3.6 Implicit Differentiation

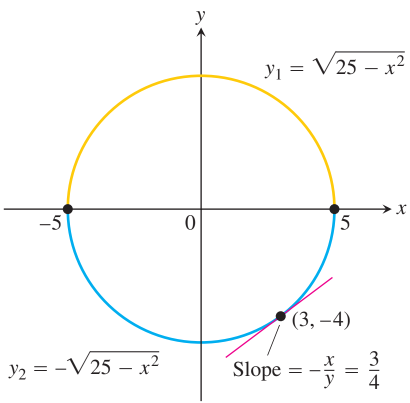

FIGURE 3.36 The circle combines the graphs of two functions. The graph of y_2 is the lower semicircle and passes through $(3, -4)$.

Most of the functions we have dealt with so far have been described by an equation of the form $y = f(x)$ that expresses y explicitly in terms of the variable x. We have learned rules for differentiating functions defined in this way. In Section 3.5 we also learned how to find the derivative dy/dx when a curve is defined parametrically by equations $x = x(t)$ and $y = y(t)$. A third situation occurs when we encounter equations like

$$x^2 + y^2 - 25 = 0, \qquad y^2 - x = 0, \qquad \text{or} \quad x^3 + y^3 - 9xy = 0.$$

(See Figures 3.36, 3.37, and 3.38.) These equations define an *implicit* relation between the variables x and y. In some cases we may be able to solve such an equation for y as an explicit function (or even several functions) of x. When we cannot put an equation $F(x, y) = 0$ in the form $y = f(x)$ to differentiate it in the usual way, we may still be able to find dy/dx by *implicit differentiation*. This consists of differentiating both sides of the equation with respect to x and then solving the resulting equation for y'. This section describes the technique and uses it to extend the Power Rule for differentiation to include rational exponents. In the examples and exercises of this section it is always assumed that the given equation determines y implicitly as a differentiable function of x.

Implicitly Defined Functions

We begin with an example.

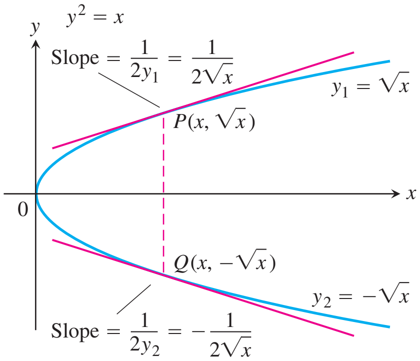

FIGURE 3.37 The equation $y^2 - x = 0$, or $y^2 = x$ as it is usually written, defines two differentiable functions of x on the interval $x \geq 0$. Example 1 shows how to find the derivatives of these functions without solving the equation $y^2 = x$ for y.

EXAMPLE 1 Differentiating Implicitly

Find dy/dx if $y^2 = x$.

Solution The equation $y^2 = x$ defines two differentiable functions of x that we can actually find, namely $y_1 = \sqrt{x}$ and $y_2 = -\sqrt{x}$ (Figure 3.37). We know how to calculate the derivative of each of these for $x > 0$:

$$\frac{dy_1}{dx} = \frac{1}{2\sqrt{x}} \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{dy_2}{dx} = -\frac{1}{2\sqrt{x}}.$$

But suppose that we knew only that the equation $y^2 = x$ defined y as one or more differentiable functions of x for $x > 0$ without knowing exactly what these functions were. Could we still find dy/dx?

The answer is yes. To find dy/dx, we simply differentiate both sides of the equation $y^2 = x$ with respect to x, treating $y = f(x)$ as a differentiable function of x:

$$y^2 = x$$
$$2y\frac{dy}{dx} = 1$$
$$\frac{dy}{dx} = \frac{1}{2y}.$$

The Chain Rule gives $\frac{d}{dx}(y^2) = \frac{d}{dx}[f(x)]^2 = 2f(x)f'(x) = 2y\frac{dy}{dx}$.

