

7.2 Electrostatics

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 23 marks**KEY WORDS** Gauss's law • potential • capacitance • dielectric

Objective

Compute fields by Gauss's law (sphere, cylinder, plane), potentials by integration, capacitance by Q/V , and apply dielectric boundary conditions – every Gauss answer checked at the boundary and in the far field.

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

■ Gauss's law chooses the surface

$$\oint \mathbf{E} \cdot d\mathbf{A} = Q_{enc}/\epsilon_0$$

Symmetry picks a surface where E is constant and normal: spheres for point/spherical charge, cylinders for line charge, pillboxes for sheets. The method fails when symmetry breaks – then integrate Coulomb directly.

■ Worked example: the uniformly charged sphere

Inside ($r < a$): $E = \rho r/(3\epsilon_0)$ (enclosed charge $\propto r^3$, area $\propto r^2$). Outside: $E = \rho a^3/(3\epsilon_0 r^2)$ – the sphere acts as a point charge. Boundary check: both give $\rho a/3\epsilon_0$ at $r = a$ ✓. Far field: $Q/(4\pi\epsilon_0 r^2)$ with $Q = 4\pi a^3 \rho/3$ ✓. Potential (zero at infinity): outside $V = Q/(4\pi\epsilon_0 r)$; inside $V = Q(3a^2 - r^2)/(8\pi\epsilon_0 a^3)$ – continuous at $r = a$ and maximal at the center (a charged sphere is a potential hill with a flat top rounded off).

■ Capacitance and dielectrics

$C = Q/V$ – geometry in one number: the isolated sphere $C = 4\pi\epsilon_0 a$; parallel plates $C = \epsilon A/d$. A **dielectric** with ϵ_r scales $D = \epsilon E$ and reduces the field for the same free charge: C multiplies by ϵ_r . **Boundary conditions:** E tangential continuous; D normal continuous (no free surface charge) – so at an air–dielectric interface the normal E drops by ϵ_r .

2 Practice

2.1 A line charge λ (C/m): using a coaxial cylindrical surface, derive $E(r)$ and state its distance dependence. [3]

2.2 An infinite sheet of charge σ (C/m²): E via a pillbox, and the direction. [3]

2.3 A parallel-plate capacitor has $A = 1\text{cm}^2$, $d = 0.1\text{mm}$, $\epsilon_r = 4.7$ (glass): compute C in pF. [3]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 A coaxial cable: inner conductor radius $a = 1\text{mm}$, outer conductor inner radius $b = 5\text{mm}$, dielectric $\epsilon_r = 2.25$ (polyethylene) between.

Using Gauss's law in the dielectric, derive $E(r)$ for $a < r < b$ in terms of the charge per unit length λ . Then integrate to find the voltage between the conductors, and compute the capacitance per unit length $C' = \lambda/V$ (check the standard $C' = 2\pi\epsilon/\ln(b/a)$). Evaluate numerically in pF/m. [7]

3.2 A point charge $q = 10nC$ sits 5 cm above an infinite grounded conducting plane (the method of images).

State the image charge and its position. Compute the field's normal component at the point on the plane directly below the charge, and the total induced surface charge on the plane (integrate $\sigma = \varepsilon_0 E_n$ over the plane – the answer should equal the image charge). Compute the force on the real charge. [7]
