36-2 INTENSITY IN SINGLE-SLIT DIFFRACTION

Learning Objectives

After reading this module, you should be able to . . .

36.08 Divide a thin slit into multiple zones of equal width and write an expression for the phase difference of the wavelets from adjacent zones in terms of the angle θ to a point on the viewing screen.

36.09 For single-slit diffraction, draw phasor diagrams for the central maximum and several of the minima and maxima off to one side, indicating the phase difference between adjacent phasors, explaining how the net electric field is calculated, and identifying the corresponding part of the diffraction pattern.

36.10 Describe a diffraction pattern in terms of the net electric field at points in the pattern.

36.11 Evaluate α, the convenient connection between angle θ to a point in a diffraction pattern and the intensity I at that point.

36.12 For a given point in a diffraction pattern, at a given angle, calculate the intensity I in terms of the intensity I_m at the center of the pattern.

Key Idea

- The intensity of the diffraction pattern at any given angle θ is

$$I(\theta) = I_m\left(\frac{\sin\alpha}{\alpha}\right)^2,$$

where I_m is the intensity at the center of the pattern and

$$\alpha = \frac{\pi a}{\lambda}\sin\theta.$$

Intensity in Single-Slit Diffraction, Qualitatively

In Module 36-1 we saw how to find the positions of the minima and the maxima in a single-slit diffraction pattern. Now we turn to a more general problem: find an expression for the intensity I of the pattern as a function of θ, the angular position of a point on a viewing screen.

To do this, we divide the slit of Fig. 36-4 into N zones of equal widths Δx small enough that we can assume each zone acts as a source of Huygens wavelets. We wish to superimpose the wavelets arriving at an arbitrary point P on the viewing screen, at angle θ to the central axis, so that we can determine the amplitude E_θ of the electric component of the resultant wave at P. The intensity of the light at P is then proportional to the square of that amplitude.

To find E_θ, we need the phase relationships among the arriving wavelets. The point here is that in general they have different phases because they travel different distances to reach P. The phase difference between wavelets from adjacent zones is given by

$$\begin{pmatrix}\text{phase}\\ \text{difference}\end{pmatrix} = \left(\frac{2\pi}{\lambda}\right)\begin{pmatrix}\text{path length}\\ \text{difference}\end{pmatrix}.$$

For point P at angle θ, the path length difference between wavelets from adjacent zones is $\Delta x \sin\theta$. Thus, we can write the phase difference $\Delta\phi$ between wavelets from adjacent zones as

$$\Delta\phi = \left(\frac{2\pi}{\lambda}\right)(\Delta x \sin\theta). \tag{36-4}$$

We assume that the wavelets arriving at P all have the same amplitude ΔE. To find the amplitude E_θ of the resultant wave at P, we add the amplitudes ΔE via phasors. To do this, we construct a diagram of N phasors, one corresponding to the wavelet from each zone in the slit.

Central Maximum. For point P_0 at $\theta = 0$ on the central axis of Fig. 36-4, Eq. 36-4 tells us that the phase difference $\Delta\phi$ between the wavelets is zero; that is, the wavelets all arrive in phase. Figure 36-7*a* is the corresponding phasor diagram; adjacent phasors represent wavelets from adjacent zones and are arranged head to tail. Because there is zero phase difference between the wavelets, there is zero angle between each pair of adjacent phasors. The amplitude E_θ of the net

