

I. Classical Differential Geometry of Curves

This is a first course on the differential geometry of curves and surfaces. It begins with topics mentioned briefly in ordinary and multivariable calculus courses, and two major goals are to formulate the mathematical concept(s) of curvature for a surface and to interpret curvature for several basic examples of surfaces that arise in multivariable calculus.

Basic references for the course

We shall begin by citing the official text for the course:

B. O'Neill. *Elementary Differential Geometry*. (Second Edition), Harcourt/Academic Press, San Diego CA, 1997, ISBN 0-112-526745-2.

There is also a Revised Second Edition (published in 2006; ISBN-10: 0-12-088735-5) which is close but not identical to the Second Edition; the latter (not the more recent version) will be the official text for the course.

This document is intended to provide a fairly complete set of notes that will reflect the content of the lectures; the approach is similar but not identical to that of O'NEILL. At various points we shall also refer to the following alternate sources. The first two of these are texts at a slightly higher level, and the third is the Schaum's Outline Series review book on differential geometry, which contains a great deal of information on the classical approach, brief outlines of the underlying theory, and many worked out examples.

M. P. do Carmo, *Differential Geometry of Curves and Surfaces*, Prentice-Hall, Saddle River NJ, 1976, ISBN 0-132-12589-7.

J. A. Thorpe, *Elementary Topics in Differential Geometry*, Springer-Verlag, New York, 1979, ISBN 0-387-90357-7.

M. Lipschutz, *Schaum's Outlines - Differential Geometry*, Schaum's/McGraw-Hill, 1969, ISBN 0-07-037985-8.

At many points we assume material covered in previous mathematics courses, so we shall include a few words on such background material. This course explicitly assumes prior experience with the elements of linear algebra (including matrices, dot products and determinants), the portions of multivariable calculus involving partial differentiation, and some familiarity with the a few basic ideas from set theory such as unions and intersections. At a few points in later units we shall also assume some familiarity with multiple integration. but we shall not be using results like Green's Theorem, Stokes' Theorem or the Divergence Theorem. For the sake of completeness, files describing the background material (with references to standard texts that have been used in the Department's courses) are included in the course directory and can be found in the files called `background*.pdf`, where $n = 1, 2$ or 3 .

The name "differential geometry" suggests a subject which uses ideas from calculus to obtain geometrical information about curves and surfaces; since vector algebra plays a crucial role in modern work on geometry, the subject also makes extensive use of material from linear algebra. At many points it will be necessary to work with topics from the prerequisites in a more sophisticated manner, and it is also necessary to be more careful in our logic to make sure that our formulas

and conclusions are accurate. Also, at numerous steps it might be necessary to go back and review things from earlier courses, and in some cases it will be important to understand things in more depth than one needs to get through ordinary calculus, multivariable calculus or matrix algebra. Frequently one of the benefits of a mathematics course is that it sharpens one's understanding and mastery of earlier material, and differential geometry certainly provides many opportunities of this sort.

The origins of differential geometry

The paragraph below gives a very brief summary of the developments which led to the emergence of differential geometry as a subject in its own right by the beginning of the 19th century. Further information may be found in any of several books on the history of mathematics.

Straight lines and circles have been central objects in geometry ever since its beginnings. During the 5th century B.C.E., Greek geometers began to study more general curves, most notably the ellipse, hyperbola and parabola but also other examples (for example, the Quadratrix of Hippias, which allows one to solve classical Greek construction problems that cannot be answered by means of straightedge and compass, and the Spiral of Archimedes, which is given in polar coordinates by the equation $r = \theta$). In the following centuries Greek mathematicians discovered a large number of other curves and investigated the properties of such curves in considerable detail for a variety of reasons. By the end of the Middle Ages in the 15th century, scientists and mathematicians had discovered further examples of curves that arise in various natural contexts, and still further examples and results were discovered during the 16th century. Problems involving curves played an important role in the development of analytic geometry and calculus during the 17th and 18th centuries, and these subjects in turn yielded powerful new techniques for analyzing curves and analyzing their properties. In particular, these advances created a unified framework for understanding the work of the Greek geometers and a setting for studying new classes of curves and problems beyond the reach of classical Greek geometry. Interactions with physics played a major role in the mathematical study of curves beginning in the 15th century, largely because curves provided a means for analyzing the motion of physical objects. By the beginning of the 19th century, the differential geometry of curves and surfaces had begun to emerge as a subject in its own right.

This unit describes the classical nineteenth century theory of curves in the plane and 3-dimensional space.

References for examples

Here are some web links to sites with pictures and written discussions of many curves that mathematicians have studied during the past 2500 years, including the examples mentioned above:

<http://www-gap.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/~history/Curves/Curves.html>

http://www.xahlee.org/SpecialPlaneCurves_dir/specialPlaneCurves.html

<http://facstaff.bloomu.edu/skokoska/curves.pdf>

Clickable links to these sites — and others mentioned in these notes — are in the course directory file `dg2010links.pdf`.

REFERENCES FOR RESULTS ON CURVES FROM CLASSICAL GREEK GEOMETRY. A survey of curves in classical Greek geometry is beyond the scope of these notes, but here are references for Archimedes' paper on the spiral named after him and a description of the work of Apollonius of Perga (c. 262–c. 190 B.C.E.) on conic sections in (relatively) modern language.

Archimedes of Syracuse (*author*) and T. L. Heath (*translator*), *The Works of Archimedes* (Reprinted from the 1912 Edition), Dover, New York, NY, 2002, ISBN 0–486–42084–1. (The paper *On spirals* appears on pages 151–188).

H. G. Zeuthen, *Die Lehre von den Kegelschnitten im Altertum* (The study of the conic sections in antiquity; translation from Danish into German by R. von Fischer-Benzon), A. F. Høst & Son, Copenhagen, DK, 1886. — See the file `zeuthenlink.pdf` in the course directory for an online copy from Google Book Search (conditions for use of this reference are included in the file).

Finally, here are a few more references, some of which are cited at various points in these notes:

<http://people.math.gatech.edu/~ghomi/LectureNotes/index.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Differential_geometry_of_surfaces

<http://www.math.uga.edu/~shifrin/ShifrinDiffGeo.pdf>

<http://www.seas.upenn.edu/~cis70005/cis700s16pdf.pdf>

<http://www.math.uab.edu/weinstei/notes/dg.pdf>

N. J. Hicks, Notes on differential geometry (Van Nostrand Mathematical Studies No. 3). *D. Van Nostrand, New York, 1965.*

(Available online: <http://www.wisdom.weizmann.ac.il/~yakov/scanlib/hicks.pdf>)

W. Kühnel, Differential Geometry: Curves – Surfaces – Manifolds (Student Mathematical Library, Vol. 16, Second Edition, transl. by B. Hunt). *American Mathematical Society, Providence, RI, 2006. ISBN-10: 0-8218-3988-8.*

I.0 : Partial differentiation

(O'Neill, § 1.1)

This is an extremely brief review of the most basic facts that are covered in multivariable calculus courses.

The basic setting for multivariable calculus involves **Cartesian** or **Euclidean n -space**, which is denoted by \mathbb{R}^n . At first one simply takes $n = 2$ or 3 depending on whether one is interested in 2-dimensional or 3-dimensional problems, but much of the discussion also works for larger values of n . We shall view elements of these spaces as vectors, with addition and scalar multiplication done coordinatewise.

In order to do differential calculus for functions of two or more real variables easily, it is necessary to consider functions that are defined on **open sets**. One way of characterizing such a set

is to say that $U \subset \mathbb{R}^n$ is open if and only if for each $\mathbf{p} = (p_1, \dots, p_n) \in U$ there is an $\varepsilon > 0$ such that if $\mathbf{x} = (x_1, \dots, x_n) \in U$ satisfies $|x_i - p_i| < \varepsilon$ for all i , then $\mathbf{x} \in U$. Alternatively, a set is open if and only if for each $\mathbf{p} \in U$ there is some $\delta > 0$ such that the set of all vectors \mathbf{x} satisfying $|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{p}| < \delta$ is contained in U (to see the equivalence of these for $n = 2$ or 3 , consider squares inscribed in circles, squares circumscribed in circles, and similarly for cubes and spheres replacing squares and circles; illustrations and further discussion are in the files `neighborhoods.pdf` and `opensets.pdf`).

Continuous real valued functions on open sets are defined formally using the same sorts of $\varepsilon - \delta$ conditions that appear in single variable calculus; unless it is absolutely necessary, we shall try to treat such limits intuitively (for example, see the discussion in Section I.2). Vector valued functions are completely determined by the n scalar functions giving their coordinates, and a vector valued function is continuous if and only if all its scalar valued coordinate functions are continuous. As in single variable calculus, polynomials are always continuous, and standard constructions on continuous functions — for example, algebraic operations and forming composite functions — produce new continuous functions from old ones.

More generally, one can also define limits for functions of several variables either by means of the standard $\varepsilon - \delta$ condition; for functions of several variables, the appropriate condition for asking whether

$$\lim_{\mathbf{x} \rightarrow \mathbf{a}} f(\mathbf{x}) = b$$

is that the function f should be defined for all \mathbf{x} sufficiently close to \mathbf{a} with the possible exception of $\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{a}$. In other words, there is some $r > 0$ such that f is defined for all \mathbf{x} satisfying

$$0 < |\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{a}| < r.$$

The definition of limit works equally well for vector and scalar valued functions, and the following basic result is often extremely useful when considering limits of vector valued functions.

VECTOR LIMIT FORMULA. *Let \mathbf{F} be a vector valued function defined on a deleted neighborhood of \mathbf{a} with values in \mathbb{R}^n , let f_i denote the i^{th} coordinate function of \mathbf{F} , and suppose that*

$$\lim_{\mathbf{x} \rightarrow \mathbf{a}} f_i(x) = b_i$$

holds for all i . Let \mathbf{e}_i denote the i^{th} unit vector in \mathbb{R}^n , whose i^{th} coordinate is equal to 1 and whose other coordinates are equal to zero. Then we have

$$\lim_{\mathbf{x} \rightarrow \mathbf{a}} f_i(x) = \sum_{i=1}^n b_i \mathbf{e}_i. \blacksquare$$

The previous statement about continuity of vector valued functions (continuous \iff all of the coordinate functions are continuous) is an immediate consequence of this formula. \blacksquare

Partial derivatives

Given a real valued function f defined on an open set U , its partial derivatives are formed as follows. For each index i between 1 and n , consider the functions obtained by holding all variables except the i^{th} variable constant, and take ordinary derivatives of such functions. The corresponding derivative is denoted by the standard notation

$$\frac{\partial f}{\partial x_i}.$$

The *gradient* of f is the vector ∇f whose i^{th} coordinate is equal to the i^{th} partial derivative.

One then has the following fundamentally important linear approximation result.

THEOREM. *Let f be a function defined on an open subset $U \subset \mathbb{R}^n$, and let $\mathbf{x} \in U$. Suppose also that ∇f is also continuous on U . Then there is a $\delta > 0$ and a function θ defined for $|\mathbf{h}| < \delta$ such that*

$$f(\mathbf{x} + \mathbf{h}) = f(\mathbf{x}) + \nabla f(\mathbf{x}) \cdot \mathbf{h} + |\mathbf{h}| \cdot \theta(\mathbf{h})$$

where $\lim_{|\mathbf{h}| \rightarrow 0} |\theta(\mathbf{h})| = 0$.■

Derivations of this theorem are given in virtually every calculus book which devotes a chapter to partial differentiation. It is important to note that the existence of partial derivatives by itself is not even enough to ensure that a function is continuous (standard examples like

$$f(x, y) = \frac{xy}{x^2 + y^2}$$

for $(x, y) \neq (0, 0)$ and $f(0, 0) = 0$ are also given in nearly all calculus books).

I.1 : Cross products

(O'Neill, § 2.2)

Courses in single variable or multivariable calculus usually define the cross product of two vectors and describe some of its basic properties. Since this construction will be particularly important to us and we shall use properties that are not always emphasized in calculus courses, we shall begin with a more detailed treatment of this construction.

Note on orthogonal vectors

One way of attempting to describe the dimension of a vector space is to suggest that the dimension represents the maximum number of mutually perpendicular directions. The following elementary result provides a formal justification for this idea.

PROPOSITION. *Let $\mathbf{S} = \{\mathbf{a}_1, \dots, \mathbf{a}_k\}$ be a set of nonzero vectors that are mutually perpendicular. Then \mathbf{S} is linearly independent.*

Proof. Suppose that we have an equation of the form

$$\sum_{i=1}^n c_i \mathbf{a}_i = \mathbf{0}$$

for some scalars c_i . If $1 \leq j \leq k$ we then have

$$0 = \mathbf{0} \cdot \mathbf{a}_j = \left(\sum_{i=1}^n c_i \mathbf{a}_i \right) \cdot \mathbf{a}_j = \sum_{i=1}^n (c_i \mathbf{a}_i \cdot \mathbf{a}_j)$$

and since the vectors in \mathbf{S} are mutually perpendicular the latter reduces to $c_j |\mathbf{a}_j|^2$. Thus the original equation implies that $c_j |\mathbf{a}_j|^2 = 0$ for all j . Since each vector \mathbf{a}_j is nonzero it follows that $|\mathbf{a}_j|^2 > 0$ for all j which in turn implies $c_j = 0$ for all j . Therefore \mathbf{S} is linearly independent. ■

Properties of cross products

Definition. If $\mathbf{a} = (a_1, a_2, a_3)$ and $\mathbf{b} = (b_1, b_2, b_3)$ are vectors in \mathbb{R}^3 then their cross product or vector product is defined to be

$$\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b} = (a_2 b_3 - a_3 b_2, a_3 b_1 - a_1 b_3, a_1 b_2 - a_2 b_1).$$

If we define unit vectors in the traditional way as $\mathbf{i} = (1, 0, 0)$, $\mathbf{j} = (0, 1, 0)$, and $\mathbf{k} = (0, 0, 1)$, then the right hand side may be written symbolically as a 3×3 determinant:

$$\begin{vmatrix} \mathbf{i} & \mathbf{j} & \mathbf{k} \\ a_1 & a_2 & a_3 \\ b_1 & b_2 & b_3 \end{vmatrix}$$

The following are immediate consequences of the definition:

- (1) $\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b} = -\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{a}$
- (2) $(c\mathbf{a}) \times \mathbf{b} = c(\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b})$
- (3) $\mathbf{a} \times (\mathbf{b} + \mathbf{c}) = (\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}) + (\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{c})$

Other properties follow directly. For example, by (1) we have that $\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{a} = -\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{a}$, so that $2\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{a} = \mathbf{0}$, which means that $\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{a} = \mathbf{0}$. Also, if $\mathbf{c} = (c_1, c_2, c_3)$ then the triple product

$$[\mathbf{c}, \mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b}] = \mathbf{c} \cdot (\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b})$$

is simply the determinant of the 3×3 matrix whose rows are \mathbf{c} , \mathbf{a} , \mathbf{b} in that order, and therefore we know that

the cross product $\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}$ is perpendicular to both \mathbf{a} and \mathbf{b} . ■

The basic properties of determinants yield the following additional identity involving dot and cross products:

$$[\mathbf{c}, \mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b}] = [\mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b}, \mathbf{c}]$$

This follows because a determinant changes sign if two rows are switched, for the latter implies

$$[\mathbf{c}, \mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b}] = -[\mathbf{a}, \mathbf{c}, \mathbf{b}] = [\mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b}, \mathbf{c}]. \blacksquare$$

The following property of cross products plays an extremely important role in this course.

PROPOSITION. *If \mathbf{a} and \mathbf{b} are linearly independent, then \mathbf{a} , \mathbf{b} and $\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}$ form a basis for \mathbb{R}^3 .*

Proof. First of all, we claim that if \mathbf{a} and \mathbf{b} are linearly independent, then $\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b} \neq \mathbf{0}$. To see this we begin by writing out $|\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}|^2$ explicitly:

$$|\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}|^2 = (a_2 b_3 - a_3 b_2)^2 + (a_3 b_1 - a_1 b_3)^2 + (a_1 b_2 - a_2 b_1)^2$$

Direct computation shows that the latter is equal to

$$(a_1^2 + a_2^2 + a_3^2)(b_1^2 + b_2^2 + b_3^2) - (a_1b_1 + a_2b_2 + a_3b_3)^2 = |\mathbf{a}|^2 |\mathbf{b}|^2 - (\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{b})^2$$

In particular, if \mathbf{a} and \mathbf{b} are both nonzero then

$$|\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}| = |\mathbf{a}| |\mathbf{b}| |\sin \theta|$$

where θ is the angle between \mathbf{a} and \mathbf{b} . Since the sine of this angle is zero if and only if the vectors are linearly dependent, it follows that $\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b} \neq \mathbf{0}$ if \mathbf{a} and \mathbf{b} are linearly independent.

Suppose now that we have an equation of the form

$$x \mathbf{a} + y \mathbf{b} + z(\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}) = \mathbf{0}$$

for suitable scalars x, y, z . Taking dot products with $\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}$ yields the equation $z|\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}|^2 = 0$, which by the previous paragraph implies that $z = 0$. One can now use the linear independence of \mathbf{a} and \mathbf{b} to conclude that x and y must also be zero. Therefore the three vectors \mathbf{a} , \mathbf{b} and $\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}$ are linearly independent, and consequently they must form a basis for \mathbb{R}^3 . ■

APPLICATION. Later in these notes we shall need the following result:

RECOGNITION FORMULA. *If $\mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b} \in \mathbb{R}^3$ are perpendicular unit vectors and $\mathbf{c} = \mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}$, then the triple product $[\mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b}, \mathbf{c}]$ is equal to 1.*

Derivation. By the length formula for a cross product and the perpendicularity assumption, we know that $|\mathbf{c}| = |\mathbf{a}| \cdot |\mathbf{b}| = 1 \cdot 1 = 1$. But we also have

$$1 = |\mathbf{c}|^2 = \mathbf{c} \cdot (\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}) = [\mathbf{c}, \mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b}] = [\mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b}, \mathbf{c}]$$

which is the equation that we want. ■

In many situations it is useful to have formulas for more complicated expressions involving cross products. For example, we have the following identity for computing threefold cross products.

“BAC—CAB” RULE. $\mathbf{a} \times (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c}) = \mathbf{b}(\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{c}) - \mathbf{c}(\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{b})$, or in more standard format the left hand side is equal to $(\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{c})\mathbf{b} - (\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{b})\mathbf{c}$.

Derivation. Suppose first that \mathbf{b} and \mathbf{c} are linearly dependent. Then their cross product is zero, and one is a scalar multiple of the other. If $\mathbf{b} = x\mathbf{c}$, then it is an elementary exercise to verify that the right hand side of the desired identity is zero, and we already know the same is true of the left hand side. If on the other hand $\mathbf{c} = y\mathbf{b}$, then once again one finds that both sides of the desired identity are zero.

Now suppose that \mathbf{b} and \mathbf{c} are linearly independent, so that $\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c} \neq \mathbf{0}$. Note that a vector is perpendicular to $\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c}$ if and only if it is a linear combination of \mathbf{b} and \mathbf{c} . The (\Leftarrow) implication follows from the perpendicularity of \mathbf{b} and \mathbf{c} to their cross product and the distributivity of the dot product, while the reverse implication follows because every vector is a linear combination

$$x\mathbf{b} + y\mathbf{c} + z(\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c})$$

and this linear combination is perpendicular to the cross product if and only if $z = 0$; *i.e.*, if and only if the vector is a linear combination of \mathbf{b} and \mathbf{c} .

Before studying the general case, we shall first consider the special cases $\mathbf{b} \times (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c})$ and $\mathbf{c} \times (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c})$. Since $\mathbf{b} \times (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c})$ is perpendicular to $\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c}$ we may write it in the form

$$\mathbf{b} \times (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c}) = u\mathbf{b} + v\mathbf{c}$$

for suitable scalars u and v . If we take dot products with \mathbf{b} and \mathbf{c} we obtain the following equations:

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{0} &= [\mathbf{b}, \mathbf{b}, \mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c}] = (\mathbf{b} \cdot (\mathbf{b} \times (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c}))) = \mathbf{b} \cdot (u\mathbf{b} + v\mathbf{c}) = u(\mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{b}) + v(\mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{c}) \\ -|\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c}|^2 &= -[(\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c}), \mathbf{b}, \mathbf{c}] = [\mathbf{b}, (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c}), \mathbf{c}] = [\mathbf{c}, \mathbf{b}, (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c})] = \\ &(\mathbf{c} \cdot (\mathbf{b} \times (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c}))) = \mathbf{c} \cdot (u\mathbf{b} + v\mathbf{c}) = u(\mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{c}) + v(\mathbf{c} \cdot \mathbf{c}) \end{aligned}$$

If we solve these equations for u and v we find that $u = \mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{c}$ and $v = -\mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{b}$. Therefore we have

$$\mathbf{b} \times (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c}) = (\mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{c})\mathbf{b} - (\mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{b})\mathbf{c}.$$

Similarly, we also have

$$\mathbf{c} \times (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c}) = (\mathbf{c} \cdot \mathbf{c})\mathbf{b} - (\mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{c})\mathbf{c}.$$

If we now write $\mathbf{a} = p\mathbf{b} + q\mathbf{c} + r(\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c})$ we have

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{a} \times (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c}) &= p\mathbf{b} \times (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c}) + q\mathbf{c} \times (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c}) = \\ &(p(\mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{c}) + q(\mathbf{c} \cdot \mathbf{c}))\mathbf{b} - (p(\mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{b}) + q(\mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{c}))\mathbf{c}. \end{aligned}$$

Since \mathbf{b} and \mathbf{c} are perpendicular to their cross product, we must have $(\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{c}) = p(\mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{c}) + q(\mathbf{c} \cdot \mathbf{c})$ and $(\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{b}) = p(\mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{b}) + q(\mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{c})$, so that the previously obtained expression for $\mathbf{a} \times (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c})$ is equal to $(\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{c})\mathbf{b} - (\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{b})\mathbf{c}$. ■

The formula for $\mathbf{a} \times (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c})$ yields numerous other identities. Here is one that will be particularly useful in this course.

PROPOSITION. *If \mathbf{a} , \mathbf{b} , \mathbf{c} and \mathbf{d} are arbitrary vectors in \mathbb{R}^3 then we have the following identity:*

$$(\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}) \cdot (\mathbf{c} \times \mathbf{d}) = (\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{c})(\mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{d}) - (\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{d})(\mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{c})$$

Proof. By definition, the expression on the left hand side of the display is equal to the triple product $[(\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}), \mathbf{c}, \mathbf{d}]$. As noted above, the properties of determinants imply that the latter is equal to $[\mathbf{d}, (\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}), \mathbf{c}]$, which in turn is equal to

$$\mathbf{d} \cdot (\mathbf{a} \times (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c})) = \mathbf{d} \cdot ((\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{c})\mathbf{b} - (\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{b})\mathbf{c})$$

and if we expand the final term we obtain the expression $(\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{c})(\mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{d}) - (\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{d})(\mathbf{b} \cdot \mathbf{c})$. ■

Cross products and higher dimensions

Given the relative ease in defining generalizations of the inner (or dot) product and the usefulness of the 3-dimensional cross product in mathematics and physics, it is natural to ask whether there are also generalizations of the cross product. However, it is rarely possible to define good

generalizations of the cross product that satisfy most of the latter's good properties. Partial but significantly more complicated generalizations can be constructed using relatively sophisticated techniques (for example, from tensor algebra or Lie algebras), but such material goes far beyond the scope of this course. Here are two online references containing further information:

<http://www.math.niu.edu/~rusin/known-math/95/prods>

<http://www.math.niu.edu/~rusin/known-math/96/octonionic>

We shall not use the material in these reference subsequently.

Although one does not have good theories of cross products in higher dimensions, there is a framework for generalizing many important features of this construction to higher dimensions. This is the theory of **differential forms**; a discussion of the 2- and 3-dimensional cases appears in Section II.1 of these notes.

Appendix: The distance between two skew lines

To illustrate the uses of calculus and linear algebra to work geometric problems, we shall prove a basic result on **skew lines**; *i.e.*, lines which have not points in common but are not parallel (hence they cannot be coplanar).

THEOREM. *Let L and M be two skew lines in \mathbb{R}^3 , and for $\mathbf{x} \in L$ and $\mathbf{y} \in M$ let $d(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y})$ denote the distance between \mathbf{x} and \mathbf{y} . Then the function $d(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y})$ takes a positive minimum value, and if \mathbf{x}_m and \mathbf{y}_m are points where $d(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y})$ is minimized, then the line joining \mathbf{x}_m and \mathbf{y}_m is perpendicular to both L and M .*

In classical Euclidean geometry this is usually stated in the form, "The shortest distance between two skew lines is along their common perpendicular." Predictably, it is possible to prove this result using the methods of classical synthetic geometry, and nearly all the textbooks on solid geometry from the first two thirds of the 20th century contain proofs of this result.

Proof. There are three main parts to the argument:

- (1) Proving that the distance function has an absolute minimum; under the hypotheses, we know that this minimum distance must be positive.
- (2) Showing that the the minimum value is realized by points \mathbf{x}_m and \mathbf{y}_m such that the line $\mathbf{x}_m \mathbf{y}_m$ is perpendicular to both L and M .
- (3) Deriving an algebraic formula for the minimum distance; one version of this formula is given in Problem 8 on page 15 of DO CARMO.

FIRST STEP. We begin by translating the problem into a question about vectors. Suppose that the skew lines have parametric equations of the form

$$\mathbf{p}_0 + t\mathbf{u} \quad , \quad \mathbf{p}_1 + s\mathbf{v}$$

where \mathbf{u} and \mathbf{v} are nonzero and in fact must be *linearly independent*; for if \mathbf{u} and \mathbf{v} are linearly dependent then the two lines described above are identical or parallel. In effect the problem is to show that the function $f(s, t) = |\mathbf{r}(s, t)|^2$, where

$$\mathbf{r}(s, t) = (\mathbf{p}_0 + t\mathbf{u}) - (\mathbf{p}_1 + s\mathbf{v})$$

has a minimum value and to find that value.

As noted above, we shall begin by proving that there is a minimum value. If we write out the conditions for a point to satisfy $\nabla f(s, t) = \mathbf{0}$ we obtain the following system of linear equations, where A and B are some constants.

$$\begin{aligned} t \langle \mathbf{u}, \mathbf{u} \rangle - s \langle \mathbf{u}, \mathbf{v} \rangle &= A \\ t \langle \mathbf{u}, \mathbf{v} \rangle - s \langle \mathbf{v}, \mathbf{v} \rangle &= B \end{aligned}$$

These equations have a unique solution because the determinant

$$\begin{vmatrix} \langle \mathbf{u}, \mathbf{u} \rangle & \langle \mathbf{u}, \mathbf{v} \rangle \\ \langle \mathbf{u}, \mathbf{v} \rangle & \langle \mathbf{v}, \mathbf{v} \rangle \end{vmatrix}$$

is nonzero by the Schwarz inequality and the linear independence of \mathbf{u} and \mathbf{v} . Let $R > 0$ be so large that the solution (s^*, t^*) lies inside the circle $s^2 + t^2 = R^2$. Then on the set $s^2 + t^2 = R^2$ either the minimum value occurs at the unique critical point or else it occurs on the boundary circle. Let D be the value of the function at the critical point, so that $D \geq 0$. If D is not a minimum value for $f(s, t)$ then for every $Q > R$ there is a point on the circle $s^2 + t^2 = Q^2$ for which the value of the function is less than D . We claim this is impossible, and it will follow that D must be the minimum value of the function.

