

# Appendix A

## Derivation of the Acceleration in Circular Motion

Let us first recall the definitions of position vector, velocity and acceleration of a particle. In a given reference frame (i.e., coordinate system) the position of a particle is given by a vector extending from the coordinate frame origin to the instantaneous position of the particle. This vector could be a function of time, thus specifying the particle trajectory

$$\mathbf{r}(t) = (x(t), y(t), z(t)). \quad (\text{A.1})$$

The velocity of the particle is defined as the change of position per unit time

$$\mathbf{v} = \lim_{\Delta t \rightarrow 0} \frac{\Delta \mathbf{r}}{\Delta t} = \frac{d\mathbf{r}}{dt}. \quad (\text{A.2})$$

The acceleration is defined as the change of velocity per unit time,

$$\mathbf{a} = \lim_{\Delta t \rightarrow 0} \frac{\Delta \mathbf{v}}{\Delta t} = \frac{d\mathbf{v}}{dt}. \quad (\text{A.3})$$

We note that this is a vector equation, so the change in velocity refers to both a change in the magnitude of velocity, as well as to a change of velocity direction.

Circular motion is described by a rotating vector  $\mathbf{r}(t)$  of fixed length,  $|\mathbf{r}| = \text{constant}$ . The position vector is thus determined by the radius of the circle  $r$ , and by the angle  $\theta(t)$  of  $\mathbf{r}$  with respect to the  $x$ -axis (Fig. A.1).

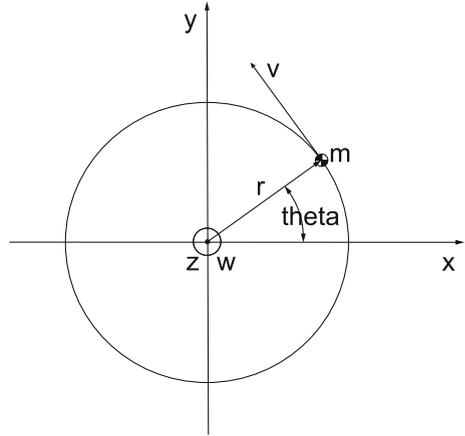
Let us now introduce a set of three orthogonal unit vectors:  $\mathbf{e}_r$  in the direction of  $\mathbf{r}$ ,  $\mathbf{e}_t$  in the direction of the tangent to the circle and  $\mathbf{e}_z$  in the direction of the  $z$  axis. The relation between the three unit vectors is given by  $\mathbf{e}_t = \mathbf{e}_z \times \mathbf{e}_r$ .

We define the angular velocity vector as being perpendicular to the plane of the circular trajectory with magnitude equal to the time derivative of the angle  $\theta$

$$\boldsymbol{\omega} = \dot{\theta} \mathbf{e}_z. \quad (\text{A.4})$$

Let us proceed to calculate the velocity

**Fig. A.1** Parameters and variables in circular motion



$$\mathbf{v} = \frac{d\mathbf{r}}{dt}. \quad (\text{A.5})$$

The direction of velocity is given by the tangent to the circle:  $\mathbf{e}_t = \mathbf{e}_z \times \mathbf{e}_r$ . The magnitude of velocity is given by the length of the infinitesimal circular arc  $ds = r d\theta$  divided by the infinitesimal time  $dt$ , that the particle requires to traverse this path

$$\frac{ds}{dt} = r \frac{d\theta}{dt} = r\dot{\theta}. \quad (\text{A.6})$$

Including the tangential direction of velocity gives

$$\mathbf{v} = r\dot{\theta}\mathbf{e}_t = \dot{\theta}\mathbf{e}_z \times r\mathbf{e}_r = \boldsymbol{\omega} \times \mathbf{r}. \quad (\text{A.7})$$

In order to obtain the acceleration, we calculate the time derivative of velocity

$$\mathbf{a} = \frac{d\mathbf{v}}{dt} = \frac{d}{dt}(\boldsymbol{\omega} \times \mathbf{r}). \quad (\text{A.8})$$

We differentiate the vector product as one would differentiate a normal product of two functions

$$\mathbf{a} = \frac{d\boldsymbol{\omega}}{dt} \times \mathbf{r} + \boldsymbol{\omega} \times \frac{d\mathbf{r}}{dt}. \quad (\text{A.9})$$

Defining the angular acceleration  $\boldsymbol{\alpha}$  as the time derivative of angular velocity  $\boldsymbol{\alpha} = \frac{d\boldsymbol{\omega}}{dt}$ , we see that the first term corresponds to the tangential acceleration

$$\mathbf{a}_t = \boldsymbol{\alpha} \times \mathbf{r}. \quad (\text{A.10})$$

In the second term we insert the expression for velocity

$$\frac{d\mathbf{r}}{dt} = \mathbf{v} = \boldsymbol{\omega} \times \mathbf{r}, \quad (\text{A.11})$$

and we get a double vector product  $\boldsymbol{\omega} \times (\boldsymbol{\omega} \times \mathbf{r})$ . Using the identity  $\mathbf{a} \times (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c}) = \mathbf{b}(\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{c}) - \mathbf{c}(\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{b})$  from vector algebra and noting that  $\boldsymbol{\omega}$  and  $\mathbf{r}$  are orthogonal, we obtain for the second term in the equation for acceleration

$$\boldsymbol{\omega} \times \frac{d\mathbf{r}}{dt} = \boldsymbol{\omega} \times (\boldsymbol{\omega} \times \mathbf{r}) = \boldsymbol{\omega}(\boldsymbol{\omega} \cdot \mathbf{r}) - \mathbf{r}(\boldsymbol{\omega} \cdot \boldsymbol{\omega}) = -\omega^2 \mathbf{r}, \quad (\text{A.12})$$

which is the radial (or centripetal) component of acceleration. So we finally have

$$\mathbf{a} = \mathbf{a}_t + \mathbf{a}_r = \boldsymbol{\alpha} \times \mathbf{r} - \omega^2 \mathbf{r}. \quad (\text{A.13})$$

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