2026

AP

AP® Physics C: Mechanics

Free-Response Questions

PHYSICS C: MECHANICS
SECTION II
TIME – 1 HOUR AND 40 MINUTES

Directions:

Section II has 4 questions and lasts 1 hour and 40 minutes.

You may use the available paper for scratch work and planning, but only work written in the free-response booklet will be scored. Any work done on scratch paper will not be scored. Label parts (e.g., A, B, C) and sub-parts (e.g., i, ii, iii) as needed. Use a pencil or a pen with black or dark blue ink to write your responses.

A calculator is allowed in this section, as well as a ruler and straightedge. You may use a handheld four-function, scientific, or graphing calculator, or the calculator available in this application. Reference information, including lists of equations, can be used throughout the exam. A digital version is available in this application.

All final numerical answers should include appropriate units when applicable. Credit for your work depends on demonstrating that you know which physical principles to apply in a particular situation. Credit will be awarded only for work that is clearly designated as the solution to a specific part of a question. Credit also depends on the quality of your solutions and explanations. Therefore, you should show your work for each part in the space provided for that part. If you need more space, be sure to clearly indicate where you continue your work. When constructing a graph or diagram, use only one color of ink or pencil.

You may pace yourself as you answer the questions in this section, or you may use these optional timing recommendations:

It is suggested that you spend about 25 minutes each on Questions 1 and 3, about 30 minutes on Question 2, and about 20 minutes on Question 4.

You can go back and forth between questions in this section until time expires. The clock will turn red when 5 minutes remain—**the proctor will not give you any time updates or warnings.**

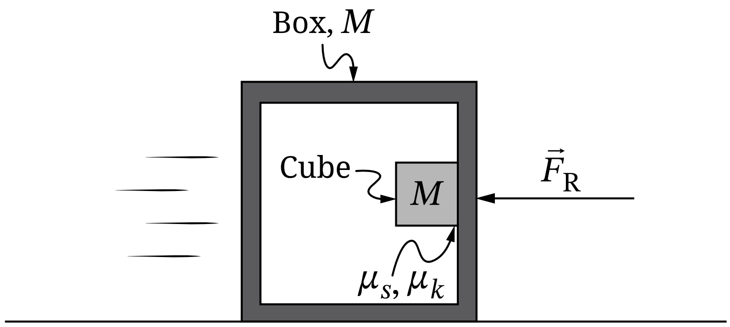
Note: This exam was originally administered digitally. It is presented here in a format optimized for teacher and student use in the classroom.

During the AP Exam administration, students have access to reference information. To see the reference information for this course, please visit AP Central: https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/exam-administration-ordering-scores/administering-exams/subject-specific/reference-information

Question 1: Version J

1. A box of mass M slides to the right on a horizontal surface. A small cube, also of mass M, is inside the box. The cube is against the right wall of the box and above the bottom of the box, as shown in Figure 1. The coefficients of static and kinetic friction between the cube and the wall of the box are μ_s and μ_k, respectively, where $\mu_s > \mu_k$.

Figure 1



The speed of the box is decreasing as a result of a resistive force that is exerted on the box. The resistive force $\vec{F}_R$ is modeled by $\vec{F}_R = -b\vec{v}$, where b is a positive constant and $\vec{v}$ is the velocity of the box. Friction between the box and horizontal surface is negligible.

Consider the motion of the box and cube for the following times.

- At time $t = 0$, the box-cube system slides to the right with speed v_0.
- For $0 \leq t < t_{crit}$, the cube remains in contact with the wall of the box at a constant height above the bottom of the box.
- At $t = t_{crit}$, the cube begins to slide downward along the wall of the box.

