

Newton's Second Law The Atwood Machine Lab Report

LAB 2

Newton's Second Law: Atwood's Machine

OBJECTIVES:

To check the validity of Newton's Second Law by using Atwood's Machine.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

Atwood's Machine with two weight holders (1), Set of weights (1), Stopwatch (1), Meter Stick (1)

THEORY:

Atwood's machine consists of two objects with masses m_1 and m_2 attached to either end of a light string which passes over a pulley of mass M (Figure 1).

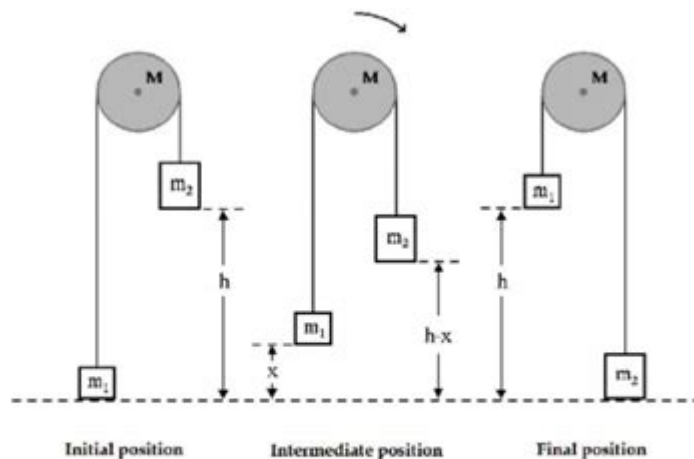


Figure 1. Atwood's machine and positions of objects with masses m_1 and m_2 during experiment.

Newton's Second Law: The Atwood Machine Lab Report

Newton's Second Law of Motion is a fundamental principle in physics that describes the relationship between the force applied to an object and its resulting motion. One of the most effective ways to explore this law in a laboratory setting is through the use of the Atwood Machine, a device that consists of two masses connected by a string that passes over a pulley. This lab report will delve into the mechanics of the Atwood Machine, the experimental methods used to investigate Newton's Second Law, and the analysis of the results obtained from the experiment.

Understanding Newton's Second Law

Newton's Second Law states that the acceleration of an object is directly proportional to the net force acting on it and inversely proportional to its mass. Mathematically, it can be expressed as:

$$F = ma$$

Where:

- F is the net force acting on the object (in Newtons),
- m is the mass of the object (in kilograms),
- a is the acceleration of the object (in meters per second squared).

This law implies that if a greater force is applied to an object, it will accelerate more quickly, and if the mass of the object increases, its acceleration will decrease, assuming the force remains constant.

The Atwood Machine: A Practical Application

The Atwood Machine serves as an excellent illustration of Newton's Second Law. By adjusting the masses on either side of the pulley, students can observe how variations in mass affect acceleration and tension in the string.

Components of the Atwood Machine

The Atwood Machine consists of several key components:

- **Pulley:** A wheel on which the string runs, allowing for the change in direction of the force.
- **String:** A lightweight, non-stretchable rope that connects the two masses.
- **Masses:** Two weights that can be adjusted to different values to observe their effects on the system.
- **Support Frame:** A stable structure that holds the pulley in place.
- **Measuring Instruments:** Tools such as a stopwatch to measure time and a scale to measure mass.

Experimental Setup

To conduct the Atwood Machine experiment, the following materials and methods are required:

Materials Needed

- Atwood machine apparatus (pulley, string, support frame)
- Two adjustable masses (e.g., 100g, 200g)
- Stopwatch
- Meterstick or ruler
- Scale for measuring mass
- Protractor (for measuring angles, if applicable)

Procedure

1. Setup the Atwood Machine: Secure the pulley to the support frame and attach the string, making sure it runs smoothly over the pulley.
2. Attach the masses: Hang one mass on each side of the pulley.
3. Measure the masses: Using the scale, record the mass of each weight.
4. Release the system: Allow the masses to move freely and use the stopwatch to measure the time taken for the heavier mass to descend a predetermined distance.
5. Repeat the experiment: Change the masses on either side and repeat the measurements multiple times for accuracy.
6. Record all data: Note the time taken for different mass configurations and any observations about the motion of the masses.

Data Analysis

Once the experiment is complete, the next step is to analyze the data collected. The analysis involves calculating the acceleration of the system using the formula derived from Newton's Second Law.

Calculating Acceleration

1. Calculate the net force acting on the system:

$$F = m_1g - m_2g$$

where m_1 is the heavier mass, m_2 is the lighter mass, and g is the acceleration due to gravity (approximately 9.81 m/s^2).

2. Calculate the total mass in the system:

$$m_{\text{total}} = m_1 + m_2$$

3. Use the relationship from Newton's Second Law to find the acceleration:

$$a = \frac{F}{m_{\text{total}}} = \frac{m_1 g - m_2 g}{m_1 + m_2}$$

4. Compare the calculated acceleration with the measured acceleration from the experiment to assess the accuracy of your results.

Conclusion

The Atwood Machine provides a hands-on approach to understanding Newton's Second Law of Motion. Through careful experimentation and data analysis, students can observe the direct correlation between mass, force, and acceleration.

