Chapter 11: Infinite Sequences and Series: 11.8 Power Series
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11.8 Power Series

A **power series** is a series of the form

1

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} c_n x^n = c_0 + c_1 x + c_2 x^2 + c_3 x^3 + \cdots$$

where x is a variable and the c_n's are constants called the **coefficients** of the series. For each fixed x, the series (1) is a series of constants that we can test for convergence or divergence. A power series may converge for some values of x and diverge for other values of x. The sum of the series is a function

$$f(x) = c_0 + c_1 x + c_2 x^2 + \cdots + c_n x^n + \cdots$$

whose domain is the set of all x for which the series converges. Notice that f resembles a polynomial. The only difference is that f has infinitely many terms.

Trigonometric Series

A power series is a series in which each term is a power function. A **trigonometric series**

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} (a_n \cos nx + b_n \sin nx)$$

is a series whose terms are trigonometric functions. This type of series is discussed on the website

www.stewartcalculus.com

Click on *Additional Topics* and then on *Fourier Series.*

For instance, if we take $c_n = 1$ for all n, the power series becomes the geometric series

2

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} x^n = 1 + x + x^2 + \cdots + x^n + \cdots$$

which converges when $-1 < x < 1$ and diverges when $|x| \geqslant 1$. (See Equation 11.2.5.)

In fact if we put $x = \frac{1}{2}$ in the geometric series (2) we get the convergent series

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \left(\frac{1}{2}\right)^n = 1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{8} + \frac{1}{16} + \cdots$$

but if we put $x = 2$ in (2) we get the divergent series

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} 2^n = 1 + 2 + 4 + 8 + 16 + \cdots$$

More generally, a series of the form

3

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} c_n (x-a)^n = c_0 + c_1 (x-a) + c_2 (x-a)^2 + \cdots$$

is called a **power series in** $(x-a)$ or a **power series centered at** a or a **power series about** a. Notice that in writing out the term corresponding to $n = 0$ in Equations 1 and 3 we have adopted the convention that $(x-a)^0 = 1$ even when $x = a$. Notice also that when $x = a$, all of the terms are 0 for $n \geqslant 1$ and so the power series (3) always converges when $x = a$.

Example 1

For what values of x is the series $\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} n! x^n$ convergent?

Solution We use the Ratio Test. If we let a_n, as usual, denote the nth term of the series, then $a_n = n! x^n$. If $x \neq 0$, we have

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} \left| \frac{a_{n+1}}{a_n} \right| = \lim_{n\to\infty} \left| \frac{(n+1)! x^{n+1}}{n! x^n} \right| = \lim_{n\to\infty} (n+1) |x| = \infty$$

By the Ratio Test, the series diverges when $x \neq 0$. Thus the given series converges only when $x = 0$.

Note

Notice that

$$(n+1)! = (n+1)n(n-1)\cdot\cdots\cdot 3\cdot 2\cdot 1$$
$$= (n+1)n!$$

Example 2

For what values of x does the series $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty}\frac{(x-3)^n}{n}$ converge?

Solution Let $a_n = (x-3)^n/n$. Then

$$\left|\frac{a_{n+1}}{a_n}\right| = \left|\frac{(x-3)^{n+1}}{n+1}\cdot\frac{n}{(x-3)^n}\right|$$
$$= \frac{1}{1+\frac{1}{n}}|x-3| \to |x-3| \quad \text{as} \quad n\to\infty$$

By the Ratio Test, the given series is absolutely convergent, and therefore convergent, when $|x-3| < 1$ and divergent when $|x-3| > 1$. Now

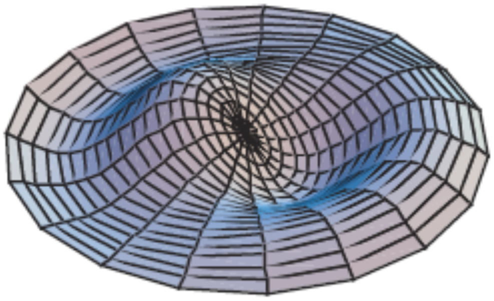
$$|x-3| < 1 \Leftrightarrow -1 < x-3 < 1 \Leftrightarrow 2 < x < 4$$

so the series converges when $2 < x < 4$ and diverges when $x < 2$ or $x > 4$.

