6.2 Volumes by Cylindrical Shells

In Section 6.1 we defined the volume of a solid S as the definite integral

$$V = \int_a^b A(x)\, dx,$$

where $A(x)$ is an integrable cross-sectional area of S from $x = a$ to $x = b$. The area $A(x)$ was obtained by slicing through the solid with a plane perpendicular to the x-axis. In this section we use the same integral definition for volume, but obtain the area by slicing through the solid in a different way. Now we slice through the solid using circular cylinders of increasing radii, like cookie cutters. We slice straight down through the solid perpendicular to the x-axis, with the axis of the cylinder parallel to the y-axis. The vertical axis of each cylinder is the same line, but the radii of the cylinders increase with each slice. In this way the solid S is sliced up into thin cylindrical shells of constant thickness that grow outward from their common axis, like circular tree rings. Unrolling a cylindrical shell shows that its volume is approximately that of a rectangular slab with area $A(x)$ and thickness Δx. This allows us to apply the same integral definition for volume as before. Before describing the method in general, let's look at an example to gain some insight.

Video

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EXAMPLE 1 Finding a Volume Using Shells

The region enclosed by the x-axis and the parabola $y = f(x) = 3x - x^2$ is revolved about the vertical line $x = -1$ to generate the shape of a solid (Figure 6.17). Find the volume of the solid.

Solution Using the washer method from Section 6.1 would be awkward here because we would need to express the x-values of the left and right branches of the parabola in terms

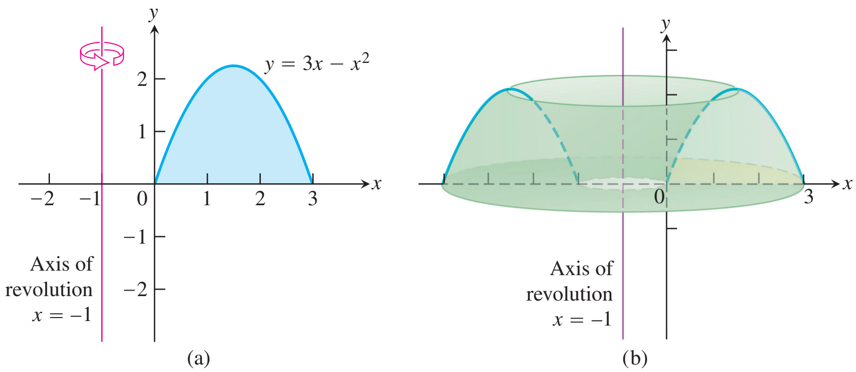

FIGURE 6.17 (a) The graph of the region in Example 1, before revolution. (b) The solid formed when the region in part (a) is revolved about the axis of revolution $x = -1$.

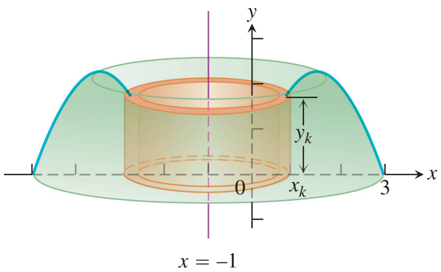

FIGURE 6.18 A cylindrical shell of height y_k obtained by rotating a vertical strip of thickness Δx about the line $x = -1$. The outer radius of the cylinder occurs at x_k, where the height of the parabola is $y_k = 3x_k - x_k^2$ (Example 1).

of y. (These x-values are the inner and outer radii for a typical washer, leading to complicated formulas.) Instead of rotating a horizontal strip of thickness Δy, we rotate a *vertical strip* of thickness Δx. This rotation produces a *cylindrical shell* of height y_k above a point x_k within the base of the vertical strip, and of thickness Δx. An example of a cylindrical shell is shown as the orange-shaded region in Figure 6.18. We can think of the cylindrical shell shown in the figure as approximating a slice of the solid obtained by cutting straight down through it, parallel to the axis of revolution, all the way around close to the inside hole. We then cut another cylindrical slice around the enlarged hole, then another, and so on, obtaining n cylinders. The radii of the cylinders gradually increase, and the heights of the cylinders follow the contour of the parabola: shorter to taller, then back to shorter (Figure 6.17a).

