

**EVALUATING  
ACADEMIC READINESS  
FOR APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING**  
Revised for  
**ACCESS TO APPRENTICESHIP**

**SCIENCE SKILLS  
SIMPLE MACHINES AND MECHANICAL ADVANTAGE**

**AN ACADEMIC SKILLS MANUAL  
for**

**The Construction Trades: Structures**

This trade group includes the following trades:  
Drywall & Acoustical Applicator, General Carpenter,  
Mason (Brick & Stone and Restoration), Reinforcing Rod Worker, Roofer,  
Terrazzo, Tile & Marble Mechanic

*Workplace Support Services Branch  
Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities*

*Revised 2011*

In preparing these Academic Skills Manuals we have used passages, diagrams and questions similar to those an apprentice might find in a text, guide or trade manual.

**This trade related material is not intended to instruct you in your trade. It is used only to demonstrate how understanding an academic skill will help you find and use the information you need.**

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# SCIENCE SKILLS

## SIMPLE MACHINES AND MECHANICAL ADVANTAGE

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*An academic skill required for the study of the  
Construction Trades: Structures*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Construction workers rely on their tools to provide extra force in situations where human muscle power needs some help. When you lever a stud wall into place, hoist a load to the second storey or drive a nail into a window frame, your crowbar, hoist and hammer give you a mechanical advantage.

These tools are actually simple machines. Hammers, wheelbarrows, crowbars, screwdrivers and pulleys have long been used to supply a mechanical advantage that makes work easier and more efficient.

The main types of simple machines are:

- ◆ the lever, from which the pulley, the wheel and the axle developed,
- ◆ the inclined plane, from which the screw and the wedge developed.

Although the design of each of these machines is simple, the help they can provide is significant. When parts of the different simple machines are combined, they form the building blocks of the more complicated machines that are found on the job, such as a crane or an engine. Unlike a simple machine, these more complex machines usually require an outside source of energy such as gasoline or electricity.

This skills manual looks at simple machines and the mechanical advantage gained by using a machine, including:

- ◆ Definitions of work and power
- ◆ Different ways machines increase force
- ◆ How a simple machine works
- ◆ The lever
- ◆ The wheel and axle
- ◆ Torque
- ◆ The pulley
- ◆ The inclined plane
- ◆ Actual and ideal mechanical advantage

## **WORK AND POWER**

We all have a pretty good idea of what doing work means in our everyday life. Work also has a scientific definition. At the mechanical level, **work is done when a force acts on an object and causes it to be moved.** For example, work is done when you pry off a broken joist because you move the joist from one position to another.

To find the work done in moving an object, the force applied is multiplied by the distance the object is moved.

$$\text{Work} = \text{Force} \times \text{distance}$$

The metric unit of work is the joule. A **joule (j)** is the work done when a force of 1 newton acts on an object over a distance of 1 meter. You do 1 joule of work when you push, pull, carry or lift a stationary mass of 1 kg over a distance of 1 meter.

The imperial unit of work is the foot-pound. A **foot-pound** is the amount of work done by moving a one pound object over a distance of 1 foot.

**Power is the rate of doing work.** It indicates how long it takes to do the job. In order to judge the effectiveness of a machine, the rate at which it works is an important consideration. Power is the work done divided by the amount of time taken to do it.

$$\text{Power} = \text{work} / \text{time}$$

The metric unit of power is the **watt (w)** and the imperial unit is the **horsepower (hp)**.

## **DIFFERENT WAYS MACHINES INCREASE FORCE**

Machines do not create energy so they will not work all by themselves. They all need an initial force such as the pull of gravity, the push of our muscles or the turning of a switch. Then the machines can change the force so that we have the right amount of force in the right place. Here are some ways that machines can change a force:

1. **Machines can transform energy from one form to another.** When the voltage from an arc welder melts the metal wire, electrical energy is changed to heat energy. A power saw converts electrical energy to mechanical energy used to cut a sheet of metal.
2. **Machines can transfer energy from one place to another.** Connecting rods, crankshafts, drive shafts and axles are machines that transfer energy from the cylinder of an engine to the wheels. They also change linear movement into circular movement and vice-versa.
3. **Machines can multiply force, as when a hydraulic lift increases the weight that can be lifted.** A machine such as a hydraulic lift uses the pressure of a fluid to increase the amount of force available.
4. **Machines can multiply speed.** We can move faster on a bicycle than walking. We can move even faster on a complex machine with an outside source of energy, such as a car or truck.