The Ratio Test gives no information when $|x-3| = 1$ so we must consider $x = 2$ and $x = 4$ separately. If we put $x = 4$ in the series, it becomes $\sum 1/n$, the harmonic series, which is divergent. If $x = 2$, the series is $\sum(-1)^n/n$, which converges by the Alternating Series Test. Thus the given power series converges for $2 \leqslant x < 4$.

We will see that the main use of a power series is that it provides a way to represent some of the most important functions that arise in mathematics, physics, and chemistry. In particular, the sum of the power series in the next example is called a **Bessel function**, after the German astronomer Friedrich Bessel (1784–1846), and the function given in Exercise 35 is another example of a Bessel function. In fact, these functions first arose when Bessel solved Kepler's equation for describing planetary motion. Since that time, these functions have been applied in many different physical situations, including the temperature distribution in a circular plate and the shape of a vibrating drumhead.

Membrane courtesy of National Film Board of Canada



Note

Notice how closely the computer-generated model (which involves Bessel functions and cosine functions) matches the photograph of a vibrating rubber membrane.

Example 3

Find the domain of the Bessel function of order 0 defined by

$$J_0(x) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{(-1)^n x^{2n}}{2^{2n}(n!)^2}$$

Solution Let $a_n = (-1)^n x^{2n}/[2^{2n}(n!)^2]$. Then

$$\begin{aligned} \left|\frac{a_{n+1}}{a_n}\right| &= \left|\frac{(-1)^{n+1}x^{2(n+1)}}{2^{2(n+1)}[(n+1)!]^2} \cdot \frac{2^{2n}(n!)^2}{(-1)^n x^{2n}}\right| \\ &= \frac{x^{2n+2}}{2^{2n+2}(n+1)^2(n!)^2} \cdot \frac{2^{2n}(n!)^2}{x^{2n}} \\ &= \frac{x^2}{4(n+1)^2} \to 0 < 1 \quad \text{for all } x \end{aligned}$$

Thus, by the Ratio Test, the given series converges for all values of x. In other words, the domain of the Bessel function J_0 is $(-\infty, \infty) = \mathbb{R}$.

Recall that the sum of a series is equal to the limit of the sequence of partial sums. So when we define the Bessel function in Example 3 as the sum of a series we mean that, for every real number x,

$$J_0(x) = \lim_{n\to\infty} s_n(x)$$

where

$$s_n(x) = \sum_{i=0}^{n} \frac{(-1)^i x^{2i}}{2^{2i}(i!)^2}$$

The first few partial sums are

$$s_0(x) = 1$$

$$s_1(x) = 1 - \frac{x^2}{4}$$

$$s_2(x) = 1 - \frac{x^2}{4} + \frac{x^4}{64}$$

$$s_3(x) = 1 - \frac{x^2}{4} + \frac{x^4}{64} - \frac{x^6}{2304}$$

$$s_4(x) = 1 - \frac{x^2}{4} + \frac{x^4}{64} - \frac{x^6}{2304} + \frac{x^8}{147{,}456}$$

Figure 1 shows the graphs of these partial sums, which are polynomials. They are all approximations to the function J_0, but notice that the approximations become better when more terms are included. Figure 2 shows a more complete graph of the Bessel function.