Each slice is sitting over a subinterval of the x-axis of length (width) Δx. Its radius is approximately $(1 + x_k)$, and its height is approximately $3x_k - x_k^2$. If we unroll the cylinder at x_k and flatten it out, it becomes (approximately) a rectangular slab with thickness Δx (Figure 6.19). The outer circumference of the kth cylinder is $2\pi \cdot \text{radius} = 2\pi(1 + x_k)$, and this is the length of the rolled-out rectangular slab. Its volume is approximated by that of a rectangular solid,

$$\begin{aligned}\Delta V_k &= \text{circumference} \times \text{height} \times \text{thickness} \\ &= 2\pi(1 + x_k) \cdot \left(3x_k - x_k^2\right) \cdot \Delta x.\end{aligned}$$

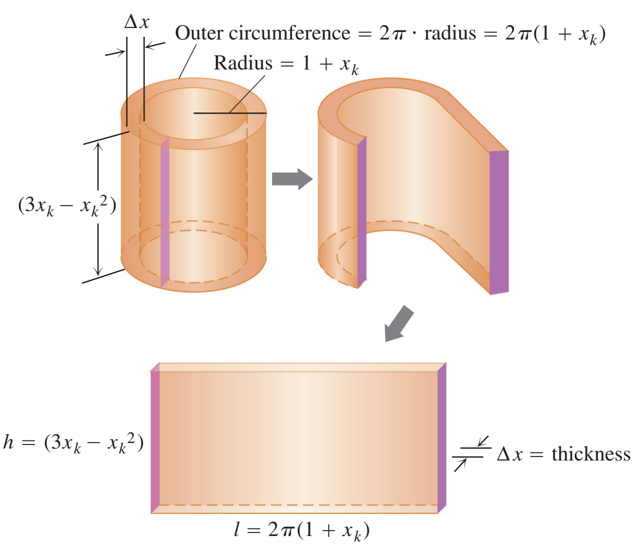

FIGURE 6.19 Imagine cutting and unrolling a cylindrical shell to get a flat (nearly) rectangular solid (Example 1).

Biography

Summing together the volumes ΔV_k of the individual cylindrical shells over the interval $[0, 3]$ gives the Riemann sum

$$\sum_{k=1}^{n} \Delta V_k = \sum_{k=1}^{n} 2\pi(x_k + 1)\left(3x_k - x_k^2\right) \Delta x.$$

Taking the limit as the thickness $\Delta x \to 0$ gives the volume integral

$$\begin{aligned} V &= \int_0^3 2\pi(x+1)(3x-x^2)\,dx \\ &= \int_0^3 2\pi(3x^2+3x-x^3-x^2)\,dx \\ &= 2\pi\int_0^3 (2x^2+3x-x^3)\,dx \\ &= 2\pi\left[\frac{2}{3}x^3+\frac{3}{2}x^2-\frac{1}{4}x^4\right]_0^3 \\ &= \frac{45\pi}{2}. \end{aligned}$$

We now generalize the procedure used in Example 1.

The Shell Method

Suppose the region bounded by the graph of a nonnegative continuous function $y = f(x)$ and the x-axis over the finite closed interval $[a, b]$ lies to the right of the vertical line $x = L$ (Figure 6.20a). We assume $a \geq L$, so the vertical line may touch the region, but not pass through it. We generate a solid S by rotating this region about the vertical line L.

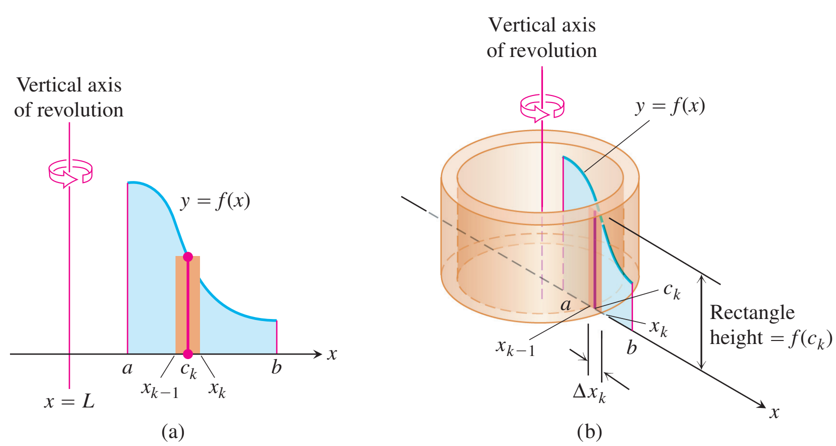

FIGURE 6.20 When the region shown in (a) is revolved about the vertical line $x = L$, a solid is produced which can be sliced into cylindrical shells. A typical shell is shown in (b).

