9.2 First-Order Linear Differential Equations

The exponential growth/decay equation $dy/dx = ky$ (Section 7.5) is a separable differential equation. It is also a special case of a differential equation having a *linear form*. Linear differential equations model a number of real-world phenomena, including electrical circuits and chemical mixture problems.

A first-order **linear** differential equation is one that can be written in the form

$$\frac{dy}{dx} + P(x)y = Q(x), \tag{1}$$

where P and Q are continuous functions of x. Equation (1) is the linear equation's **standard form**.

Since the exponential growth/decay equation can be put in the standard form

$$\frac{dy}{dx} - ky = 0,$$

we see it is a linear equation with $P(x) = -k$ and $Q(x) = 0$. Equation (1) is *linear* (in y) because y and its derivative dy/dx occur only to the first power, are not multiplied together, nor do they appear as the argument of a function (such as $\sin y$, e^y, or $\sqrt{dy/dx}$).

EXAMPLE 1 Finding the Standard Form

Put the following equation in standard form:

$$x\frac{dy}{dx} = x^2 + 3y, \qquad x > 0.$$

Solution

$$x\frac{dy}{dx} = x^2 + 3y$$

$$\frac{dy}{dx} = x + \frac{3}{x}y \qquad \text{Divide by } x$$

$$\frac{dy}{dx} - \frac{3}{x}y = x \qquad \text{Standard form with } P(x) = -3/x \text{ and } Q(x) = x$$

Notice that $P(x)$ is $-3/x$, not $+3/x$. The standard form is $y' + P(x)y = Q(x)$, so the minus sign is part of the formula for $P(x)$. ■

Solving Linear Equations

We solve the equation

$$\frac{dy}{dx} + P(x)y = Q(x) \tag{2}$$

by multiplying both sides by a *positive* function $v(x)$ that transforms the left side into the derivative of the product $v(x) \cdot y$. We will show how to find v in a moment, but first we want to show how, once found, it provides the solution we seek.

Here is why multiplying by $v(x)$ works:

$$\frac{dy}{dx} + P(x)y = Q(x) \qquad \text{Original equation is in standard form.}$$

$$v(x)\frac{dy}{dx} + P(x)v(x)y = v(x)Q(x) \qquad \text{Multiply by positive } v(x).$$

$$\frac{d}{dx}(v(x) \cdot y) = v(x)Q(x) \qquad v(x) \text{ is chosen to make } v\frac{dy}{dx} + Pvy = \frac{d}{dx}(v \cdot y).$$

$$v(x) \cdot y = \int v(x)Q(x)\,dx \qquad \text{Integrate with respect to } x.$$

$$y = \frac{1}{v(x)}\int v(x)Q(x)\,dx \tag{3}$$

Equation (3) expresses the solution of Equation (2) in terms of the function $v(x)$ and $Q(x)$. We call $v(x)$ an **integrating factor** for Equation (2) because its presence makes the equation integrable.

Why doesn't the formula for $P(x)$ appear in the solution as well? It does, but indirectly, in the construction of the positive function $v(x)$. We have

$$\frac{d}{dx}(vy) = v\frac{dy}{dx} + Pvy \qquad \text{Condition imposed on } v$$

$$v\frac{dy}{dx} + y\frac{dv}{dx} = v\frac{dy}{dx} + Pvy \qquad \text{Product Rule for derivatives}$$

$$y\frac{dv}{dx} = Pvy \qquad \text{The terms } v\frac{dy}{dx} \text{ cancel.}$$

This last equation will hold if

$$\frac{dv}{dx} = Pv$$

$$\frac{dv}{v} = P\,dx \qquad \text{Variables separated, } v > 0$$

$$\int \frac{dv}{v} = \int P\,dx \qquad \text{Integrate both sides.}$$

$$\ln v = \int P\,dx \qquad \text{Since } v > 0 \text{, we do not need absolute value signs in } \ln v.$$

$$e^{\ln v} = e^{\int P\,dx} \qquad \text{Exponentiate both sides to solve for } v.$$

$$v = e^{\int P\,dx} \tag{4}$$

Thus a formula for the general solution to Equation (1) is given by Equation (3), where $v(x)$ is given by Equation (4). However, rather than memorizing the formula, just remember how to find the integrating factor once you have the standard form so $P(x)$ is correctly identified.

> To solve the linear equation $y' + P(x)y = Q(x)$, multiply both sides by the integrating factor $v(x) = e^{\int P(x)\,dx}$ and integrate both sides.

When you integrate the left-side product in this procedure, you always obtain the product $v(x)y$ of the integrating factor and solution function y because of the way v is defined.