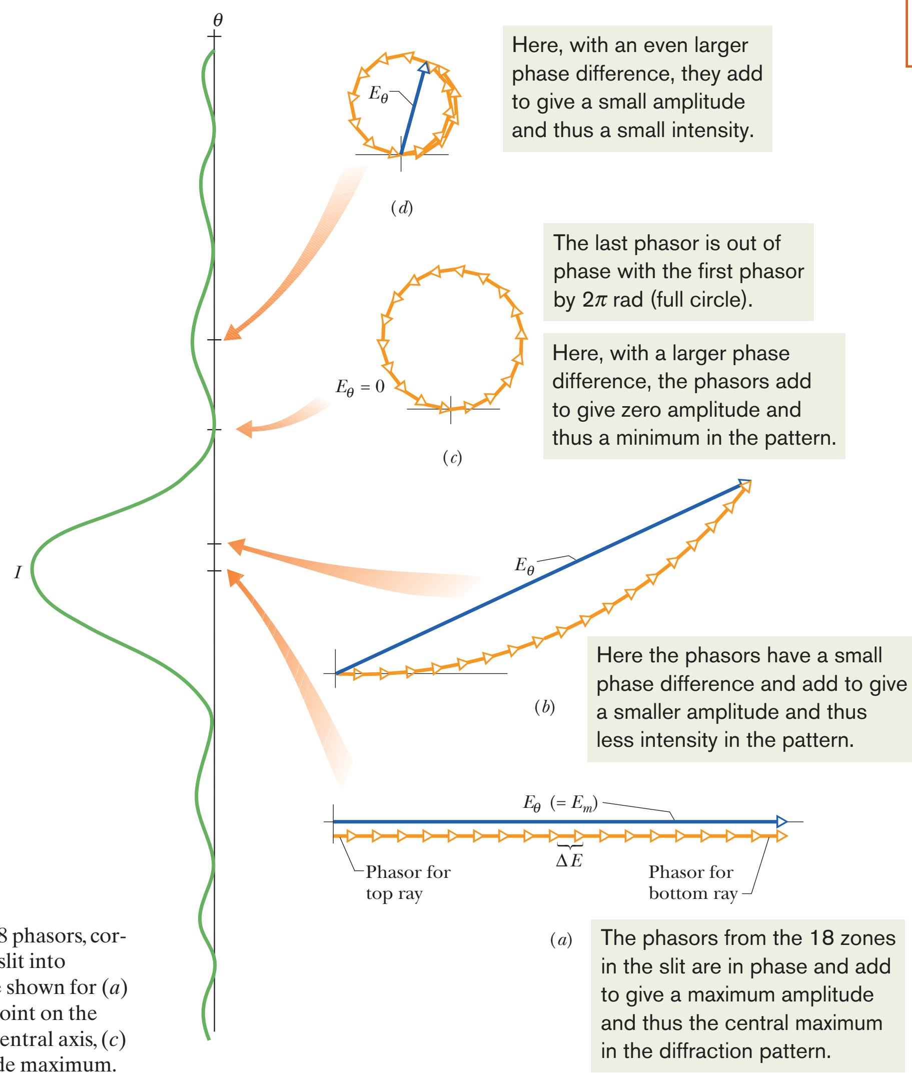


Figure 36-7 Phasor diagrams for $N = 18$ phasors, corresponding to the division of a single slit into 18 zones. Resultant amplitudes E_θ are shown for (*a*) the central maximum at $\theta = 0$, (*b*) a point on the screen lying at a small angle θ to the central axis, (*c*) the first minimum, and (*d*) the first side maximum.

wave at P_0 is the vector sum of these phasors. This arrangement of the phasors turns out to be the one that gives the greatest value for the amplitude E_θ. We call this value E_m; that is, E_m is the value of E_θ for $\theta = 0$.

We next consider a point P that is at a small angle θ to the central axis. Equation 36-4 now tells us that the phase difference $\Delta\phi$ between wavelets from adjacent zones is no longer zero. Figure 36-7*b* shows the corresponding phasor diagram; as before, the phasors are arranged head to tail, but now there is an angle $\Delta\phi$ between adjacent phasors. The amplitude E_θ at this new point is still the vector sum of the phasors, but it is smaller than that in Fig. 36-7*a*, which means that the intensity of the light is less at this new point P than at P_0.

First Minimun. If we continue to increase θ, the angle $\Delta\phi$ between adjacent phasors increases, and eventually the chain of phasors curls completely around so that the head of the last phasor just reaches the tail of the first phasor (Fig. 36-7*c*). The amplitude E_θ is now zero, which means that the intensity of the light is also zero. We have reached the first minimum, or dark fringe, in the diffraction pattern. The first and last phasors now have a phase difference of 2π rad, which means that the path length difference between the top and bottom rays through the slit equals one wavelength. Recall that this is the condition we determined for the first diffraction minimum.

