Power Cycles

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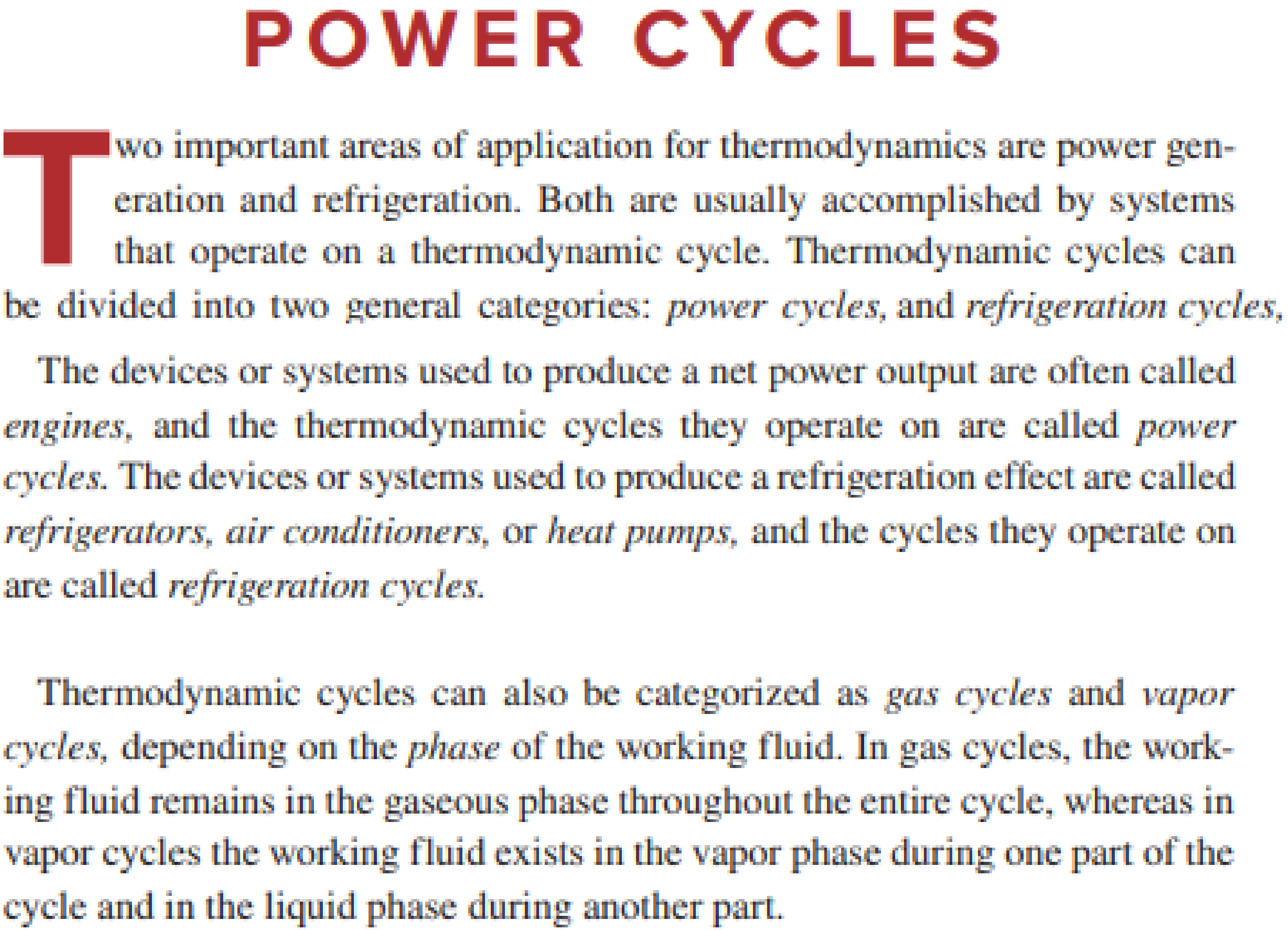
Chapter One

