

Multivariable Calculus and Linear Algebra

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Contents

I	Multivariable Calculus	1
11	Parametric Equations and Polar Coordinates	2
11.1	Curves Defined by Parametric Equations	2
11.2	Calculus with Parametric Curves	3
11.3	Polar Coordinates	9
11.4	Areas and Lengths in Polar Coordinates	9
11.5	Conic Sections	9
11.6	Conic Sections in Polar Coordinates	9
12	Infinite Sequences and Series	10
12.1	Sequences	11
12.2	Series	11
12.3	The Integral Test and Estimates of Sums	11
12.4	The Comparison Tests	11
12.5	Alternating Series	11
12.6	Absolute Convergence and the Ratio and Root Tests	11
12.7	Strategy for Testing Series	11
12.8	Power Series	11
12.9	Representation of Functions as Power Series	11
12.10	Taylor and Maclaurin Series	11
12.11	The Binomial Series	11
12.12	Applications of Taylor Polynomials	11
13	Vectors and the Geometry of Space	12
13.1	Three-Dimensional Coordinate Systems	12
13.2	Vectors	12
13.3	The Dot Product	12
13.4	The Cross Product	12
13.5	Equations of Lines and Planes	12
13.6	Cylinders and Quadric Surfaces	12
13.7	Cylindrical and Spherical Coordinates	12
14	Vector Functions	13
14.1	Vector Functions and Space Curves	13
14.2	Derivatives and Integrals of Vector Functions	13

14.3	Arc Length and Curvature	13
14.4	Motion in Space: Velocity and Acceleration	13
15	Partial Derivatives	14
15.1	Functions of Several Variables	14
15.2	Limits and Continuity	14
15.3	Partial Derivatives	14
15.4	Tangent Planes and Linear Approximations	14
15.5	The Chain Rule	14
15.6	Directional Derivatives and the Gradient Vector	14
15.7	Maximum and Minimum Values	14
15.8	Lagrange Multipliers	14
16	Multiple Integrals	15
16.1	Double Integrals over Rectangles	15
16.2	Iterated Integrals	15
16.3	Double Integrals over General Regions	15
16.4	Double Integrals in Polar Coordinates	15
16.5	Applications of Double Integrals	15
16.6	Surface Area	15
16.7	Triple Integrals	15
16.8	Triple Integrals in Cylindrical and Spherical Coordinates	15
16.9	Change of Variables in Multiple Integrals	15
17	Vector Calculus	16
17.1	Vector Fields	16
17.2	Line Integrals	16
17.3	The Fundamental Theorem for Line Integrals	16
17.4	Green's Theorem	16
17.5	Curl and Divergence	16
17.6	Parametric Surfaces and Their Areas	16
17.7	Surface Integrals	16
17.8	Stokes' Theorem	16
17.9	The Divergence Theorem	16
17.10	Summary	16
18	Second-Order Differential Equations	17
18.1	Second-Order Linear Equations	17
18.2	Nonhomogenous Linear Equations	17
18.3	Applications of Second-Order Differential Equations	17
18.4	Series Solutions	17
II	Linear Algebra	18
1	Vectors	19

1.1	The Geometry and Algebra of Vectors	19
1.2	Length and Angle: The Dot Product	19
1.3	Lines and Planes	19
1.4	Code Vectors and Modular Systems	19
2	Systems of Linear Equations	20
2.1	Introduction to Systems of Linear Equations	20
2.2	Direct Methods for Solving Linear Systems	20
2.3	Spanning Sets and Linear Independence	20
2.4	Applications	20
2.5	Iterative Method for Solving Linear Systems	20
3	Matrices	21
3.1	Matrix Operations	21
3.2	Matrix Algebra	21
3.3	The Inverse of a Matrix	21
3.4	The LU Factorization	21
3.5	Subspaces, Basis, Dimension, and Rank	21
3.6	Introduction to Linear Transformations	21
3.7	Applications	21
4	Eigenvalues and Eigenvectors	22
4.1	Introduction to Eigenvalues and Eigenvectors	22
4.2	Determinants	22
4.3	Eigenvalues and Eigenvectors of $n \times n$ Matrices	22
4.4	Similarity and Diagonalization	22
4.5	Iterative Methods for Computing Eigenvalues	22
4.6	Applications and the Perron-Frobenius Theorem	22
5	Orthogonality	23
5.1	Orthogonality in \mathbb{R}^n	23
5.2	Orthogonal Complements and Orthogonal Projections	23
5.3	The Gram-Schmidt Process and the QR Factorization	23
5.4	Orthogonal Diagonalization of Symmetric Matrices	23
5.5	Applications	23
6	Vector Spaces	24
6.1	Vector Spaces and Subspaces	24
6.2	Linear Independence, Basis, and Dimension	24
6.3	Change of Basis	24
6.4	Linear Transformation	24
6.5	The Kernel and Range of a Linear Transformation	24
6.6	The Matrix of a Linear Transformation	24
6.7	Applications	24
7	Distance and Approximation	25

