Chapter 1

Sequences in Calculus

We have introduced sequences in a previous chapter. Now, we will examine them in more detail in a calculus context. You already know about arithmetic and geometric sequences, but not all sequences can be classified as arithmetic or geometric. Take the famous Fibonacci sequence, {1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, ...}, which can be explicitly defined as $a_n = a_{n-1} + a_{n-2}$, with $a_1 = a_2 = 1$. There is no common difference or common ratio, so the Fibonacci sequence is not arithmetic or geometric. Another example is $a_n = \sin \frac{n\pi}{6}$, which will cycle through a set of values. In later chapters, you will learn that the sum of all the values in a sequence is a series and how to use series to describe functions. In order to be able to do all that, first we need to talk in-depth about sequences.

Some sequences are defined explicitly, like $a_n = \sin \frac{n\pi}{6}$, while others are defined recursively, like $a_n = a_{n-1} + a_{n-2}$.

Example: Write the first 5 terms for the explicitly defined sequence $a_n = \frac{n}{n+1}$.

Solution: We can construct a table to keep track of our work:

n	work	a_n
1	$\frac{1}{1+1}$	$\frac{1}{2}$
2	$\frac{2}{2+1}$	$\frac{2}{3}$
3	$\frac{3}{3+1}$	$\frac{3}{4}$
4	$\frac{4}{4+1}$	$\frac{4}{5}$
5	$\frac{5}{5+1}$	$\frac{5}{6}$

Exercise 1

Write the first 5 terms for each sequence.

1. $a_n = \frac{2^n}{2n+1}$
2. $a_n = \cos \frac{n\pi}{2}$
3. $a_1 = 1$, $a_{n+1} = 5a_n - 3$
4. $a_1 = 6$, $a_{n+1} = \frac{a_n}{n+1}$

Working Space

Answer on Page 5

You can visualize a sequence on an xy-plane or a number line. Figures 1.1 and 1.2 show visualizations of the sequence $a_n = \frac{n}{n+1}$. To visualize this on the xy-plane, we take points such that $x = n$ and $y = a_n$, where n is a positive integer. What do you notice about this sequence? As n increases, a_n gets closer and closer to 1.

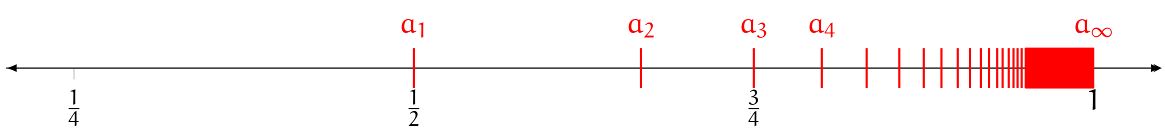

Figure 1.1: $a_n = \frac{n}{n+1}$ on a number line

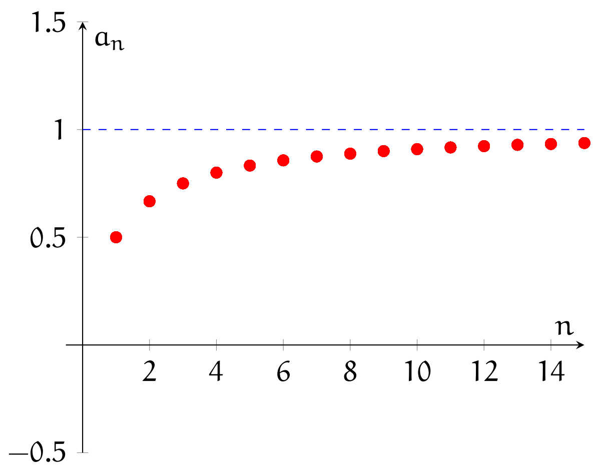

Figure 1.2: $a_n = \frac{n}{n+1}$ on an xy-plane

Because a_n approaches a specific number as $n \to \infty$, we call the series $a_n = \frac{n}{n+1}$ *convergent*. We prove a sequence is convergent by taking the limit as n approaches ∞. If the limit exists and approaches a specific number, the sequence is convergent. If the limit does not exist or approaches $\pm\infty$, the sequence is divergent.

We can see graphically that $\lim_{n\to\infty} \frac{n}{n+1} = 1$, so that sequence is convergent. What about $b_n = \frac{n}{\sqrt{10+n}}$? Is b_n convergent or divergent?

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} \frac{n}{\sqrt{10+n}} = \lim_{n\to\infty} \frac{n/n}{\sqrt{\frac{10}{n^2} + \frac{n}{n^2}}}$$

$$= \lim_{n\to\infty} \frac{1}{\sqrt{\frac{10}{n^2} + \frac{1}{n}}} = \infty$$

Therefore, the sequence $b_n = \frac{n}{\sqrt{10+n}}$ is divergent.

Here is another example of a divergent sequence: $c_n = \sin \frac{n\pi}{2}$. The graph is shown in figure 1.3. As you can see, the value of c_n oscillates between 1, 0, and -1 without approaching a specific number. This means that c_n does not approach a particular number as $n \to \infty$ and the sequence is divergent.

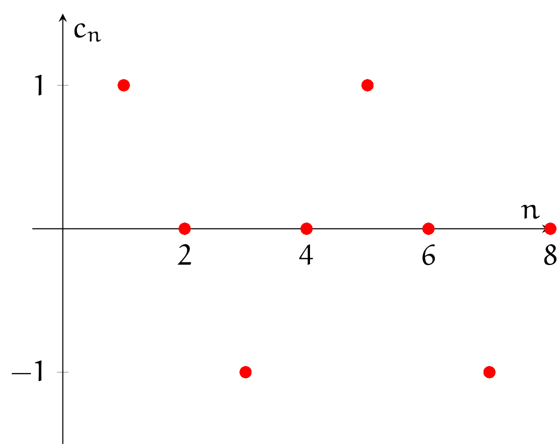

Figure 1.3: $c_n = \sin \frac{n\pi}{2}$ on an xy-plane

Exercise 2

Classify each sequence as convergent or divergent. If the sequence is convergent, find the limit as $n \to \infty$.

1. $a_n = \frac{3+5n^2}{n+n^2}$
2. $a_n = \frac{n^4}{n^3-2n}$
3. $a_n = 2 + (0.86)^n$
4. $a_n = \cos \frac{n\pi}{n+1}$
5. $a_n = \sin n$

Working Space

Answer on Page ??

Appendix A

Answers to Exercises

Answer to Exercise 1 (on page 2)

1. $\frac{2}{3}, \frac{4}{5}, \frac{8}{7}, \frac{16}{9}, \frac{32}{11}$
2. 0, -1, 0, 1, 0
3. 1, 2, 7, 32, 157
4. 6, 3, 1, $\frac{1}{4}, \frac{1}{20}$

Answer to Exercise ?? (on page ??)

1. convergent, 5
2. divergent
3. convergent, 2
4. convergent, -1
5. divergent