

Before Conducting Physics Labs

(Theories and conventions for measurements and data analyses)

Your Name _____	TA's signature allowing you to take the quiz or leave _____
Partners' Names _____	

	Obtained reasonable experimental results? yes <input type="checkbox"/>
	Answered questions? yes <input type="checkbox"/>
	Cleaned your table? yes <input type="checkbox"/>

Introduction

Physics is one of the most quantitative sciences. It is important to obtain an experimental result as accurately as possible. This philosophy has contributed to the foundation of technologies and it enables us to make smaller engineering devices with quite a few functions. On the other hand, physics experiments have another objective to confirm or to falsify the correspondent theoretical prediction. We could never obtain the absolutely “true” value; however, it is significant for physics experiments to estimate the scientific tendency, such as how it approaches the expected value or how the data consistently indicate a rule or law.

The actual experimental procedure can be illustrated as follows: First, experimental data have to have objective properties; thus, we use units to express the experimental values to be comparable. Second, measurement always contains uncertainty, which is based on the limitation of the device capability and internal / external noise. Therefore, the last digits fluctuate and this gives us the meaningfulness of significant figures. This consideration can never be excluded as a scientific aspect, which leads to the error analysis. Third, only a few trials would not explain the inclination of data; hence, sufficient amounts of data have to be taken to support the result in terms of the statistical sense. The average and standard deviation of experimental data provide a major property of the experimental result.

From the various perspectives, the experiment can be improved to find more accurate results and to discover new scientific phenomena. This lab will procure the fundamental information on how you conduct physics experiments using analysis methods and various interpretations of your experimental data.

Objectives:

- To learn importance of physical units
- To learn experimental uncertainty and its analysis
- To learn how to acquire experimental data and how to process and interpret the set of data

1. Units and their importance

- SI Units
The term, SI, derived from “Le Systeme International d'Unites”, which means the international unit system in French.

Attention! You now have to remember the three basic SI units, meters (m) for length, kilograms (kg) for mass, and seconds (s) for time.

- Why do we have to use units?

The main reasons are to compare the physical values and to confirm the consistency of the physical system.

You may mention the mass is 100, but it can be 100 kg, 100 g, or 100 mg. Thus, a number without units has no meaning and it does not allow you to compare the values.

A physical system is consistent, and so is the unit system since it is closely related. This is called dimension analysis. The units for physics or kinematics are consistent with the formulas. For example, velocity has the unit, m/s. Velocity is defined as length divided by time. The length has the unit, m, and time has s, so the unit and its formula are consistent in terms of this analysis.

- Unit conversion

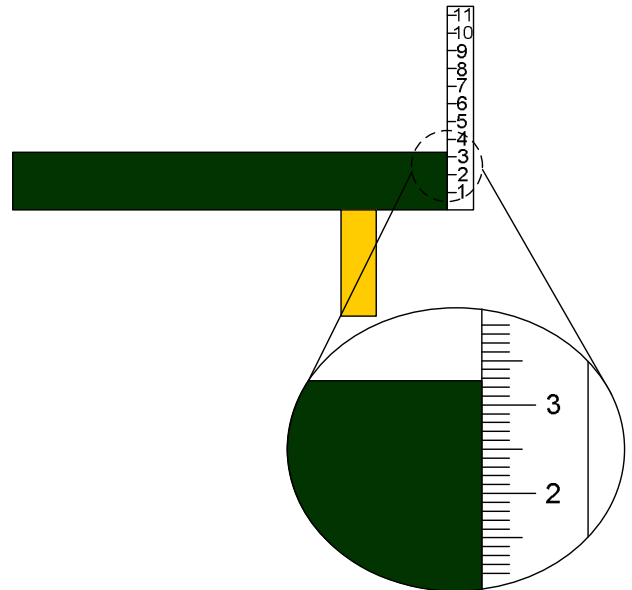
Sometimes, a physical value is given by non-SI units, such as 200 g. The value must be converted to be used in physics. One kilogram is equivalent with one thousand grams (1 kg = 1,000 g). The unit, kg, is a larger scale than “g.” Thus, to convert it, you divide it by 1000. Namely, $(200 \div 1000) = 0.200$ kg. [Analogously, when 20 cents have to be converted into dollars, you will divide it by 100, not multiplying.]

