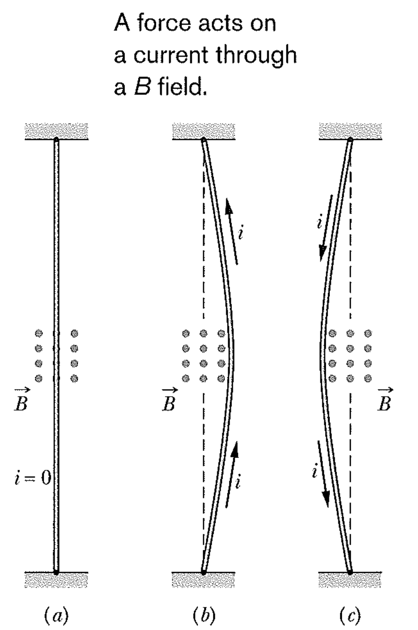


Fig. 28-14 A flexible wire passes between the pole faces of a magnet (only the farther pole face is shown). (*a*) Without current in the wire, the wire is straight. (*b*) With upward current, the wire is deflected rightward. (*c*) With downward current, the deflection is leftward. The connections for getting the current into the wire at one end and out of it at the other end are not shown.

28-8 Magnetic Force on a Current-Carrying Wire

We have already seen (in connection with the Hall effect) that a magnetic field exerts a sideways force on electrons moving in a wire. This force must then be transmitted to the wire itself, because the conduction electrons cannot escape sideways out of the wire.

In Fig. 28-14*a*, a vertical wire, carrying no current and fixed in place at both ends, extends through the gap between the vertical pole faces of a magnet. The magnetic field between the faces is directed outward from the page. In Fig. 28-14*b*, a current is sent upward through the wire; the wire deflects to the right. In Fig. 28-14*c*, we reverse the direction of the current and the wire deflects to the left.

Figure 28-15 shows what happens inside the wire of Fig. 28-14*b*. We see one of the conduction electrons, drifting downward with an assumed drift speed v_d. Equation 28-3, in which we must put $\phi = 90°$, tells us that a force $\vec{F}_B$ of magnitude ev_dB must act on each such electron. From Eq. 28-2 we see that this force must be directed to the right. We expect then that the wire as a whole will experience a force to the right, in agreement with Fig. 28-14*b*.

If, in Fig. 28-15, we were to reverse *either* the direction of the magnetic field *or* the direction of the current, the force on the wire would reverse, being directed now to the left. Note too that it does not matter whether we consider negative charges drifting downward in the wire (the actual case) or positive charges drifting upward. The direction of the deflecting force on the wire is the same. We are safe then in dealing with a current of positive charge, as we usually do in dealing with circuits.

Consider a length L of the wire in Fig. 28-15. All the conduction electrons in this section of wire will drift past plane xx in Fig. 28-15 in a time $t = L/v_d$. Thus, in that time a charge given by

$$q = it = i\frac{L}{v_d}$$

will pass through that plane. Substituting this into Eq. 28-3 yields

$$F_B = qv_dB \sin \phi = \frac{iL}{v_d} v_dB \sin 90°$$

or

$$F_B = iLB. \tag{28-25}$$

Note that this equation gives the magnetic force that acts on a length L of straight wire carrying a current i and immersed in a uniform magnetic field $\vec{B}$ that is *perpendicular* to the wire.

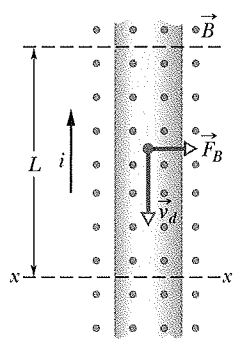


Fig. 28-15 A close-up view of a section of the wire of Fig. 28-14*b*. The current direction is upward, which means that electrons drift downward. A magnetic field that emerges from the plane of the page causes the electrons and the wire to be deflected to the right.

If the magnetic field is *not* perpendicular to the wire, as in Fig. 28-16, the magnetic force is given by a generalization of Eq. 28-25:

$$\vec{F}_B = i\vec{L} \times \vec{B} \qquad \text{(force on a current).} \tag{28-26}$$

Here $\vec{L}$ is a *length vector* that has magnitude L and is directed along the wire segment in the direction of the (conventional) current. The force magnitude F_B is

$$F_B = iLB \sin \phi, \tag{28-27}$$

where ϕ is the angle between the directions of $\vec{L}$ and $\vec{B}$. The direction of $\vec{F}_B$ is that of the cross product $\vec{L} \times \vec{B}$ because we take current i to be a positive quantity. Equation 28-26 tells us that $\vec{F}_B$ is always perpendicular to the plane defined by vectors $\vec{L}$ and $\vec{B}$, as indicated in Fig. 28-16.

