11.2 Infinite Series

An *infinite series* is the sum of an infinite sequence of numbers

$$a_1 + a_2 + a_3 + \cdots + a_n + \cdots$$

The goal of this section is to understand the meaning of such an infinite sum and to develop methods to calculate it. Since there are infinitely many terms to add in an infinite series, we cannot just keep adding to see what comes out. Instead we look at what we get by summing the first n terms of the sequence and stopping. The sum of the first n terms

$$s_n = a_1 + a_2 + a_3 + \cdots + a_n$$

is an ordinary finite sum and can be calculated by normal addition. It is called the *nth partial sum*. As n gets larger, we expect the partial sums to get closer and closer to a limiting value in the same sense that the terms of a sequence approach a limit, as discussed in Section 11.1.

For example, to assign meaning to an expression like

$$1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{8} + \frac{1}{16} + \cdots$$

We add the terms one at a time from the beginning and look for a pattern in how these partial sums grow.

Partial sum		**Suggestive expression for partial sum**	**Value**
First:	$s_1 = 1$	$2 - 1$	1
Second:	$s_2 = 1 + \frac{1}{2}$	$2 - \frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{3}{2}$
Third:	$s_3 = 1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4}$	$2 - \frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{7}{4}$
⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮
nth:	$s_n = 1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \cdots + \frac{1}{2^{n-1}}$	$2 - \frac{1}{2^{n-1}}$	$\frac{2^n - 1}{2^{n-1}}$

Indeed there is a pattern. The partial sums form a sequence whose nth term is

$$s_n = 2 - \frac{1}{2^{n-1}}.$$

This sequence of partial sums converges to 2 because $\lim_{n\to\infty}(1/2^n) = 0$. We say

$$\text{"the sum of the infinite series } 1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \cdots + \frac{1}{2^{n-1}} + \cdots \text{ is 2."}$$

Is the sum of any finite number of terms in this series equal to 2? No. Can we actually add an infinite number of terms one by one? No. But we can still define their sum by defining it to be the limit of the sequence of partial sums as $n \to \infty$, in this case 2 (Figure 11.5). Our knowledge of sequences and limits enables us to break away from the confines of finite sums.

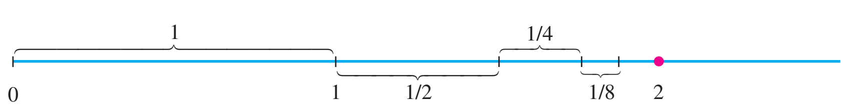

FIGURE 11.5 As the lengths $1, \frac{1}{2}, \frac{1}{4}, \frac{1}{8}, \ldots$ are added one by one, the sum approaches 2.

HISTORICAL BIOGRAPHY

Blaise Pascal
(1623–1662)

DEFINITIONS Infinite Series, *n*th Term, Partial Sum, Converges, Sum

Given a sequence of numbers $\{a_n\}$, an expression of the form

$$a_1 + a_2 + a_3 + \cdots + a_n + \cdots$$

is an **infinite series**. The number a_n is the ***n*th term** of the series. The sequence $\{s_n\}$ defined by

$$\begin{aligned} s_1 &= a_1 \\ s_2 &= a_1 + a_2 \\ &\vdots \\ s_n &= a_1 + a_2 + \cdots + a_n = \sum_{k=1}^{n} a_k \\ &\vdots \end{aligned}$$

is the **sequence of partial sums** of the series, the number s_n being the ***n*th partial sum**. If the sequence of partial sums converges to a limit L, we say that the series **converges** and that its **sum** is L. In this case, we also write

$$a_1 + a_2 + \cdots + a_n + \cdots = \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} a_n = L.$$

If the sequence of partial sums of the series does not converge, we say that the series **diverges**.