CONTENTS

iv

7.1	Inner Product Spaces	25
7.2	Norms and Distance Function	25
7.3	Least Squares Approximation	25
7.4	The Singular Value Decomposition	25
7.5	Applications	25

Part I

Multivariable Calculus

Chapter 11

Parametric Equations and Polar Coordinates

11.1 Curves Defined by Parametric Equations

Suppose that x and y are both given as functions of a third variable t (called a **parameter** by the equations)

$$x = f(t) \quad y = g(t)$$

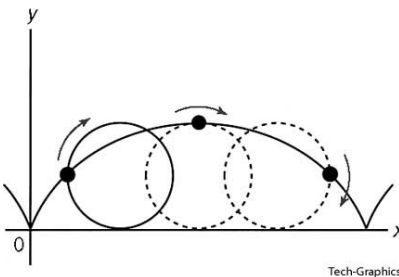
(called **parametric equations**). Each value of t determines a point (x,y) . As t changes, $(x,y) = (f(t), g(t))$ changes and traces out a curve C , which is called a **parametric curve**. The direction of the arrows on curve C show the change in the position of the equation as t increases.

We can also restrict t to a finite interval. In general, the curve with parametric equations

$$x = f(t) \quad y = g(t) \quad a \leq t \leq b$$

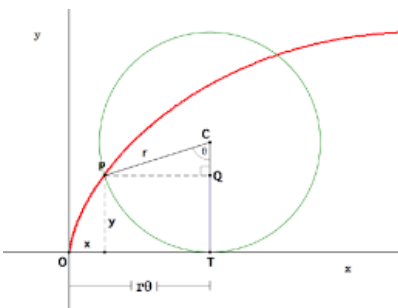
has **initial point** $(f(a), g(a))$ and **terminal point** $(f(b), g(b))$.

The Cycloid



Example 11.1.1. A circle with radius r rolls along the x -axis. The curve traced out by a point P on the circumference of the circle is called a **cycloid**. Find parametric equations for the cycloid.

Solution. We will use the angle of rotation θ as the parameter ($\theta = 0$ when P is at the origin).



Suppose the circle has rotated θ radians. Using the figure, the distance it has rolled from the origin is

$$|OT| = \text{arc } PT = r\theta$$

because P starts at the origin. Therefore, the center of the circle is $C(r\theta, r)$. Let the coordinates of P be (x, y) . Then from the figure,

$$x = |OT| - |PQ| = r\theta - r\sin\theta = r(\theta - \sin\theta)$$

$$y = |TC| - |QC| = r - r\cos\theta = r(1 - \cos\theta)$$

Definition 11.1.1. Parametric equations of the cycloid are

$$x = r(\theta - \sin\theta) \quad y = r(1 - \cos\theta)$$

11.2 Calculus with Parametric Curves

We will mainly solve problems involving tangents, area, arc length, and surface area.