Figure 1

Partial sums of the Bessel function J_0

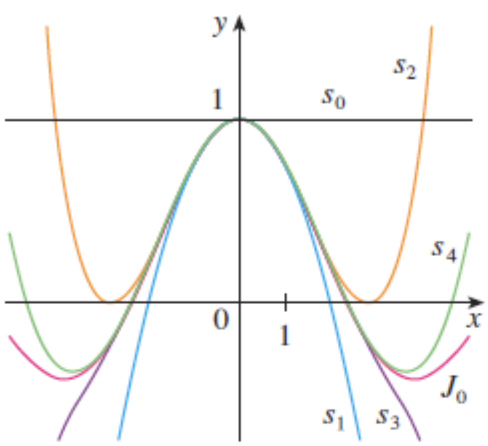
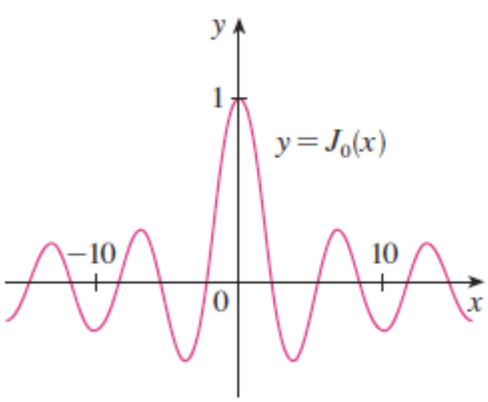


Figure 2



For the power series that we have looked at so far, the set of values of x for which the series is convergent has always turned out to be an interval [a finite interval for the geometric series and the series in Example 2, the infinite interval $(-\infty, \infty)$ in Example 3, and a collapsed interval $[0, 0] = \{0\}$ in Example 1]. The following theorem, proved in Appendix F, says that this is true in general.

4 Theorem

For a given power series $\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} c_n (x-a)^n$, there are only three possibilities:

(i) The series converges only when $x = a$.

(ii) The series converges for all x.

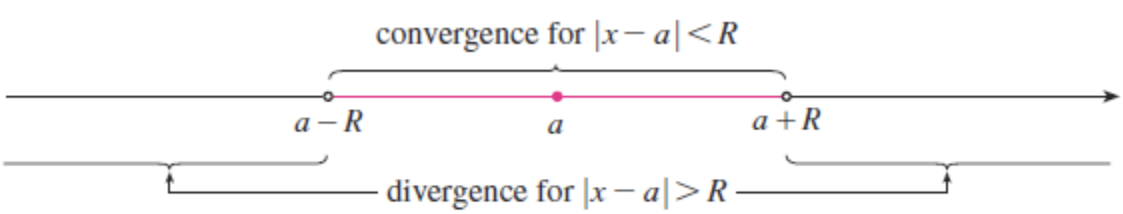
(iii) There is a positive number R such that the series converges if $|x-a| < R$ and diverges if $|x-a| > R$.

The number R in case (iii) is called the **radius of convergence** of the power series. By convention, the radius of convergence is $R = 0$ in case (i) and $R = \infty$ in case (ii). The **interval of convergence** of a power series is the interval that consists of all values of x for which the series converges. In case (i) the interval consists of just a single point a. In case (ii) the interval is $(-\infty, \infty)$. In case (iii) note that the inequality $|x-a| < R$ can be rewritten as $a - R < x < a + R$. When x is an *endpoint* of the interval, that is, $x = a \pm R$, anything can happen—the series might converge at one or both endpoints or it might diverge at both endpoints. Thus in case (iii) there are four possibilities for the interval of convergence:

$$(a-R, a+R) \quad (a-R, a+R] \quad [a-R, a+R] \quad [a-R, a+R)$$

The situation is illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3



We summarize here the radius and interval of convergence for each of the examples already considered in this section.