## **HOW A SIMPLE MACHINE WORKS**

When an object is lifted, a force must be applied to overcome its weight.

- ◆ *The force used to move an object is called the **applied or effort force**.*
  - The terms applied force and effort force are used interchangeably,
- ◆ *An object's opposition to being moved is called the **resistance force or the load**.*
  - The terms load and resistance force can also be used interchangeably.
- ◆ If friction is ignored, an object's resistance to being moved is generally the same as its weight, so the load is considered to be the same as the object's weight.

A simple machine uses a single applied force to do work on a single load. A single **effort force** applied at the end of a crowbar will pry out a nail, which is the **load force**. When a simple machine does work, both the effort force (the crowbar) and the load (the nail) move a certain distance. So work is done where the effort force is applied and where the load is moved. Here are some examples:

- You use a lever to get a large block out of the way.
  - Work is done on the long arm of a lever at the point where your muscles apply a force by pushing down. This causes the lever to move.
  - Work is done by the lever where the shorter arm of the lever moves up. As the lever moves up, it causes the load or block to move.
  - This results in the block rolling out of the way.
- The crowbar, a simple machine, enables you to remove a nail that you couldn't pull out with your fingers.
  - The applied force occurs in your arm and the shaft of the crowbar, up to where it bends.
  - The resistance force or the load occurs in the crowbar, after the bend, and the nail.
  - When you pry the nail out, you move the applied force (your arm and crowbar shaft) a certain distance.
  - The load, (the crowbar end and the nail), also moves when you press on the crowbar, although they move a shorter distance.
  - The short amount the nail moves is enough to pull it out of the board.

The work done to move the load, the block or the nail, is the same as the work supplied by the effort force, your arm acting on the lever or the crowbar. This is expressed by saying the output (the work done on the load) is the same as the input (the applied force).

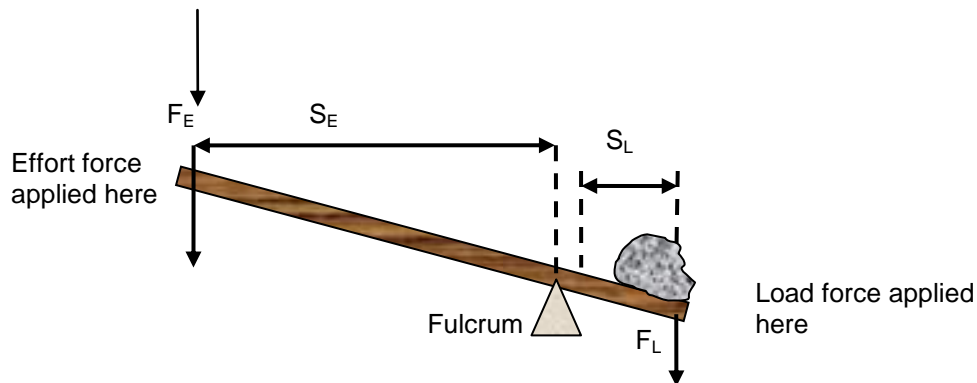
## **THE LEVER**

*A **lever** is a rigid bar which is free to turn about a pivot point called the **fulcrum**.*

- The side of the lever that you push down on is called the **effort arm**.
- The arm on the other side of the fulcrum that goes under the load is called the **resistance (or load) arm**.

Levers enable you to move objects (resistance forces or loads) that are too heavy to push or lift. They do this by acting over a longer distance than our arms can.

If you want to move a heavy object like a stone, you can get a long bar, put the fulcrum close to the stone and pry it up. You can see in Figure 1 that when you push down on your end of the lever, the load will be lifted up. The effort force you need to make this happen will be less than the effort you would need to lift the load with your arms.



**FIGURE 1: Work Done By a Lever**

A large load is placed a short distance from the fulcrum ( $S_L$ ) on one end of the lever. It can be moved by a weaker force on the other end of the lever if the effort force is a longer distance ( $S_E$ ) from the fulcrum.

The lever does work on both sides of the fulcrum. Remember that work done is equal to *force times distance*.