2. Uncertainty and significant figures you have to obtain

- Experimental measurement and uncertainty

Suppose you measure a length of the thickness of a table with a ruler. You may encounter the following situation: ① In the first look, the thickness reads a little more than 3 cm (0.03 m). ② When you look with more precision, it reads a little more than 3.2 cm (0.032 m).

You may read as many figures as the tool of measurement provides. This ruler provides you to estimate one more digit, such as 3.27 cm (0.0327 m). The last digit “7” contains uncertainty. Under this measurement, you are able to obtain three digits (3, 2, and 7). These are called **significant figures**. You can say, this has three significant figures.



Attention! You always have to obtain one more digit than the measurer can indicate, which can be doubtful, but important to include.

Attention! According to the above discussion, the experimental values always take uncertain figure because no one obtains the “true” value of the physical quantity.

- Why do we have to consider “significant figures” in physics?

For example, the mass of a water melon is told as 1.7 kg (2 sig.fig.), and another one is told as 1.73 kg (3 sig. fig.) *scientifically*. Which water melon is heavier? For the first one, the last digit of “7” of 1.7 kg is uncertain, so value ranges from 1.65 kg to 1.74 kg. The first water melon can be heavier if it has another digit like 1.74 kg. If not, it cannot be compared exactly in accordance because of the difference between the number of significant figures in each measurement.

3. Calculation of the experimental values and its rounding numbers

Attention! Use the same unit (usually SI units) to calculate them.

The basic rule of rounding is following: When the digit is more than or equal to 5, it will be rounded up. When it is less than 5, it will be rounded off. (*The official rule involves more details.*)

- Addition and subtraction

You have two physical values to be added, 3.67 and 1.3. The result will be

$$3.\underline{67} + 1.\underline{3} = 4.\underline{97} \Rightarrow 5.0$$

The underlined digit(s) is (are) uncertain accordingly. Then, the last digit has to be rounded accordingly. Other examples are:

$$2.\underline{34} + 3.51\underline{6} = 5.8\underline{56} \Rightarrow 5.86$$

and

$$5.22\underline{3} - 0.45\underline{5} = 4.7\underline{68} \Rightarrow 4.77.$$

- Multiplication and division

With the same procedure, we can calculate:

$$3.\underline{58} \times 0.2\underline{1} = 0.7518 \Rightarrow 0.75$$

The final result is always fit with the least significant figures of calculated values. So is calculation for the division.

- Calculation with physical or mathematical constants

For given reference values and constants, you have to use at least one more figure than the experimental significant number of figures. Suppose you calculate an area of circle.

The radius of an object is 0.0262 m. The area will be πr^2 . The radius has three significant figures, so π should be taken as 3.142 at least. (Note that you should use full figures of a constant if it is provided as reference.) The result is:

$$\pi r^2 = 3.142 \times (0.0262 \text{ m})^2 = 3.142 \times 0.000686 = 2.15 \text{ m}^2$$

4. Types of error

- The human error?

This error is just a *mistake*, and not a scientific estimate. You **MUST NOT** mention this sort of error in your report. Mistakes have to be corrected before you leave the lab.

Attention! The human error can be caused by following: The experimenter does not grasp what is being measured. The skill to perform the experiment is not yet improved by the number of trials. (Make sure each time whether you obtain a proper result.) Simple calculation mistake also results in the different outcome.

- The random error

This error is based on the capability of the device. It could have fluctuation toward the true value due to physical limits of the device. This error must be small enough to exclude any other major systematic errors and mistakes.

- The systematic error

This error is induced by offset or zero setting mistakes. You may record the consistent results, but they are different from what you expect from the theory. It could be a simple mistake of how to read the result, how to set up the devices, or how you make the timing to measure. Also, some devices may have a problem which consistently causes wrong results.

☑ When you encounter this sort of error, consult your instructor or try hints written in the manual.