This one formula gives the derivatives we calculated for *both* explicit solutions $y_1 = \sqrt{x}$ and $y_2 = -\sqrt{x}$:

$$\frac{dy_1}{dx} = \frac{1}{2y_1} = \frac{1}{2\sqrt{x}} \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{dy_2}{dx} = \frac{1}{2y_2} = \frac{1}{2(-\sqrt{x})} = -\frac{1}{2\sqrt{x}}.$$

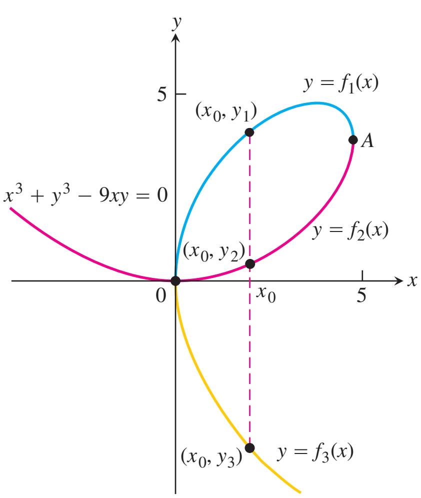

FIGURE 3.38 The curve $x^3 + y^3 - 9xy = 0$ is not the graph of any one function of x. The curve can, however, be divided into separate arcs that *are* the graphs of functions of x. This particular curve, called a *folium*, dates to Descartes in 1638.

EXAMPLE 2 Slope of a Circle at a Point

Find the slope of circle $x^2 + y^2 = 25$ at the point $(3, -4)$.

Solution The circle is not the graph of a single function of x. Rather it is the combined graphs of two differentiable functions, $y_1 = \sqrt{25 - x^2}$ and $y_2 = -\sqrt{25 - x^2}$ (Figure 3.36). The point $(3, -4)$ lies on the graph of y_2, so we can find the slope by calculating explicitly:

$$\left.\frac{dy_2}{dx}\right|_{x=3} = -\left.\frac{-2x}{2\sqrt{25 - x^2}}\right|_{x=3} = -\frac{-6}{2\sqrt{25 - 9}} = \frac{3}{4}.$$

But we can also solve the problem more easily by differentiating the given equation of the circle implicitly with respect to x:

$$\frac{d}{dx}(x^2) + \frac{d}{dx}(y^2) = \frac{d}{dx}(25)$$
$$2x + 2y\frac{dy}{dx} = 0$$
$$\frac{dy}{dx} = -\frac{x}{y}.$$

The slope at $(3, -4)$ is $-\left.\frac{x}{y}\right|_{(3,-4)} = -\frac{3}{-4} = \frac{3}{4}$.

Notice that unlike the slope formula for dy_2/dx, which applies only to points below the x-axis, the formula $dy/dx = -x/y$ applies everywhere the circle has a slope. Notice also that the derivative involves *both* variables x and y, not just the independent variable x. ■

To calculate the derivatives of other implicitly defined functions, we proceed as in Examples 1 and 2: We treat y as a differentiable implicit function of x and apply the usual rules to differentiate both sides of the defining equation.

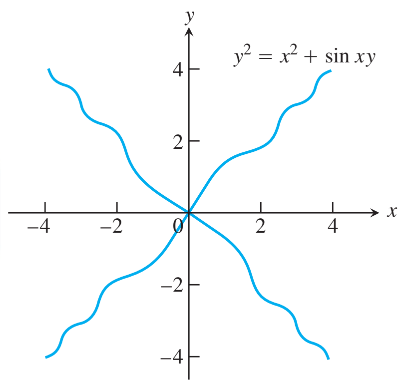

FIGURE 3.39 The graph of $y^2 = x^2 + \sin xy$ in Example 3. The example shows how to find slopes on this implicitly defined curve.

EXAMPLE 3 Differentiating Implicitly

Find dy/dx if $y^2 = x^2 + \sin xy$ (Figure 3.39).

