Lecture Note 10 (Ref. text book page 140)

09/01/2021

2.7 Derivatives and Rates of Change

The **derivative of a function** f **at a number** a, denoted by $f'(a)$, is

$$f'(a) = \lim_{x \to a} \frac{f(x) - f(a)}{x - a} = \lim_{h \to 0} \frac{f(a+h) - f(a)}{h}$$

if this limit exists.

Example 1 Find the derivative of the function $f(x) = x^2 - 8x + 9$ at the number a.

The **tangent line** to $y = f(x)$ at $(a, f(a))$ is the line through $(a, f(a))$ whose slope is equal to $f'(a)$, the derivative of f at a.

Example 2 Find an equation of the tangent line to the curve $y = x^3 - 3x + 1$ at the point $(2, 3)$.

Rates of Change: Suppose y is a quantity that depends on another quantity x. Thus y is a function of x and we write $y = f(x)$. If x changes from x_1 to x_2, then the change in x (also called the **increment** of x) is $\Delta x = x_2 - x_1$ and the corresponding change in y is $\Delta y = f(x_2) - f(x_1)$. The difference quotient

$$\frac{\Delta y}{\Delta x} = \frac{f(x_2) - f(x_1)}{x_2 - x_1}$$

is called the **average rate of change of y with respect to x** over the interval $[x_1, x_2]$. By analogy with velocity, we consider the average rate of change over smaller and smaller intervals by letting x_2 approach x_1 and therefore letting Δx approach 0. The limit of these average rates of change is called the **(instantaneous) rate of change of y with respect to x** at $x = x_1$, that is,

$$\text{instantaneous rate of change} = \lim_{\Delta x \to 0} \frac{\Delta y}{\Delta x} = \lim_{x_2 \to x_1} \frac{f(x_2) - f(x_1)}{x_2 - x_1}$$

We recognize this limit as being the derivative $f'(x_1)$.

Velocities: If $s = f(t)$ is the position function of a particle that moves along a straight line, then $f'(a)$ is the rate of change of the displacement s with respect to the time t. In other words, $f'(a)$ is the velocity of the particle at time $t = a$. The speed of the particle is the absolute value of the velocity, that is, $|f'(a)|$

Example 3 If a ball is thrown into the air with a velocity of 40 ft/s, its height (in feet) after t seconds is given by $y = 40t - 16t^2$. Find the velocity when $t = 2$.