Week 3 Worksheet Solutions
Electrostatics

Jacob Erlikhman

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Exercise 1. Using Dirac delta functions in the appropriate coordinates if necessary, express the following charge distributions as three-dimensional charge densities $\rho(\mathbf{r})$.

a) In spherical coordinates, a charge Q uniformly distributed over a spherical shell of radius R.

b) In cylindrical coordinates, a charge λ per unit length uniformly distributed over a cylindrical surface of radius b.

c) In cylindrical coordinates, a charge Q spread uniformly over a flat circular disc of negligible thickness and radius R.

d) Same as (c), but in spherical coordinates.

a)

$$\rho(\mathbf{r}) = \frac{Q}{4\pi R^2}\delta(r - R).$$

b) Place the cylinder axis along the z-axis. Then,

$$\rho(\mathbf{r}) = \frac{\lambda}{2\pi}\delta(s - b).$$

c) Place the disc in the plane $z = 0$. Then,

$$\rho(\mathbf{r}) = \frac{Q}{\pi R^2}\delta(z).$$

Exercise 2. Two infinite parallel plates carry equal and opposite uniform charge densities $\pm\sigma$. Put the positively charged plate in the (x, y)-plane and the negatively charged one at $z = 1$ above it. Find the electric field in each of three regions: $z < 0$, $0 < z < 1$, and $z > 1$.

Use a "Gaussian pillbox" and the infinitude of the plates. The latter implies that given one such plate, the electric field will point directly perpendicular to it. Thus, we can use a Gaussian pillbox and Gauss' law to determine the electric field. Since it is everywhere perpendicular to one such plate, the electric field due to it will be

$$2E \cdot A = \pm \frac{\sigma A}{\varepsilon_0},$$

where A is the area of plate enclosed by the pillbox. The reason the factor of two appears is because the pillbox has two sides through which electric field exits, and both of them have area A; moreover, the electric field will either point "out" through both sides or "in" through both sides, depending on whether the plate is positively or negatively charged, respectively. Hence, we have

$$\mathbf{E} = \pm \frac{\sigma}{2\varepsilon_0} \hat{z}.$$

Now, suppose given two such plates with opposite charge densities. Then in between them the electric field will be $\frac{\sigma}{\varepsilon_0}\hat{z}$, for $z < 0$ it will be $\mathbf{0}$, and for $z > 0$ it will be $\mathbf{0}$ as well.

Exercise 3.

a) The potential at a point $\mathbf{r}$ is defined as

$$V(\mathbf{r}) = -\int_{\mathcal{O}}^{\mathbf{r}} \mathbf{E} \cdot \mathrm{d}\boldsymbol{\ell},$$

where $\mathcal{O}$ is some reference point. Explain why this is well-defined (i.e. unambiguous, up to the choice of $\mathcal{O}$).

b) An infinite plate carries a uniform charge density σ. Using your result from Exercise 2, find the potential everywhere.
Hint: Where would you put your reference point $\mathcal{O}$?

This problem will be on the Week 4 Worksheet, so solutions will be released along with solutions to that worksheet.