EXAMPLE 2 Solving a First-Order Linear Differential Equation

Solve the equation

$$x\frac{dy}{dx} = x^2 + 3y, \qquad x > 0.$$

HISTORICAL BIOGRAPHY

Adrien Marie Legendre (1752–1833)

Solution First we put the equation in standard form (Example 1):

$$\frac{dy}{dx} - \frac{3}{x}y = x,$$

so $P(x) = -3/x$ is identified.

The integrating factor is

$$\begin{aligned} v(x) = e^{\int P(x)\,dx} &= e^{\int(-3/x)\,dx} \\ &= e^{-3\ln|x|} && \text{Constant of integration is 0, so } v \text{ is as simple as possible.} \\ &= e^{-3\ln x} && x > 0 \\ &= e^{\ln x^{-3}} = \frac{1}{x^3}. \end{aligned}$$

Next we multiply both sides of the standard form by $v(x)$ and integrate:

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{1}{x^3}\cdot\left(\frac{dy}{dx} - \frac{3}{x}y\right) &= \frac{1}{x^3}\cdot x \\ \frac{1}{x^3}\frac{dy}{dx} - \frac{3}{x^4}y &= \frac{1}{x^2} \\ \frac{d}{dx}\left(\frac{1}{x^3}y\right) &= \frac{1}{x^2} && \text{Left side is } \tfrac{d}{dx}(v\cdot y). \\ \frac{1}{x^3}y &= \int\frac{1}{x^2}\,dx && \text{Integrate both sides.} \\ \frac{1}{x^3}y &= -\frac{1}{x} + C. \end{aligned}$$

Solving this last equation for y gives the general solution:

$$y = x^3\left(-\frac{1}{x} + C\right) = -x^2 + Cx^3, \qquad x > 0. \quad \blacksquare$$

EXAMPLE 3 Solving a First-Order Linear Initial Value Problem

Solve the equation

$$xy' = x^2 + 3y, \qquad x > 0,$$

given the initial condition $y(1) = 2$.

Solution We first solve the differential equation (Example 2), obtaining

$$y = -x^2 + Cx^3, \qquad x > 0.$$

We then use the initial condition to find C:

$$\begin{aligned} y &= -x^2 + Cx^3 \\ 2 &= -(1)^2 + C(1)^3 && y = 2 \text{ when } x = 1 \\ C &= 2 + (1)^2 = 3. \end{aligned}$$

The solution of the initial value problem is the function $y = -x^2 + 3x^3$. ■

EXAMPLE 4 Find the particular solution of

$$3xy' - y = \ln x + 1, \qquad x > 0,$$

satisfying $y(1) = -2$.

Solution With $x > 0$, we write the equation in standard form:

$$y' - \frac{1}{3x}y = \frac{\ln x + 1}{3x}.$$

Then the integrating factor is given by

$$v = e^{\int -dx/3x} = e^{(-1/3)\ln x} = x^{-1/3}. \qquad x > 0$$

Thus

$$x^{-1/3}y = \frac{1}{3}\int (\ln x + 1)x^{-4/3}\,dx. \qquad \text{Left side is } vy.$$

Integration by parts of the right side gives

$$x^{-1/3}y = -x^{-1/3}(\ln x + 1) + \int x^{-4/3}\,dx + C.$$

Therefore

$$x^{-1/3}y = -x^{-1/3}(\ln x + 1) - 3x^{-1/3} + C$$

or, solving for y,

$$y = -(\ln x + 4) + Cx^{1/3}.$$

When $x = 1$ and $y = -2$ this last equation becomes

$$-2 = -(0 + 4) + C,$$

so

$$C = 2.$$

Substitution into the equation for y gives the particular solution

$$y = 2x^{1/3} - \ln x - 4.$$

In solving the linear equation in Example 2, we integrated both sides of the equation after multiplying each side by the integrating factor. However, we can shorten the amount of work, as in Example 4, by remembering that the left side *always* integrates into the product $v(x) \cdot y$ of the integrating factor times the solution function. From Equation (3) this means that

$$v(x)y = \int v(x)Q(x)\,dx.$$

We need only integrate the product of the integrating factor $v(x)$ with the right side $Q(x)$ of Equation (1) and then equate the result with $v(x)y$ to obtain the general solution. Nevertheless, to emphasize the role of $v(x)$ in the solution process, we sometimes follow the complete procedure as illustrated in Example 2.

Observe that if the function $Q(x)$ is identically zero in the standard form given by Equation (1), the linear equation is separable:

$$\frac{dy}{dx} + P(x)y = Q(x)$$

$$\frac{dy}{dx} + P(x)y = 0 \qquad Q(x) \equiv 0$$

$$dy = -P(x)\,dx \qquad \text{Separating the variables}$$

We now present two applied problems modeled by a first-order linear differential equation.

