2.3 Monotonic Functions and the First Derivative Test

In sketching the graph of a differentiable function it is useful to know where it increases (rises from left to right) and where it decreases (falls from left to right) over an interval. This section defines precisely what it means for a function to be increasing or decreasing over an interval, and gives a test to determine where it increases and where it decreases. We also show how to test the critical points of a function for the presence of local extreme values.

Increasing Functions and Decreasing Functions

What kinds of functions have positive derivatives or negative derivatives? The answer, provided by the Mean Value Theorem's third corollary, is this: The only functions with positive derivatives are increasing functions; the only functions with negative derivatives are decreasing functions.

DEFINITIONS Increasing, Decreasing Function

Let f be a function defined on an interval I and let x_1 and x_2 be any two points in I.

1. If $f(x_1) < f(x_2)$ whenever $x_1 < x_2$, then f is said to be **increasing** on I.
2. If $f(x_2) < f(x_1)$ whenever $x_1 < x_2$, then f is said to be **decreasing** on I.

A function that is increasing or decreasing on I is called **monotonic** on I.

COROLLARY 3 First Derivative Test for Monotonic Functions

Suppose that f is continuous on $[a, b]$ and differentiable on (a, b).

If $f'(x) > 0$ at each point $x \in (a, b)$, then f is increasing on $[a, b]$.

If $f'(x) < 0$ at each point $x \in (a, b)$, then f is decreasing on $[a, b]$.

EXAMPLE 1 Using the First Derivative Test for Monotonic Functions

Find the critical points of $f(x) = x^3 - 12x - 5$ and identify the intervals on which f is increasing and decreasing.

Solution The function f is everywhere continuous and differentiable. The first derivative

$$\begin{aligned} f'(x) &= 3x^2 - 12 = 3(x^2 - 4) \\ &= 3(x + 2)(x - 2) \end{aligned}$$

is zero at $x = -2$ and $x = 2$. These critical points subdivide the domain of f into intervals $(-\infty, -2)$, $(-2, 2)$, and $(2, \infty)$ on which f' is either positive or negative. We determine the sign of f' by evaluating f at a convenient point in each subinterval. The behavior of f is determined by then applying Corollary 3 to each subinterval. The results are summarized in the following table, and the graph of f is given in Figure 2.7 .

Intervals	$-\infty < x < -2$	$-2 < x < 2$	$2 < x < \infty$
f' Evaluated	$f'(-3) = 15$	$f'(0) = -12$	$f'(3) = 15$
Sign of f'	$+$	$-$	$+$
Behavior of f	increasing	decreasing	increasing

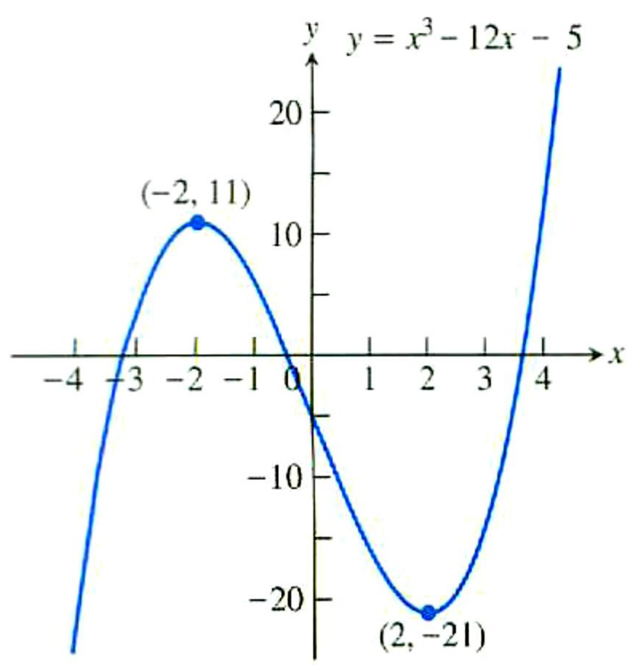


FIGURE 2.7 The function $f(x) = x^3 - 12x - 5$ is monotonic on three separate intervals (Example 1).

First Derivative Test for Local Extrema

In Figure 2.8 , at the points where f has a minimum value, $f' < 0$ immediately to the left and $f' > 0$ immediately to the right. (If the point is an endpoint, there is only one side to consider.) Thus, the function is decreasing on the left of the minimum value and it is increasing on its right. Similarly, at the points where f has a maximum value, $f' > 0$ immediately to the left and $f' < 0$ immediately to the right. Thus, the function is increasing on the left of the maximum value and decreasing on its right. In summary, at a local extreme point, the sign of $f'(x)$ changes.

