Subject: Calculus 1
Chapter: 2

Section: 2.1

Topic: Rate of change and Limits

Average Rates of Change and Secant Lines

Given an arbitrary function $y = f(x)$, we calculate the average rate of change of y with respect to x over the interval $[x_1, x_2]$ by dividing the change in the value of y, $\Delta y = f(x_2) - f(x_1)$, by the length $\Delta x = x_2 - x_1 = h$ of the interval over which the change occurs.

DEFINITION **Average Rate of Change over an Interval**

The **average rate of change** of $y = f(x)$ with respect to x over the interval $[x_1, x_2]$ is

$$\frac{\Delta y}{\Delta x} = \frac{f(x_2) - f(x_1)}{x_2 - x_1} = \frac{f(x_1 + h) - f(x_1)}{h}, \qquad h \neq 0.$$

Geometrically, the rate of change of f over $[x_1, x_2]$ is the slope of the line through the points $P(x_1, f(x_1))$ and $Q(x_2, f(x_2))$ (Figure 2.1). In geometry, a line joining two points of a curve is a **secant** to the curve. Thus, the average rate of change of f from x_1 to x_2 is identical with the slope of secant PQ.

Experimental biologists often want to know the rates at which populations grow under controlled laboratory conditions.

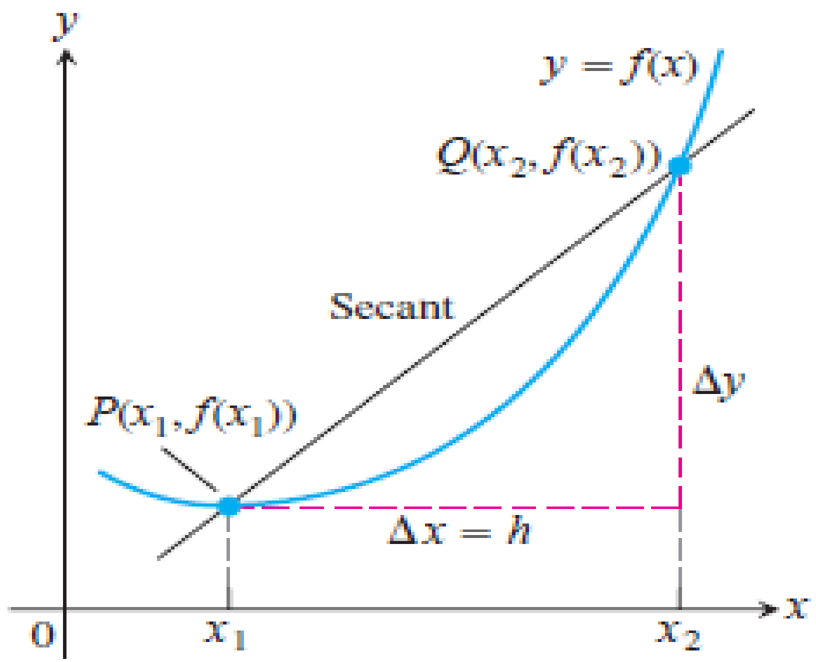


FIGURE 2.1 A secant to the graph $y = f(x)$. Its slope is $\Delta y / \Delta x$, the average rate of change of f over the interval $[x_1, x_2]$.

EXAMPLE 1 Finding an Average Speed

A rock breaks loose from the top of a tall cliff. What is its average speed

(a) during the first 2 sec of fall?

(b) during the 1-sec interval between second 1 and second 2?

$$y = 16t^2,$$ → function

where 16 is the constant of proportionality.

The average speed of the rock during a given time interval is the change in distance, Δy, divided by the length of the time interval, Δt.

(a) For the first 2 sec: $\dfrac{\Delta y}{\Delta t} = \dfrac{16(2)^2 - 16(0)^2}{2 - 0} = 32\,\dfrac{\text{ft}}{\text{sec}}$

(b) From sec 1 to sec 2: $\dfrac{\Delta y}{\Delta t} = \dfrac{16(2)^2 - 16(1)^2}{2 - 1} = 48\,\dfrac{\text{ft}}{\text{sec}}$ ■

Limits of Function Values

Our examples have suggested the limit idea. Let's begin with an informal definition of limit, postponing the precise definition until we've gained more insight.

