

# Conducting sphere inside electric field

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## The problem:

A neutral conducting sphere with a radius  $R$  is placed inside a constant field  $\vec{E} = E_0 \hat{z}$

1. Find the dipole induced by the sphere.
2. What is the electric field outside the sphere?
3. What is the charge distribution on the sphere shell?

## The solution:

1. As we know the electric field inside a conducting sphere is 0.

The electric field induced inside a polarized sphere is

$$\vec{E}_d = -k \frac{\vec{p}}{R^3} \quad (1)$$

Therefore:

$$\vec{E}_z - \vec{E}_d = 0 \quad (2)$$

$$E_0 \hat{z} - \frac{k\vec{p}}{R^3} = 0 \quad (3)$$

$$(4)$$

and

$$\vec{p} = \frac{R^3 E_0}{k} \hat{z} \quad (5)$$

The electric field outside the sphere is just the sum of the field induced by the sphere and the constant external field:

$$\vec{E} = k \frac{3(\vec{p} \cdot \vec{r})\vec{r} - r^2\vec{p}}{r^5} + E_0 \hat{z} \quad (6)$$

$$= k \frac{3p_z z \vec{r} - r^2 p_z \hat{z}}{r^5} + E_0 \hat{z} = E_0 \left( R^3 \frac{3z\vec{r} - r^2 \hat{z}}{r^5} + \hat{z} \right) \quad (7)$$

Outside of the sphere the normal component of the electric field to the surface is

$$E_r = \vec{E} \cdot \hat{r} = E_0 \left( R^3 \frac{3z\vec{r} - r^2 \hat{z}}{r^5} + \hat{z} \right) \cdot \hat{r} = E_0 \left( R^3 \frac{3z - r \cos \theta}{r^4} + \cos \theta \right) \quad (8)$$

$$= E_0 \left( R^3 \frac{2 \cos \theta}{r^3} + \cos \theta \right) \quad (9)$$

where  $\theta$  is the angle between  $\vec{r}$  and  $\hat{z}$ . Then at  $r = R$

$$E_r^+ = 3E_0 \cos \theta \quad (10)$$

whereas inside the sphere the field is zero.

By the Gauss' law

$$\vec{E}_r^+ - \vec{E}_r^- = 4\pi k \sigma \quad (11)$$

Therefore,

$$\sigma = \frac{3E_0 \cos \theta}{4\pi k} \quad (12)$$