

Lecture 6

Second-Order Linear Equations

Consider the homogeneous linear second-order DE with variable coefficients

$$p_0(x)y'' + p_1(x)y' + p_2(x)y = 0, \quad (6.1)$$

where $p_0(x) (> 0)$, $p_1(x)$ and $p_2(x)$ are continuous in J . There does not exist any method to solve it except in a few rather restrictive cases. However, the results below follow immediately from the general theory of first-order linear systems, which we shall present in later lectures.

Theorem 6.1. There exist exactly two solutions $y_1(x)$ and $y_2(x)$ of (6.1) which are linearly independent (essentially different) in J ; i.e., there does not exist a constant c such that $y_1(x) = cy_2(x)$ for all $x \in J$.

Theorem 6.2. Two solutions $y_1(x)$ and $y_2(x)$ of (6.1) are linearly independent in J if and only if their *Wronskian* defined by

$$W(x) = W(y_1, y_2)(x) = \begin{vmatrix} y_1(x) & y_2(x) \\ y_1'(x) & y_2'(x) \end{vmatrix} = y_1(x)y_2'(x) - y_2(x)y_1'(x) \quad (6.2)$$

is different from zero for some $x = x_0$ in J .

Theorem 6.3. For the Wronskian defined in (6.2) the following Abel's identity (also known as the Ostrogradsky–Liouville formula) holds:

$$W(x) = W(x_0) \exp\left(-\int_{x_0}^x \frac{p_1(t)}{p_0(t)} dt\right), \quad x_0 \in J. \quad (6.3)$$

Thus, if the Wronskian is zero at some $x_0 \in J$, then it is zero for all $x \in J$.

Theorem 6.4. If $y_1(x)$ and $y_2(x)$ are solutions of (6.1) and c_1 and c_2 are arbitrary constants, then $c_1y_1(x) + c_2y_2(x)$ is also a solution of (6.1). Further, if $y_1(x)$ and $y_2(x)$ are linearly independent, then any solution $y(x)$ of (6.1) can be written as $y(x) = \bar{c}_1y_1(x) + \bar{c}_2y_2(x)$, where \bar{c}_1 and \bar{c}_2 are suitable constants.

Now we shall show that, if one solution $y_1(x)$ of (6.1) is known (by some clever method), then we can employ variation of parameters to find the second solution of (6.1). For this we let $y(x) = u(x)y_1(x)$ and substitute this in (6.1) to get

$$p_0(uy_1)'' + p_1(uy_1)' + p_2(uy_1) = 0,$$

or

$$p_0 u'' y_1 + 2p_0 u' y_1' + p_0 u y_1'' + p_1 u' y_1 + p_1 u y_1' + p_2 u y_1 = 0,$$

or

$$p_0 u'' y_1 + (2p_0 y_1' + p_1 y_1) u' + (p_0 y_1'' + p_1 y_1' + p_2 y_1) u = 0.$$

However, since y_1 is a solution of (6.1), the above equation with $v = u'$ is the same as

$$p_0 y_1 v' + (2p_0 y_1' + p_1 y_1) v = 0, \quad (6.4)$$

which is a first-order equation, and it can be solved easily provided $y_1 \neq 0$ in J . Indeed, multiplying (6.4) by y_1/p_0 , we get

$$(y_1^2 v' + 2y_1' y_1 v) + \frac{p_1}{p_0} y_1^2 v = 0,$$

which is the same as

$$(y_1^2 v)' + \frac{p_1}{p_0} (y_1^2 v) = 0$$

and hence

$$y_1^2 v = c \exp\left(-\int^x \frac{p_1(t)}{p_0(t)} dt\right),$$

or, on taking $c = 1$,

$$v(x) = \frac{1}{y_1^2(x)} \exp\left(-\int^x \frac{p_1(t)}{p_0(t)} dt\right).$$

Hence, the second solution of (6.1) is

$$y_2(x) = y_1(x) \int^x \frac{1}{y_1^2(t)} \exp\left(-\int^t \frac{p_1(s)}{p_0(s)} ds\right) dt. \quad (6.5)$$