Let $f(x)$ be defined on an open interval about x_0, *except possibly at* x_0 *itself*. If $f(x)$ gets arbitrarily close to L (as close to L as we like) for all x sufficiently close to x_0, we say that f approaches the **limit** L as x approaches x_0, and we write

$$\lim_{x \to x_0} f(x) = L,$$

which is read "the limit of $f(x)$ as x approaches x_0 is L". Essentially, the definition says that the values of $f(x)$ are close to the number L whenever x is close to x_0 (on either side of x_0). This definition is "informal" because phrases like *arbitrarily close* and *sufficiently close* are imprecise; their meaning depends on the context. To a machinist manufacturing a piston, *close* may mean *within a few thousandths of an inch*. To an astronomer studying distant galaxies, *close* may mean *within a few thousand light-years*. The definition is clear enough, however, to enable us to recognize and evaluate limits of specific functions. We will need the precise definition of Section 2.3, however, when we set out to prove theorems about limits.

EXAMPLE 5 Behavior of a Function Near a Point

How does the function

$$f(x) = \frac{x^2 - 1}{x - 1}$$

behave near $x = 1$?

Solution The given formula defines f for all real numbers x except $x = 1$ (we cannot divide by zero). For any $x \neq 1$, we can simplify the formula by factoring the numerator and canceling common factors:

$$f(x) = \frac{(x - 1)(x + 1)}{x - 1} = x + 1 \qquad \text{for} \qquad x \neq 1.$$

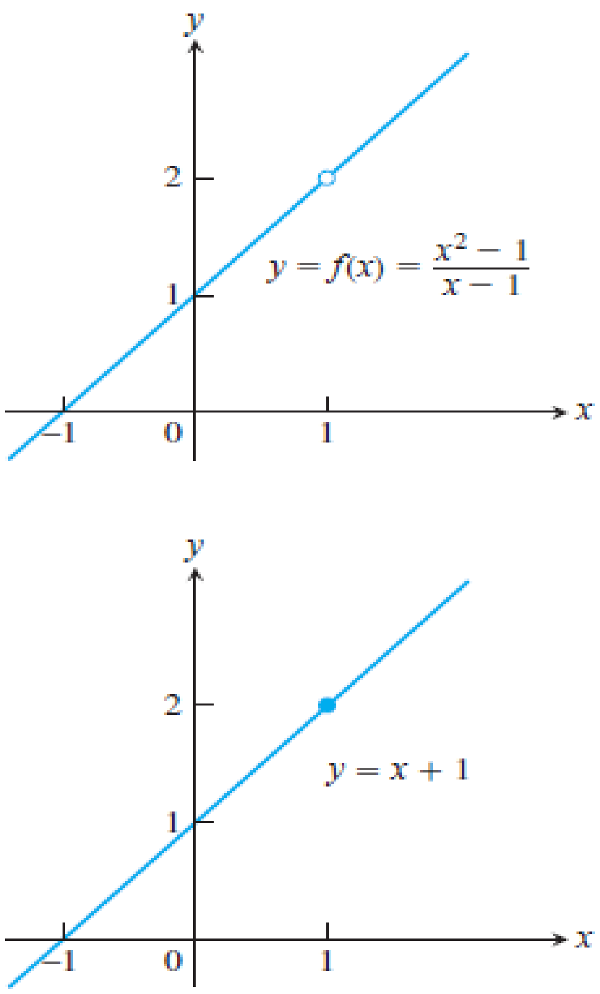


FIGURE 2.4 The graph of f is identical with the line $y = x + 1$ except at $x = 1$, where f is not defined (Example 5).

The graph of f is thus the line $y = x + 1$ with the point (1, 2) *removed*. This removed point is shown as a "hole" in Figure 2.4. Even though $f(1)$ is not defined, it is clear that we can make the value of $f(x)$ *as close as we want* to 2 by choosing x *close enough* to 1 (Table 2.2).

