



A. Classical Approach

1. Consider a wire with one conduction electron (red) per atom (blue), carrying an electric current density J . The actual drift velocity of the electrons, v_d , is opposed to J .
2. The electric current generates a magnetic field B .

3. Now consider an electron moving with velocity v along wire axis. The left hand rule for electrons yields a Lorentz force F_L points *away* from the wire axis.

B. Relativistic Explanation

1. Imagine you sit on the electron. Your velocity relative to the resting, positive charged metal ions (blue) is v . Your velocity relative to the moving, negatively charged electrons in the wire (red), in contrast, is $v + v_d$.
2. According to the “Special Theory of Relativity,” you see objects that you approach with a velocity v “Lorentz-contracted” by a factor $(1 - (v/c)^2)^{-1/2}$, where c is the velocity of light in vacuum.
3. Since you approach the electrons in the wire with a higher velocity than the metal ions, the Lorentz contraction causes you to see a net negative charge. This negative charge repels the electron away from the wire. In conclusion, magnetic fields can be explained as relativistic effects of electric fields.