6.3 Unit Step Function. t-Shifting

This section and the next one are extremely important because we shall now reach the point where the Laplace transform method shows its real power in applications and its superiority over the classical approach of Chap. 2. The reason is that we shall introduce two auxiliary functions, the *unit step function* or *Heaviside function* $u(t-a)$ (below) and *Dirac's delta* $\delta(t-a)$ (in Sec. 6.4). These functions are suitable for solving ODEs with complicated right sides of considerable engineering interest, such as single waves, inputs (driving forces) that are discontinuous or act for some time only, periodic inputs more general than just cosine and sine, or impulsive forces acting for an instant (hammerblows, for example).

Unit Step Function (Heaviside Function) $u(t-a)$

The **unit step function** or **Heaviside function** $u(t-a)$ is 0 for $t < a$, has a jump of size 1 at $t = a$ (where we can leave it undefined), and is 1 for $t > a$, in a formula:

$$u(t-a) = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } t < a \\ 1 & \text{if } t > a \end{cases} \qquad (a \geqq 0). \tag{1}$$

Figure 117 shows the special case $u(t)$, which has its jump at zero, and Fig. 118 the general case $u(t-a)$ for an arbitrary positive a. (For Heaviside see Sec. 6.1.)

The transform of $u(t-a)$ follows directly from the defining integral in Sec. 6.1,

$$\mathcal{L}\{u(t-a)\} = \int_0^{\infty} e^{-st}u(t-a)\,dt = \int_a^{\infty} e^{-st} \cdot 1\,dt = -\frac{e^{-st}}{s}\Bigg|_{t=a}^{\infty};$$

here the integration begins at $t = a$ ($\geqq 0$) because $u(t-a)$ is 0 for $t < a$. Hence

$$\mathcal{L}\{u(t-a)\} = \frac{e^{-as}}{s} \qquad (s > 0). \tag{2}$$

The unit step function is a typical "engineering function" made to measure for engineering applications, which often involve functions (mechanical or electrical driving forces) that are either "off" or "on." Multiplying functions $f(t)$ with $u(t-a)$, we can produce all sorts of effects. The simple basic idea is illustrated in Figs. 119 and 120. In Fig. 119 the given function is shown in (A). In (B) it is switched off between $t = 0$ and $t = 2$ (because $u(t-2) = 0$ when $t < 2$) and is switched on beginning at $t = 2$. In (C) it is shifted to the right by 2 units, say, for instance, by 2 secs, so that it begins 2 secs later in the same fashion as before. More generally we have the following.

Let $f(t) = 0$ for all negative t. Then $f(t-a)u(t-a)$ with $a > 0$ is $f(t)$ ***shifted*** *(translated) to the right by the amount a.*

Figure 120 shows the effect of many unit step functions, three of them in (A) and infinitely many in (B) when continued periodically to the right; this is the effect of a rectifier that clips off the negative half-waves of a sinuosidal voltage. CAUTION! Make sure that you fully understand these figures, in particular the difference between parts (B) and (C) of Figure 119. Figure 119(C) will be applied next.

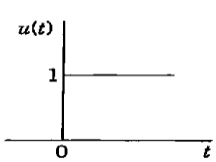


Fig. 117. Unit step function $u(t)$

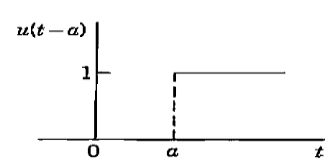
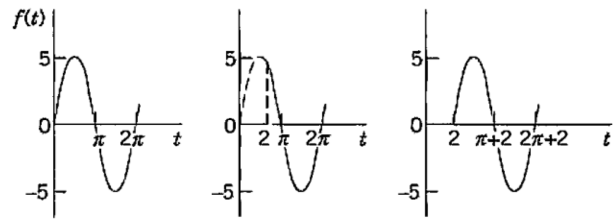


Fig. 118. Unit step function $u(t-a)$



(A) $f(t) = 5 \sin t$ (B) $f(t)u(t-2)$ (C) $f(t-2)u(t-2)$

Fig. 119. Effects of the unit step function: (A) Given function. (B) Switching off and on. (C) Shift.

