3.8 Newton's Method

■ **Approximate a zero of a function using Newton's Method.**

Newton's Method

In this section, you will study a technique for approximating the real zeros of a function. The technique is called **Newton's Method,** and it uses tangent lines to approximate the graph of the function near its x-intercepts.

To see how Newton's Method works, consider a function f that is continuous on the interval $[a, b]$ and differentiable on the interval (a, b). If $f(a)$ and $f(b)$ differ in sign, then, by the Intermediate Value Theorem, f must have at least one zero in the interval (a, b). To estimate this zero, you choose

$$x = x_1 \qquad \text{First estimate}$$

as shown in Figure 3.60(a). Newton's Method is based on the assumption that the graph of f and the tangent line at $(x_1, f(x_1))$ both cross the x-axis at *about* the same point. Because you can easily calculate the x-intercept for this tangent line, you can use it as a second (and, usually, better) estimate of the zero of f. The tangent line passes through the point $(x_1, f(x_1))$ with a slope of $f'(x_1)$. In point-slope form, the equation of the tangent line is

$$y - f(x_1) = f'(x_1)(x - x_1)$$
$$y = f'(x_1)(x - x_1) + f(x_1).$$

Letting $y = 0$ and solving for x produces

$$x = x_1 - \frac{f(x_1)}{f'(x_1)}.$$

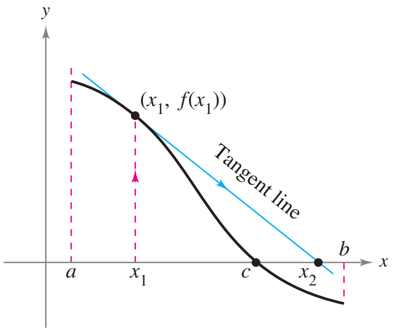
So, from the initial estimate x_1, you obtain a new estimate

$$x_2 = x_1 - \frac{f(x_1)}{f'(x_1)}. \qquad \text{Second estimate [See Figure 3.60(b).]}$$

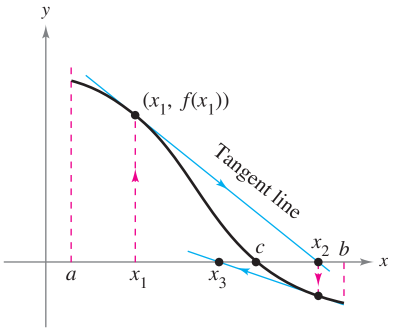
You can improve on x_2 and calculate yet a third estimate

$$x_3 = x_2 - \frac{f(x_2)}{f'(x_2)}. \qquad \text{Third estimate}$$

Repeated application of this process is called Newton's Method.



(a)



(b)
The x-intercept of the tangent line approximates the zero of f.
Figure 3.60

NEWTON'S METHOD

Isaac Newton first described the method for approximating the real zeros of a function in his text *Method of Fluxions*. Although the book was written in 1671, it was not published until 1736. Meanwhile, in 1690, Joseph Raphson (1648–1715) published a paper describing a method for approximating the real zeros of a function that was very similar to Newton's. For this reason, the method is often referred to as the Newton-Raphson method.

Newton's Method for Approximating the Zeros of a Function

Let $f(c) = 0$, where f is differentiable on an open interval containing c. Then, to approximate c, use these steps.

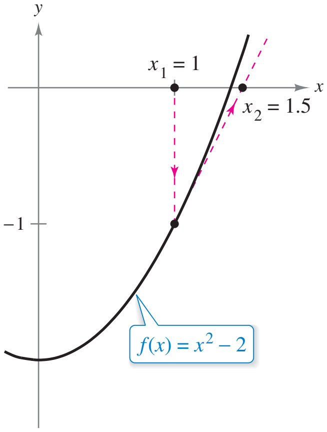
1. Make an initial estimate x_1 that is close to c. (A graph is helpful.)
2. Determine a new approximation

$$x_{n+1} = x_n - \frac{f(x_n)}{f'(x_n)}.$$

3. When $|x_n - x_{n+1}|$ is within the desired accuracy, let x_{n+1} serve as the final approximation. Otherwise, return to Step 2 and calculate a new approximation.

