Partial Derivatives

Exercise-13.3

Definition of derivative for function of 1 variable:

Derivative for 1 variable:

$$f'(x_0) = \lim_{\Delta x \to 0} \frac{f(x_0 + \Delta x) - f(x_0)}{\Delta x}$$

In general,

$$f'(x) = \frac{df}{dx} = \lim_{\Delta x \to 0} \frac{f(x + \Delta x) - f(x)}{\Delta x}$$

slope of the tangent line or rate of change of 'y' with respect to 'x'.

Partial derivatives for function of two variables:

If *f* is a function of two variables, its partial derivatives are the functions f_x

and f_y at a specific point (x_0, y_0) defined by

$$f_x(x_0, y_0) = \frac{d}{dx}[f(x, y_0)]\bigg|_{x=x_0} = \lim_{\Delta x \to 0} \frac{f(x_0 + \Delta x, y_0) - f(x_0, y_0)}{\Delta x}$$

$$f_y(x_0, y_0) = \frac{d}{dy}[f(x_0, y)]\bigg|_{y=y_0} = \lim_{\Delta y \to 0} \frac{f(x_0, y_0 + \Delta y) - f(x_0, y_0)}{\Delta y}$$

In general,

$$f_x(x, y) = \lim_{\Delta x \to 0} \frac{f(x + \Delta x, y) - f(x, y)}{\Delta x}$$

$$f_y(x, y) = \lim_{\Delta y \to 0} \frac{f(x, y + \Delta y) - f(x, y)}{\Delta y}$$

RULE FOR FINDING PARTIAL DERIVATIVES OF $z = f(x, y)$

1. To find f_x, regard y as a constant and differentiate $f(x, y)$ with respect to x.
2. To find f_y, regard x as a constant and differentiate $f(x, y)$ with respect to y.

Examples

▶ **Example 1** Find $f_x(1, 3)$ and $f_y(1, 3)$ for the function $f(x, y) = 2x^3y^2 + 2y + 4x$.

Solution. Since

$$f_x(x, 3) = \frac{d}{dx}[f(x, 3)] = \frac{d}{dx}[18x^3 + 4x + 6] = 54x^2 + 4$$

we have $f_x(1, 3) = 54 + 4 = 58$. Also, since

$$f_y(1, y) = \frac{d}{dy}[f(1, y)] = \frac{d}{dy}[2y^2 + 2y + 4] = 4y + 2$$

we have $f_y(1, 3) = 4(3) + 2 = 14$. ◀

▶ **Example 2** Find $f_x(x, y)$ and $f_y(x, y)$ for $f(x, y) = 2x^3y^2 + 2y + 4x$, and use those partial derivatives to compute $f_x(1, 3)$ and $f_y(1, 3)$.

Solution. Keeping y fixed and differentiating with respect to x yields

$$f_x(x, y) = \frac{d}{dx}[2x^3y^2 + 2y + 4x] = 6x^2y^2 + 4$$

and keeping x fixed and differentiating with respect to y yields

$$f_y(x, y) = \frac{d}{dy}[2x^3y^2 + 2y + 4x] = 4x^3y + 2$$

Thus,

$$f_x(1, 3) = 6(1^2)(3^2) + 4 = 58 \quad \text{and} \quad f_y(1, 3) = 4(1^3)3 + 2 = 14$$

which agree with the results in Example 1. ◀

Partial Derivative Notation

$$f_x(x, y) = f_x = \frac{\partial f}{\partial x} = \frac{\partial}{\partial x} f(x, y) = \frac{\partial z}{\partial x}$$

$$f_y(x, y) = f_y = \frac{\partial f}{\partial y} = \frac{\partial}{\partial y} f(x, y) = \frac{\partial z}{\partial y}$$

Some typical notations for the partial derivatives of $z = f(x, y)$ at a point (x_0, y_0) are

$$\left.\frac{\partial f}{\partial x}\right|_{x=x_0, y=y_0}, \quad \left.\frac{\partial z}{\partial x}\right|_{(x_0,y_0)}, \quad \left.\frac{\partial f}{\partial x}\right|_{(x_0,y_0)}, \quad \frac{\partial f}{\partial x}(x_0, y_0), \quad \frac{\partial z}{\partial x}(x_0, y_0)$$

PARTIAL DERIVATIVES VIEWED AS RATES OF CHANGE AND SLOPES

Recall that if $y = f(x)$, then the value of $f'(x_0)$ can be interpreted either as the rate of change of y with respect to x at x_0 or as the slope of the tangent line to the graph of f at x_0. Partial derivatives have analogous interpretations. To see that this is so, suppose that C_1 is the intersection of the surface $z = f(x, y)$ with the plane $y = y_0$ and that C_2 is its intersection with the plane $x = x_0$ (Figure 13.3.1). Thus, $f_x(x, y_0)$ can be interpreted as the rate of change of z with respect to x along the curve C_1, and $f_y(x_0, y)$ can be interpreted as the rate of change of z with respect to y along the curve C_2. In particular, $f_x(x_0, y_0)$ is the rate of change of z with respect to x along the curve C_1 at the point (x_0, y_0), and $f_y(x_0, y_0)$ is the rate of change of z with respect to y along the curve C_2 at the point (x_0, y_0).

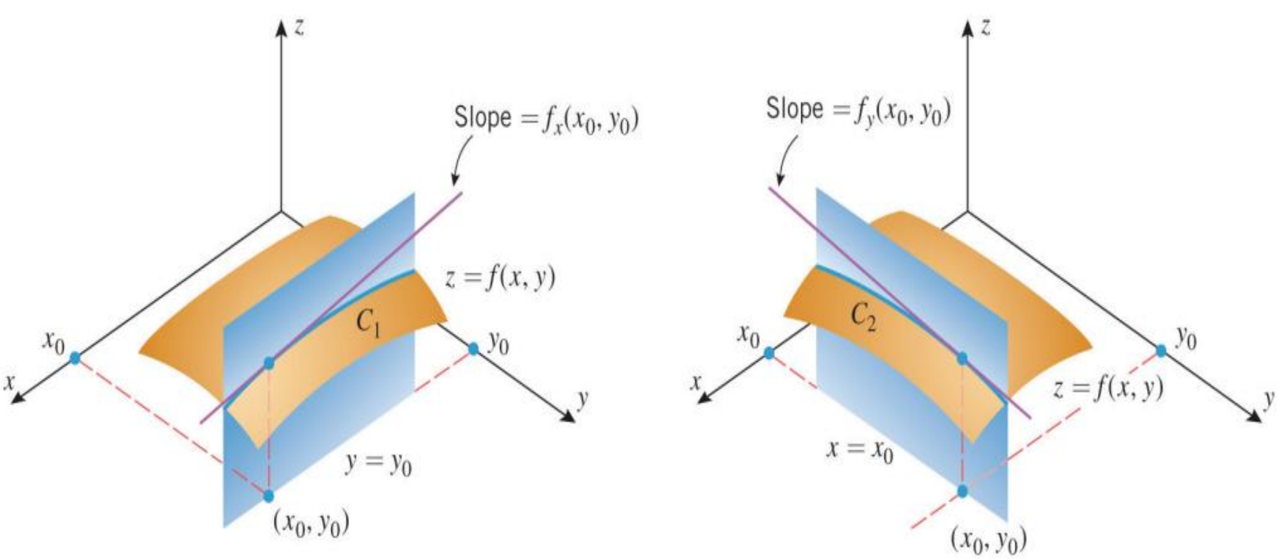

Figure 13.3.1

Geometrically, $f_x(x_0, y_0)$ can be viewed as the slope of the tangent line to the curve C_1 at the point (x_0, y_0), and $f_y(x_0, y_0)$ can be viewed as the slope of the tangent line to the curve C_2 at the point (x_0, y_0) (Figure 13.3.1). We will call $f_x(x_0, y_0)$ the ***slope of the surface in the x-direction*** at (x_0, y_0) and $f_y(x_0, y_0)$ the ***slope of the surface in the y-direction*** at (x_0, y_0).

▶ Example 4 Recall that the wind chill temperature index is given by the formula

$$W = 35.74 + 0.6215T + (0.4275T - 35.75)v^{0.16}$$

Compute the partial derivative of W with respect to v at the point $(T, v) = (25, 10)$ and interpret this partial derivative as a rate of change.

Solution. Holding T fixed and differentiating with respect to v yields

$$\frac{\partial W}{\partial v}(T, v) = 0 + 0 + (0.4275T - 35.75)(0.16)v^{0.16-1} = (0.4275T - 35.75)(0.16)v^{-0.84}$$

Since W is in degrees Fahrenheit and v is in miles per hour, a rate of change of W with respect to v will have units $^\circ\mathrm{F}/(\mathrm{mi/h})$ (which may also be written as $^\circ\mathrm{F}{\cdot}\mathrm{h/mi}$). Substituting $T = 25$ and $v = 10$ gives

$$\frac{\partial W}{\partial v}(25, 10) = (-4.01)10^{-0.84} \approx -0.58\ \frac{^\circ\mathrm{F}}{\mathrm{mi/h}}$$

as the instantaneous rate of change of W with respect to v at $(T, v) = (25, 10)$. We conclude that if the air temperature is a constant 25°F and the wind speed changes by a small amount from an initial speed of 10 mi/h, then the ratio of the change in the wind chill index to the change in wind speed should be about $-0.58^\circ\mathrm{F}/(\mathrm{mi/h})$. ◀

▶ Example 5 Let $f(x, y) = x^2y + 5y^3$.

(a) Find the slope of the surface $z = f(x, y)$ in the x-direction at the point $(1, -2)$.

(b) Find the slope of the surface $z = f(x, y)$ in the y-direction at the point $(1, -2)$.

Solution (a). Differentiating f with respect to x with y held fixed yields

$$f_x(x, y) = 2xy$$

Thus, the slope in the x-direction is $f_x(1, -2) = -4$; that is, z is decreasing at the rate of 4 units per unit increase in x.

Solution (b). Differentiating f with respect to y with x held fixed yields

$$f_y(x, y) = x^2 + 15y^2$$

Thus, the slope in the y-direction is $f_y(1, -2) = 61$; that is, z is increasing at the rate of 61 units per unit increase in y. ◀

ESTIMATING PARTIAL DERIVATIVES FROM TABULAR DATA

For functions that are presented in tabular form, we can estimate partial derivatives by using adjacent entries within the table.

▶ Example 6 Use the values of the wind chill index function $W(T, v)$ displayed in Table 13.3.1 to estimate the partial derivative of W with respect to v at $(T, v) = (25, 10)$. Compare this estimate with the value of the partial derivative obtained in Example 4.

Table 13.3.1

TEMPERATURE T (°F)

WIND SPEED v (mi/h)	20	25	30	35
5	13	19	25	31
10	9	15	21	27
15	6	13	19	25
20	4	11	17	24

Solution. Since

$$\frac{\partial W}{\partial v}(25, 10) = \lim_{\Delta v \to 0} \frac{W(25, 10 + \Delta v) - W(25, 10)}{\Delta v} = \lim_{\Delta v \to 0} \frac{W(25, 10 + \Delta v) - 15}{\Delta v}$$

we can approximate the partial derivative by

$$\frac{\partial W}{\partial v}(25, 10) \approx \frac{W(25, 10 + \Delta v) - 15}{\Delta v}$$

With $\Delta v = 5$ this approximation is

$$\frac{\partial W}{\partial v}(25, 10) \approx \frac{W(25, 10 + 5) - 15}{5} = \frac{W(25, 15) - 15}{5} = \frac{13 - 15}{5} = -\frac{2}{5}\ \frac{^\circ\mathrm{F}}{\mathrm{mi/h}}$$

and with $\Delta v = -5$ this approximation is

$$\frac{\partial W}{\partial v}(25, 10) \approx \frac{W(25, 10 - 5) - 15}{-5} = \frac{W(25, 5) - 15}{-5} = \frac{19 - 15}{-5} = -\frac{4}{5}\ \frac{^\circ\mathrm{F}}{\mathrm{mi/h}}$$

We will take the average, $-\frac{3}{5} = -0.6\,^\circ\mathrm{F}/(\mathrm{mi/h})$, of these two approximations as our estimate of $(\partial W/\partial v)(25, 10)$. This is close to the value

$$\frac{\partial W}{\partial v}(25, 10) = (-4.01)10^{-0.84} \approx -0.58\ \frac{^\circ\mathrm{F}}{\mathrm{mi/h}}$$

found in Example 4. ◀

IMPLICIT PARTIAL DIFFERENTIATION

▶ **Example 7** Find the slope of the sphere $x^2 + y^2 + z^2 = 1$ in the y-direction at the points $\left(\frac{2}{3}, \frac{1}{3}, \frac{2}{3}\right)$ and $\left(\frac{2}{3}, \frac{1}{3}, -\frac{2}{3}\right)$ (Figure 13.3.2).

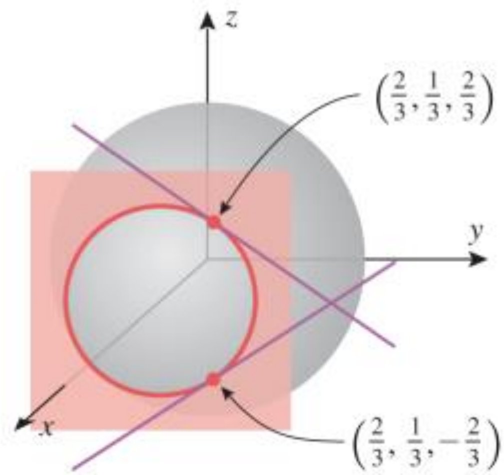

Figure 13.3.2

Solution. The point $\left(\frac{2}{3}, \frac{1}{3}, \frac{2}{3}\right)$ lies on the upper hemisphere $z = \sqrt{1 - x^2 - y^2}$, and the point $\left(\frac{2}{3}, \frac{1}{3}, -\frac{2}{3}\right)$ lies on the lower hemisphere $z = -\sqrt{1 - x^2 - y^2}$. We could find the slopes by differentiating each expression for z separately with respect to y and then evaluating the derivatives at $x = \frac{2}{3}$ and $y = \frac{1}{3}$. However, it is more efficient to differentiate the given equation

$$x^2 + y^2 + z^2 = 1$$

implicitly with respect to y, since this will give us both slopes with one differentiation. To perform the implicit differentiation, we view z as a function of x and y and differentiate both sides with respect to y, taking x to be fixed. The computations are as follows:

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial y}[x^2 + y^2 + z^2] = \frac{\partial}{\partial y}[1]$$

$$0 + 2y + 2z\frac{\partial z}{\partial y} = 0$$

$$\frac{\partial z}{\partial y} = -\frac{y}{z}$$

Substituting the y- and z-coordinates of the points $\left(\frac{2}{3}, \frac{1}{3}, \frac{2}{3}\right)$ and $\left(\frac{2}{3}, \frac{1}{3}, -\frac{2}{3}\right)$ in this expression, we find that the slope at the point $\left(\frac{2}{3}, \frac{1}{3}, \frac{2}{3}\right)$ is $-\frac{1}{2}$ and the slope at $\left(\frac{2}{3}, \frac{1}{3}, -\frac{2}{3}\right)$ is $\frac{1}{2}$.

Implicit Differentiation:

$$x^2+y^2+z^2=1$$

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial y}(x^2+y^2+z^2)=\frac{\partial}{\partial y}(1)$$

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial y}(x^2)+\frac{\partial}{\partial y}(y^2)+\frac{\partial}{\partial y}(z^2)=\frac{\partial}{\partial y}(1)$$

$$0+2y+2z\frac{\partial z}{\partial y}=0$$

(chain rule)

$$\boxed{\frac{\partial (z^2)}{\partial z}\cdot\frac{\partial z}{\partial y}}$$

$$\Rightarrow \frac{\partial z}{\partial y}=\frac{-\cancel{2}y}{\cancel{2}z}$$

$$\frac{\partial z}{\partial y}=\frac{-y}{z}$$

Example 8 Suppose that $D=\sqrt{x^2+y^2}$ is the length of the diagonal of a rectangle whose sides have lengths x and y that are allowed to vary. Find a formula for the rate of change of D with respect to x if x varies with y held constant, and use this formula to find the rate of change of D with respect to x at the point where $x=3$ and $y=4$.