Part A

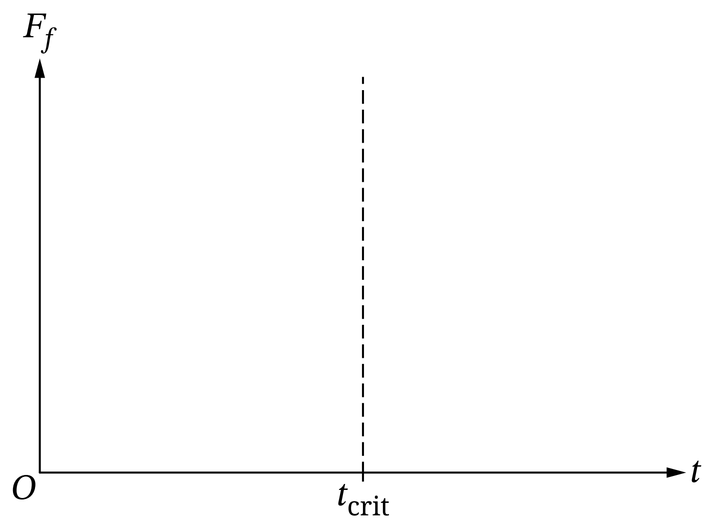
The magnitude of the normal force exerted on the cube by the wall of the box is F_N.

i. **Determine** an expression for the magnitude of the acceleration of the cube. Express your answer in terms of M, F_N, and physical constants, as appropriate.

ii. **Derive** an expression for F_N as a function of t from $t = 0$ until immediately before the cube reaches the bottom of the box. Express your answer in terms of M, b, v_0, t, and physical constants, as appropriate. Begin your derivation with a fundamental physics principle or an equation from the reference information.

iii. On the axes shown in Figure 2, **sketch** a graph of the magnitude F_f of the frictional force exerted on the cube by the wall of the box as a function of t from $t = 0$ until immediately before the cube reaches the bottom of the box.

Figure 2



Part B

Derive an expression for t_{crit} in terms of M, b, μ_s, v_0, and physical constants, as appropriate. Begin your derivation with a fundamental physics principle or an equation from the reference information.

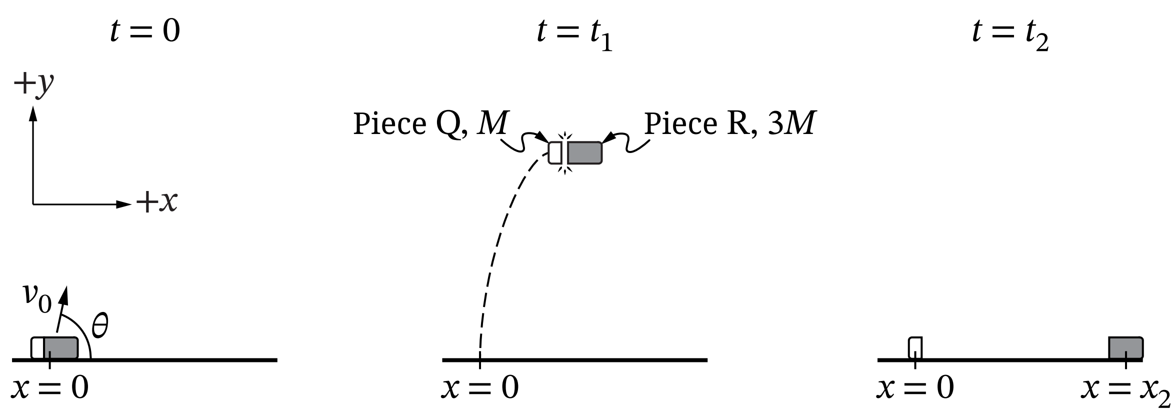
Question 2: Version J

2. A projectile of total mass $4M$ is launched from the ground at position $x = 0$ and time $t = 0$. The projectile is launched with an initial speed v_0 at an angle θ above the horizontal. When the projectile is at the highest point in its trajectory, it breaks into Pieces Q and R of masses M and $3M$, respectively.

The motion of the projectile is described for the following times.

