

12.2 Centripetal acceleration

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 15 marks

Objective

Build the skills to answer exam questions on **centripetal acceleration and force**.

You must be able to:

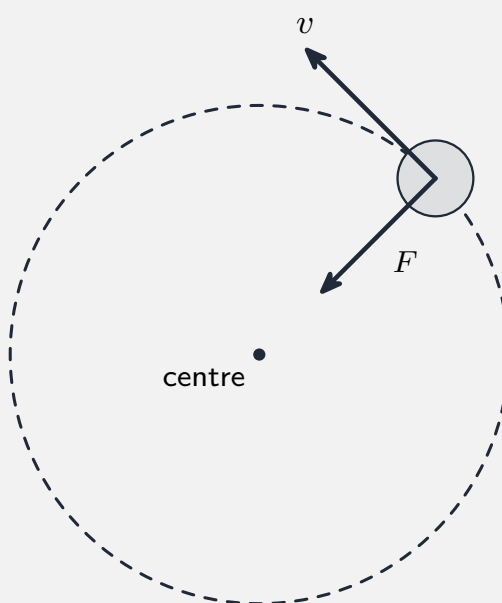
- describe uniform circular motion in terms of **velocity** and **acceleration**
- use $a = v^2/r = r\omega^2$ and $F = mv^2/r = mr\omega^2$
- identify the **real force** that provides the centripetal force (tension, friction, gravity, electric)

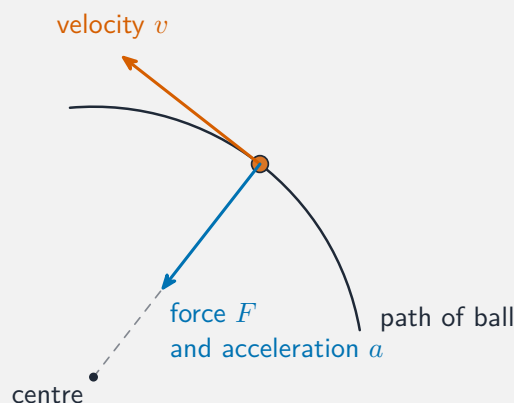
1 Worked examples

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.

■ Centripetal acceleration

In a circle at constant speed, the **speed** is constant but the **velocity** keeps changing direction —so there is an acceleration, directed **towards the centre**, perpendicular to v :





Centripetal acceleration points to the centre

$$a = \frac{v^2}{r} = r\omega^2.$$

■ Centripetal force

$$F = ma = \frac{mv^2}{r} = mr\omega^2.$$

This is **not a new force** —it is provided by a **real** force acting towards the centre: **tension** (string), **friction** (a car cornering), **gravity** (a satellite or planet), or the **electric force** (an electron orbiting a nucleus).

Worked example. A 0.20 kg ball whirled on a string in a 0.50 m horizontal circle at 3.0 m s^{-1} : the string tension provides $F = \frac{0.20 \times 3.0^2}{0.50} = 3.6 \text{ N}$.

Worked example (orbit). If an electric force of $8.2 \times 10^{-8} \text{ N}$ keeps an electron (mass $9.1 \times 10^{-31} \text{ kg}$) in a circle of radius $5.3 \times 10^{-11} \text{ m}$, that force is the centripetal force: $v = \sqrt{\frac{Fr}{m}} = \sqrt{\frac{(8.2 \times 10^{-8})(5.3 \times 10^{-11})}{9.1 \times 10^{-31}}} = 2.2 \times 10^6 \text{ m s}^{-1}$.

2 Practice

Now apply the methods above.

2.1 Describe uniform circular motion in terms of its **velocity** and its **acceleration**. [2]

2.2 Write **two** forms of the centripetal acceleration equation. [2]

2.3 A 0.20 kg ball is whirled in a horizontal circle of radius 0.50 m at 3.0 m s^{-1} . Find the **centripetal force**. [2]

2.4 State what provides the centripetal force for a car turning a **flat** corner. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 For an object in uniform circular motion, the centripetal force is directed: [1]

- **A** along the velocity
- **B** towards the centre
- **C** away from the centre
- **D** opposite to the velocity

3.2 A car of mass 900 kg turns a corner of radius 30 m at 15 m s^{-1} . Calculate the **centripetal force** needed. [3]

3.3 An electron of mass $9.1 \times 10^{-31} \text{ kg}$ moves in a circle of radius $5.3 \times 10^{-11} \text{ m}$. The electric force on it is $8.2 \times 10^{-8} \text{ N}$ and provides the centripetal force.

(a) State why the electron is **accelerating** even though its speed is constant. [1]

(b) Calculate the **speed** of the electron.

[3]

3.4 A stone is whirled on a string in a horizontal circle. State what provides the centripetal force, and describe its motion **if the string breaks**.

[2]

4 Go further

You are now ready for the real exam questions on this subtopic. Open the **12.2 Centripetal acceleration** past-paper sheet in the Library, or try these in **Practice mode**:

- 9702/41 J25 —Q2 (centripetal force, structured)
- 9702/43 J25 —Q2 (centripetal force, calculation)
- 9702/42 N25 —Q1 (circular motion)
- 9702/41 N25 —Q1 (centripetal acceleration, structured)
- 9702/42 M25 —Q1 (centripetal force)

Solutions

2.1 The **speed is constant** but the **velocity changes** (its direction is always along the tangent); the **acceleration is constant in magnitude and directed towards the centre** (centripetal).

2.2 $a = \frac{v^2}{r}$ and $a = r\omega^2$.

2.3 $F = \frac{mv^2}{r} = \frac{0.20 \times 3.0^2}{0.50} = 3.6 \text{ N}.$

2.4 Friction between the tyres and the road.

3.1 B —towards the centre.

3.2 $F = \frac{mv^2}{r} = \frac{900 \times 15^2}{30} = 6750 \text{ N} \approx 6.8 \times 10^3 \text{ N}.$

3.3 (a) Its **velocity is changing direction**, and a changing velocity is an acceleration (towards the centre).

3.3 (b) The electric force is the centripetal force: $F = \frac{mv^2}{r}$, so $v = \sqrt{\frac{Fr}{m}} = \sqrt{\frac{(8.2 \times 10^{-8})(5.3 \times 10^{-11})}{9.1 \times 10^{-31}}}$
 $= 2.2 \times 10^6 \text{ m s}^{-1}.$

3.4 The **tension** in the string provides it; if the string breaks the stone flies off along a **straight line (the tangent)**, since there is no longer a centripetal force.