

IB Physics Data Booklet Reference

IB SL Study Guide

Contents

How to Use This Guide	NOT Given (Must Memorize)
Section 1: Fundamental Constants	Section 6: Theme D — Fields
Universal Constants	Given in the Booklet (All Levels)
Electromagnetic Constants	Given in the Booklet (HL Only) HL
Particle Masses	NOT Given (Must Memorize)
Earth and Astronomical Data	Section 7: Theme E — Nuclear and Quantum Physics
Section 2: Unit Prefixes and Conversions	Given in the Booklet (All Levels)
Metric Prefixes (Given in Booklet)	Given in the Booklet (HL Only) HL
Common Unit Conversions	NOT Given (Must Memorize)
Section 3: Theme A — Space, Time and Motion	Section 8: Exam Strategies for Using the Data Booklet
Given in the Booklet (All Levels)	1. Know the Layout
NOT Given (Must Memorize)	2. Understand vs. Locate
Section 4: Theme B — The Particulate Nature of Matter	3. Memorize Strategic Shortcuts
Given in the Booklet (All Levels)	4. Check Units and Factors
Given in the Booklet (HL Only) HL	5. Cross-Reference Related Formulas
NOT Given (Must Memorize)	6. Flag HL-Only Content
Section 5: Theme C — Wave Behaviour	7. Practice Under Exam Conditions
Given in the Booklet (All Levels)	Exam-Style Practice Questions
Given in the Booklet (HL Only) HL	Final Checklist for Data Booklet Mastery

How to Use This Guide

The IB Physics Data Booklet is your official formula sheet for all exams — Paper 1, Paper 2, and Paper 3. This guide helps you:

- **Understand what's given** — constants, equations, and tables you can reference during exams
- **Know what to memorize** — core concepts and relationships NOT in the booklet
- **Navigate efficiently** — find formulas quickly under exam pressure
- **Avoid common mistakes** — unit errors, sign conventions, and factor-of-2 pitfalls

EXAM ALERT

Critical Exam Rule: You receive the Data Booklet with every physics exam. Do NOT waste time memorizing every formula — instead, know WHERE to find each equation and WHEN to use it.

This guide is based on the IB Physics Data Booklet for first assessment 2025+. Always verify with your teacher that you have the current version.

Jump to section: Fundamental Constants · Unit Prefixes & Conversions · Theme A: Motion · Theme B: Particulate Nature · Theme C: Waves · Theme D: Fields · Theme E: Nuclear & Quantum · Exam Strategies

Section 1: Fundamental Constants

These constants appear throughout physics calculations. The Data Booklet provides precise values — you don't need to memorize them.

Universal Constants

Symbol	Constant	Value (from booklet)	Units
c	Speed of light in vacuum	3.00×10^8	m s^{-1}
G	Gravitational constant	6.67×10^{-11}	$\text{N m}^2 \text{kg}^{-2}$
N_A	Avogadro constant	6.02×10^{23}	mol^{-1}
R	Molar gas constant	8.31	$\text{J K}^{-1} \text{mol}^{-1}$
k_B	Boltzmann constant	1.38×10^{-23}	J K^{-1}
σ	Stefan-Boltzmann constant	5.67×10^{-8}	$\text{W m}^{-2} \text{K}^{-4}$

Electromagnetic Constants

Symbol	Constant	Value (from booklet)	Units
e	Elementary charge	1.60×10^{-19}	C
ϵ_0	Permittivity of free space	8.85×10^{-12}	F m ⁻¹
μ_0	Permeability of free space	$4\pi \times 10^{-7}$	H m ⁻¹
h	Planck constant	6.63×10^{-34}	J s

Particle Masses

Particle	Symbol	Mass (from booklet)	Units
Electron	m_e	9.11×10^{-31}	kg
Proton	m_p	1.673×10^{-27}	kg
Neutron	m_n	1.675×10^{-27}	kg
Unified atomic mass unit	u	1.661×10^{-27}	kg

IB TIP

Relationship to memorize: Note that $k_B = R/N_A$ and $c^2 = 1/(\epsilon_0\mu_0)$. These aren't stated explicitly in the booklet but follow from the constants given.

