

In a nutshell: Laplace's equation

Given a region that is a subset of a rectangle or three-dimensional orthotope (a rectangular parallelepiped) that is defined by $[a_x, b_x] \times [a_y, b_y]$ or $[a_x, b_x] \times [a_y, b_y] \times [a_z, b_z]$ such that there exists an h and integers n_x, n_y and possibly n_z such that $h = \frac{b_x - a_x}{n_x} = \frac{b_y - a_y}{n_y}$ and possibly $h = \frac{b_z - a_z}{n_z}$, suppose we want to approximate the solution to

Laplace's equation $u(x, y)$ or $u(x, y, z)$.

1. Set $x_i \leftarrow a_x + ih$ noting that $x_{n_x} = b_x$, $y_j \leftarrow a_y + jh$ noting that $y_{n_y} = b_y$, and possibly $z_k \leftarrow a_z + kh$ noting that $z_{n_z} = b_z$.
2. Create an $(n_x + 1) \times (n_y + 1)$ 2D-array or $(n_x + 1) \times (n_y + 1) \times (n_z + 1)$ 3D-array \mathbf{u} where u_{ij} will approximate $u(x_i, y_j)$ or where $u_{i,j,k}$ will approximate $u(x_i, y_j, z_k)$.
3. Some points will have fixed values, others will be insulated, and others will be unknown. It is essential that all values along the boundary of the rectangle or 3-dimensional orthotope either have fixed values or be insulated—they cannot be unknown.
4. Let N be the number of unknown values. Associate each unknown value with an unknown ranging from v_1 to v_N . For example, we may have the following where insulated boundary values are marked with *, fixed boundary values are marked with a real number, and there are 22 unknown interior points, each associated with an index into a one-dimensional vector \mathbf{v} .

$$\begin{pmatrix} 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 \\ * & u_{1,1} = v_1 & u_{1,2} = v_2 & u_{1,3} = v_3 & u_{1,4} = v_4 & u_{1,5} = v_5 & u_{1,6} = v_6 & 5 \\ * & u_{2,1} = v_7 & u_{2,2} = v_8 & u_{2,3} = v_9 & u_{2,4} = v_{10} & u_{2,5} = v_{11} & u_{2,5} = v_{12} & 5 \\ * & u_{3,1} = v_{13} & u_{3,2} = v_{14} & * & u_{3,4} = v_{15} & u_{3,5} = v_{16} & u_{3,5} = v_{17} & 5 \\ * & u_{4,1} = v_{18} & u_{4,2} = v_{19} & * & u_{4,4} = v_{20} & u_{4,5} = v_{21} & u_{4,5} = v_{22} & 5 \\ 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 & 25 & 25 & 5 & 5 \end{pmatrix}$$

5. For each unknown, write down the following equation: $4u_{i,j} - u_{i-1,j} - u_{i+1,j} - u_{i,j-1} - u_{i,j+1} = 0$ or, if applicable, $6u_{i,j,k} - u_{i-1,j,k} - u_{i+1,j,k} - u_{i,j-1,k} - u_{i,j+1,k} - u_{i,j,k-1} - u_{i,j,k+1} = 0$. Each of these entries is associated with either a boundary value, an insulated boundary, or an unknown v_ℓ . For each fixed value, just substitute it into the equation. For each insulated boundary point, replace it with the unknown v_ℓ associated with the point u_{ij} or $u_{i,j,k}$, and for each unknown, substitute it with its corresponding unknown v_ℓ .
For example, we have $4u_{4,2} - u_{3,2} - u_{5,2} - u_{4,1} - u_{4,3} = 0$, so $4v_{19} - v_{14} - v_{19} - v_{18} - 5 = 0$, with one insulated point and one boundary point.
6. Having done this for each unknown value, this defines a system of N linear equations in N unknowns. Solve this system of linear equations. The solution v_ℓ is the approximation of the corresponding value $u(x_i, y_j)$ or $u(x_i, y_j, z_k)$.

For example, having solved we get that $v_{19} = 5.22$, so $u_{4,2} = 5.22$.

Acknowledgement: Jakob Koblinsky noted the incorrect indices in the Cartesian products and Step 1.