Tangents

In the previous section, we saw that some curves defined by parametric equations $x = f(t)$ and $y = g(t)$ can also be expressed, by eliminating the parameter, in the form $y = F(x)$. If we substitute $x = f(t)$ and $y = g(t)$ in the equation $y = F(x)$, we get

$$g(t) = F(f(t))$$

If g , f , and F are differentiable, the Chain Rule gives

$$g'(t) = F'(f(t))f'(t) = F'(x)f'(t)$$

If $f'(t) \neq 0$, we can solve for $F'(x)$:

Definition 11.2.1. The slope of the tangent to the parametric curve $y = F(x)$ is $F'(x)$.

$$F'(x) = \frac{g'(t)}{f'(t)}$$

This enables us to find tangents to parametric curves without having to eliminate the parameter. We can rewrite the previous equation in an easily remembered form.

Definition 11.2.2. We can use this to find tangents to parametric curves without having to eliminate the parameter.

$$\frac{dy}{dx} = \frac{\frac{dy}{dt}}{\frac{dx}{dt}} \quad \text{if} \quad \frac{dx}{dt} \neq 0$$

The curve has a

- horizontal tangent when $\frac{dy}{dt} = 0$ (provided that $\frac{dx}{dt} \neq 0$)
- vertical tangent when $\frac{dx}{dt} = 0$ (provided that $\frac{dy}{dt} \neq 0$)

This is useful when sketching parametric curves.

Definition 11.2.3. We can also find $\frac{d^2y}{dx^2}$ by replacing y with $\frac{dy}{dx}$

$$\frac{d^2y}{dx^2} = \frac{d}{dx} \left(\frac{dy}{dx} \right) = \frac{\frac{d}{dt} \left(\frac{dy}{dx} \right)}{\frac{dx}{dt}}$$

Proof. Find $\frac{dy}{dx}$ and $\frac{d^2y}{dx^2}$ considering $y(t)$ and $g(t)$.

1.

$$\text{Chain rule: } \frac{dy}{dt} = \frac{dy}{dx} \frac{dx}{dt} \implies \frac{dy}{dx} = \frac{\frac{dy}{dt}}{\frac{dx}{dt}} \quad (\implies \text{ means "implies" })$$

2.

$$\text{Chain rule: } \frac{d}{dt} \left(\frac{dy}{dx} \right) = \left(\frac{d}{dx} \frac{dy}{dx} \right) \frac{dx}{dt} = \frac{d^2y}{dx^2} \frac{dx}{dt}$$

$$\text{Substitute: } \frac{d}{dt} \left(\frac{dy}{dx} \right) = \frac{d}{dt} \left(\frac{\frac{dy}{dt}}{\frac{dx}{dt}} \right)$$

$$\text{Quotient rule: } = \frac{\frac{d^2y}{dt^2} \frac{dx}{dt} - \frac{dy}{dt} \frac{d^2x}{dt^2}}{\left(\frac{dx}{dt} \right)^2}$$

Set equation from line 1 and line 3 equal and divide both sides by $\frac{dx}{dt}$

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{d^2y}{dx^2} &= \frac{\frac{d^2y}{dt^2} \frac{dx}{dt} - \frac{dy}{dt} \frac{d^2x}{dt^2}}{\left(\frac{dx}{dt} \right)^2 \left(\frac{dx}{dt} \right)} \\ &= \frac{\frac{d^2y}{dt^2} \frac{dx}{dt} - \frac{dy}{dt} \frac{d^2x}{dt^2}}{\left(\frac{dx}{dt} \right)^3} \end{aligned}$$

□

Example 11.2.1. A curve C is defined by the parametric equations $x = t^2$, $y = t^3 - 3t$.

1. Show that C has two tangents at the point $(3,0)$ and find their equations.
2. Find the points on C where the tangent is horizontal or vertical.
3. Determine where the curve is concave upward or downward.

Solution. A curve C is defined by the parametric equations $x = t^2$, $y = t^3 - 3t$.