Attention! You have to pay attention while you are measuring a physical value. Any one of the conditions could cause systematic errors. Think about where, when, how, and what for the experiment.

- The unanticipated external causes of error
The experiment can be formulated with a basic relationship. Besides the random and systematic errors, (absolutely, after you corrected any possible mistakes), suppose you still have some deviation, then it can be referred to as external effects toward the entire system, such as temperature, friction, pressure, time-dependent properties, and any other extra factors to be considered beyond the given formula. This is **worthwhile** to be discussed in your report.

5. Error analyses

- Percent error
When there is a reference to be compared, the experimental value will be subtracted from it and divided by the reference (accepted) value.

Example

The accepted value is 0.761 m and correspondent measured value is 0.782 m. Thus, the error will be calculated as

$$\frac{|\text{accepted} - \text{measured}|}{\text{accepted}} \times 100\% = \frac{|0.761 - 0.782|}{0.761} \times 100\% = 2.76\%$$

- Percent difference
When the expected value is not known and one experimental value is not as important as the others, the error will be calculated with the difference between the values divided by the average value of them.

Example

The values you obtained are 2.87 kg and 2.76 kg under theoretically equivalent, but with different ways. The error will be:

$$\frac{|\text{one} - \text{the other}|}{\text{these average}} \times 100\% = \frac{|2.87 - 2.76|}{\frac{1}{2}(2.87 + 2.76)} \times 100\% = 3.91\%$$

- Average (mean) and standard deviation
The average value of the set of data is the likely index of the expected value. One calculates it as the sum of the data divided by the number of the trials. Let's calculate the average from the following set of data: 5.12, 5.43, 5.02, 5.72, and 5.31. Therefore, the average or mean value is $(5.12 + 5.43 + 5.02 + 5.27 + 5.31) \div 5 = 5.23$.

Now, we can also think of another property of the set of data. Here is another set of data: 5.52, 5.15, 4.98, 5.49, and 5.01. The average is $(5.52 + 5.15 + 4.98 + 5.49 + 5.01) \div 5 = 5.23$. Although the average is equal to the above two sets of data, the distributions of the values around the average are different. Namely, we should know how to quantify the difference. This is known as standard deviation.

The standard deviation indicates how the set of data deviated from the average. Therefore, you subtract the average from each datum. Use the first set of data:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{(The 1}^{\text{st}} \text{ data, } 5.12 - \text{average, } 5.23)^2 &= 0.0121 \\ \text{(The 2}^{\text{nd}} \text{ data, } 5.43 - \text{average, } 5.23)^2 &= 0.0400 \\ \text{(The 3}^{\text{rd}} \text{ data, } 5.02 - \text{average, } 5.23)^2 &= 0.0441 \\ \text{(The 4}^{\text{th}} \text{ data, } 5.27 - \text{average, } 5.23)^2 &= 0.00160 \\ \text{(The 5}^{\text{th}} \text{ data, } 5.31 - \text{average, } 5.23)^2 &= 0.00640 \end{aligned}$$

The reason why it has to be squared is to avoid cancellation simply between positive and negative values. The sum of them is $0.0121 + 0.0400 + 0.0441 + 0.0016 + 0.0064 = 0.1042$. This is divided by (the number of the trial – 1) [Note that this works even for small amount of the samples.] Thus, $0.1042 \div (5-1) = 0.02605$. We square each deviation, so we eventually have to square root to get back the original, $\sqrt{0.02605} = 0.16$. This is the **standard deviation** of the set of data. The general formula is given as

$$\text{STD} = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N-1} \sum (\text{Ave.} - \text{Each datum})^2}$$

where \sum indicates the sum of each term. For the second set of data, we can do the same. The standard deviation is 0.26. Even though the data have the equal average, how it is distributed makes them different.

The scientific expressions of the above will be [average \pm standard deviation]:

For the first set of data: 5.23 ± 0.16

For the second set of data: 5.23 ± 0.26

6. Interpretation of the experimental results

The average and standard deviation have to be written together to display the property of the set of the data as shown in the previous section. Namely,

Average value \pm standard deviation (units).

