There are three possible methods for estimating the size of the error:

1. If a graphing device is available, we can use it to graph $|R_n(x)|$ and thereby estimate the error.
2. If the series happens to be an alternating series, we can use the Alternating Series Estimation Theorem.
3. In all cases we can use Taylor's Inequality (Theorem 11.10.9), which says that if $|f^{(n+1)}(x)| \leqslant M$, then

$$|R_n(x)| \leqslant \frac{M}{(n+1)!}|x-a|^{n+1}$$

V EXAMPLE 1

(a) Approximate the function $f(x) = \sqrt[3]{x}$ by a Taylor polynomial of degree 2 at $a = 8$.
(b) How accurate is this approximation when $7 \leqslant x \leqslant 9$?

SOLUTION

(a)

$$\begin{aligned} f(x) &= \sqrt[3]{x} = x^{1/3} & f(8) &= 2 \\ f'(x) &= \tfrac{1}{3}x^{-2/3} & f'(8) &= \tfrac{1}{12} \\ f''(x) &= -\tfrac{2}{9}x^{-5/3} & f''(8) &= -\tfrac{1}{144} \\ f'''(x) &= \tfrac{10}{27}x^{-8/3} \end{aligned}$$

Thus the second-degree Taylor polynomial is

$$\begin{aligned} T_2(x) &= f(8) + \frac{f'(8)}{1!}(x-8) + \frac{f''(8)}{2!}(x-8)^2 \\ &= 2 + \tfrac{1}{12}(x-8) - \tfrac{1}{288}(x-8)^2 \end{aligned}$$

The desired approximation is

$$\sqrt[3]{x} \approx T_2(x) = 2 + \tfrac{1}{12}(x-8) - \tfrac{1}{288}(x-8)^2$$

(b) The Taylor series is not alternating when $x < 8$, so we can't use the Alternating Series Estimation Theorem in this example. But we can use Taylor's Inequality with $n = 2$ and $a = 8$:

$$|R_2(x)| \leqslant \frac{M}{3!}|x-8|^3$$

where $|f'''(x)| \leqslant M$. Because $x \geqslant 7$, we have $x^{8/3} \geqslant 7^{8/3}$ and so

$$f'''(x) = \frac{10}{27} \cdot \frac{1}{x^{8/3}} \leqslant \frac{10}{27} \cdot \frac{1}{7^{8/3}} < 0.0021$$

Therefore we can take $M = 0.0021$. Also $7 \leqslant x \leqslant 9$, so $-1 \leqslant x - 8 \leqslant 1$ and $|x - 8| \leqslant 1$. Then Taylor's Inequality gives

$$|R_2(x)| \leqslant \frac{0.0021}{3!} \cdot 1^3 = \frac{0.0021}{6} < 0.0004$$

Thus, if $7 \leqslant x \leqslant 9$, the approximation in part (a) is accurate to within 0.0004. ■

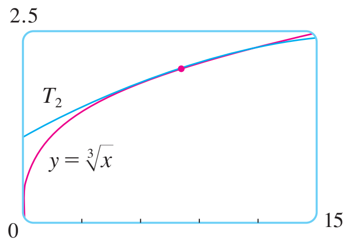

FIGURE 2

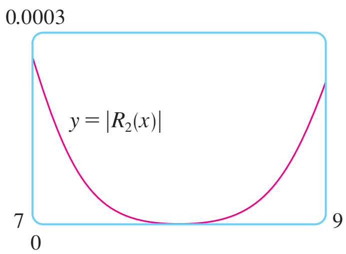

FIGURE 3

Let's use a graphing device to check the calculation in Example 1. Figure 2 shows that the graphs of $y = \sqrt[3]{x}$ and $y = T_2(x)$ are very close to each other when x is near 8. Figure 3 shows the graph of $|R_2(x)|$ computed from the expression

$$|R_2(x)| = |\sqrt[3]{x} - T_2(x)|$$

We see from the graph that

$$|R_2(x)| < 0.0003$$

when $7 \leqslant x \leqslant 9$. Thus the error estimate from graphical methods is slightly better than the error estimate from Taylor's Inequality in this case.

V EXAMPLE 2

(a) What is the maximum error possible in using the approximation

$$\sin x \approx x - \frac{x^3}{3!} + \frac{x^5}{5!}$$

when $-0.3 \leqslant x \leqslant 0.3$? Use this approximation to find $\sin 12°$ correct to six decimal places.

(b) For what values of x is this approximation accurate to within 0.00005?

SOLUTION

(a) Notice that the Maclaurin series

$$\sin x = x - \frac{x^3}{3!} + \frac{x^5}{5!} - \frac{x^7}{7!} + \cdots$$

is alternating for all nonzero values of x, and the successive terms decrease in size because $|x| < 1$, so we can use the Alternating Series Estimation Theorem. The error in approximating $\sin x$ by the first three terms of its Maclaurin series is at most

$$\left|\frac{x^7}{7!}\right| = \frac{|x|^7}{5040}$$

If $-0.3 \leqslant x \leqslant 0.3$, then $|x| \leqslant 0.3$, so the error is smaller than

$$\frac{(0.3)^7}{5040} \approx 4.3 \times 10^{-8}$$

To find $\sin 12°$ we first convert to radian measure.

$$\begin{aligned}\sin 12° &= \sin\left(\frac{12\pi}{180}\right) = \sin\left(\frac{\pi}{15}\right)\\ &\approx \frac{\pi}{15} - \left(\frac{\pi}{15}\right)^3\frac{1}{3!} + \left(\frac{\pi}{15}\right)^5\frac{1}{5!} \approx 0.20791169\end{aligned}$$

Thus, correct to six decimal places, $\sin 12° \approx 0.207912$.

(b) The error will be smaller than 0.00005 if

$$\frac{|x|^7}{5040} < 0.00005$$