

21.1 Characteristics of alternating currents

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 22 marks

KEY WORDS period • power • frequency • peak value • current

Objective

Build the skills to answer exam questions on **alternating currents** – peak, r.m.s. and mean power.

You must be able to:

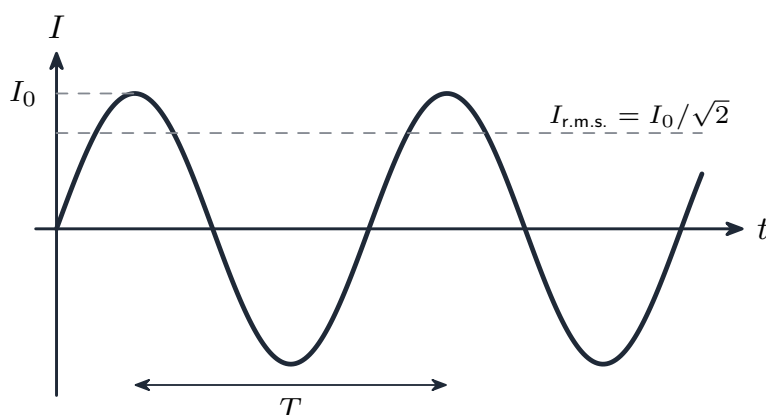
- use **period**, **frequency** and **peak value** for a.c.
- use $x = x_0 \sin \omega t$ and $I_{\text{r.m.s.}} = I_0 / \sqrt{2}$
- use that the **mean power** is **half** the peak power

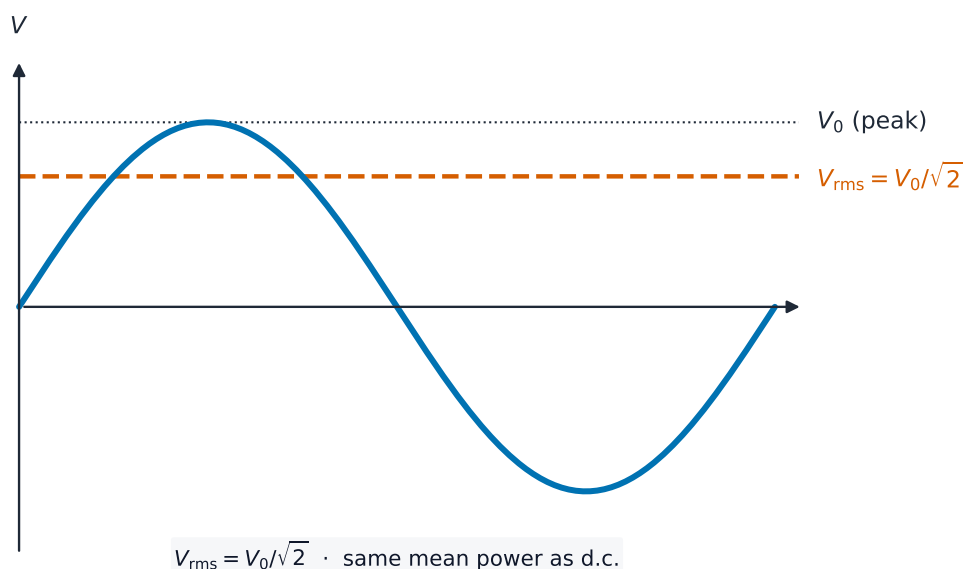
1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a question type used later – follow the steps and you can do the Practice and Exam-style questions yourself.

■ Alternating current

An a.c. follows $I = I_0 \sin \omega t$:





RMS values of an alternating current

- **peak** I_0 (amplitude); **period** T ; **frequency** $f = 1/T$; $\omega = 2\pi f$.

■ Reading the equation

Exam questions often **give** the a.c. as an equation, e.g. $V = 18 \cos(40\pi t)$. Read off the **peak** ($V_0 = 18 \text{ V}$) and the **angular frequency** ($\omega = 40\pi \text{ rad s}^{-1}$), then $T = \frac{2\pi}{\omega}$ and $f = \frac{1}{T}$.

Worked example. For $V = 18 \cos(40\pi t)$, read off $V_0 = 18 \text{ V}$ and $\omega = 40\pi \text{ rad s}^{-1}$:

- $T = \frac{2\pi}{\omega} = \frac{2\pi}{40\pi} = 0.050 \text{ s}$, so $f = \frac{1}{T} = 20 \text{ Hz}$
- $V_{\text{r.m.s.}} = \frac{V_0}{\sqrt{2}} = \frac{18}{\sqrt{2}} = 13 \text{ V}$

■ r.m.s. and mean power

$$I_{\text{r.m.s.}} = \frac{I_0}{\sqrt{2}}, \quad V_{\text{r.m.s.}} = \frac{V_0}{\sqrt{2}}.$$

The **mean power** in a resistor is **half** the peak power; $\langle P \rangle = I_{\text{r.m.s.}} V_{\text{r.m.s.}} = \frac{V_{\text{r.m.s.}}^2}{R}$.

Worked example. $V_0 = 340 \text{ V}$: $V_{\text{r.m.s.}} = V_0/\sqrt{2} = 340/\sqrt{2} = 240 \text{ V}$.

2 Practice

Now apply the methods above.

2.1 Define the **peak value** and the **period** of an alternating current. [2]

2.2 An a.c. has a peak current of 5.0 A. Find the **r.m.s.** current. [2]

2.3 State the relationship between the r.m.s. and peak **voltage**. [1]

2.4 Mains frequency is 50 Hz. Find the **period**. [1]

2.5 An a.c. voltage is $V = 18 \cos(40\pi t)$. State the **peak voltage** and the **angular frequency**. [2]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 The r.m.s. value of a sinusoidal a.c. of peak I_0 is: [1]

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A I_0

B $I_0/2$

C $I_0/\sqrt{2}$

D $2I_0$

3.2 A sinusoidal supply has a peak voltage of 340 V. Calculate (a) the r.m.s. voltage, (b) the mean power delivered to a $100\ \Omega$ resistor. [4]

3.3 Explain why the **mean power** in a resistor is **half** the peak power for a sinusoidal a.c. [2]

3.4 An a.c. has a period of 0.020 s. Find the **angular frequency** ω . [2]

3.5 A mains voltage is $V = 340 \sin(100\pi t)$, with V in volts and t in seconds.

(a) Show that the **period** is 0.020 s. [2]

(b) Calculate the **r.m.s. voltage** and the **mean power** delivered to a $60\ \Omega$ heater. [3]