MATH 134 Calculus 2 with FUNdamentals

Section 10.3: Convergence of Series with Positive Terms

In this section we learn some tests for determining whether an infinite series converges or diverges. In general, it is not possible to find the explicit sum of a convergent series (unless the series is geometric); the main goal is to determine whether an infinite series converges or not. The tests in this section are only for series with *positive* terms.

The Integral Test

Suppose that $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} a_n$ is an infinite series with $a_n > 0$ for each n. Let $f : [1, \infty) \to \mathbb{R}$ be the function obtained by replacing the n in the formula for a_n with the variable x. Suppose that $f(x)$ is a positive, decreasing, and continuous function. Then

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} a_n \text{ converges} \quad \text{if and only if} \quad \int_1^{\infty} f(x)\,dx \text{ converges.}$$

The idea behind the integral test is that a series with positive terms can be thought of as a Riemann sum with rectangles of base 1 and heights a_n. Thus, the improper integral should be a good approximation to the series. The integral and series converge or diverge together.

Example 1: Consider the infinite series $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n^2}$. We can apply the integral test by letting $f(x) = \frac{1}{x^2}$. Then f is a positive, decreasing, and continuous function for $x \geq 1$. It is decreasing because $f'(x) = -2x^{-3} < 0$ for $x \geq 1$. Since

$$\int_1^{\infty} \frac{1}{x^2}\,dx = \lim_{b\to\infty} \int_1^{b} x^{-2}\,dx = \lim_{b\to\infty} -\frac{1}{x}\bigg|_1^b = \lim_{b\to\infty} -\frac{1}{b} + 1 = 1\,,$$

the improper integral converges. Therefore, by the integral test, the series also converges. Note that the series does *not* converge to the same value as the integral. In fact, the sum is actually $\pi^2/6$, a famous result discovered by Euler in 1734 that can be proven using Fourier Series.

Exercise 1: Use the integral test to determine whether the given series converges or diverges.

(a) $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{\sqrt{n}}$

(b) $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n^2+1}$

The p-series Test

The series $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n^p}$ converges if $p > 1$ and diverges if $p \leq 1$.

A series of the form $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n^p}$ is called a p**-series.** The p-series test follows directly from the integral test and the power rule. The series $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n^{1.1}}$ converges, while the series $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n^{0.9}}$ diverges. The border line case is $p = 1$, the all-important **Harmonic Series**. Of all the p-series, the Harmonic Series is the slowest divergent series (the sum goes to infinity very, very slowly—as slowly as $\ln x$ goes to infinity).

Exercise 2: Using an appropriate test for convergence, determine whether the given infinite series converges or diverges.

(a) $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n\sqrt{n}}$

(b) $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{n^2}{n^2 + 4}$

(c) $\sum_{n=2}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n \ln n}$