Related Rates

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Related Rates

If we are pumping air into a balloon, both the volume and the radius of the balloon are increasing and their rates of increase are related to each other. But it is much easier to measure directly the rate of increase of the volume than the rate of increase of the radius.

In a related rates problem the idea is to compute the rate of change of one quantity in terms of the rate of change of another quantity (which may be more easily measured). The procedure is to find an equation that relates the two quantities and then use the Chain Rule to differentiate both sides with respect to time.

Problem Solving Strategy It is useful to recall some of the problem-solving principles from page 75 and adapt them to related rates in light of our experience in Examples 1–3:

1. Read the problem carefully.
2. Draw a diagram if possible.
3. Introduce notation. Assign symbols to all quantities that are functions of time.
4. Express the given information and the required rate in terms of derivatives.
5. Write an equation that relates the various quantities of the problem. If necessary, use the geometry of the situation to eliminate one of the variables by substitution (as in Example 3).
6. Use the Chain Rule to differentiate both sides of the equation with respect to t.
7. Substitute the given information into the resulting equation and solve for the unknown rate.

V EXAMPLE 1 Air is being pumped into a spherical balloon so that its volume increases at a rate of 100 cm^3/s. How fast is the radius of the balloon increasing when the diameter is 50 cm?

SOLUTION We start by identifying two things:

the *given information:*

the rate of increase of the volume of air is 100 cm^3/s

and the *unknown*:

the rate of increase of the radius when the diameter is 50 cm

In order to express these quantities mathematically, we introduce some suggestive *notation*:

Let V be the volume of the balloon and let r be its radius.

Given: $\dfrac{dV}{dt} = 100 \text{ cm}^3/\text{s}$

Unknown: $\dfrac{dr}{dt}$ when $r = 25$ cm

In order to connect dV/dt and dr/dt, we first relate V and r by the formula for the volume of a sphere:

$$V = \tfrac{4}{3}\pi r^3$$

In order to use the given information, we differentiate each side of this equation with respect to t. To differentiate the right side, we need to use the Chain Rule:

$$\frac{dV}{dt} = \frac{dV}{dr}\frac{dr}{dt} = 4\pi r^2 \frac{dr}{dt}$$

Now we solve for the unknown quantity:

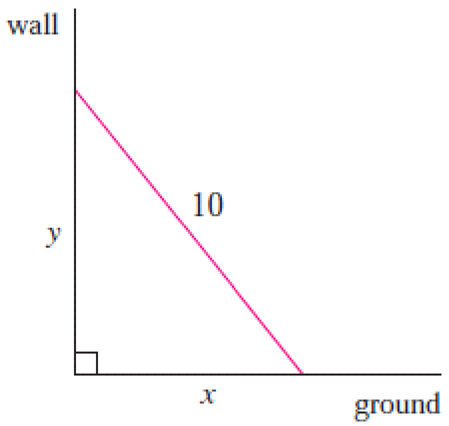
$$\frac{dr}{dt} = \frac{1}{4\pi r^2}\frac{dV}{dt}$$

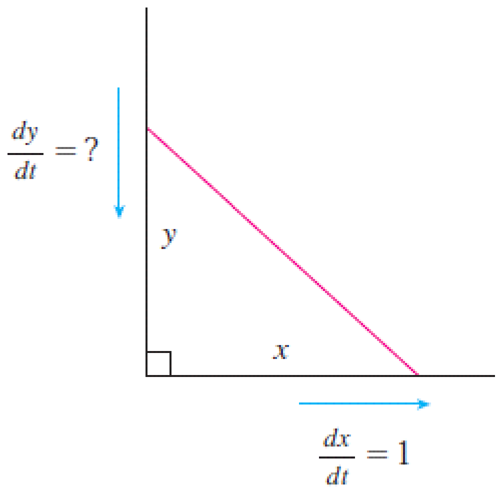
If we put $r = 25$ and $dV/dt = 100$ in this equation, we obtain

$$\frac{dr}{dt} = \frac{1}{4\pi(25)^2}100 = \frac{1}{25\pi}$$

The radius of the balloon is increasing at the rate of $1/(25\pi) \approx 0.0127$ cm/s. ■

EXAMPLE 2 A ladder 10 ft long rests against a vertical wall. If the bottom of the ladder slides away from the wall at a rate of 1 ft/s, how fast is the top of the ladder sliding down the wall when the bottom of the ladder is 6 ft from the wall?





We are given that $dx/dt = 1$ ft/s and we are asked to find dy/dt when $x = 6$ ft (see Figure 2). In this problem, the relationship between x and y is given by the Pythagorean Theorem:

$$x^2 + y^2 = 100$$

Differentiating each side with respect to t using the Chain Rule, we have

$$2x\frac{dx}{dt} + 2y\frac{dy}{dt} = 0$$

and solving this equation for the desired rate, we obtain

$$\frac{dy}{dt} = -\frac{x}{y}\frac{dx}{dt}$$

When $x = 6$, the Pythagorean Theorem gives $y = 8$ and so, substituting these values and $dx/dt = 1$, we have

$$\frac{dy}{dt} = -\frac{6}{8}(1) = -\frac{3}{4} \text{ ft/s}$$

The fact that dy/dt is negative means that the distance from the top of the ladder to the ground is *decreasing* at a rate of $\frac{3}{4}$ ft/s. In other words, the top of the ladder is sliding down the wall at a rate of $\frac{3}{4}$ ft/s.

1. If V is the volume of a cube with edge length x and the cube expands as time passes, find dV/dt in terms of dx/dt.

2. (a) If A is the area of a circle with radius r and the circle expands as time passes, find dA/dt in terms of dr/dt.
(b) Suppose oil spills from a ruptured tanker and spreads in a circular pattern. If the radius of the oil spill increases at a constant rate of 1 m/s, how fast is the area of the spill increasing when the radius is 30 m?