

3.2 Non-uniform motion

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 31 marks

KEY WORDS drag 阻力 • terminal velocity 收尾速度 • viscous 黏性
• gravitational potential energy 重力势能 • velocity 速度

Objective

Build the skills to answer exam questions on **non-uniform motion** — friction and drag, falling through air, and terminal velocity.

You must be able to:

- describe **friction** 摩擦力 and **drag** 阻力 (drag grows with speed)
- explain the motion of an object falling through air
- explain **terminal velocity** 收尾速度 and the energy transfer
- balance the **three** forces on an object falling through a **liquid** (weight, upthrust, drag)
- **draw** labelled force arrows, and get a terminal speed out of a given drag equation

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.

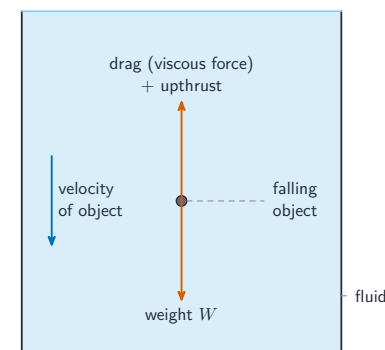
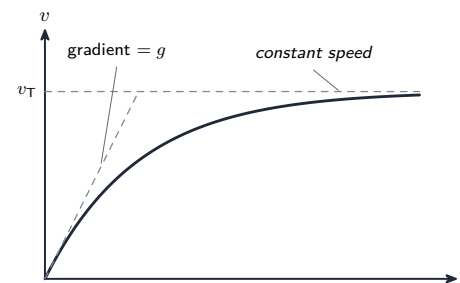
■ Drag increases with speed

A **drag** (viscous) force from a fluid opposes motion. A simple model: **drag is zero at zero speed and grows as the speed grows.**

■ Falling through air → terminal velocity

An object dropped from rest:

1. at first only **weight** acts → it accelerates at g ;
2. as it speeds up, **drag grows**, so the resultant force and the acceleration **shrink**;
3. when **drag = weight**, the resultant force is zero → constant speed, the **terminal velocity**.



Forces on a falling object reaching terminal velocity

■ Energy at terminal velocity

At terminal velocity the kinetic energy is **constant**, so the lost **gravitational potential energy** is transferred to **thermal energy of the air** — **not** to extra KE of the faller.

■ Falling through a LIQUID: three forces, not two

In air the upthrust is tiny and we ignore it. In a **liquid** it is not, so **three** forces act on a sinking object:

- **weight** $W = mg$, down (or $\rho_{\text{object}} Vg$);
- **upthrust** U , up — the weight of the liquid pushed aside, $U = \rho_{\text{liquid}} Vg$;
- **viscous drag** D , up, growing with speed.

Upthrust exists because the **pressure in a liquid increases with depth**: the pressure on the bottom of the object is larger than on the top, so the upward force on the bottom beats the downward force on the top, and the difference is the upthrust.

At **terminal velocity** the object is not accelerating, so

$$W = U + D$$

Worked example. A sphere of volume $2.0 \times 10^{-7} \text{ m}^3$ and mass $1.6 \times 10^{-3} \text{ kg}$ falls through oil of density 900 kg m^{-3} . The drag is $D = kv$ with $k = 1.4 \times 10^{-2} \text{ kg s}^{-1}$.

$$W = mg = 1.6 \times 10^{-3} \times 9.81 = 1.57 \times 10^{-2} \text{ N}$$

$$U = \rho Vg = 900 \times 2.0 \times 10^{-7} \times 9.81 = 1.77 \times 10^{-3} \text{ N}$$

$$D = W - U = 1.39 \times 10^{-2} \text{ N} \quad \Rightarrow \quad v = \frac{D}{k} = \frac{1.39 \times 10^{-2}}{1.4 \times 10^{-2}} = 0.99 \text{ m s}^{-1}$$

Write $W = U + D$ **first** — that line is the method mark, whatever happens to the arithmetic afterwards.

A **heavier** (or denser) object reaches a **higher** terminal velocity — it needs more speed (more drag) to balance its larger weight. Opening a **parachute** suddenly increases the drag, so drag exceeds weight and the diver **decelerates** to a new, much **lower** terminal velocity.

2 Practice

Now apply the methods above.

2.1 State what happens to the **drag force** on an object as its speed increases. [1]

2.2 State the condition (in terms of forces) for an object to move at **terminal velocity**. [1]

2.3 State the acceleration of an object **just after** it is released and begins to fall through air. [1]

2.4 State the main energy transfer for a parachutist falling at **terminal velocity**. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 A parachutist falls at constant (terminal) velocity. Which statement is **not** correct? [1]



- A Gravitational PE is converted to kinetic energy of the air.
- B Gravitational PE is converted to kinetic energy of the parachutist.
- C Gravitational PE is converted to thermal energy of the air.
- D The resultant force on the parachutist is zero.

3.2 Describe and explain the motion of an object dropped from rest and falling through air, until it reaches terminal velocity. [4]

3.3 A skydiver is falling at terminal velocity. State the **resultant force** on her and explain why her velocity stays **constant**. [2]

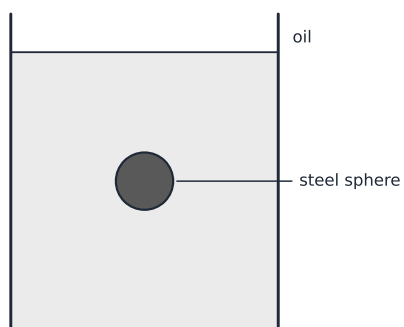
3.4 Sketch a **velocity–time graph** for an object falling from rest through air, labelling the terminal velocity. [2]

3.5 A skydiver falling at terminal velocity opens her parachute.

- (a) State what happens to her velocity **just after** the parachute opens. [1]

- (b) Explain, in terms of **forces**, why she settles to a new **lower** terminal velocity. [2]

3.6 A small steel sphere of radius 3.0 mm is released from rest just below the surface of a tall jar of oil. The density of steel is 7800 kg m^{-3} and the density of the oil is 900 kg m^{-3} .



- (a) **Define** pressure. [1]

- (b) **Explain** how the pressure in the oil gives rise to an **upthrust** on the sphere. [2]

- (c) On the diagram above, **draw** labelled arrows from the sphere to show the **three** forces acting on it as it falls. [3]

- (d) The volume of a sphere of radius r is $\frac{4}{3}\pi r^3$. **Show that** the upthrust on the sphere is about $1.0 \times 10^{-3} \text{ N}$. [2]

- (e) The viscous drag on the sphere is given by $D = 6\pi\eta rv$, where v is its speed. **Determine** the SI base units of η . [2]

- (f) The oil has $\eta = 0.20 \text{ kg m}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$. **Determine** the terminal speed of the sphere. [3]

- (g) **Calculate** the resultant force on the sphere at the instant it is released from rest, and state its direction. [2]