4.1 Numerical Differentiation

The derivative of the function f at x_0 is

$$f'(x_0) = \lim_{h \to 0} \frac{f(x_0 + h) - f(x_0)}{h}.$$

This formula gives an obvious way to generate an approximation to $f'(x_0)$; simply compute

$$\boxed{f'(x) \approx \frac{f(x_0 + h) - f(x_0)}{h}.}$$

Example 1 Use the forward-difference formula to approximate the derivative of $f(x) = \ln x$ at $x_0 = 1.8$ using $h = 0.1$, $h = 0.05$, and $h = 0.01$, and determine bounds for the approximation errors.

Solution The forward-difference formula

$$\frac{f(1.8 + h) - f(1.8)}{h}$$

with $h = 0.1$ gives

$$\frac{\ln 1.9 - \ln 1.8}{0.1} = \frac{0.64185389 - 0.58778667}{0.1} = 0.5406722.$$

Bound for approximation error:

$$\boxed{f'(x_0) = \frac{f(x_0+h) - f(x_0)}{h} - \frac{h}{2} f''(\xi).}$$

For small values of h, the difference quotient $[f(x_0+h) - f(x_0)]/h$ can be used to approximate $f'(x_0)$ with an error bounded by $M|h|/2$, where M is a bound on $|f''(x)|$ for x between x_0 and $x_0 + h$. This formula is known as the **forward-difference formula** if $h > 0$ (see Figure 4.1) and the **backward-difference formula** if $h < 0$.

Because $f''(x) = -1/x^2$ and $1.8 < \xi < 1.9$, a bound for this approximation error is

$$\frac{|hf''(\xi)|}{2} = \frac{|h|}{2\xi^2} < \frac{0.1}{2(1.8)^2} = 0.0154321.$$

The approximation and error bounds when $h = 0.05$ and $h = 0.01$ are found in a similar manner and the results are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

h	$f(1.8+h)$	$\dfrac{f(1.8+h) - f(1.8)}{h}$	$\dfrac{\lvert h \rvert}{2(1.8)^2}$
0.1	0.64185389	0.5406722	0.0154321
0.05	0.61518564	0.5479795	0.0077160
0.01	0.59332685	0.5540180	0.0015432

Since $f'(x) = 1/x$, the exact value of $f'(1.8)$ is $0.55\overline{5}$, and in this case the error bounds are quite close to the true approximation error. ■

Three-Point Formulas

Three-Point Endpoint Formula

- $$f'(x_0) = \frac{1}{2h}[-3f(x_0) + 4f(x_0 + h) - f(x_0 + 2h)] + \frac{h^2}{3}f^{(3)}(\xi_0), \tag{4.4}$$

where ξ_0 lies between x_0 and $x_0 + 2h$.

Three-Point Midpoint Formula

- $$f'(x_0) = \frac{1}{2h}[f(x_0 + h) - f(x_0 - h)] - \frac{h^2}{6}f^{(3)}(\xi_1), \tag{4.5}$$

where ξ_1 lies between $x_0 - h$ and $x_0 + h$.

Five-Point Formulas

Five-Point Midpoint Formula

- $$f'(x_0) = \frac{1}{12h}[f(x_0 - 2h) - 8f(x_0 - h) + 8f(x_0 + h) - f(x_0 + 2h)] + \frac{h^4}{30} f^{(5)}(\xi), \tag{4.6}$$

where ξ lies between $x_0 - 2h$ and $x_0 + 2h$.

Five-Point Endpoint Formula

- $$f'(x_0) = \frac{1}{12h}[-25f(x_0) + 48f(x_0 + h) - 36f(x_0 + 2h) + 16f(x_0 + 3h) - 3f(x_0 + 4h)] + \frac{h^4}{5} f^{(5)}(\xi), \tag{4.7}$$

where ξ lies between x_0 and $x_0 + 4h$.

Example 2 Values for $f(x) = xe^x$ are given in Table 4.2. Use all the applicable three-point and five-point formulas to approximate $f'(2.0)$.

