

# Personal Calculator Algorithms II: Trigonometric Functions

*A detailed explanation of the algorithms used by HP hand-held calculators to compute sine, cosine, and tangent.*

by William E. Egbert

**B**EGINNING WITH THE HP-35,<sup>1,2</sup> all HP personal calculators have used essentially the same algorithms for computing complex mathematical functions in their BCD (binary-coded decimal) microprocessors. While improvements have been made in newer calculators,<sup>3</sup> the changes have affected primarily special cases and not the fundamental algorithms.

This article is the second of a series that examines these algorithms and their implementation. Each article will present in detail the methods used to implement a common mathematical function. For simplicity, rigorous proofs will not be given, and special cases other than those of particular interest will be omitted.

Although tailored for efficiency within the environment of a special-purpose BCD microprocessor, the basic mathematical equations and the techniques used to transform and implement them are applicable to a wide range of computing problems and devices.

## The Trigonometric Function Algorithm

This article will discuss the method of generating sine, cosine, and tangent. To minimize program length, a single function,  $\tan \theta$ , is generated first. Once  $\tan \theta$  is calculated,  $\sin \theta$  is found by the formula

$$\sin \theta = \frac{\pm \tan \theta}{\sqrt{1 + \tan^2 \theta}}.$$

It turns out (as will be explained later) that  $\cot \theta$  can easily be generated while generating  $\tan \theta$ . Then  $\cos \theta$  is calculated using the formula

$$\cos \theta = \frac{\pm \cot \theta}{\sqrt{1 + \cot^2 \theta}}.$$

It can be seen that these formulas are identical, except for the cotangent replacing the tangent. Thus the same routine can solve for either sine or cosine depending on whether the argument is tangent or cotangent.

## Scaling

Since  $\theta$  and  $\theta + n(360^\circ)$  yield identical trigonometric functions, every angular argument is resolved to a positive angle between  $0^\circ$  and  $360^\circ$ . For reasons to be explained later, all calculations assume angles expressed in radians. An angle in degrees is first converted to radians by:

$$\theta_{\text{rad}} = \theta_{\text{deg}} \times \pi/180.$$

Angles expressed in grads are also converted using the appropriate scale factor.

Once  $\theta$  is in radians,  $2\pi$  is subtracted repeatedly from  $|\theta|$  until the absolute remainder is between 0 and  $2\pi$ . For large angles this would take a long time. In such cases  $2\pi \times 10^n$  can be subtracted in a process similar to division. Suppose an angle  $\theta$  is expressed in scientific notation (e.g.,  $8.5 \times 10^5$ ).  $2\pi \times 10^n$ , or  $6.28... \times 10^n$ , is then repeatedly subtracted from  $\theta$  until the result becomes negative (underflow). Thus  $6.28... \times 10^5$  is subtracted from  $8.5 \times 10^5$  twice and underflow occurs.  $6.28... \times 10^5$  is then added to the negative remainder to give a number between 0 and  $2\pi \times 10^5$ , in this case  $2.2 \times 10^5$ . The remainder is expressed now as  $22 \times 10^4$  and the process is repeated, this time subtracting  $2\pi \times 10^4$ . With this method, large angles are quickly resolved.

The problem with this scaling process is that in current computers numbers can be expressed only to a limited number of digits, so  $2\pi$  and therefore  $2\pi \times 10^n$  cannot be expressed exactly. Error creeps in with each shift of the remainder. Thus, the larger the angle, the fewer significant digits remain in the scaled result. A rule of thumb for rough estimates is that for each count in the exponent, one digit of accuracy will be lost. For example,  $5 \times 10^5$  when scaled will lose five digits of accuracy.

A negative argument is treated the same as a positive number until the end, when the scaling routine returns a number between 0 and  $-2\pi$ . Then  $2\pi$  is added to the negative result, giving again a number between 0 and  $2\pi$ . This addition of  $2\pi$  causes a digit



to be lost, which results in asymmetry such as  $\cos(86^\circ) \neq \cos(-86^\circ)$ . Newer calculators obviate this problem by scaling to a number between 0 and  $\pi/4$ .

### Vector Rotation

An angle can be expressed as a vector having X and Y components and a resultant **R** (see Fig. 1). If **R** is the unit vector, then  $X = \cos \theta$  and  $Y = \sin \theta$ . However, regardless of the length of **R**,  $Y/X = \tan \theta$  and  $X/Y = \cot \theta$ . This holds true for all values of  $\theta$  from 0 to  $2\pi$ . Thus, if some way could be found to generate X and Y for a given  $\theta$ , all the trigonometric functions could be found.

