12.4 The Cross Product

In studying lines in the plane, when we needed to describe how a line was tilting, we used the notions of slope and angle of inclination. In space, we want a way to describe how a *plane* is tilting. We accomplish this by multiplying two vectors in the plane together to get a third vector perpendicular to the plane. The direction of this third vector tells us the "inclination" of the plane. The product we use to multiply the vectors together is the *vector* or *cross product*, the second of the two vector multiplication methods we study in calculus.

Cross products are widely used to describe the effects of forces in studies of electricity, magnetism, fluid flows, and orbital mechanics. This section presents the mathematical properties that account for the use of cross products in these fields.

The Cross Product of Two Vectors in Space

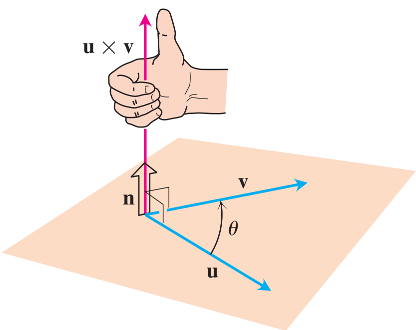

FIGURE 12.27 The construction of $\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}$.

We start with two nonzero vectors $\mathbf{u}$ and $\mathbf{v}$ in space. If $\mathbf{u}$ and $\mathbf{v}$ are not parallel, they determine a plane. We select a unit vector $\mathbf{n}$ perpendicular to the plane by the **right-hand rule**. This means that we choose $\mathbf{n}$ to be the unit (normal) vector that points the way your right thumb points when your fingers curl through the angle θ from $\mathbf{u}$ to $\mathbf{v}$ (Figure 12.27). Then the **cross product** $\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}$ ("$\mathbf{u}$ cross $\mathbf{v}$") is the *vector* defined as follows.

DEFINITION **Cross Product**

$$\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v} = (|\mathbf{u}||\mathbf{v}| \sin \theta)\, \mathbf{n}$$

Unlike the dot product, the cross product is a vector. For this reason it's also called the **vector product** of $\mathbf{u}$ and $\mathbf{v}$, and applies *only* to vectors in space. The vector $\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}$ is orthogonal to both $\mathbf{u}$ and $\mathbf{v}$ because it is a scalar multiple of $\mathbf{n}$.

Since the sines of 0 and π are both zero, it makes sense to define the cross product of two parallel nonzero vectors to be $\mathbf{0}$. If one or both of $\mathbf{u}$ and $\mathbf{v}$ are zero, we also define $\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}$ to be zero. This way, the cross product of two vectors $\mathbf{u}$ and $\mathbf{v}$ is zero if and only if $\mathbf{u}$ and $\mathbf{v}$ are parallel or one or both of them are zero.

Parallel Vectors

Nonzero vectors $\mathbf{u}$ and $\mathbf{v}$ are parallel if and only if $\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v} = \mathbf{0}$.

The cross product obeys the following laws.

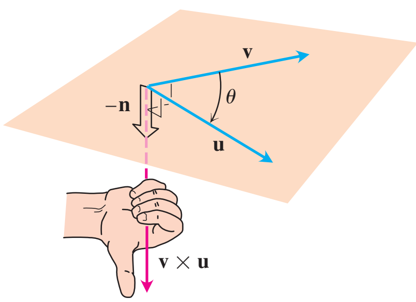

FIGURE 12.28 The construction of $\mathbf{v} \times \mathbf{u}$.

You Try It

> **Properties of the Cross Product**
>
> If $\mathbf{u}$, $\mathbf{v}$, and $\mathbf{w}$ are any vectors and r, s are scalars, then
>
> 1. $(r\mathbf{u}) \times (s\mathbf{v}) = (rs)(\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v})$
> 2. $\mathbf{u} \times (\mathbf{v} + \mathbf{w}) = \mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v} + \mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{w}$
> 3. $(\mathbf{v} + \mathbf{w}) \times \mathbf{u} = \mathbf{v} \times \mathbf{u} + \mathbf{w} \times \mathbf{u}$
> 4. $\mathbf{v} \times \mathbf{u} = -(\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v})$
> 5. $\mathbf{0} \times \mathbf{u} = \mathbf{0}$

To visualize Property 4, for example, notice that when the fingers of a right hand curl through the angle θ from $\mathbf{v}$ to $\mathbf{u}$, the thumb points the opposite way and the unit vector we choose in forming $\mathbf{v} \times \mathbf{u}$ is the negative of the one we choose in forming $\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}$ (Figure 12.28).