TABLE 2.2 The closer x gets to 1, the closer $f(x) = (x^2 - 1)/(x - 1)$ seems to get to 2

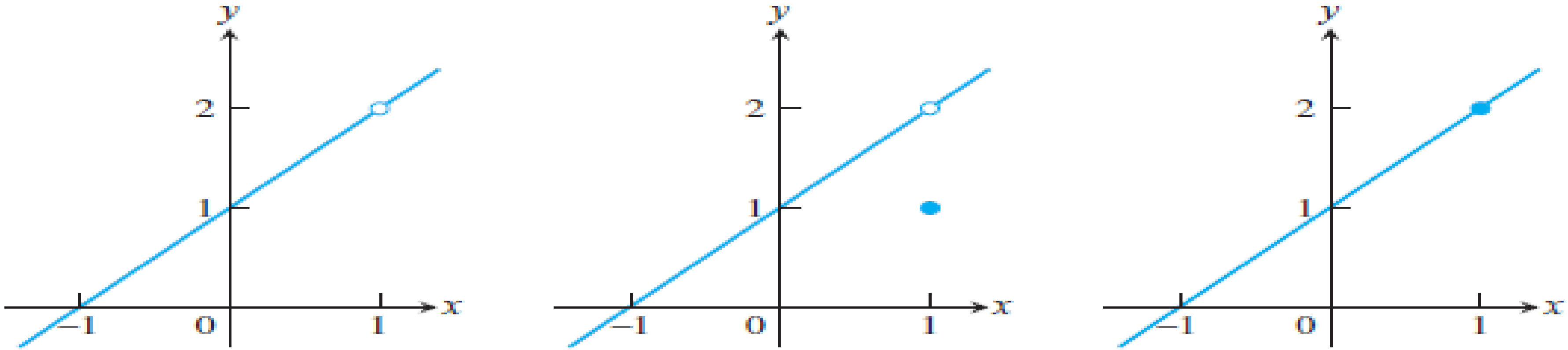
Values of x below and above 1	$f(x) = \frac{x^2 - 1}{x - 1} = x + 1, \quad x \neq 1$
0.9	1.9
1.1	2.1
0.99	1.99
1.01	2.01
0.999	1.999
1.001	2.001
0.999999	1.999999
1.000001	2.000001

We say that $f(x)$ approaches the *limit* 2 as x approaches 1, and write

$$\lim_{x \to 1} f(x) = 2, \qquad \text{or} \qquad \lim_{x \to 1} \frac{x^2 - 1}{x - 1} = 2.$$

EXAMPLE 6 The Limit Value Does Not Depend on How the Function Is Defined at x_0

The function f in Figure 2.5 has limit 2 as $x \longrightarrow 1$ even though f is not defined at $x = 1$. The function g has limit 2 as $x \longrightarrow 1$ even though $2 \neq g(1)$. The function h is the only one



(a) $f(x) = \dfrac{x^2 - 1}{x - 1}$ (b) $g(x) = \begin{cases} \dfrac{x^2-1}{x-1}, & x \neq 1 \\ 1, & x = 1 \end{cases}$ (c) $h(x) = x + 1$

FIGURE 2.5 The limits of $f(x)$, $g(x)$, and $h(x)$ all equal 2 as x approaches 1. However, only $h(x)$ has the same function value as its limit at $x = 1$ (Example 6).

whose limit as $x \to 1$ equals its value at $x = 1$. For h, we have $\lim_{x \to 1} h(x) = h(1)$. This equality of limit and function value is special, and we return to it in Section 2.6. ■

Sometimes $\lim_{x \to x_0} f(x)$ can be evaluated by calculating $f(x_0)$. This holds, for example, whenever $f(x)$ is an algebraic combination of polynomials and trigonometric functions for which $f(x_0)$ is defined. (We will say more about this in Sections 2.2 and 2.6.)

EXAMPLE 7 Finding Limits by Calculating $f(x_0)$

(a) $\lim_{x \to 2} (4) = 4$

(b) $\lim_{x \to -13} (4) = 4$

(c) $\lim_{x \to 3} x = 3$

(d) $\lim_{x \to 2} (5x - 3) = 10 - 3 = 7$

(e) $\lim_{x \to -2} \dfrac{3x + 4}{x + 5} = \dfrac{-6 + 4}{-2 + 5} = -\dfrac{2}{3}$ ■

EXAMPLE 8 The Identity and Constant Functions Have Limits at Every Point

(a) If f is the **identity function** $f(x) = x$, then for any value of x_0 (Figure 2.6a),

$$\lim_{x \to x_0} f(x) = \lim_{x \to x_0} x = x_0.$$

(b) If f is the **constant function** $f(x) = k$ (function with the constant value k), then for any value of x_0 (Figure 2.6b),

$$\lim_{x \to x_0} f(x) = \lim_{x \to x_0} k = k.$$

For instance,

$$\lim_{x \to 3} x = 3 \qquad \text{and} \qquad \lim_{x \to -7} (4) = \lim_{x \to 2} (4) = 4.$$

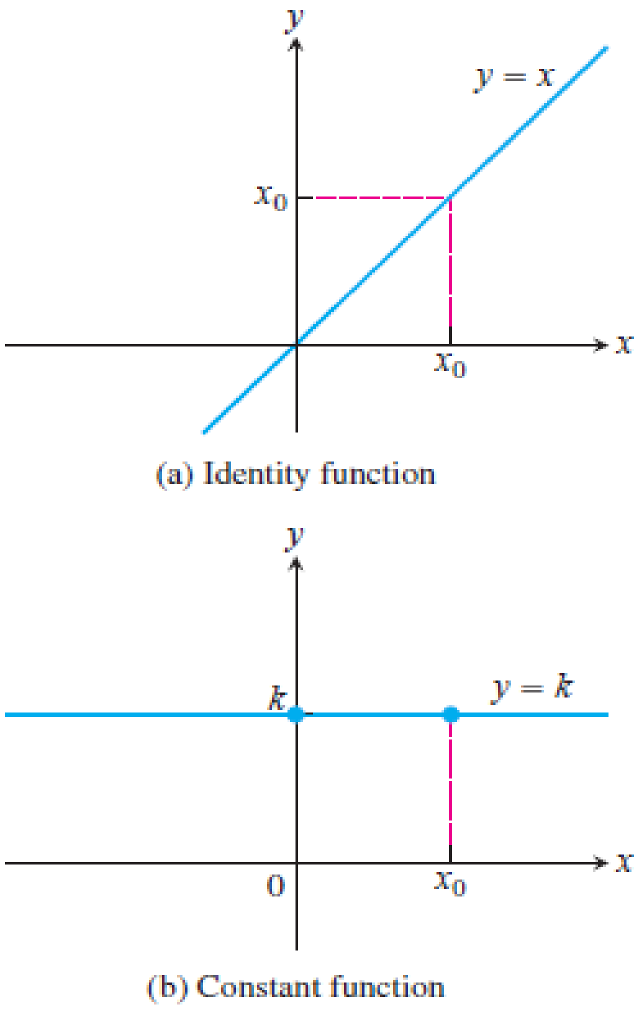


FIGURE 2.6 The functions in Example 8.