When we begin to study a given series $a_1 + a_2 + \cdots + a_n + \cdots$, we might not know whether it converges or diverges. In either case, it is convenient to use sigma notation to write the series as

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} a_n, \qquad \sum_{k=1}^{\infty} a_k, \qquad \text{or} \qquad \sum a_n$$

A useful shorthand when summation from 1 to ∞ is understood

Geometric Series

Geometric series are series of the form

$$a + ar + ar^2 + \cdots + ar^{n-1} + \cdots = \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} ar^{n-1}$$

in which a and r are fixed real numbers and $a \neq 0$. The series can also be written as $\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} ar^n$. The **ratio** r can be positive, as in

$$1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \cdots + \left(\frac{1}{2}\right)^{n-1} + \cdots,$$

or negative, as in

$$1 - \frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{9} - \cdots + \left(-\frac{1}{3}\right)^{n-1} + \cdots.$$

If $r = 1$, the nth partial sum of the geometric series is

$$s_n = a + a(1) + a(1)^2 + \cdots + a(1)^{n-1} = na,$$

and the series diverges because $\lim_{n\to\infty} s_n = \pm\infty$, depending on the sign of a. If $r = -1$, the series diverges because the nth partial sums alternate between a and 0. If $|r| \neq 1$, we can determine the convergence or divergence of the series in the following way:

You Try It

$$s_n = a + ar + ar^2 + \cdots + ar^{n-1}$$

$$rs_n = ar + ar^2 + \cdots + ar^{n-1} + ar^n$$ Multiply s_n by r.

$$s_n - rs_n = a - ar^n$$ Subtract rs_n from s_n. Most of the terms on the right cancel.

$$s_n(1-r) = a(1-r^n)$$ Factor.

$$s_n = \frac{a(1-r^n)}{1-r}, \qquad (r \neq 1).$$ We can solve for s_n if $r \neq 1$.

If $|r| < 1$, then $r^n \to 0$ as $n \to \infty$ (as in Section 11.1) and $s_n \to a/(1-r)$. If $|r| > 1$, then $|r^n| \to \infty$ and the series diverges.

> If $|r| < 1$, the geometric series $a + ar + ar^2 + \cdots + ar^{n-1} + \cdots$ converges to $a/(1-r)$:
>
> $$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} ar^{n-1} = \frac{a}{1-r}, \qquad |r| < 1.$$
>
> If $|r| \geq 1$, the series diverges.

We have determined when a geometric series converges or diverges, and to what value. Often we can determine that a series converges without knowing the value to which it converges, as we will see in the next several sections. The formula $a/(1-r)$ for the sum of a geometric series applies *only* when the summation index begins with $n = 1$ in the expression $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} ar^{n-1}$ (or with the index $n = 0$ if we write the series as $\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} ar^n$).

EXAMPLE 1 Index Starts with $n = 1$

The geometric series with $a = 1/9$ and $r = 1/3$ is

$$\frac{1}{9} + \frac{1}{27} + \frac{1}{81} + \cdots = \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{9}\left(\frac{1}{3}\right)^{n-1} = \frac{1/9}{1-(1/3)} = \frac{1}{6}.$$

■

Video You Try It

EXAMPLE 2 Index Starts with $n = 0$

The series

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{(-1)^n 5}{4^n} = 5 - \frac{5}{4} + \frac{5}{16} - \frac{5}{64} + \cdots$$

is a geometric series with $a = 5$ and $r = -1/4$. It converges to

$$\frac{a}{1-r} = \frac{5}{1+(1/4)} = 4.$$

■

EXAMPLE 3 A Bouncing Ball

You drop a ball from a meters above a flat surface. Each time the ball hits the surface after falling a distance h, it rebounds a distance rh, where r is positive but less than 1. Find the total distance the ball travels up and down (Figure 11.6).