Solution

$$y^2 = x^2 + \sin xy$$

$$\frac{d}{dx}\left(y^2\right) = \frac{d}{dx}\left(x^2\right) + \frac{d}{dx}\left(\sin xy\right) \qquad \text{Differentiate both sides with respect to } x \ldots$$

$$2y\frac{dy}{dx} = 2x + (\cos xy)\frac{d}{dx}(xy) \qquad \ldots \text{ treating } y \text{ as a function of } x \text{ and using the Chain Rule.}$$

$$2y\frac{dy}{dx} = 2x + (\cos xy)\left(y + x\frac{dy}{dx}\right) \qquad \text{Treat } xy \text{ as a product.}$$

$$2y\frac{dy}{dx} - (\cos xy)\left(x\frac{dy}{dx}\right) = 2x + (\cos xy)y \qquad \text{Collect terms with } dy/dx \ldots$$

$$(2y - x\cos xy)\frac{dy}{dx} = 2x + y\cos xy \qquad \ldots \text{ and factor out } dy/dx.$$

$$\frac{dy}{dx} = \frac{2x + y\cos xy}{2y - x\cos xy} \qquad \text{Solve for } dy/dx \text{ by dividing.}$$

Notice that the formula for dy/dx applies everywhere that the implicitly defined curve has a slope. Notice again that the derivative involves *both* variables x and y, not just the independent variable x. ■

Implicit Differentiation

1. Differentiate both sides of the equation with respect to x, treating y as a differentiable function of x.
2. Collect the terms with dy/dx on one side of the equation.
3. Solve for dy/dx.

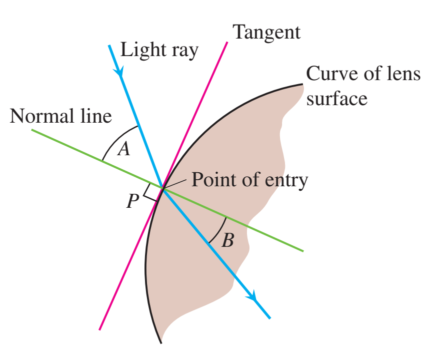

FIGURE 3.40 The profile of a lens, showing the bending (refraction) of a ray of light as it passes through the lens surface.

Lenses, Tangents, and Normal Lines

In the law that describes how light changes direction as it enters a lens, the important angles are the angles the light makes with the line perpendicular to the surface of the lens at the point of entry (angles A and B in Figure 3.40). This line is called the *normal* to the surface at the point of entry. In a profile view of a lens like the one in Figure 3.40, the **normal** is the line perpendicular to the tangent to the profile curve at the point of entry.

You Try It

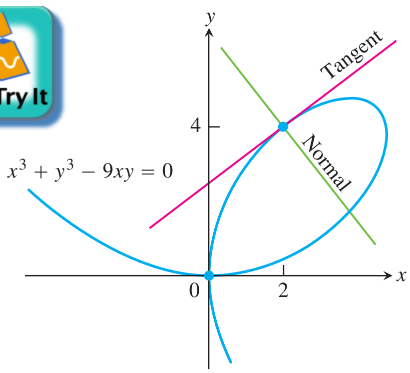

FIGURE 3.41 Example 4 shows how to find equations for the tangent and normal to the folium of Descartes at (2, 4).

EXAMPLE 4 Tangent and Normal to the Folium of Descartes

Animation

Show that the point (2, 4) lies on the curve $x^3 + y^3 - 9xy = 0$. Then find the tangent and normal to the curve there (Figure 3.41).

Solution The point (2, 4) lies on the curve because its coordinates satisfy the equation given for the curve: $2^3 + 4^3 - 9(2)(4) = 8 + 64 - 72 = 0$.