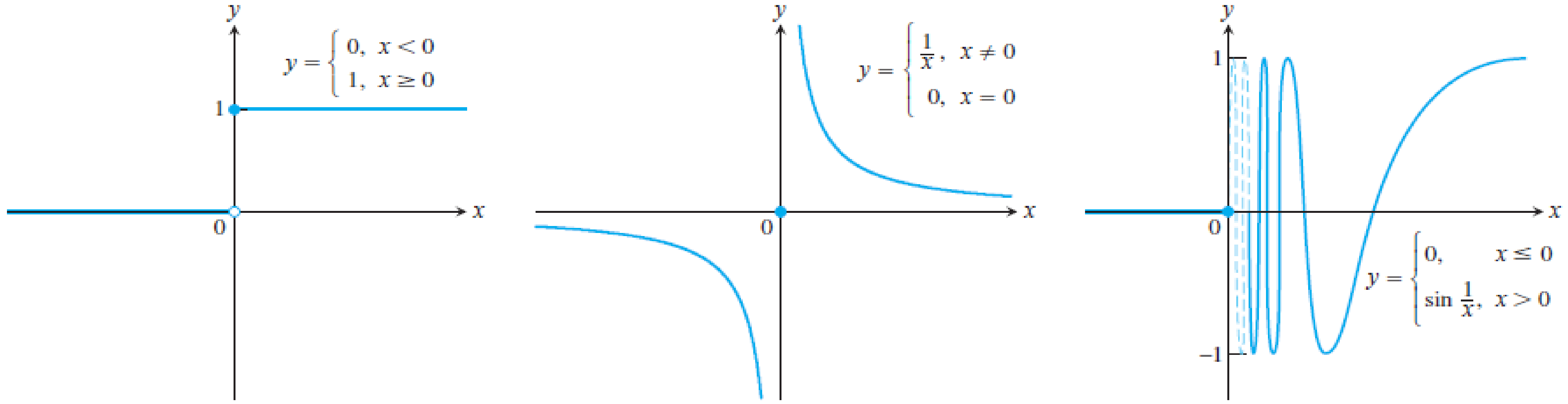
EXAMPLE 9 **A Function May Fail to Have a Limit at a Point in Its Domain**

Discuss the behavior of the following functions as $x \longrightarrow 0$.

(a) $U(x) = \begin{cases} 0, & x < 0 \\ 1, & x \geq 0 \end{cases}$

(b) $g(x) = \begin{cases} \dfrac{1}{x}, & x \neq 0 \\ 0, & x = 0 \end{cases}$

(c) $f(x) = \begin{cases} 0, & x \leq 0 \\ \sin \dfrac{1}{x}, & x > 0 \end{cases}$



(a) Unit step function $U(x)$ (b) $g(x)$ (c) $f(x)$

FIGURE 2.7 None of these functions has a limit as x approaches 0 (Example 9).

Solution

(a) It *jumps:* The **unit step function** $U(x)$ has no limit as $x \to 0$ because its values jump at $x = 0$. For negative values of x arbitrarily close to zero, $U(x) = 0$. For positive values of x arbitrarily close to zero, $U(x) = 1$. There is no *single* value L approached by $U(x)$ as $x \to 0$ (Figure 2.7a).

(b) It *grows too large to have a limit*: $g(x)$ has no limit as $x \to 0$ because the values of g grow arbitrarily large in absolute value as $x \to 0$ and do not stay close to *any* real number (Figure 2.7b).

(c) It *oscillates too much to have a limit*: $f(x)$ has no limit as $x \to 0$ because the function's values oscillate between $+1$ and -1 in every open interval containing 0. The values do not stay close to any one number as $x \to 0$ (Figure 2.7c). ■

Limits by Substitution

In Exercises 21–28, find the limits by substitution. *Support your answers with a computer or calculator if available.*

21. $\lim_{x \to 2} 2x$

22. $\lim_{x \to 0} 2x$

23. $\lim_{x \to 1/3} (3x - 1)$

24. $\lim_{x \to 1} \dfrac{-1}{(3x - 1)}$

25. $\lim_{x \to -1} 3x(2x - 1)$

26. $\lim_{x \to -1} \dfrac{3x^2}{2x - 1}$

27. $\lim_{x \to \pi/2} x \sin x$

28. $\lim_{x \to \pi} \dfrac{\cos x}{1 - \pi}$

Average Rates of Change

In Exercises 29–34, find the average rate of change of the function over the given interval or intervals.

29. $f(x) = x^3 + 1$;

a. $[2, 3]$ **b.** $[-1, 1]$

30. $g(x) = x^2$;

a. $[-1, 1]$ **b.** $[-2, 0]$

31. $h(t) = \cot t$;

a. $[\pi/4, 3\pi/4]$ **b.** $[\pi/6, \pi/2]$

32. $g(t) = 2 + \cos t$;

a. $[0, \pi]$ **b.** $[-\pi, \pi]$

33. $R(\theta) = \sqrt{4\theta + 1}$; $[0, 2]$

34. $P(\theta) = \theta^3 - 4\theta^2 + 5\theta$; $[1, 2]$