Gradient Descent for Risk Optimization

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1 Intuition Behind Gradient Descent

Although the term 'gradient descent' is very fancy, the idea and intuition behind this term is extremely simple. It is same for *convergence rate*. All you need to know is that what is the meaning of derivative.

The **derivative** of a function of a real variable measures the sensitivity to change of the function value (output value) with respect to a change in its argument (input value). Let's draw a table for this definition.

Table 1.1: Derivative

Measures	Input value	Output value
Sensitivity to	Change	Change
↓	↓	↓
	change rate	change rate
	↓	↓
Convergence Rate		

If you got the idea of table 1.1, you can stop reading the section 1 and jump to section 2 and 3. If not, allow me to spend a little more time to explain this.

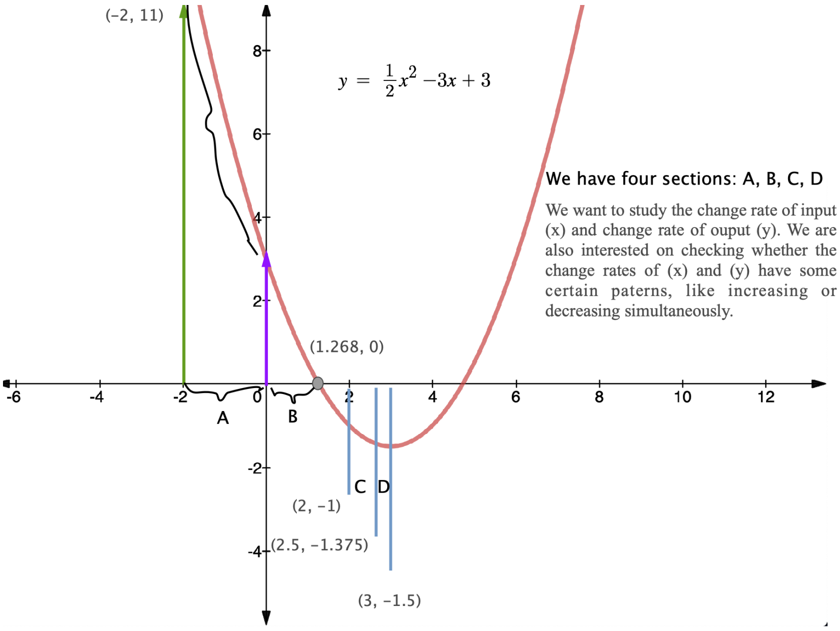

Figure 1.1: Gradient Visualisation

Again, the derivative is not just about the measurement of change of input and output, it also reflects the sensitivity of those changes. Take a look the figure 1.1, tell me where both input (x) and output (y) are changing fast, and where both input (x) and output (y) are changing slowly[1].

From the figure 1.1, we can see that in section A, both input (x) and output (y) are changing quite fast by measuring the differences. When it comes to section C and D, the changing rates for input-x and output-y are decreasing simultaneously. We also say that input x and output y have the same **convergence rate** intuitively[2]. For the **supervised learning** in *machine learning*, it starts to do optimization with the tool of convergence rate.

Now, let's check the formal definition of derivative. The slope m of the secant line is the difference between the y values of these points divided by the difference between the x values, that is,

$$m = \frac{\Delta f(x)}{\Delta x} = \frac{f(x+h) - f(x)}{(x+h) - x} = \frac{f(x+h) - f(x)}{h}$$

Geometrically, the limit of the secant lines is the tangent line. Therefore, the limit of the difference quotient as h approaches zero, if it exists, should represent the slope of the tangent line to $(x, f(x))$. This limit is defined to be the derivative of the function f at x:

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

With the riview of defintion of derivative, we are ready to apply the so called **gradient descent** algorithm to find the minimum of a function.

Definition 1.1. Gradient descent is a first-order iterative optimization algorithm for finding the minimum of a function.

Let's disentangle the convergence rate for the function $y = \frac{1}{2}x^2 - 3x + 3$ in figure 1.1 by presenting the following table:

Table 1.2: Show the gradient descent step by step

Section	Points	Change of input(x)	Change of ouput (y)	Convergence ratio
A	$(-2, 11)$			
	$(0, 0)$	2	11	$11/2 = 5.5$
B	$(0, 0)$			
	(2,-1)	2	1	$1/2 = 0.5$
C	(2,-1)			
	(2.5,-1.375)	0.5	0.375	$0.375/0.5 = 0.75$
D				

2 A Mathematical example

3 A Machine Learning Example

[1]If we assume that speed of changing is measured by the difference between two values.
[2]This is not formal mathematical definition.

References