

1 Introduction to Integrals

Why do we care about integrals?

Integrals in natural science are widely used as they help understanding some phenomena. Some of the most common case uses of integrals are:

- Quantum chemistry. The expectation value of position is

$$\langle x \rangle = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} x |\psi_0(x)|^2 dx,$$

where

$$\psi_0(x) = \left(\frac{\alpha}{\pi}\right)^{1/4} e^{-\frac{\alpha x^2}{2}}.$$

- Spectroscopy. The intensity of absorption or emission is related to the *transition dipole moment*, which is expressed as an integral:

$$\mu_{if} = \int \psi_f^*(\mathbf{r}) \hat{\mu} \psi_i(\mathbf{r}) d\mathbf{r},$$

where ψ_i and ψ_f are the initial and final electronic states, and $\hat{\mu} = -e\mathbf{r}$ is the dipole operator. The value of this integral determines whether a transition is allowed and how intense the absorption or emission line will be. This gives rise to the *spectroscopic selection rule* for vibrational transitions and explain why spectra have the peaks and intensities observed in experiments.

- Thermodynamics. Integrals are used to calculate the work done on or by a system and the heat exchanged in processes such as expansion or compression. For example, the work associated with a pressure–volume change is given by

$$W = \int_{V_i}^{V_f} P(V) dV,$$

where $P(V)$ is the pressure as a function of volume. In the special case of an ideal gas undergoing isothermal expansion, $P(V) = \frac{nRT}{V}$, so the work integral becomes

$$W = nRT \int_{V_i}^{V_f} \frac{dV}{V} = nRT \ln \left(\frac{V_f}{V_i} \right).$$

2 Definition

Integrals are sums.

Integrals were developed to compute the area under the curve (function). One of the most used numerical integration methods is the sum of “bins”. Geometrically this sum represents the sum of the areas of each rectangle, Fig. 1. This approach is known as *Riemann sum*. As we can observe, there is a limitation, depending on the topology of the function we may require more or less “rectangles” to correctly compute the area under

the curve for a given function. In the infinite limit of number of “bins”, $(x_i - x_j) \approx 0$, we can define this sum as a limiting process,

$$\lim_{h \rightarrow 0} \sum_i^N f(\varepsilon_i)h = \int_a^b f(x) dx. \quad (1)$$

Eq. 1 is also known as *Riemann integral*. $f(x)$ is known as the **integrand**.

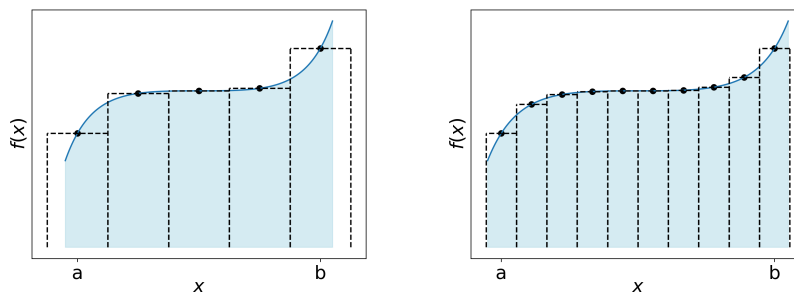


Figure 1: An illustration of integrals.

There are two different types of integrals commonly encountered in chemistry:

1. **Definite integrals**, which evaluate the area under a curve between two limits:

$$\int_a^b f(x) dx. \quad (2)$$

2. **Indefinite integrals**, which represent the family of antiderivatives of a function:

$$\int f(x) dx = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} f(x) dx = F(x) + C, \quad (3)$$

where $F(x)$ is the antiderivative of $f(x)$, i.e. $\frac{d}{dx}F(x) = f(x)$, and C is an integration constant.

In summary, definite integrals are used to compute quantities between specific limits, while indefinite integrals provide the general antiderivative that can later be applied to many different problems.

3 Properties of integrals

Similar to derivatives, integrals have some nice properties that we can use to our advantage.