- At $t = t_1$, immediately after the projectile breaks apart, the two pieces are moving away from each other horizontally.
- At $t = t_2$, Piece Q reaches the ground at $x = 0$ and Piece R reaches the ground at $x = x_2$, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1



Note: Figure not drawn to scale.

Part A

The horizontal and vertical components of a momentum vector are represented by p_x and p_y, respectively. The shaded bars in Figure 2 represent p_x and p_y of the projectile immediately after $t = 0$.

Figure 2

$t = 0$

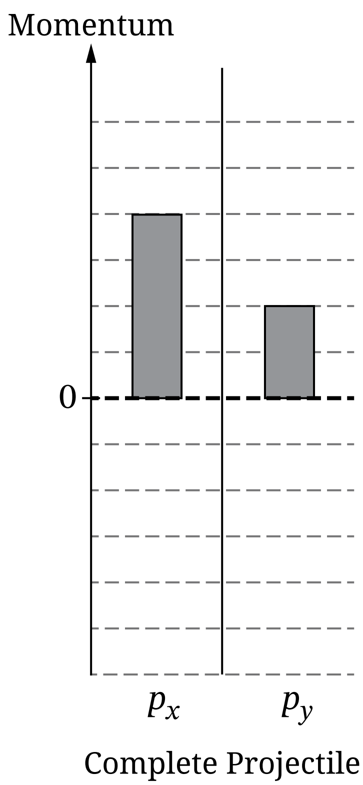
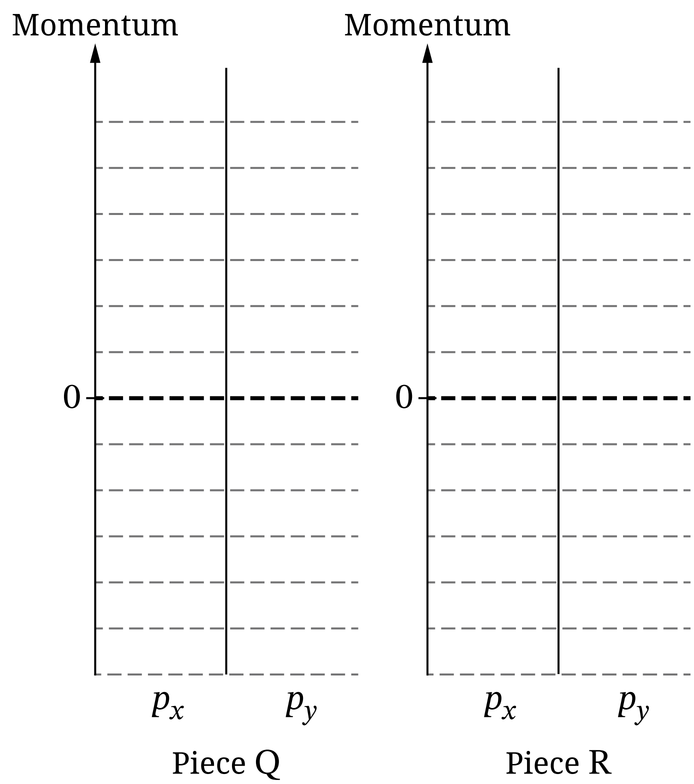


Figure 3

$t = t_1$



On Figure 3, **draw** shaded bars to represent p_x and p_y of Pieces Q and R at $t = t_1$.

- Start the shaded bars at the dashed line that represents zero momentum.
- Represent the magnitudes of the components of the momentum by using the heights of the shaded bars, consistent with the scale used in Figure 2.
- Represent any momentum component that is equal to zero by drawing a distinct line on the zero-momentum line.