- The length and the force on **each side** of the fulcrum are multiplied together to determine the amount of work done on each side.
- The position of the fulcrum determines the length that each force moves through.
- The load force is the weight of the block.
- The effort force comes from your arms pushing on the effort side of the lever.

When you push on the lever and make it move, the work done on both sides is the same. Work output is equal to the work input. This can be represented by the equation:

$$F_E \times S_E = F_L \times S_L$$

where:

$F_E$  is the effort force

$S_E$  is the distance of the effort force to the fulcrum

$F_L$  is the resistance force or load

$S_L$  is the distance of the resistance force to the fulcrum

The distances used in the equation are those of the length of the lever on each side of the fulcrum (Look again at Figure 1). *When work is done, those lengths are proportional to the distance each end of the lever arcs through as the effort force is applied.*

**Example:** Say the length of lever like the one in the diagram is 60 inches on one side of the fulcrum and 12 inches on the other. If the long end of the lever moves 20 inches, how far does the shorter end move?

Since the lengths on each side are proportional, we can write them as ratios or fractions on different sides of an equal sign. We will write the unknown length of the shorter end of the lever as  $D$ .

$$\frac{D}{12} = \frac{20}{60}$$

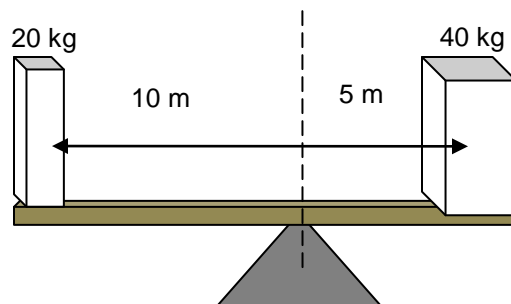
$$D = \frac{20 \times 12}{60}$$

$$= 4$$

The length that the shorter end of the lever moves is 4 inches.

As the end of the lever under the stone is moved 4 inches, it in turn moves the stone. Our job is successful as the stone is moved out of the way.

**Example:** A load of 20 newtons (n) on one end of a lever that is 10 meters from the fulcrum will balance a second load of 40 newtons placed 5 meters from the fulcrum.



$$20 \text{ n} \times 10 \text{ m} = 40 \text{ n} \times 5 \text{ m}$$
$$200 \text{ n m} = 200 \text{ n m}$$

The lever is in equilibrium with both sides balancing each other. Next we will look at an example of how to find the effort force needed to move a load:

**Question:** You need to move a 400 pound block with a 6 foot lever. The 400 pound load force is positioned at the end of the lever 1 foot away from the fulcrum. You will apply the effort force at the other end of the lever, 5 feet from the fulcrum. What effort force will you need?

$$F_E \times S_E = F_L \times S_L$$

$F_E$  = effort force

$S_E$  = 5 ft

$F_L$  = 400 lb

$S_L$  = 1 ft

$$F_E \times 5 \text{ ft} = 400 \text{ lb} \times 1 \text{ ft}$$

$$F_E = \frac{400 \times 1}{5}$$

$$F_E = 80$$

The resistance force of 400 lb is balanced by an effort force of 80 pounds 5 feet from the fulcrum.

**Question:** What if you aren't strong enough to move a load of 80 lbs with a lever that is 5 feet from the fulcrum? If you increase the length of the lever so that the effort distance ( $S_E$ ) is longer, you will need less effort force to move the load. You can increase the mechanical advantage of the lever by making your side longer, say to 10 feet instead of 5.

To balance the effect on both sides of the equation, it now is:

$$F_E \times S_E = F_L \times S_L$$

$F_E$  = effort force

$S_E$  = 10 ft

$F_L$  = 400 lb

$S_L$  = 1 ft

$$F_E \times 10 \text{ ft} = 400 \text{ lb} \times 1 \text{ ft}$$

$$F_E = \frac{400 \times 1}{10}$$

$$F_E = 40$$

$F_E$  is now only 40 lb. A push of just 40 lbs on your side of the lever at 10 ft from the fulcrum will move the load.

