The Derivative of a Constant Function

A constant function is one with no independent variable. There are no *x*'s in a constant function.

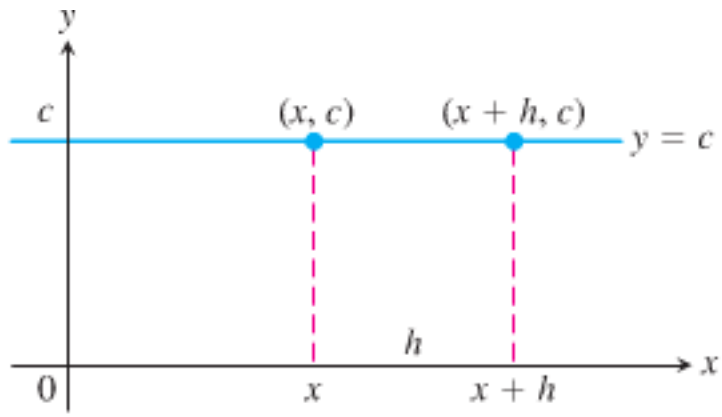

FIGURE 3.9 The rule $(d/dx)(c) = 0$ is another way to say that the values of constant functions never change and that the slope of a horizontal line is zero at every point.

Derivative of a Constant Function

If f has the constant value $f(x) = c$, then

$$\frac{df}{dx} = \frac{d}{dx}(c) = 0.$$

Thomas' Calculus, Early Transcendentals, 12th ed. Pearson, 2010. Section 3.3, p 135-138

The Derivative of a Power Function

A power function is a function of x to a power. It has the form $y = x^n$, where n is a real number.

Power Rule (General Version)

If n is any real number, then

$$\frac{d}{dx}x^n = nx^{n-1},$$

for all x where the powers x^n and x^{n-1} are defined.

EXAMPLE 1 Differentiate the following powers of x.

(a) x^3 **(b)** $x^{2/3}$ **(c)** $x^{\sqrt{2}}$ **(d)** $\frac{1}{x^4}$ **(e)** $x^{-4/3}$ **(f)** $\sqrt{x^{2+\pi}}$

Solution

(a) $\frac{d}{dx}(x^3) = 3x^{3-1} = 3x^2$ **(b)** $\frac{d}{dx}(x^{2/3}) = \frac{2}{3}x^{(2/3)-1} = \frac{2}{3}x^{-1/3}$

(c) $\frac{d}{dx}\left(x^{\sqrt{2}}\right) = \sqrt{2}x^{\sqrt{2}-1}$ **(d)** $\frac{d}{dx}\left(\frac{1}{x^4}\right) = \frac{d}{dx}(x^{-4}) = -4x^{-4-1} = -4x^{-5} = -\frac{4}{x^5}$

(e) $\frac{d}{dx}(x^{-4/3}) = -\frac{4}{3}x^{-(4/3)-1} = -\frac{4}{3}x^{-7/3}$

(f) $\frac{d}{dx}\left(\sqrt{x^{2+\pi}}\right) = \frac{d}{dx}\left(x^{1+(\pi/2)}\right) = \left(1 + \frac{\pi}{2}\right)x^{1+(\pi/2)-1} = \frac{1}{2}(2 + \pi)\sqrt{x^{\pi}}$ ■

Thomas' Calculus, Early Transcendentals, 12th ed. Pearson, 2010. Section 3.3, p 135-138

The Constant Multiple Rule

A constant multiple is the coefficient of a variable term. It is the number multiplied by the variable.

Derivative Constant Multiple Rule

If u is a differentiable function of x, and c is a constant, then

$$\frac{d}{dx}(cu) = c\frac{du}{dx}.$$

EXAMPLE 2

(a) The derivative formula

$$\frac{d}{dx}(3x^2) = 3 \cdot 2x = 6x$$

says that if we rescale the graph of $y = x^2$ by multiplying each y-coordinate by 3, then we multiply the slope at each point by 3 (Figure 3.10).