Each successive application of this procedure is called an **iteration.**

REMARK For many functions, just a few iterations of Newton's Method will produce approximations having very small errors, as shown in Example 1.



The first iteration of Newton's Method
Figure 3.61

EXAMPLE 1 Using Newton's Method

Calculate three iterations of Newton's Method to approximate a zero of $f(x) = x^2 - 2$. Use $x_1 = 1$ as the initial guess.

Solution Because $f(x) = x^2 - 2$, you have $f'(x) = 2x$, and the iterative formula is

$$x_{n+1} = x_n - \frac{f(x_n)}{f'(x_n)} = x_n - \frac{x_n^2 - 2}{2x_n}.$$

The calculations for three iterations are shown in the table.

n	x_n	$f(x_n)$	$f'(x_n)$	$\frac{f(x_n)}{f'(x_n)}$	$x_n - \frac{f(x_n)}{f'(x_n)}$
1	1.000000	−1.000000	2.000000	−0.500000	1.500000
2	1.500000	0.250000	3.000000	0.083333	1.416667
3	1.416667	0.006945	2.833334	0.002451	1.414216
4	1.414216				

Of course, in this case you know that the two zeros of the function are $\pm\sqrt{2}$. To six decimal places, $\sqrt{2} = 1.414214$. So, after only three iterations of Newton's Method, you have obtained an approximation that is within 0.000002 of an actual root. The first iteration of this process is shown in Figure 3.61.

EXAMPLE 2 Using Newton's Method

See LarsonCalculus.com for an interactive version of this type of example.

Use Newton's Method to approximate the zeros of

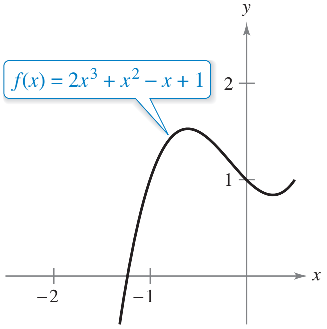
$$f(x) = 2x^3 + x^2 - x + 1.$$

Continue the iterations until two successive approximations differ by less than 0.0001.

Solution Begin by sketching a graph of f, as shown in Figure 3.62. From the graph, you can observe that the function has only one zero, which occurs near $x = -1.2$. Next, differentiate f and form the iterative formula

$$x_{n+1} = x_n - \frac{f(x_n)}{f'(x_n)} = x_n - \frac{2x_n^3 + x_n^2 - x_n + 1}{6x_n^2 + 2x_n - 1}.$$

The calculations are shown in the table.



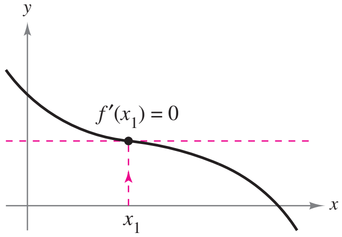
After three iterations of Newton's Method, the zero of f is approximated to the desired accuracy.
Figure 3.62

n	x_n	$f(x_n)$	$f'(x_n)$	$\frac{f(x_n)}{f'(x_n)}$	$x_n - \frac{f(x_n)}{f'(x_n)}$
1	−1.20000	0.18400	5.24000	0.03511	−1.23511
2	−1.23511	−0.00771	5.68276	−0.00136	−1.23375
3	−1.23375	0.00001	5.66533	0.00000	−1.23375
4	−1.23375				

Because two successive approximations differ by less than the required 0.0001, you can estimate the zero of f to be -1.23375.

When, as in Examples 1 and 2, the approximations approach a limit, the sequence $x_1, x_2, x_3, \ldots, x_n, \ldots$ is said to **converge.** Moreover, when the limit is c, it can be shown that c must be a zero of f.