Earth and Astronomical Data

The booklet includes:

- Mass of Earth: $M_E = 5.97 \times 10^{24}$ kg
- Mean radius of Earth: $R_E = 6.37 \times 10^6$ m
- Gravitational field strength at Earth's surface: $g = 9.81$ m s⁻²
- Mass of Sun: $M_S = 1.99 \times 10^{30}$ kg
- Mean Earth-Sun distance: 1.50×10^{11} m (1 AU)

EXAM ALERT

Common Mistake: The booklet provides $g = 9.81$ m s⁻² for Earth's surface. Do NOT use $g = 10$ m s⁻² in exam calculations unless the question explicitly rounds it.

Section 2: Unit Prefixes and Conversions

Metric Prefixes (Given in Booklet)

Prefix	Symbol	Factor	Example
tera	T	10^{12}	1 TW = 10^{12} W
giga	G	10^9	1 GHz = 10^9 Hz
mega	M	10^6	1 MeV = 10^6 eV
kilo	k	10^3	1 km = 10^3 m
centi	c	10^{-2}	1 cm = 10^{-2} m
milli	m	10^{-3}	1 ms = 10^{-3} s
micro	μ	10^{-6}	1 μ F = 10^{-6} F
nano	n	10^{-9}	1 nm = 10^{-9} m
pico	p	10^{-12}	1 pF = 10^{-12} F
femto	f	10^{-15}	1 fm = 10^{-15} m

Common Unit Conversions

The booklet provides:

- 1 electronvolt (eV) = 1.60×10^{-19} J
- 1 day = 8.64×10^4 s
- 1 year = 3.16×10^7 s
- 1 light year (ly) = 9.46×10^{15} m
- 1 parsec (pc) = 3.08×10^{16} m

MEMORISE THIS

Know by heart: The relationship $1 \text{ eV} = 1.60 \times 10^{-19} \text{ J}$ is critical for nuclear and quantum physics. While it's in the booklet, you should recognize it instantly.

Section 3: Theme A — Space, Time and Motion

Given in the Booklet (All Levels)

Kinematics:

- $v = u + at$ (constant acceleration)
- $s = ut + \frac{1}{2}at^2$
- $v^2 = u^2 + 2as$
- $s = \frac{1}{2}(u + v)t$

Projectile motion:

- Horizontal: $x = v_x t$
- Vertical: $y = v_y t - \frac{1}{2}gt^2$

Momentum and collisions:

- $p = mv$ (momentum)
- $F = \frac{\Delta p}{\Delta t}$ (Newton's second law, impulse form)

Energy and work:

- $E_k = \frac{1}{2}mv^2$ (kinetic energy)
- $E_p = mgh$ (gravitational potential energy near Earth's surface)
- $W = Fs \cos \theta$ (work done)
- $P = \frac{W}{t}$ (power)
- Efficiency: $\eta = \frac{\text{useful energy output}}{\text{total energy input}}$

Circular motion:

- $v = \frac{2\pi r}{T}$ (tangential speed)
- $a_c = \frac{v^2}{r}$ (centripetal acceleration)
- $F_c = \frac{mv^2}{r}$ (centripetal force)

NOT Given (Must Memorize)

MEMORISE THIS

Core definitions:

- Velocity is rate of change of displacement: $v = \Delta s / \Delta t$
- Acceleration is rate of change of velocity: $a = \Delta v / \Delta t$
- Newton's first law: object continues in uniform motion unless acted on by resultant force
- Newton's second law: $F = ma$ (standard form)
- Newton's third law: action-reaction pairs are equal and opposite

Conservation laws:

- **Conservation of momentum:** Total momentum before = total momentum after (in isolated system)
- **Conservation of energy:** Total energy is constant in isolated system

EXAM ALERT

Exam Trap: The booklet gives $F = \Delta p / \Delta t$ but NOT $F = ma$. However, for constant mass, they are equivalent. Show your working when deriving one from the other.

