MATH 135 – Calculus 1
Higher Derivatives
October 26, 2016

Background

If $f(x)$ is a function, $f'(x)$ is often called its *first derivative*. (In the alternate notation that might be written $\frac{dy}{dx}$ if we're thinking of the graph $y = f(x)$. The reason for this is that it is possible to go on and differentiate $f'(x)$ to get another new function. The derivative of $f'(x)$, that is, $(f')'(x)$ is also called the *second derivative* of the original f, and written $f''(x)$ or $\frac{d^2y}{dx^2}$. Continuing in the same way, if we can differentiate $f''(x)$, the result is called the *third derivative* of f, and so forth. The rules for computing these *higher derivatives* are exactly the same as the rules for computing $f'(x)$ to start. Today, we want to practice with these and understand why they are interesting.

Questions

(1) For each function, use the appropriate short-cut rules to find the first derivative, and then differentiate again to get the second derivative:

  (a) $f(x) = x^5 + 4x^3 + x$. Also find the third derivative $f'''(x)$, the fourth derivative, the fifth derivative, and the sixth derivative for this one. (What *always* happens if you differentiate a polynomial function repeatedly enough times?)

  (b) $g(x) = \dfrac{x}{x^2 - 1}$. Your life will be a lot easier here if you simplify the first derivative before differentiating again to get $g''(x)$.

  (c) $h(x) = (x^2 + x + 1)e^x$. Also find the third derivative $h'''(x)$ for this one.

(2) So *why* would we want to be able to differentiate multiple times? The answer is that the second derivative f'' in particular encodes interesting information about the original function f.

  (a) (A physical reason) – If $x(t)$ is the position of a moving object, then the rate of change of position $v(t) = x'(t)$ is called the *(instantaneous) velocity* at t. The rate of change of velocity is $v'(t) = x''(t)$. What is the physical name for the rate of change of velocity?

  (b) Suppose we know $f''(x) > 0$ on some interval (a, b). Recall that $f'' = (f')'$. What can we say about f' on that interval? Draw pictures illustrating graphs on which $f''(x) > 0$ for all x. What is the name for the property you are seeing (recall today's video)?

  (c) Now, suppose we know $f''(x) < 0$ on some interval (a, b). Recall again that $f'' = (f')'$. What can we say about f' on that interval? Draw pictures illustrating graphs on which $f''(x) < 0$ for all x. What is the name for the property you are seeing?

(3) One of the graphs on the back this sheet is $y = f(x)$, and the other two are $y = f'(x)$ and $y = f''(x)$ for the same function $f(x)$. Which graph is which? (Be careful – these are not polynomial functions, so counting x-axis intercepts or "turning points" might not give the correct result!)

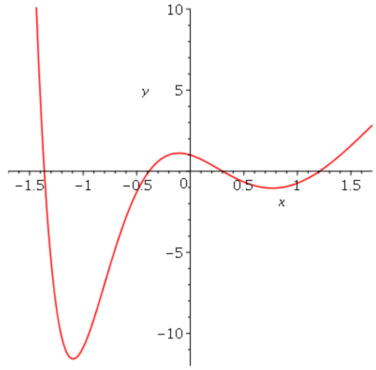

Figure 1: Plot A

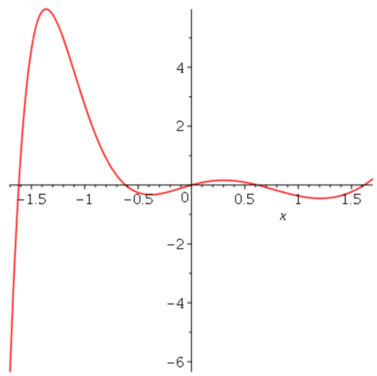

Figure 2: Plot B

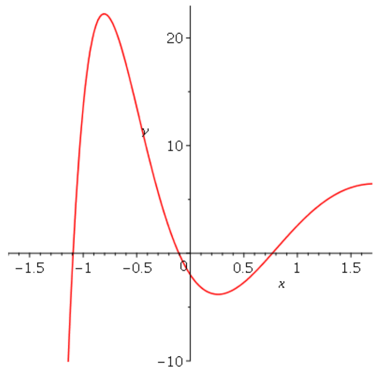

Figure 3: Plot C