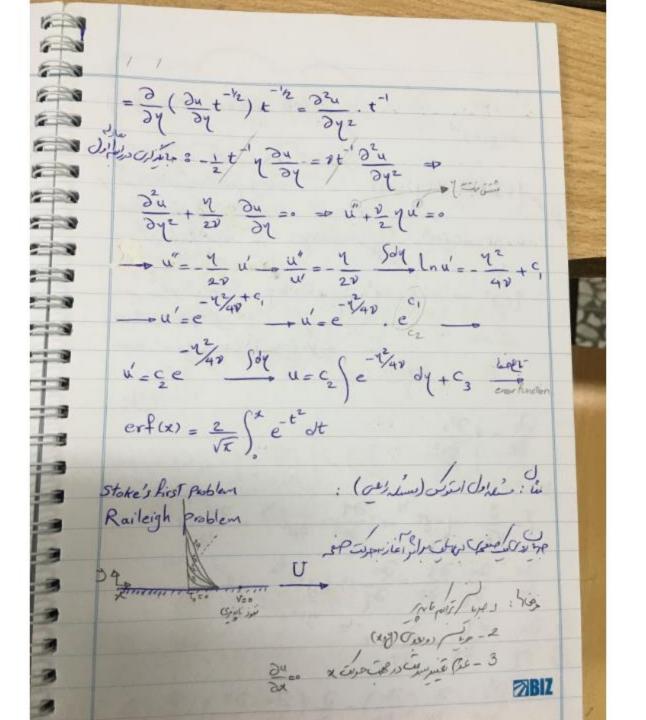


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Flow near a plate suddenly set in motion

Rayleigh's problem or Stokes' first problem.

Consider a semi-infinite incompressible Newtonian liquid of viscosity η and density ρ , bounded below by a plate at y=0 (Fig. 6.20). Initially, both the plate and the liquid are at rest.

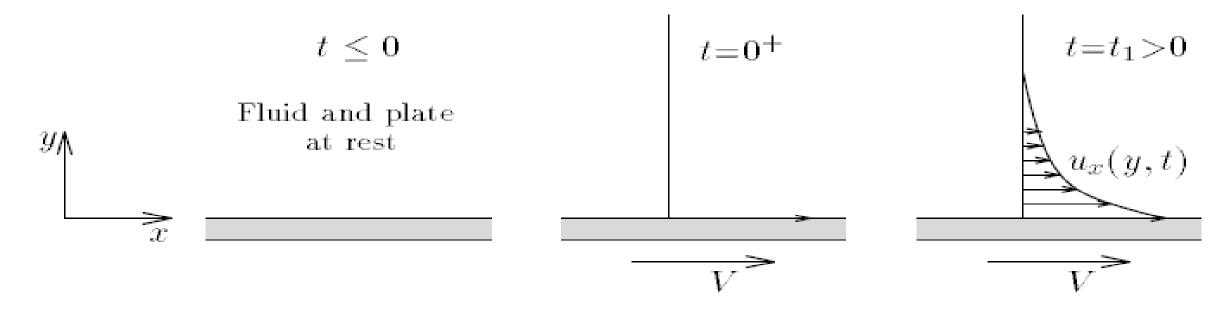


Figure 6.20. Flow near a plate suddenly set in motion.

The governing equation for $u_x(y,t)$ is homogeneous:

$$\frac{\partial u_x}{\partial t} = \nu \frac{\partial^2 u_x}{\partial y^2}, \tag{6.112}$$

where $\nu \equiv \eta/\rho$ is the kinematic viscosity. Mathematically, Eq. (6.112) is called the heat or diffusion equation. The boundary and initial conditions are:

Similarity solution:

Let us, however, assume that the existence of a similarity solution and the proper combination of y and t are not known a priori, and assume that the solution is of the form

$$u_x(y,t) = V f(\xi),$$
 (6.114)

where

$$\xi = a \frac{y}{t^n}, \quad \text{with} \quad n > 0.$$
 (6.115)

Here $\xi(y,t)$ is the similarity variable, a is a constant to be determined later so that ξ is dimensionless, and n is a positive number to be chosen so that the original partial differential equation (6.112) can be transformed into an ordinary differential equation with f as the dependent variable and ξ as the independent one.