Example 6.1. It is easy to verify that $y_1(x) = x^2$ is a solution of the DE

$$x^2 y'' - 2xy' + 2y = 0, \quad x \neq 0.$$

For the second solution we use (6.5), to obtain

$$y_2(x) = x^2 \int^x \frac{1}{t^4} \exp\left(-\int^t \left(-\frac{2s}{s^2}\right) ds\right) dt = x^2 \int^x \frac{1}{t^4} t^2 dt = -x.$$

Now we shall find a particular solution of the nonhomogeneous equation

$$p_0(x)y'' + p_1(x)y' + p_2(x)y = r(x). \quad (6.6)$$

For this also we shall apply the method of variation of parameters. Let $y_1(x)$ and $y_2(x)$ be two solutions of (6.1). We assume $y(x) = c_1(x)y_1(x) + c_2(x)y_2(x)$ is a solution of (6.6). Note that $c_1(x)$ and $c_2(x)$ are two unknown

functions, so we can have two sets of conditions which determine $c_1(x)$ and $c_2(x)$. Since

$$y' = c_1y_1' + c_2y_2' + c_1'y_1 + c_2'y_2$$

as a first condition, we assume that

$$c_1'y_1 + c_2'y_2 = 0. \tag{6.7}$$

Thus, we have

$$y' = c_1y_1' + c_2y_2'$$

and on differentiation

$$y'' = c_1y_1'' + c_2y_2'' + c_1'y_1' + c_2'y_2'.$$

Substituting these in (6.6), we find

$$c_1(p_0y_1'' + p_1y_1' + p_2y_1) + c_2(p_0y_2'' + p_1y_2' + p_2y_2) + p_0(c_1'y_1' + c_2'y_2') = r(x).$$

Clearly, this equation in view of the fact that $y_1(x)$ and $y_2(x)$ are solutions of (6.1) is the same as

$$c_1'y_1' + c_2'y_2' = \frac{r(x)}{p_0(x)}. \tag{6.8}$$

Solving (6.7), (6.8) we find

$$c_1' = - \frac{y_2(x)r(x)/p_0(x)}{\begin{vmatrix} y_1(x) & y_2(x) \\ y_1'(x) & y_2'(x) \end{vmatrix}}, \quad c_2' = \frac{y_1(x)r(x)/p_0(x)}{\begin{vmatrix} y_1(x) & y_2(x) \\ y_1'(x) & y_2'(x) \end{vmatrix}};$$

and hence a particular solution of (6.6) is

$$\begin{aligned} y_p(x) &= c_1(x)y_1(x) + c_2(x)y_2(x) \\ &= -y_1(x) \int^x \frac{y_2(t)r(t)/p_0(t)}{\begin{vmatrix} y_1(t) & y_2(t) \\ y_1'(t) & y_2'(t) \end{vmatrix}} dt + y_2(x) \int^x \frac{y_1(t)r(t)/p_0(t)}{\begin{vmatrix} y_1(t) & y_2(t) \\ y_1'(t) & y_2'(t) \end{vmatrix}} dt \\ &= \int^x H(x, t) \frac{r(t)}{p_0(t)} dt, \end{aligned} \tag{6.9}$$

where

$$H(x, t) = \begin{vmatrix} y_1(t) & y_2(t) \\ y_1(x) & y_2(x) \end{vmatrix} \bigg/ \begin{vmatrix} y_1(t) & y_2(t) \\ y_1'(t) & y_2'(t) \end{vmatrix}. \tag{6.10}$$

The general solution of (6.6) which is obtained by adding this particular solution with the general solution of (6.1) appears as

$$y(x) = c_1y_1(x) + c_2y_2(x) + y_p(x). \tag{6.11}$$

The following properties of the function $H(x, t)$ are immediate:

- (i) $H(x, t)$ is defined for all $(x, t) \in J \times J$;
- (ii) $\partial^j H(x, t)/\partial x^j$, $j = 0, 1, 2$ are continuous for all $(x, t) \in J \times J$;
- (iii) for each fixed $t \in J$ the function $z(x) = H(x, t)$ is a solution of the homogeneous DE (6.1) satisfying $z(t) = 0$, $z'(t) = 1$; and
- (iv) the function

$$v(x) = \int_{x_0}^x H(x, t) \frac{r(t)}{p_0(t)} dt$$

is a particular solution of the nonhomogeneous DE (6.6) satisfying $y(x_0) = y'(x_0) = 0$.