Property 1 can be verified by applying the definition of cross product to both sides of the equation and comparing the results. Property 2 is proved in Appendix 6. Property 3 follows by multiplying both sides of the equation in Property 2 by -1 and reversing the order of the products using Property 4. Property 5 is a definition. As a rule, cross product multiplication is *not associative* so $(\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}) \times \mathbf{w}$ does not generally equal $\mathbf{u} \times (\mathbf{v} \times \mathbf{w})$. (See Additional Exercise 15.)

When we apply the definition to calculate the pairwise cross products of $\mathbf{i}$, $\mathbf{j}$, and $\mathbf{k}$, we find (Figure 12.29)

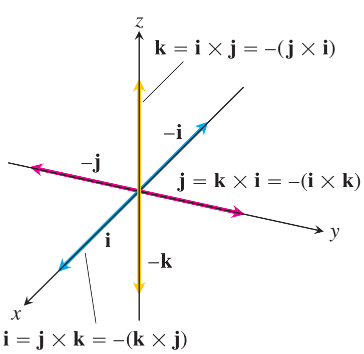

FIGURE 12.29 The pairwise cross products of $\mathbf{i}$, $\mathbf{j}$, and $\mathbf{k}$.

$$\mathbf{i} \times \mathbf{j} = -(\mathbf{j} \times \mathbf{i}) = \mathbf{k}$$

$$\mathbf{j} \times \mathbf{k} = -(\mathbf{k} \times \mathbf{j}) = \mathbf{i}$$

$$\mathbf{k} \times \mathbf{i} = -(\mathbf{i} \times \mathbf{k}) = \mathbf{j}$$

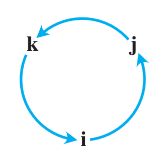

Diagram for recalling these products

and

$$\mathbf{i} \times \mathbf{i} = \mathbf{j} \times \mathbf{j} = \mathbf{k} \times \mathbf{k} = \mathbf{0}.$$

$|\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}|$ Is the Area of a Parallelogram

Because $\mathbf{n}$ is a unit vector, the magnitude of $\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}$ is

$$|\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}| = |\mathbf{u}||\mathbf{v}|\,|\sin\theta|\,|\mathbf{n}| = |\mathbf{u}||\mathbf{v}|\sin\theta.$$

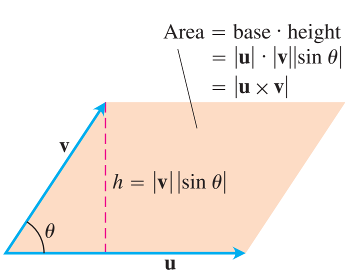

FIGURE 12.30 The parallelogram determined by $\mathbf{u}$ and $\mathbf{v}$.

This is the area of the parallelogram determined by $\mathbf{u}$ and $\mathbf{v}$ (Figure 12.30), $|\mathbf{u}|$ being the base of the parallelogram and $|\mathbf{v}||\sin\theta|$ the height.

Determinant Formula for $\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}$

Our next objective is to calculate $\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}$ from the components of $\mathbf{u}$ and $\mathbf{v}$ relative to a Cartesian coordinate system.

