
LAB 6. THE PENDULUM CHALLENGE

Introduction

You will swing a metal weight attached to a thread so that when the weight reaches the bottom of its swing, a sharp blade cuts the thread. Your challenge is to predict exactly where the weight will land on the floor.

Supplies

Pendulum support, thread, fishing weight, white paper, carbon paper, tape, target, plumb line, measuring tape, [utility blade]

Activity

1. Obtain the vertical stand, horizontal bar, thread, fishing weight, white paper, tape, and carbon paper.
2. Tie the thread to the fishing weight. Hang the weight by the thread from the horizontal bar so that the knot is just below the level of the table top. (When the weight is released as a pendulum, a blade fastened to the table top will cut the string right above the knot.) You may make the string any length you like.
3. Decide where and how to release the pendulum so that the blade cuts the swinging thread. Calculate where the weight will land after the thread is cut.
4. Tape the target to the floor where you predict the weight will land.
5. Summon the instructor. Allow the instructor to attach the blade to the table top directly under the point where the thread is attached, so that the swinging thread meets the edge of the blade at a glancing angle.
6. Place a piece of carbon paper, carbon side down, atop the target.
7. While the instructor watches, position and release the weight so that its thread is cut at the bottom of its swing and the weight lands on the floor at the predicted spot.
8. Allow the instructor to remove the carbon paper and observe the carbon mark left by the landing weight.

Evaluation

1. If the carbon mark is within 4.0 cm of the target, you have completed this lab!
2. If the mark is more than 4.0 cm distant from the target:
 - a. Measure where the weight actually landed.
 - b. Determine what went wrong in your calculation or execution.
 - c. Explain your findings to the instructor.
 - d. Try once more.
3. If the carbon mark is within 4.0 cm of the target, you have completed this lab!

4. If the mark is more than 4.0 cm distant from the target, your group must make a report. Measure and record the mass of the weight. Record the specifics of your apparatus: thread length, table height, height of release of the weight, etc. You will need them for your report.

Report

Only if the weight failed twice to hit the mark, write a complete report detailing your activities and findings.

Apparatus

Describe your system: length of thread, mass of weight, height of table, and all other quantities needed to fully specify it.

Model

Describe the mathematical model you used to simulate the system. Include the formulas you used, the variables you were trying to find, and the values of all quantities. Report the results of your predictions.

Procedure

Describe the steps you followed in “launching” the pendulum.

Results

Report where the weight actually landed in both attempts.

Analysis

Explore why you missed the target. Were there effects that you did not consider? Were any quantities measured in error? Were incorrect quantities used in formulas? Did your model use correct physics concepts?

Does further consideration lead you to a revised prediction? If so, explain how you arrived at the prediction. Does your revised prediction match the actual results?

Conclusion

It is better to hit the mark than to miss.