(A) $k[u(t-1) - 2u(t-4) + u(t-6)]$ (B) $4 \sin(\frac{1}{2}\pi t)[u(t) - u(t-2) + u(t-4) - + \cdots]$

Fig. 120. Use of many unit step functions.

Time Shifting (t-Shifting): Replacing t by $t - a$ in $f(t)$

The first shifting theorem ("s-shifting") in Sec. 6.1 concerned transforms $F(s) = \mathcal{L}\{f(t)\}$ and $F(s - a) = \mathcal{L}\{e^{at}f(t)\}$. The second shifting theorem will concern functions $f(t)$ and $f(t - a)$. Unit step functions are just tools, and the theorem will be needed to apply them in connection with any other functions.

THEOREM 1

Second Shifting Theorem; Time Shifting

If $f(t)$ has the transform $F(s)$, then the **"shifted function"**

(3) $$\tilde{f}(t) = f(t-a)u(t-a) = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } t < a \\ f(t-a) & \text{if } t > a \end{cases}$$

has the transform $e^{-as}F(s)$. That is, if $\mathcal{L}\{f(t)\} = F(s)$, then

(4) $$\mathcal{L}\{f(t-a)u(t-a)\} = e^{-as}F(s).$$

Or, if we take the inverse on both sides, we can write

(4*) $$f(t-a)u(t-a) = \mathcal{L}^{-1}\{e^{-as}F(s)\}.$$

Practically speaking, if we know $F(s)$, we can obtain the transform of (3) by multiplying $F(s)$ by e^{-as}. In Fig. 119, the transform of $5 \sin t$ is $F(s) = 5/(s^2 + 1)$, hence the shifted function $5 \sin(t-2)\, u(t-2)$ shown in Fig. 119(C) has the transform

$$e^{-2s}F(s) = 5e^{-2s}/(s^2 + 1).$$

PROOF We prove Theorem 1. In (4) on the right we use the definition of the Laplace transform, writing τ for t (to have t available later). Then, taking e^{-as} inside the integral, we have

$$e^{-as}F(s) = e^{-as}\int_0^\infty e^{-s\tau}f(\tau)\,d\tau = \int_0^\infty e^{-s(\tau+a)}f(\tau)\,d\tau.$$

Substituting $\tau + a = t$, thus $\tau = t - a$, $d\tau = dt$, in the integral (CAUTION, the lower limit changes!), we obtain

$$e^{-as}F(s) = \int_a^\infty e^{-st}f(t-a)\,dt.$$

To make the right side into a Laplace transform, we must have an integral from 0 to ∞, not from a to ∞. But this is easy. We multiply the integrand by $u(t-a)$. Then for t from 0 to a the integrand is 0, and we can write, with $\widetilde{f}$ as in (3),

$$e^{-as}F(s) = \int_0^\infty e^{-st}f(t-a)u(t-a)\,dt = \int_0^\infty e^{-st}\widetilde{f}(t)\,dt.$$

(Do you now see why $u(t-a)$ appears?) This integral is the left side of (4), the Laplace transform of $\widetilde{f}(t)$ in (3). This completes the proof. ■

EXAMPLE 1 **Application of Theorem 1. Use of Unit Step Functions**

Write the following function using unit step functions and find its transform.

$$f(t) = \begin{cases} 2 & \text{if } 0 < t < 1 \\ \frac{1}{2}t^2 & \text{if } 1 < t < \frac{1}{2}\pi \\ \cos t & \text{if } \quad t > \frac{1}{2}\pi. \end{cases} \qquad \text{(Fig. 121)}$$

Solution. *Step 1.* In terms of unit step functions,

$$f(t) = 2(1 - u(t-1)) + \tfrac{1}{2}t^2(u(t-1) - u(t - \tfrac{1}{2}\pi)) + (\cos t)u(t - \tfrac{1}{2}\pi).$$

Indeed, $2(1 - u(t-1))$ gives $f(t)$ for $0 < t < 1$, and so on.

Step 2. To apply Theorem 1, we must write each term in $f(t)$ in the form $f(t-a)u(t-a)$. Thus, $2(1 - u(t-1))$ remains as it is and gives the transform $2(1 - e^{-s})/s$. Then

$$\mathcal{L}\left\{\frac{1}{2}t^2u(t-1)\right\} = \mathcal{L}\left(\frac{1}{2}(t-1)^2 + (t-1) + \frac{1}{2}\right)u(t-1)\Big\} = \left(\frac{1}{s^3} + \frac{1}{s^2} + \frac{1}{2s}\right)e^{-s}$$

$$\mathcal{L}\left\{\frac{1}{2}t^2u\left(t - \frac{1}{2}\pi\right)\right\} = \mathcal{L}\left\{\frac{1}{2}\left(t - \frac{1}{2}\pi\right)^2 + \frac{\pi}{2}\left(t - \frac{1}{2}\pi\right) + \frac{\pi^2}{8}\right)u\left(t - \frac{1}{2}\pi\right)\Big\}$$

$$= \left(\frac{1}{s^3} + \frac{\pi}{2s^2} + \frac{\pi^2}{8s}\right)e^{-\pi s/2}$$

$$\mathcal{L}\left\{(\cos t)u\left(t - \frac{1}{2}\pi\right)\right\} = \mathcal{L}\left\{-\left(\sin\left(t - \frac{1}{2}\pi\right)\right)u\left(t - \frac{1}{2}\pi\right)\right\} = -\frac{1}{s^2+1}e^{-\pi s/2}.$$

Together,

$$\mathcal{L}(f) = \frac{2}{s} - \frac{2}{s}e^{-s} + \left(\frac{1}{s^3} + \frac{1}{s^2} + \frac{1}{2s}\right)e^{-s} - \left(\frac{1}{s^3} + \frac{\pi}{2s^2} + \frac{\pi^2}{8s}\right)e^{-\pi s/2} - \frac{1}{s^2+1}e^{-\pi s/2}.$$

If the conversion of $f(t)$ to $f(t-a)$ is inconvenient, replace it by

$$\mathcal{L}\{f(t)u(t-a)\} = e^{-as}\mathcal{L}\{f(t+a)\}. \tag{4**}$$

(4**) follows from (4) by writing $f(t-a) = g(t)$, hence $f(t) = g(t+a)$ and then again writing f for g. Thus,

$$\mathcal{L}\left\{\frac{1}{2}t^2u(t-1)\right\} = e^{-s}\mathcal{L}\left\{\frac{1}{2}(t+1)^2\right\} = e^{-s}\mathcal{L}\left\{\frac{1}{2}t^2 + t + \frac{1}{2}\right\} = e^{-s}\left(\frac{1}{s^3} + \frac{1}{s^2} + \frac{1}{2s}\right)$$

as before. Similarly for $\mathcal{L}\{\frac{1}{2}t^2u(t - \frac{1}{2}\pi)\}$. Finally, by (4**),

$$\mathcal{L}\left\{\cos t\, u\left(t - \frac{1}{2}\pi\right)\right\} = e^{-\pi s/2}\mathcal{L}\left\{\cos\left(t + \frac{1}{2}\pi\right)\right\} = e^{-\pi s/2}\mathcal{L}\{-\sin t\} = -e^{-\pi s/2}\,\frac{1}{s^2+1}. \quad \blacksquare$$

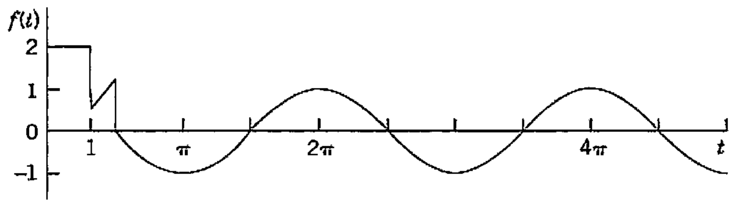


Fig. 121. $f(t)$ in Example 1

EXAMPLE 2 Application of Both Shifting Theorems. Inverse Transform

Find the inverse transform $f(t)$ of

$$F(s) = \frac{e^{-s}}{s^2+\pi^2} + \frac{e^{-2s}}{s^2+\pi^2} + \frac{e^{-3s}}{(s+2)^2}.$$

Solution. Without the exponential functions in the numerator the three terms of $F(s)$ would have the inverses $(\sin \pi t)/\pi$, $(\sin \pi t)/\pi$, and te^{-2t} because $1/s^2$ has the inverse t, so that $1/(s+2)^2$ has the inverse te^{-2t} by the first shifting theorem in Sec. 6.1. Hence by the second shifting theorem (t-shifting),

$$f(t) = \frac{1}{\pi}\sin(\pi(t-1))\,u(t-1) + \frac{1}{\pi}\sin(\pi(t-2))\,u(t-2) + (t-3)e^{-2(t-3)}\,u(t-3).$$

Now $\sin(\pi t - \pi) = -\sin \pi t$ and $\sin(\pi t - 2\pi) = \sin \pi t$, so that the second and third terms cancel each other when $t > 2$. Hence we obtain $f(t) = 0$ if $0 < t < 1$, $-(\sin \pi t)/\pi$ if $1 < t < 2$, 0 if $2 < t < 3$, and $(t-3)e^{-2(t-3)}$ if $t > 3$. See Fig. 122. $\blacksquare$

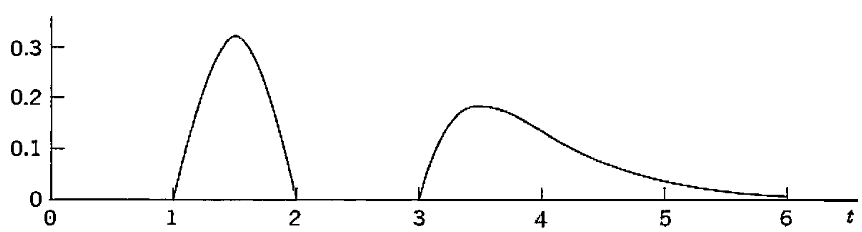


Fig. 122. $f(t)$ in Example 2

EXAMPLE 3 Response of an *RC*-Circuit to a Single Rectangular Wave

Find the current $i(t)$ in the RC-circuit in Fig. 123 if a single rectangular wave with voltage V_0 is applied. The circuit is assumed to be quiescent before the wave is applied.

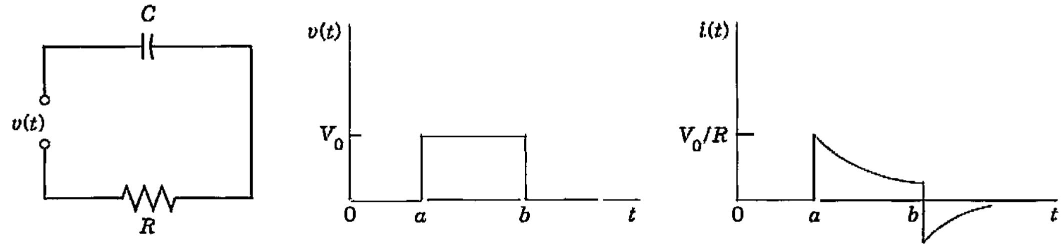


Fig. 123. *RC*-circuit, electromotive force *v*(*t*), and current in Example 3

Solution. The input is $V_0[u(t-a) - u(t-b)]$. Hence the circuit is modeled by the integro-differential equation (see Sec. 2.9 and Fig. 123)

$$Ri(t) + \frac{q(t)}{C} = Ri(t) + \frac{1}{C}\int_0^t i(\tau)\,d\tau = v(t) = V_0[u(t-a) - u(t-b)].$$

Using Theorem 3 in Sec. 6.2 and formula (1) in this section, we obtain the subsidiary equation

$$RI(s) + \frac{I(s)}{sC} = \frac{V_0}{s}\left[e^{-as} - e^{-bs}\right].$$

Solving this equation algebraically for $I(s)$, we get

$$I(s) = F(s)(e^{-as} - e^{-bs}) \qquad \text{where} \qquad F(s) = \frac{V_0/R}{s + 1/(RC)} \qquad \text{and} \qquad \mathcal{L}^{-1}(F) = \frac{V_0}{R}e^{-t/(RC)},$$

the last expression being obtained from Table 6.1 in Sec. 6.1. Hence Theorem 1 yields the solution (Fig. 123)

$$i(t) = \mathcal{L}^{-1}(I) = \mathcal{L}^{-1}\{e^{-as}F(s)\} - \mathcal{L}^{-1}\{e^{-bs}F(s)\} = \frac{V_0}{R}\left[e^{-(t-a)/(RC)}u(t-a) - e^{-(t-b)/(RC)}u(t-b)\right];$$

that is, $i(t) = 0$ if $t < a$, and

$$i(t) = \begin{cases} K_1 e^{-t/(RC)} & \text{if } a < t < b \\ (K_1 - K_2)e^{-t/(RC)} & \text{if } a > b \end{cases}$$

where $K_1 = V_0 e^{a/(RC)}/R$ and $K_2 = V_0 e^{b/(RC)}/R$. ■

EXAMPLE 4 Response of an *RLC*-Circuit to a Sinusoidal Input Acting Over a Time Interval

Find the response (the current) of the *RLC*-circuit in Fig. 124, where $E(t)$ is sinusoidal, acting for a short time interval only, say,

$$E(t) = 100 \sin 400t \quad \text{if } 0 < t < 2\pi \qquad \text{and} \qquad E(t) = 0 \text{ if } t > 2\pi$$

and current and charge are initially zero.

Solution. The electromotive force $E(t)$ can be represented by $(100 \sin 400t)(1 - u(t - 2\pi))$. Hence the model for the current $i(t)$ in the circuit is the integro-differential equation (see Sec. 2.9)

$$0.1i' + 11i + 100\int_0^t i(\tau)\,d\tau = (100 \sin 400t)(1 - u(t - 2\pi)), \qquad i(0) = 0, \quad i'(0) = 0.$$

From Theorems 2 and 3 in Sec. 6.2 we obtain the subsidiary equation for $I(s) = \mathcal{L}(i)$

$$0.1sI + 11I + 100\frac{I}{s} = \frac{100 \cdot 400s}{s^2 + 400^2}\left(\frac{1}{s} - \frac{e^{-2\pi s}}{s}\right).$$

Solving it algebraically and noting that $s^2 + 110s + 1000 = (s + 10)(s + 100)$, we obtain

$$I(s) = \frac{1000 \cdot 400}{(s + 10)(s + 100)} \left(\frac{s}{s^2 + 400^2} - \frac{se^{-2\pi s}}{s^2 + 400^2} \right).$$

For the first term in the parentheses $(\cdots)$ times the factor in front of them we use the partial fraction expansion

$$\frac{400\,000s}{(s + 10)(s + 100)(s^2 + 400^2)} = \frac{A}{s + 10} + \frac{B}{s + 100} + \frac{Ds + K}{s^2 + 400^2}.$$

Now determine A, B, D, K by your favorite method or by a CAS or as follows. Multiplication by the common denominator gives

$$400\,000s = A(s + 100)(s^2 + 400^2) + B(s + 10)(s^2 + 400^2) + (Ds + K)(s + 10)(s + 100).$$

We set $s = -10$ and -100 and then equate the sums of the s^3 and s^2 terms to zero, obtaining (all values rounded)

$(s = -10)$	$-4\,000\,000 = 90(10^2 + 400^2)A,$	$A = -0.27760$
$(s = -100)$	$-40\,000\,000 = -90(100^2 + 400^2)B,$	$B = 2.6144$
(s^3-terms)	$0 = A + B + D,$	$D = -2.3368$
(s^2-terms)	$0 = 100A + 10B + 110D + K,$	$K = 258.66.$

Since $K = 258.66 = 0.6467 \cdot 400$, we thus obtain for the first term I_1 in $I = I_1 - I_2$

$$I_1 = -\frac{0.2776}{s + 10} + \frac{2.6144}{s + 100} - \frac{2.3368s}{s^2 + 400^2} + \frac{0.6467 \cdot 400}{s^2 + 400^2}.$$

From Table 6.1 in Sec. 6.1 we see that its inverse is

$$i_1(t) = -0.2776e^{-10t} + 2.6144e^{-100t} - 2.3368 \cos 400t + 0.6467 \sin 400t.$$

This is the current $i(t)$ when $0 < t < 2\pi$. It agrees for $0 < t < 2\pi$ with that in Example 1 of Sec. 2.9 (except for notation), which concerned the same *RLC*-circuit. Its graph in Fig. 62 in Sec. 2.9 shows that the exponential terms decrease very rapidly. Note that the present amount of work was substantially less.

The second term I_1 of I differs from the first term by the factor $e^{-2\pi s}$. Since $\cos 400(t - 2\pi) = \cos 400t$ and $\sin 400(t - 2\pi) = \sin 400t$, the second shifting theorem (Theorem 1) gives the inverse $i_2(t) = 0$ if $0 < t < 2\pi$, and for $> 2\pi$ it gives

$$i_2(t) = -0.2776e^{-10(t-2\pi)} + 2.6144e^{-100(t-2\pi)} - 2.3368 \cos 400t + 0.6467 \sin 400t.$$

Hence in $i(t)$ the cosine and sine terms cancel, and the current for $t > 2\pi$ is

$$i(t) = -0.2776(e^{-10t} - e^{-10(t-2\pi)}) + 2.6144(e^{-100t} - e^{-100(t-2\pi)}).$$

It goes to zero very rapidly, practically within 0.5 sec. ■

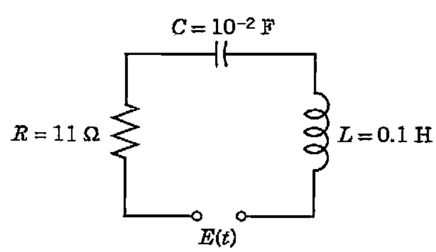


Fig. 124. *RLC*-circuit in Example 4

PROBLEM SET 6.3

1. **WRITING PROJECT. Shifting Theorem.** Explain and compare the different roles of the two shifting theorems, using your own formulations and examples.

2–13 UNIT STEP FUNCTION AND SECOND SHIFTING THEOREM

Sketch or graph the given function (which is assumed to be zero outside the given interval). Represent it using unit step functions. Find its transform. Show the details of your work.

2. $t \ (0 < t < 1)$
3. $e^t \ (0 < t < 2)$
4. $\sin 3t \ (0 < t < \pi)$
5. $t^2 \ (1 < t < 2)$
6. $t^2 \ (t > 3)$
7. $\cos \pi t \ (1 < t < 4)$
8. $1 - e^{-t} \ (0 < t < \pi)$
9. $t \ (5 < t < 10)$
10. $\sin \omega t \ (t > 6\pi/\omega)$
11. $20 \cos \pi t \ (3 < t < 6)$
12. $\sinh t \ (0 < t < 2)$
13. $e^{\pi t} \ (2 < t < 4)$

14–22 INVERSE TRANSFORMS BY THE SECOND SHIFTING THEOREM

Find and sketch or graph $f(t)$ if $\mathscr{L}(f)$ equals:

14. $se^{-s}/(s^2 + \omega^2)$
15. e^{-4s}/s^2
16. $s^{-2} - (s^{-2} + s^{-1})e^{-s}$
17. $(e^{-2\pi s} - e^{-8\pi s})/(s^2 + 1)$
18. $e^{-\pi s}/(s^2 + 2s + 2)$
19. e^{-2s}/s^5
20. $(1 - e^{-s+k})/(s - k)$
21. $se^{-3s}/(s^2 - 4)$
22. $2.5(e^{-3.8s} - e^{-2.6s})/s$