Example 6.2. Consider the DE

$$y'' + y = \cot x.$$

For the corresponding homogeneous DE $y'' + y = 0$, $\sin x$ and $\cos x$ are the solutions. Thus, its general solution can be written as

$$\begin{aligned} y(x) &= c_1 \cos x + c_2 \sin x + \int^x \frac{\begin{vmatrix} \sin t & \cos t \\ \sin x & \cos x \end{vmatrix} \frac{\cos t}{\sin t} dt}{\begin{vmatrix} \sin t & \cos t \\ \cos t & -\sin t \end{vmatrix}} \\ &= c_1 \cos x + c_2 \sin x - \int^x (\sin t \cos x - \sin x \cos t) \frac{\cos t}{\sin t} dt \\ &= c_1 \cos x + c_2 \sin x - \cos x \int^x \cos t dt + \sin x \int^x \frac{\cos^2 t}{\sin t} dt \\ &= c_1 \cos x + c_2 \sin x - \cos x \sin x + \sin x \int^x \frac{1 - \sin^2 t}{\sin t} dt \\ &= c_1 \cos x + c_2 \sin x - \cos x \sin x - \sin x \int^x \sin t dt + \sin x \int^x \frac{1}{\sin t} dt \\ &= c_1 \cos x + c_2 \sin x + \sin x \int^x \frac{\operatorname{cosec} t (\operatorname{cosec} t - \cot t)}{(\operatorname{cosec} t - \cot t)} dt \\ &= c_1 \cos x + c_2 \sin x + \sin x \ln[\operatorname{cosec} x - \cot x]. \end{aligned}$$

From the general theory of first-order linear systems, which we shall present in later lectures, it also follows that if the functions $p_0(x)$ (> 0), $p_1(x)$, $p_2(x)$, and $r(x)$ are continuous on J and $x_0 \in J$, then the initial value problem: (6.6) together with the *initial conditions*

$$y(x_0) = y_0, \quad y'(x_0) = y_1 \tag{6.12}$$

has a unique solution.

Now we shall show that second-order DEs with constant coefficients can be solved explicitly. In fact, to find the solution of the equation

$$y'' + ay' + by = 0, \quad (6.13)$$

where a and b are constants, as a first step we look back at the equation $y' + ay = 0$ (a is a constant) for which all solutions are multiples of $y = e^{-ax}$. Thus, for (6.13) also some form of exponential function would be a reasonable choice and would utilize the property that the differentiation of an exponential function e^{rx} always yields a constant multiplied by e^{rx} .

Thus, we try $y = e^{rx}$ and find the value(s) of r . For this, we have

$$r^2 e^{rx} + a r e^{rx} + b e^{rx} = (r^2 + ar + b)e^{rx} = 0,$$

which gives

$$r^2 + ar + b = 0. \quad (6.14)$$

Hence, e^{rx} is a solution of (6.13) if r is a solution of (6.14). Equation (6.14) is called the *characteristic equation*. For the roots of (6.14) we have the following three cases:

1. Distinct real roots. If r_1 and r_2 are real and distinct roots of (6.14), then $e^{r_1 x}$ and $e^{r_2 x}$ are two solutions of (6.13) and its general solution can be written as

$$y(x) = c_1 e^{r_1 x} + c_2 e^{r_2 x}.$$

In the particular case when $r_1 = r$, $r_2 = -r$ (then the DE (6.13) is $y'' - r^2 y = 0$) we have

$$\begin{aligned} y(x) &= c_1 e^{rx} + c_2 e^{-rx} = \left(\frac{A+B}{2}\right) e^{rx} + \left(\frac{A-B}{2}\right) e^{-rx} \\ &= A \left(\frac{e^{rx} + e^{-rx}}{2}\right) + B \left(\frac{e^{rx} - e^{-rx}}{2}\right) = A \cosh rx + B \sinh rx. \end{aligned}$$

2. Repeated real roots. If $r_1 = r_2 = r$ is a repeated root of (6.14), then e^{rx} is a solution. To find the second solution, we let $y(x) = u(x)e^{rx}$ and substitute it in (6.13), to get

$$e^{rx}(u'' + 2ru' + r^2u) + ae^{rx}(u' + ru) + bue^{rx} = 0,$$

or

$$u'' + (2r + a)u' + (r^2 + ar + b)u = u'' + (2r + a)u' = 0.$$

Now since r is a repeated root of (6.14) it follows that $2r + a = 0$ and hence $u'' = 0$, i.e., $u(x) = c_1 + c_2 x$. Thus,

$$y(x) = (c_1 + c_2 x)e^{rx} = c_1 e^{rx} + c_2 x e^{rx}.$$

Hence, the second solution of (6.13) is xe^{rx} .