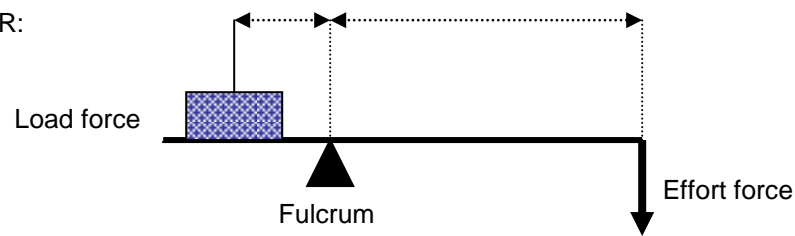
To move a load using a lever, the longer the distance from the fulcrum to the point where the effort force is applied, the less effort force is needed to move the load. The length of the lever gives us a mechanical advantage in that we can move the block using less force.

### Types of Levers

In a lever like the one in Figure 1, the fulcrum is placed between the applied force and the load. In other types of levers, the fulcrum can be at one end. The applied force and the load can also be

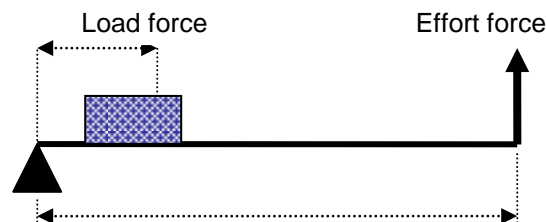
in different positions on the lever. Levers are classified as first, second or third class based on where the effort and resistance forces are positioned relative to the fulcrum. See Figure 2.

FIRST CLASS LEVER:  
Example - nail puller



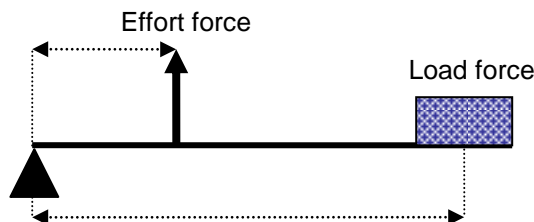
In a first class lever the load force and the effort force are on opposite sides of the fulcrum

SECOND CLASS LEVER:  
Example – wheel barrow



In a second class lever the load force and the effort force are on the same side of the fulcrum, with the fulcrum at one end, the load in the middle and the effort applied at the other end

THIRD CLASS LEVER:  
Example - hammer



In a third class lever the load force and the effort force are on the same side, with the fulcrum at one end, the effort applied in the middle and the load at the other end

**FIGURE 2: Types of Levers**

In a **first class lever**, the fulcrum is between the load at one end and the effort force which is applied at the other end of the lever. This is what is typically thought of as a lever.

First class levers include

- scissors,
- balance scales,
- nail pullers
- and pliers.

Most jacks are first class levers. The resistance force or load is at one end supported by the jack. The fulcrum is between the load and the pump handle. The pump handle is at opposite end of the lever from the load. In a jack, there is often a hydraulic cylinder as part of the fulcrum to assist in the lifting.

A **second class lever** has the fulcrum at one end, the weight balanced in the middle and the effort applied at the other end. A wheelbarrow is a second class lever. The wheel is the fulcrum (the load pivots on the axle of the wheel) and the effort is applied at the handles at the other end from the wheel. The weight or resistance of the load is between the fulcrum and the handles. Other second class levers include

- bottle openers
- and nutcrackers.

A **third class lever** has the fulcrum at one end, the load at the other end and the effort force between them. An example of a third class lever is a hammer. The fulcrum is the elbow or wrist, the hammer head is the effort and the load is the resistance of the wood to the nail. Other examples of third class levers are

- fishing rods
- and tweezers.

### **THE WHEEL AND AXLE**

A **wheel and axle** uses the principle of a lever to give a mechanical advantage.

- A wheel is basically a lever where the larger wheel, actually the edge of the main wheel, rotates around the smaller wheel of the axle.
- The smaller wheel of the axle rotates around the fulcrum at the center.
- The effort force is applied in a circular direction around the fulcrum to turn the axle. This circular, turning force is called **torque**.
- Since the axle is connected to the main wheel (or tire rim), both turn together.
- There is usually a fair distance between the outside of the wheel and the outside of the axle, so a wheel provides a significant mechanical advantage.

In a vehicle, the wheel can transmit energy from the engine. When an engine transmits a rotary force to the axle, the axle causes the wheels to turn. The force applied to the axle and transmitted to the wheels results in the motion of the car. A force that results in a turning motion such as the rotation of a wheel is called torque.

### **TORQUE**

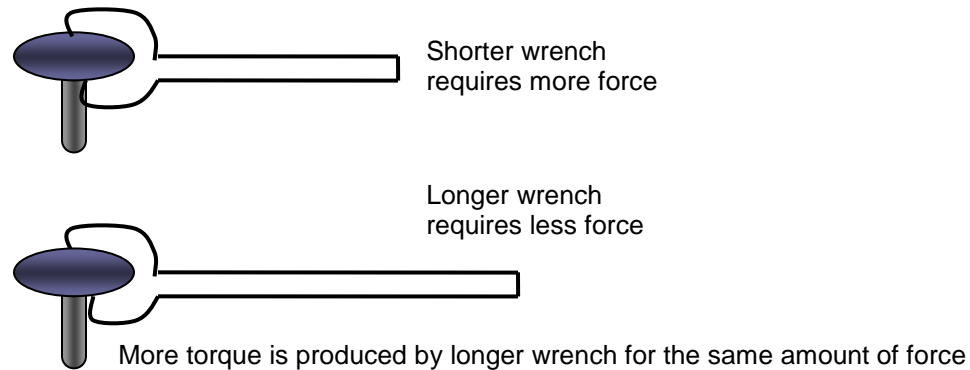
**Torque** refers to a force that produces a turning motion in an object such as a wheel or a bolt and wrench. A torque causes the shaft of the object to rotate around an axis or a pivot point. When you turn a wrench that pivots on a bolt, you apply a torque or a turning force to the bolt that causes it to be loosened or tightened as it moves up or down.

### **Using a Wrench to Produce Torque**

When you want to loosen or tighten a bolt, you use the force of your muscles at one end of a wrench to rotate that end. The head of the wrench is connected to the bolt at the pivot end. This part of the shaft also turns, causing the bolt to rotate. The length of the wrench is measured from the center of the bolt to the end where the force is applied.

The torque applied by the wrench to turn the bolt depends on the amount of force applied and the length of the wrench. So torque is calculated by multiplying the force times the length of the wrench.

To get enough rotation or torque to loosen a bolt with a wrench of a given length, you need to apply a certain amount of force. If you use a **longer** wrench, you can apply **less** force. If you use a **shorter** wrench, you will need to apply **more** force. See Figure 3.



**FIGURE 3; Amount Of Torque Increases With Size Of Wrench**

If you tried to loosen a bolt with a 15 cm wrench but found the bolt was on too tightly, what size wrench should you try next – 10 cm or 25 cm?

If you picked the 25 cm one, you have a good chance of being successful. This is because less force is required to produce the same amount of torque as the distance from the center increases. A longer wrench turned with the same amount of force (exerted by the pulling with your muscles) will give you more torque or ability to make the bolt turn.

A wrench gives you a mechanical advantage over using your fingers to loosen a bolt because it acts as a lever. Remember that a lever increases the distance over which the force acts compared to your fingers. Since the force is multiplied by the distance it is applied over, the longer the distance, the more torque there is for the same amount of applied force.

### ***THE PULLEY***

A pulley changes the direction of movement. Pulling down to move something is easier for us than lifting up. A pulley is made by running a rope over a supported wheel. If a load is attached to the rope, it can be lifted up by pulling down on the other end of the rope.

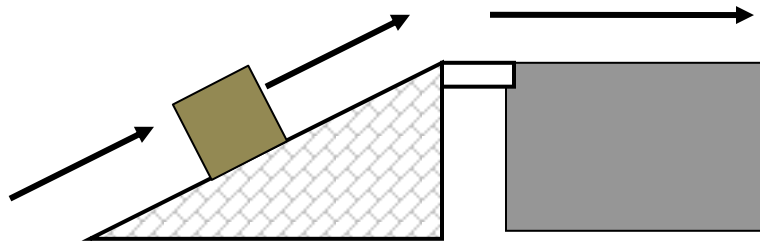
Several pulleys can be connected to form lifting systems that not only change the direction of the force but also amplify the force. An example is a block and tackle.

## ***THE INCLINED PLANE***

If you want to raise an object to a certain height, you must do a certain amount of work. You cannot reduce the amount of work, but you can change the way the work is done.

