

Sample Problem

Flux through a closed cube, nonuniform field

A *nonuniform* electric field given by $\vec{E} = 3.0x\hat{i} + 4.0\hat{j}$ pierces the Gaussian cube shown in Fig. 23-5a. (E is in newtons per coulomb and x is in meters.) What is the electric flux through the right face, the left face, and the top face? (We consider the other faces in another sample problem.)

KEY IDEA

We can find the flux Φ through the surface by integrating the scalar product $\vec{E} \cdot d\vec{A}$ over each face.

Right face: An area vector \vec{A} is always perpendicular to its surface and always points away from the interior of a Gaussian surface. Thus, the vector $d\vec{A}$ for any area element (small section) on the right face of the cube must point in the positive direction of the x axis. An example of such an element is shown in Figs. 23-5b and c, but we would have an identical vector for any other choice of an area element on that face. The most convenient way to express the vector is in unit-vector notation,

$$d\vec{A} = dA\hat{i}.$$

From Eq. 23-4, the flux Φ_r through the right face is then

$$\begin{aligned}\Phi_r &= \int \vec{E} \cdot d\vec{A} = \int (3.0x\hat{i} + 4.0\hat{j}) \cdot (dA\hat{i}) \\ &= \int [(3.0x)(dA)\hat{i} \cdot \hat{i} + (4.0)(dA)\hat{j} \cdot \hat{i}] \\ &= \int (3.0x \, dA + 0) = 3.0 \int x \, dA.\end{aligned}$$

We are about to integrate over the right face, but we note that x has the same value everywhere on that face—namely, $x = 3.0$ m. This means we can substitute that constant value

for x . This can be a confusing argument. Although x is certainly a variable as we move left to right across the figure, because the right face is perpendicular to the x axis, every point on the face has the same x coordinate. (The y and z coordinates do not matter in our integral.) Thus, we have

$$\Phi_r = 3.0 \int (3.0) \, dA = 9.0 \int dA.$$

The integral $\int dA$ merely gives us the area $A = 4.0 \text{ m}^2$ of the right face; so

$$\Phi_r = (9.0 \text{ N/C})(4.0 \text{ m}^2) = 36 \text{ N} \cdot \text{m}^2/\text{C}. \quad (\text{Answer})$$

Left face: The procedure for finding the flux through the left face is the same as that for the right face. However, two factors change. (1) The differential area vector $d\vec{A}$ points in the negative direction of the x axis, and thus $d\vec{A} = -dA\hat{i}$ (Fig. 23-5d). (2) The term x again appears in our integration, and it is again constant over the face being considered. However, on the left face, $x = 1.0$ m. With these two changes, we find that the flux Φ_l through the left face is

$$\Phi_l = -12 \text{ N} \cdot \text{m}^2/\text{C}. \quad (\text{Answer})$$

Top face: The differential area vector $d\vec{A}$ points in the positive direction of the y axis, and thus $d\vec{A} = dA\hat{j}$ (Fig. 23-5e). The flux Φ_t through the top face is then

$$\begin{aligned}\Phi_t &= \int (3.0x\hat{i} + 4.0\hat{j}) \cdot (dA\hat{j}) \\ &= \int [(3.0x)(dA)\hat{i} \cdot \hat{j} + (4.0)(dA)\hat{j} \cdot \hat{j}] \\ &= \int (0 + 4.0 \, dA) = 4.0 \int dA \\ &= 16 \text{ N} \cdot \text{m}^2/\text{C}. \quad (\text{Answer})\end{aligned}$$