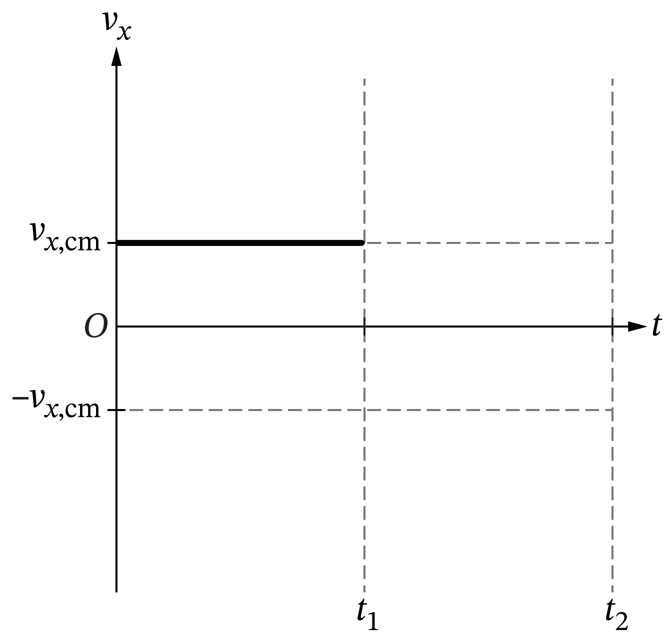
Part B

Derive an expression for x_2 in terms of v_0, θ, and physical constants, as appropriate. Begin your derivation by writing a fundamental physics principle or an equation from the reference information.

Part C

The horizontal component of a velocity vector is represented by v_x. Figure 4 shows the horizontal component $v_{x,\mathrm{cm}}$ of the velocity of the center of mass of the projectile as a function of t during the time interval $0 < t < t_1$.

Figure 4



On Figure 4, **sketch** a line or curve to represent v_x as a function of t for the time interval $t_1 < t < t_2$ for each of the following.

- Piece Q
- Piece R
- The center of mass of the two-piece system

Clearly **label** all lines or curves.

Part D

Consider a case in which the projectile is launched at the same angle and initial speed as initially described. When the projectile breaks into Pieces Q and R, Piece Q falls straight down. In this case, Piece R reaches the ground at $x = x_{\mathrm{new}}$.

Indicate whether x_{new} is greater than, less than, or equal to x_2 by writing one of the following.

- $x_{\mathrm{new}} > x_2$
- $x_{\mathrm{new}} < x_2$
- $x_{\mathrm{new}} = x_2$

Briefly **justify** your answer either by referencing a feature of the representations you drew in part A or C or by using conceptual reasoning beyond algebraic solutions.

Question 3

The following information applies to parts A and B.

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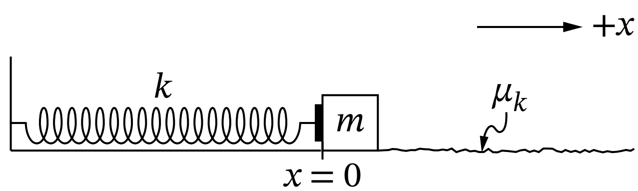
3. A horizontal spring of known spring constant k is attached to a wall. A block of known mass m is placed on a horizontal surface next to but not attached to the spring. The spring is at its relaxed length when the block is at position $x = 0$, as shown in Figure 1. There is friction between the block and the surface only for positions $x > 0$.

Figure 1



A student is asked to experimentally determine the coefficient of kinetic friction μ_k between the block and the surface using a graph. The student is permitted to use only measurements from a meterstick.

Part A

i. **Indicate** quantities that could be measured by the student that would allow them to determine μ_k using a graph.

ii. Briefly **describe** a method to reduce experimental uncertainty for the measured quantities.

Part B

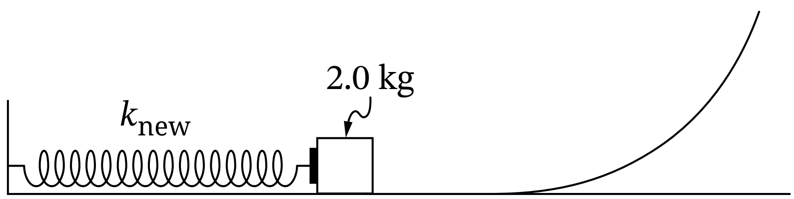
i. **Indicate** what quantities the student could graph on the horizontal and vertical axes to create a graph that can be used to determine μ_k.

ii. Briefly **describe** the relationship between μ_k and a feature of the graph from part B (i). Your answer may include an equation that relates μ_k and the chosen feature of the graph.

