

Macro Scale Screen

Visualize the electrostatic force that two charges exert on each other, and adjust the charge magnitude and separation to see how they affect the force.

SEE the forces in the system

MEASURE the distance between charges

VIEW forces in standard or scientific notation

Atomic Scale Screen

Explore electrostatic attraction and repulsion at the atomic scale, and build a Hydrogen atom.

DRAG charges apart or together

OBSERVE the distance scale

SHOW/HIDE force magnitude

Model Simplifications

- The color of the charge represents its sign (blue = negative, red = positive, gray = no charge). The saturation of the color represents the magnitude of the charge.
- The Force Values checkbox displays the **magnitude** of the forces, and is therefore always positive.
- The vector arrows represent the direction of the force, and scale with its magnitude. Due to the large range of possible values, the force vectors do not scale linearly, and are meant to be a qualitative representation.
- The figures attached to the charges are displayed to help students understand why the objects stay in place, despite their attraction or repulsion. When the force is attractive, the figures will pull on the masses. When the force is repulsive, the figures will push against the masses. The figures will take a deeper stance to indicate that the force exerted on the charge it is holding has increased. However, the figures are massless and do not contribute to the forces in the system.
- The figures on the Atomic Scale screen appear to be built out of a ball-and-stick modeling kit to help cue the scale differences between the screens.



Suggestions for Use

Sample Challenge Prompts

- Identify two ways you can change the amount of electrostatic force that the charges experience. How could you increase electrostatic force using each factor? How could you decrease electrostatic force using each factor?
- Select two different values for charge 1 and charge 2. How does the force that the smaller charge exerts on the larger charge compare to the force that the larger charge exerts on the smaller charge?
- Predict what happens to the electrostatic force as the distance between the charges is doubled.
- Explain the difference between attractive and repulsive forces.
- On the Atomic Scale Screen, measure the electrostatic force in a Hydrogen atom.
- Pick an independent variable to manipulate and design an experiment to determine what happens to the electrostatic force as this variable is changed. What do you observe?
- Design an experiment to determine the equation that describes the relationship between the electrostatic force, the charges, and the distance between the charges. Plot your data and choose an appropriate trend line.

Explore Inverse Square Laws

Use [Gravity Force Lab](#) to investigate the gravitational force.

- Determine the similarities and differences between the gravitational and electrostatic forces.
- Compare the magnitudes of the gravitational and electrostatic forces in the hydrogen atom.

See all published activities for Coulomb's Law [here](#).

For more tips on using PhET sims with your students, see [Tips for Using PhET](#).