We will deal with vectors more fully in Chapter 3. For now, we deal only with motion in one dimension, along a line. In this case, vectors which point in one direction will have a positive sign, whereas vectors that point in the opposite direction will have a negative sign, along with their magnitude.

Consider the motion of an object over a particular time interval. Suppose that at some initial time, call it t_1, the object is on the x axis at the position x_1 in the coordinate system shown in Fig. 2–5. At some later time, t_2, suppose the object has moved to position x_2. The displacement of our object is $x_2 - x_1$, and is represented by the arrow pointing to the right in Fig. 2–5. It is convenient to write

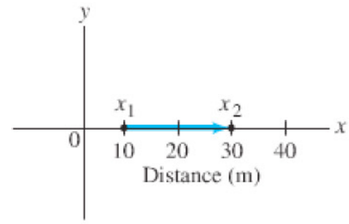


FIGURE 2–5 The arrow represents the displacement $x_2 - x_1$. Distances are in meters.

$$\Delta x = x_2 - x_1,$$

where the symbol Δ (Greek letter delta) means "change in." Then Δx means "the change in x," or "change in position," which is the displacement. Note that the "change in" any quantity means the final value of that quantity, minus the initial value.

Δ means final value minus initial value

Suppose $x_1 = 10.0\text{ m}$ and $x_2 = 30.0\text{ m}$. Then

$$\Delta x = x_2 - x_1 = 30.0\text{ m} - 10.0\text{ m} = 20.0\text{ m},$$

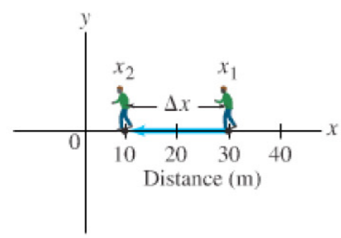
so the displacement is 20.0 m in the positive direction, as in Fig. 2–5.

Now consider an object moving to the left as shown in Fig. 2–6. Here the object, say, a person, starts at $x_1 = 30.0\text{ m}$ and walks to the left to the point $x_2 = 10.0\text{ m}$. In this case

$$\Delta x = x_2 - x_1 = 10.0\text{ m} - 30.0\text{ m} = -20.0\text{ m},$$

and the blue arrow representing the vector displacement points to the left. The displacement is 20.0 m in the negative direction. This example illustrates that for one-dimensional motion along the x axis, a vector pointing to the right has a positive sign, whereas a vector pointing to the left has a negative sign.

FIGURE 2–6 For the displacement $\Delta x = x_2 - x_1 = 10.0\text{ m} - 30.0\text{ m}$, the displacement vector points to the left.



2–2 Average Velocity

Consider a racing sprinter, a galloping horse, a speeding Ferrari, or a rocket shot off into space. The most obvious aspect of their motion is how fast they are moving, which brings us to the idea of speed and velocity.

The term "speed" refers to how far an object travels in a given time interval, regardless of direction. If a car travels 240 kilometers (km) in 3 hours (h), we say its average speed was 80 km/h. In general, the **average speed** of an object is defined as *the total distance traveled along its path divided by the time it takes to travel this distance*:

$$\text{average speed} = \frac{\text{distance traveled}}{\text{time elapsed}}. \quad \textbf{(2–1)}$$

Average speed

The terms "velocity" and "speed" are often used interchangeably in ordinary language. But in physics we make a distinction between the two. Speed is simply a positive number, with units. **Velocity**, on the other hand, is used to signify both the *magnitude* (numerical value) of how fast an object is moving and also the *direction* in which it is moving. (Velocity is therefore a vector.) There is a second difference between speed and velocity: namely, the **average velocity** is defined in terms of *displacement*, rather than total distance traveled:

Velocity

$$\text{average velocity} = \frac{\text{displacement}}{\text{time elapsed}} = \frac{\text{final position} - \text{initial position}}{\text{time elapsed}}.$$

Average velocity