

6.1 The Earth and the Solar System

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 9 marks

KEY WORDS orbit • solar system • orbits and gravity • planet • sun

Objective

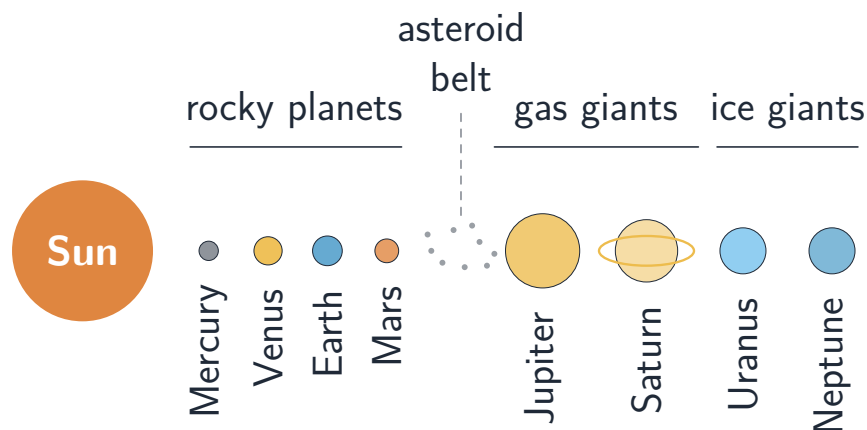
Build the skills to answer exam questions on **the Earth and the Solar System** — day/night/seasons, **orbital speed** $v = \frac{2\pi r}{T}$, the planets, and **orbits and gravity** .

You must be able to:

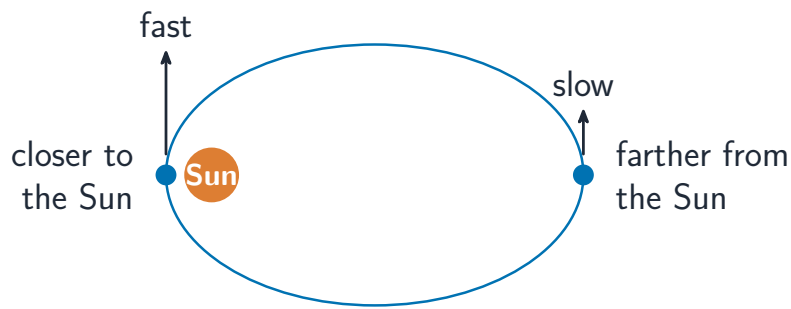
- explain day, year, seasons and Moon phases
- use $v = \frac{2\pi r}{T}$ for an orbit
- describe the Solar System and elliptical orbits

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

■ Orbits and orbital speed



Four small rocky planets, then the asteroid belt, then four large gaseous planets



An object speeds up when closer to the Sun ($PE \rightarrow KE$) and slows down when farther away

Space station, $r = 7.0 \times 10^6 \text{ m}$, $T = 5800 \text{ s}$: $v = \frac{2\pi r}{T} = \frac{2\pi(7.0 \times 10^6)}{5800} \approx 7600 \frac{\text{m}}{\text{s}}$.

2 Practice

2.1 State what causes day and night. [1]

2.2 Name the force that keeps a planet in orbit around the Sun. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Compared with the inner planets, the outer planets orbit the Sun: [1]

- ☐ **A** faster
☐ **B** more slowly
☐ **C** at the same speed
☐ **D** in the opposite direction

3.2 A moon orbits a planet at a radius of 4.0×10^8 m with a period of 2.0×10^6 s.

(a) Find its orbital speed. [3]

(b) State what happens to the gravitational field strength of the planet as you move further from it. [1]

3.3 A comet moves in a very stretched elliptical orbit. Explain why it moves fastest when closest to the Sun. [2]

Solutions

Each answer shows the steps, then the **result**.

2.1

- the Earth spinning (rotating) on its axis

2.2

- gravity / the Sun's gravitational attraction

3.1 B

- the Sun's gravity is weaker further out, so outer planets move more slowly

3.2

(a) $v = 2\pi r/T$

$$v = \frac{2\pi(4.0 \times 10^8 \text{ m})}{2.0 \times 10^6 \text{ s}} = \mathbf{1.3 \times 10^3 \frac{m}{s}}$$

(b) it decreases (gets weaker)

3.3

- as the comet comes closer, its gravitational potential energy falls
- by conservation of energy this becomes kinetic energy, so it speeds up