An accepted value of the speed of sound at room temperature is 343.2 m/s. Suppose your set of data gives the average and standard deviation as

Case 1: 341.6 ± 2.4 m/s

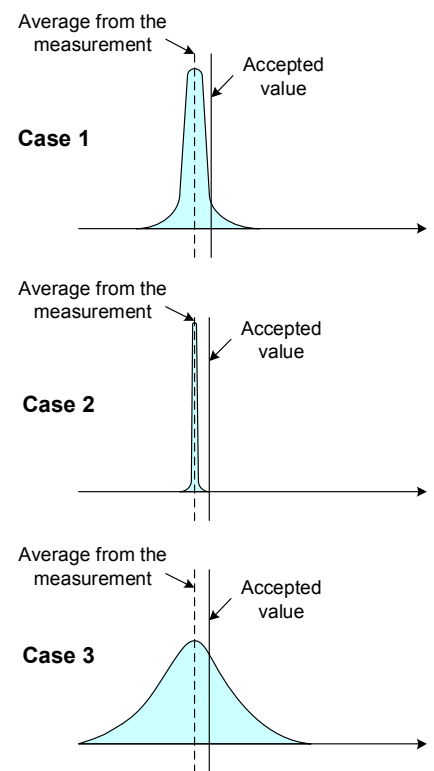
This can be consistent and accepted as the final result since it is within the standard deviation to be agreed with the accepted value. Most of the standard deviation comes from the random error.

Case 2: 341.6 ± 0.12 m/s

The standard deviation is small enough to conclude that this is an accurate data. However, it does not fall on the accepted value. A possible reason can be referred to as a systematic error.

Case 3: 341.6 ± 12.56 m/s

This is consistent with the reference value; however, the standard deviation is too large. From this result, it is hard to identify the causes of error. The experimentation is possibly NOT suitable for obtaining the accepted value.

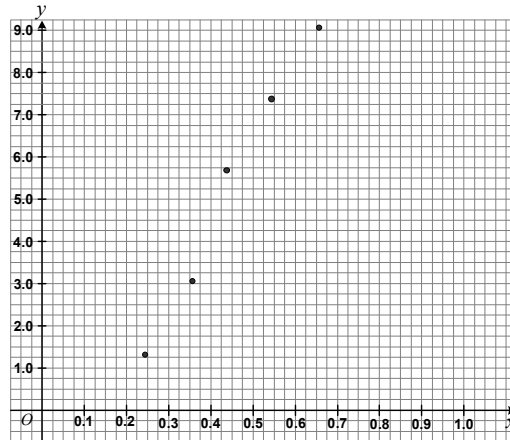


7. Data fitting with a slope

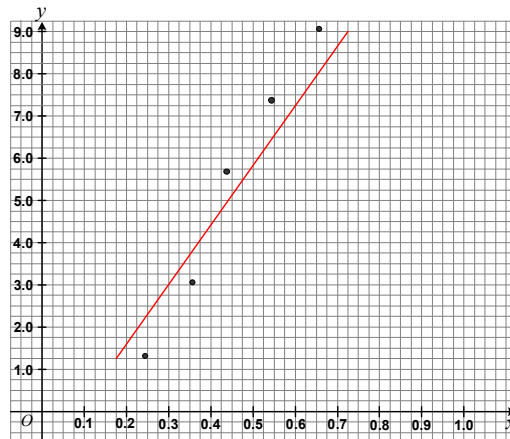
When a relationship between two variables is proportional linearly, the data should be analyzed by the slope. [Note: The systematic method to obtain the slope is called the least square fit.] Suppose you obtain the following relationship between two values.

x	y
0.241	1.32
0.352	3.07
0.437	5.72
0.548	7.43
0.656	9.11

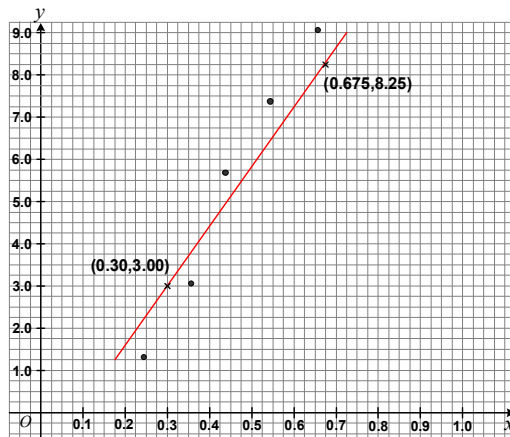
① Label the numbers with an equal space and plot the each point.