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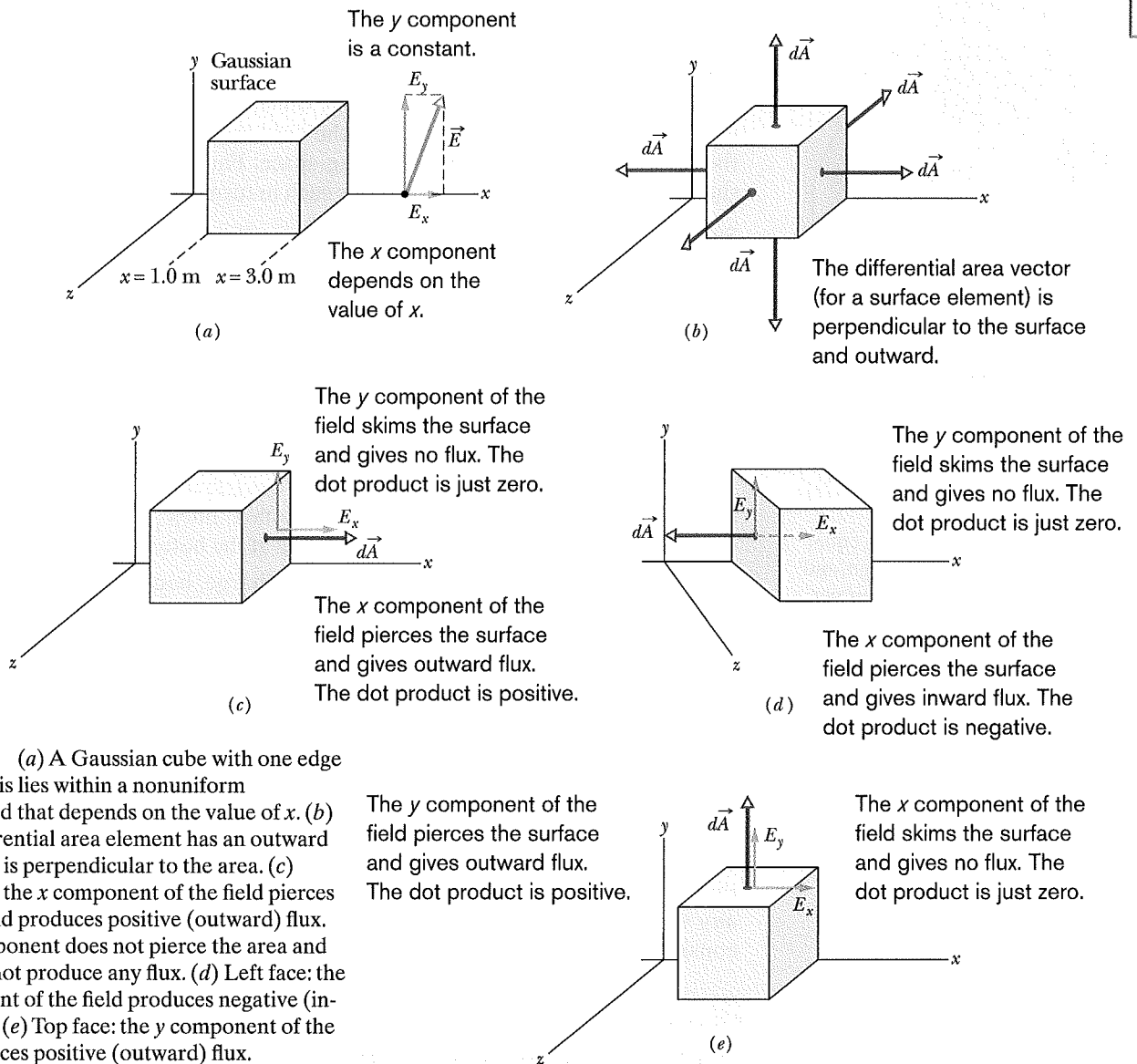
23-4 Gauss' Law

Gauss' law relates the net flux Φ of an electric field through a closed surface (a Gaussian surface) to the *net* charge q_{enc} that is *enclosed* by that surface. It tells us that

$$\epsilon_0 \Phi = q_{\text{enc}} \quad (\text{Gauss' law}). \quad (23-6)$$

By substituting Eq. 23-4, the definition of flux, we can also write Gauss' law as

$$\epsilon_0 \oint \vec{E} \cdot d\vec{A} = q_{\text{enc}} \quad (\text{Gauss' law}). \quad (23-7)$$



Equations 23-6 and 23-7 hold only when the net charge is located in a vacuum or (what is the same for most practical purposes) in air. In Chapter 25, we modify Gauss' law to include situations in which a material such as mica, oil, or glass is present.

