

[gex70] Laplacian operating on vector field

Consider a vector field stated in rectangular coordinates as follows:

$$\mathbf{V}_r(x, y, z) = x^2 y^2 \hat{\mathbf{i}} + y^3 z \hat{\mathbf{j}} + x^2 z^4 \hat{\mathbf{k}}.$$

(a) For Cartesian coordinates, the Laplacian operating on a vector is equivalent to the vector sum of Laplacian operating on each coordinate treated as a scalar.

$$\nabla^2 \mathbf{V}_r = \nabla^2 V_{rx} \hat{\mathbf{i}} + \nabla^2 V_{ry} \hat{\mathbf{j}} + \nabla^2 V_{rz} \hat{\mathbf{k}}.$$

Verify this relation. The Mathematica commands `Laplacian[V_r(x, y, z), {x, y, z}, "Cartesian"]` works for vectors and scalars. This relation does not extend to curvilinear coordinates.

(b) Express the vector field $\mathbf{V}_r(x, y, z)$ as $V_c(\rho, \phi, z)$ in cylindrical coordinates and as $V_s(r, \theta, \phi)$ in spherical coordinates.

(c) Use the commands,

$$\text{Laplacian}[V_c(\rho, \phi, z), \{\rho, \phi, z\}, \text{"Cylindrical"}], \quad \text{Laplacian}[V_s(r, \theta, \phi), \{r, \theta, \phi\}, \text{"Spherical"}],$$

to calculate vectors representing the Laplacian of \mathbf{V} in cylindrical and spherical coordinates.

(d) Show for all three sets of coordinates that the Laplacian operating on a vector (as executed by Mathematica) is equivalent to the following combination of the differential operators gradient, divergence, and curl:

$$\nabla^2 \mathbf{V} = \nabla(\nabla \cdot \mathbf{V}) - \nabla \times (\nabla \times \mathbf{V}).$$

Use the corresponding Mathematica commands for this demonstration. The right-hand side of this identity is used as the definition of Laplacian applied to vectors in curvilinear coordinates.

Solution: