

3.4 Conservation of Energy

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 12 marks

KEY WORDS mechanical energy 机械能 • thermal energy 热能 • conservation of mechanical energy 机械能守恒
• friction 摩擦力 • potential energy 势能

Objective

Build the skills to answer exam questions on **conservation of energy**.

You must be able to:

- apply **conservation of mechanical energy** 机械能守恒 when no friction acts
- convert between kinetic and potential energy
- use $K_i + U_i = K_f + U_f$
- account for energy lost to friction as thermal energy

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a question type used later — follow the steps and you can do the Practice and Exam-style questions yourself.

■ Mechanical energy is conserved

With no friction, the total of kinetic plus potential energy stays constant:

$$K_i + U_i = K_f + U_f.$$

■ A falling object

Drop a 2 kg mass from 5 m ($g = 10 \text{ m s}^{-2}$). All the PE becomes KE:

$$mgh = \frac{1}{2}mv^2 \Rightarrow v = \sqrt{2gh} = \sqrt{2(10)(5)} = 10 \text{ m s}^{-1}.$$

■ When friction acts

Friction removes mechanical energy as heat:

$$K_i + U_i = K_f + U_f + (\text{energy lost to friction}).$$

2 Practice

Now apply the methods above.

2.1 State the condition under which mechanical energy is conserved. [1]

2.2 A ball is dropped from 2 m ($g = 10 \text{ m s}^{-2}$). Find its speed just before landing. [2]

2.3 At the top of a swing, a pendulum has 6 J of PE and no KE. State its KE at the bottom (no friction). [1]

2.4 Where does mechanical energy go when friction acts? [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 In the absence of friction, as an object falls its [1]

- A total mechanical energy increases
 - B total mechanical energy stays constant
 - C kinetic energy decreases
 - D potential energy increases
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3.2 A cart at the top of a frictionless track has PE = 40 J and KE = 0. At the bottom its KE is [1]

- A 0
 - B 20 J
 - C 40 J
 - D 80 J
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3.3 A 0.5 kg ball is released from rest at height 1.8 m on a frictionless ramp ($g = 10 \text{ m s}^{-2}$).
(a) Find its speed at the bottom. [2]

(b) State the assumption you made.

[1]

3.4 A 1 kg block slides down a ramp, starting with 20 J of PE, and reaches the bottom with 14 J of KE.

(a) State how much energy was lost to friction.

[1]

(b) Explain where that energy went.

[1]

Solutions

2.1 When no friction (or other non-conservative force) acts.

2.2 $v = \sqrt{2gh} = \sqrt{2(10)(2)} = 6.3 \text{ m s}^{-1}$.

2.3 6 J (all PE becomes KE).

2.4 It becomes thermal energy (heat).

3.1 B — with no friction, total mechanical energy is constant.

3.2 C — all 40 J of PE becomes KE.

3.3 (a) $v = \sqrt{2gh} = \sqrt{2(10)(1.8)} = 6 \text{ m s}^{-1}$. (b) No friction / energy is conserved.

3.4 (a) $20 - 14 = 6 \text{ J}$. (b) It was converted to thermal energy by friction.