② Draw a linear line that is close to every point.



③ Pick out two points which can easily be read from the graph with an enough separation.

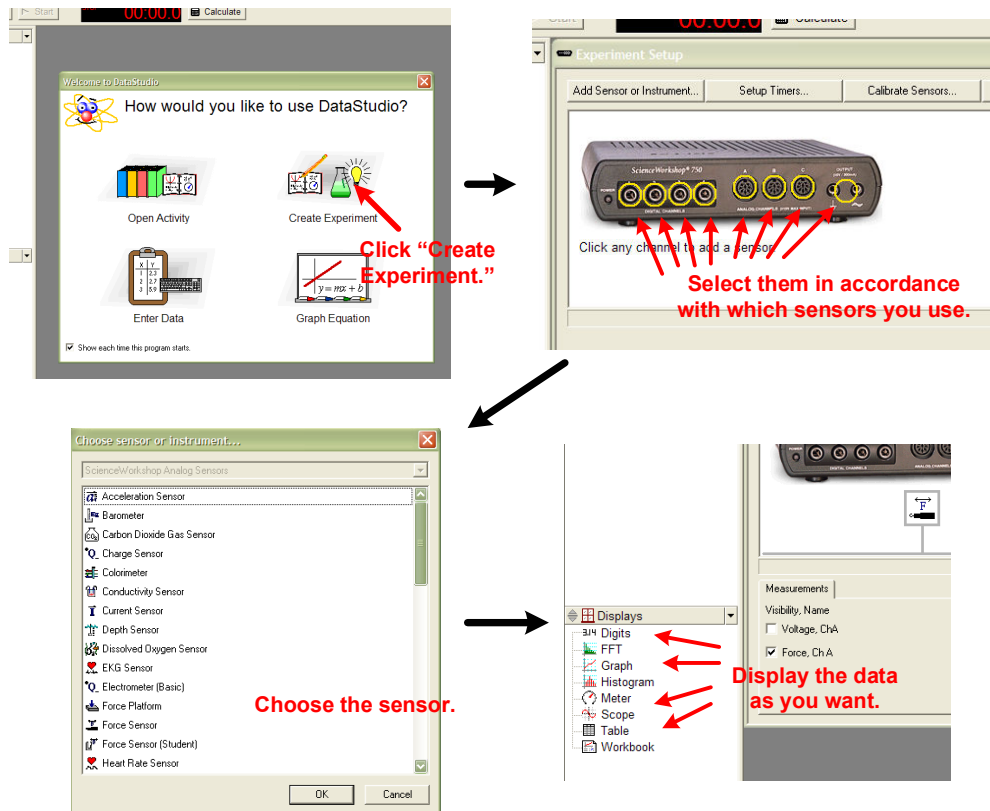


④ The slope is obtained by following:

$$\text{Slope} = \frac{y_1 - y_2}{x_1 - x_2} = \frac{8.25 - 3.00}{0.675 - 0.300} = 14.0$$

8. DataStudio (PASCO Interface) instruction

Most of the experimental activities are measured with sensors and the software. The common procedure is just a few steps. ① Click “Create Experiment.” ② Make sure what sensors you are using for the experiment, and then click the exact connection on the screen. ③ After that, the screen that prompts you to select the sensors pops up. Choose a proper sensor. ④ You also have to display the recorded results. Select one of them in accordance with the purpose.



9. References for sizes\

This is the reference so you can compare your experimental results with some of typical lengths and masses.