Determinants

2×2 and 3×3 determinants are evaluated as follows:

$$\begin{vmatrix} a & b \\ c & d \end{vmatrix} = ad - bc$$

EXAMPLE

$$\begin{vmatrix} 2 & 1 \\ -4 & 3 \end{vmatrix} = (2)(3) - (1)(-4) = 6 + 4 = 10$$

$$\begin{vmatrix} a_1 & a_2 & a_3 \\ b_1 & b_2 & b_3 \\ c_1 & c_2 & c_3 \end{vmatrix} = a_1 \begin{vmatrix} b_2 & b_3 \\ c_2 & c_3 \end{vmatrix} - a_2 \begin{vmatrix} b_1 & b_3 \\ c_1 & c_3 \end{vmatrix} + a_3 \begin{vmatrix} b_1 & b_2 \\ c_1 & c_2 \end{vmatrix}$$

EXAMPLE

$$\begin{vmatrix} -5 & 3 & 1 \\ 2 & 1 & 1 \\ -4 & 3 & 1 \end{vmatrix} = (-5)\begin{vmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 3 & 1 \end{vmatrix} - (3)\begin{vmatrix} 2 & 1 \\ -4 & 1 \end{vmatrix} + (1)\begin{vmatrix} 2 & 1 \\ -4 & 3 \end{vmatrix}$$

$$= -5(1 - 3) - 3(2 + 4) + 1(6 + 4) = 10 - 18 + 10 = 2$$

(For more information, see the Web site at **www.aw-bc.com/thomas.**)

Suppose that

$$\mathbf{u} = u_1\mathbf{i} + u_2\mathbf{j} + u_3\mathbf{k}, \qquad \mathbf{v} = v_1\mathbf{i} + v_2\mathbf{j} + v_3\mathbf{k}.$$

Then the distributive laws and the rules for multiplying **i**, **j**, and **k** tell us that

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v} &= (u_1\mathbf{i} + u_2\mathbf{j} + u_3\mathbf{k}) \times (v_1\mathbf{i} + v_2\mathbf{j} + v_3\mathbf{k}) \\ &= u_1v_1\mathbf{i} \times \mathbf{i} + u_1v_2\mathbf{i} \times \mathbf{j} + u_1v_3\mathbf{i} \times \mathbf{k} \\ &\quad + u_2v_1\mathbf{j} \times \mathbf{i} + u_2v_2\mathbf{j} \times \mathbf{j} + u_2v_3\mathbf{j} \times \mathbf{k} \\ &\quad + u_3v_1\mathbf{k} \times \mathbf{i} + u_3v_2\mathbf{k} \times \mathbf{j} + u_3v_3\mathbf{k} \times \mathbf{k} \\ &= (u_2v_3 - u_3v_2)\mathbf{i} - (u_1v_3 - u_3v_1)\mathbf{j} + (u_1v_2 - u_2v_1)\mathbf{k}. \end{aligned}$$

The terms in the last line are the same as the terms in the expansion of the symbolic determinant

$$\begin{vmatrix} \mathbf{i} & \mathbf{j} & \mathbf{k} \\ u_1 & u_2 & u_3 \\ v_1 & v_2 & v_3 \end{vmatrix}.$$

We therefore have the following rule.

Calculating Cross Products Using Determinants

If $\mathbf{u} = u_1\mathbf{i} + u_2\mathbf{j} + u_3\mathbf{k}$ and $\mathbf{v} = v_1\mathbf{i} + v_2\mathbf{j} + v_3\mathbf{k}$, then

$$\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v} = \begin{vmatrix} \mathbf{i} & \mathbf{j} & \mathbf{k} \\ u_1 & u_2 & u_3 \\ v_1 & v_2 & v_3 \end{vmatrix}.$$

EXAMPLE 1 Calculating Cross Products with Determinants

Find $\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}$ and $\mathbf{v} \times \mathbf{u}$ if $\mathbf{u} = 2\mathbf{i} + \mathbf{j} + \mathbf{k}$ and $\mathbf{v} = -4\mathbf{i} + 3\mathbf{j} + \mathbf{k}$.