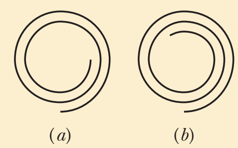
First Side Maximum. As we continue to increase θ, the angle $\Delta\phi$ between adjacent phasors continues to increase, the chain of phasors begins to wrap back on itself, and the resulting coil begins to shrink. Amplitude E_θ now increases until it reaches a maximum value in the arrangement shown in Fig. 36-7*d*. This arrangement corresponds to the first side maximum in the diffraction pattern.

Second Minimum. If we increase θ a bit more, the resulting shrinkage of the coil decreases E_θ, which means that the intensity also decreases. When θ is increased enough, the head of the last phasor again meets the tail of the first phasor. We have then reached the second minimum.

We could continue this qualitative method of determining the maxima and minima of the diffraction pattern but, instead, we shall now turn to a quantitative method.

Checkpoint 2

The figures represent, in smoother form (with more phasors) than Fig. 36-7, the phasor diagrams for two points of a diffraction pattern that are on opposite sides of a certain diffraction maximum. (a) Which maximum is it? (b) What is the approximate value of m (in Eq. 36-3) that corresponds to this maximum?



Intensity in Single-Slit Diffraction, Quantitatively

Equation 36-3 tells us how to locate the minima of the single-slit diffraction pattern on screen C of Fig. 36-4 as a function of the angle θ in that figure. Here we wish to derive an expression for the intensity $I(\theta)$ of the pattern as a function of θ. We state, and shall prove below, that the intensity is given by

$$I(\theta) = I_m\left(\frac{\sin\alpha}{\alpha}\right)^2, \qquad (36\text{-}5)$$

where

$$\alpha = \tfrac{1}{2}\phi = \frac{\pi a}{\lambda}\sin\theta. \qquad (36\text{-}6)$$

The symbol α is just a convenient connection between the angle θ that locates a point on the viewing screen and the light intensity $I(\theta)$ at that point. The intensity I_m is the greatest value of the intensities $I(\theta)$ in the pattern and occurs at the central maximum (where $\theta = 0$), and ϕ is the phase difference (in radians) between the top and bottom rays from the slit of width a.

Study of Eq. 36-5 shows that intensity minima will occur where

$$\alpha = m\pi, \qquad \text{for } m = 1, 2, 3, \ldots. \qquad (36\text{-}7)$$

If we put this result into Eq. 36-6, we find

$$m\pi = \frac{\pi a}{\lambda}\sin\theta, \qquad \text{for } m = 1, 2, 3, \ldots,$$

or

$$a\sin\theta = m\lambda, \qquad \text{for } m = 1, 2, 3, \ldots \quad \text{(minima—dark fringes)}, \qquad (36\text{-}8)$$

which is exactly Eq. 36-3, the expression that we derived earlier for the location of the minima.

Plots. Figure 36-8 shows plots of the intensity of a single-slit diffraction pattern, calculated with Eqs. 36-5 and 36-6 for three slit widths: $a = \lambda$, $a = 5\lambda$, and $a = 10\lambda$. Note that as the slit width increases (relative to the wavelength), the width of the *central diffraction maximum* (the central hill-like region of the graphs) decreases; that is, the light undergoes less flaring by the slit. The secondary maxima also decrease in width (and become weaker). In the limit of slit width a being much greater than wavelength λ, the secondary maxima due to the slit disappear; we then no longer have single-slit diffraction (but we still have diffraction due to the edges of the wide slit, like that produced by the edges of the razor blade in Fig. 36-2).