Newton's Method does not always yield a convergent sequence. One way it can fail to do so is shown in Figure 3.63. Because Newton's Method involves division by $f'(x_n)$, it is clear that the method will fail when the derivative is zero for any x_n in the sequence. When you encounter this problem, you can usually overcome it by choosing a different value for x_1. Another way Newton's Method can fail is shown in the next example.



Newton's Method fails to converge when $f'(x_n) = 0$.
Figure 3.63

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION For more on when Newton's Method fails, see the article "No Fooling! Newton's Method Can Be Fooled" by Peter Horton in *Mathematics Magazine*. To view this article, go to *MathArticles.com*.

EXAMPLE 3 An Example in Which Newton's Method Fails

The function $f(x) = x^{1/3}$ is not differentiable at $x = 0$. Show that Newton's Method fails to converge using $x_1 = 0.1$.

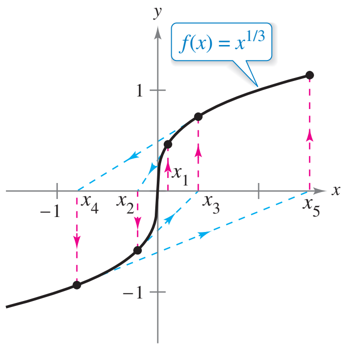
Solution Because $f'(x) = \frac{1}{3}x^{-2/3}$, the iterative formula is

$$x_{n+1} = x_n - \frac{f(x_n)}{f'(x_n)} = x_n - \frac{x_n^{1/3}}{\frac{1}{3}x_n^{-2/3}} = x_n - 3x_n = -2x_n.$$

The calculations are shown in the table. This table and Figure 3.64 indicate that x_n continues to increase in magnitude as $n \to \infty$, and so the limit of the sequence does not exist.

n	x_n	$f(x_n)$	$f'(x_n)$	$\frac{f(x_n)}{f'(x_n)}$	$x_n - \frac{f(x_n)}{f'(x_n)}$
1	0.10000	0.46416	1.54720	0.30000	−0.20000
2	−0.20000	−0.58480	0.97467	−0.60000	0.40000
3	0.40000	0.73681	0.61401	1.20000	−0.80000
4	−0.80000	−0.92832	0.3680	−2.40000	1.60000

REMARK In Example 3, the initial estimate $x_1 = 0.1$ fails to produce a convergent sequence. Try showing that Newton's Method also fails for every other choice of x_1 (other than the actual zero).



Newton's Method fails to converge for every x-value other than the actual zero of f.
Figure 3.64

It can be shown that a condition sufficient to produce convergence of Newton's Method to a zero of f is that

$$\left|\frac{f(x)f''(x)}{[f'(x)]^2}\right| < 1$$

Condition for convergence

on an open interval containing the zero. For instance, in Example 1, this test would yield

$$f(x) = x^2 - 2, \quad f'(x) = 2x, \quad f''(x) = 2,$$

and

$$\left|\frac{f(x)f''(x)}{[f'(x)]^2}\right| = \left|\frac{(x^2 - 2)(2)}{4x^2}\right| = \left|\frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{x^2}\right|.$$

Example 1

On the interval $(1, 3)$, this quantity is less than 1 and therefore the convergence of Newton's Method is guaranteed. On the other hand, in Example 3, you have

$$f(x) = x^{1/3}, \quad f'(x) = \frac{1}{3}x^{-2/3}, \quad f''(x) = -\frac{2}{9}x^{-5/3}$$

and

$$\left|\frac{f(x)f''(x)}{[f'(x)]^2}\right| = \left|\frac{x^{1/3}(-2/9)(x^{-5/3})}{(1/9)(x^{-4/3})}\right| = 2$$

Example 3

which is not less than 1 for any value of x, so you cannot conclude that Newton's Method will converge.