Let P be a partition of the interval $[a, b]$ by the points $a = x_0 < x_1 < \cdots < x_n = b$, and let c_k be the midpoint of the kth subinterval $[x_{k-1}, x_k]$. We approximate the region in Figure 6.20a with rectangles based on this partition of $[a, b]$. A typical approximating rectangle has height $f(c_k)$ and width $\Delta x_k = x_k - x_{k-1}$. If this rectangle is rotated about the vertical line $x = L$, then a shell is swept out, as in Figure 6.20b. A formula from geometry tells us that the volume of the shell swept out by the rectangle is

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta V_k &= 2\pi \times \text{average shell radius} \times \text{shell height} \times \text{thickness} \\ &= 2\pi \cdot (c_k - L) \cdot f(c_k) \cdot \Delta x_k. \end{aligned}$$

We approximate the volume of the solid S by summing the volumes of the shells swept out by the n rectangles based on P:

$$V \approx \sum_{k=1}^{n} \Delta V_k.$$

The limit of this Riemann sum as $\|P\| \to 0$ gives the volume of the solid as a definite integral:

$$\begin{aligned} V &= \int_a^b 2\pi(\text{shell radius})(\text{shell height})\, dx. \\ &= \int_a^b 2\pi(x - L)f(x)\, dx. \end{aligned}$$

We refer to the variable of integration, here x, as the **thickness variable**. We use the first integral, rather than the second containing a formula for the integrand, to emphasize the *process* of the shell method. This will allow for rotations about a horizontal line L as well.

> **Shell Formula for Revolution About a Vertical Line**
> The volume of the solid generated by revolving the region between the x-axis and the graph of a continuous function $y = f(x) \geq 0$, $L \leq a \leq x \leq b$, about a vertical line $x = L$ is
>
> $$V = \int_a^b 2\pi \begin{pmatrix}\text{shell} \\ \text{radius}\end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix}\text{shell} \\ \text{height}\end{pmatrix} dx.$$

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EXAMPLE 2 Cylindrical Shells Revolving About the y-Axis

The region bounded by the curve $y = \sqrt{x}$, the x-axis, and the line $x = 4$ is revolved about the y-axis to generate a solid. Find the volume of the solid.

Solution Sketch the region and draw a line segment across it *parallel* to the axis of revolution (Figure 6.21a). Label the segment's height (shell height) and distance from the axis of revolution (shell radius). (We drew the shell in Figure 6.21b, but you need not do that.)

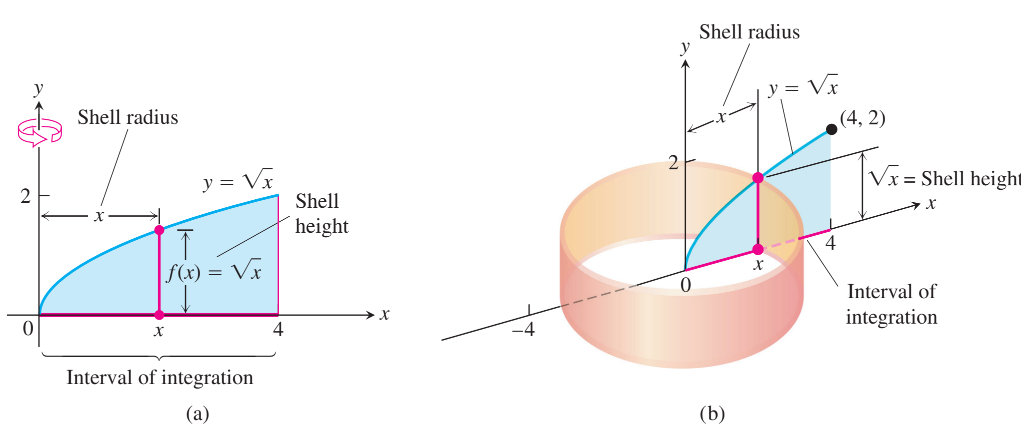

FIGURE 6.21 (a) The region, shell dimensions, and interval of integration in Example 2. (b) The shell swept out by the vertical segment in part (a) with a width Δx.