The following information applies to parts C and D.

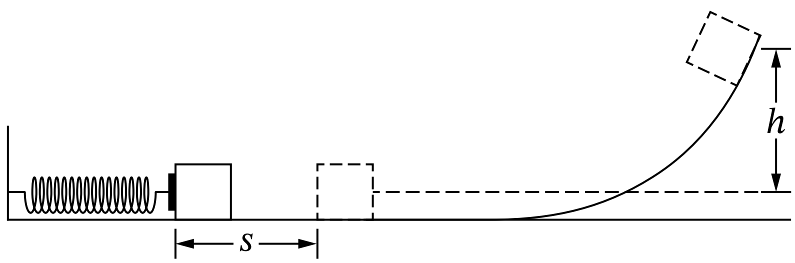
In a different experiment, the student is asked to determine the spring constant k_{new} of a new spring that is attached to a wall. A block of mass 2.0 kg is placed next to the spring on a surface where frictional forces are negligible. The surface is horizontal near the spring and slopes upward into a ramp to the right of the initial position of the block, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2



The student pushes the block, compressing the spring a distance s, as shown in Figure 3. The block is released from rest.

Figure 3



The student uses a meterstick to measure the maximum height h of the block on the ramp. The experiment is repeated several times with different compression distances s. The student's measurements of s and h are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

s (m)	h (m)
0.020	0.02
0.040	0.04
0.060	0.13
0.080	0.18
0.100	0.33

Part C

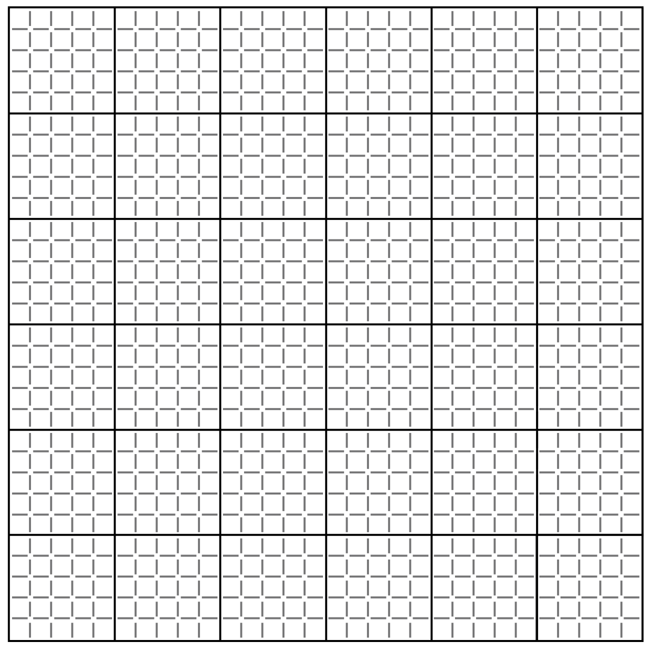
i. **Label** the axes of the grid provided with measured or calculated quantities. Include units, as appropriate. The graphed quantities should yield a linear graph that can be used to determine k_{new}.

ii. On the grid provided, create a graph of the quantities indicated in part C (i).

- Clearly **label** the vertical and horizontal axes with numerical scales.
- **Plot** the corresponding data points on the grid.
- Table 2 is provided in your booklet for scratch work and will not be scored.

