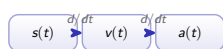


Contextual Applications of Differentiation

AP Calculus BC ■ Unit 4

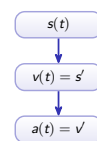
AP Calculus BC



Contextual Applications of Differentiation

What we will cover

- 1 Interpreting a derivative in context
- 2 Straight-line motion
- 3 Related rates
- 4 Linear approximation
- 5 L'Hospital's rule



1 In context

Contextual Applications of Differentiation

↳ In context

Interpreting a derivative – units and a sentence

$f'(x)$ is the instantaneous rate of change of f per unit of x .

The **unit** 单位 of f' is unit of $f \div$ unit of x : acres per week, litres per minute.

“Interpret $g'(140) = 2.3$ with units”

A full-credit sentence needs **four** parts:
At $x = 140$ (the moment), the quantity is *increasing* (the direction) at about 2.3 units (the value) **per unit** of x (the rate word).

2 Motion

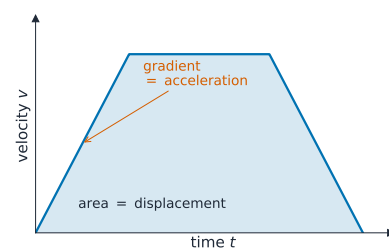
Contextual Applications of Differentiation

↳ Motion

Straight-line motion

Three functions of time, linked by differentiation:

- **position** 位置 $s(t)$
- **velocity** 速度 $v(t) = s'(t)$ – signed
- **acceleration** 加速度 $a(t) = v'(t) = s''(t)$



Reading the motion – the frequent exam parts

At rest 静止
 $v(t) = 0$

Changes direction
where v changes sign

Direction
right/up if $v > 0$.
left/down if $v < 0$.

Speed
 $|v(t)|$ – no direction

A rising balloon: related rates
link how fast radius, volume and
height change together

Speeding up or slowing down?

Compare the **signs** of v and a :

Same sign $\Rightarrow$ speeding up. **Opposite signs** $\Rightarrow$ slowing down.

Velocity has direction; speed does not. The exam tests exactly this difference.



Related rates coaster

Worked example – a particle on a line

$$s(t) = t^3 - 6t^2 + 9t$$

$$v(t) = 3t^2 - 12t + 9 = 3(t-1)(t-3)$$

At rest at $t = 1$ and $t = 3$; it changes direction at each. At $t = 2$: $v(2) = -3 < 0$ (moving left), and just after, $a > 0$ while $v < 0$ – opposite signs, so it is **slowing down**.

$$s(t) = t^3 - 6t^2 + 9t$$

$$v(t) = 3(t-1)(t-3)$$

$$a(t) = 6t - 12$$

3 Related rates

Related rates – the five-step template

In a **related rates** 相关变化率 problem, quantities change together in time. The engine is the **chain rule**: differentiate with respect to t .

- 1 name the variables; list given & wanted rates
- 2 write an equation relating them
- 3 differentiate both sides in t
- 4 substitute the values **last**
- 5 state **units** and the correct **sign**

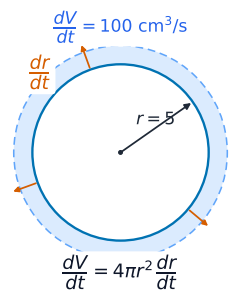
Worked example – the inflating balloon

$\frac{dV}{dt} = 100 \text{ cm}^3/\text{s}$: how fast is r growing at $r = 5$?

Start from $V = \frac{4}{3}\pi r^3$ and differentiate in t first:

$$\frac{dV}{dt} = 4\pi r^2 \frac{dr}{dt}$$

$$100 = 4\pi(5)^2 \frac{dr}{dt} \Rightarrow \frac{dr}{dt} = \frac{1}{\pi} \approx 0.32 \text{ cm/s.}$$



The classic related-rates error

❌ **Substitute $r = 5$ first**

$V = \frac{4}{3}\pi(5)^3$ is a **constant**, so $\frac{dV}{dt} = 0$. The radius is now frozen – the problem is destroyed.

✅ **Differentiate first**

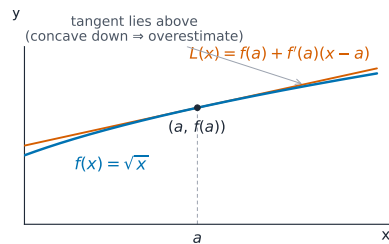
Keep r a **function of t** , differentiate the general relationship, **then** put $r = 5$ in.

Substituting the instant's value **too early** is the single most common lost mark here.

4 Approximation

Local linearity and linearization

Near the point of tangency a smooth curve **looks like** its tangent – **local linearity** 局部线性. So the tangent is the best **linear approximation** 线性近似:
 $f(x) \approx L(x) = f(a) + f'(a)(x - a)$.



Worked example – estimate $\sqrt{4.1}$

$f(x) = \sqrt{x}$, $a = 4$

$f(4) = 2$ and $f'(x) = \frac{1}{2\sqrt{x}}$, so $f'(4) = \frac{1}{4}$:

$$L(4.1) = 2 + \frac{1}{4}(4.1 - 4) = 2.025$$

(true value 2.0248...).

$\sqrt{x}$ is **concave down** ($f' < 0$), so the tangent lies **above** the curve – a slight **overestimate** 高估.

Justify over/under with the **sign of f'** , never by eye.

5 L'Hospital

L'Hospital's rule

If substitution gives the **indeterminate form** 未定式 $\frac{0}{0}$ or $\frac{\infty}{\infty}$:

$$\lim_{x \rightarrow c} \frac{f(x)}{g(x)} = \lim_{x \rightarrow c} \frac{f'(x)}{g'(x)}.$$

Differentiate top and bottom **separately** – this is **not** the quotient rule.

Evaluate $\lim_{x \rightarrow 0} \frac{\sin x}{x}$

Substituting gives $\frac{0}{0}$, so differentiate top and bottom:

$$\lim_{x \rightarrow 0} \frac{\cos x}{1} = \cos 0 = 1$$

– the famous limit from Unit 1.

Check the **form first** – applying the rule to anything else is a mistake.

6

Recap

Unit 4 – key takeaways

1 In context

f is a rate: units of f per unit of x – always interpret

2 Motion

$s \rightarrow v \rightarrow a$; same signs speed up, opposite slow down

3 Related rates

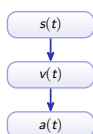
differentiate in t FIRST, substitute last

4 Approximation

tangent line estimates f nearby; f' gives over/under

Check yourself

- 1 $v < 0$ and $a < 0$. Speeding up or slowing down?
- 2 In a related-rates problem, when do you substitute the numbers?
- 3 $C(t)$ is acres, t is weeks. Units of $C'(t)$?
- 4 Which form must you confirm before using L'Hospital?



Answers 1. speeding up (same sign) 2. last, after differentiating 3. acres per week
4. $\frac{0}{0}$ or $\frac{\infty}{\infty}$