You have learned several techniques for finding the zeros of functions. The zeros of some functions, such as

$$f(x) = x^3 - 2x^2 - x + 2$$

can be found by simple algebraic techniques, such as factoring. The zeros of other functions, such as

$$f(x) = x^3 - x + 1$$

cannot be found by *elementary* algebraic methods. This particular function has only one real zero, and by using more advanced algebraic techniques, you can determine the zero to be

$$x = -\sqrt[3]{\frac{3 - \sqrt{23/3}}{6}} - \sqrt[3]{\frac{3 + \sqrt{23/3}}{6}}.$$

Because the *exact* solution is written in terms of square roots and cube roots, it is called a **solution by radicals.**

The determination of radical solutions of a polynomial equation is one of the fundamental problems of algebra. The earliest such result is the Quadratic Formula, which dates back at least to Babylonian times. The general formula for the zeros of a cubic function was developed much later. In the sixteenth century, an Italian mathematician, Jerome Cardan, published a method for finding radical solutions to cubic and quartic equations. Then, for 300 years, the problem of finding a general quintic formula remained open. Finally, in the nineteenth century, the problem was answered independently by two young mathematicians. Niels Henrik Abel, a Norwegian mathematician, and Evariste Galois, a French mathematician, proved that it is not possible to solve a *general* fifth- (or higher-) degree polynomial equation by radicals. Of course, you can solve particular fifth-degree equations, such as

$$x^5 - 1 = 0$$

but Abel and Galois were able to show that no general *radical* solution exists.

NIELS HENRIK ABEL (1802–1829)

EVARISTE GALOIS (1811–1832)

Although the lives of both Abel and Galois were brief, their work in the fields of analysis and abstract algebra was far-reaching.
See LarsonCalculus.com to read a biography about each of these mathematicians.

The Granger Collection, New York

3.8 Exercises

See CalcChat.com for tutorial help and worked-out solutions to odd-numbered exercises.

Using Newton's Method **In Exercises 1–4, complete two iterations of Newton's Method to approximate a zero of the function using the given initial guess.**

1. $f(x) = x^2 - 5, \quad x_1 = 2.2$

2. $f(x) = x^3 - 3, \quad x_1 = 1.4$

3. $f(x) = \cos x, \quad x_1 = 1.6$

4. $f(x) = \tan x, \quad x_1 = 0.1$

Using Newton's Method **In Exercises 5–14, approximate the zero(s) of the function. Use Newton's Method and continue the process until two successive approximations differ by less than 0.001. Then find the zero(s) using a graphing utility and compare the results.**

5. $f(x) = x^3 + 4$

6. $f(x) = 2 - x^3$

7. $f(x) = x^3 + x - 1$

8. $f(x) = x^5 + x - 1$

9. $f(x) = 5\sqrt{x-1} - 2x$

10. $f(x) = x - 2\sqrt{x+1}$

11. $f(x) = x^3 - 3.9x^2 + 4.79x - 1.881$

12. $f(x) = x^4 + x^3 - 1$

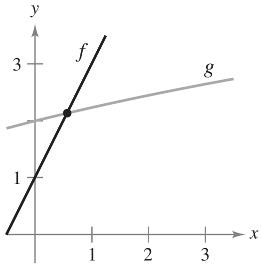
13. $f(x) = 1 - x + \sin x$

14. $f(x) = x^3 - \cos x$

Finding Point(s) of Intersection **In Exercises 15–18, apply Newton's Method to approximate the x-value(s) of the indicated point(s) of intersection of the two graphs. Continue the process until two successive approximations differ by less than 0.001. [*Hint:* Let $h(x) = f(x) - g(x)$.]**