1. Rewrite $y = t^3 - 3t = t(t^2 - 3) = 0$ when $t = 0$ or $t = \pm\sqrt{3}$. This indicates that C intersects itself at $(3,0)$.

$$\frac{dy}{dx} = \frac{dy/dt}{dx/dt} = \frac{3t^2 - 3}{2t} = \frac{3}{2} \left(t - \frac{1}{t} \right)$$

$$t = \pm\sqrt{3} \rightarrow dy/dx = \pm 6/(2\sqrt{3})$$

so the equations of the tangents at $(3,0)$ are

$$y = \sqrt{3}(x - 3) \quad \text{and} \quad y = -\sqrt{3}(x - 3)$$

2. C has a horizontal tangent when $dy/dx = 0$. In other words, when $dy/dt = 0$ and $dx/dt \neq 0$. $dy/dt = 3t^2 - 3 = 0$ when $t^2 = 1$ so $t = \pm 1$. This means there are horizontal tangents on C at $(1, -2)$ and $(1, 2)$. C has a vertical tangent when $dx/dt = 2t = 0$, so $t = 0$. This means C has a vertical tangent at $(0, 0)$.
3. To determine concavity we calculate the second derivative:

$$\frac{d^2y}{dx^2} = \frac{\frac{d}{dt}\left(\frac{dy}{dx}\right)}{\frac{dx}{dt}} = \frac{\frac{3}{2}\left(1 + \frac{1}{t^2}\right)}{2t} = \frac{3(t^2 + 1)}{4t^3}$$

The curve is concave upward when $t > 0$ and concave downward when $t < 0$.

Area

We already know that area under a curve $y = F(x)$ from a to b is $A = \int_a^b F(x)dx$. We can apply this to parametric equations using the Substitution Rule for Definite Integrals.

Definition 11.2.4. If the curve C is given by parametric equations $x = f(t)$ and $y = g(t)$ and t increases from α to β ,

$$A = \int_a^b ydx = \int_\alpha^\beta g(t)f'(t)dt$$

(Switch α to β if the point on C at β is more left than α .)

Example 11.2.2. Find the area under one arch of the cycloid $x = r(\theta - \sin \theta)$, $y = r(1 - \cos \theta)$.

Solution. One arch of the cycloid is given by $0 \leq \theta \leq 2\pi$. Using the Substitution Rule with $y = r(1 - \cos \theta)$ and $dx = r(1 - \cos \theta)d\theta$, we have

$$\begin{aligned} A &= \int_0^{2\pi} ydx = \int_0^{2\pi} r(1 - \cos \theta)r(1 - \cos \theta)d\theta \\ &= r^2 \int_0^{2\pi} (1 - \cos \theta)^2 d\theta = r^2 \int_0^{2\pi} (1 - 2\cos \theta + \cos^2 \theta) d\theta \\ &= r^2 \int_0^{2\pi} \left[1 - 2\cos \theta + \frac{1}{2}(1 + \cos 2\theta) \right] d\theta \\ &= r^2 \left[\frac{3}{2}\theta - 2\sin \theta + \frac{1}{4}\sin 2\theta \right]_0^{2\pi} \\ &= r^2 \left(\frac{3}{2} \cdot 2\pi \right) = 3\pi r^2 \end{aligned}$$

Arc Length

We already know how to find length L of a curve C given in the form $y = F(x)$, $a \leq x \leq b$.

Definition 11.2.5. If F' is continuous, then

$$L = \int_a^b \sqrt{1 + \left(\frac{dy}{dx}\right)^2} dx$$

If C can describe the parametric equations $x = f(t)$ and $y = g(t)$, $\alpha \leq t \leq \beta$, where $dx/dt = f'(t) > 0$. Using the substitution rule, we obtain

$$L = \int_a^b \sqrt{1 + \left(\frac{dy}{dx}\right)^2} dx = \int_\alpha^\beta \sqrt{1 + \left(\frac{dy/dt}{dx/dt}\right)^2} \frac{dx}{dt} dt$$

Since $dx/dt > 0$, we have

Theorem 11.1. If a curve C is described by the parametric equations $x = f(t)$, $y = g(t)$, $\alpha \leq t \leq \beta$, where f' and g' are continuous on $[\alpha, \beta]$ and C is traversed exactly once as t increases from α to β , then the length of C is

$$L = \int_\alpha^\beta \sqrt{\left(\frac{dx}{dt}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy}{dt}\right)^2} dt$$

This is consistent with the general formula $L = \int ds$ and $(ds^2) = (dx^2) + (dy^2)$.