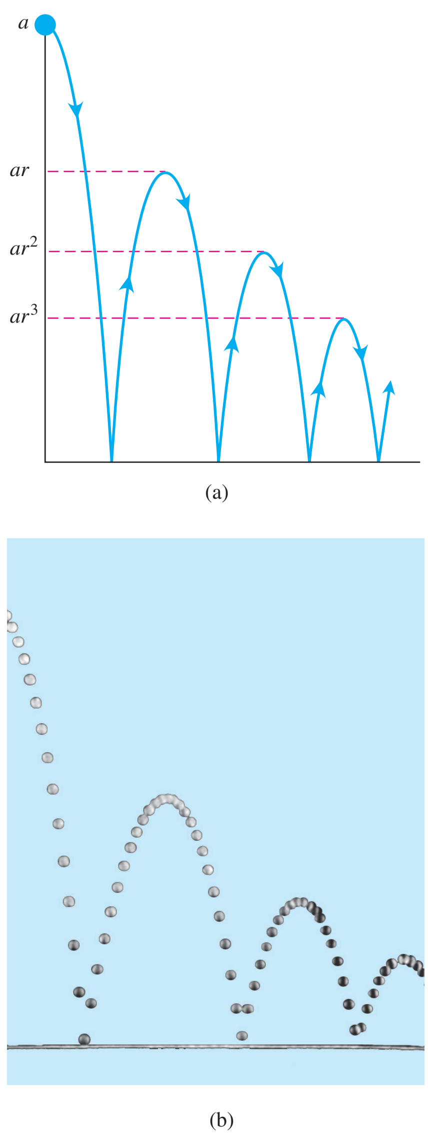

FIGURE 11.6 (a) Example 3 shows how to use a geometric series to calculate the total vertical distance traveled by a bouncing ball if the height of each rebound is reduced by the factor r. (b) A stroboscopic photo of a bouncing ball.

Solution The total distance is

$$s = \underbrace{a + 2ar + 2ar^2 + 2ar^3 + \cdots}_{\text{This sum is } 2ar/(1-r).} = a + \frac{2ar}{1-r} = a\frac{1+r}{1-r}.$$

If $a = 6$ m and $r = 2/3$, for instance, the distance is

$$s = 6\frac{1 + (2/3)}{1 - (2/3)} = 6\left(\frac{5/3}{1/3}\right) = 30 \text{ m}.$$ ■

EXAMPLE 4 Repeating Decimals

Express the repeating decimal $5.232323\ldots$ as the ratio of two integers.

Solution

$$\begin{aligned} 5.232323\ldots &= 5 + \frac{23}{100} + \frac{23}{(100)^2} + \frac{23}{(100)^3} + \cdots \\ &= 5 + \frac{23}{100}\underbrace{\left(1 + \frac{1}{100} + \left(\frac{1}{100}\right)^2 + \cdots\right)}_{1/(1-0.01)} \qquad \begin{array}{l} a = 1, \\ r = 1/100 \end{array} \\ &= 5 + \frac{23}{100}\left(\frac{1}{0.99}\right) = 5 + \frac{23}{99} = \frac{518}{99} \end{aligned}$$ ■

Unfortunately, formulas like the one for the sum of a convergent geometric series are rare and we usually have to settle for an estimate of a series' sum (more about this later). The next example, however, is another case in which we can find the sum exactly.

EXAMPLE 5 A Nongeometric but Telescoping Series

Find the sum of the series $\displaystyle\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n(n+1)}$.

Solution We look for a pattern in the sequence of partial sums that might lead to a formula for s_k. The key observation is the partial fraction decomposition

$$\frac{1}{n(n+1)} = \frac{1}{n} - \frac{1}{n+1},$$

so

$$\sum_{n=1}^{k} \frac{1}{n(n+1)} = \sum_{n=1}^{k}\left(\frac{1}{n} - \frac{1}{n+1}\right)$$

and

$$s_k = \left(\frac{1}{1} - \frac{1}{2}\right) + \left(\frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{3}\right) + \left(\frac{1}{3} - \frac{1}{4}\right) + \cdots + \left(\frac{1}{k} - \frac{1}{k+1}\right).$$

Removing parentheses and canceling adjacent terms of opposite sign collapses the sum to

$$s_k = 1 - \frac{1}{k+1}.$$

We now see that $s_k \to 1$ as $k \to \infty$. The series converges, and its sum is 1:

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n(n+1)} = 1. \quad \blacksquare$$

Divergent Series

One reason that a series may fail to converge is that its terms don't become small.