Solution. Differentiating both sides of the equation $D^2 = x^2 + y^2$ with respect to x yields

$$2D\frac{\partial D}{\partial x} = 2x \quad \text{and thus} \quad D\frac{\partial D}{\partial x} = x$$

Since $D = 5$ when $x = 3$ and $y = 4$, it follows that

$$5\left.\frac{\partial D}{\partial x}\right|_{x=3,y=4} = 3 \quad \text{or} \quad \left.\frac{\partial D}{\partial x}\right|_{x=3,y=4} = \frac{3}{5}$$

Thus, D is increasing at a rate of $\frac{3}{5}$ unit per unit increase in x at the point (3, 4). ◀

PARTIAL DERIVATIVES AND CONTINUITY

In contrast to the case of functions of a single variable, the existence of partial derivatives for a multivariable function does not guarantee the continuity of the function. This fact is shown in the following example.

▶ Example 9 Let

$$f(x,y) = \begin{cases} -\dfrac{xy}{x^2+y^2}, & (x,y) \neq (0,0) \\ 0, & (x,y) = (0,0) \end{cases}$$

(a) Show that $f_x(x,y)$ and $f_y(x,y)$ exist at all points (x,y).

(b) Explain why f is not continuous at $(0,0)$.

Solution:

$$f_x(x,y) = -\frac{(x^2+y^2)y - xy(2x)}{(x^2+y^2)^2} = \frac{x^2y - y^3}{(x^2+y^2)^2}$$

$$f_y(x,y) = -\frac{(x^2+y^2)x - xy(2y)}{(x^2+y^2)^2} = \frac{xy^2 - x^3}{(x^2+y^2)^2}$$

Applying formulas

$$f_x(0,0) = \lim_{\Delta x \to 0} \frac{f(\Delta x, 0) - f(0,0)}{\Delta x} = \lim_{\Delta x \to 0} \frac{0-0}{\Delta x} = 0$$

$$f_y(0,0) = \lim_{\Delta y \to 0} \frac{f(0, \Delta y) - f(0,0)}{\Delta y} = \lim_{\Delta y \to 0} \frac{0-0}{\Delta y} = 0$$

This shows that f has partial derivatives at $(0, 0)$ and the values of both partial derivatives are 0 at that point.

Solution (b). We saw in Example 3 of Section 13.2 that

$$\lim_{(x,y)\to(0,0)} -\frac{xy}{x^2+y^2}$$

does not exist. Thus, f is not continuous at $(0, 0)$. ◀

PARTIAL DERIVATIVES OF FUNCTIONS WITH MORE THAN TWO VARIABLES

For a function $f(x, y, z)$ of three variables, there are three ***partial derivatives***:

$$f_x(x, y, z), \quad f_y(x, y, z), \quad f_z(x, y, z)$$

The partial derivative f_x is calculated by holding y and z constant and differentiating with respect to x. For f_y the variables x and z are held constant, and for f_z the variables x and y are held constant. If a dependent variable

$$w = f(x, y, z)$$

is used, then the three partial derivatives of f can be denoted by

$$\frac{\partial w}{\partial x}, \quad \frac{\partial w}{\partial y}, \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{\partial w}{\partial z}$$

▶ **Example 10** If $f(x, y, z) = x^3y^2z^4 + 2xy + z$, then

$$f_x(x, y, z) = 3x^2y^2z^4 + 2y$$
$$f_y(x, y, z) = 2x^3yz^4 + 2x$$
$$f_z(x, y, z) = 4x^3y^2z^3 + 1$$
$$f_z(-1, 1, 2) = 4(-1)^3(1)^2(2)^3 + 1 = -31$$ ◀

In general:

$$w = f(v_1, v_2, v_3, \ldots, v_n)$$

then partial derivatives are denoted by

$$\frac{\partial w}{\partial v_1}, \frac{\partial w}{\partial v_2}, \frac{\partial w}{\partial v_3}, \ldots, \frac{\partial w}{\partial v_n}$$

where $\frac{\partial w}{\partial v_i}$ is obtained by holding all variables constant except 'v_i' and differentiating with respect to 'v_i'.