Section 4: Theme B — The Particulate Nature of Matter

Given in the Booklet (All Levels)

Thermal physics:

- $pV = nRT$ (ideal gas law)
- $E_k = \frac{3}{2}k_B T$ (mean kinetic energy of ideal gas molecule)
- $Q = mc\Delta T$ (heat energy transfer, specific heat)
- $Q = mL$ (latent heat)

Internal energy and thermodynamics:

- First law: $\Delta U = Q - W$
- $W = p\Delta V$ (work done by gas at constant pressure)

Density and pressure:

- $\rho = \frac{m}{V}$ (density)
- $p = \frac{F}{A}$ (pressure)

Given in the Booklet (HL Only) HL

- $pV^\gamma = \text{constant}$ (adiabatic process)
- Carnot efficiency: $\eta = 1 - \frac{T_C}{T_H}$
- Entropy change: $\Delta S = \frac{Q}{T}$ (reversible process)

NOT Given (Must Memorize)

MEMORISE THIS

Key concepts:

- **Absolute zero:** 0 K = -273.15°C (lowest possible temperature)
- **Internal energy** is the sum of random kinetic and potential energies of particles
- **Isothermal process:** constant temperature ($\Delta T = 0$, so $\Delta U = 0$ for ideal gas)
- **Isobaric process:** constant pressure
- **Isochoric process:** constant volume ($\Delta V = 0$, so $W = 0$)

IB TIP

Quick Check: For ideal gas at constant temperature, $pV = \text{constant}$ (Boyle's law). This follows from $pV = nRT$ when T and n are fixed.

Section 5: Theme C — Wave Behaviour

Given in the Booklet (All Levels)

Wave properties:

- $v = f\lambda$ (wave equation)
- $f = \frac{1}{T}$ (frequency and period)

Electromagnetic spectrum:

- The booklet includes a table showing wavelength ranges for radio, microwave, infrared, visible, UV, X-ray, gamma

Optics:

- $n = \frac{c}{v}$ (refractive index)
- Snell's law: $n_1 \sin \theta_1 = n_2 \sin \theta_2$
- Critical angle: $\sin \theta_c = \frac{n_2}{n_1}$ (for $n_1 > n_2$)
- Lens equation: $\frac{1}{f} = \frac{1}{u} + \frac{1}{v}$
- Magnification: $m = \frac{v}{u}$

Interference:

- Double-slit: $d \sin \theta = n\lambda$ (maxima)
- Single-slit diffraction: $b \sin \theta = n\lambda$ (minima)

Doppler effect:

- For sound: $f' = f \frac{v \pm v_o}{v \mp v_s}$
- For light (non-relativistic): $\frac{\Delta f}{f} = \frac{v}{c}$ (approaching source)

Given in the Booklet (HL Only) HL

- Diffraction grating: $d \sin \theta = n\lambda$
- Rayleigh criterion: $\theta \approx 1.22 \frac{\lambda}{b}$
- Relativistic Doppler: $f' = f \sqrt{\frac{1+v/c}{1-v/c}}$

NOT Given (Must Memorize)

MEMORISE THIS

Definitions:

- **Wavelength λ** : distance between successive crests
- **Frequency f** : number of oscillations per second
- **Amplitude A** : maximum displacement from equilibrium
- **Transverse wave**: oscillations perpendicular to energy transfer (e.g., EM waves, water waves)

- **Longitudinal wave:** oscillations parallel to energy transfer (e.g., sound)

Key concepts:

- Constructive interference: waves in phase, amplitudes add
- Destructive interference: waves out of phase, amplitudes subtract
- Polarization applies only to transverse waves

⚠ EXAM ALERT

Common Error: The double-slit formula $d \sin \theta = n\lambda$ gives maxima positions. For small angles, $\sin \theta \approx \tan \theta = x/D$, so $x = \frac{n\lambda D}{d}$ (fringe separation is $\Delta x = \frac{\lambda D}{d}$).

