

9.2 Mechanical Advantage of Simple Machines

READ

We use simple machines to make tasks easier. While the output work of a simple machine can never be greater than the input work, a simple machine can multiply input forces OR multiply input distances (but never both at the same time). You can use this skill sheet to practice calculating mechanical advantage (MA) for two common simple machines: levers and ramps.

The general formula for the mechanical advantage (MA) of levers:

$$MA_{\text{lever}} = \frac{F_o \text{ (output force)}}{F_i \text{ (input force)}}$$

Or you can use the ratio of the input arm length to the output arm length:

$$MA_{\text{lever}} = \frac{L_i \text{ (length of input arm)}}{L_o \text{ (length of output arm)}}$$

Most of the time, levers are used to multiply force to lift heavy objects.

The general formula for the mechanical advantage (MA) of ramps:

$$MA_{\text{ramp}} = \frac{\text{ramp length}}{\text{ramp height}}$$

A ramp makes it possible to move a heavy load to a new height using less force (but over a longer distance).

EXAMPLE

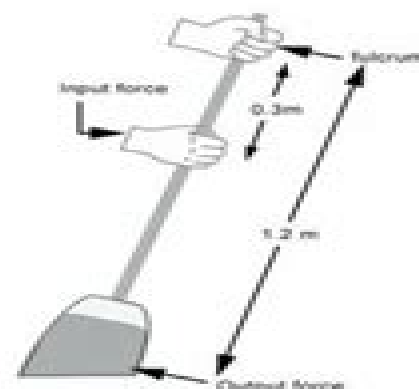
Example 1: A construction worker uses a board and log as a lever to lift a heavy rock. If the input arm is 3 meters long and the output arm is 0.75 meters long, what is the mechanical advantage of the lever?

$$MA = \frac{3 \text{ meters}}{0.75 \text{ meter}} = 4$$

Example 2: Sometimes levers are used to multiply distance. For a broom, your upper hand is the fulcrum and your lower hand provides the input force. Notice the input arm is shorter than the output arm. The mechanical advantage of this broom is:

$$MA = \frac{0.3 \text{ meter}}{1.2 \text{ meters}} = 0.25$$

A mechanical advantage less than one doesn't mean a machine isn't useful. It just means that instead of multiplying force, the machine multiplies distance. A broom doesn't push the dust with as much force as you use to push the broom, but a small movement of your arm pushes the dust a large distance.



Physical Science 233 Levers And Mechanical Advantage

Answer Key

Thomas Griffiths



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