

Mathematical Methods for Engineers and Scientists 2

K.T. Tang

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Vector Analysis, Ordinary Differential Equations
and Laplace Transforms

With 73 Figures and 4 Tables

 Springer

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Preface

For some thirty years, I have taught two “Mathematical Physics” courses. One of them was previously named “Engineering Analysis”. There are several textbooks of unquestionable merit for such courses, but I could not find one that fitted our needs. It seemed to me that students might have an easier time if some changes were made in these books. I ended up using class notes. Actually I felt the same about my own notes, so they got changed again and again. Throughout the years, many students and colleagues have urged me to publish them. I resisted until now, because the topics were not new and I was not sure that my way of presenting them was really that much better than others. In recent years, some former students came back to tell me that they still found my notes useful and looked at them from time to time. The fact that they always singled out these courses, among many others I have taught, made me think that besides being kind, they might even mean it. Perhaps it is worthwhile to share these notes with a wider audience.

It took far more work than expected to transcribe the lecture notes into printed pages. The notes were written in an abbreviated way without much explanation between any two equations, because I was supposed to supply the missing links in person. How much detail I would go into depended on the reaction of the students. Now without them in front of me, I had to decide the appropriate amount of derivation to be included. I chose to err on the side of too much detail rather than too little. As a result, the derivation does not look very elegant, but I also hope it does not leave any gap in students’ comprehension.

Precisely stated and elegantly proved theorems looked great to me when I was a young faculty member. But in later years, I found that elegance in the eyes of the teacher might be stumbling blocks for students. Now I am convinced that before the student can use a mathematical theorem with confidence, he must first develop an intuitive feeling. The most effective way to do that is to follow a sufficient number of examples.

This book is written for students who want to learn but need a firm hand-holding. I hope they will find the book readable and easy to learn from.

Learning, as always, has to be done by the student herself or himself. No one can acquire mathematical skill without doing problems, the more the better. However, realistically students have a finite amount of time. They will be overwhelmed if problems are too numerous, and frustrated if problems are too difficult. A common practice in textbooks is to list a large number of problems and let the instructor to choose a few for assignments. It seems to me that is not a confidence building strategy. A self-learning person would not know what to choose. Therefore a moderate number of not overly difficult problems, with answers, are selected at the end of each chapter. Hopefully after the student has successfully solved all of them, he will be encouraged to seek more challenging ones. There are plenty of problems in other books. Of course, an instructor can always assign more problems at levels suitable to the class.

Professor I.I. Rabi used to say “All textbooks are written with the principle of least astonishment”. Well, there is a good reason for that. After all, textbooks are supposed to explain the mysteries and make the profound obvious. This book is no exception. Nevertheless, I still hope the reader will find something in this book exciting.

On certain topics, I went farther than most other similar books. For example, most textbooks of mathematical physics discuss viscous damping of an oscillator, in which the friction force is proportional to velocity. Yet every student in freshman physics learnt that the friction force is proportional to the normal force between the planes of contact. This is known as Coulomb damping. Usually Coulomb damping is not even mentioned. In this book, Coulomb damping and viscous damping are discussed side by side.

Volume I consists of complex analysis and matrix theory. In this volume, we discuss vector and tensor analysis, ordinary differential equations and Laplace transforms. Fourier analysis and partial differential equations will be discussed in volume III. Students are supposed to have already completed two or three semesters of calculus and a year of college physics.

This book is dedicated to my students. I want to thank my A and B students, their diligence and enthusiasm have made teaching enjoyable and worthwhile. I want to thank my C and D students, their difficulties and mistakes made me search for better explanations.

I want to thank Brad Oraw for drawing many figures in this book, and Mathew Hacker for helping me to typeset the manuscript.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to Professor S.H. Patil, Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay. He has read the entire manuscript and provided many excellent suggestions. He has also checked the equations and the problems and corrected numerous errors.