Section 6: Theme D – Fields

Given in the Booklet (All Levels)

Gravitational fields:

- $g = \frac{F}{m}$ (field strength)
- $F = \frac{Gm_1m_2}{r^2}$ (Newton's law of gravitation)
- $g = \frac{GM}{r^2}$ (field strength at distance r)
- $V = -\frac{GM}{r}$ (gravitational potential)
- $E_p = -\frac{GMm}{r}$ (gravitational potential energy)

Orbital motion:

- $v = \sqrt{\frac{GM}{r}}$ (orbital speed)
- $T^2 = \frac{4\pi^2}{GM}r^3$ (Kepler's third law)

Electric fields:

- $F = \frac{1}{4\pi\epsilon_0} \frac{q_1q_2}{r^2}$ (Coulomb's law, also written as $F = k \frac{q_1q_2}{r^2}$ where $k = \frac{1}{4\pi\epsilon_0}$)
- $E = \frac{F}{q}$ (electric field strength)
- $E = \frac{V}{d}$ (uniform field between plates)
- $V = \frac{Q}{4\pi\epsilon_0 r}$ (electric potential, point charge)
- $C = \frac{Q}{V}$ (capacitance)
- $E = \frac{1}{2}QV = \frac{1}{2}CV^2 = \frac{1}{2} \frac{Q^2}{C}$ (energy stored in capacitor)

Magnetic fields:

- $F = BIl \sin \theta$ (force on current-carrying wire)
- $F = Bqv \sin \theta$ (force on moving charge)

Given in the Booklet (HL Only) HL

- $r = \frac{mv}{Bq}$ (radius of circular path in magnetic field)
- Faraday's law: $\mathcal{E} = -N \frac{\Delta\Phi}{\Delta t}$

- Magnetic flux: $\Phi = BA \cos \theta$
- $\mathcal{E} = Blv$ (motional EMF)

NOT Given (Must Memorize)

MEMORISE THIS

Core principles:

- **Gravitational fields are always attractive**
- **Electric fields can be attractive or repulsive** (like charges repel, unlike attract)
- Gravitational potential energy is zero at infinity and becomes more negative closer to mass
- Electric potential is zero at infinity for point charges

Escape velocity concept: Minimum speed to escape gravitational field. Derivation uses $E_k + E_p = 0$ at infinity.

IB TIP

Sign conventions: The negative signs in $V = -GM/r$ and $E_p = -GMm/r$ are critical. Gravitational potential is always negative (field is attractive). Don't drop the sign in calculations.

Section 7: Theme E — Nuclear and Quantum Physics

Given in the Booklet (All Levels)

Photon energy and quantum theory:

- $E = hf$ (photon energy)
- $E = \frac{hc}{\lambda}$ (alternative form)
- $E_k = hf - \phi$ (photoelectric effect)
- $\lambda = \frac{h}{p}$ (de Broglie wavelength)

Nuclear physics:

- $E = mc^2$ (mass-energy equivalence)
- $A = \lambda N$ (radioactive decay activity)
- $N = N_0 e^{-\lambda t}$ (exponential decay law)
- $T_{1/2} = \frac{\ln 2}{\lambda}$ (half-life)

Atomic structure:

- $\frac{1}{\lambda} = R \left(\frac{1}{n_f^2} - \frac{1}{n_i^2} \right)$ (Rydberg formula for hydrogen spectrum)
- Rydberg constant: $R = 1.097 \times 10^7 \text{ m}^{-1}$

Given in the Booklet (HL Only) HL

- Schrödinger equation (time-independent): $-\frac{\hbar^2}{2m} \frac{d^2\psi}{dx^2} + V\psi = E\psi$
- Heisenberg uncertainty principle: $\Delta x \Delta p \geq \frac{\hbar}{2}$ (where $\hbar = h/2\pi$)
- Tunneling probability expressions

NOT Given (Must Memorize)

MEMORISE THIS

Key concepts:

- **Work function** ϕ : minimum energy to remove electron from metal surface
- **Threshold frequency** f_0 : minimum photon frequency for photoelectric effect ($hf_0 = \phi$)
- **Nuclear notation:** ${}^A_Z X$ where A is mass number (nucleons), Z is atomic number (protons)
- **Alpha decay:** ${}^A_Z X \rightarrow {}^{A-4}_{Z-2} Y + {}^4_2 \text{He}$
- **Beta-minus decay:** ${}^A_Z X \rightarrow {}^A_{Z+1} Y + e^- + \bar{\nu}_e$
- **Beta-plus decay:** ${}^A_Z X \rightarrow {}^A_{Z-1} Y + e^+ + \nu_e$
- **Gamma decay:** excited nucleus releases photon, A and Z unchanged

Decay constant λ : probability of decay per unit time. Related to half-life by $T_{1/2} = \ln 2 / \lambda \approx 0.693 / \lambda$.

EXAM ALERT

Critical Distinction: In photoelectric effect, $E_k = hf - \phi$ gives the **maximum** kinetic energy of emitted electrons. Some electrons lose energy escaping the metal, so their kinetic energy is less than this maximum.

IB TIP

Energy units: Nuclear physics often uses electronvolts (eV) or mega-electronvolts (MeV). Remember $1 \text{ eV} = 1.60 \times 10^{-19} \text{ J}$. For example, rest mass energy of electron is $m_e c^2 = 0.511 \text{ MeV}$.

Section 8: Exam Strategies for Using the Data Booklet

1. Know the Layout

The Data Booklet is organized by theme (A, B, C, D, E). Spend 5 minutes at the start of your course familiarizing yourself with the booklet's structure:

- **Page 1:** Constants and conversion factors
- **Pages 2-6:** Formulae organized by theme (A through E)
- **Page 7:** Standard model of particle physics (HL)
- **Page 8:** Electromagnetic spectrum, units, SI prefixes

 **IB TIP**

Pre-exam drill: Before each mock exam, practice finding 10 random formulas in the booklet. Time yourself — you should locate any equation within 10 seconds.

2. Understand vs. Locate

Don't treat the Data Booklet as a crutch. You still need to:

- **Understand when to use each formula** (the booklet doesn't tell you which equation applies to which problem)
- **Know variable meanings** (is r radius, distance, or separation?)
- **Recognize units** (does your answer need to be in eV or Joules?)

 **EXAM ALERT**

Examiner Tip: The most common error is using the correct formula with the wrong variables. For example, using r as Earth's radius when the problem requires orbital radius. Always sketch a diagram and label variables clearly.

3. Memorize Strategic Shortcuts

While most formulas are given, memorizing a few relationships saves time:

 **MEMORISE THIS**

High-frequency formulas to know by heart:

- $v = f\lambda$ (wave equation)
- $F = ma$ (Newton's second law, standard form)
- $E_k = \frac{1}{2}mv^2$
- $p = mv$
- $E = hf$
- $E = mc^2$
- Conservation of momentum and energy (concepts, not just formulas)

4. Check Units and Factors

Many formulas have factors like $\frac{1}{2}$, 2π , or 4π . Common mistakes:

Formula	Common Error	Correct Form
$E_k = \frac{1}{2}mv^2$	Forgetting $\frac{1}{2}$	Always include the half
$v = \frac{2\pi r}{T}$	Writing $v = \frac{r}{T}$	Don't drop 2π
Coulomb's law	Forgetting $4\pi\epsilon_0$	$F = \frac{1}{4\pi\epsilon_0} \frac{q_1q_2}{r^2}$
Half-life	Using λ instead of $\ln 2T_{1/2}$	$\lambda = \frac{\ln 2}{T_{1/2}} = \frac{0.693}{T_{1/2}}$

EXAM ALERT

Units Check: After calculating, verify your answer has the correct SI unit. For example, energy must be in joules (J), not $\text{kg m}^2 \text{s}^{-2}$ (even though they're equivalent, the markscheme expects J).