23–34 INITIAL VALUE PROBLEMS, SOME WITH DISCONTINUOUS INPUTS

Using the Laplace transform and showing the details, solve:

23. $y'' + 2y' + 2y = 0, \quad y(0) = 0, \quad y'(0) = 1$
24. $9y'' - 6y' + y = 0, \quad y(0) = 3, \quad y'(0) = 1$
25. $y'' + 4y' + 13y = 145 \cos 2t, \quad y(0) = 10, \quad y'(0) = 14$
26. $y'' + 10y' + 24y = 144t^2, \quad y(0) = \frac{19}{12}, \quad y'(0) = -5$
27. $y'' + 9y = r(t)$, $r(t) = 8 \sin t$ if $0 < t < \pi$ and 0 if $t > \pi$; $y(0) = 0$, $y'(0) = 4$
28. $y'' + 3y' + 2y = r(t)$, $r(t) = 1$ if $0 < t < 1$ and 0 if $t > 1$; $y(0) = 0$, $y'(0) = 0$
29. $y'' + y = r(t)$, $r(t) = t$ if $0 < t < 1$ and 0 if $t > 1$; $y(0) = y'(0) = 0$
30. $y'' - 16y = r(t)$, $r(t) = 48e^{2t}$ if $0 < t < 4$ and 0 if $t > 4$; $y(0) = 3$, $y'(0) = -4$
31. $y'' + y' - 2y = r(t)$, $r(t) = 3 \sin t - \cos t$ if $0 < t < 2\pi$ and $3 \sin 2t - \cos 2t$ if $t > 2\pi$; $y(0) = 1$, $y'(0) = 0$
32. $y'' + 8y' + 15y = r(t)$, $r(t) = 35e^{2t}$ if $0 < t < 2$ and 0 if $t > 2$; $y(0) = 3$, $y'(0) = -8$
33. **(Shifted data)** $y'' + 4y = 8t^2$ if $0 < t < 5$ and 0 if $t > 5$; $y(1) = 1 + \cos 2$, $y'(1) = 4 - 2 \sin 2$
34. $y'' + 2y' + 5y = 10 \sin t$ if $0 < t < 2\pi$ and 0 if $t > 2\pi$; $y(\pi) = 1$, $y'(\pi) = 2e^{-\pi} - 2$

MODELS OF ELECTRIC CIRCUITS

35. **(Discharge)** Using the Laplace transform, find the charge $q(t)$ on the capacitor of capacitance C in Fig. 125 if the capacitor is charged so that its potential is V_0 and the switch is closed at $t = 0$.

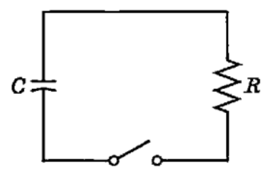


Fig. 125. Problem 35

36–38 RC-CIRCUIT

Using the Laplace transform and showing the details, find the current $i(t)$ in the circuit in Fig. 126 with $R = 10\ \Omega$ and $C = 10^{-2}$ F, where the current at $t = 0$ is assumed to be zero, and:

36. $v(t) = 100$ V if $0.5 < t < 0.6$ and 0 otherwise. Why does $i(t)$ have jumps?
37. $v = 0$ if $t < 2$ and $100(t - 2)$ V if $t > 2$
38. $v = 0$ if $t < 4$ and $14 \cdot 10^6 e^{-3t}$ V if $t > 4$

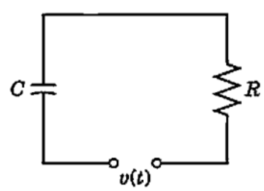


Fig. 126. Problems 36–38

39–41 RL-CIRCUIT

Using the Laplace transform and showing the details, find the current $i(t)$ in the circuit in Fig. 127, assuming $i(0) = 0$ and: