13.1 Vector Functions and Space Curves

In general, a function is a rule that assigns to each element in the domain an ele the range. A **vector-valued function**, or **vector function**, is simply a functio domain is a set of real numbers and whose range is a set of vectors. We are mo ested in vector functions **r** whose values are three-dimensional vectors. This m for every number t in the domain of **r** there is a unique vector in V_3 denoted b $f(t)$, $g(t)$, and $h(t)$ are the components of the vector $\mathbf{r}(t)$, then f, g, and h are rea functions called the **component functions** of **r** and we can write

$$\mathbf{r}(t) = \langle f(t), g(t), h(t) \rangle = f(t)\,\mathbf{i} + g(t)\,\mathbf{j} + h(t)\,\mathbf{k}$$

We use the letter t to denote the independent variable because it represents time applications of vector functions.

EXAMPLE 1 If

$$\mathbf{r}(t) = \left\langle t^3, \ln(3 - t), \sqrt{t} \right\rangle$$

then the component functions are

$$f(t) = t^3 \qquad g(t) = \ln(3 - t) \qquad h(t) = \sqrt{t}$$

By our usual convention, the domain of **r** consists of all values of t for which th sion for $\mathbf{r}(t)$ is defined. The expressions t^3, $\ln(3 - t)$, and $\sqrt{t}$ are all defined wh $3 - t > 0$ and $t \geq 0$. Therefore the domain of **r** is the interval $[0, 3)$.

■ Limits and Continuity

The **limit** of a vector function **r** is defined by taking the limits of its componen as follows.

If $\lim_{t \to a} \mathbf{r}(t) = \mathbf{L}$, this definition is equivalent to saying that the length and direction of the vector $\mathbf{r}(t)$ approach the length and direction of the vector **L**.

1 If $\mathbf{r}(t) = \langle f(t), g(t), h(t) \rangle$, then

$$\lim_{t \to a} \mathbf{r}(t) = \left\langle \lim_{t \to a} f(t), \lim_{t \to a} g(t), \lim_{t \to a} h(t) \right\rangle$$

provided the limits of the component functions exist.

Equivalently, we could have used an ε-δ definition (see Exercise 54). Limi functions obey the same rules as limits of real-valued functions (see Exercis

EXAMPLE 2 Find $\lim_{t \to 0} \mathbf{r}(t)$, where $\mathbf{r}(t) = (1 + t^3)\,\mathbf{i} + te^{-t}\,\mathbf{j} + \dfrac{\sin t}{t}\,\mathbf{k}$.

SOLUTION According to Definition 1, the limit of **r** is the vector whose com the limits of the component functions of **r**:

$$\lim_{t \to 0} \mathbf{r}(t) = \left[\lim_{t \to 0} (1 + t^3)\right]\mathbf{i} + \left[\lim_{t \to 0} te^{-t}\right]\mathbf{j} + \left[\lim_{t \to 0} \frac{\sin t}{t}\right]\mathbf{k}$$

$$= \mathbf{i} + \mathbf{k} \qquad \text{(by Equation 3.3.2)}$$

A vector function $\mathbf{r}$ is **continuous at a** if

$$\lim_{t \to a} \mathbf{r}(t) = \mathbf{r}(a)$$

In view of Definition 1, we see that $\mathbf{r}$ is continuous at a if and only if its component functions f, g, and h are continuous at a.

Space Curves

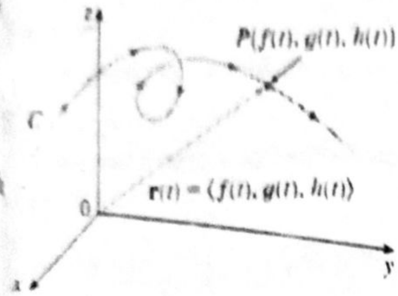

FIGURE 1
C is traced out by the tip of a moving position vector $\mathbf{r}(t)$.

There is a close connection between continuous vector functions and space curves. Suppose that f, g, and h are continuous real-valued functions on an interval I. Then the set C of all points (x, y, z) in space, where

$$\boxed{2} \qquad x = f(t) \qquad y = g(t) \qquad z = h(t)$$

and t varies throughout the interval I, is called a **space curve**. The equations in (2) are called **parametric equations of C** and t is called a **parameter**. We can think of C as being traced out by a moving particle whose position at time t is $(f(t), g(t), h(t))$. If we now consider the vector function $\mathbf{r}(t) = \langle f(t), g(t), h(t)\rangle$, then $\mathbf{r}(t)$ is the position vector of the point $P(f(t), g(t), h(t))$ on C. Thus any continuous vector function $\mathbf{r}$ defines a space curve C that is traced out by the tip of the moving vector $\mathbf{r}(t)$, as shown in Figure 1.

EXAMPLE 3 Describe the curve defined by the vector function

$$\mathbf{r}(t) = \langle 1 + t, 2 + 5t, -1 + 6t\rangle$$

TEC Visual 13.1A shows several curves being traced out by position vectors, including those in Figures 1 and 2.

SOLUTION The corresponding parametric equations are

$$x = 1 + t \qquad y = 2 + 5t \qquad z = -1 + 6t$$

which we recognize from Equations 12.5.2 as parametric equations of a line passing through the point $(1, 2, -1)$ and parallel to the vector $\langle 1, 5, 6\rangle$. Alternatively, we could observe that the function can be written as $\mathbf{r} = \mathbf{r}_0 + t\mathbf{v}$, where $\mathbf{r}_0 = \langle 1, 2, -1\rangle$ and $\mathbf{v} = \langle 1, 5, 6\rangle$, and this is the vector equation of a line as given by Equation 12.5.1. ■

Plane curves can also be represented in vector notation. For instance, the curve given by the parametric equations $x = t^2 - 2t$ and $y = t + 1$ (see Example 10.1.1) could also be described by the vector equation

$$\mathbf{r}(t) = \langle t^2 - 2t, t + 1\rangle = (t^2 - 2t)\,\mathbf{i} + (t + 1)\,\mathbf{j}$$

where $\mathbf{i} = \langle 1, 0\rangle$ and $\mathbf{j} = \langle 0, 1\rangle$.

EXAMPLE 4 Sketch the curve whose vector equation is

$$\mathbf{r}(t) = \cos t\,\mathbf{i} + \sin t\,\mathbf{j} + t\,\mathbf{k}$$

SOLUTION The parametric equations for this curve are

$$x = \cos t \qquad y = \sin t \qquad z = t$$

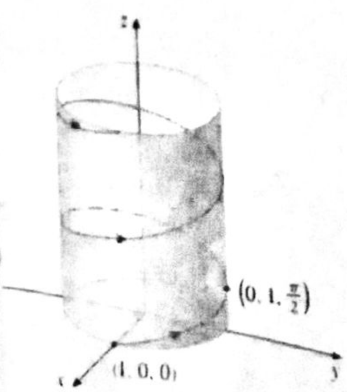

FIGURE 2

Since $x^2 + y^2 = \cos^2 t + \sin^2 t = 1$ for all values of t, the curve must lie on the circular cylinder $x^2 + y^2 = 1$. The point (x, y, z) lies directly above the point $(x, y, 0)$, which moves counterclockwise around the circle $x^2 + y^2 = 1$ in the xy-plane. (The projection of the curve onto the xy-plane has vector equation $\mathbf{r}(t) = \langle \cos t, \sin t, 0\rangle$. See Example 10.1.2.) Since $z = t$, the curve spirals upward around the cylinder as t increases. The curve, shown in Figure 2, is called a **helix**. ■

FIGURE 3
A double helix

The corkscrew shape of the helix in Example 4 is familiar from its occurr coiled springs. It also occurs in the model of DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid, the material of living cells). In 1953 James Watson and Francis Crick showed that the ture of the DNA molecule is that of two linked, parallel helixes that are intertwine Figure 3.

In Examples 3 and 4 we were given vector equations of curves and asked for metric description or sketch. In the next two examples we are given a geometric de tion of a curve and are asked to find parametric equations for the curve.

Figure 4 shows the line segment PQ in Example 5.

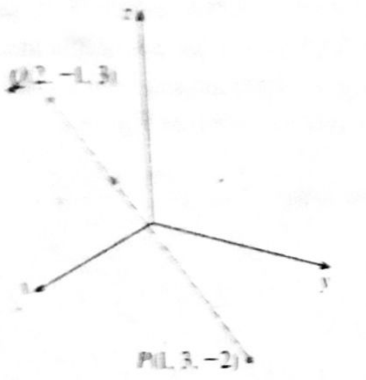

FIGURE 4

EXAMPLE 5 Find a vector equation and parametric equations for the line segme joins the point $P(1, 3, -2)$ to the point $Q(2, -1, 3)$.

SOLUTION In Section 12.5 we found a vector equation for the line segment that j the tip of the vector $\mathbf{r}_0$ to the tip of the vector $\mathbf{r}_1$:

$$\mathbf{r}(t) = (1 - t)\mathbf{r}_0 + t\mathbf{r}_1 \qquad 0 \leqslant t \leqslant 1$$

(See Equation 12.5.4.) Here we take $\mathbf{r}_0 = \langle 1, 3, -2 \rangle$ and $\mathbf{r}_1 = \langle 2, -1, 3 \rangle$ to obta vector equation of the line segment from P to Q:

$$\mathbf{r}(t) = (1 - t)\langle 1, 3, -2 \rangle + t\langle 2, -1, 3 \rangle \qquad 0 \leqslant t \leqslant 1$$

or

$$\mathbf{r}(t) = \langle 1 + t, 3 - 4t, -2 + 5t \rangle \qquad 0 \leqslant t \leqslant 1$$

The corresponding parametric equations are

$$x = 1 + t \qquad y = 3 - 4t \qquad z = -2 + 5t \qquad 0 \leqslant t \leqslant 1$$

EXAMPLE 6 Find a vector function that represents the curve of intersection of th cylinder $x^2 + y^2 = 1$ and the plane $y + z = 2$.