The responsibility for remaining errors is, of course, entirely mine. I will greatly appreciate if they are brought to my attention.

Tacoma, Washington
December 2005

K.T. Tang

Contents

Part I Vector Analysis

1	Vectors	3
1.1	Bound and Free Vectors	4
1.2	Vector Operations	4
1.2.1	Multiplication by a Scalar	5
1.2.2	Unit Vector	5
1.2.3	Addition and Subtraction	5
1.2.4	Dot Product	6
1.2.5	Vector Components	10
1.2.6	Cross Product	13
1.2.7	Triple Products	17
1.3	Lines and Planes	23
1.3.1	Straight Lines	23
1.3.2	Planes in Space	27
	Exercises	31
2	Vector Calculus	35
2.1	The Time Derivative	36
2.1.1	Velocity and Acceleration	36
2.1.2	Angular Velocity Vector	37
2.2	Differentiation in Noninertial Reference Systems	42
2.3	Theory of Space Curve	47
2.4	The Gradient Operator	51
2.4.1	The Gradient of a Scalar Function	51
2.4.2	Geometrical Interpretation of Gradient	53
2.4.3	Line Integral of a Gradient Vector	56
2.5	The Divergence of a Vector	61
2.5.1	The Flux of a Vector Field	62
2.5.2	Divergence Theorem	65
2.5.3	Continuity Equation	69

VIII Contents

2.6	The Curl of a Vector	70
2.6.1	Stokes' Theorem	71
2.7	Further Vector Differential Operations	78
2.7.1	Product Rules	79
2.7.2	Second Derivatives	81
2.8	Further Integral Theorems	85
2.8.1	Green's Theorem	85
2.8.2	Other Related Integrals	86
2.9	Classification of Vector Fields	89
2.9.1	Irrotational Field and Scalar Potential	89
2.9.2	Solenoidal Field and Vector Potential	92
2.10	Theory of Vector Fields	95
2.10.1	Functions of Relative Coordinates	95
2.10.2	Divergence of $\hat{\mathbf{R}}/ R ^2$ as a Delta Function	98
2.10.3	Helmholtz's Theorem	101
2.10.4	Poisson's and Laplace's Equations	104
2.10.5	Uniqueness Theorem	105
	Exercises	106
3	Curved Coordinates	113
3.1	Cylindrical Coordinates	113
3.1.1	Differential Operations	116
3.1.2	Infinitesimal Elements	120
3.2	Spherical Coordinates	122
3.2.1	Differential Operations	125
3.2.2	Infinitesimal Elements	128
3.3	General Curvilinear Coordinate System	130
3.3.1	Coordinate Surfaces and Coordinate Curves	130
3.3.2	Differential Operations in Curvilinear Coordinate Systems	133
3.4	Elliptical Coordinates	138
3.4.1	Coordinate Surfaces	139
3.4.2	Relations with Rectangular Coordinates	141
3.4.3	Prolate Spheroidal Coordinates	144
3.5	Multiple Integrals	144
3.5.1	Jacobian for Double Integral	145
3.5.2	Jacobians for Multiple Integrals	147
	Exercises	150
4	Vector Transformation and Cartesian Tensors	155
4.1	Transformation Properties of Vectors	156
4.1.1	Transformation of Position Vector	156
4.1.2	Vector Equations	158
4.1.3	Euler Angles	159
4.1.4	Properties of Rotation Matrices	162

4.1.5	Definition of a Scalar and a Vector in Terms of Transformation Properties	165
4.2	Cartesian Tensors	169
4.2.1	Definition	169
4.2.2	Kronecker and Levi-Civita Tensors	171
4.2.3	Outer Product	174
4.2.4	Contraction	176
4.2.5	Summation Convention	177
4.2.6	Tensor Fields	179
4.2.7	Quotient Rule	182
4.2.8	Symmetry Properties of Tensors	183
4.2.9	Pseudotensors	185
4.3	Some Physical Examples	189
4.3.1	Moment of Inertia Tensor	189
4.3.2	Stress Tensor	190
4.3.3	Strain Tensor and Hooke's Law	193
	Exercises	195