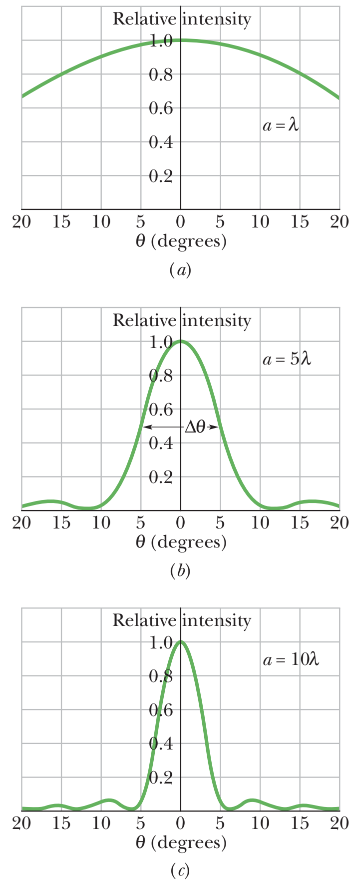


Figure 36-8 The relative intensity in single-slit diffraction for three values of the ratio a/λ. The wider the slit is, the narrower is the central diffraction maximum.

Proof of Eqs. 36-5 and 36-6

To find an expression for the intensity at a point in the diffraction pattern, we need to divide the slit into many zones and then add the phasors corresponding to those zones, as we did in Fig. 36-7. The arc of phasors in Fig. 36-9 represents the wavelets that reach an arbitrary point P on the viewing screen of Fig. 36-4, corresponding to a particular small angle θ. The amplitude E_θ of the resultant wave at P is the vector sum of these phasors. If we divide the slit of Fig. 36-4 into infinitesimal zones of width Δx, the arc of phasors in Fig. 36-9 approaches the arc of a circle; we call its radius R as indicated in that figure. The length of the arc must be E_m, the amplitude at the center of the diffraction pattern, because if we straightened out the arc we would have the phasor arrangement of Fig. 36-7*a* (shown lightly in Fig. 36-9).

The angle ϕ in the lower part of Fig. 36-9 is the difference in phase between the infinitesimal vectors at the left and right ends of arc E_m. From the geometry, ϕ is also the angle between the two radii marked R in Fig. 36-9. The dashed line in that figure, which bisects ϕ, then forms two congruent right triangles. From either triangle we can write

$$\sin \tfrac{1}{2}\phi = \frac{E_\theta}{2R}. \tag{36-9}$$

In radian measure, ϕ is (with E_m considered to be a circular arc)

$$\phi = \frac{E_m}{R}.$$

Solving this equation for R and substituting in Eq. 36-9 lead to

$$E_\theta = \frac{E_m}{\tfrac{1}{2}\phi} \sin \tfrac{1}{2}\phi. \tag{36-10}$$

Intensity. In Module 33-2 we saw that the intensity of an electromagnetic wave is proportional to the square of the amplitude of its electric field. Here, this means that the maximum intensity I_m (at the center of the pattern) is proportional to E_m^2 and the intensity $I(\theta)$ at angle θ is proportional to E_θ^2. Thus,

$$\frac{I(\theta)}{I_m} = \frac{E_\theta^2}{E_m^2}. \tag{36-11}$$

Substituting for E_θ with Eq. 36-10 and then substituting $\alpha = \tfrac{1}{2}\phi$, we are led to Eq. 36-5 for the intensity as a function of θ:

$$I(\theta) = I_m \left(\frac{\sin \alpha}{\alpha}\right)^2.$$

The second equation we wish to prove relates α to θ. The phase difference ϕ between the rays from the top and bottom of the entire slit may be related to a path length difference with Eq. 36-4; it tells us that

$$\phi = \left(\frac{2\pi}{\lambda}\right)(a \sin \theta),$$

where a is the sum of the widths Δx of the infinitesimal zones. However, $\phi = 2\alpha$, so this equation reduces to Eq. 36-6.