EXAMPLE 6 Partial Sums Outgrow Any Number

(a) The series

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} n^2 = 1 + 4 + 9 + \cdots + n^2 + \cdots$$

diverges because the partial sums grow beyond every number L. After $n = 1$, the partial sum $s_n = 1 + 4 + 9 + \cdots + n^2$ is greater than n^2.

(b) The series

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{n+1}{n} = \frac{2}{1} + \frac{3}{2} + \frac{4}{3} + \cdots + \frac{n+1}{n} + \cdots$$

diverges because the partial sums eventually outgrow every preassigned number. Each term is greater than 1, so the sum of n terms is greater than n. $\blacksquare$

The *n*th-Term Test for Divergence

Observe that $\lim_{n\to\infty} a_n$ must equal zero if the series $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} a_n$ converges. To see why, let S represent the series' sum and $s_n = a_1 + a_2 + \cdots + a_n$ the nth partial sum. When n is large, both s_n and s_{n-1} are close to S, so their difference, a_n, is close to zero. More formally,

$$a_n = s_n - s_{n-1} \quad \to \quad S - S = 0. \qquad \text{Difference Rule for sequences}$$

This establishes the following theorem.

Caution
Theorem 7 *does not say* that $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} a_n$ converges if $a_n \to 0$. It is possible for a series to diverge when $a_n \to 0$.

THEOREM 7

If $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} a_n$ converges, then $a_n \to 0$.

Theorem 7 leads to a test for detecting the kind of divergence that occurred in Example 6.

The *n*th-Term Test for Divergence

$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} a_n$ diverges if $\lim_{n\to\infty} a_n$ fails to exist or is different from zero.

EXAMPLE 7 Applying the nth-Term Test

(a) $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} n^2$ diverges because $n^2 \to \infty$

(b) $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{n+1}{n}$ diverges because $\frac{n+1}{n} \to 1$

(c) $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} (-1)^{n+1}$ diverges because $\lim_{n\to\infty}(-1)^{n+1}$ does not exist

(d) $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{-n}{2n+5}$ diverges because $\lim_{n\to\infty} \frac{-n}{2n+5} = -\frac{1}{2} \neq 0.$ ■

EXAMPLE 8 $a_n \to 0$ but the Series Diverges

The series

$$1 + \underbrace{\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2}}_{\text{2 terms}} + \underbrace{\frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{4}}_{\text{4 terms}} + \cdots + \underbrace{\frac{1}{2^n} + \frac{1}{2^n} + \cdots + \frac{1}{2^n}}_{2^n \text{ terms}} + \cdots$$

diverges because the terms are grouped into clusters that add to 1, so the partial sums increase without bound. However, the terms of the series form a sequence that converges to 0. Example 1 of Section 11.3 shows that the harmonic series also behaves in this manner. ■

Combining Series

Whenever we have two convergent series, we can add them term by term, subtract them term by term, or multiply them by constants to make new convergent series.

THEOREM 8

If $\sum a_n = A$ and $\sum b_n = B$ are convergent series, then

1. *Sum Rule:* $\sum(a_n + b_n) = \sum a_n + \sum b_n = A + B$
2. *Difference Rule:* $\sum(a_n - b_n) = \sum a_n - \sum b_n = A - B$
3. *Constant Multiple Rule:* $\sum k a_n = k \sum a_n = kA$ (Any number k).

Proof The three rules for series follow from the analogous rules for sequences in Theorem 1, Section 11.1. To prove the Sum Rule for series, let

$$A_n = a_1 + a_2 + \cdots + a_n, \quad B_n = b_1 + b_2 + \cdots + b_n.$$

Then the partial sums of $\sum(a_n + b_n)$ are

$$\begin{aligned} s_n &= (a_1 + b_1) + (a_2 + b_2) + \cdots + (a_n + b_n) \\ &= (a_1 + \cdots + a_n) + (b_1 + \cdots + b_n) \\ &= A_n + B_n. \end{aligned}$$

Since $A_n \to A$ and $B_n \to B$, we have $s_n \to A + B$ by the Sum Rule for sequences. The proof of the Difference Rule is similar.