SOLUTION Figure 5 shows how the plane and the cylinder intersect, and Figure shows the curve of intersection C, which is an ellipse.

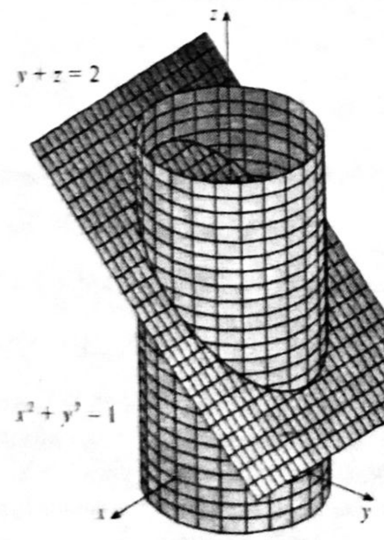

FIGURE 5

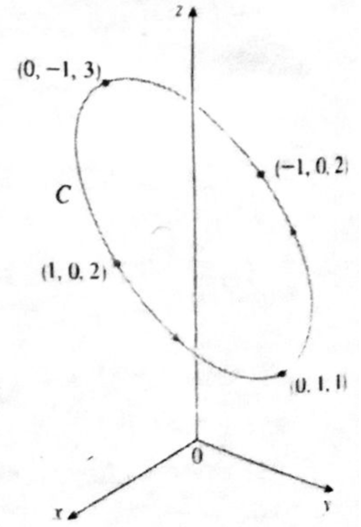

FIGURE 6

The projection of C onto the xy-plane is the circle $x^2 + y^2 = 1$, $z = 0$. So we know from Example 10.1.2 that we can write

$$x = \cos t \qquad y = \sin t \qquad 0 \leqslant t \leqslant 2\pi$$

From the equation of the plane, we have

$$z = 2 - y = 2 - \sin t$$

So we can write parametric equations for C as

$$x = \cos t \qquad y = \sin t \qquad z = 2 - \sin t \qquad 0 \leqslant t \leqslant 2\pi$$

The corresponding vector equation is

$$\mathbf{r}(t) = \cos t\,\mathbf{i} + \sin t\,\mathbf{j} + (2 - \sin t)\,\mathbf{k} \qquad 0 \leqslant t \leqslant 2\pi$$

This equation is called a *parametrization* of the curve C. The arrows in Figure 6 indicate the direction in which C is traced as the parameter t increases. ■

Using Computers to Draw Space Curves

Space curves are inherently more difficult to draw by hand than plane curves; for an accurate representation we need to use technology. For instance, Figure 7 shows a computer-generated graph of the curve with parametric equations

$$x = (4 + \sin 20t)\cos t \qquad y = (4 + \sin 20t)\sin t \qquad z = \cos 20t$$

It's called a **toroidal spiral** because it lies on a torus. Another interesting curve, the **trefoil knot**, with equations

$$x = (2 + \cos 1.5t)\cos t \qquad y = (2 + \cos 1.5t)\sin t \qquad z = \sin 1.5t$$

is graphed in Figure 8. It wouldn't be easy to plot either of these curves by hand.

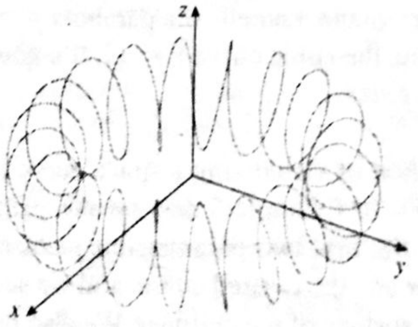

FIGURE 7
A toroidal spiral

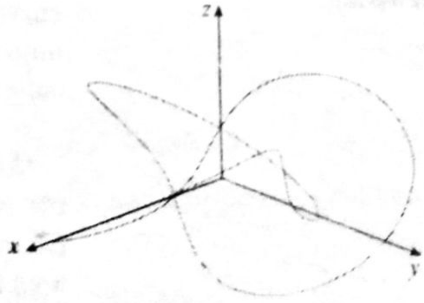

FIGURE 8
A trefoil knot

Even when a computer is used to draw a space curve, optical illusions make it difficult to get a good impression of what the curve really looks like. (This is especially true in Figure 8. See Exercise 52.) The next example shows how to cope with this problem.

EXAMPLE 7 Use a computer to draw the curve with vector equation $\mathbf{r}(t) = \langle t, t^2, t^3 \rangle$. This curve is called a **twisted cubic**.

SOLUTION We start by using the computer to plot the curve with parametric equations $x = t$, $y = t^2$, $z = t^3$ for $-2 \leqslant t \leqslant 2$. The result is shown in Figure 9(a), but it's hard to see the true nature of the curve from that graph alone. Most three-dimensional