INTRODUCTION AND BASIC CONCEPTS



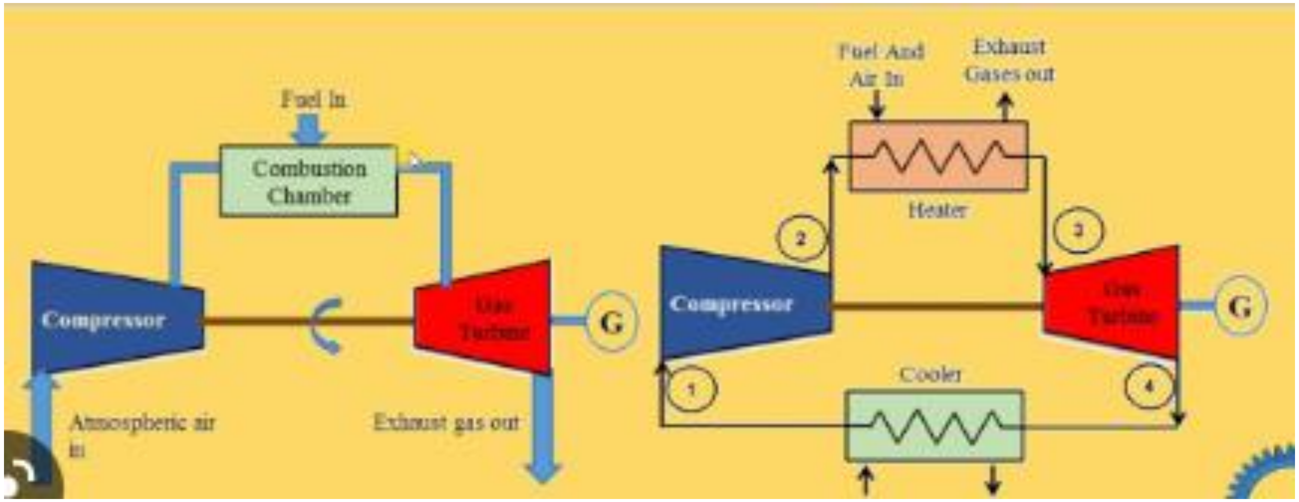
POWER CYCLES

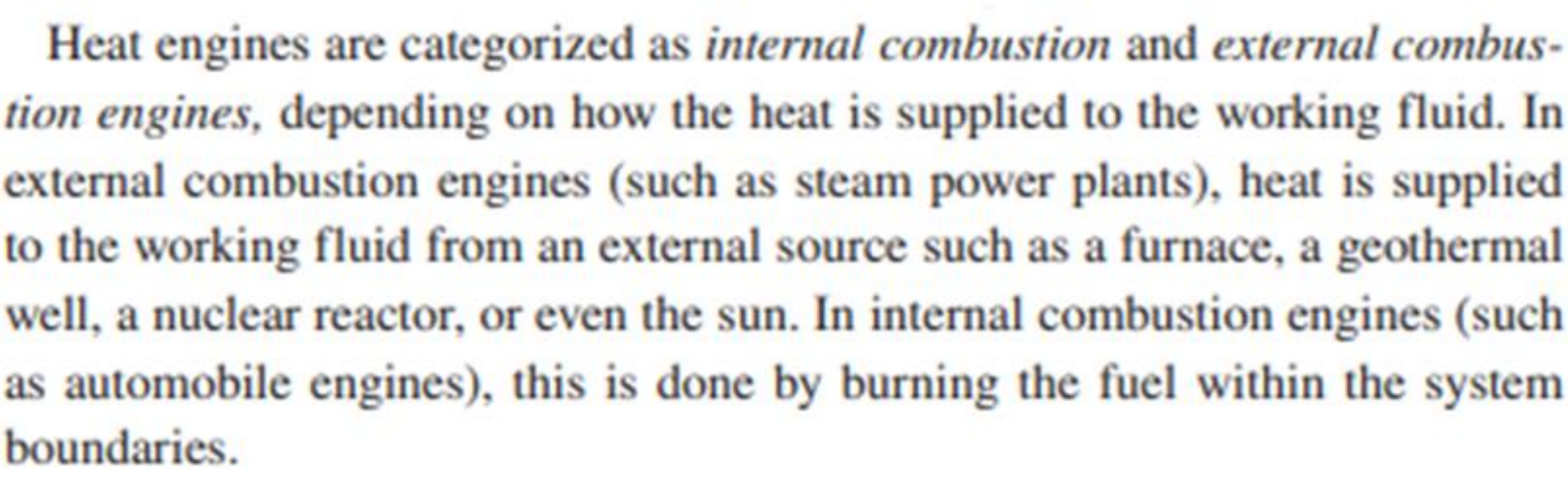
Two important areas of application for thermodynamics are power generation and refrigeration. Both are usually accomplished by systems that operate on a thermodynamic cycle. Thermodynamic cycles can be divided into two general categories: *power cycles*, and *refrigeration cycles*,

