

Earth's rotation is slow enough that Earth is nearly an inertial frame. You ordinarily must perform precise experiments to observe fictitious forces and the slight departures from Newton's laws, such as the effect just described. On the large scale, such as for the rotation of weather systems and ocean currents, the effects can be easily observed.

The crucial factor in determining whether a frame of reference is inertial is whether it accelerates or rotates relative to a known inertial frame. Unless stated otherwise, all phenomena discussed in this text are considered in inertial frames.

All the forces discussed in this section are real forces, but there are a number of other real forces, such as lift and thrust, that are not discussed in this section. They are more specialized, and it is not necessary to discuss every type of force. It is natural, however, to ask where the basic simplicity we seek to find in physics is in the long list of forces. Are some more basic than others? Are some different manifestations of the same underlying force? The answer to both questions is yes, as will be seen in the next (extended) section and in the treatment of modern physics later in the text.

Forces in 1 Dimension

Explore the forces at work when you try to push a filing cabinet. Create an applied force and see the resulting friction force and total force acting on the cabinet. Charts show the forces, position, velocity, and acceleration vs. time. View a free-body diagram of all the forces (including gravitational and normal forces). [Click to open media in new browser.](https://phet.colorado.edu/en/simulation/legacy/forces-1d)
(<https://phet.colorado.edu/en/simulation/legacy/forces-1d>)

4.6 Problem-Solving Strategies

Success in problem solving is obviously necessary to understand and apply physical principles, not to mention the more immediate need of passing exams. The basics of problem solving, presented earlier in this text, are followed here, but specific strategies useful in applying Newton's laws of motion are emphasized. These techniques also reinforce concepts that are useful in many other areas of physics. Many problem-solving strategies are stated outright in the worked examples, and so the following techniques should reinforce skills you have already begun to develop.

Problem-Solving Strategy for Newton's Laws of Motion

Step 1. As usual, it is first necessary to identify the physical principles involved. *Once it is determined that Newton's laws of motion are involved (if the problem involves forces), it is particularly important to draw a careful sketch of the situation.* Such a sketch is shown in [Figure 4.21\(a\)](#). Then, as in [Figure 4.21\(b\)](#), use arrows to represent all forces, label them carefully, and make their lengths and directions correspond to the forces they represent (whenever sufficient information exists).

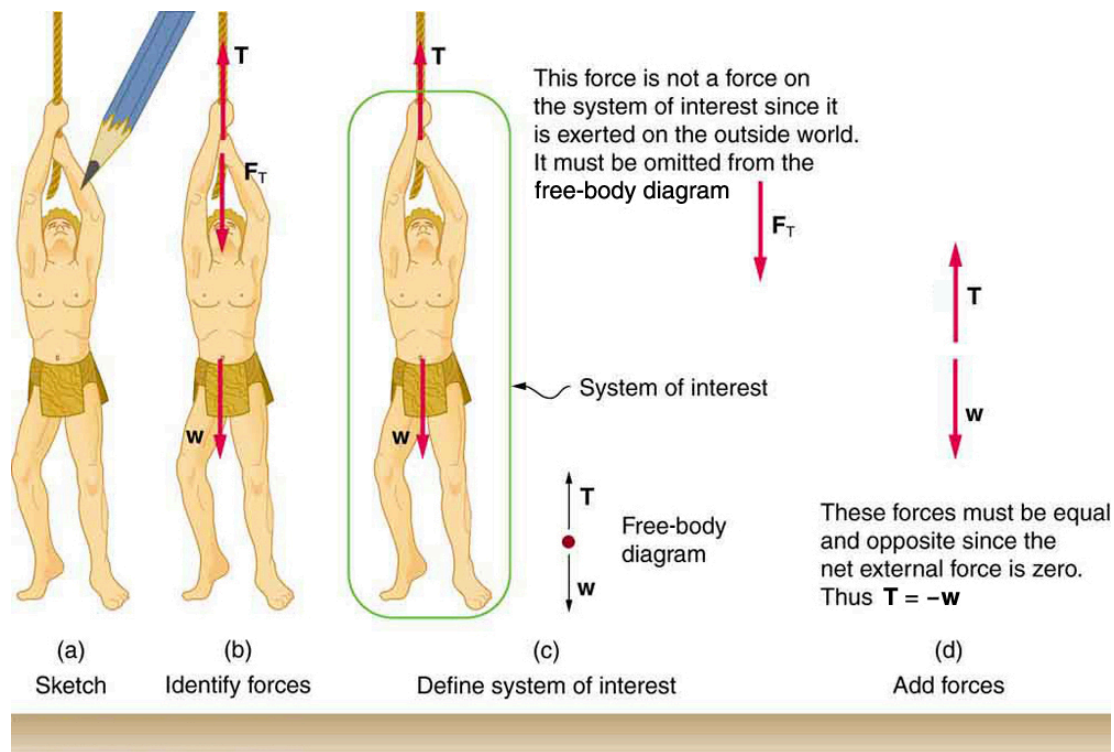


Figure 4.21 (a) A sketch of Tarzan hanging from a vine. (b) Arrows are used to represent all forces. T is the tension in the vine above Tarzan, F_T is the force he exerts on the vine, and w is his weight. All other forces, such as the nudge of a breeze, are assumed negligible. (c) Suppose we are given the ape man's mass and asked to find the tension in the vine. We then define the system of interest as shown and draw a free-body diagram. F_T is no longer shown, because it is not a force acting on the system of interest; rather, F_T acts on the outside world. (d) Showing only the arrows, the head-to-tail method of addition is used. It is apparent that $T = -w$, if Tarzan is stationary.

