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Name _____
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The Metric System and Angular Measurement

Science and technology have had great success because of their quantitative approach. The basis of most scientific research is an assumption of cause and effect. Researchers try to describe quantitatively what conditions and observations are expected from a particular experiment. The researchers then perform the experiment and measure anything that has changed in order to try and understand the cause and effect relationship. This often results in the discovery of physical laws. A crucial aspect of this process is measurement. To better understand the nature of the work of the scientist, it is necessary to be familiar with the elementary operations of measurements. In this investigation work will be done with measurements involving physical properties and angles.

I. The Metric System

To test the laws of science in everyday aspects of our lives, it is important to be able to measure many different quantities. Lord Kelvin, a 19th century English scientist, summed up the importance of measurement to science in the following way:

"I often say that when you can measure what you are speaking about, and express it in numbers, you know something about it, but when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meager and unsatisfactory kind; it may be the beginning of knowledge, but you have scarcely, in your thoughts, advanced to the stage of Science, whatever the matter may be."

If you think about your own experience in buying, selling, repairing, building, etc., the necessity and importance of measurement is obvious. The nature of measurement requires comparisons to previously determined standards. Generally the role of establishing and maintaining standards of measurement is the responsibility of governments. Historically, different societies and their governments have chosen standards that were relevant to them and their needs. For example, in the United States we have continued to use a system

of measurement that evolved from our English heritage called the *English system* of measurement. Thus for each society there can be a different standard measurement. In the 18th century great dissatisfaction was aroused in parts of Europe over the lack of a single universal standard of precise measurement. This was further aggravated by the Age of Exploration and the establishment of colonies in many parts of the world. The dissatisfaction eventually led to the adoption of a logical and relatively simple system of measurement known as the *metric system*, which derives its name from the unit of length called the *meter*. The metric system is now commonly used in every country with the exception of a few undeveloped countries and the United States, which is evaluating the advantages of converting to widespread use of the metric system. The metric system originated from the deliberations of the French National Assembly during the period 1791-1795, and became compulsory in France in 1837. Although the metric system is legally recognized in the United States, it has not been officially adopted. Because of the far reaching economic implications of conversion and the general hesitancy of public acceptance of the metric system, widespread conversion from the English system to the metric system in the United States has been delayed. The necessity to deal with imported metric products, however, encourages an ability to work with the metric system even if we continue to accept English system measurements in the United States.

The minimum quantities required to make all necessary measurements are referred to as the *fundamental units of measure*. The quantities that are combinations of the fundamental units of measure are called the *derived units of measure*. By international agreement seven fundamental units of measure have been adopted; they are length, mass, time, temperature, electrical current, light intensity, and the amount of molecular matter.

Astronomy Through Practical Investigations Number 34

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