MATH 1080 Vagnozzi

11.1: Approximating Functions with Polynomials

Learning Objectives. Upon successful completion of Section 11.1, you will be able to...

- Answer conceptual questions about Taylor polynomials.
- Use linear and quadratic polynomials to approximate functions.
- Find the Taylor polynomial for a function centered at a specified number.
- Use Taylor polynomials to approximate functions.
- Compare the graph of a function and its Taylor polynomials.
- Find the remainder of an n^{th} order Taylor polynomial for a given function.
- Find the remainder term of a Taylor approximation and use it to estimate error.

Power Series

Chapter 11 focuses on a particular type of infinite series called a **power series**.

Definition. A power series is an infinite series of the form

$$\sum_{k=0}^{\infty} c_k x^k = c_0 + c_1 x + c_2 x^2 + \dots + c_n x^n + c_{n+1} x^{n+1} + \dots,$$

or, more generally,

$$\sum_{k=0}^{\infty} c_k(x-a)^k = c_0 + c_1(x-a) + c_2(x-a)^2 + \dots + c_n(x-a)^n + c_{n+1}(x-a)^{n+1} + \dots,$$

where a and c_k are constants. The values of c_k are called the **coefficients**.

Motivation. Why are power series important?

- Functions can be represented by power series.
- Functions can be defined as power series.
- Power series are like infinitely long polynomials, and polynomials have a lot of nice properties that make them straightforward to work with.
- Power series can be used to solve differential equations. (Differential equations were introduced in Section 4.9 in MATH 1060.)

Question: What should the form of the coefficients c_k be to provide a good approximation of a function? Let's explore! We will consider the function $f(x) = e^x$ centered at x = 0.

1 First, we will find a linear approximation for f(x) at x = 0. In other words, we will find the equation $p_1(x) = c_0 + c_1 x$ of the line tangent to f(x) at x = 0.

Note: $p_1(x)$ and f(x) have the same y-value and same first derivative at x = 0.

(2) To obtain a better approximation, let's consider a quadratic approximation that adds a quadratic term to $p_1(x)$:

$$p_2(x) = p_1(x) + c_2 x^2 = c_0 + c_1 x + c_2 x^2$$

We want a value for c_2 that results in a good approximation of f(x) near x = 0. $p_1(x)$ was a good linear approximation to f(x) because the y-values and first derivatives matched. It would be reasonable to want a value c_2 so that the second derivatives match as well.

- (a) Calculate $p_2(0)$ to show that the y-values match.
- (b) Calculate $p'_2(0)$ to show that the first derivatives match.
- (c) Calculate $p_2''(x)$. Then find a value for c_2 so that the second derivatives match.

(3) We can keep adding higher-order terms to get a better approximation to f(x) at x = 0. Let

$$p_3(x) = c_0 + c_1 x + c_2 x^2 + c_3 x^3.$$

Based on our work from the previous page, we know what c_0 , c_1 , and c_2 are. Let's find c_3 so that the third derivatives match.

(4) Let's look at one more approximation:

$$p_4(x) = c_0 + c_1 x + c_2 x^2 + c_3 x^3 + c_4 x^4.$$

Find the value of c_4 so that the fourth derivatives are equal.

Taylor Polynomials

The polynomial approximations we explored on the previous two pages are referred to as **Taylor polynomials**.

Definition. The *n*th-order Taylor polynomial $p_n(x)$ for f centered at x = a is

- **Example.** Consider the function $f(x) = \sqrt{x}$.
 - (a) Find the Taylor polynomial p_3 at a=1 for $f(x)=\sqrt{x}$.

(b) Now use p_3 to approximate $\sqrt{1.06}$.

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Approximations with Taylor Polynomials

Taylor polynomials provide a good approximation of f near the center a, and the approximation gets better as the order of the Taylor polynomial increases. Similar to our work when approximating the sum of a series, we can determine *how accurate* an approximation is through the idea of looking at remainders and error bounds.

Definition. Let p_n be the *n*th-order Taylor polynomial for f. The **remainder** in using p_n to approximate f at the point x is

 $|R_n(x)|$ is the **error** made in approximating f by p_n .

There are two theorems that will allow us to estimate bounds on the error in approximation with Taylor polynomials.

Taylor's Theorem (Remainder Theorem). Let f have continuous derivatives up to $f^{(n+1)}$ on an open interval containing a. For all x-values in the interval,

where p_n is the nth-order Taylor polynomial for f centered at a and the remainder is

$$R_n(x) = \frac{f^{(n+1)}(c)}{(n+1)!} (x-a)^{n+1},$$

for some point x between x and a.

Theorem: Estimate of the Remainder. Let n be a fixed positive integer. Suppose there exists a number M such that $|f^{(n+1)}(c)| \leq M$ for all c between a and x inclusive. The remainder in the nth-order Taylor polynomial for f centered at a satisfies

$$|R_n(x)| = |f(x) - p_n(x)| \le M \frac{|x - a|^{n+1}}{(n+1)!}$$

As a result of the two theorems above, we can get a **bound on the error** by...

- finding $f^{(n+1)}(x)$,
- finding a number M so that $|f^{(n+1)}(c)| \leq M$ for all $c \in [a, x]$, and then
- ullet plugging M into the formula from the second Theorem above.

Finding Error Bounds. For a Taylor polynomial used to approximate f...

- 2 Find a number M so that $|f^{(n+1)}(c)| \leq M$ for all $c \in [a, x]$.
- (3) Plug M into the estimation theorem to find the error bound:

$$|R_n(x)| \le M \frac{|x-a|^{n+1}}{(n+1)!}$$

- **Example.** Consider the function $f(x) = \cos x$ centered at a = 0.
 - (a) Find the Taylor polynomials of order n=2 and n=3 for f.

(b) Use the remainder term to find a bound on the error in the approximation $p_3(x)$ to f(x) on the interval $\left[-\frac{\pi}{4}, \frac{\pi}{4}\right]$.

Example. Let $\sqrt{x} \approx 2 + \frac{1}{4}(x-4) - \frac{1}{64}(x-4)^2$ on [4, 4.2]. Use the remainder term to find a bound on the error in the approximation on the given interval.

Example. What is the minimum order of Taylor polynomial required to approximate $e^{-0.5}$ with an absolute error no greater than 10^{-3} ?