In vector geometry a useful formula results when one rotates a vector through a given angle. Let us suppose we have a vector whose angle is  $\theta_1$ , and we know its components  $X_1$  and  $Y_1$  (see Fig. 2). The  $X_2$  and  $Y_2$  that result when the vector is rotated an additional angle  $\theta_2$  are given by:

$$X_2 = X_1 \cos \theta_2 - Y_1 \sin \theta_2$$

$$Y_2 = Y_1 \cos \theta_2 + X_1 \sin \theta_2$$

Dividing both sides of these equations by  $\cos \theta_2$  gives:

$$\frac{X_2}{\cos \theta_2} = X_1 - Y_1 \tan \theta_2 = X_2' \quad (1)$$

$$\frac{Y_2}{\cos \theta_2} = Y_1 + X_1 \tan \theta_2 = Y_2'$$

Note that  $X_2'$  and  $Y_2'$ , while not the true values of  $X_2$  and  $Y_2$ , both differ by the same factor,  $\cos \theta_2$ . Thus  $Y_2'/X_2' = Y_2/X_2$ . From Fig. 2 it is plain that the quotient  $Y_2'/X_2'$  is equal to  $\tan(\theta_1 + \theta_2)$ . Thus the tangent of a large angle can be found by manipulating smaller angles whose sum equals the large one. Returning to equation 1 above, it can be seen that to generate  $X_2'$  and  $Y_2'$ ,  $X_1$  and  $Y_1$  need to be multiplied

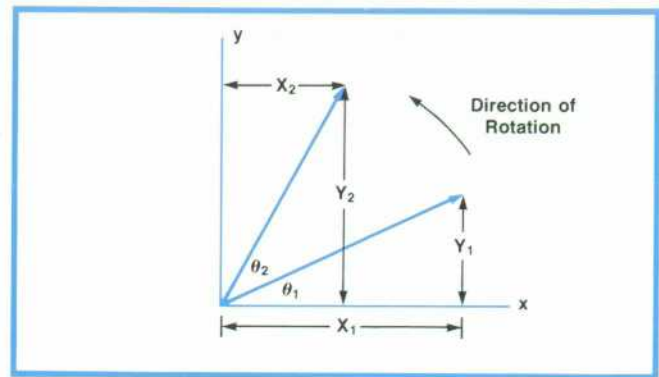


Fig. 2.

by  $\tan \theta_2$  and added or subtracted as needed. If  $\theta_2$  is chosen so that  $\tan \theta_2$  is a simple power of 10 (i.e., 1, 0.1, 0.01,...) then the multiplications simply amount to shifting  $X_1$  and  $Y_1$ . Thus to generate  $X_2'$  and  $Y_2'$ , only a shift and an add or subtract are needed.

### Pseudo-Division

The tangent of  $\theta$  is found as follows. First  $\theta$  is divided into a sum of smaller angles whose tangents are powers of 10. The angles are  $\tan^{-1}(1) = 45^\circ$ ,  $\tan^{-1}(0.1) \approx 5.7^\circ$ ,  $\tan^{-1}(0.01) \approx 0.57^\circ$ ,  $\tan^{-1}(0.001) \approx 0.057^\circ$ ,  $\tan^{-1}(0.0001) \approx 0.0057^\circ$ , and so on.

This process is called pseudo-division. First,  $45^\circ$  is subtracted from  $\theta$  until overdraft, keeping track of the number of subtractions. The remainder is restored by adding  $45^\circ$ . Then  $5.7^\circ$  is repeatedly subtracted, again keeping track of the number of subtractions. This process is repeated with smaller and smaller angles. Thus:

$$\theta = q_0 \tan^{-1}(1) + q_1 \tan^{-1}(0.1) + q_2 \tan^{-1}(0.01) \dots + r$$

The coefficients  $q_i$  refer to the number of subtractions possible in each decade. Each  $q_i$  is equal to or less than 10, so it can be stored in a single four-bit digit.