Proof. Prove the length formula of a parametric curve

$$\vec{ds} = \vec{i} dx + \vec{j} dy$$

$$ds^2 = \vec{ds} \cdot \vec{ds} = \left(\vec{i} dx + \vec{j} dy\right) \cdot \left(\vec{i} dx + \vec{j} dy\right) = dx^2 + dy^2$$

$$ds = \sqrt{dx^2 + dy^2} = \sqrt{\left(\frac{dx}{dt}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy}{dt}\right)^2} dt$$

$$L = \int_\alpha^\beta ds = \int_\alpha^\beta \sqrt{\left(\frac{dx}{dt}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy}{dt}\right)^2} dt$$

Example 11.2.3. Find the length of the unit circle as (x, y) moves both once and twice around the circle.

Solution. For one traversal around the unit circle,

$$x = \cos t \quad y = \sin t \quad 0 \leq t \leq 2\pi$$

so $dx/dt = -\sin t$ and $dy/dt = \cos t$

$$\begin{aligned} L &= \int_0^{2\pi} \sqrt{\left(\frac{dx}{dt}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy}{dt}\right)^2} dt = \int_0^{2\pi} \sqrt{\sin^2 t + \cos^2 t} dt \\ &= \int_0^{2\pi} dt = 2\pi \end{aligned}$$

For two traversals around the unit circle,

$$x = \sin 2t \quad y = \cos 2t \quad 0 \leq t \leq 2\pi$$

so $dx/dt = 2 \cos 2t$ and $dy/dt = -2 \sin 2t$

$$L = \int_0^{2\pi} \sqrt{\left(\frac{dx}{dt}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy}{dt}\right)^2} dt = \int_0^{2\pi} \sqrt{4 \cos^2 2t + 4 \sin^2 2t} dt = \int_0^{2\pi} 2 dt = 4\pi$$

Surface Area

We can also adapt the surface area formula to a parametric curve.

Definition 11.2.6. If a curve C is described by the parametric equations $x = f(t)$, $y = g(t)$, $\alpha \leq t \leq \beta$, is rotated about the **x-axis**, where f', g' are continuous and $g(t) \geq 0$, the surface area is

$$S = \int_{\alpha}^{\beta} 2\pi y \sqrt{\left(\frac{dx}{dt}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy}{dt}\right)^2} dt$$

If the curve C is rotated about the **y-axis**, the surface area is

$$S = \int_{\alpha}^{\beta} 2\pi x \sqrt{\left(\frac{dx}{dt}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy}{dt}\right)^2} dt$$

The generic formulas $S = \int 2\pi y ds$ for rotation about the x-axis and $S = \int 2\pi x ds$ for rotation about the y-axis are still valid, but for parametric curves we use

$$ds = \sqrt{\left(\frac{dx}{dt}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy}{dt}\right)^2} dt$$

Example 11.2.4. Show that the surface area of a sphere of radius r is $4\pi r^2$

Solution. The sphere is obtained by rotating the semicircle

$$x = r \cos t \quad y = r \sin t \quad 0 \leq t \leq \pi$$

about the x-axis.

$$\begin{aligned} S &= \int_0^{\pi} 2\pi r \sin t \sqrt{(-r \sin t)^2 + (r \cos t)^2} dt \\ &= 2\pi \int_0^{\pi} r \sin t \sqrt{r^2(\sin^2 t + \cos^2 t)} dt \\ &= 2\pi \int_0^{\pi} r \sin t \cdot r dt = 2\pi r^2 \int_0^{\pi} \sin t dt \\ &= 2\pi r^2 (-\cos t) \Big|_0^{\pi} = 4\pi r^2 \end{aligned}$$

