1 15.6: Tangent Planes and Linear Approximation

Tangent Plane for $z = f(x, y)$
Let f be differentiable at the point (a, b). An equation of the plane tangent to the surface $z = f(x, y)$ at the point $(a, b, f(a, b))$ is

$$z = f_x(a, b)(x - a) + f_y(a, b)(y - b) + f(a, b)$$

Definition. (Linear Approximation)
Let f be differentiable at (a, b). The linear approximation to the surface $z = f(x, y)$ at the point $(a, b, f(a, b))$ is the tangent plane at that point, given by the equation

$$L(x, y) = f_x(a, b)(x - a) + f_y(a, b)(y - b) + f(a, b),$$

For a function of three variables, the linear approximation to $w = f(x, y, z)$ at the point $(a, b, c, f(a, b, c))$ is given by

$$L(x, y, z) = f_x(a, b, c)(x - a) + f_y(a, b, c)(y - b) + f_z(a, b, c)(z - c) + f(a, b, c).$$

Definition. (The differential dz)
Let f be differentiable at the point (x, y). The change in $z = f(x, y)$ as the independent variables change from (x, y) to $(x+dx, y+dy)$ is denoted Δz and is approximated by the differential dz:

$$\Delta z \approx dz = f_x(x, y)\, dx + f_y(x, y)\, dy.$$