1. Integrals are linear operations

$$\int_a^b (f(x) + g(x)) dx = \int_a^b f(x) dx + \int_a^b g(x) dx = F(a) - F(b) + G(a) - G(b) \quad (4)$$

or

$$\int_{-\infty}^{\infty} (f(x) + g(x)) dx = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} f(x) dx + \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} g(x) dx \quad (5)$$

$$= F(x) + C_f + G(x) + C_g \quad (6)$$

$$= F(x) + G(x) + C \quad (7)$$

2. Constants do not affect integrals

$$\int a f(x) dx = a \int f(x) dx \quad (8)$$

3. Constants

$$\int a dx = a \int dx = ax + C \quad (9)$$

4. Polynomials, $n \neq -1$

$$\int x^n dx = \frac{x^{n+1}}{n+1} + C \quad (10)$$

5. Polynomials, $n = -1$

$$\int \frac{1}{x} dx = \ln x + C \quad (11)$$

6. Polynomials, $n = -1$

$$\int e^x dx = e^x + C \quad (12)$$

7. Trigonometric functions

$$\int \cos(x) dx = \sin(x) + C \quad (13)$$

$$\int \sin(x) dx = -\cos(x) + C \quad (14)$$

Exercise: Compute the integral of $f(x) = c$ within the interval a and b .

$$\int_a^b c dx = c \int_a^b dx = cx|_a^b = c(b-a) \quad (15)$$

3.1 Change of variable

Some times it is convenient to use a chain of variable to make the integral easier. This is similar to the chain rule in derivatives.

Exercise: Compute the integral of $f(x) = e^{ax}$. We can define $u = ax$, the total differential of u is

$$du = \left(\frac{\partial u}{\partial x} \right) dx = a dx, \quad \text{meaning} \quad dx = \frac{1}{a} du. \quad (16)$$

$$\int e^{ax} dx = \frac{1}{a} \int e^u du = \frac{1}{a} e^u + c = \frac{e^{ax}}{a} + c \quad (17)$$

4 Integration by parts

Integration by parts is one of the most used methods for computing the integral of complex functions. Integration by parts is defined as,

$$\int u dv = uv - \int v du, \quad (18)$$

where u and v are both functions of x ; $u = u(x)$. In Spanish, there is a good mnemonic to memorize integration by parts.

un dia vi una vaca vestida de uniforme. ¹

Exercise: Evaluate the following integral

$$\int f(x) dx = \int 10 + \left(\frac{x}{10}\right)^3 e^{\left(\frac{x}{10}\right)^2} dx \quad (19)$$

$$= 10 \int dx + \int \left(\frac{x}{10}\right)^3 e^{\left(\frac{x}{10}\right)^2} dx \quad (20)$$

Let's focus on the second integral and use a change of variable, $u = \left(\frac{x}{10}\right)^2$,

$$\int \left(\frac{x}{10}\right)^3 e^{\left(\frac{x}{10}\right)^2} dx = \int \left(\frac{x}{10}\right)^3 \frac{50}{x} e^u du \quad (21)$$

$$= \int \left(\frac{x}{10}\right)^3 \frac{50}{x} e^u du = 5 \int \left(\frac{x}{10}\right)^2 e^u du \quad (22)$$

$$= 5 \int u e^u du \quad (23)$$

For this integral it is convenient to use the following definitions for u and v ,

$$u = u \quad \text{and} \quad du = du \quad (24)$$

$$dv = e^u du \quad \text{and} \quad v = \int dv = \int e^u du = e^u \quad (25)$$

Plugging these equations into Eq. 4, we get,

$$\int u e^u du = u e^u - \int e^u du = u e^u - e^u = e^u (u - 1). \quad (26)$$

Let's bring back the definitions based on x ,

$$\int \left(\frac{x}{10}\right)^3 e^{\left(\frac{x}{10}\right)^2} dx = 5 \int u e^u du = 5 e^{\left(\frac{x}{10}\right)^2} \left(\left(\frac{x}{10}\right)^2 - 1 \right) \quad (27)$$

The full integral of $f(x)$ is,

$$\int 10 + \left(\frac{x}{10}\right)^3 e^{\left(\frac{x}{10}\right)^2} dx = 10x + \frac{1}{20} e^{\left(\frac{x}{10}\right)^2} (x^2 - 100) + C \quad (28)$$

¹One day I saw a cow dressed in uniform