Chapter 3
Applications of Derivatives

3.4 Limits at Infinity; Horizontal Asymptotes

Example. What is the limit of $f(x) = \dfrac{x^2 - 1}{x^2 + 1}$ when x becomes large?

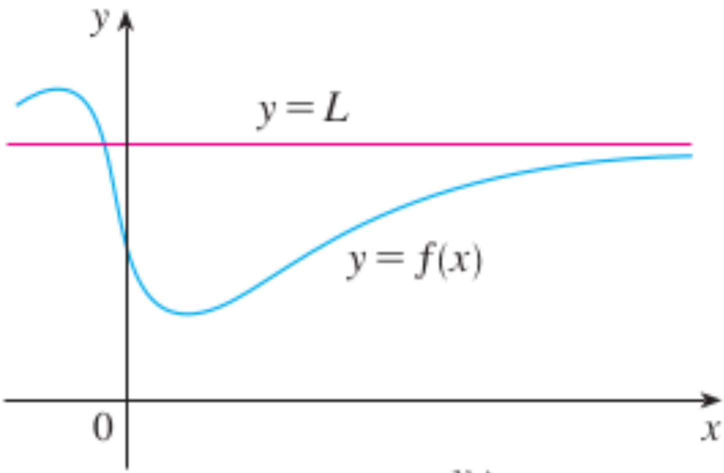
x	$f(x)$

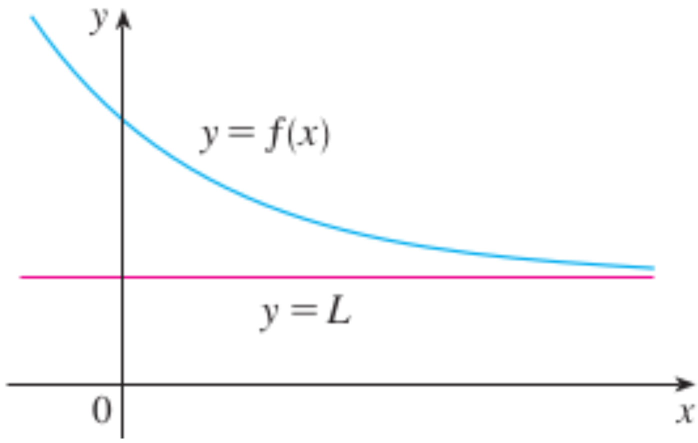
x	$f(x)$

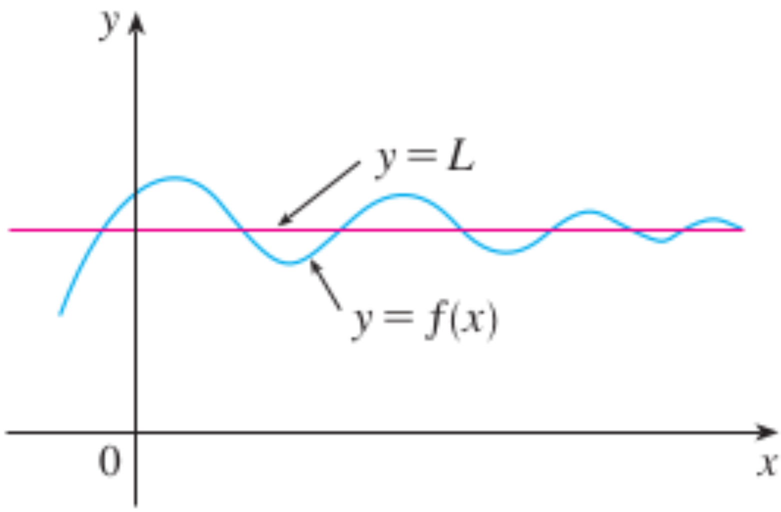
1 Intuitive Definition of a Limit at Infinity Let f be a function defined on some interval (a, ∞). Then

$$\lim_{x \to \infty} f(x) = L$$

means that the values of $f(x)$ can be made arbitrarily close to L by requiring x to be sufficiently large.







Example. What is the limit of $f(x) = \dfrac{x^2 - 1}{x^2 + 1}$ when x becomes large?

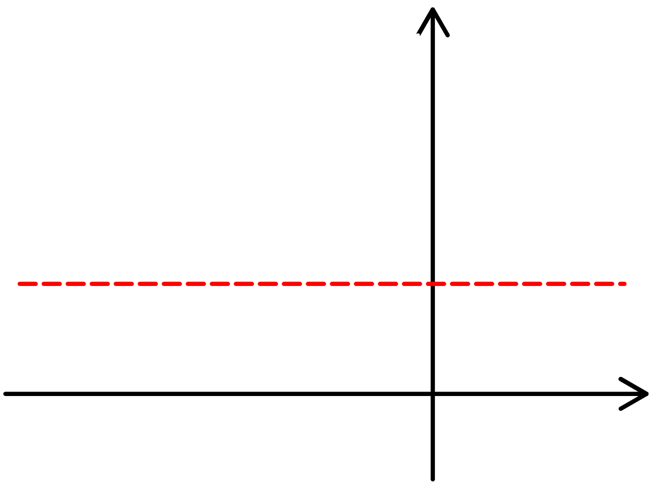
x	$f(x)$

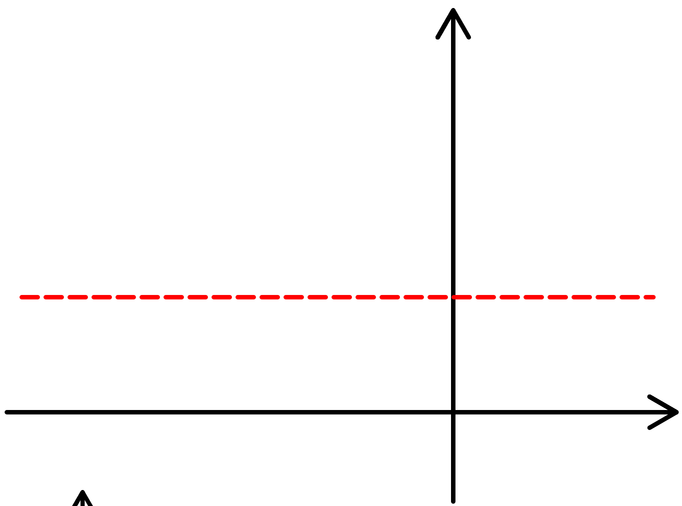
x	$f(x)$

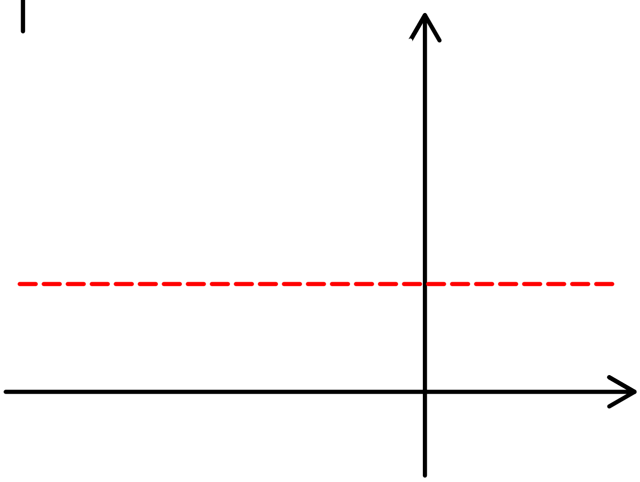
2 Definition Let f be a function defined on some interval $(-\infty, a)$. Then

$$\lim_{x \to -\infty} f(x) = L$$

means that the values of $f(x)$ can be made arbitrarily close to L by requiring x to be sufficiently large negative.







3 Definition The line $y = L$ is called a **horizontal asymptote** of the curve $y = f(x)$ if either

$$\lim_{x \to \infty} f(x) = L \qquad \text{or} \qquad \lim_{x \to -\infty} f(x) = L$$

EXAMPLE 1 Find the infinite limits, limits at infinity, and asymptotes for the function f whose graph is shown in Figure 5.

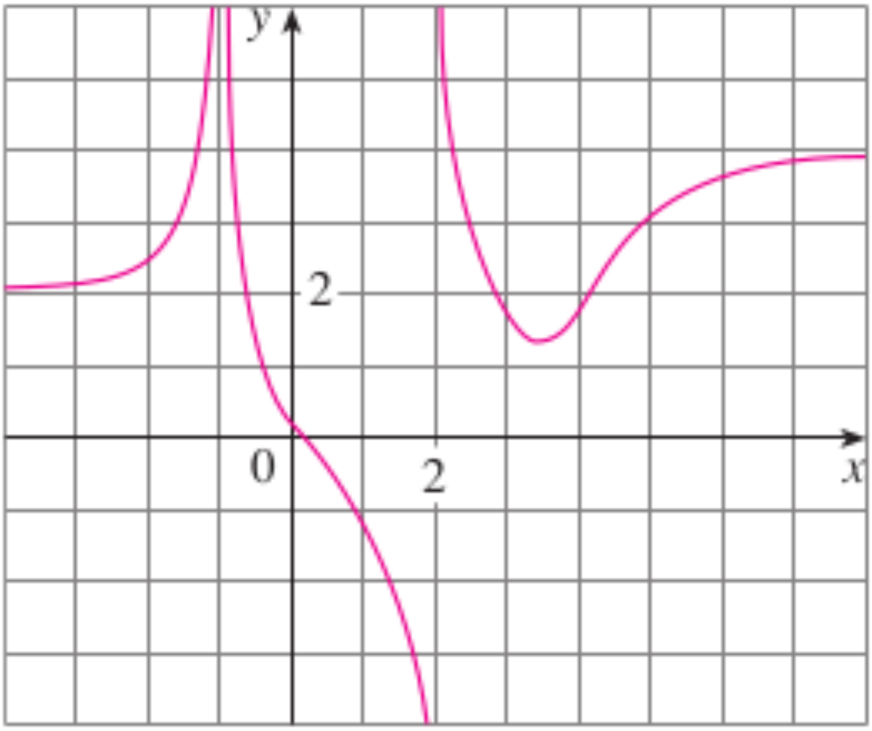


FIGURE 5

Rules for Limits at infinity.

4 Theorem If $r > 0$ is a rational number, then

$$\lim_{x \to \infty} \frac{1}{x^r} = 0$$

If $r > 0$ is a rational number such that x^r is defined for all x, then

$$\lim_{x \to -\infty} \frac{1}{x^r} = 0$$

EXAMPLE 3 Evaluate

$$\lim_{x \to \infty} \frac{3x^2 - x - 2}{5x^2 + 4x + 1}$$

EXAMPLE 4 Find the horizontal and vertical asymptotes of the graph of the function

$$f(x) = \frac{\sqrt{2x^2 + 1}}{3x - 5}$$

EXAMPLE 5 Compute $\lim_{x \to \infty} \left(\sqrt{x^2 + 1} - x\right)$.

Infinite Limits at Infinity.

The notation

$$\lim_{x \to \infty} f(x) = \infty$$

means that the values of $f(x)$ become larger and larger as the values of x becomes larger and larger. Similar meanings are attached to the following symbols:

$$\lim_{x \to -\infty} f(x) = \infty, \qquad \lim_{x \to \infty} f(x) = -\infty \quad \text{and} \quad \lim_{x \to -\infty} f(x) = -\infty.$$

WARNING!!

EXAMPLE 8 Find $\lim_{x \to \infty} x^3$ and $\lim_{x \to -\infty} x^3$.

EXAMPLE 9 Find $\lim_{x \to \infty} (x^2 - x)$.