Solution

$$\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v} = \begin{vmatrix} \mathbf{i} & \mathbf{j} & \mathbf{k} \\ 2 & 1 & 1 \\ -4 & 3 & 1 \end{vmatrix} = \begin{vmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 3 & 1 \end{vmatrix}\mathbf{i} - \begin{vmatrix} 2 & 1 \\ -4 & 1 \end{vmatrix}\mathbf{j} + \begin{vmatrix} 2 & 1 \\ -4 & 3 \end{vmatrix}\mathbf{k}$$

$$= -2\mathbf{i} - 6\mathbf{j} + 10\mathbf{k}$$

$$\mathbf{v} \times \mathbf{u} = -(\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}) = 2\mathbf{i} + 6\mathbf{j} - 10\mathbf{k}$$ ■

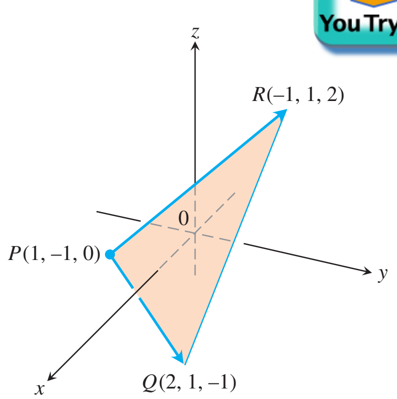

FIGURE 12.31 The area of triangle PQR is half of $|\overrightarrow{PQ} \times \overrightarrow{PR}|$ (Example 2).

EXAMPLE 2 Finding Vectors Perpendicular to a Plane

Find a vector perpendicular to the plane of $P(1, -1, 0)$, $Q(2, 1, -1)$, and $R(-1, 1, 2)$ (Figure 12.31).

Solution The vector $\overrightarrow{PQ} \times \overrightarrow{PR}$ is perpendicular to the plane because it is perpendicular to both vectors. In terms of components,

$$\overrightarrow{PQ} = (2-1)\mathbf{i} + (1+1)\mathbf{j} + (-1-0)\mathbf{k} = \mathbf{i} + 2\mathbf{j} - \mathbf{k}$$

$$\overrightarrow{PR} = (-1-1)\mathbf{i} + (1+1)\mathbf{j} + (2-0)\mathbf{k} = -2\mathbf{i} + 2\mathbf{j} + 2\mathbf{k}$$

$$\overrightarrow{PQ} \times \overrightarrow{PR} = \begin{vmatrix} \mathbf{i} & \mathbf{j} & \mathbf{k} \\ 1 & 2 & -1 \\ -2 & 2 & 2 \end{vmatrix} = \begin{vmatrix} 2 & -1 \\ 2 & 2 \end{vmatrix}\mathbf{i} - \begin{vmatrix} 1 & -1 \\ -2 & 2 \end{vmatrix}\mathbf{j} + \begin{vmatrix} 1 & 2 \\ -2 & 2 \end{vmatrix}\mathbf{k}$$

$$= 6\mathbf{i} + 6\mathbf{k}.$$

EXAMPLE 3 Finding the Area of a Triangle

Find the area of the triangle with vertices $P(1, -1, 0)$, $Q(2, 1, -1)$, and $R(-1, 1, 2)$ (Figure 12.31).

Solution The area of the parallelogram determined by P, Q, and R is

$$|\overrightarrow{PQ} \times \overrightarrow{PR}| = |6\mathbf{i} + 6\mathbf{k}|$$

Values from Example 2.

$$= \sqrt{(6)^2 + (6)^2} = \sqrt{2 \cdot 36} = 6\sqrt{2}.$$

The triangle's area is half of this, or $3\sqrt{2}$.

EXAMPLE 4 Finding a Unit Normal to a Plane

Find a unit vector perpendicular to the plane of $P(1, -1, 0)$, $Q(2, 1, -1)$, and $R(-1, 1, 2)$.

Solution Since $\overrightarrow{PQ} \times \overrightarrow{PR}$ is perpendicular to the plane, its direction $\mathbf{n}$ is a unit vector perpendicular to the plane. Taking values from Examples 2 and 3, we have

$$\mathbf{n} = \frac{\overrightarrow{PQ} \times \overrightarrow{PR}}{|\overrightarrow{PQ} \times \overrightarrow{PR}|} = \frac{6\mathbf{i} + 6\mathbf{k}}{6\sqrt{2}} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}\mathbf{i} + \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}\mathbf{k}.$$

For ease in calculating the cross product using determinants, we usually write vectors in the form $\mathbf{v} = v_1\mathbf{i} + v_2\mathbf{j} + v_3\mathbf{k}$ rather than as ordered triples $\mathbf{v} = \langle v_1, v_2, v_3 \rangle$.