To prove the Constant Multiple Rule for series, observe that the partial sums of $\sum ka_n$ form the sequence

$$s_n = ka_1 + ka_2 + \cdots + ka_n = k(a_1 + a_2 + \cdots + a_n) = kA_n,$$

which converges to kA by the Constant Multiple Rule for sequences. ■

As corollaries of Theorem 8, we have

1. Every nonzero constant multiple of a divergent series diverges.
2. If $\sum a_n$ converges and $\sum b_n$ diverges, then $\sum(a_n + b_n)$ and $\sum(a_n - b_n)$ both diverge.

We omit the proofs.

CAUTION Remember that $\sum(a_n + b_n)$ can converge when $\sum a_n$ and $\sum b_n$ both diverge. For example, $\sum a_n = 1 + 1 + 1 + \cdots$ and $\sum b_n = (-1) + (-1) + (-1) + \cdots$ diverge, whereas $\sum(a_n + b_n) = 0 + 0 + 0 + \cdots$ converges to 0.

EXAMPLE 9 Find the sums of the following series.

(a)

$$\begin{aligned}\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{3^{n-1} - 1}{6^{n-1}} &= \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \left(\frac{1}{2^{n-1}} - \frac{1}{6^{n-1}}\right) \\ &= \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2^{n-1}} - \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{6^{n-1}} && \text{Difference Rule} \\ &= \frac{1}{1 - (1/2)} - \frac{1}{1 - (1/6)} && \text{Geometric series with } a = 1 \text{ and } r = 1/2, 1/6 \\ &= 2 - \frac{6}{5} \\ &= \frac{4}{5}\end{aligned}$$

(b)

$$\begin{aligned}\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{4}{2^n} &= 4 \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2^n} && \text{Constant Multiple Rule} \\ &= 4\left(\frac{1}{1 - (1/2)}\right) && \text{Geometric series with } a = 1, r = 1/2 \\ &= 8\end{aligned}$$

■

Adding or Deleting Terms

We can add a finite number of terms to a series or delete a finite number of terms without altering the series' convergence or divergence, although in the case of convergence this will usually change the sum. If $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} a_n$ converges, then $\sum_{n=k}^{\infty} a_n$ converges for any $k > 1$ and

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} a_n = a_1 + a_2 + \cdots + a_{k-1} + \sum_{n=k}^{\infty} a_n.$$

Conversely, if $\sum_{n=k}^{\infty} a_n$ converges for any $k > 1$, then $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} a_n$ converges. Thus,

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{5^n} = \frac{1}{5} + \frac{1}{25} + \frac{1}{125} + \sum_{n=4}^{\infty} \frac{1}{5^n}$$

and

$$\sum_{n=4}^{\infty} \frac{1}{5^n} = \left(\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{5^n}\right) - \frac{1}{5} - \frac{1}{25} - \frac{1}{125}.$$

HISTORICAL BIOGRAPHY

Richard Dedekind
(1831–1916)

Reindexing

As long as we preserve the order of its terms, we can reindex any series without altering its convergence. To raise the starting value of the index h units, replace the n in the formula for a_n by $n - h$:

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} a_n = \sum_{n=1+h}^{\infty} a_{n-h} = a_1 + a_2 + a_3 + \cdots.$$

To lower the starting value of the index h units, replace the n in the formula for a_n by $n + h$:

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} a_n = \sum_{n=1-h}^{\infty} a_{n+h} = a_1 + a_2 + a_3 + \cdots.$$

It works like a horizontal shift. We saw this in starting a geometric series with the index $n = 0$ instead of the index $n = 1$, but we can use any other starting index value as well. We usually give preference to indexings that lead to simple expressions.

EXAMPLE 10 Reindexing a Geometric Series

We can write the geometric series

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2^{n-1}} = 1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \cdots$$

as

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2^n}, \qquad \sum_{n=5}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2^{n-5}}, \qquad \text{or even} \qquad \sum_{n=-4}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2^{n+4}}.$$

The partial sums remain the same no matter what indexing we choose. ■