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Definition 13.31

Let $R \subseteq \mathbb{R}^2$ be an open region in the plane, and $f: R \to \mathbb{R}$ be a function of two variables. For $(x_0, y_0) \in R$, f is said to be differentiable at (x_0, y_0) if $(f_x(x_0, y_0), f_y(x_0, y_0))$ both exist and

$$\lim_{(x,y)\to(x_0,y_0)} \frac{\left| f(x,y) - f(x_0,y_0) - (f_x(x_0,y_0), f_y(x_0,y_0)) \cdot (x - x_0, y - y_0) \right|}{\sqrt{(x - x_0)^2 + (y - y_0)^2}} = 0.$$

The ordered pair $(f_x(x_0, y_0), f_y(x_0, y_0))$ is called the derivative of f at (x_0, y_0) if f is differentiable at (x_0, y_0) and is usually denoted by $(Df)(x_0, y_0)$.

Let $R \subseteq \mathbb{R}^2$ be an open region in the plane, and $f: R \to \mathbb{R}$ be a function of two variables. For $(x_0, y_0) \in R$, f is said to be differentiable at (x_0, y_0) if $(f_x(x_0, y_0), f_y(x_0, y_0))$ both exist and there exist functions ε_1 and ε_2 such that

$$\Delta z = f_x(x_0, y_0) \Delta x + f_y(x_0, y_0) \Delta y + \varepsilon_1 \Delta x + \varepsilon_2 \Delta y,$$

where both ε_1 and ε_2 approaches 0 as $(x,y) \to (x_0,y_0)$.

• Differentiability of functions of several variables

A real-valued function f of n variables is differentiable at (a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n) if there exist n real numbers A_1, A_2, \dots, A_n such that

$$\lim_{(x_1,\dots,x_n)\to(a_1,\dots,a_n)} \frac{\left| f(x_1,\dots,x_n) - f(a_1,\dots,a_n) - (A_1,\dots,A_n) \cdot (x_1 - a_1,\dots,x_n - a_n) \right|}{\sqrt{(x_1 - a_1)^2 + \dots + (x_n - a_n)^2}} = 0.$$

We also note that when f is differentiable at (a_1, \dots, a_n) , then these numbers A_1, A_2, \dots, A_n must be $f_{x_1}(a_1, \dots, a_n), f_{x_2}(a_1, \dots, a_n), \dots, f_{x_n}(a_1, \dots, a_n)$, respectively.

Theorem 13.35

Let $R \subseteq \mathbb{R}^2$ be an open region in the plane, and $f: R \to \mathbb{R}$ be a function of two variables. If f_x and f_y are continuous in a neighborhood of $(x_0, y_0) \in R$, then f is differentiable at (x_0, y_0) . In particular, if f_x and f_y are continuous on R, then f is differentiable on R; that is, f is said to be differentiable at every point in R.

Theorem 13.36

Let $R \subseteq \mathbb{R}^2$ be an open region in the plane, and $f: R \to \mathbb{R}$ be a function of two variables. If f is differentiable at (x_0, y_0) , then f is continuous at (x_0, y_0) .

13.5 Chain Rules for Functions of Several Variables

Recall the chain rule for functions of one variable:

Let I, J be open intervals, $f: J \to \mathbb{R}$, $g: I \to \mathbb{R}$ be real-valued functions, and the range of g is contained in J. If g is differentiable at $c \in I$ and f is differentiable at g(c), then $f \circ g$ is differentiable at c and

$$\frac{d}{dx}\Big|_{x=c} (f \circ g)(x) = f'(g(c))g'(c).$$

For functions of two variables, we have the following

Theorem 13.37

Let z = f(x, y) be a differentiable function (of x and y). If x = g(t) and y = h(t) are differentiable functions (of t), then z(t) = f(x(t), y(t)) is differentiable and

$$z'(t) = f_x(x(t), y(t))x'(t) + f_y(x(t), y(t))y'(t).$$

Let $\gamma(t) = (x(t), y(t))$. Then $\gamma'(t) = (x'(t), y'(t))$, and the chain rule above can be written as

$$\frac{d}{dt}(f \circ \gamma)(t) = (Df)(\gamma(t)) \cdot \gamma'(t).$$

A short-hand notation of the identity above

$$\frac{dz}{dt} = \frac{\partial f}{\partial x}\frac{dx}{dt} + \frac{\partial f}{\partial y}\frac{dy}{dt} = (f_x, f_y) \cdot (x', y').$$

Corollary 13.38

Let z = f(x, y) be a differentiable function (of x and y).