Torque

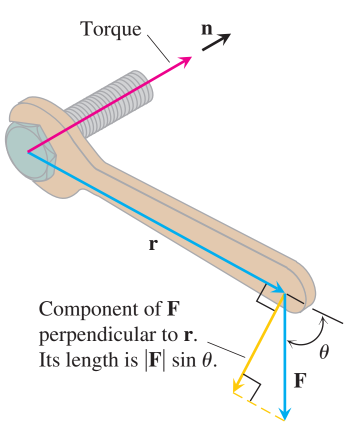

FIGURE 12.32 The torque vector describes the tendency of the force **F** to drive the bolt forward.

When we turn a bolt by applying a force **F** to a wrench (Figure 12.32), the torque we produce acts along the axis of the bolt to drive the bolt forward. The magnitude of the torque depends on how far out on the wrench the force is applied and on how much of the force is perpendicular to the wrench at the point of application. The number we use to measure the torque's magnitude is the product of the length of the lever arm **r** and the scalar component of **F** perpendicular to **r**. In the notation of Figure 12.32,

$$\text{Magnitude of torque vector} = |\mathbf{r}||\mathbf{F}| \sin\theta,$$

or $|\mathbf{r} \times \mathbf{F}|$. If we let $\mathbf{n}$ be a unit vector along the axis of the bolt in the direction of the torque, then a complete description of the torque vector is $\mathbf{r} \times \mathbf{F}$, or

$$\text{Torque vector} = (|\mathbf{r}||\mathbf{F}| \sin\theta)\,\mathbf{n}.$$

Recall that we defined $\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}$ to be $\mathbf{0}$ when $\mathbf{u}$ and $\mathbf{v}$ are parallel. This is consistent with the torque interpretation as well. If the force $\mathbf{F}$ in Figure 12.32 is parallel to the wrench, meaning that we are trying to turn the bolt by pushing or pulling along the line of the wrench's handle, the torque produced is zero.

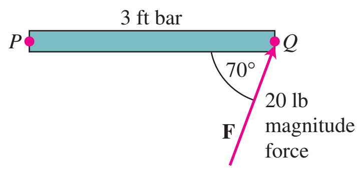

FIGURE 12.33 The magnitude of the torque exerted by **F** at *P* is about 56.4 ft-lb (Example 5).

EXAMPLE 5 Finding the Magnitude of a Torque

The magnitude of the torque generated by force $\mathbf{F}$ at the pivot point P in Figure 12.33 is

$$\begin{aligned} |\overrightarrow{PQ} \times \mathbf{F}| &= |\overrightarrow{PQ}||\mathbf{F}| \sin 70° \\ &\approx (3)(20)(0.94) \\ &\approx 56.4 \text{ ft-lb}. \end{aligned}$$

■

Triple Scalar or Box Product

The product $(\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}) \cdot \mathbf{w}$ is called the **triple scalar product** of $\mathbf{u}$, $\mathbf{v}$, and $\mathbf{w}$ (in that order). As you can see from the formula

$$|(\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}) \cdot \mathbf{w}| = |\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}||\mathbf{w}||\cos\theta|,$$

the absolute value of the product is the volume of the parallelepiped (parallelogram-sided box) determined by $\mathbf{u}$, $\mathbf{v}$, and $\mathbf{w}$ (Figure 12.34). The number $|\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}|$ is the area of the base parallelogram. The number $|\mathbf{w}||\cos\theta|$ is the parallelepiped's height. Because of this geometry, $(\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}) \cdot \mathbf{w}$ is also called the **box product** of $\mathbf{u}$, $\mathbf{v}$, and $\mathbf{w}$.