Step 2. Identify what needs to be determined and what is known or can be inferred from the problem as stated. That is, make a list of knowns and unknowns. *Then carefully determine the system of interest.* This decision is a crucial step, since Newton's second law involves only external forces. Once the system of interest has been identified, it becomes possible to determine which forces are external and which are internal, a necessary step to employ Newton's second law. (See [Figure 4.21\(c\)](#).) Newton's third law may be used to identify whether forces are exerted between components of a system (internal) or between the system and something outside (external). As illustrated earlier in this chapter, the system of interest depends on what question we need to answer. This choice becomes easier with practice, eventually developing into an almost unconscious process. Skill in clearly defining systems will be beneficial in later chapters as well.

A diagram showing the system of interest and all of the external forces is called a **free-body diagram**. Only forces are shown on free-body diagrams, not acceleration or velocity. We have drawn several of these in worked examples. [Figure 4.21\(c\)](#) shows a free-body diagram for the system of interest. Note that no internal forces are shown in a free-body diagram.

Step 3. Once a free-body diagram is drawn, *Newton's second law can be applied to solve the problem.* This is done in [Figure 4.21\(d\)](#) for a particular situation. In general, once external forces are clearly identified in free-body diagrams, it should be a straightforward task to put them into equation form and solve for the unknown, as done in all previous examples. If the problem is one-dimensional—that is, if all forces are parallel—then they add like scalars. If the problem is two-dimensional, then it must be broken down into a pair of one-dimensional problems. This is done by projecting the force vectors onto a set of axes chosen for convenience. As seen in previous examples, the choice of axes can simplify the problem. For example, when an incline is involved, a set of axes with one axis parallel to the incline and one perpendicular to it is most convenient. It is almost always convenient to make one axis parallel to the direction of motion, if this is known.

Applying Newton's Second Law

Before you write net force equations, it is critical to determine whether the system is accelerating in a particular direction. If the acceleration is zero in a particular direction, then the net force is zero in that direction. Similarly, if the acceleration is nonzero in a particular direction, then the net force is described by the equation: $F_{\text{net}} = ma$.

For example, if the system is accelerating in the horizontal direction, but it is not accelerating in the vertical direction, then you will have the following conclusions:

$$F_{\text{net } x} = ma,$$

$$F_{\text{net } y} = 0.$$

4.57

4.58

You will need this information in order to determine unknown forces acting in a system.

Step 4. As always, *check the solution to see whether it is reasonable*. In some cases, this is obvious. For example, it is reasonable to find that friction causes an object to slide down an incline more slowly than when no friction exists. In practice, intuition develops gradually through problem solving, and with experience it becomes progressively easier to judge whether an answer is reasonable. Another way to check your solution is to check the units. If you are solving for force and end up with units of m/s, then you have made a mistake.

4.7 Further Applications of Newton's Laws of Motion

There are many interesting applications of Newton's laws of motion, a few more of which are presented in this section. These serve also to illustrate some further subtleties of physics and to help build problem-solving skills.



EXAMPLE 4.7

Drag Force on a Barge

Suppose two tugboats push on a barge at different angles, as shown in [Figure 4.22](#). The first tugboat exerts a force of 2.7×10^5 N in the x-direction, and the second tugboat exerts a force of 3.6×10^5 N in the y-direction.

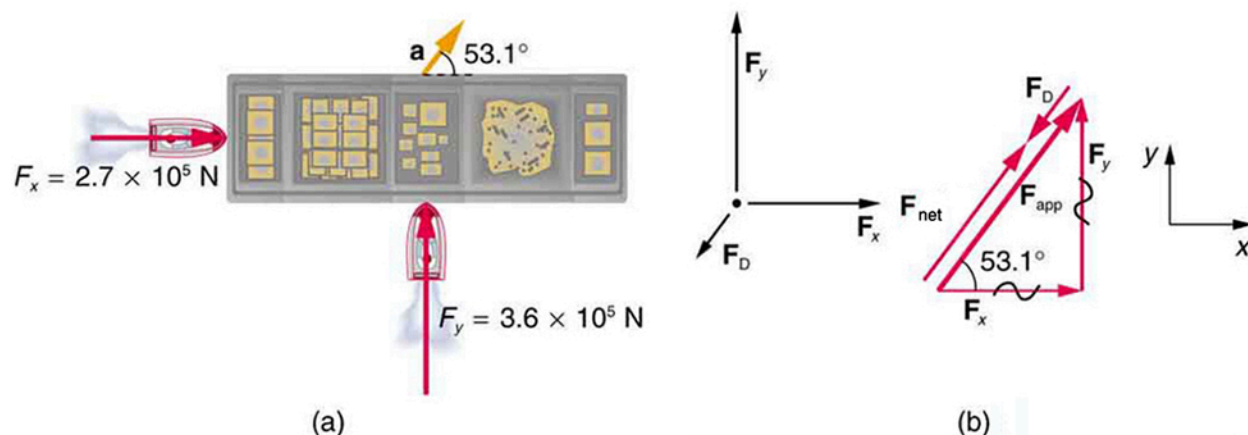


Figure 4.22 (a) A view from above of two tugboats pushing on a barge. (b) The free-body diagram for the ship contains only forces acting in the plane of the water. It omits the two vertical forces—the weight of the barge and the buoyant force of the water supporting it cancel and are not shown. Since the applied forces are perpendicular, the x - and y -axes are in the same direction as F_x and F_y . The problem quickly becomes a one-dimensional problem along the direction of F_{app} , since friction is in the direction opposite to F_{app} .

If the mass of the barge is 5.0×10^6 kg and its acceleration is observed to be 7.5×10^{-2} m/s² in the direction shown, what is the drag force of the water on the barge resisting the motion? (Note: drag force is a frictional force exerted by fluids, such as air or water. The drag force opposes the motion of the object.)