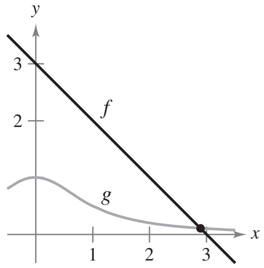
15. $f(x) = 2x + 1$

$g(x) = \sqrt{x+4}$



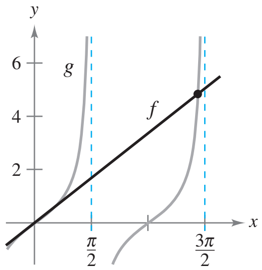
16. $f(x) = 3 - x$

$g(x) = \dfrac{1}{x^2 + 1}$



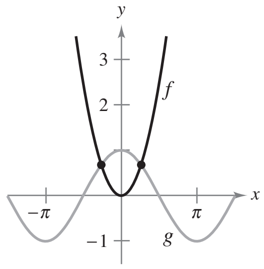
17. $f(x) = x$

$g(x) = \tan x$



18. $f(x) = x^2$

$g(x) = \cos x$



19. Mechanic's Rule The Mechanic's Rule for approximating $\sqrt{a}$, $a > 0$, is

$$x_{n+1} = \frac{1}{2}\left(x_n + \frac{a}{x_n}\right), \quad n = 1, 2, 3 \ldots$$

where x_1 is an approximation of $\sqrt{a}$.

(a) Use Newton's Method and the function $f(x) = x^2 - a$ to derive the Mechanic's Rule.

(b) Use the Mechanic's Rule to approximate $\sqrt{5}$ and $\sqrt{7}$ to three decimal places.

20. Approximating Radicals

(a) Use Newton's Method and the function $f(x) = x^n - a$ to obtain a general rule for approximating $x = \sqrt[n]{a}$.

(b) Use the general rule found in part (a) to approximate $\sqrt[4]{6}$ and $\sqrt[3]{15}$ to three decimal places.

Failure of Newton's Method **In Exercises 21 and 22, apply Newton's Method using the given initial guess, and explain why the method fails.**

21. $y = 2x^3 - 6x^2 + 6x - 1, \quad x_1 = 1$

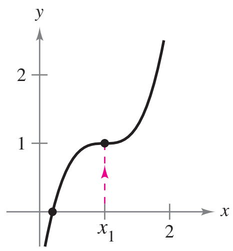


Figure for 21

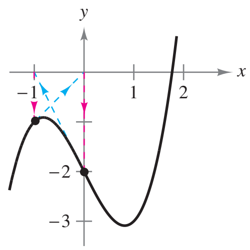


Figure for 22

22. $y = x^3 - 2x - 2, \quad x_1 = 0$

Fixed Point **In Exercises 23 and 24, approximate the fixed point of the function to two decimal places. [A *fixed point* x_0 of a function f is a value of x such that $f(x_0) = x_0$.]**

23. $f(x) = \cos x$

24. $f(x) = \cot x, \quad 0 < x < \pi$

25. Approximating Reciprocals Use Newton's Method to show that the equation

$$x_{n+1} = x_n(2 - ax_n)$$

can be used to approximate $1/a$ when x_1 is an initial guess of the reciprocal of a. Note that this method of approximating reciprocals uses only the operations of multiplication and subtraction. (*Hint:* Consider

$$f(x) = \frac{1}{x} - a.)$$

26. Approximating Reciprocals Use the result of Exercise 25 to approximate (a) $\frac{1}{3}$ and (b) $\frac{1}{11}$ to three decimal places.

WRITING ABOUT CONCEPTS

27. Using Newton's Method Consider the function $f(x) = x^3 - 3x^2 + 3$.

(a) Use a graphing utility to graph f.

(b) Use Newton's Method to approximate a zero with $x_1 = 1$ as an initial guess.

(c) Repeat part (b) using $x_1 = \frac{1}{4}$ as an initial guess and observe that the result is different.

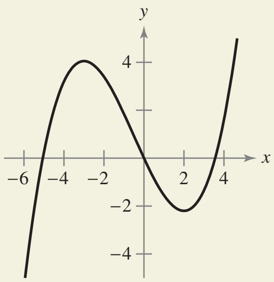
(d) To understand why the results in parts (b) and (c) are different, sketch the tangent lines to the graph of f at the points $(1, f(1))$ and $\left(\frac{1}{4}, f\left(\frac{1}{4}\right)\right)$. Find the x-intercept of each tangent line and compare the intercepts with the first iteration of Newton's Method using the respective initial guesses.

