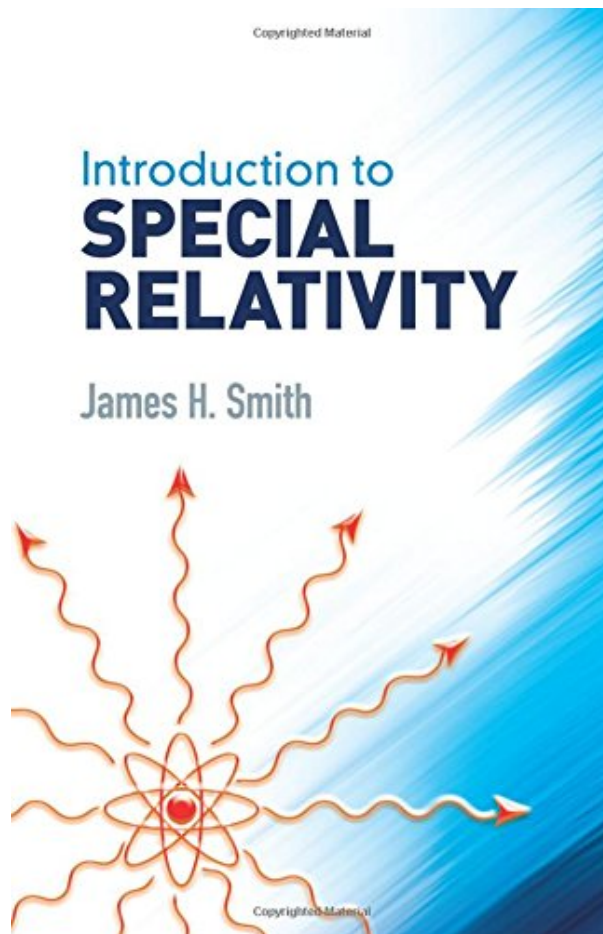


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By the year 1900, most of physics seemed to be encompassed in the two great theories of Newtonian mechanics and Maxwell's theory of electromagnetism. Unfortunately, there were inconsistencies between the two theories that seemed irreconcilable. Although many physicists struggled with the problem, it took the genius of Einstein to see that the inconsistencies were concerned not merely with mechanics and electromagnetism, but with our most elementary ideas of space and time. In the special theory of relativity, Einstein resolved these difficulties and profoundly altered our conception of the physical universe.

Readers looking for a concise, well-written explanation of one of the most important theories in modern physics need search no further than this lucid undergraduate-level text. Replete with examples that make it especially suitable for self-study, the book assumes only a knowledge of algebra. Topics include classical relativity and the relativity postulate, time dilation, the twin paradox, momentum and energy, particles of zero mass, electric and magnetic fields and forces, and more.

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About the Author

James H. Smith was Professor of Physics at the University of Illinois.

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14 of 14 people found the following review helpful.

A well-written introductory text that is easy to understand

By Samuel Silverstein

I used this textbook in my first undergraduate relativity course, and it is still one of the best introductions to the subject that I have ever read.

While the book is aimed at second or third semester physics students, the math is confined to straightforward algebra. Although this makes the formalism a little less "neat" than in other treatments, it makes the subject much more understandable, especially for readers with less experience in higher mathematics.

The writing style is easy to read, and there are many good explanations and worked-out examples. The "Twin Paradox", for example, is not only solved in its entirety, but cross-checked using three different approaches, all of which use special relativity alone. The exercises in each chapter are well chosen, and prompt the reader to understand the significance of the answers.

I consider this to be one of the best undergraduate introductory textbooks in relativity, and also recommend it to anyone with at least a high-school algebra background who wishes to learn more about this fascinating subject.

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Great book to get you going .. next stop General Relativity

By Kersi Von Zerubbubbel

This is a fine book on Special Relativity. All one needs is a grasp of algebra to follow the text. There are quite a few exercises at the end of each chapter. I specially like the fact that the author discusses the non-relativistic approach to a concept followed by the relativistic view. The chapters on Momentum and Energy and Particles of Zero Mass are plain excellent.

Since no calculus to speak of is used some of the "derivations" are quite awkward. But that is a minor cavil. If you are still in school and algebra is fresh on your mind, this book will be a breeze. If your algebra is rusty, journey on, albeit slowly. The reward at the end of the road is worth it!

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

Best SR book that I've found so far

By Camoph

I don't like to post reviews of products here, but this book is so good that it deserves the effort. Despite the fact there are so many good books about General Relativity (Schutz, Hartle, d'Inverno, MTW, etc), these books just "summarize" in the first chapters the basic ideas of Special Relativity (SR) with no "depth", because it's assumed the reader already knows the subject. However, finding a good book about SR is such a hard task (I'm sorry, but I don't like A.P. French, MIT course). In his book, J.H. Smith explains the key ideas of the theory in a clear and elegant way, using more a "physical intuition" point of view (more in the Einstein spirit) instead of a heavy mathematical and more "obscure" way, for example like the Jackson's Classical Electrodynamics. The author gives clear and very pedagogical examples for the reader to master the Lorentz transformations. The discussion of the "twin paradox" for exmaple, is one of the best I have found. I specially liked the chapter 12 about the four-momentum, including the applications of relativistic collisions. For self study (my case) this is one of the best books that I've found so far. I highly recommend it for undergraduate and even graduate students in Physics.

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