In Eqs. 23-6 and 23-7, the net charge q_{enc} is the algebraic sum of all the *enclosed* positive and negative charges, and it can be positive, negative, or zero. We include the sign, rather than just use the magnitude of the enclosed charge, because the sign tells us something about the net flux through the Gaussian surface: If q_{enc} is positive, the net flux is *outward*; if q_{enc} is negative, the net flux is *inward*.

Charge outside the surface, no matter how large or how close it may be, is not included in the term q_{enc} in Gauss' law. The exact form and location of the charges inside the Gaussian surface are also of no concern; the only things that

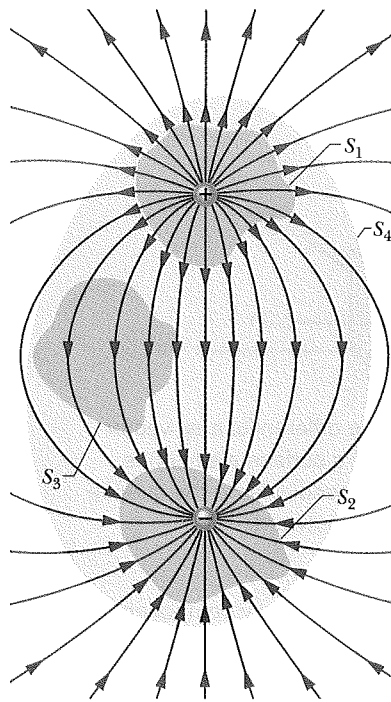


Fig. 23-6 Two point charges, equal in magnitude but opposite in sign, and the field lines that represent their net electric field. Four Gaussian surfaces are shown in cross section. Surface S_1 encloses the positive charge. Surface S_2 encloses the negative charge. Surface S_3 encloses no charge. Surface S_4 encloses both charges and thus no net charge.

matter on the right side of Eqs. 23-6 and 23-7 are the magnitude and sign of the net enclosed charge. The quantity \vec{E} on the left side of Eq. 23-7, however, is the electric field resulting from *all* charges, both those inside and those outside the Gaussian surface. This statement may seem to be inconsistent, but keep this in mind: The electric field due to a charge outside the Gaussian surface contributes zero net flux *through* the surface, because as many field lines due to that charge enter the surface as leave it.

Let us apply these ideas to Fig. 23-6, which shows two point charges, equal in magnitude but opposite in sign, and the field lines describing the electric fields the charges set up in the surrounding space. Four Gaussian surfaces are also shown, in cross section. Let us consider each in turn.

Surface S_1 . The electric field is outward for all points on this surface. Thus, the flux of the electric field through this surface is positive, and so is the net charge within the surface, as Gauss' law requires. (That is, in Eq. 23-6, if Φ is positive, q_{enc} must be also.)

Surface S_2 . The electric field is inward for all points on this surface. Thus, the flux of the electric field through this surface is negative and so is the enclosed charge, as Gauss' law requires.

Surface S_3 . This surface encloses no charge, and thus $q_{\text{enc}} = 0$. Gauss' law (Eq. 23-6) requires that the net flux of the electric field through this surface be zero. That is reasonable because all the field lines pass entirely through the surface, entering it at the top and leaving at the bottom.

Surface S_4 . This surface encloses no *net* charge, because the enclosed positive and negative charges have equal magnitudes. Gauss' law requires that the net flux of the electric field through this surface be zero. That is reasonable because there are as many field lines leaving surface S_4 as entering it.

What would happen if we were to bring an enormous charge Q up close to surface S_4 in Fig. 23-6? The pattern of the field lines would certainly change, but the net flux for each of the four Gaussian surfaces would not change. We can understand this because the field lines associated with the added Q would pass entirely through each of the four Gaussian surfaces, making no contribution to the net flux through any of them. The value of Q would not enter Gauss' law in any way, because Q lies outside all four of the Gaussian surfaces that we are considering.

CHECKPOINT 2

The figure shows three situations in which a Gaussian cube sits in an electric field. The arrows and the values indicate the directions of the field lines and the magnitudes (in $\text{N} \cdot \text{m}^2/\text{C}$) of the flux through the six sides of each cube. (The lighter arrows are for the hidden faces.) In which situation does the cube enclose (a) a positive net charge, (b) a negative net charge, and (c) zero net charge?

