Symmetry

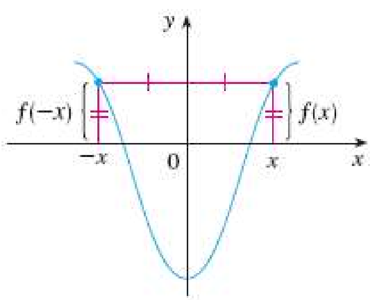
If a function f satisfies $f(-x) = f(x)$ for every number x in its domain, then f is called an **even function**. For instance, the function $f(x) = x^2$ is even because

$$f(-x) = (-x)^2 = x^2 = f(x)$$

The geometric significance of an even function is that its graph is symmetric with respect to the y-axis (see Figure 19). This means that if we have plotted the graph of f for $x \geqslant 0$, we obtain the entire graph simply by reflecting this portion about the y-axis.

Figure 19

An even function



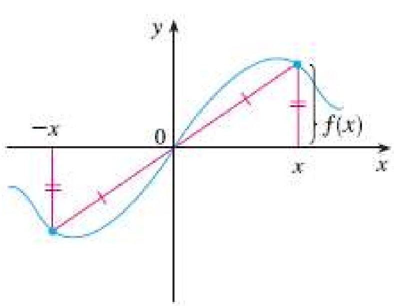
If f satisfies $f(-x) = -f(x)$ for every number x in its domain, then f is called an **odd function**. For example, the function $f(x) = x^3$ is odd because

$$f(-x) = (-x)^3 = -x^3 = -f(x)$$

The graph of an odd function is symmetric about the origin (see Figure 20). If we already have the graph of f for $x \geqslant 0$, we can obtain the entire graph by rotating this portion through $180°$ about the origin.

Figure 20

An odd function



Example 11

Determine whether each of the following functions is even, odd, or neither even nor odd.

(a) $f(x) = x^5 + x$

(b) $g(x) = 1 - x^4$

(c) $h(x) = 2x - x^2$

Solution

(a) $f(-x) = (-x)^5 + (-x) = (-1)^5 x^5 + (-x)$

$$= -x^5 - x = -(x^5 + x)$$

$$= -f(x)$$

Therefore f is an odd function.

(b) $g(-x) = 1 - (-x)^4 = 1 - x^4 = g(x)$

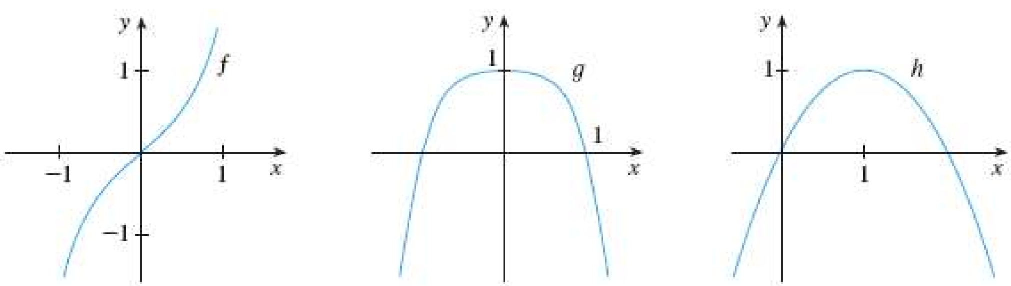
So g is even.

(c) $h(-x) = 2(-x) - (-x)^2 = -2x - x^2$

Since $h(-x) \neq h(x)$ and $h(-x) \neq -h(x)$, we conclude that h is neither even nor odd.

The graphs of the functions in Example 11 are shown in Figure 21. Notice that the graph of h is symmetric neither about the y-axis nor about the origin.

Figure 21



(a) (b) (c)

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