3. Complex conjugate roots. Let $r_1 = \mu + i\nu$ and $r_2 = \mu - i\nu$ where $i = \sqrt{-1}$, so that

$$e^{(\mu \pm i\nu)x} = e^{\mu x}(\cos \nu x \pm i \sin \nu x).$$

Since for the DE (6.13) real part, i.e., $e^{\mu x} \cos \nu x$ and the complex part, i.e., $e^{\mu x} \sin \nu x$ both are solutions, the general solution of (6.13) can be written as

$$y(x) = c_1 e^{\mu x} \cos \nu x + c_2 e^{\mu x} \sin \nu x.$$

In the particular case when $r_1 = i\nu$ and $r_2 = -i\nu$ (then the DE (6.13) is $y'' + \nu^2 y = 0$) we have $y(x) = c_1 \cos \nu x + c_2 \sin \nu x$.

Finally, in this lecture we shall find the solution of the *Cauchy-Euler equation*

$$x^2 y'' + axy' + by = 0, \quad x > 0. \quad (6.15)$$

We assume $y(x) = x^m$ to obtain

$$x^2 m(m-1)x^{m-2} + axm x^{m-1} + bx^m = 0,$$

or

$$m(m-1) + am + b = 0. \quad (6.16)$$

This is the characteristic equation for (6.15), and as earlier for (6.14) the nature of its roots determines the solution:

Real, distinct roots $m_1 \neq m_2$: $y(x) = c_1 x^{m_1} + c_2 x^{m_2}$,

Real, repeated roots $m = m_1 = m_2$: $y(x) = c_1 x^m + c_2 (\ln x) x^m$,

Complex conjugate roots $m_1 = \mu + i\nu$, $m_2 = \mu - i\nu$: $y(x) = c_1 x^\mu \cos(\nu \ln x) + c_2 x^\mu \sin(\nu \ln x)$.

In the particular case

$$x^2 y'' + xy' - \lambda^2 y = 0, \quad x > 0, \quad \lambda > 0 \quad (6.17)$$

the characteristic equation is $m(m-1) + m - \lambda^2 = 0$, or $m^2 - \lambda^2 = 0$. The roots are $m = \pm \lambda$ and hence the solution of (6.17) appears as

$$y(x) = c_1 x^\lambda + c_2 x^{-\lambda}. \quad (6.18)$$

Problems

6.1. Let $y_1(x), y_2(x), y_3(x)$ and $\lambda(x)$ be differentiable functions in J . Show that for all $x \in J$,

- (i) $W(y_1, y_2 + y_3)(x) = W(y_1, y_2)(x) + W(y_1, y_3)(x)$;
- (ii) $W(\lambda y_1, \lambda y_2)(x) = \lambda^2(x)W(y_1, y_2)(x)$;
- (iii) $W(y_1, \lambda y_1)(x) = \lambda'(x)y_1^2(x)$.

6.2. Show that the functions $y_1(x) = c$ ($c \neq 0$) and $y_2(x) = 1/x^2$ satisfy the nonlinear DE $y'' + 3xyy' = 0$ in $(0, \infty)$, but $y_1(x) + y_2(x)$ does not satisfy the given DE. (This shows that Theorem 6.4 holds good only for the linear equations.)

6.3. Given the solution $y_1(x)$, find the second solution of the following DEs:

- (i) $(x^2 - x)y'' + (3x - 1)y' + y = 0$ ($x \neq 0, 1$), $y_1(x) = (x - 1)^{-1}$.
- (ii) $x(x - 2)y'' + 2(x - 1)y' - 2y = 0$ ($x \neq 0, 2$), $y_1(x) = (1 - x)$.
- (iii) $xy'' - y' - 4x^3y = 0$ ($x \neq 0$), $y_1(x) = \exp(x^2)$.
- (iv) $(1 - x^2)y'' - 2xy' + 2y = 0$ ($|x| < 1$), $y_1(x) = x$.