This process of pseudo-division is one reason that all the trigonometric functions are done in radians. For accuracy,  $\tan^{-1}(10^{-i})$  needs to be expressed to ten digits. In degrees, these constants are random digits and require considerable ROM (read-only memory) space to store. However, in radians, they become, for the most part, nines followed by sixes. Because of this, they can be generated arithmetically, thus using fewer ROM states. Also, in radians,  $\tan^{-1}(1) = \pi/4$ , which is needed anyway to generate  $\pi$ . The problem with using radians is that since  $\pi$  is an irrational number, scaling errors occur as discussed earlier. This means cardinal points do not give exact answers. For example,  $\sin(720^\circ) \neq 0$  when calculated this way but rather  $4 \times 10^{-9}$ . See reference 3 for a discussion of this point.

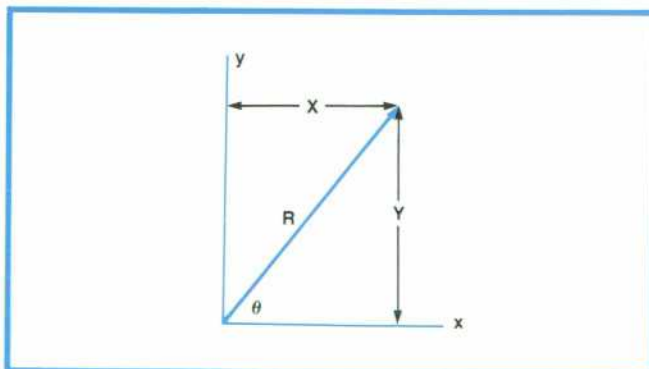


Fig. 1.



So far, a pseudo-quotient has been generated that represents the division of the given angle  $\theta$  into smaller angles whose tangents are powers of 10. In many HP calculators the pseudo-quotient is five hexadecimal digits long. Each digit represents one series of subtractions and is a number from 0 to 10. For example, if  $\theta$  were  $359.9999^\circ$ , the pseudo-quotient would be 77877, representing  $\theta = 7\tan^{-1}(1) + 7\tan^{-1}(0.1) + 8\tan^{-1}(0.01) + 7\tan^{-1}(0.001) + 7\tan^{-1}(0.0001)$ . There may also be a remainder  $r$ , which is the angle remaining after the previous partial quotient subtractions have taken place.

$\tan \theta$  can now be found using the vector rotation process discussed earlier.

### Pseudo-Multiplication

To use equation 1 we need an initial  $X_1$  and  $Y_1$ . These correspond to the  $X$  and  $Y$  of the residual angle  $r$  discussed previously. This angle is small (less than  $0.001^\circ$ ), and for small angles in radians,  $\sin \theta = \theta$  (another reason to use radians instead of degrees). Thus, to good accuracy, the initial  $Y_1$  can be set to the residual angle, and the initial  $X_1$  set to 1. Equation 1 can now be repeatedly applied, where  $\theta_2$  is the angle whose tangent is  $10^{-j}$ . Each time equation 1 is applied, a new  $X_1$  and  $Y_1$  are generated, i.e.,  $X_2'$  and  $Y_2'$ . The number of times equation 1 is applied is determined by the count in the pseudo-quotient digit for that  $\theta$ . Thus if the original angle had a 3 in the pseudo-quotient digit corresponding to  $\tan^{-1}0.1$ , or  $5.7^\circ$ , equation 1 would be applied three times with  $X_1$  and  $Y_1$  being shifted one place right for  $\tan(\tan^{-1}0.1)$  before the addition or subtraction. In this manner, new  $X_1$  and  $Y_1$  are formed as the vector is rotated the amount corresponding to the count in the pseudo-quotient digits which, of course, sum to the original angle  $\theta$ .

Equation 1 shows that to generate  $X_2$  requires a shift of  $Y_1$  and a subtraction from  $X_1$ . Likewise  $Y_2$  requires a shift of  $X_1$  and an addition to  $Y_1$ . To implement this would require either two extra registers to hold the shifted values of  $X_1$  and  $Y_1$ , or else shifting one register twice and the other once. It would be desirable to shift only one register once. Happily, this is possible. Consider the following: Let  $Y = 123$  and  $X = 456$ . Suppose we want  $Y + (X \times 0.01)$ . This can be obtained by keeping the decimal points in the same places and shifting  $X$  two places right.

$$\begin{array}{r} 123 \\ + \quad 4.56 \\ \hline 127.56 \end{array}$$

Now suppose instead of shifting  $X$  two places right, we multiply  $Y$  by 100, shifting it two places left. What happens?

$$\begin{array}{r} 12300 \\ 456 \\ \hline 12756 \end{array}$$

The digits in both answers are exactly the same. The only difference between the two is that the second answer is 100 times the correct value, which is the same value by which  $Y$  was multiplied before the addition. Thus to avoid shifting  $X$ ,  $Y$  must be multiplied by  $10^j$ .