These observations lead to a test for the presence and nature of local extreme values of differentiable functions.

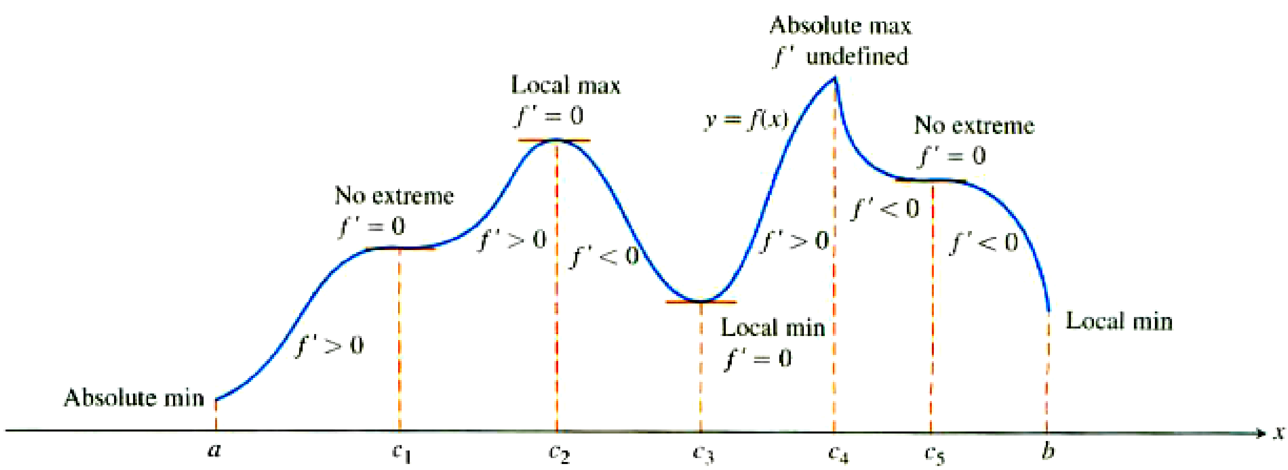


FIGURE 2.8 A function's first derivative tells how the graph rises and falls.

> **First Derivative Test for Local Extrema**
>
> Suppose that c is a critical point of a continuous function f, and that f is differentiable at every point in some interval containing c except possibly at c itself. Moving across c from left to right,
>
> 1. if f' changes from negative to positive at c, then f has a local minimum at c;
> 2. if f' changes from positive to negative at c, then f has a local maximum at c;
> 3. if f' does not change sign at c (that is, f' is positive on both sides of c or negative on both sides), then f has no local extremum at c.

EXAMPLE 2 Using the First Derivative Test for Local Extrema

Find the critical points of

$$f(x) = (x^2 - 3)e^x.$$

Identify the intervals on which f is increasing and decreasing. Find the function's local and absolute extreme values.

Solution The function f is continuous and differentiable for all real numbers, so the critical points occur only at the zeros of f'.

Using the Product Rule, we find the derivative

$$\begin{aligned} f'(x) &= (x^2 - 3) \cdot \frac{d}{dx} e^x + \frac{d}{dx}(x^2 - 3) \cdot e^x \\ &= (x^2 - 3) \cdot e^x + (2x) \cdot e^x \\ &= (x^2 + 2x - 3)e^x. \end{aligned}$$

Since e^x is never zero, the first derivative is zero if and only if

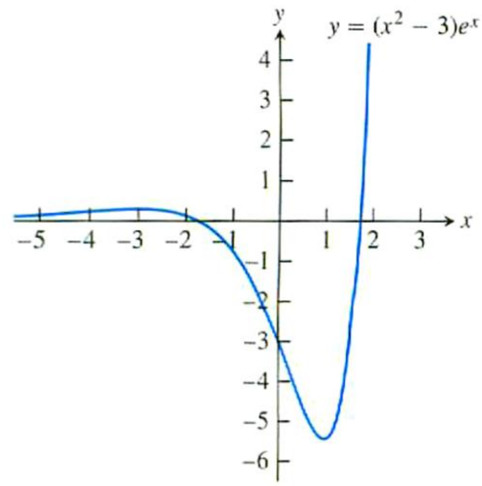
$$\begin{aligned} x^2 + 2x - 3 &= 0 \\ (x + 3)(x - 1) &= 0. \end{aligned}$$

The zeros $x = -3$ and $x = 1$ partition the x-axis into intervals as follows.