	Series	Radius of convergence	Interval of convergence
Geometric series	$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} x^n$	$R = 1$	$(-1, 1)$

	Series	Radius of convergence	Interval of convergence
Example 1	$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} n!\, x^n$	$R = 0$	$\{0\}$
Example 2	$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{(x-3)^n}{n}$	$R = 1$	$[2,\ 4)$
Example 3	$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{(-1)^n\, x^{2n}}{2^{2n}\,(n!)^2}$	$R = \infty$	$(-\infty,\ \infty)$

In general, the Ratio Test (or sometimes the Root Test) should be used to determine the radius of convergence R. The Ratio and Root Tests always fail when x is an endpoint of the interval of convergence, so the endpoints must be checked with some other test.

Example 4

Find the radius of convergence and interval of convergence of the series

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{(-3)^n x^n}{\sqrt{n+1}}$$

Solution Let $a_n = (-3)^n x^n / \sqrt{n+1}$. Then

$$\left|\frac{a_{n+1}}{a_n}\right| = \left|\frac{(-3)^{n+1} x^{n+1}}{\sqrt{n+2}} \cdot \frac{\sqrt{n+1}}{(-3)^n x^n}\right| = \left|-3x\sqrt{\frac{n+1}{n+2}}\right|$$

$$= 3\sqrt{\frac{1+(1/n)}{1+(2/n)}}\ |x| \to 3\,|x| \qquad \text{as } n \to \infty$$

By the Ratio Test, the given series converges if $3\,|x| < 1$ and diverges if $3\,|x| > 1$.

Thus it converges if $|x| < \frac{1}{3}$ and diverges if $|x| > \frac{1}{3}$. This means that the radius of convergence is $R = \frac{1}{3}$.

We know the series converges in the interval $\left(-\frac{1}{3},\ \frac{1}{3}\right)$, but we must now test for convergence at the endpoints of this interval. If $x = -\frac{1}{3}$, the series becomes

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{(-3)^n \left(-\frac{1}{3}\right)^n}{\sqrt{n+1}} = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{\sqrt{n+1}} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{1}} + \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} + \frac{1}{\sqrt{3}} + \frac{1}{\sqrt{4}} + \cdots$$

which diverges. (Use the Integral Test or simply observe that it is a p-series with $p = \frac{1}{2} < 1$.) If $x = \frac{1}{3}$, the series is

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{(-3)^n \left(\frac{1}{3}\right)^n}{\sqrt{n+1}} = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{(-1)^n}{\sqrt{n+1}}$$

which converges by the Alternating Series Test. Therefore the given power series converges when $-\frac{1}{3} < x \leqslant \frac{1}{3}$, so the interval of convergence is $\left(-\frac{1}{3},\ \frac{1}{3}\right]$.

Example 5

Find the radius of convergence and interval of convergence of the series

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{n(x+2)^n}{3^{n+1}}$$

Solution If $a_n = n(x+2)^n/3^{n+1}$, then

$$\left|\frac{a_{n+1}}{a_n}\right| = \left|\frac{(n+1)(x+2)^{n+1}}{3^{n+2}} \cdot \frac{3^{n+1}}{n(x+2)^n}\right|$$

$$= \left(1 + \frac{1}{n}\right) \frac{|x+2|}{3} \to \frac{|x+2|}{3} \qquad \text{as } n \to \infty$$

Using the Ratio Test, we see that the series converges if $|x+2|/3 < 1$ and it diverges if $|x+2|/3 > 1$. So it converges if $|x+2| < 3$ and diverges if $|x+2| > 3$. Thus the radius of convergence is $R = 3$.

The inequality $|x+2| < 3$ can be written as $-5 < x < 1$, so we test the series at the endpoints -5 and 1. When $x = -5$, the series is

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{n(-3)^n}{3^{n+1}} = \frac{1}{3} \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} (-1)^n n$$

which diverges by the Test for Divergence [$(-1)^n n$ doesn't converge to 0]. When $x = 1$, the series is

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{n(3)^n}{3^{n+1}} = \frac{1}{3} \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} n$$

which also diverges by the Test for Divergence. Thus the series converges only when $-5 < x < 1$, so the interval of convergence is $(-5,\ 1)$.

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