5. Cross-Reference Related Formulas

Some physics problems require combining multiple equations. The Data Booklet doesn't show derivations, so practice connecting formulas:

Example: To find escape velocity from a planet, you combine:

- Gravitational potential energy: $E_p = -\frac{GMm}{r}$
- Kinetic energy: $E_k = \frac{1}{2}mv^2$
- Conservation of energy: $E_k + E_p = 0$ at infinity

Result (NOT in booklet): $v_{\text{esc}} = \sqrt{\frac{2GM}{r}}$

IB TIP

Derivation Practice: For each major topic, identify 2-3 formulas that aren't directly in the booklet but can be derived from those that are. Practice these derivations — they frequently appear in Paper 2.

6. Flag HL-Only Content

If you're taking SL, ignore formulas marked "HL only" in the booklet (they appear in a separate section or are marked explicitly). Spending time on irrelevant equations wastes exam minutes.

MEMORISE THIS

SL students ignore:

- Adiabatic processes ($pV^\gamma = \text{constant}$)
- Carnot cycle and entropy formulas
- Rayleigh criterion and diffraction grating details
- Relativistic Doppler
- Schrödinger equation
- Detailed particle physics (HL covers quarks, leptons, Feynman diagrams)

7. Practice Under Exam Conditions

In mock exams:

1. **Time yourself** — can you find a formula in under 10 seconds?
2. **Mark up the booklet** — you're allowed to write in it during the exam (though it's discarded after). Use it to track which page has which theme.

3. **Check the version** — ensure you're practicing with the 2025+ booklet, not an outdated version.

 **EXAM ALERT**

Do NOT bring your own formula sheet. Only the official IB-provided Data Booklet is allowed. Any notes or annotations from home are prohibited.

Exam-Style Practice Questions

- ▶ **Question 1:** A student claims they don't need to memorize any physics formulas because "it's all in the Data Booklet." Evaluate this claim. [4 marks]
- ▶ **Question 2:** The Data Booklet gives gravitational potential energy as $E_p = -\frac{GMm}{r}$ but many textbooks use $E_p = mgh$ near Earth's surface. Explain why both are correct and state when each should be used. [3 marks]
- ▶ **Question 3:** A student finds three different formulas for capacitor energy in the Data Booklet: $E = \frac{1}{2}QV$, $E = \frac{1}{2}CV^2$, and $E = \frac{1}{2}\frac{Q^2}{C}$. Show that these are equivalent starting from $C = Q/V$. [3 marks]
- ▶ **Question 4:** The Data Booklet provides the formula $\lambda = h/p$ for de Broglie wavelength. A proton is accelerated through a potential difference of 100 V. Calculate its de Broglie wavelength. (Mass of proton $m_p = 1.673 \times 10^{-27}$ kg, $h = 6.63 \times 10^{-34}$ J s, $e = 1.60 \times 10^{-19}$ C) [4 marks]

Final Checklist for Data Booklet Mastery

Before your IB Physics exam, ensure you can:

- Locate any formula in the booklet within 10 seconds
- State from memory which formulas are NOT in the booklet (e.g., $F = ma$ standard form, conservation laws as concepts)
- Explain when to use general formulas vs. special cases (e.g., $E_p = -GMm/r$ vs. $E_p = mgh$)
- Identify all variables in context (e.g., distinguish orbital radius from planetary radius)
- Derive 5+ important relationships not directly given (escape velocity, Kepler's third law proof, capacitor energy forms)
- Check units after every calculation
- Recognize common factor errors ($\frac{1}{2}$, 2π , $4\pi\epsilon_0$)

 **IB TIP**

Final Advice: The Data Booklet is a tool, not a crutch. Students who score 7s in IB Physics rarely look up formulas — they've internalized when to use each equation and only reference the booklet for exact constant values or rarely-used formulas. Aim for that level of mastery.

Related Guides:

- Space, Time and Motion — Theme A formulas in context
- Fields — Theme D formulas in context
- Nuclear and Quantum Physics — Theme E formulas in context
- Wave Behaviour — Theme C formulas in context
- Particulate Nature of Matter — Theme B formulas in context

AP IB Study Guides — IB & AP Study Guides