

5.1: Systems of Units

Several different systems of units are in common use. For everyday civil use, most of the world uses *metric* units. The United Kingdom uses both metric units and an *imperial* system. Here in the United States, *U.S. customary units* are most common for everyday use.¹

There are actually several “metric” systems in use. They can be broadly grouped into two categories: those that use the meter, kilogram, and second as base units (MKS systems), and those that use the centimeter, gram, and second as base units (CGS systems). There is only one MKS system, called *SI units*. We will mostly use SI units in this course, but we will use other systems from time to time so that you get some experience with using them.

1. In the mid-1970s the U.S. government attempted to switch the United States to the metric system, but the idea was abandoned after strong public opposition. One remnant from that era is the two-liter bottle of soda pop.

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