RL Circuits

The diagram in Figure 9.5 represents an electrical circuit whose total resistance is a constant R ohms and whose self-inductance, shown as a coil, is L henries, also a constant. There is a switch whose terminals at a and b can be closed to connect a constant electrical source of V volts.

Ohm's Law, $V = RI$, has to be modified for such a circuit. The modified form is

$$L\frac{di}{dt} + Ri = V, \tag{5}$$

where i is the intensity of the current in amperes and t is the time in seconds. By solving this equation, we can predict how the current will flow after the switch is closed.

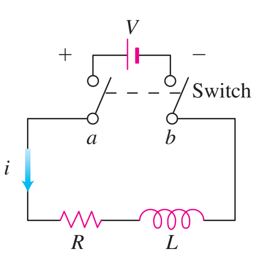

FIGURE 9.5 The *RL* circuit in Example 5.

EXAMPLE 5 Electric Current Flow

The switch in the *RL* circuit in Figure 9.5 is closed at time $t = 0$. How will the current flow as a function of time?

Solution Equation (5) is a first-order linear differential equation for i as a function of t. Its standard form is

$$\frac{di}{dt} + \frac{R}{L}i = \frac{V}{L}, \tag{6}$$

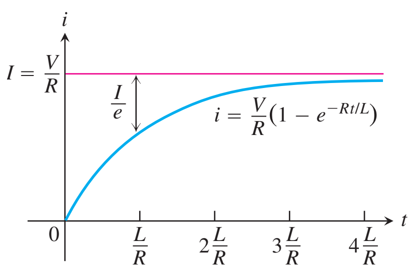

FIGURE 9.6 The growth of the current in the RL circuit in Example 5. I is the current's steady-state value. The number $t = L/R$ is the time constant of the circuit. The current gets to within 5% of its steady-state value in 3 time constants (Exercise 31).

and the corresponding solution, given that $i = 0$ when $t = 0$, is

$$i = \frac{V}{R} - \frac{V}{R}e^{-(R/L)t} \tag{7}$$

(Exercise 32). Since R and L are positive, $-(R/L)$ is negative and $e^{-(R/L)t} \to 0$ as $t \to \infty$. Thus,

$$\lim_{t\to\infty} i = \lim_{t\to\infty}\left(\frac{V}{R} - \frac{V}{R}e^{-(R/L)t}\right) = \frac{V}{R} - \frac{V}{R}\cdot 0 = \frac{V}{R}.$$

At any given time, the current is theoretically less than V/R, but as time passes, the current approaches the **steady-state value** V/R. According to the equation

$$L\frac{di}{dt} + Ri = V,$$

$I = V/R$ is the current that will flow in the circuit if either $L = 0$ (no inductance) or $di/dt = 0$ (steady current, $i =$ constant) (Figure 9.6).

Equation (7) expresses the solution of Equation (6) as the sum of two terms: a **steady-state solution** V/R and a **transient solution** $-(V/R)e^{-(R/L)t}$ that tends to zero as $t \to \infty$. ■

Mixture Problems

A chemical in a liquid solution (or dispersed in a gas) runs into a container holding the liquid (or the gas) with, possibly, a specified amount of the chemical dissolved as well. The mixture is kept uniform by stirring and flows out of the container at a known rate. In this process, it is often important to know the concentration of the chemical in the container at any given time. The differential equation describing the process is based on the formula

$$\begin{array}{c}\text{Rate of change}\\ \text{of amount}\\ \text{in container}\end{array} = \begin{pmatrix}\text{rate at which}\\ \text{chemical}\\ \text{arrives}\end{pmatrix} - \begin{pmatrix}\text{rate at which}\\ \text{chemical}\\ \text{departs.}\end{pmatrix} \tag{8}$$

If $y(t)$ is the amount of chemical in the container at time t and $V(t)$ is the total volume of liquid in the container at time t, then the departure rate of the chemical at time t is

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Departure rate} &= \frac{y(t)}{V(t)}\cdot(\text{outflow rate})\\ &= \begin{pmatrix}\text{concentration in}\\ \text{container at time } t\end{pmatrix}\cdot(\text{outflow rate}).\end{aligned} \tag{9}$$

Accordingly, Equation (8) becomes

$$\frac{dy}{dt} = (\text{chemical's arrival rate}) - \frac{y(t)}{V(t)}\cdot(\text{outflow rate}). \tag{10}$$