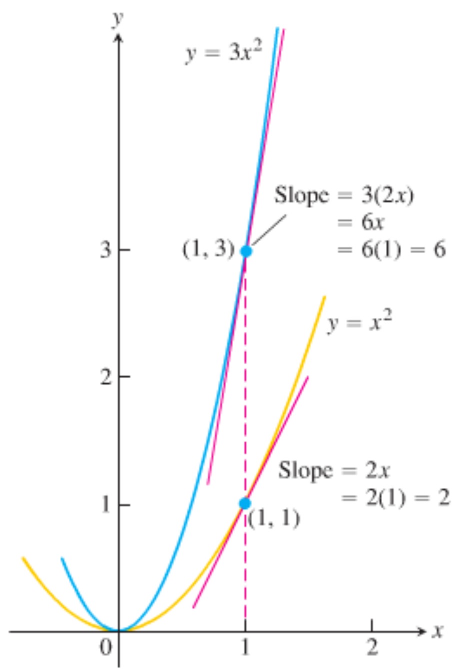

FIGURE 3.10 The graphs of $y = x^2$ and $y = 3x^2$. Tripling the y-coordinate triples the slope (Example 2).

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The Sum/Difference Rule

This rule applies to functions that have terms that are added or subtracted. It does not apply to terms that are multiplied or divided.

Derivative Sum Rule

If u and v are differentiable functions of x, then their sum $u + v$ is differentiable at every point where u and v are both differentiable. At such points,

$$\frac{d}{dx}(u + v) = \frac{du}{dx} + \frac{dv}{dx}.$$

EXAMPLE 3 Find the derivative of the polynomial $y = x^3 + \frac{4}{3}x^2 - 5x + 1$.

Solution

$$\frac{dy}{dx} = \frac{d}{dx}x^3 + \frac{d}{dx}\left(\frac{4}{3}x^2\right) - \frac{d}{dx}(5x) + \frac{d}{dx}(1) \qquad \text{Sum and Difference Rules}$$

$$= 3x^2 + \frac{4}{3} \cdot 2x - 5 + 0 = 3x^2 + \frac{8}{3}x - 5$$

■

We can differentiate any polynomial term by term, the way we differentiated the polynomial in Example 3. All polynomials are differentiable at all values of x.

EXAMPLE 4 Does the curve $y = x^4 - 2x^2 + 2$ have any horizontal tangents? If so, where?

Solution The horizontal tangents, if any, occur where the slope dy/dx is zero. We have

$$\frac{dy}{dx} = \frac{d}{dx}(x^4 - 2x^2 + 2) = 4x^3 - 4x.$$

Now solve the equation $\frac{dy}{dx} = 0$ for x:

$$\begin{aligned} 4x^3 - 4x &= 0 \\ 4x(x^2 - 1) &= 0 \\ x &= 0, 1, -1. \end{aligned}$$

The curve $y = x^4 - 2x^2 + 2$ has horizontal tangents at $x = 0, 1$, and -1. The corresponding points on the curve are $(0, 2)$, $(1, 1)$ and $(-1, 1)$. See Figure 3.11. We will see in Chapter 4 that finding the values of x where the derivative of a function is equal to zero is an important and useful procedure. ■

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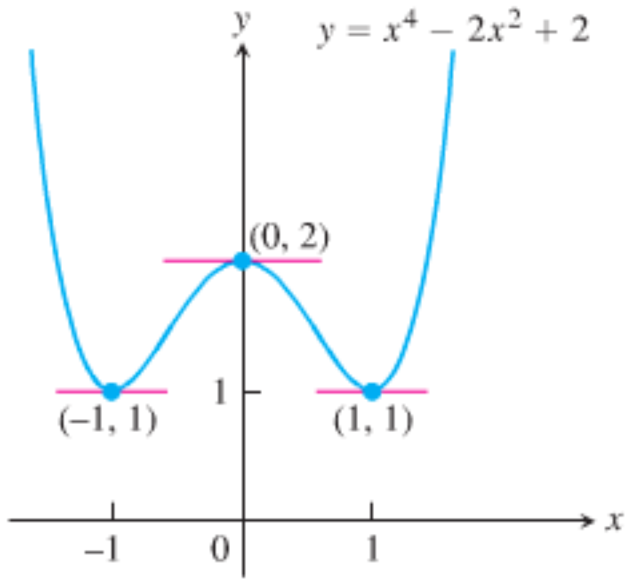

FIGURE 3.11 The curve in Example 4 and its horizontal tangents.

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