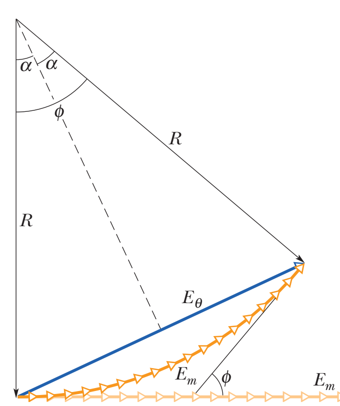
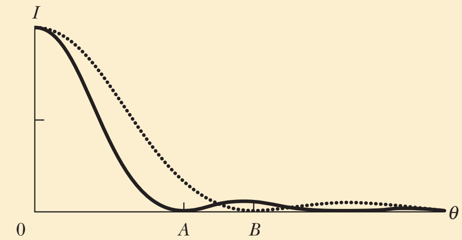


Figure 36-9 A construction used to calculate the intensity in single-slit diffraction. The situation shown corresponds to that of Fig. 36-7*b*.

Checkpoint 3

Two wavelengths, 650 and 430 nm, are used separately in a single-slit diffraction experiment. The figure shows the results as graphs of intensity I versus angle θ for the two diffraction patterns. If both wavelengths are then used simultaneously, what color will be seen in the combined diffraction pattern at (a) angle A and (b) angle B?



Sample Problem 36.02 Intensities of the maxima in a single-slit interference pattern

Find the intensities of the first three secondary maxima (side maxima) in the single-slit diffraction pattern of Fig. 36-1, measured as a percentage of the intensity of the central maximum.

KEY IDEAS

The secondary maxima lie approximately halfway between the minima, whose angular locations are given by Eq. 36-7 ($\alpha = m\pi$). The locations of the secondary maxima are then given (approximately) by

$$a = (m + \tfrac{1}{2})\pi, \qquad \text{for } m = 1, 2, 3, \ldots,$$

with α in radian measure. We can relate the intensity I at any point in the diffraction pattern to the intensity I_m of the central maximum via Eq. 36-5.

Calculations: Substituting the approximate values of α for the secondary maxima into Eq. 36-5 to obtain the relative intensities at those maxima, we get

$$\frac{I}{I_m} = \left(\frac{\sin\alpha}{\alpha}\right)^2 = \left(\frac{\sin(m + \frac{1}{2})\pi}{(m + \frac{1}{2})\pi}\right)^2, \quad \text{for } m = 1, 2, 3, \ldots .$$

The first of the secondary maxima occurs for $m = 1$, and its relative intensity is

$$\frac{I_1}{I_m} = \left(\frac{\sin(1 + \frac{1}{2})\pi}{(1 + \frac{1}{2})\pi}\right)^2 = \left(\frac{\sin 1.5\pi}{1.5\pi}\right)^2$$

$$= 4.50 \times 10^{-2} \approx 4.5\%. \qquad \text{(Answer)}$$

For $m = 2$ and $m = 3$ we find that

$$\frac{I_2}{I_m} = 1.6\% \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{I_3}{I_m} = 0.83\%. \qquad \text{(Answer)}$$

As you can see from these results, successive secondary maxima decrease rapidly in intensity. Figure 36-1 was deliberately overexposed to reveal them.

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36-3 DIFFRACTION BY A CIRCULAR APERTURE

Learning Objectives

After reading this module, you should be able to . . .

36.13 Describe and sketch the diffraction pattern from a small circular aperture or obstacle.

36.14 For diffraction by a small circular aperture or obstacle, apply the relationships between the angle θ to the first minimum, the wavelength λ of the light, the diameter d of the aperture, the distance D to a viewing screen, and the distance y between the minimum and the center of the diffraction pattern.

36.15 By discussing the diffraction patterns of point objects, explain how diffraction limits visual resolution of objects.

36.16 Identify that Rayleigh's criterion for resolvability gives the (approximate) angle at which two point objects are just barely resolvable.

36.17 Apply the relationships between the angle θ_R in Rayleigh's criterion, the wavelength λ of the light, the diameter d of the aperture (for example, the diameter of the pupil of an eye), the angle θ subtended by two distant point objects, and the distance L to those objects.