(e) Write a short paragraph summarizing how Newton's Method works. Use the results of this exercise to describe why it is important to select the initial guess carefully.

28. Using Newton's Method Repeat the steps in Exercise 27 for the function $f(x) = \sin x$ with initial guesses of $x_1 = 1.8$ and $x_1 = 3$.

29. Newton's Method In your own words and using a sketch, describe Newton's Method for approximating the zeros of a function.

30. HOW DO YOU SEE IT? For what value(s) will Newton's Method fail to converge for the function shown in the graph? Explain your reasoning.



Using Newton's Method **Exercises 31–33 present problems similar to exercises from the previous sections of this chapter. In each case, use Newton's Method to approximate the solution.**

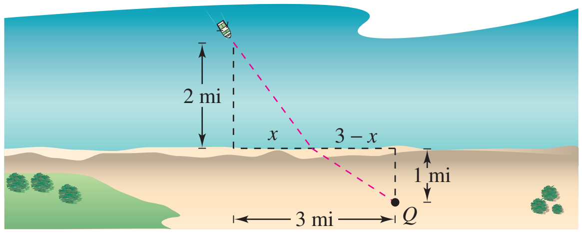
31. Minimum Distance Find the point on the graph of $f(x) = 4 - x^2$ that is closest to the point $(1, 0)$.

32. Medicine The concentration C of a chemical in the bloodstream t hours after injection into muscle tissue is given by

$$C = \frac{3t^2 + t}{50 + t^3}.$$

When is the concentration the greatest?

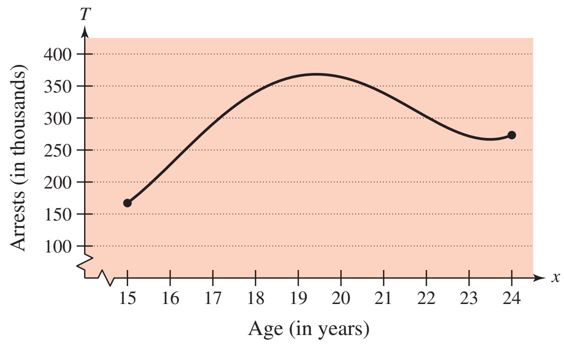
33. Minimum Time You are in a boat 2 miles from the nearest point on the coast (see figure). You are to go to a point Q that is 3 miles down the coast and 1 mile inland. You can row at 3 miles per hour and walk at 4 miles per hour. Toward what point on the coast should you row in order to reach Q in the least time?



34. Crime The total number of arrests T (in thousands) for all males ages 15 to 24 in 2010 is approximated by the model

$$T = 0.2988x^4 - 22.625x^3 + 628.49x^2 - 7565.9x + 33{,}478$$

for $15 \le x \le 24$, where x is the age in years (see figure). Approximate the two ages that had total arrests of 300 thousand. *(Source: U.S. Department of Justice)*



True or False? **In Exercises 35–38, determine whether the statement is true or false. If it is false, explain why or give an example that shows it is false.**

35. The zeros of $f(x) = \dfrac{p(x)}{q(x)}$ coincide with the zeros of $p(x)$.

36. If the coefficients of a polynomial function are all positive, then the polynomial has no positive zeros.

37. If $f(x)$ is a cubic polynomial such that $f'(x)$ is never zero, then any initial guess will force Newton's Method to converge to the zero of f.

38. The roots of $\sqrt{f(x)} = 0$ coincide with the roots of $f(x) = 0$.

39. Tangent Lines The graph of $f(x) = -\sin x$ has infinitely many tangent lines that pass through the origin. Use Newton's Method to approximate to three decimal places the slope of the tangent line having the greatest slope.

40. Point of Tangency The graph of $f(x) = \cos x$ and a tangent line to f through the origin are shown. Find the coordinates of the point of tangency to three decimal places.