Typical LENGTHS of various objects

The diameter of penny ~19.05 mm / 1.950 cm / 0.01905 m



The diameter of quarter ~24.26 mm / 2.426 cm / 0.02426 m



A pencil lead ~60.0 mm / 6.00 cm / 0.060 m



The width of letter size of paper
~216 mm / 21.6 cm / 0.216 m

The length of letter size of paper
~279 mm / 27.9 cm / 0.279 m



The height of a dinning table
~700 mm / 70.0 cm / 0.700 m



The height of a standard car
~1,500 mm / 150.0 cm / 1.500 m



The height of 5-shelf bookcase
~1,800 mm / 180.0 cm / 1.800 m



Typical MASSES of various objects

A penny ~ 2.500 g / 0.0025 kg



A quarter ~ 5.670 g / 0.00567 kg



An egg ~ 60 g / 0.060 kg



A baseball ~150 g / 0.150 kg



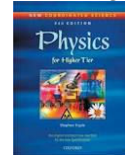
A grapefruit ~230 g / 0.230 kg



A soccer ball ~430 g / 0.430 kg



A physics textbook ~2,300 g / 2.300 kg



One gallon of water ~3,785 g / 3.785 kg



A middle size of watermelon
~5,000 g / 5.000 kg



Problem Sets:

❶ Write down the SI units for mass, length, and time.

❷ Convert the following expressions into SI units. (Show your work.)

230 cm \Rightarrow _____ ()

19 g \Rightarrow _____ ()

48 km \Rightarrow _____ ()

50.5 pounds \Rightarrow _____ ()

3.67 miles \Rightarrow _____ ()

78.0 feet \Rightarrow _____ ()

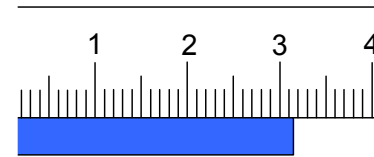
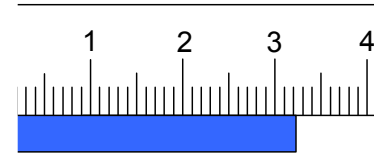
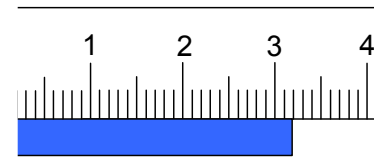
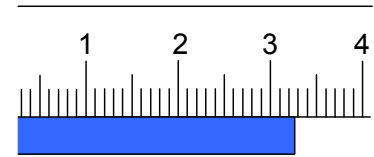
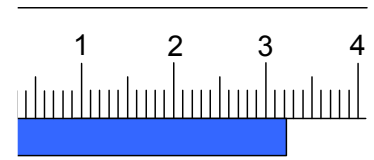
92.8 mg \Rightarrow _____ ()

88.4 mm \Rightarrow _____ ()

Unit Conversion Table
1 cm = 0.01 m
1 mm = 0.001 m
1 miles = 1609.344 m
1 kg = 1000 g
1 kg = 2.2046 pounds
1 m = 3.281 feet
1 mg = 10^{-6} kg

⑤ The length of an object is measured by several people as follows:
 Read each with three significant figures. (You must include an uncertain figure to be significant.)

trial	Reading
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	



What is the average of this measurement?

_____ ()

What is the standard deviation (show the work)?

How many figures do you have to take? Explain the rule.

This is very important. From next lab, you have to follow this rule!

How would you describe the possible error for this measurement? Can it be a systematic error or a random error? Justify your answer.

④ You have obtained a velocity, 2.76 m/s. In the second trial, you obtained 2.65 m/s but the object has a different mass. What error analysis do you have to use to compare the two velocities (the percent error or percent difference)? Then, calculate it.

⑤ From an experiment, you measured the average gravitational acceleration, 9.72 m/s². The accepted value is 9.82 m/s². What error analysis do you have to use for this (the percent error or percent difference)? Then, calculate it.

6 Find the best fit slope out of the following data.

x	y
0.332	0.210
0.445	0.403
0.527	0.624
0.639	0.886
0.743	1.102

Follow the instruction in part 7 of this manual.