The shell thickness variable is x, so the limits of integration for the shell formula are $a = 0$ and $b = 4$ (Figure 6.20). The volume is then

$$\begin{aligned} V &= \int_a^b 2\pi \begin{pmatrix}\text{shell}\\ \text{radius}\end{pmatrix}\begin{pmatrix}\text{shell}\\ \text{height}\end{pmatrix} dx \\ &= \int_0^4 2\pi(x)\left(\sqrt{x}\right) dx \\ &= 2\pi \int_0^4 x^{3/2}\, dx = 2\pi\left[\frac{2}{5}x^{5/2}\right]_0^4 = \frac{128\pi}{5}. \end{aligned}$$

So far, we have used vertical axes of revolution. For horizontal axes, we replace the x's with y's.

EXAMPLE 3 Cylindrical Shells Revolving About the x-Axis

Video

You Try It

The region bounded by the curve $y = \sqrt{x}$, the x-axis, and the line $x = 4$ is revolved about the x-axis to generate a solid. Find the volume of the solid.

Solution Sketch the region and draw a line segment across it *parallel* to the axis of revolution (Figure 6.22a). Label the segment's length (shell height) and distance from the axis of revolution (shell radius). (We drew the shell in Figure 6.22b, but you need not do that.)

In this case, the shell thickness variable is y, so the limits of integration for the shell formula method are $a = 0$ and $b = 2$ (along the y-axis in Figure 6.22). The volume of the solid is

$$\begin{aligned} V &= \int_a^b 2\pi \begin{pmatrix}\text{shell}\\ \text{radius}\end{pmatrix}\begin{pmatrix}\text{shell}\\ \text{height}\end{pmatrix} dy \\ &= \int_0^2 2\pi(y)(4 - y^2)\, dy \\ &= \int_0^2 2\pi(4y - y^3)\, dy \\ &= 2\pi\left[2y^2 - \frac{y^4}{4}\right]_0^2 = 8\pi. \end{aligned}$$

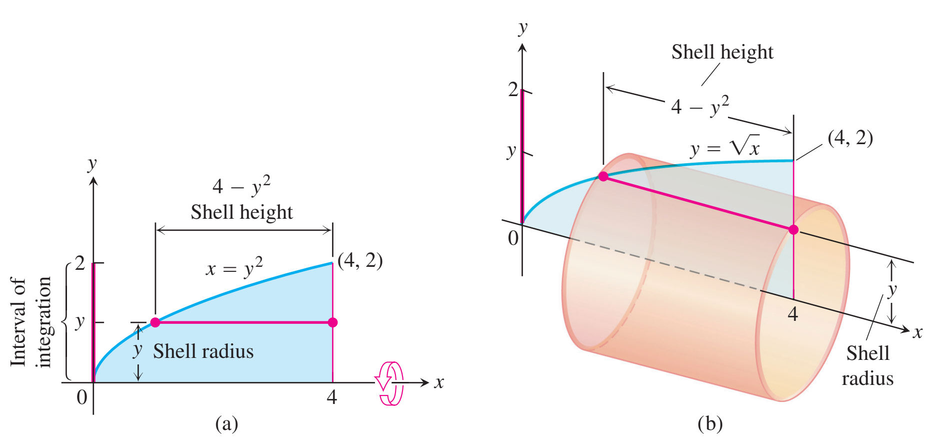

FIGURE 6.22 (a) The region, shell dimensions, and interval of integration in Example 3. (b) The shell swept out by the horizontal segment in part (a) with a width Δy.

Summary of the Shell Method

Regardless of the position of the axis of revolution (horizontal or vertical), the steps for implementing the shell method are these.

1. *Draw the region and sketch a line segment* across it *parallel* to the axis of revolution. *Label* the segment's height or length (shell height) and distance from the axis of revolution (shell radius).
2. *Find* the limits of integration for the thickness variable.
3. *Integrate* the product 2π (shell radius) (shell height) with respect to the thickness variable (x or y) to find the volume.

The shell method gives the same answer as the washer method when both are used to calculate the volume of a region. We do not prove that result here, but it is illustrated in Exercises 33 and 34. Both volume formulas are actually special cases of a general volume formula we look at in studying double and triple integrals in Chapter 15. That general formula also allows for computing volumes of solids other than those swept out by regions of revolution.