Equation 28-26 is equivalent to Eq. 28-2 in that either can be taken as the defining equation for $\vec{B}$. In practice, we define $\vec{B}$ from Eq. 28-26 because it is much easier to measure the magnetic force acting on a wire than that on a single moving charge.

If a wire is not straight or the field is not uniform, we can imagine the wire broken up into small straight segments and apply Eq. 28-26 to each segment. The force on the wire as a whole is then the vector sum of all the forces on the segments that make it up. In the differential limit, we can write

$$d\vec{F}_B = i\, d\vec{L} \times \vec{B}, \tag{28-28}$$

and we can find the resultant force on any given arrangement of currents by integrating Eq. 28-28 over that arrangement.

In using Eq. 28-28, bear in mind that there is no such thing as an isolated current-carrying wire segment of length dL. There must always be a way to introduce the current into the segment at one end and take it out at the other end.

The force is perpendicular to both the field and the length.

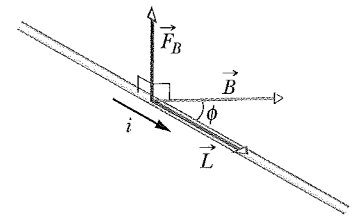
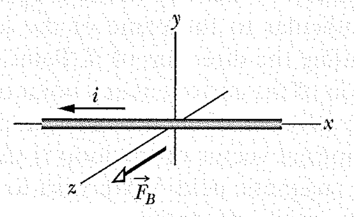


Fig. 28-16 A wire carrying current i makes an angle ϕ with magnetic field $\vec{B}$. The wire has length L in the field and length vector $\vec{L}$ (in the direction of the current). A magnetic force $\vec{F}_B = i\vec{L} \times \vec{B}$ acts on the wire.

CHECKPOINT 4

The figure shows a current i through a wire in a uniform magnetic field $\vec{B}$, as well as the magnetic force $\vec{F}_B$ acting on the wire. The field is oriented so that the force is maximum. In what direction is the field?



Sample Problem

Magnetic force on a wire carrying current

A straight, horizontal length of copper wire has a current $i = 28$ A through it. What are the magnitude and direction of the minimum magnetic field $\vec{B}$ needed to suspend the wire—that is, to balance the gravitational force on it? The linear density (mass per unit length) of the wire is 46.6 g/m.

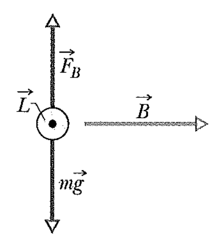


Fig. 28-17 A wire (shown in cross section) carrying current out of the page.

KEY IDEAS

(1) Because the wire carries a current, a magnetic force $\vec{F}_B$ can act on the wire if we place it in a magnetic field $\vec{B}$. To balance the downward gravitational force $\vec{F}_g$ on the wire, we want $\vec{F}_B$ to be directed upward (Fig. 28-17). (2) The direction of $\vec{F}_B$ is related to the directions of $\vec{B}$ and the wire's length vector $\vec{L}$ by Eq. 28-26 ($\vec{F}_B = i\vec{L} \times \vec{B}$).

Calculations: Because $\vec{L}$ is directed horizontally (and the current is taken to be positive), Eq. 28-26 and the right-hand rule for cross products tell us that $\vec{B}$ must be horizontal and rightward (in Fig. 28-17) to give the required upward $\vec{F}_B$.

The magnitude of $\vec{F}_B$ is $F_B = iLB \sin\phi$ (Eq. 28-27). Because we want $\vec{F}_B$ to balance $\vec{F}_g$, we want

$$iLB \sin\phi = mg, \tag{28-29}$$

where mg is the magnitude of $\vec{F}_g$ and m is the mass of the wire.

We also want the minimal field magnitude B for $\vec{F}_B$ to balance $\vec{F}_g$. Thus, we need to maximize $\sin\phi$ in Eq. 28-29. To do so, we set $\phi = 90°$, thereby arranging for $\vec{B}$ to be perpendicular to the wire. We then have $\sin\phi = 1$, so Eq. 28-29 yields

$$B = \frac{mg}{iL \sin\phi} = \frac{(m/L)g}{i}. \tag{28-30}$$

We write the result this way because we know m/L, the linear density of the wire. Substituting known data then gives us

$$B = \frac{(46.6 \times 10^{-3}\ \text{kg/m})(9.8\ \text{m/s}^2)}{28\ \text{A}}$$

$$= 1.6 \times 10^{-2}\ \text{T}. \qquad \text{(Answer)}$$

This is about 160 times the strength of Earth's magnetic field.

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