To find the slope of the curve at (2, 4), we first use implicit differentiation to find a formula for dy/dx:

$$x^3 + y^3 - 9xy = 0$$

$$\frac{d}{dx}\left(x^3\right) + \frac{d}{dx}\left(y^3\right) - \frac{d}{dx}\left(9xy\right) = \frac{d}{dx}\left(0\right)$$ Differentiate both sides with respect to x.

$$3x^2 + 3y^2\frac{dy}{dx} - 9\left(x\frac{dy}{dx} + y\frac{dx}{dx}\right) = 0$$ Treat xy as a product and y as a function of x.

$$(3y^2 - 9x)\frac{dy}{dx} + 3x^2 - 9y = 0$$

$$3(y^2 - 3x)\frac{dy}{dx} = 9y - 3x^2$$

$$\frac{dy}{dx} = \frac{3y - x^2}{y^2 - 3x}.$$ Solve for dy/dx.

We then evaluate the derivative at $(x, y) = (2, 4)$:

$$\left.\frac{dy}{dx}\right|_{(2,4)} = \left.\frac{3y - x^2}{y^2 - 3x}\right|_{(2,4)} = \frac{3(4) - 2^2}{4^2 - 3(2)} = \frac{8}{10} = \frac{4}{5}.$$

The tangent at (2, 4) is the line through (2, 4) with slope $4/5$:

$$y = 4 + \frac{4}{5}\left(x - 2\right)$$

$$y = \frac{4}{5}x + \frac{12}{5}.$$

The normal to the curve at (2, 4) is the line perpendicular to the tangent there, the line through (2, 4) with slope $-5/4$:

$$y = 4 - \frac{5}{4}(x - 2)$$

$$y = -\frac{5}{4}x + \frac{13}{2}.$$ ■

The quadratic formula enables us to solve a second-degree equation like $y^2 - 2xy + 3x^2 = 0$ for y in terms of x. There is a formula for the three roots of a cubic equation that is like the quadratic formula but much more complicated. If this formula is used to solve the equation $x^3 + y^3 = 9xy$ for y in terms of x, then three functions determined by the equation are

$$y = f(x) = \sqrt[3]{-\frac{x^3}{2} + \sqrt{\frac{x^6}{4} - 27x^3}} + \sqrt[3]{-\frac{x^3}{2} - \sqrt{\frac{x^6}{4} - 27x^3}}$$

and

$$y = \frac{1}{2}\left[-f(x) \pm \sqrt{-3}\left(\sqrt[3]{-\frac{x^3}{2} + \sqrt{\frac{x^6}{4} - 27x^3}} - \sqrt[3]{-\frac{x^3}{2} - \sqrt{\frac{x^6}{4} - 27x^3}}\right)\right].$$

Using implicit differentiation in Example 4 was much simpler than calculating dy/dx directly from any of the above formulas. Finding slopes on curves defined by higher-degree equations usually requires implicit differentiation.

Derivatives of Higher Order

Implicit differentiation can also be used to find higher derivatives. Here is an example.

EXAMPLE 5 Finding a Second Derivative Implicitly

Find d^2y/dx^2 if $2x^3 - 3y^2 = 8$.

Solution To start, we differentiate both sides of the equation with respect to x in order to find $y' = dy/dx$.

$$\frac{d}{dx}(2x^3 - 3y^2) = \frac{d}{dx}(8)$$

$$6x^2 - 6yy' = 0 \qquad \text{Treat } y \text{ as a function of } x.$$

$$x^2 - yy' = 0$$

$$y' = \frac{x^2}{y}, \qquad \text{when } y \neq 0 \qquad \text{Solve for } y'.$$

We now apply the Quotient Rule to find y''.

$$y'' = \frac{d}{dx}\left(\frac{x^2}{y}\right) = \frac{2xy - x^2y'}{y^2} = \frac{2x}{y} - \frac{x^2}{y^2}\cdot y'$$

Finally, we substitute $y' = x^2/y$ to express y'' in terms of x and y.

$$y'' = \frac{2x}{y} - \frac{x^2}{y^2}\left(\frac{x^2}{y}\right) = \frac{2x}{y} - \frac{x^4}{y^3}, \qquad \text{when } y \neq 0$$ ■

Rational Powers of Differentiable Functions

We know that the rule

$$\frac{d}{dx}x^n = nx^{n-1}$$

holds when n is an integer. Using implicit differentiation we can show that it holds when n is any rational number.