If, say, y is measured in pounds, V in gallons, and t in minutes, the units in Equation (10) are

$$\frac{\text{pounds}}{\text{minutes}} = \frac{\text{pounds}}{\text{minutes}} - \frac{\text{pounds}}{\text{gallons}}\cdot\frac{\text{gallons}}{\text{minutes}}.$$

EXAMPLE 6 Oil Refinery Storage Tank

Video

In an oil refinery, a storage tank contains 2000 gal of gasoline that initially has 100 lb of an additive dissolved in it. In preparation for winter weather, gasoline containing 2 lb of

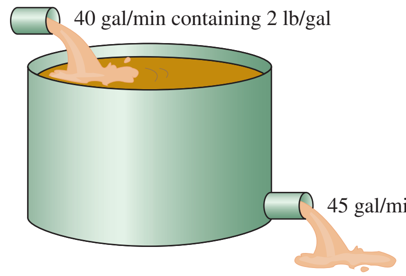

FIGURE 9.7 The storage tank in Example 6 mixes input liquid with stored liquid to produce an output liquid.

additive per gallon is pumped into the tank at a rate of 40 gal/min. The well-mixed solution is pumped out at a rate of 45 gal/min. How much of the additive is in the tank 20 min after the pumping process begins (Figure 9.7)?

Solution Let y be the amount (in pounds) of additive in the tank at time t. We know that $y = 100$ when $t = 0$. The number of gallons of gasoline and additive in solution in the tank at any time t is

$$\begin{aligned} V(t) &= 2000 \text{ gal} + \left(40 \frac{\text{gal}}{\text{min}} - 45 \frac{\text{gal}}{\text{min}}\right)(t \text{ min}) \\ &= (2000 - 5t) \text{ gal}. \end{aligned}$$

Therefore,

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Rate out} &= \frac{y(t)}{V(t)} \cdot \text{outflow rate} && \text{Eq. (9)} \\ &= \left(\frac{y}{2000 - 5t}\right) 45 && \text{Outflow rate is 45 gal/min. and } v = 2000 - 5t. \\ &= \frac{45y}{2000 - 5t} \frac{\text{lb}}{\text{min}}. \end{aligned}$$

Also,

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Rate in} &= \left(2 \frac{\text{lb}}{\text{gal}}\right)\left(40 \frac{\text{gal}}{\text{min}}\right) \\ &= 80 \frac{\text{lb}}{\text{min}}. && \text{Eq. (10)} \end{aligned}$$

The differential equation modeling the mixture process is

$$\frac{dy}{dt} = 80 - \frac{45y}{2000 - 5t}$$

in pounds per minute.

To solve this differential equation, we first write it in standard form:

$$\frac{dy}{dt} + \frac{45}{2000 - 5t} y = 80.$$

Thus, $P(t) = 45/(2000 - 5t)$ and $Q(t) = 80$.

The integrating factor is

$$v(t) = e^{\int P\,dt} = e^{\int \frac{45}{2000-5t}\,dt}$$
$$= e^{-9\ln(2000-5t)} \qquad 2000 - 5t > 0$$
$$= (2000 - 5t)^{-9}.$$

Multiplying both sides of the standard equation by $v(t)$ and integrating both sides gives,

$$(2000 - 5t)^{-9} \cdot \left(\frac{dy}{dt} + \frac{45}{2000 - 5t}\,y\right) = 80(2000 - 5t)^{-9}$$

$$(2000 - 5t)^{-9}\frac{dy}{dt} + 45(2000 - 5t)^{-10}y = 80(2000 - 5t)^{-9}$$

$$\frac{d}{dt}\left[(2000 - 5t)^{-9}y\right] = 80(2000 - 5t)^{-9}$$

$$(2000 - 5t)^{-9}y = \int 80(2000 - 5t)^{-9}\,dt$$

$$(2000 - 5t)^{-9}y = 80 \cdot \frac{(2000 - 5t)^{-8}}{(-8)(-5)} + C.$$

The general solution is

$$y = 2(2000 - 5t) + C(2000 - 5t)^9.$$

Because $y = 100$ when $t = 0$, we can determine the value of C:

$$100 = 2(2000 - 0) + C(2000 - 0)^9$$
$$C = -\frac{3900}{(2000)^9}.$$

The particular solution of the initial value problem is

$$y = 2(2000 - 5t) - \frac{3900}{(2000)^9}(2000 - 5t)^9.$$

The amount of additive 20 min after the pumping begins is

$$y(20) = 2[2000 - 5(20)] - \frac{3900}{(2000)^9}[2000 - 5(20)]^9 \approx 1342 \text{ lb}.$$ ■