The boundary condition at y=0 is equivalent to

$$f = 1 \text{ at } \xi = 0,$$
 (6.116)

whereas the boundary condition at $y\to\infty$ and the initial condition collapse to a single boundary condition for f,

$$f = 0 \text{ at } \xi \to \infty$$
. (6.117)

$$u_x(y,t) = V f(\xi),$$
 (6.114)

$$\xi = a \frac{y}{t^n}, \quad \text{with} \quad n > 0.$$
 (6.115)

Differentiation of Eq. (6.114) using the chain rule gives

$$\frac{\partial u_x}{\partial t} = -V n \frac{ay}{t^{n+1}} f' = -V n \frac{\xi}{t} f',$$

$$\frac{\partial u_x}{\partial y} = V \frac{a}{t^n} f' \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{\partial^2 u_x}{\partial y^2} = V \frac{a^2}{t^{2n}} f'',$$

where primes denote differentiation with respect to ξ . Substitution of the above derivatives into Eq. (6.112) gives the following equation:

$$f'' + \frac{n\xi}{\nu a^2} t^{2n-1} f' = 0$$
.

By setting n=1/2, time is eliminated and the above expression becomes a second-order ordinary differential equation,

$$f'' + \frac{\xi}{2\nu a^2} f' = 0 \quad \text{with} \quad \xi = a \frac{y}{\sqrt{t}}.$$

Taking a equal to $1/\sqrt{\nu}$ makes the similarity variable dimensionless. For convenience in the solution of the differential equation, we set $a=1/(2\sqrt{\nu})$. Hence,

$$\xi = \frac{y}{2\sqrt{\nu t}},\tag{6.118}$$

whereas the resulting ordinary differential equation is

$$f'' + 2\xi f' = 0. (6.119)$$

This equation is subject to the boundary conditions (6.116) and (6.117). By straightforward integration, we obtain

$$f(\xi) = c_1 \int_0^{\xi} e^{-z^2} dz + c_2,$$

where z is a dummy variable of integration. At $\xi=0$, f=1; consequently, $c_2=1$. At $\xi\to\infty$, f=0; therefore,

$$c_1 \int_0^\infty e^{-z^2} dz + 1 = 0 \quad \text{or} \quad c_1 = -\frac{2}{\sqrt{\pi}},$$

and

$$f(\xi) = 1 - \frac{2}{\sqrt{\pi}} \int_0^{\xi} e^{-z^2} dz = 1 - \text{erf}(\xi),$$
 (6.120)

where erf is the error function, defined as

$$\operatorname{erf}(\xi) \equiv \frac{2}{\sqrt{\pi}} \int_0^{\xi} e^{-z^2} dz$$
. (6.121)

Values of the error function are tabulated in several math textbooks. It is a monotone increasing function with

$$erf(0) = 0$$
 and $\lim_{\xi \to \infty} erf(\xi) = 1$.

Note that the second expression was used when calculating the constant c_1 . Substituting into Eq. (6.114), we obtain the solution

$$u_x(y,t) = V \left[1 - \operatorname{erf}\left(\frac{y}{2\sqrt{\nu t}}\right) \right]. \tag{6.122}$$

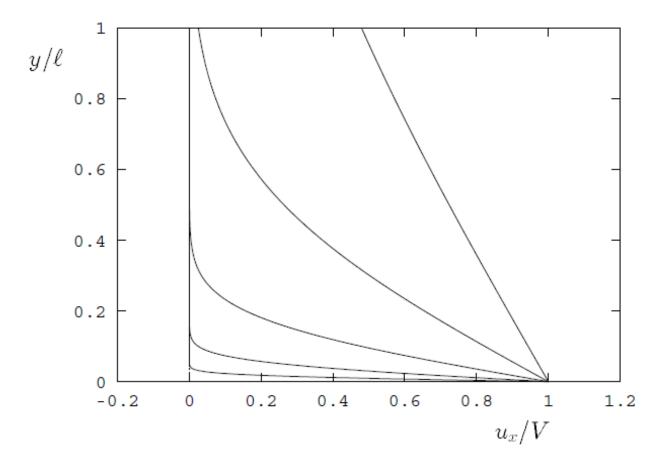


Figure 6.21. Transient flow due to the sudden motion of a plate. Velocity profiles at $\nu t/\ell^2 = 0.0001$, 0.001, 0.01, 0.1 and 1, where ℓ is an arbitrary length scale.

A boundary-layer thickness, $\delta(t)$, can be defined as the distance from the moving plate at which $u_x/V=0.01$. This happens when ξ is about 1.8, and thus

$$\delta(t) = 3.6 \sqrt{\nu t}.$$