6.4. The differential equation

$$xy'' - (x + n)y' + ny = 0$$

is interesting because it has an exponential solution and a polynomial solution.

- (i) Verify that one solution is $y_1(x) = e^x$.
- (ii) Show that the second solution has the form $y_2(x) = ce^x \int^x t^n e^{-t} dt$. Further, show that with $c = -1/n!$,

$$y_2(x) = 1 + \frac{x}{1!} + \frac{x^2}{2!} + \cdots + \frac{x^n}{n!}.$$

Note that $y_2(x)$ is the first $n + 1$ terms of the Taylor series about $x = 0$ for e^x , that is, for $y_1(x)$.

6.5. For the differential equation

$$y'' + \delta(xy' + y) = 0,$$

verify that $y_1(x) = \exp(-\delta x^2/2)$ is one solution. Find its second solution.

6.6. Let $y_1(x) \neq 0$ and $y_2(x)$ be two linearly independent solutions of the DE (6.1). Show that $y(x) = y_2(x)/y_1(x)$ is a nonconstant solution of the DE

$$y_1(x)y'' + \left(2y_1'(x) + \frac{p_1(x)}{p_0(x)}y_1(x)\right)y' = 0.$$

6.7. Let $y_1(x)$ and $y_2(x)$ be solutions of the DE

$$y'' + p_1(x)y' + p_2(x)y = 0 \tag{6.19}$$

in J . Show the following:

- (i) If $y_1(x)$ and $y_2(x)$ vanish at the same point in J , then $y_1(x)$ is a constant multiple of $y_2(x)$.
- (ii) If $y_1(x)$ and $y_2(x)$ have maxima or minima at the same point in the open interval J , then $y_1(x)$ and $y_2(x)$ are not the linearly independent solutions.
- (iii) If $W(y_1, y_2)(x)$ is independent of x , then $p_1(x) = 0$ for all $x \in J$.
- (iv) If $y_1(x)$ and $y_2(x)$ are linearly independent, then $y_1(x)$ and $y_2(x)$ cannot have a common point of inflexion in J unless $p_1(x)$ and $p_2(x)$ vanish simultaneously there.
- (v) If $W(y_1, y_2)(x^*) = y_1(x^*) = 0$, then either $y_1(x) = 0$ for all $x \in J$, or $y_2(x) = (y_2'(x^*)/y_1'(x^*))y_1(x)$.

6.8. Let $y_1(x)$ and $y_2(x)$ be linearly independent solutions of (6.19), and $W(x)$ be their Wronskian. Show that

$$y'' + p_1(x)y' + p_2(x)y = \frac{W}{y_1} \frac{d}{dx} \left(\frac{y_1^2}{W} \frac{d}{dx} \left(\frac{y}{y_1} \right) \right).$$

6.9. Show that the DE (6.1) can be transformed into a first-order nonlinear DE by means of a change of dependent variable

$$y = \exp \left(\int^x f(t)w(t)dt \right),$$

where $f(x)$ is any nonvanishing differentiable function. In particular, if $f(x) = p_0(x)$, then show that (6.1) reduces to the Riccati equation,

$$w' + p_0(x)w^2 + \frac{p_0'(x) + p_1(x)}{p_0(x)}w + \frac{p_2(x)}{p_0^2(x)} = 0. \quad (6.20)$$

6.10. If $w_1(x)$ and $w_2(x)$ are two different solutions of the DE (6.20) with $p_0(x) = 1$, i.e.,

$$w' + w^2 + p_1(x)w + p_2(x) = 0, \quad (6.21)$$

then show that its general solution $w(x)$ is given by

$$\frac{w(x) - w_1(x)}{w(x) - w_2(x)} \exp \left(\int^x (w_1(t) - w_2(t))dt \right) = c_1.$$

Further, if $w_3(x)$ is another known solution of (6.21), then

$$\frac{w(x) - w_3(x)}{w(x) - w_2(x)} = c_2 \frac{w_1(x) - w_3(x)}{w_1(x) - w_2(x)}.$$

6.11. Find the general solution of the following homogeneous DEs:

- (i) $y'' + 7y' + 10y = 0.$
- (ii) $y'' - 8y' + 16y = 0.$
- (iii) $y'' + 2y' + 3y = 0.$

6.12. Find the general solution of the following nonhomogeneous DEs:

- (i) $y'' + 4y = \sin 2x.$
- (ii) $y'' + 4y' + 3y = e^{-3x}.$
- (iii) $y'' + 5y' + 4y = e^{-4x}.$

6.13. Show that if the real parts of all solutions of (6.14) are negative, then $\lim_{x \rightarrow \infty} y(x) = 0$ for every solution of (6.13).