1. If x = u(s,t) and y = v(s,t) are such that $\frac{\partial u}{\partial s}$ and $\frac{\partial v}{\partial s}$ exist, then the first partial derivative $\frac{\partial z}{\partial s}$ of the function z(s,t) = f(u(s,t),v(s,t)) exists and

$$z_s(s,t) = f_x(u(s,t), v(s,t))u_s(s,t) + f_y(u(s,t), v(s,t))v_s(s,t).$$

2. If x = u(s,t) and y = v(s,t) are such that $\frac{\partial u}{\partial t}$ and $\frac{\partial v}{\partial t}$ exist, then the first partial derivative $\frac{\partial z}{\partial t}$ of the function z(s,t) = f(u(s,t),v(s,t)) exists and

$$z_t(s,t) = f_x(u(s,t),v(s,t))u_t(s,t) + f_y(u(s,t),v(s,t))v_t(s,t)$$
.

Example 13.39. Let $f(x,y) = x^2y - y^2$. Find $\frac{dz}{dt}$, where $z(t) = f(\sin t, e^t)$.

1. Since $z(t) = e^t \sin^2 t - e^{2t}$, by the product rule and the chain rule for functions of one variable, we find that

$$z'(t) = \frac{de^t}{dt}\sin^2 t + e^t \frac{d\sin^2 t}{dt} - 2e^{2t} = e^t \sin^2 t + 2e^t \sin t \cos t - 2e^{2t}.$$

2. By the chain rule for functions of two variables,

$$z'(t) = (f_x(\sin t, e^t), f_y(\sin t, e^t)) \cdot \frac{d}{dt}(\sin t, e^t)$$
$$= (2xy, x^2 - 2y)\Big|_{(x,y) = (\sin t, e^t)} \cdot (\cos t, e^t)$$
$$= (2e^t \sin t, \sin^2 t - 2e^t) \cdot (\cos t, e^t)$$
$$= 2e^t \sin t \cos t + e^t \sin^2 t - 2e^{2t}.$$

Example 13.40. Let f(x,y) = 2xy. Find $\frac{\partial z}{\partial s}$ and $\frac{\partial z}{\partial t}$, where $z(s,t) = f\left(s^2 + t^2, \frac{s}{t}\right)$.

1. Since $z(s,t) = 2(s^2 + t^2)\frac{s}{t} = \frac{2s^3}{t} + 2st$, by the product rule we find that

$$\frac{\partial z}{\partial s}(s,t) = \frac{6s^2}{t} + 2t$$
 and $\frac{\partial z}{\partial t}(s,t) = -\frac{2s^3}{t^2} + 2s$.

2. By the chain rule for functions of two variables,

$$\frac{\partial z}{\partial s}(s,t) = \left(f_x(s^2 + t^2, s/t), f_y(s^2 + t^2, s/t)\right) \cdot \frac{\partial}{\partial s} \left(s^2 + t^2, \frac{s}{t}\right)$$
$$= \left(\frac{2s}{t}, 2(s^2 + t^2)\right) \cdot \left(2s, \frac{1}{t}\right) = \frac{4s^2}{t} + \frac{2s^2 + 2t^2}{t} = \frac{6s^2}{t} + 2t$$

and

$$\frac{\partial z}{\partial t}(s,t) = \left(f_x(s^2 + t^2, s/t), f_y(s^2 + t^2, s/t)\right) \cdot \frac{\partial}{\partial t} \left(s^2 + t^2, \frac{s}{t}\right)$$

$$= \left(\frac{2s}{t}, 2(s^2 + t^2)\right) \cdot \left(2t, -\frac{s}{t^2}\right) = 4s - \frac{2s^3 + 2st^2}{t^2} = -\frac{2s^3}{t^2} + 2s.$$

The chain rule for functions of several variables

Suppose that $w = f(x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n)$ be a differentiable function (of x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n). If each x_i is a differentiable function of m variables t_1, t_2, \dots, t_m , then

$$\frac{\partial w}{\partial t_{1}} = \frac{\partial w}{\partial x_{1}} \frac{\partial x_{1}}{\partial t_{1}} + \frac{\partial w}{\partial x_{2}} \frac{\partial x_{2}}{\partial t_{1}} + \dots + \frac{\partial w}{\partial x_{n}} \frac{\partial x_{n}}{\partial t_{1}} = \sum_{j=1}^{n} \frac{\partial w}{\partial x_{j}} \frac{\partial x_{j}}{\partial t_{1}},$$

$$\frac{\partial w}{\partial t_{2}} = \frac{\partial w}{\partial x_{1}} \frac{\partial x_{1}}{\partial t_{2}} + \frac{\partial w}{\partial x_{2}} \frac{\partial x_{2}}{\partial t_{2}} + \dots + \frac{\partial w}{\partial x_{n}} \frac{\partial x_{n}}{\partial t_{2}} = \sum_{j=1}^{n} \frac{\partial w}{\partial x_{j}} \frac{\partial x_{j}}{\partial t_{2}},$$