The devices or systems used to produce a net power output are often called *engines*, and the thermodynamic cycles they operate on are called *power cycles*. The devices or systems used to produce a refrigeration effect are called *refrigerators*, *air conditioners*, or *heat pumps*, and the cycles they operate on are called *refrigeration cycles*.

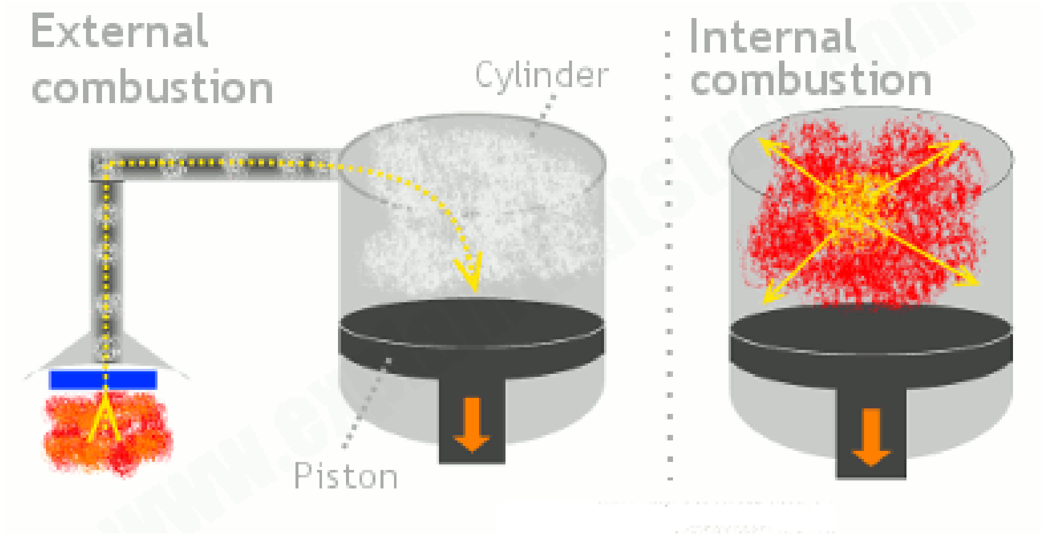
Thermodynamic cycles can also be categorized as *gas cycles* and *vapor cycles*, depending on the *phase* of the working fluid. In gas cycles, the working fluid remains in the gaseous phase throughout the entire cycle, whereas in vapor cycles the working fluid exists in the vapor phase during one part of the cycle and in the liquid phase during another part.

Thermodynamic cycles can be categorized yet another way: *closed* and *open cycles*. In closed cycles, the working fluid is returned to the initial state at the end of the cycle and is recirculated. In open cycles, the working fluid is renewed at the end of each cycle instead of being recirculated. In automobile engines, the combustion gases are exhausted and replaced by fresh air–fuel mixture at the end of each cycle. The engine operates on a mechanical cycle, but the working fluid does not go through a complete thermodynamic cycle.





