We therefore predict that the CO_2 level will exceed 400 ppm by the year 2019. This prediction is somewhat risky because it involves a time quite remote from our observations. ■

POLYNOMIALS

A function P is called a **polynomial** if

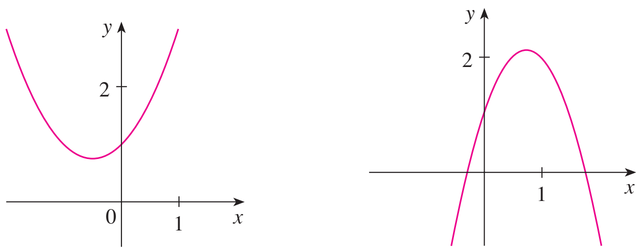
$$P(x) = a_n x^n + a_{n-1} x^{n-1} + \cdots + a_2 x^2 + a_1 x + a_0$$

where n is a nonnegative integer and the numbers $a_0, a_1, a_2, \ldots, a_n$ are constants called the **coefficients** of the polynomial. The domain of any polynomial is $\mathbb{R} = (-\infty, \infty)$. If the leading coefficient $a_n \neq 0$, then the **degree** of the polynomial is n. For example, the function

$$P(x) = 2x^6 - x^4 + \tfrac{2}{5}x^3 + \sqrt{2}$$

is a polynomial of degree 6.

A polynomial of degree 1 is of the form $P(x) = mx + b$ and so it is a linear function. A polynomial of degree 2 is of the form $P(x) = ax^2 + bx + c$ and is called a **quadratic function**. Its graph is always a parabola obtained by shifting the parabola $y = ax^2$, as we will see in the next section. The parabola opens upward if $a > 0$ and downward if $a < 0$. (See Figure 7.)



(a) $y = x^2 + x + 1$ (b) $y = -2x^2 + 3x + 1$

FIGURE 7 The graphs of quadratic functions are parabolas.

A polynomial of degree 3 is of the form

$$P(x) = ax^3 + bx^2 + cx + d \qquad (a \neq 0)$$

and is called a **cubic function**. Figure 8 shows the graph of a cubic function in part (a) and graphs of polynomials of degrees 4 and 5 in parts (b) and (c). We will see later why the graphs have these shapes.

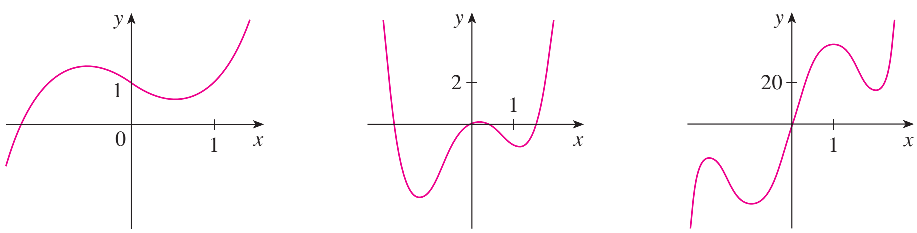


FIGURE 8 (a) $y = x^3 - x + 1$ (b) $y = x^4 - 3x^2 + x$ (c) $y = 3x^5 - 25x^3 + 60x$