$$\vdots$$

$$\frac{\partial w}{\partial t_{m}} = \frac{\partial w}{\partial x_{1}} \frac{\partial x_{1}}{\partial t_{m}} + \frac{\partial w}{\partial x_{2}} \frac{\partial x_{2}}{\partial t_{m}} + \dots + \frac{\partial w}{\partial x_{n}} \frac{\partial x_{n}}{\partial t_{m}} = \sum_{j=1}^{n} \frac{\partial w}{\partial x_{j}} \frac{\partial x_{j}}{\partial t_{m}}.$$

Using the notation of the matrix multiplication,

$$\begin{bmatrix}
\frac{\partial w}{\partial t_1} & \frac{\partial w}{\partial t_2} & \cdots & \frac{\partial w}{\partial t_m}
\end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix}
\frac{\partial f}{\partial x_1} & \frac{\partial f}{\partial x_2} & \cdots & \frac{\partial f}{\partial x_n}
\end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix}
\frac{\partial x_1}{\partial t_1} & \frac{\partial x_1}{\partial t_2} & \cdots & \frac{\partial x_1}{\partial t_m} \\
\frac{\partial x_2}{\partial t_1} & \frac{\partial x_2}{\partial t_2} & \cdots & \frac{\partial x_2}{\partial t_m} \\
\vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\
\frac{\partial x_n}{\partial t_1} & \frac{\partial x_n}{\partial t_2} & \cdots & \frac{\partial x_n}{\partial t_m}
\end{bmatrix}.$$

• Implicit partial differentiation

In Section 2.4 we have talked about finding derivatives of a function y = f(x) which is defined implicitly by F(x,y) = 0 (when F is giving explicitly). Now suppose that z = F(x,y) is a differentiable function and the relation F(x,y) = 0 defines a differentiable function y = f(x) implicitly (so that F(x, f(x)) = 0). By the chain rule,

$$0 = \frac{d}{dx}F(x, f(x)) = F_x(x, f(x)) + F_y(x, f(x))f'(x)$$

which implies that

$$f'(x) = -\frac{F_x(x, f(x))}{F_y(x, f(x))}$$
 if $F_y(x, f(x)) \neq 0$.

Since f is in general unknown (but exists), we usually write the identity above as

$$\frac{dy}{dx} = -\frac{F_x(x,y)}{F_y(x,y)} \quad \text{if } F(x,y) = 0 \text{ and } F_y(x,y) \neq 0.$$

In fact, when F_x and F_y are continuous in an open region R, and F(a,b) = 0 and $F_y(a,b) \neq 0$ at some point $(a,b) \in R$, the relation F(x,y) = 0 defines a function y = f(x) implicitly near (a,b) and f is continuously differentiable near x = a. This is the Implicit Function Theorem and the precise statement is stated as follows.

Theorem 13.41: Implicit Function Theorem (Special case)

Let $R \subseteq \mathbb{R}^2$ be an open region in the plane, and $F: R \to \mathbb{R}$ be a function of two variables such that F_x and F_y are continuous in a neighborhood of $(a,b) \in R$. If F(a,b) = 0 and $F_y(a,b) = 0$, then there exists $\delta > 0$ and a unique continuous function $f: (a-\delta, a+\delta) \to \mathbb{R}$ satisfying F(x, f(x)) = 0 for all $x \in (a-\delta, a+\delta)$, and b = f(a). Moreover, f is differentiable on $(a-\delta, a+\delta)$, and

$$f'(x) = -\frac{F_x(x, f(x))}{F_y(x, f(x))} \qquad \forall x \in (a - \delta, a + \delta).$$

In general, let F be a function of n variables (x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n) such that $F_{x_1}, F_{x_2}, \dots, F_{x_n}$ are continuous in a neighborhood of (a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n) . If $F(a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n) = 0$ and $F_{x_n}(a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n) \neq 0$, then locally near (a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n) there exists a unique continuous function f satisfying $F(x_1, \dots, x_{n-1}, f(x_1, \dots, x_{n-1})) = 0$ and $a_n = f(a_1, \dots, a_{n-1})$. Moreover, for $1 \leq j \leq n-1$,

$$\frac{\partial f}{\partial x_j}(x_1, \dots, x_{n-1}) = -\frac{F_{x_j}(x_1, \dots, x_{n-1}, f(x_1, \dots, x_{n-1}))}{F_{x_n}(x_1, \dots, x_{n-1}, f(x_1, \dots, x_{n-1}))}.$$