6.14. Show that the solution of the initial value problem

$$y'' - 2(r + \beta)y' + r^2y = 0, \quad y(0) = 0, \quad y'(0) = 1$$

can be written as

$$y_\beta(x) = \frac{1}{2\sqrt{\beta(2r + \beta)}} \left[e^{[r + \beta + \sqrt{\beta(2r + \beta)}]x} - e^{[r + \beta - \sqrt{\beta(2r + \beta)}]x} \right].$$

Further, show that $\lim_{\beta \rightarrow 0} y_\beta(x) = xe^{rx}$.

6.15. Verify that $y_1(x) = x$ and $y_2(x) = 1/x$ are solutions of

$$x^3y'' + x^2y' - xy = 0.$$

Use this information and the variation of parameters method to find the general solution of

$$x^3y'' + x^2y' - xy = x/(1 + x).$$

Answers or Hints

6.1. Use the definition of Wronskian.

6.2. Verify directly.

6.3. (i) $\ln x/(x-1)$. (ii) $(1/2)(1-x) \ln[(x-2)/x] - 1$. (iii) e^{-x^2} . (iv) $(x/2) \times \ln[(1+x)/(1-x)] - 1$.

6.4. (i) Verify directly. (ii) Use (6.5).

6.5. $e^{-\delta x^2/2} \int^x e^{\delta t^2/2} dt.$

- 6.6.** Use $y_2(x) = y_1(x)y(x)$ and the fact that $y_1(x)$ and $y_2(x)$ are solutions.
- 6.7.** (i) Use Abel's identity. (ii) If both attain maxima or minima at x_0 , then $\phi_1'(x_0) = \phi_2'(x_0) = 0$. (iii) Use Abel's identity. (iv) If x_0 is a common point of inflexion, then $\phi_1''(x_0) = \phi_2''(x_0) = 0$. (v) $W(x^*) = 0$ implies $\phi_2(x) = c\phi_1(x)$. If $\phi_1'(x^*) = 0$, then $\phi_1(x) \equiv 0$, and if $\phi_1'(x^*) \neq 0$ then $c = \phi_2'(x^*)/\phi_1'(x^*)$.
- 6.8.** Directly show right-hand side is the same as left-hand side.
- 6.9.** Verify directly.
- 6.10.** Use the substitution $w = z + w_1$ to obtain $z' + (2w_1 + p_1(x))z + z^2 = 0$, which is a Bernoulli equation whose multiplier is $z^{-2} \exp(-\int^x (2u_1 + p_1)dt)$. Hence, if w_1 is a solution of (6.21), then its integrating factor is $(w - w_1)^{-2} \exp(-\int^x (2u_1 + p_1)dt)$. Now use Theorem 3.4.
- 6.11.** (i) $c_1 e^{-2x} + c_2 e^{-5x}$. (ii) $(c_1 + c_2 x)e^{4x}$. (iii) $c_1 e^{-x} \cos \sqrt{2}x + c_2 e^{-x} \times \sin \sqrt{2}x$.
- 6.12.** (i) $c_1 \cos 2x + c_2 \sin 2x - \frac{1}{4}x \cos 2x$. (ii) $c_1 e^{-x} + c_2 e^{-3x} - \frac{1}{2}x e^{-3x}$
(iii) $c_1 e^{-x} + c_2 e^{-4x} - \frac{1}{3}x e^{-4x}$.
- 6.13.** Use explicit forms of the solution.
- 6.14.** Note that $\sqrt{\beta(\beta + 2r)} \rightarrow 0$ as $\beta \rightarrow 0$.
- 6.15.** $c_1 x + (c_2/x) + (1/2)[(x - (1/x)) \ln(1 + x) - x \ln x - 1]$.