Heat engines are categorized as *internal combustion* and *external combustion engines,* depending on how the heat is supplied to the working fluid. In external combustion engines (such as steam power plants), heat is supplied to the working fluid from an external source such as a furnace, a geothermal well, a nuclear reactor, or even the sun. In internal combustion engines (such as automobile engines), this is done by burning the fuel within the system boundaries.



BASIC CONSIDERATIONS IN THE ANALYSIS OF POWER CYCLES

Most power-producing devices operate on cycles, and the study of power cycles is an exciting and important part of thermodynamics. The cycles encountered in actual devices are difficult to analyze because of the presence of complicating effects, such as friction, and the absence of sufficient time for establishment of the equilibrium conditions during the cycle. To make an analytical study of a cycle feasible, we have to keep the complexities at a manageable level and utilize some idealizations (Fig. 9–1). When the actual cycle is stripped of all the internal irreversibilities and complexities, we end up with a cycle that resembles the actual cycle closely but is made up totally of internally reversible processes. Such a cycle is called an **ideal cycle**.

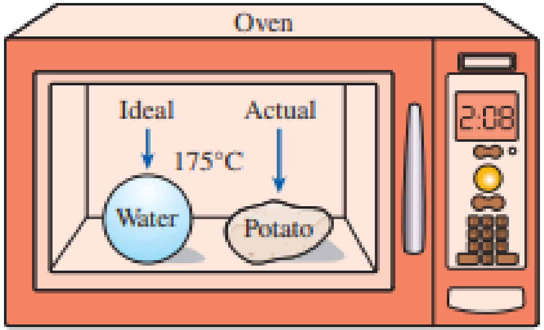


FIGURE 9–1
Modeling is a powerful engineering tool that provides great insight and simplicity at the expense of some loss in accuracy.

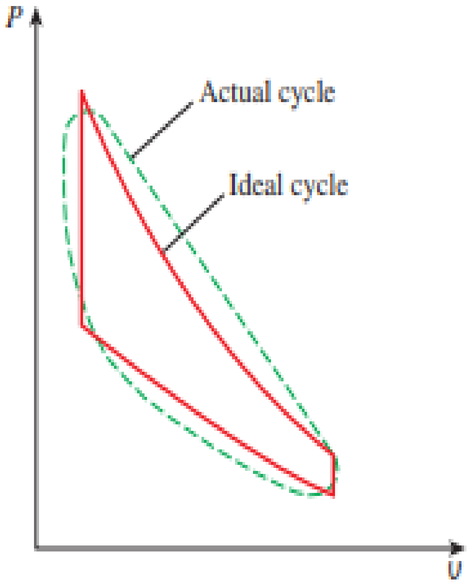


FIGURE 9–2

The analysis of many complex processes can be reduced to a manageable level by utilizing some idealizations.

A simple idealized model enables engineers to study the effects of the major parameters that dominate the cycle without getting bogged down in the details. The cycles discussed in this chapter are somewhat idealized, but they still retain the general characteristics of the actual cycles they represent. The conclusions reached from the analysis of ideal cycles are also applicable to actual cycles. The thermal efficiency of the Otto cycle, the ideal cycle for spark-ignition automobile engines, for example, increases with the compression ratio. This is also the case for actual automobile engines. The numerical values obtained from the analysis of an ideal cycle, however, are not necessarily representative of the actual cycles, and care should be exercised in their interpretation. The simplified analysis presented in this chapter for various power cycles of practical interest may also serve as the starting point for a more in-depth study.

Heat engines are designed for the purpose of converting thermal energy to work, and their performance is expressed in terms of the **thermal efficiency** η_{th}, which is the ratio of the net work produced by the engine to the total heat input:

$$\eta_{th} = \frac{W_{net}}{Q_{in}} \quad \text{or} \quad \eta_{th} = \frac{w_{net}}{q_{in}} \qquad (9\text{–}1)$$