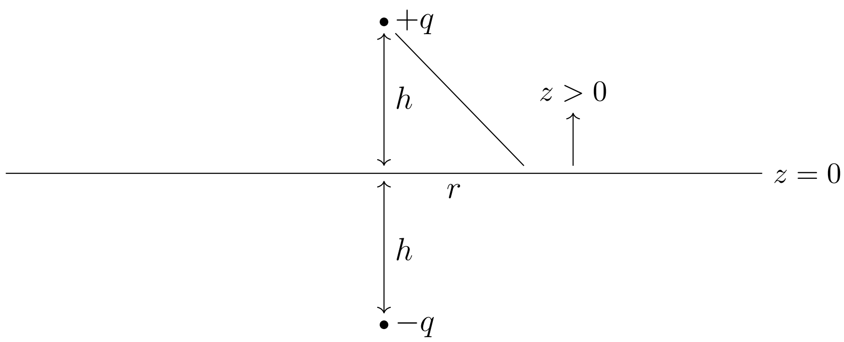
This is as the wall coincides with an equipotential of the dipole. The induced surface charge density on the wall can be worked out from

$$\frac{\sigma}{\epsilon_0} = \mathbf{n} \cdot \mathbf{E} = E_z = -\frac{qh}{4\pi\epsilon_0 (r^2 + h^2)^{3/2}},$$

where $r = \sqrt{x^2 + y^2}$. The total induced surface charge is

$$\int_0^\infty \sigma 2\pi r \, \mathrm{d}r = -qh \int_0^\infty \frac{r \, \mathrm{d}r}{(r^2 + h^2)^{3/2}} = -q.$$

Figure 3: Point Charge and Wall



A simple *capacitor* consists of two separated conductors carrying charges $\pm Q$.

If the potential difference (voltage) between them is V, then the capacitance is defined by

$$C = \frac{Q}{V},$$

and depends only on the geometry, because Φ depends linearly on Q.

Example 2.2.

Consider two infinite parallel plates separated by d. Let the plate surfaces be at $z = 0$, $z = d$, and have surface charge densities $\pm\sigma$. Then, $\mathbf{E} = E\mathbf{e}_z$ with $E = \sigma/\epsilon_0$ constant for $0 < z < d$.

Then $\Phi = -Ez + \text{constant}$ and $V = Ed$.

The same solution holds approximately for parallel plates of area $A \gg d^2$ if end-effects are neglected. So,

$$C = \frac{Q}{V} \approx \frac{\sigma A}{Ed} \approx \frac{\epsilon_0 A}{d}.$$

The electrostatic energy stored in the capacitor is

$$U = \int \frac{\epsilon_0 |\mathbf{E}|^2}{2} \, \mathrm{d}V \approx \frac{\epsilon_0 E^2}{2} Ad \approx \frac{1}{2} CV^2.$$

In general,

$$U = \frac{1}{2}CV^2 = \frac{Q^2}{2C}.$$

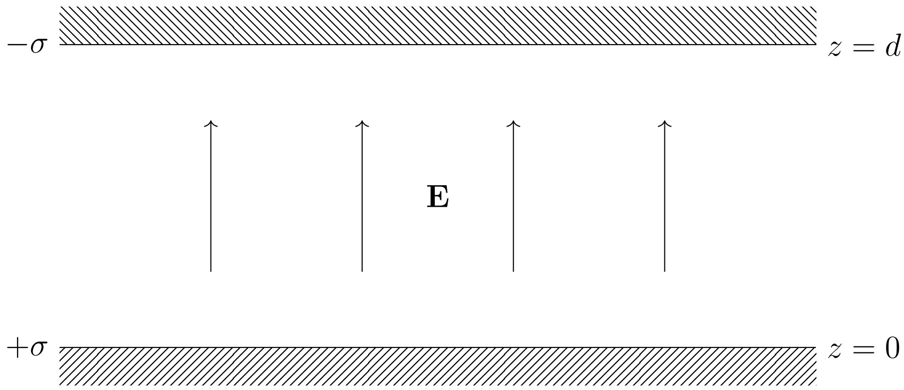
The work done in moving an element of charge δQ from one plate to another is $\delta W = V\delta Q$. So the total work done is

$$\int_0^Q \frac{Q'}{C}\,\mathrm{d}Q' = \frac{Q^2}{2C}.$$

Or we can use

$$U = \frac{1}{2}\int \rho\Phi\,\mathrm{d}V = \frac{1}{2}Q\Phi_+ - \frac{1}{2}Q\Phi_- = \frac{1}{2}QV.$$

Figure 4: Capacitors



Index