Work has two aspects: the effort put into it and the distance the effort is maintained.

- When raising an object, you can move it up on a slant rather than lifting it directly up.
- This increases the distance you need to apply your force over while reducing the amount of force needed.
- When you raise an object by pushing or pulling it up an inclined plane or a ramp, less force is needed than if you were lifting straight up, because the force is applied over a longer distance. See Figure 4.



Using an inclined plane to raise a load requires less force but the load must be moved a longer distance

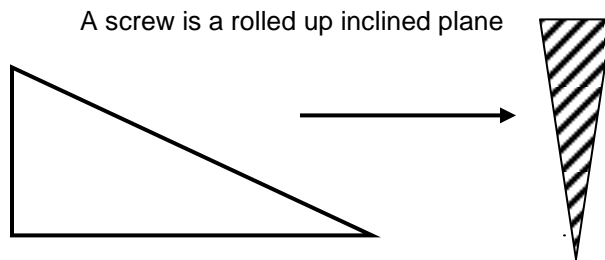
**FIGURE 4; The Inclined Plane**

Imagine you need to raise a heavy crate, one you cannot lift, 4 feet from the floor to the bench. Four feet is the distance the resistance force moves. You push it up a 10 foot long ramp. Ten feet is the distance the effort force moves. By using the ramp to move the crate which is too heavy to lift, you have gained a mechanical advantage.

When we use an inclined plane, we use less force to lift an object, but we have to apply the force over a longer distance. We use loading ramps to load trucks so we can prevent injury to workers and equipment.

## ***THE SCREW***

A screw is an inclined plane rolled into a cone. If you take a piece of paper cut into a right triangle (an inclined plane) and roll it up, it looks like a screw. The distance between two adjacent edges of the rolled up paper or between the threads of a screw is called the pitch. See Figure 5.



**FIGURE 5: The Screw**

A screw can have a very large mechanical advantage, but it is an inefficient machine because of the large amount of friction that occurs between the wood and the turning screw. However, this friction helps hold the screw tightly in the wood.

The screwdriver used to turn the screw is a third class lever where your wrist is the fulcrum, your hand supplies the effort force and the head of the screw is the resistance. Some of the effort force applied to the screw by the screwdriver parts the wood as the screw turns.

### ***THE WEDGE***

The wedge is a double-sided inclined plane. A wedge acts as a moving inclined plane. Most cutting machines like axes and saws make use of a wedge. When a saw cuts a board, some of the forward movement of the saw is converted into sideways movement in the wood. The sideways movement splits open the board.

### ***ACTUAL AND IDEAL MECHANICAL ADVANTAGE***

Machines give us a ***mechanical advantage***. This is defined as *an advantage gained in the amount of work done by the use of a mechanism in transmitting force*. Work is a force of a certain strength applied over a certain distance. It is the combination of both force and distance that determines the work done when moving an object. A machine can increase the amount of force applied or it can increase the distance over which the force is applied.

Most simple machines increase the distance over which the force is transmitted.

- When you use a crowbar to pry a large unit into its exact position, the crowbar, with its long arm, provides you with a longer distance over which to apply the force of your muscles. It gives you the advantage of greater distance so you use less muscle power.
- You can move a heavy object more easily and more accurately using a lever by doing it yourself. A lever gives you the advantage of greater distance from the object to be moved.

Mechanical advantage is expressed as a ratio. This ratio indicates how much help the simple machine provides.

### Actual Mechanical Advantage

We find the **actual mechanical advantage** of a simple machine (MA) by using *the ratio of the resistance force ( $F_L$ ) or the weight of the object being moved, to the effort force ( $F_E$ )*.

$$MA = \frac{F_L}{F_E}$$

The resistance or load force is the force that results from the weight of the object to be moved. The effort force ( $F_E$ ) is the force applied by the person using a machine to move the object.

The smaller our effort in relation to the weight moved, the greater the actual mechanical advantage. If a machine such as a wheeled cart allows you to move a 200 lb load of bricks from the delivery truck to the job site using 40 lb of applied force from our muscles, the wheels have given you a mechanical advantage.

**Note:** When you divide to find the actual mechanical advantage of a machine both the load and the effort force have the same units, they cancel out.

**Example:** If you move an object with a weight of 200 lb using a machine and the force you apply is 40 lb, what is the mechanical advantage of the machine?

$$\text{mechanical advantage} = \frac{\text{load weight}}{\text{effort force}}$$

$$MA = \frac{F_L}{F_E}$$

$$MA = \frac{200 \text{ lb}}{40 \text{ lb}}$$

$$MA = 5$$

The actual mechanical advantage is 5.

The actual mechanical advantage ratio compares two forces, the force of the load and the force of the effort. There is a second ratio called ideal mechanical advantage that compares the distances over which two forces are applied.

### Ideal Mechanical Advantage

The **ideal mechanical advantage** is *the ratio of the distance the effort force moves ( $s_E$ ) to the distance the load moves ( $s_L$ )*.

$$\text{Ideal MA} = \frac{S_F}{S_I}$$

**Example:** What is the ideal mechanical advantage of a lever if the effort force is applied at a distance of 8 meters from the fulcrum to move a load that is 2 meters from the fulcrum 2 meters?

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Ideal MA} &= \frac{S_F}{S_l} \\ &= \frac{8m}{2m} \\ &= 4\end{aligned}$$

### Efficiency of a Machine

The efficiency of a machine is the ratio of work output to work input. It is usually expressed as a percentage. An ideal machine would be 100% efficient. In reality, machines lose energy as heat from friction. In our examples, we have been ignoring the effects of friction.

The efficiency of a machine such as a lever or an inclined plane depends on four different factors:

- ◆ the resistance force or load
- ◆ the applied force or effort
- ◆ the distance the load moves through
- ◆ the distance the applied force moves through

$$\text{efficiency} = \frac{\text{force} \times \text{distance of the load}}{\text{force} \times \text{distance of the effort}}$$

### CONCLUSION

In the construction trades, you have to lift, move, hold and maneuver heavy objects. You have to drill, hoist, cut and lift. To help you do these tasks efficiently and safely, you can use both simple and complex machines.

These machines work to ensure that you have the correct amount of force to produce the necessary movement in the right place. With the mechanical advantage provided by the different machines you operate, you can do jobs that require more force than your muscles can supply.

The complex machinery you use is made of simple machines linked together in various ways and driven by an outside source of power. Motors, hoists and lifts all operate on the basic principles of simple machines. Understanding how a simple machine gives you a mechanical advantage can help you interpret how more complex machines work for you.

**Answer the following questions by filling in the blank spaces with one of these words.  
The answers are at the end of this skills manual.**

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lever force longer less hammer mechanical advantage fulcrum distance

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1. Mechanical advantage is an advantage gained by the use of a mechanism in transmitting \_\_\_\_\_.
2. To find the actual \_\_\_\_\_ of a lever, the resistance force (the weight of the object to be moved) is divided by the effort force applied.
3. The ideal mechanical advantage is the ratio of the \_\_\_\_\_ that the effort force moves compared to the distance that the resistance force moves.
4. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a rigid bar that is free to turn about a pivot point called a fulcrum.
5. When a lever is balanced, the resistance force multiplied by its distance to the \_\_\_\_\_ is equal to the effort force multiplied by its distance to the fulcrum.
6. When we need to move a heavy object using a lever, we can increase the effectiveness of our applied force by making the length of the lever on the effort side of the fulcrum \_\_\_\_\_.
7. When we use an inclined plane to raise an object, the force we need to apply is \_\_\_\_\_ than when we lift it straight up, but the distance we apply it over is longer.
8. A \_\_\_\_\_ is an example of a third class lever.

**Answer the following questions by writing true or false in the blanks.**

9. Torque refers to a force that produces a turning motion. \_\_\_\_\_
10. The torque on a bolt depends on the force applied and the length of the wrench. \_\_\_\_\_
11. If the resistance force is 48 newtons and the effort force is 12 newtons, the mechanical advantage of the lever is 3. \_\_\_\_\_
12. A screw is a rolled up lever. \_\_\_\_\_

**Answer page**

1. force
2. mechanical advantage
3. distance
4. lever
5. fulcrum
6. longer
7. less
8. hammer (fishing rod, tweezers)
9. true
10. true
11. false, (it is 4)
12. false (it is a rolled up inclined plane)