11.3 Polar Coordinates

11.4 Areas and Lengths in Polar Coordinates

11.5 Conic Sections

11.6 Conic Sections in Polar Coordinates

Chapter 12

Infinite Sequences and Series

12.1 Sequences

12.2 Series

12.3 The Integral Test and Estimates of Sums

12.4 The Comparison Tests

12.5 Alternating Series

12.6 Absolute Convergence and the Ratio and Root Tests

12.7 Strategy for Testing Series

12.8 Power Series

12.9 Representation of Functions as Power Series

12.10 Taylor and Maclaurin Series

12.11 The Binomial Series

12.12 Applications of Taylor Polynomials

Chapter 13

Vectors and the Geometry of Space

13.1 Three-Dimensional Coordinate Systems

13.2 Vectors

13.3 The Dot Product

13.4 The Cross Product

13.5 Equations of Lines and Planes

13.6 Cylinders and Quadric Surfaces

13.7 Cylindrical and Spherical Coordinates

Chapter 14

Vector Functions

14.1 Vector Functions and Space Curves

14.2 Derivatives and Integrals of Vector Functions

14.3 Arc Length and Curvature

14.4 Motion in Space: Velocity and Acceleration

Chapter 15

Partial Derivatives

15.1 Functions of Several Variables

15.2 Limits and Continuity

15.3 Partial Derivatives

15.4 Tangent Planes and Linear Approximations

15.5 The Chain Rule

15.6 Directional Derivatives and the Gradient Vector

15.7 Maximum and Minimum Values

15.8 Lagrange Multipliers

Chapter 16

Multiple Integrals

16.1 Double Integrals over Rectangles

16.2 Iterated Integrals

16.3 Double Integrals over General Regions

16.4 Double Integrals in Polar Coordinates

16.5 Applications of Double Integrals

16.6 Surface Area

16.7 Triple Integrals

16.8 Triple Integrals in Cylindrical and Spherical Coordinates

16.9 Change of Variables in Multiple Integrals

Chapter 17

Vector Calculus

17.1 Vector Fields

17.2 Line Integrals

17.3 THE Fundamental Theorem for Line Integrals

17.4 Green's Theorem

17.5 Curl and Divergence

17.6 Parametric Surfaces and Their Areas

17.7 Surface Integrals

17.8 Stokes' Theorem

17.9 The Divergence Theorem

17.10 Summary

Chapter 18

Second-Order Differential Equations

18.1 Second-Order Linear Equations

18.2 Nonhomogenous Linear Equations

18.3 Applications of Second-Order Differential Equations

18.4 Series Solutions

Part II

Linear Algebra

Chapter 1

Vectors

1.1 The Geometry and Algebra of Vectors

1.2 Length and Angle: The Dot Product

1.3 Lines and Planes

1.4 Code Vectors and Modular Systems

Chapter 2

Systems of Linear Equations

- 2.1 Introduction to Systems of Linear Equations
- 2.2 Direct Methods for Solving Linear Systems
- 2.3 Spanning Sets and Linear Independence
- 2.4 Applications
- 2.5 Iterative Method for Solving Linear Systems

Chapter 3

Matrices

3.1 Matrix Operations

3.2 Matrix Algebra

3.3 The Inverse of a Matrix

3.4 The LU Factorization

3.5 Subspaces, Basis, Dimension, and Rank

3.6 Introduction to Linear Transformations

3.7 Applications

Chapter 4

Eigenvalues and Eigenvectors

- 4.1 Introduction to Eigenvalues and Eigenvectors
- 4.2 Determinants
- 4.3 Eigenvalues and Eigenvectors of $n \times n$ Matrices
- 4.4 Similarity and Diagonalization
- 4.5 Iterative Methods for Computing Eigenvalues
- 4.6 Applications and the Perron-Frobenius Theorem

Chapter 5

Orthogonality

- 5.1 Orthogonality in \mathbb{R}^n
- 5.2 Orthogonal Complements and Orthogonal Projections
- 5.3 The Gram-Schmidt Process and the QR Factorization
- 5.4 Orthogonal Diagonalization of Symmetric Matrices
- 5.5 Applications

Chapter 6

Vector Spaces

6.1 Vector Spaces and Subspaces

6.2 Linear Independence, Basis, and Dimension

6.3 Change of Basis

6.4 Linear Transformation

6.5 The Kernel and Range of a Linear Transformation

6.6 The Matrix of a Linear Transformation

6.7 Applications

Chapter 7

Distance and Approximation

7.1 Inner Product Spaces

7.2 Norms and Distance Function

7.3 Least Squares Approximation

7.4 The Singular Value Decomposition

7.5 Applications