Expanding this method to the problem at hand also helps us solve another problem, that of accuracy. During pseudo-division, the angle  $\theta$  is resolved until a small angle  $r$  is left as the original  $Y$  value. Since this is done in fixed point arithmetic, zero digits are generated following the decimal point (e.g., .00123).

Since zero digits do not convey information except to indicate the decimal point, the remainder is shifted left one place (multiplied by 10) during each decade of pseudo-division. This preserves an extra digit of accuracy with each decade. The final remainder is equal to  $r \times 10^4$  if the pseudo-quotient is five digits long.

To demonstrate mathematically the implementation that requires only a single register shift, return to equation 1 and replace  $\tan \theta_2$  by  $10^{-j}$ . This substitution is legal because  $\theta_2 = \tan^{-1}(10^{-j})$ , where  $j$  is the decade digit.

$$\begin{aligned} X_2' &= X_1 - Y_1 \times 10^{-j} \\ Y_2' &= Y_1 + X_1 \times 10^{-j} \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

Now let  $Z = Y_1 \times 10^j$ , or  $Y_1 = Z \times 10^{-j}$ . Substituting in equation 2,

$$\begin{aligned} X_1' &= X_1 - Z \times 10^{-2j} \\ Y_2' &= Z \times 10^{-j} + X_1 \times 10^{-j} \end{aligned}$$

Multiplying the second equation by  $10^j$  gives:

$$Y_2' \times 10^j = Z + X_1$$

The left-hand side ( $Y_2' \times 10^j$ ) is in the correct form to be the new  $Z$  for the next iteration. Thus for each iteration within a decade:

$$\begin{aligned} X_2' &= X_1 - Z \times 10^{-2j} \\ Y_2' \times 10^j &= Z + X_1 \\ X_2' &\text{ becomes the new } X_1 \\ Y_2' \times 10^j &\text{ becomes the new } Z \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

Since the shifted remainder ( $r \times 10^4$ ) is desired as  $Z$  for the first iteration, the original  $j$  is 4.

To implement equation 3,  $X_1$  and  $Z$  are stored in two registers.  $Z \times 10^{-2j}$  is formed and stored in a third register.  $X_1$  is added to  $Z$  to form the new  $Z$ . This leaves  $X_1$  undisturbed so that  $Z \times 10^{-2j}$  can be subtracted from it to form the new  $X_2'$ .

This implementation saves extra shifts and increases accuracy by removing leading zeros in  $Z$ . The only register shifted is  $Z$ .




After equation 3 has been applied the number of times indicated by one pseudo-quotient digit, Z is shifted right one place, and a new pseudo-quotient digit is fetched. This in effect creates  $Y_1 \times 10^j$ , where j is one less than before. Again equation 3 is applied, and the process is repeated until all five pseudo-quotient digits have been exhausted. The result is an X and a Y that are proportional to the cosine and sine of the angle  $\theta$ . Because the final j is zero, the final Y (=Z) is correctly normalized with respect to X.

So far, then, an X and a Y have been generated by a pseudo-multiply operation consisting of shifts and additions. If  $\tan \theta$  is required,  $Y/X$  is generated, which is the correct answer. For  $\sin \theta$ ,  $Y/X$  is calculated, and for  $\cos \theta$ ,  $X/Y$  is calculated. Then either  $X/Y$  or  $Y/X$  is operated on by the routine described at the beginning of this article. The only difference between the computation for  $\sin \theta$  and that for  $\cos \theta$  is whether X and Y are exchanged.

In summary, the computation of trigonometric functions proceeds as follows:

1. Scale the input angle to a number in radians between 0 and  $2\pi$ .
2. Using the pseudo-division process divide the scaled number into groups of selected smaller angles.
3. With the pseudo-multiply process of equation 3 applied once for each angle resulting from the division of the input argument, generate an X and a Y that are proportional to the sine and co-

sine of the input angle.

4. With X and Y, compute the required function using elementary operations.
  5. Round and display the answer.
- The calculator is now ready for another operation. 

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## HEWLETT-PACKARD JOURNAL

**JUNE 1977** Volume 28 • Number 10

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