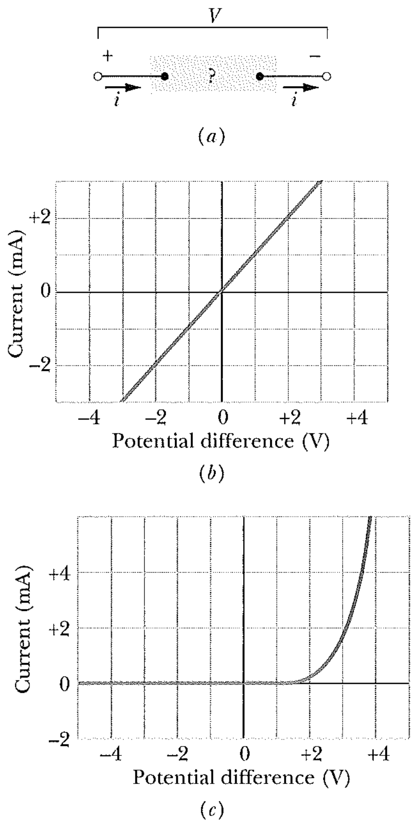

Fig. 26-11 (*a*) A potential difference V is applied to the terminals of a device, establishing a current i. (*b*) A plot of current i versus applied potential difference V when the device is a 1000 Ω resistor. (*c*) A plot when the device is a semiconducting *pn* junction diode.

26-5 Ohm's Law

As we just discussed in Section 26-4, a resistor is a conductor with a specified resistance. It has that same resistance no matter what the magnitude and direction (*polarity*) of the applied potential difference are. Other conducting devices, however, might have resistances that change with the applied potential difference.

Figure 26-11*a* shows how to distinguish such devices. A potential difference V is applied across the device being tested, and the resulting current i through the device is measured as V is varied in both magnitude and polarity. The polarity of V is arbitrarily taken to be positive when the left terminal of the device is at a higher potential than the right terminal. The direction of the resulting current (from left to right) is arbitrarily assigned a plus sign. The reverse polarity of V (with the right terminal at a higher potential) is then negative; the current it causes is assigned a minus sign.

Figure 26-11*b* is a plot of i versus V for one device. This plot is a straight line passing through the origin, so the ratio i/V (which is the slope of the straight line) is the same for all values of V. This means that the resistance $R = V/i$ of the device is independent of the magnitude and polarity of the applied potential difference V.

Figure 26-11*c* is a plot for another conducting device. Current can exist in this device only when the polarity of V is positive and the applied potential difference is more than about 1.5 V. When current does exist, the relation between i and V is not linear; it depends on the value of the applied potential difference V.

We distinguish between the two types of device by saying that one obeys Ohm's law and the other does not.

Ohm's law is an assertion that the current through a device is *always* directly proportional to the potential difference applied to the device.

(This assertion is correct only in certain situations; still, for historical reasons, the term "law" is used.) The device of Fig. 26-11*b*—which turns out to be a 1000 Ω resistor—obeys Ohm's law. The device of Fig. 26-11*c*—which is called a *pn* junction diode—does not.

A conducting device obeys Ohm's law when the resistance of the device is independent of the magnitude and polarity of the applied potential difference.

It is often contended that $V = iR$ is a statement of Ohm's law. That is not true! This equation is the defining equation for resistance, and it applies to all conducting devices, whether they obey Ohm's law or not. If we measure the potential difference V across, and the current i through, any device, even a *pn* junction diode, we can find its resistance *at that value of* V as $R = V/i$. The essence of Ohm's law, however, is that a plot of i versus V is linear; that is, R is independent of V.

We can express Ohm's law in a more general way if we focus on conducting *materials* rather than on conducting *devices*. The relevant relation is then Eq. 26-11 ($\vec{E} = \rho\vec{J}$), which corresponds to $V = iR$.

A conducting material obeys Ohm's law when the resistivity of the material is independent of the magnitude and direction of the applied electric field.

All homogeneous materials, whether they are conductors like copper or semiconductors like pure silicon or silicon containing special impurities, obey Ohm's law within some range of values of the electric field. If the field is too strong, however, there are departures from Ohm's law in all cases.

CHECKPOINT 4

The following table gives the current i (in amperes) through two devices for several values of potential difference V (in volts). From these data, determine which device does not obey Ohm's law.

Device 1		Device 2	
V	i	V	i
2.00	4.50	2.00	1.50
3.00	6.75	3.00	2.20
4.00	9.00	4.00	2.80

26-6 A Microscopic View of Ohm's Law

To find out *why* particular materials obey Ohm's law, we must look into the details of the conduction process at the atomic level. Here we consider only conduction in metals, such as copper. We base our analysis on the *free-electron model,* in which we assume that the conduction electrons in the metal are free to move throughout the volume of a sample, like the molecules of a gas in a closed container. We also assume that the electrons collide not with one another but only with atoms of the metal.

According to classical physics, the electrons should have a Maxwellian speed distribution somewhat like that of the molecules in a gas (Section 19-7), and thus the average electron speed should depend on the temperature. The motions of electrons are, however, governed not by the laws of classical physics but by those of quantum physics. As it turns out, an assumption that is much closer to the quantum reality is that conduction electrons in a metal move with a single effective speed v_{eff}, and this speed is essentially independent of the temperature. For copper, $v_{\text{eff}} \approx 1.6 \times 10^6$ m/s.

When we apply an electric field to a metal sample, the electrons modify their random motions slightly and drift very slowly—in a direction opposite that of the field—with an average drift speed v_d. The drift speed in a typical metallic conductor is about 5×10^{-7} m/s, less than the effective speed (1.6×10^6 m/s) by many orders of magnitude. Figure 26-12 suggests the relation between these two speeds. The gray lines show a possible random path for an electron in the absence of an applied field; the electron proceeds from A to B, making six collisions along the way. The green lines show how the same events *might* occur when an electric field $\vec{E}$ is applied. We see that the electron drifts steadily to the right, ending at B' rather than at B. Figure 26-12 was drawn with the assumption that $v_d \approx 0.02v_{\text{eff}}$. However, because the actual value is more like $v_d \approx (10^{-13})v_{\text{eff}}$, the drift displayed in the figure is greatly exaggerated.

The motion of conduction electrons in an electric field $\vec{E}$ is thus a combination of the motion due to random collisions and that due to $\vec{E}$. When we consider all the free electrons, their random motions average to zero and make no contribution to the drift speed. Thus, the drift speed is due only to the effect of the electric field on the electrons.

If an electron of mass m is placed in an electric field of magnitude E, the electron will experience an acceleration given by Newton's second law:

$$a = \frac{F}{m} = \frac{eE}{m}. \qquad (26\text{-}18)$$

The nature of the collisions experienced by conduction electrons is such that, after a typical collision, each electron will—so to speak—completely lose its memory of its previous drift velocity. Each electron will then start off fresh after every encounter, moving off in a random direction. In the average time τ between collisions, the average electron will acquire a drift speed of $v_d = a\tau$. Moreover, if we measure the drift speeds of all the electrons at any instant, we will find that their average drift speed is also $a\tau$. Thus, at any instant, on average, the electrons will have drift speed $v_d = a\tau$. Then Eq. 26-18 gives us

$$v_d = a\tau = \frac{eE\tau}{m}. \qquad (26\text{-}19)$$

Combining this result with Eq. 26-7 ($\vec{J} = ne\vec{v}_d$), in magnitude form, yields

$$v_d = \frac{J}{ne} = \frac{eE\tau}{m}, \qquad (26\text{-}20)$$

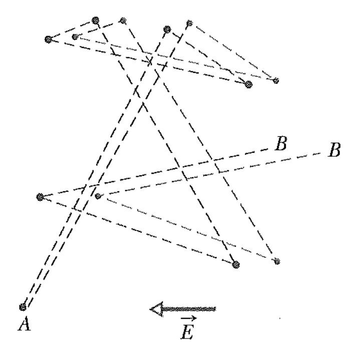

Fig. 26-12 The gray lines show an electron moving from A to B, making six collisions en route. The green lines show what the electron's path might be in the presence of an applied electric field $\vec{E}$. Note the steady drift in the direction of $-\vec{E}$. (Actually, the green lines should be slightly curved, to represent the parabolic paths followed by the electrons between collisions, under the influence of an electric field.)

which we can write as

$$E = \left(\frac{m}{e^2 n\tau}\right) J. \qquad (26\text{-}21)$$

Comparing this with Eq. 26-11 ($\vec{E} = \rho\vec{J}$), in magnitude form, leads to

$$\rho = \frac{m}{e^2 n\tau}. \qquad (26\text{-}22)$$

Equation 26-22 may be taken as a statement that metals obey Ohm's law if we can show that, for metals, their resistivity ρ is a constant, independent of the strength of the applied electric field $\vec{E}$. Let's consider the quantities in Eq. 26-22. We can reasonably assume that n, the number of conduction electrons per volume, is independent of the field, and m and e are constants. Thus, we only need to convince ourselves that τ, the average time (or *mean free time*) between collisions, is a constant, independent of the strength of the applied electric field. Indeed, τ can be considered to be a constant because the drift speed v_d caused by the field is so much smaller than the effective speed v_{eff} that the electron speed—and thus τ—is hardly affected by the field.

Sample Problem

Mean free time and mean free distance

(a) What is the mean free time τ between collisions for the conduction electrons in copper?

KEY IDEAS

The mean free time τ of copper is approximately constant, and in particular does not depend on any electric field that might be applied to a sample of the copper. Thus, we need not consider any particular value of applied electric field. However, because the resistivity ρ displayed by copper under an electric field depends on τ, we can find the mean free time τ from Eq. 26-22 ($\rho = m/e^2 n\tau$).

Calculations: That equation gives us

$$\tau = \frac{m}{ne^2\rho}. \qquad (26\text{-}23)$$

The number of conduction electrons per unit volume in copper is $8.49 \times 10^{28}\ \text{m}^{-3}$. We take the value of ρ from Table 26-1. The denominator then becomes

$$(8.49 \times 10^{28}\ \text{m}^{-3})(1.6 \times 10^{-19}\ \text{C})^2(1.69 \times 10^{-8}\ \Omega\cdot\text{m})$$
$$= 3.67 \times 10^{-17}\ \text{C}^2\cdot\Omega/\text{m}^2 = 3.67 \times 10^{-17}\ \text{kg/s},$$

where we converted units as

$$\frac{\text{C}^2\cdot\Omega}{\text{m}^2} = \frac{\text{C}^2\cdot\text{V}}{\text{m}^2\cdot\text{A}} = \frac{\text{C}^2\cdot\text{J/C}}{\text{m}^2\cdot\text{C/s}} = \frac{\text{kg}\cdot\text{m}^2/\text{s}^2}{\text{m}^2/\text{s}} = \frac{\text{kg}}{\text{s}}.$$

Using these results and substituting for the electron mass m, we then have

$$\tau = \frac{9.1 \times 10^{-31}\ \text{kg}}{3.67 \times 10^{-17}\ \text{kg/s}} = 2.5 \times 10^{-14}\ \text{s}. \quad \text{(Answer)}$$

(b) The mean free path λ of the conduction electrons in a conductor is the average distance traveled by an electron between collisions. (This definition parallels that in Section 19-6 for the mean free path of molecules in a gas.) What is λ for the conduction electrons in copper, assuming that their effective speed v_{eff} is 1.6×10^6 m/s?

KEY IDEA

The distance d any particle travels in a certain time t at a constant speed v is $d = vt$.

Calculation: For the electrons in copper, this gives us

$$\lambda = v_{eff}\tau \qquad (26\text{-}24)$$
$$= (1.6 \times 10^6\ \text{m/s})(2.5 \times 10^{-14}\ \text{s})$$
$$= 4.0 \times 10^{-8}\ \text{m} = 40\ \text{nm}. \quad \text{(Answer)}$$

This is about 150 times the distance between nearest-neighbor atoms in a copper lattice. Thus, on the average, each conduction electron passes many copper atoms before finally hitting one.