In conclusion, the Atwood Machine not only reinforces the theoretical concepts of physics but also enhances the practical skills necessary for scientific investigation. By varying the masses and measuring the resulting accelerations, students gain a deeper insight into the principles that govern motion. This experiment serves as a foundational exercise in physics education, illustrating the significance of Newton's Second Law in real-world applications.

For those looking to further their understanding, additional experiments can be conducted by introducing friction, varying the angle of the pulley, or using different materials for the string to see how these factors influence the results. Through continuous exploration and experimentation, the principles of physics become more tangible and accessible, fostering a lifelong appreciation for the subject.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Newton's second law and how does it apply to the Atwood machine?

Newton's second law states that the force acting on an object is equal to the mass of that object multiplied by its acceleration ($F = ma$). In the Atwood machine, this law helps explain how the unequal masses of the two objects affect their acceleration and the tension in the connecting string.

What is an Atwood machine and what is its purpose in experiments?

An Atwood machine is a simple device consisting of two masses connected by a string over a pulley. It is used in experiments to demonstrate principles of classical mechanics, particularly Newton's second law and the concepts of tension and acceleration.

How do you calculate the acceleration of the Atwood machine?

The acceleration of the Atwood machine can be calculated using the formula $a = (m_1 - m_2)g / (m_1 + m_2)$, where m_1 and m_2 are the masses on either side of the pulley and g is the acceleration due to gravity.

What variables should be controlled in an Atwood machine lab experiment?

Variables that should be controlled include the mass of the weights, the friction on the pulley, the length of the string, and the initial conditions such as the position of the masses.

What are common sources of error in an Atwood machine experiment?

Common sources of error include measurement inaccuracies in mass and distance, friction in the pulley system, air resistance, and not accounting for the mass of the pulley itself.

How can you determine the tension in the string of an Atwood machine?

Tension in the string can be determined by analyzing the forces acting on one of the masses. For example, by using the equation $T = m_1g - m_1a$ for mass m_1 , where T is tension, g is gravitational acceleration, and a is the acceleration of the system.

What role does friction play in the Atwood machine experiment?

Friction can affect the accuracy of the results by reducing the acceleration of the masses. Minimizing friction is important to ensure that the experiment closely aligns with theoretical predictions based on Newton's second law.

How can the Atwood machine lab report demonstrate the relationship between force and acceleration?

The lab report can include data collected from varying mass configurations and their corresponding accelerations, demonstrating that as the net force increases (due to a greater mass difference), the acceleration also increases, consistent with Newton's second law.

What conclusions can be drawn from an Atwood machine experiment regarding Newton's second law?

Conclusions can confirm that the acceleration of the system is directly proportional to the net force acting on it and inversely proportional to the total mass of the system, thus validating Newton's second law through practical application.

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Newton (unit) - Wikipedia

An average-sized apple with mass 200 g exerts about two newtons of force at Earth's surface, which we measure as the apple's weight on Earth. $0.200 \text{ kg} \times 9.80665 \text{ m/s}^2 = 1.961 \text{ N}$

Convert newtons to lbs - Unit Converter

Convert newtons to lbs Please provide values below to convert newton [N] to pound-force [lbf], or vice versa.

Newton | Definition & Facts | Britannica

The formula $F = ma$ is employed to calculate the number of newtons required to increase or decrease the velocity of a given body. In countries still using the English system of ...

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Jun 10, 2025 · "What Are Newton's Laws of Motion?" ThoughtCo, Jun. 10, 2025, [thoughtco.com/what-are-newtons-laws-of-motion-608324](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-are-newtons-laws-of-motion-608324). Helmenstine, Anne Marie, Ph.D. ...

Newton (unit) explained

gn =), a kilogram mass exerts a force of about 9.81 N. An average-sized apple with mass 200 g exerts about two newtons of force at Earth's surface, which we measure as the apple's weight ...

What is the unit called a newton? - Sizes

Aug 1, 2011 · Definition of the newton. The unit of force in SI, defined as that force which, applied to a mass of 1 kilogram, gives it an acceleration of 1 meter per second per second. Symbol, N, ...

newton - Metric System

F is the gravitational force acting between the two objects, measured in newtons, symbol N, G is the gravitational constant, equal to approximately $6.674 \times 10^{-11} \text{ N m}^2 \text{ kg}^{-2}$,

How to Calculate a Newton: Understanding the Unit of Force

3. Plug in values and multiply - Use the equation $F = m \cdot a$ to calculate the force exerted on that object in Newtons. Example Let's consider a 10 kg object being pushed with an acceleration of ...

Newton - Energy Education

A newton is the SI unit of force. It is equal to $1 \text{ kg} \times 1 \text{ m/s}^2$ $1 \text{ kg} \times 1 \text{ m/s}^2$. This is roughly equal to the weight of an apple. Conversions ... 9.8 newtons is roughly the force exerted by a 1 ...

Newton (unit) - Simple English Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The US Customary Unit of force is the pound (symbol: lbf). 1 pound is equal to 4.44822 newtons. In 1946, Conférence Générale des Poids et Mesures (CGPM) set the unit of force in the MKS ...

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Explore our comprehensive lab report on Newton's Second Law using the Atwood Machine. Discover how this classic experiment illustrates key physics concepts. Learn more!

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