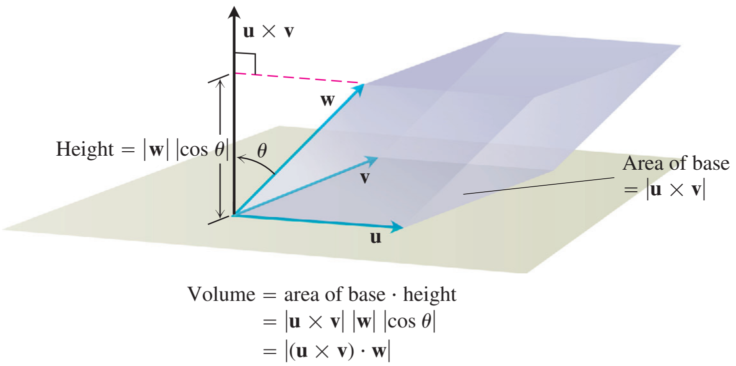

FIGURE 12.34 The number $|(\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}) \cdot \mathbf{w}|$ is the volume of a parallelepiped.

The dot and cross may be interchanged in a triple scalar product without altering its value.

By treating the planes of $\mathbf{v}$ and $\mathbf{w}$ and of $\mathbf{w}$ and $\mathbf{u}$ as the base planes of the parallelepiped determined by $\mathbf{u}$, $\mathbf{v}$, and $\mathbf{w}$, we see that

$$(\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}) \cdot \mathbf{w} = (\mathbf{v} \times \mathbf{w}) \cdot \mathbf{u} = (\mathbf{w} \times \mathbf{u}) \cdot \mathbf{v}.$$

Since the dot product is commutative, we also have

$$(\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}) \cdot \mathbf{w} = \mathbf{u} \cdot (\mathbf{v} \times \mathbf{w}).$$

The triple scalar product can be evaluated as a determinant:

$$\begin{aligned}(\mathbf{u}\times\mathbf{v})\cdot\mathbf{w} &= \left[\begin{vmatrix} u_2 & u_3 \\ v_2 & v_3\end{vmatrix}\mathbf{i} - \begin{vmatrix} u_1 & u_3 \\ v_1 & v_3\end{vmatrix}\mathbf{j} + \begin{vmatrix} u_1 & u_2 \\ v_1 & v_2\end{vmatrix}\mathbf{k}\right]\cdot\mathbf{w} \\ &= w_1\begin{vmatrix} u_2 & u_3 \\ v_2 & v_3\end{vmatrix} - w_2\begin{vmatrix} u_1 & u_3 \\ v_1 & v_3\end{vmatrix} + w_3\begin{vmatrix} u_1 & u_2 \\ v_1 & v_2\end{vmatrix} \\ &= \begin{vmatrix} u_1 & u_2 & u_3 \\ v_1 & v_2 & v_3 \\ w_1 & w_2 & w_3\end{vmatrix}.\end{aligned}$$

Calculating the Triple Scalar Product

$$(\mathbf{u}\times\mathbf{v})\cdot\mathbf{w} = \begin{vmatrix} u_1 & u_2 & u_3 \\ v_1 & v_2 & v_3 \\ w_1 & w_2 & w_3\end{vmatrix}$$

You Try It

EXAMPLE 6 Finding the Volume of a Parallelepiped

Find the volume of the box (parallelepiped) determined by $\mathbf{u} = \mathbf{i} + 2\mathbf{j} - \mathbf{k}$, $\mathbf{v} = -2\mathbf{i} + 3\mathbf{k}$, and $\mathbf{w} = 7\mathbf{j} - 4\mathbf{k}$.

Solution Using the rule for calculating determinants, we find

$$(\mathbf{u}\times\mathbf{v})\cdot\mathbf{w} = \begin{vmatrix} 1 & 2 & -1 \\ -2 & 0 & 3 \\ 0 & 7 & -4\end{vmatrix} = -23.$$

The volume is $|(\mathbf{u}\times\mathbf{v})\cdot\mathbf{w}| = 23$ units cubed. ■