HIGHER-ORDER PARTIAL DERIVATIVES

Suppose that f is a function of two variables x and y. Since the partial derivatives $\partial f/\partial x$ and $\partial f/\partial y$ are also functions of x and y, these functions may themselves have partial derivatives. This gives rise to four possible ***second-order*** partial derivatives of f, which are defined by

$$\frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial x^2} = \frac{\partial}{\partial x}\left(\frac{\partial f}{\partial x}\right) = f_{xx} \qquad \frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial y^2} = \frac{\partial}{\partial y}\left(\frac{\partial f}{\partial y}\right) = f_{yy}$$

Differentiate twice with respect to x.

Differentiate twice with respect to y.

$$\frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial y \partial x} = \frac{\partial}{\partial y}\left(\frac{\partial f}{\partial x}\right) = f_{xy} \qquad \frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial x \partial y} = \frac{\partial}{\partial x}\left(\frac{\partial f}{\partial y}\right) = f_{yx}$$

Differentiate first with respect to x and then with respect to y.

Differentiate first with respect to y and then with respect to x.

▶ **Example 12** Find the second-order partial derivatives of $f(x, y) = x^2y^3 + x^4y$.

Solution. We have

$$\frac{\partial f}{\partial x} = 2xy^3 + 4x^3y \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{\partial f}{\partial y} = 3x^2y^2 + x^4$$

so that

$$\frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial x^2} = \frac{\partial}{\partial x}\left(\frac{\partial f}{\partial x}\right) = \frac{\partial}{\partial x}(2xy^3 + 4x^3y) = 2y^3 + 12x^2y$$

$$\frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial y^2} = \frac{\partial}{\partial y}\left(\frac{\partial f}{\partial y}\right) = \frac{\partial}{\partial y}(3x^2y^2 + x^4) = 6x^2y$$

$$\frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial x \partial y} = \frac{\partial}{\partial x}\left(\frac{\partial f}{\partial y}\right) = \frac{\partial}{\partial x}(3x^2y^2 + x^4) = 6xy^2 + 4x^3$$

$$\frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial y \partial x} = \frac{\partial}{\partial y}\left(\frac{\partial f}{\partial x}\right) = \frac{\partial}{\partial y}(2xy^3 + 4x^3y) = 6xy^2 + 4x^3 \blacktriangleleft$$

Third-order, fourth-order, and higher-order partial derivatives can be obtained by successive differentiation. Some possibilities are

$$\frac{\partial^3 f}{\partial x^3} = \frac{\partial}{\partial x}\left(\frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial x^2}\right) = f_{xxx} \qquad \frac{\partial^4 f}{\partial y^4} = \frac{\partial}{\partial y}\left(\frac{\partial^3 f}{\partial y^3}\right) = f_{yyyy}$$

$$\frac{\partial^3 f}{\partial y^2 \partial x} = \frac{\partial}{\partial y}\left(\frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial y \partial x}\right) = f_{xyy} \qquad \frac{\partial^4 f}{\partial y^2 \partial x^2} = \frac{\partial}{\partial y}\left(\frac{\partial^3 f}{\partial y \partial x^2}\right) = f_{xxyy}$$

▶ **Example 13** Let $f(x, y) = y^2e^x + y$. Find f_{xyy}.

Solution.

$$f_{xyy} = \frac{\partial^3 f}{\partial y^2 \partial x} = \frac{\partial^2}{\partial y^2}\left(\frac{\partial f}{\partial x}\right) = \frac{\partial^2}{\partial y^2}(y^2e^x) = \frac{\partial}{\partial y}(2ye^x) = 2e^x \blacktriangleleft$$

Equality of Mixed Partials:

13.3.2 THEOREM *Let f be a function of two variables. If f_{xy} and f_{yx} are continuous on some open disk, then $f_{xy} = f_{yx}$ on that disk.*

It follows from this theorem that if $f_{xy}(x, y)$ and $f_{yx}(x, y)$ are continuous everywhere, then $f_{xy}(x, y) = f_{yx}(x, y)$ for all values of x and y. Since polynomials are continuous everywhere, this explains why the mixed second-order partials in Example 12 are equal.