Table 4.2

x	$f(x)$
1.8	10.889365
1.9	12.703199
2.0	14.778112
2.1	17.148957
2.2	19.855030

We can use the endpoint formula (4.4) with $h = 0.1$ or with $h = -0.1$.

$$\boxed{f'(x_0) = \frac{1}{2h}[-3f(x_0) + 4f(x_0 + h) - f(x_0 + 2h)]}$$

Endpoint with $h = 0.1$: $\frac{1}{0.2}[-3f(2.0) + 4f(2.1) - f(2.2)] = 22.032310.$

Endpoint with $h = -0.1$: $\frac{1}{-0.2}[-3f(2.0) + 4f(1.9) - f(1.8)] = 22.054525.$

Using the midpoint formula (4.5) with $h = 0.1$ gives

$$\boxed{f'(x_0) = \frac{1}{2h}[f(x_0 + h) - f(x_0 - h)]}$$

$$\text{Midpoint with } h = 0.1: \quad \frac{1}{0.2}[f(2.1) - f(1.9)] = 22.228790.$$

$$\text{Midpoint with } h = 0.2: \quad \frac{1}{0.4}[f(2.2) - f(1.8)] = 22.414163.$$

The only five-point formula for which the table gives sufficient data is the midpoint formula (4.6) with $h = 0.1$. This gives

$$\boxed{f'(x_0) = \frac{1}{12h}[f(x_0 - 2h) - 8f(x_0 - h) + 8f(x_0 + h) - f(x_0 + 2h)]}$$

$$f'(x_0) = \frac{1}{12h}[f(x_0 - 2h) - 8f(x_0 - h) + 8f(x_0 + h) - f(x_0 + 2h)]$$

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{1}{1.2}[f(1.8) - 8f(1.9) + 8f(2.1) - f(2.2)] &= \frac{1}{1.2}[10.889365 - 8(12.703199) \\ &\quad + 8(17.148957) - 19.855030] \\ &= 22.166999\end{aligned}$$

The true value in this case is $f'(2.0) = (2+1)e^2 = 22.167168$, so the approximation errors are actually:

Three-point endpoint with $h = 0.1$: 1.35×10^{-1};

Three-point endpoint with $h = -0.1$: 1.13×10^{-1};

Three-point midpoint with $h = 0.1$: -6.16×10^{-2};

Three-point midpoint with $h = 0.2$: -2.47×10^{-1};

Five-point midpoint with $h = 0.1$: 1.69×10^{-4}. ■

Verify ?

[Three-Point Midpoint Formula for Approximating f'']

Second Derivative Midpoint Formula

- $$f''(x_0) = \frac{1}{h^2}[f(x_0 - h) - 2f(x_0) + f(x_0 + h)] - \frac{h^2}{12}f^{(4)}(\xi), \qquad (4.9)$$

for some ξ, where $x_0 - h < \xi < x_0 + h$.

Example 3 In Example 2 we used the data shown in Table 4.3 to approximate the first derivative of $f(x) = xe^x$ at $x = 2.0$. Use the second derivative formula (4.9) to approximate $f''(2.0)$.

$$\boxed{f''(x_0) = \frac{1}{h^2}[f(x_0 - h) - 2f(x_0) + f(x_0 + h)]}$$

Solution The data permits us to determine two approximations for $f''(2.0)$. Using (4.9) with $h = 0.1$ gives

$$\frac{1}{0.01}[f(1.9) - 2f(2.0) + f(2.1)] = 100[12.703199 - 2(14.778112) + 17.148957]$$

$$= 29.593200,$$

[Three-Point Midpoint Formula for Approximating f'']

$$\boxed{f''(x_0) = \frac{1}{h^2}[f(x_0 - h) - 2f(x_0) + f(x_0 + h)]}$$

and using (4.9) with $h = 0.2$ gives

$$\frac{1}{0.04}[f(1.8) - 2f(2.0) + f(2.2)] = 25[10.889365 - 2(14.778112) + 19.855030]$$
$$= 29.704275.$$

