

Vector Operators in Cylindrical and Spherical Coordinates

Tables such as these abound. Here's another. One page is used for each of cylindrical and spherical coordinate systems, for clarity and for printing only what's needed.

The notation is a combination of that of Jackson's *Classical Electrodynamics*, Simmons's *Calculus and Analytic Geometry* and Purcell's *Electricity and Magnetism*. ψ is any sufficiently differentiable scalar function and \mathbf{A} is any sufficiently differentiable vector function. Subscripts represent components of \mathbf{A} , not partial differentiation, as in $\mathbf{A} = A_x \hat{\mathbf{x}} + A_y \hat{\mathbf{y}} + A_z \hat{\mathbf{z}}$. In spherical coordinates, "physics" notation, with $z = r \cos \theta$, is used.

For completeness, the familiar expressions in Cartesian coordinates are included.

Cartesian

Following Purcell, the unit vectors are denoted $\{\hat{\mathbf{x}}, \hat{\mathbf{y}}, \hat{\mathbf{z}}\}$, $\hat{\mathbf{x}} \times \hat{\mathbf{y}} = \hat{\mathbf{z}}$.

$$\nabla \psi = \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial x} \hat{\mathbf{x}} + \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial y} \hat{\mathbf{y}} + \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial z} \hat{\mathbf{z}}$$

$$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{A} = \frac{\partial A_x}{\partial x} + \frac{\partial A_y}{\partial y} + \frac{\partial A_z}{\partial z}$$

$$\nabla \times \mathbf{A} = \left(\frac{\partial A_z}{\partial y} - \frac{\partial A_y}{\partial z} \right) \hat{\mathbf{x}} + \left(\frac{\partial A_x}{\partial z} - \frac{\partial A_z}{\partial x} \right) \hat{\mathbf{y}} + \left(\frac{\partial A_y}{\partial x} - \frac{\partial A_x}{\partial y} \right) \hat{\mathbf{z}}$$

$$\nabla^2 \psi = \frac{\partial^2 \psi}{\partial x^2} + \frac{\partial^2 \psi}{\partial y^2} + \frac{\partial^2 \psi}{\partial z^2}$$

Cylindrical

Unit vectors $\{\hat{\mathbf{r}}, \hat{\theta}, \hat{\mathbf{z}}\}$, $\hat{\mathbf{r}} \times \hat{\theta} = \hat{\mathbf{z}}$, $\mathbf{A} = A_r \hat{\mathbf{r}} + A_\theta \hat{\theta} + A_z \hat{\mathbf{z}}$.

$$\begin{aligned} x &= r \cos \theta & r &= \sqrt{x^2 + y^2} \\ y &= r \sin \theta & \tan \theta &= \frac{y}{x} \\ z &= z & z &= z \end{aligned}$$

$$\nabla \psi = \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial r} \hat{\mathbf{r}} + \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial \theta} \hat{\theta} + \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial z} \hat{\mathbf{z}}$$

$$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{A} = \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} (r A_r) + \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial A_\theta}{\partial \theta} + \frac{\partial A_z}{\partial z}$$

$$\nabla \times \mathbf{A} = \left(\frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial A_z}{\partial \theta} - \frac{\partial A_\theta}{\partial z} \right) \hat{\mathbf{r}} + \left(\frac{\partial A_r}{\partial z} - \frac{\partial A_z}{\partial r} \right) \hat{\theta} + \frac{1}{r} \left(\frac{\partial}{\partial r} (r A_\theta) - \frac{\partial A_r}{\partial \theta} \right) \hat{\mathbf{z}}$$

Note that

$$\nabla \times \mathbf{A} = \frac{1}{r} \begin{vmatrix} \hat{\mathbf{r}} & r \hat{\theta} & \hat{\mathbf{z}} \\ \frac{\partial}{\partial r} & \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} & \frac{\partial}{\partial z} \\ A_r & r A_\theta & A_z \end{vmatrix}.$$

$$\nabla^2 \psi = \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} \left(r \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial r} \right) + \frac{1}{r^2} \frac{\partial^2 \psi}{\partial \theta^2} + \frac{\partial^2 \psi}{\partial z^2}$$

Spherical

Unit vectors $\{\hat{\mathbf{r}}, \hat{\theta}, \hat{\phi}\}$, $\hat{\mathbf{r}} \times \hat{\theta} = \hat{\phi}$, $\mathbf{A} = A_r \hat{\mathbf{r}} + A_\theta \hat{\theta} + A_\phi \hat{\phi}$.

$$\begin{aligned} x &= r \sin \theta \cos \phi & r &= \sqrt{x^2 + y^2 + z^2} \\ y &= r \sin \theta \sin \phi & \cos \theta &= \frac{z}{\sqrt{x^2 + y^2 + z^2}} \\ z &= r \cos \theta & \tan \phi &= \frac{y}{x} \end{aligned}$$

$$0 \leq \theta \leq \pi, \quad 0 \leq \phi \leq 2\pi$$

$$\nabla \psi = \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial r} \hat{\mathbf{r}} + \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial \theta} \hat{\theta} + \frac{1}{r \sin \theta} \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial \phi} \hat{\phi}$$

$$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{A} = \frac{1}{r^2} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} (r^2 A_r) + \frac{1}{r \sin \theta} \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} (\sin \theta A_\theta) + \frac{1}{r \sin \theta} \frac{\partial A_\phi}{\partial \phi}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \nabla \times \mathbf{A} &= \frac{1}{r \sin \theta} \left[\frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} (\sin \theta A_\phi) - \frac{\partial A_\theta}{\partial \phi} \right] \hat{\mathbf{r}} \\ &+ \left[\frac{1}{r \sin \theta} \frac{\partial A_r}{\partial \phi} - \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} (r A_\phi) \right] \hat{\theta} + \frac{1}{r} \left[\frac{\partial}{\partial r} (r A_\theta) - \frac{\partial A_r}{\partial \theta} \right] \hat{\phi} \end{aligned}$$

Note that

$$\nabla \times \mathbf{A} = \frac{1}{r^2 \sin \theta} \begin{vmatrix} \hat{\mathbf{r}} & r \hat{\theta} & r \sin \theta \hat{\phi} \\ \frac{\partial}{\partial r} & \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} & \frac{\partial}{\partial \phi} \\ A_r & r A_\theta & r \sin \theta A_\phi \end{vmatrix}.$$

$$\begin{aligned} \nabla^2 \psi &= \frac{1}{r^2} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} \left(r^2 \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial r} \right) + \frac{1}{r^2 \sin \theta} \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} \left(\sin \theta \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial \theta} \right) + \frac{1}{r^2 \sin^2 \theta} \frac{\partial^2 \psi}{\partial \phi^2} \\ &\left[\text{Note that } \frac{1}{r^2} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} \left(r^2 \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial r} \right) = \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial^2}{\partial r^2} (r \psi). \right] \end{aligned}$$