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# Bisection Method

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## Contents

1 Bisection Method	2
References	4

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# 1 BISECTION METHOD

The **bisection method** can be used to find the root of a univariate function  $f(x)$ , with no restrictions on the differentiability of  $f$ . The basic idea behind the bisection is starting off with some interval  $[a, b]$  containing a root, iteratively “shrinking” this interval until it is below some tolerance threshold, and then taking the root to be the midpoint of this interval. The general procedure is as follows:

1. Make an initial guess for the interval  $[a, b]$  containing the root.
2. Assume the root,  $c$ , is the midpoint of this interval:  $c = (a + b)/2$ .
3. Evaluate  $f(a)$  and  $f(c)$ .
  - (a) If  $f(a) < 0$  and  $f(c) > 0$  (i.e. they have different sign), we know the true root is contained in the interval  $[a, c]$ . Therefore, we update our interval so that  $a$  remains the same, but  $b$  is updated to be  $c$ .
  - (b) If  $f(a)$  and  $f(c)$  have the same sign (either both negative or both positive), we know the true root must be contained in the interval  $[c, b]$ . Therefore, we update our interval so that  $b$  remains the same, but  $a$  is updated to be  $c$ .
4. Repeating steps 2 and 3, the interval  $[a, b]$  will keep shrinking. Once the difference  $(b - a)$  is small enough, we say that the estimate of the root has **converged** to the true root, within some **tolerance** (which we denote as TOL). Therefore, if we predetermine that, at most, the root must be restricted to an interval of length TOL, we will keep repeating steps 2 and 3 until  $(b - a) < \text{TOL}$ .

In some cases, the difference  $(b - a)$  may never decrease below TOL, or take too long to decrease to below TOL. Therefore, we also define the **maximum number of iterations** ( $i_{\max}$ ) so that the algorithm does not keep iterating forever, or for too long of a time [1, 2].

There are two basic algorithms for implementing the bisection method. The first implementation, shown in Algorithm 1 below, does *not* store the result of each iteration. On the other hand, the second implementation, shown in Algorithm 2, *does* store the result of each iteration. `bisection_method` implements both of these algorithms.

Since Algorithm 2 first needs to preallocate a potentially huge array to store all of the intermediate solutions, Algorithm 1 is significantly faster. Even if  $i_{\max}$  (determines size of the preallocated array) is set to be a small number (for example, 10), Algorithm 1 is still faster. The reason we still consider and implement Algorithm 2 is so that convergence studies may be performed.

## Algorithm 1:

Bisection method [fast implementation].

### Given:

- $f(x)$  - function
- $a$  - lower bound for initial guess of interval with root
- $b$  - upper bound for initial guess of interval with root
- TOL - tolerance
- $i_{\max}$  - maximum number of iterations

### Procedure:

1. Initial guess for root.

$$c = \frac{a + b}{2}$$

2. Initialize  $x_{\text{new}}$  so its scope will not be limited to within the while loop.

$$x_{\text{new}} = 0$$

3. Find the root using the bisection method.

**while**  $((b - a) > \text{TOL})$  **and**  $(i < i_{\max})$

```

(a) Update interval.
    if  $f(c) = 0$ 
    |   Stop
    else if  $\text{sgn}[f(c)] = \text{sgn}[f(a)]$ 
    |    $a = c$ 
    else
    |    $b = c$ 
    end

(b) Update root estimate.
                                      $c = \frac{a + b}{2}$ 

(c) Increment loop index.
                                      $i = i + 1$ 

end

```

**Return:**

- $\text{root} = c$  - converged root

**Algorithm 2:**

Bisection method [storing intermediate root estimates].

**Given:**

- $f(x)$  - function
- $a$  - lower bound for initial guess of interval with root
- $b$  - upper bound for initial guess of interval with root
- TOL - tolerance
- $i_{\max}$  - maximum number of iterations

**Procedure:**

1. Preallocate  $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^{i_{\max}}$  to store the estimates of the root at each iteration.
2. Store the initial guess for the root in the first element of  $\mathbf{x}$ .

$$x_1 = \frac{a + b}{2}$$

3. Find the root using the bisection method.

**while**  $((b - a) > \text{TOL})$  **and**  $(i < i_{\max})$

```

    (a) Update interval.
        if  $f(x_i) = 0$ 
        |   Stop
        else if  $\text{sgn}[f(x_i)] = \text{sgn}[f(a)]$ 
        |    $a = x_i$ 
        else
        |    $b = x_i$ 
        end

    (b) Update root estimate.
                                     
$$x_{i+1} = \frac{a+b}{2}$$


    (c) Increment loop index.
                                     
$$i = i + 1$$


end
```

**Return:**

- $\mathbf{x}$  - vector where the first element is the initial guess for the root, the subsequent elements are the intermediate root estimates, and the final element is the converged root

## REFERENCES

- [1] *Bisection method*. Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bisection\\_method](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bisection_method) (accessed: February 7, 2020).
- [2] James Hateley. *Nonlinear Equations*. MATH 3620 Course Reader (Vanderbilt University). 2019.