Optimization problem for f(x, y)

▸ **Example 6** Determine the dimensions of a rectangular box, open at the top, having a volume of 32 ft^3, and requiring the least amount of material for its construction.

Solution. Let

x = length of the box (in feet)
y = width of the box (in feet)
z = height of the box (in feet)
S = surface area of the box (in square feet)

We may reasonably assume that the box with least surface area requires the least amount of material, so our objective is to minimize the surface area

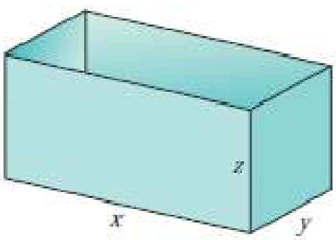
$$S = xy + 2xz + 2yz \tag{5}$$

(Figure 13.8.10) subject to the volume requirement

$$xyz = 32 \tag{6}$$

From (6) we obtain $z = 32/xy$, so (5) can be rewritten as

$$S = xy + \frac{64}{y} + \frac{64}{x} \tag{7}$$



Two sides each have area xz.
Two sides each have area yz.
The base has area xy.

▲ **Figure**

which expresses S as a function of two variables. The dimensions x and y in this formula must be positive, but otherwise have no limitation, so our problem reduces to finding the absolute minimum value of S over the open first quadrant: $x > 0$, $y > 0$. Because this region is neither closed nor bounded, we have no mathematical guarantee at this stage that an absolute minimum exists. However, if S has an absolute minimum value in the open first quadrant, then it must occur at a critical point of S. Thus, our next step is to find the critical points of S.

Differentiating (7) we obtain

$$\frac{\partial S}{\partial x} = y - \frac{64}{x^2}, \quad \frac{\partial S}{\partial y} = x - \frac{64}{y^2} \tag{8}$$

so the coordinates of the critical points of S satisfy

$$y - \frac{64}{x^2} = 0, \quad x - \frac{64}{y^2} = 0$$

Solving the first equation for y yields

$$y = \frac{64}{x^2} \tag{9}$$

and substituting this expression in the second equation yields

$$x - \frac{64}{(64/x^2)^2} = 0$$

which can be rewritten as

$$x\left(1 - \frac{x^3}{64}\right) = 0$$

The solutions of this equation are $x = 0$ and $x = 4$. Since we require $x > 0$, the only solution of significance is $x = 4$. Substituting this value into (9) yields $y = 4$. We conclude that the point $(x, y) = (4, 4)$ is the only critical point of S in the first quadrant.

$$f(x,y) = S = xy + \frac{64}{y} + \frac{64}{x}$$

$$f_{xx} = \frac{128}{x^3}$$

$$f_{yy} = \frac{128}{y^3}$$

$$f_{xy} = 1$$

$$D = f_{xx} \cdot f_{yy} - f_{xy}^2$$

$f_{xx}(4,4) > 0$ and $D(4,4) > 0$, hence f has a relative minimum.

Optimization problem for f(x, y)

EXAMPLE 5 Find the shortest distance from the point $(1, 0, -2)$ to the plane $x + 2y + z = 4$.

SOLUTION The distance from any point (x, y, z) to the point $(1, 0, -2)$ is

$$d = \sqrt{(x-1)^2 + y^2 + (z+2)^2}$$

but if (x, y, z) lies on the plane $x + 2y + z = 4$, then $z = 4 - x - 2y$ and so we have $d = \sqrt{(x-1)^2 + y^2 + (6-x-2y)^2}$. We can minimize d by minimizing the simpler expression

$$d^2 = f(x, y) = (x-1)^2 + y^2 + (6-x-2y)^2$$

By solving the equations

$$f_x = 2(x-1) - 2(6-x-2y) = 4x + 4y - 14 = 0$$

$$f_y = 2y - 4(6-x-2y) = 4x + 10y - 24 = 0$$

we find that the only critical point is $\left(\frac{11}{6}, \frac{5}{3}\right)$. Since $f_{xx} = 4$, $f_{xy} = 4$, and $f_{yy} = 10$, we have $D(x, y) = f_{xx}f_{yy} - (f_{xy})^2 = 24 > 0$ and $f_{xx} > 0$, so by the Second Derivatives Test f has a local minimum at $\left(\frac{11}{6}, \frac{5}{3}\right)$. Intuitively, we can see that this local minimum is actually an absolute minimum because there must be a point on the given plane that is closest to $(1, 0, -2)$. If $x = \frac{11}{6}$ and $y = \frac{5}{3}$, then

$$d = \sqrt{(x-1)^2 + y^2 + (6-x-2y)^2} = \sqrt{\left(\tfrac{5}{6}\right)^2 + \left(\tfrac{5}{3}\right)^2 + \left(\tfrac{5}{6}\right)^2} = \tfrac{5}{6}\sqrt{6}$$

The shortest distance from $(1, 0, -2)$ to the plane $x + 2y + z = 4$ is $\frac{5}{6}\sqrt{6}$. ■

$$f_{xx} = 4, f_{xy} = 4, f_{yy} = 10$$

$$D = f_{xx}.f_{yy} - f_{xy}^2 > 0$$

Hence f has a relative minimum.