Quantity (units, if appropriate)

__________ __________



Quantity (units, if appropriate)

__________ __________

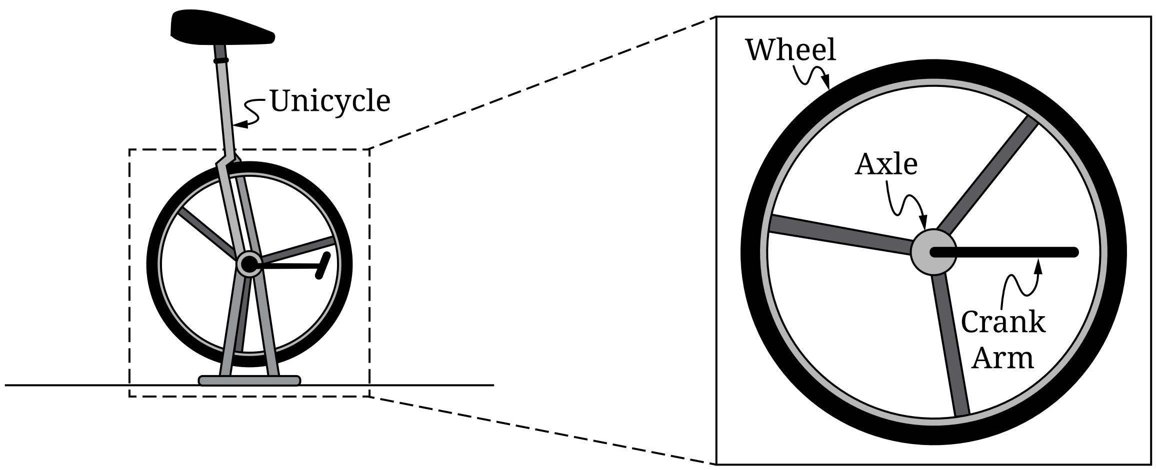
iii. **Draw** a best-fit line for the data graphed in part C (ii).

Part D

Using the best-fit line that you drew in part C (iii), **calculate** an experimental value for k_{new}.

Question 4

4. A unicycle is placed on a stand such that the wheel does not touch the ground. The rotational inertia of the wheel about the axle is I_W. One end of a crank arm can be attached to the wheel, as shown in the side view.



Side View

In Scenarios 1 and 2, crank arms of different lengths are connected to the wheel. In each scenario, the wheel is initially at rest. A force of magnitude F is then exerted at the end of each crank arm. The direction of the force remains perpendicular to each crank arm at all times. The mass of each crank arm is negligible. The scenarios differ as described.

- Scenario 1: The length of the crank arm is ℓ_1. The angular speed of the wheel immediately after the crank arm has been turned through one rotation is ω_1.
- Scenario 2: The length of the crank arm is ℓ_2, where $\ell_2 > \ell_1$. The angular speed of the wheel immediately after the longer crank arm has been turned through one rotation is ω_2.

Part A

Indicate whether ω_2 is greater than, less than, or equal to ω_1 by writing one of the following.

- $\omega_2 > \omega_1$
- $\omega_2 < \omega_1$
- $\omega_2 = \omega_1$

Justify your answer. Your justification may reference equations but must include conceptual reasoning beyond algebraic solutions.

Part B

Derive an expression for the angular speed ω_1 of the wheel in Scenario 1 immediately after the crank arm has been turned through one rotation. Express your answer in terms of I_W, F, ℓ_1, and physical constants, as appropriate. Begin your derivation by writing a fundamental physics principle or an equation from the reference information.

Part C

In Scenario 3, the unicycle is placed on the ground such that the unicycle can move forward without the wheel slipping on the ground. A force of the same magnitude F is exerted at the end of the crank arm of length ℓ_1, as in Scenario 1. The direction of the force remains perpendicular to the crank arm at all times. The resulting angular speed of the wheel immediately after the crank arm has been turned through one rotation is ω_3.

Indicate whether ω_3 is greater than, less than, or equal to ω_1 by writing one of the following.

- $\omega_3 > \omega_1$
- $\omega_3 < \omega_1$
- $\omega_3 = \omega_1$

Briefly **justify** your answer. Your justification may reference equations but must include conceptual reasoning beyond algebraic solutions.

STOP

END OF EXAM