Because $f''(x) = (x + 2)e^x$, the exact value is $f''(2.0) = 29.556224$. Hence the actual errors are -3.70×10^{-2} and -1.48×10^{-1}, respectively. ■

1. Use the forward-difference formulas and backward-difference formulas to determine each missing entry in the following tables.

a.

x	$f(x)$	$f'(x)$
0.5	0.4794	
0.6	0.5646	
0.7	0.6442	

3. The data in Exercise 1 were taken from the following functions. Compute the actual errors in Exercise 1, and find error bounds using the error formulas.

a. $f(x) = \sin x$

Solution:

The approximations are in the following tables.

(a)

x	Actual Error	Error Bound
0.5	0.0255	0.0282
0.6	0.0267	0.0282
0.7	0.0312	0.0322

6. Use the most accurate three-point formula to determine each missing entry in the following tables.

a.

x	$f(x)$	$f'(x)$
-0.3	-0.27652	
-0.2	-0.25074	
-0.1	-0.16134	
0	0	

8. The data in Exercise 6 were taken from the following functions. Compute the actual errors in Exercise 6, and find error bounds using the error formulas.

a. $f(x) = e^{2x} - \cos 2x$

Solution:

x	$f(x)$	$f'(x)$
-0.3	-0.27652	-0.06030
-0.2	-0.25074	0.57590
-0.1	-0.16134	1.25370
0.0	0.0	1.97310

x	Actual Error	Error Bound
-0.3	0.028638	0.029692
-0.2	0.014097	0.014846
-0.1	0.013577	0.014130
0.0	0.026900	0.028260

EXERCISE SET 4.1

1. Use the forward-difference formulas and backward-difference formulas to determine each missing entry in the following tables.

   a.

x	$f(x)$	$f'(x)$
0.5	0.4794	
0.6	0.5646	
0.7	0.6442	

   b.

x	$f(x)$	$f'(x)$
0.0	0.00000	
0.2	0.74140	
0.4	1.3718	

2. Use the forward-difference formulas and backward-difference formulas to determine each missing entry in the following tables.

   a.

x	$f(x)$	$f'(x)$
−0.3	1.9507	
−0.2	2.0421	
−0.1	2.0601	

   b.

x	$f(x)$	$f'(x)$
1.0	1.0000	
1.2	1.2625	
1.4	1.6595	

3. The data in Exercise 1 were taken from the following functions. Compute the actual errors in Exercise 1, and find error bounds using the error formulas.

   a. $f(x) = \sin x$ b. $f(x) = e^x - 2x^2 + 3x - 1$

4. The data in Exercise 2 were taken from the following functions. Compute the actual errors in Exercise 2, and find error bounds using the error formulas.

   a. $f(x) = 2\cos 2x - x$ b. $f(x) = x^2 \ln x + 1$

5. Use the most accurate three-point formula to determine each missing entry in the following tables.

a.

x	$f(x)$	$f'(x)$
1.1	9.025013	
1.2	11.02318	
1.3	13.46374	
1.4	16.44465	

b.

x	$f(x)$	$f'(x)$
8.1	16.94410	
8.3	17.56492	
8.5	18.19056	
8.7	18.82091	

c.

x	$f(x)$	$f'(x)$
2.9	−4.827866	
3.0	−4.240058	
3.1	−3.496909	
3.2	−2.596792	

d.

x	$f(x)$	$f'(x)$
2.0	3.6887983	
2.1	3.6905701	
2.2	3.6688192	
2.3	3.6245909	

18. Consider the following table of data:

x	0.2	0.4	0.6	0.8	1.0
$f(x)$	0.9798652	0.9177710	0.808038	0.6386093	0.3843735

a. Use all the appropriate formulas given in this section to approximate $f'(0.4)$ and $f''(0.4)$.

b. Use all the appropriate formulas given in this section to approximate $f'(0.6)$ and $f''(0.6)$.