THEOREM 4 **Power Rule for Rational Powers**

If p/q is a rational number, then $x^{p/q}$ is differentiable at every interior point of the domain of $x^{(p/q)-1}$, and

$$\frac{d}{dx}x^{p/q} = \frac{p}{q}x^{(p/q)-1}.$$

EXAMPLE 6 Using the Rational Power Rule

(a) $\dfrac{d}{dx}\left(x^{1/2}\right) = \dfrac{1}{2}x^{-1/2} = \dfrac{1}{2\sqrt{x}}$ for $x > 0$

(b) $\dfrac{d}{dx}\left(x^{2/3}\right) = \dfrac{2}{3}x^{-1/3}$ for $x \neq 0$

(c) $\dfrac{d}{dx}\left(x^{-4/3}\right) = -\dfrac{4}{3}x^{-7/3}$ for $x \neq 0$ ■

Proof of Theorem 4 Let p and q be integers with $q > 0$ and suppose that $y = \sqrt[q]{x^p} = x^{p/q}$. Then

$$y^q = x^p.$$

Since p and q are integers (for which we already have the Power Rule), and assuming that y is a differentiable function of x, we can differentiate both sides of the equation with respect to x and get

$$qy^{q-1}\frac{dy}{dx} = px^{p-1}.$$

If $y \neq 0$, we can divide both sides of the equation by qy^{q-1} to solve for dy/dx, obtaining

$$\begin{aligned}
\frac{dy}{dx} &= \frac{px^{p-1}}{qy^{q-1}} \\
&= \frac{p}{q}\cdot\frac{x^{p-1}}{(x^{p/q})^{q-1}} && y = x^{p/q} \\
&= \frac{p}{q}\cdot\frac{x^{p-1}}{x^{p-p/q}} && \frac{p}{q}(q-1) = p - \frac{p}{q} \\
&= \frac{p}{q}\cdot x^{(p-1)-(p-p/q)} && \text{A law of exponents} \\
&= \frac{p}{q}\cdot x^{(p/q)-1},
\end{aligned}$$

which proves the rule. ■

We will drop the assumption of differentiability used in the proof of Theorem 4 in Chapter 7, where we prove the Power Rule for any nonzero real exponent. (See Section 7.3.)

By combining the result of Theorem 4 with the Chain Rule, we get an extension of the Power Chain Rule to rational powers of u: If p/q is a rational number and u is a differentiable function of x, then $u^{p/q}$ is a differentiable function of x and

$$\frac{d}{dx}u^{p/q} = \frac{p}{q}u^{(p/q)-1}\frac{du}{dx},$$

provided that $u \neq 0$ if $(p/q) < 1$. This restriction is necessary because 0 might be in the domain of $u^{p/q}$ but not in the domain of $u^{(p/q)-1}$, as we see in the next example.

EXAMPLE 7 Using the Rational Power and Chain Rules

function defined on $[-1, 1]$

(a) $$\frac{d}{dx}\underbrace{\left(1-x^2\right)^{1/4}} = \frac{1}{4}\left(1-x^2\right)^{-3/4}(-2x) \qquad \text{Power Chain Rule with } u = 1 - x^2$$

$$= \frac{-x}{2\left(1-x^2\right)^{3/4}}$$

derivative defined only on $(-1, 1)$

(b) $$\frac{d}{dx}(\cos x)^{-1/5} = -\frac{1}{5}(\cos x)^{-6/5}\frac{d}{dx}(\cos x)$$

$$= -\frac{1}{5}(\cos x)^{-6/5}(-\sin x)$$

$$= \frac{1}{5}(\sin x)(\cos x)^{-6/5}$$

■