Intervals	$x < -3$	$-3 < x < 1$	$1 < x$
Sign of f'	$+$	$-$	$+$
Behavior of f	increasing	decreasing	increasing

We can see from the table that there is a local maximum (about 0.299) at $x = -3$ and a local minimum (about -5.437) at $x = 1$. The local minimum value is also an absolute minimum because $f(x) > 0$ for $|x| > \sqrt{3}$. There is no absolute maximum. The function increases on $(-\infty, -3)$ and $(1, \infty)$ and decreases on $(-3, 1)$. Figure 2.9 shows the graph.

FIGURE 2.9 The graph of $f(x) = (x^2 - 3)e^x$. (Example 2)



EXAMPLE 3 Using the First Derivative Test for Local Extrema

Find the critical points of

$$f(x) = x^{1/3}(x - 4) = x^{4/3} - 4x^{1/3}.$$

Identify the intervals on which f is increasing and decreasing. Find the function's local and absolute extreme values.

Solution The function f is continuous at all x since it is the product of two continuous functions, $x^{1/3}$ and $(x - 4)$. The first derivative

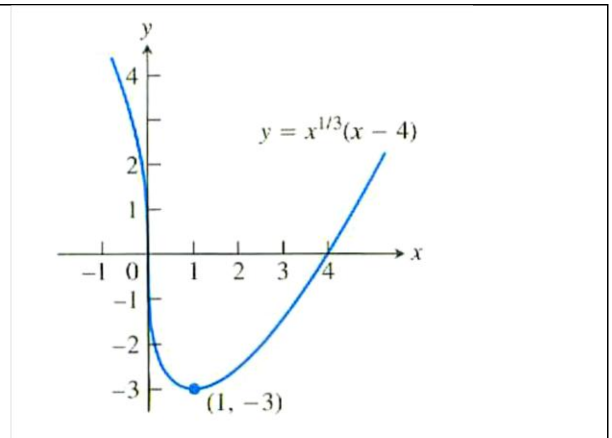
$$f'(x) = \frac{d}{dx}\left(x^{4/3} - 4x^{1/3}\right) = \frac{4}{3}x^{1/3} - \frac{4}{3}x^{-2/3}$$
$$= \frac{4}{3}x^{-2/3}\left(x - 1\right) = \frac{4(x - 1)}{3x^{2/3}}$$

is zero at $x = 1$ and undefined at $x = 0$. There are no endpoints in the domain, so the critical points $x = 0$ and $x = 1$ are the only places where f might have an extreme value.

The critical points partition the x-axis into intervals on which f' is either positive or negative. The sign pattern of f' reveals the behavior of f between and at the critical points. We can display the information in a table like the following:

Intervals	$x < 0$	$0 < x < 1$	$x > 1$
Sign of f'	$-$	$-$	$+$
Behavior of f	decreasing	decreasing	increasing

FIGURE 2.10 The function $f(x) = x^{1/3}(x - 4)$ decreases when $x < 1$ and increases when $x > 1$ (Example 3).



Exercise 2.3

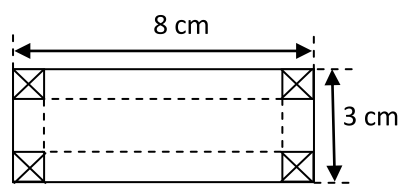
- **Identify the intervals on which $f(x)$ is increasing or decreasing and hence find the extreme values of f :**

(1) $f(x) = -3x^2 + 9x + 5$

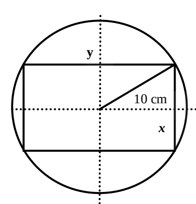
(2) $f(x) = x^4 - 4x^3 + 4x^2$

(3) $f(x) = x^4 - 8x^2 + 16$

- **An open top box is to be made of a $3\ cm \times 8\ cm$ rectangular sheet of metal by cutting out squares of equal size from the 4 corners and bending up the sides find the maximum possible volume of the box**



- **Find the dimensions of the rectangle with maximum area that can be inscribed inside a circle of radius 10.**



- **Find the dimensions of the largest right circular cylinder that can be inscribed inside a sphere of radius R.**