

27.7: Sample proposal review (Measuring g using a pendulum)

Summary and Goal

The authors propose to measure the value of g to within 10% by measuring the period of a simple pendulum, using the SHM equations and theory. The proposal is reasonably clear, but lacks some details in how to measure the initial angle of the pendulum. The authors propose to use an amplitude of 90° for the pendulum, but at such a large angle, the motion is not expected to be SHM, since it is only so at small angles. By using a smaller angle, the experiment has a good chance of being successful in the proposed timeline.

Review

The experimental methods are described clearly and succinctly, with most information clearly stated. For the materials list, it is stated that “a mass” must be used. Here, it should be stated that a small, solid, non-deformable mass should be used to minimize drag and to act as a point mass. The authors refer to a “measuring device” when determining the amplitude of the pendulum, but this is not described. Anyhow, the amplitude of the oscillations is irrelevant for a pendulum in SHM, as long as the amplitude is small.

Most equations are described in the theory section, but it is incorrectly assumed that the period of a pendulum is independent of the drop angle for all angles. The small angle approximation is not expected to apply with an oscillation amplitude of 90° .

No justification is provided for the use of 20 oscillations prior to measuring the period - it may be necessary to iterate on the reason why 20 oscillations was chosen.

The equipment can be easily obtained and is fairly inexpensive. Adequate resources are available to the group to perform this experiment. A clear troubleshooting plan is described and a method for evaluating success is included.

Timeline and team

This experiment is fairly simple and the equipment/setup is not difficult to handle. The proposed team should be qualified to perform this experiment in the proposed amount of time, although I worry a little bit about Dennis, as he seems to be a bit of a menace.

Overall Rating of the Proposal

Good - this proposal was clearly explained and is scientifically sound, apart from the use of a large angle for the oscillations. It was succinctly written, and most components of the experiment were clearly described. A little more detail in the justification for using 20 oscillations is necessary.

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