Part II Differential Equations and Laplace Transforms

5	Ordinary Differential Equations	201
5.1	First-Order Differential Equations	201
5.1.1	Equations with Separable Variables	202
5.1.2	Equations Reducible to Separable Type	204
5.1.3	Exact Differential Equations	205
5.1.4	Integrating Factors	207
5.2	First-Order Linear Differential Equations	210
5.2.1	Bernoulli Equation	213
5.3	Linear Differential Equations of Higher Order	214
5.4	Homogeneous Linear Differential Equations with Constant Coefficients	216
5.4.1	Characteristic Equation with Distinct Roots	217
5.4.2	Characteristic Equation with Equal Roots	218
5.4.3	Characteristic Equation with Complex Roots	218
5.5	Nonhomogeneous Linear Differential Equations with Constant Coefficients	222
5.5.1	Method of Undetermined Coefficients	222
5.5.2	Use of Complex Exponentials	229
5.5.3	Euler–Cauchy Differential Equations	230
5.5.4	Variation of Parameters	232
5.6	Mechanical Vibrations	235
5.6.1	Free Vibration	236
5.6.2	Free Vibration with Viscous Damping	238
5.6.3	Free Vibration with Coulomb Damping	241

5.6.4	Forced Vibration without Damping	244
5.6.5	Forced Vibration with Viscous Damping	247
5.7	Electric Circuits	249
5.7.1	Analog Computation	250
5.7.2	Complex Solution and Impedance	252
5.8	Systems of Simultaneous Linear Differential Equations	254
5.8.1	The Reduction of a System to a Single Equation	254
5.8.2	Cramer's Rule for Simultaneous Differential Equations	255
5.8.3	Simultaneous Equations as an Eigenvalue Problem	257
5.8.4	Transformation of an n th Order Equation into a System of n First-Order Equations	259
5.8.5	Coupled Oscillators and Normal Modes	261
5.9	Other Methods and Resources for Differential Equations	264
	Exercises	265
6	Laplace Transforms	271
6.1	Definition and Properties of Laplace Transforms	271
6.1.1	Laplace Transform – A Linear Operator	271
6.1.2	Laplace Transforms of Derivatives	274
6.1.3	Substitution: s -Shifting	275
6.1.4	Derivative of a Transform	276
6.1.5	A Short Table of Laplace Transforms	276
6.2	Solving Differential Equation with Laplace Transform	278
6.2.1	Inverse Laplace Transform	278
6.2.2	Solving Differential Equations	288
6.3	Laplace Transform of Impulse and Step Functions	291
6.3.1	The Dirac Delta Function	291
6.3.2	The Heaviside Unit Step Function	294
6.4	Differential Equations with Discontinuous Forcing Functions	297
6.5	Convolution	302
6.5.1	The Duhamel Integral	302
6.5.2	The Convolution Theorem	304
6.6	Further Properties of Laplace Transforms	307
6.6.1	Transforms of Integrals	307
6.6.2	Integration of Transforms	307
6.6.3	Scaling	308
6.6.4	Laplace Transforms of Periodic Functions	309
6.6.5	Inverse Laplace Transforms Involving Periodic Functions	311
6.6.6	Laplace Transforms and Gamma Functions	312
6.7	Summary of Operations of Laplace Transforms	313
6.8	Additional Applications of Laplace Transforms	316
6.8.1	Evaluating Integrals	316

6.8.2	Differential Equation with Variable Coefficients	319
6.8.3	Integral and Integrodifferential Equations	321
6.9	Inversion by Contour Integration	323
6.10	Computer Algebraic Systems for Laplace Transforms	326
	Exercises	328
	References	333
	Index	335