Consider the values of the function f on the circle of radius ρ ; these are given by

$$|\mathbf{r}(\rho \cos \theta, \rho \sin \theta)|^2$$

and if we write everything out explicitly we obtain the following expression for this function, in which \mathbf{q} is the vector $\mathbf{p}_0 - \mathbf{p}_1$:

$$\rho^2 |\cos \theta \mathbf{u} - \sin \theta \mathbf{v}|^2 + 2\rho \langle \cos \theta \mathbf{u} - \sin \theta \mathbf{v}, \mathbf{q} \rangle + |\mathbf{q}|^2$$

Let m denote the minimum value of $|\cos \theta \mathbf{u} - \sin \theta \mathbf{v}|$ for $\theta \in [0, 2\pi]$ and let M denote the maximum value. Since \mathbf{u} and \mathbf{v} are linearly independent, the displayed expression is always positive and therefore m must be positive. We claim that the minimum value of $f(s, t)$ on the circle $s^2 + t^2 = \rho^2$ is greater than or equal to the following expression:

$$\rho^2 m^2 - 2\rho M |\mathbf{q}| + |\mathbf{q}|^2$$

This follows immediately from the inequalities

$$\begin{aligned} \rho^2 |\cos \theta \mathbf{u} - \sin \theta \mathbf{v}|^2 &\geq \rho^2 m^2 \\ 2\rho \langle \cos \theta \mathbf{u} - \sin \theta \mathbf{v}, \mathbf{q} \rangle &\geq -2\rho |\cos \theta \mathbf{u} - \sin \theta \mathbf{v}| \cdot |\mathbf{q}| \geq 2\rho M |\mathbf{q}| \end{aligned}$$

where the first inequality in the second line comes from the Schwarz inequality.

Since

$$\lim_{\rho \rightarrow \infty} \rho^2 m^2 - 2\rho M |\mathbf{q}| + |\mathbf{q}|^2 = +\infty$$

it follows that all sufficiently large ρ the minimum value of $f(s, t)$ on the circle $s^2 + t^2 = \rho^2$ is strictly greater than D , and therefore D must be the absolute minimum for f on the set $s^2 + t^2 \leq \rho^2$ for

all sufficiently large ρ . But this means that D must be the absolute minimum for the function over all possible values of s and t .

SECOND STEP. In order to determine where the minimum value is attained, one must set the partial derivatives of f with respect to a and t both equal to zero. If we do this we obtain the following equations:

$$\begin{aligned} 0 &= 2\mathbf{r}(s, t) \cdot (-\mathbf{v}) \\ 0 &= 2\mathbf{r}(s, t) \cdot (\mathbf{u}) \end{aligned}$$

Since \mathbf{u} and \mathbf{v} are linearly independent, this minimum occurs when $\mathbf{r}(s, t)$ a scalar multiple of $\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}$.

Suppose that the minimum distance between the lines is attained at parameter values (s_0, t_0) . If \mathbf{x} and \mathbf{y} are the points on the lines where this minimum value is realized, then by construction we know that $\mathbf{r}(s_0, t_0) = \mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y}$, and since the left hand side is a multiple of $\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}$ it follows that the line joining \mathbf{x} and \mathbf{y} is perpendicular to both L and M .

THIRD STEP. As above, Suppose that the minimum distance between the lines is attained at parameter values (s_0, t_0) . Then as before we have $\mathbf{r}(s_0, t_0) = k \mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}$ for some scalar k , and it follows immediately that the minimum distance d satisfies

$$d = \frac{|\ [\mathbf{u}, \mathbf{v}, \mathbf{r}(s_0, t_0)] \ |}{|\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{v}|}$$

where $[\mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b}, \mathbf{c}]$ refers to the usual triple product of vectors having the form $(\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}) \cdot \mathbf{c} = \mathbf{a} \cdot (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c})$. The exercise in do Carmo claims that a similar formula holds with $\mathbf{r}(0, 0) = \mathbf{p}_0 = \mathbf{p}_1$ replacing $\mathbf{r}(s_0, t_0)$. This is true because

$$\mathbf{r}(0, 0) = \mathbf{r}(s_0, t_0) + t_0 \mathbf{u} - s_0 \mathbf{v}$$

which implies that the triple products $[\mathbf{u}, \mathbf{v}, \mathbf{r}(s_0, t_0)]$ and $[\mathbf{u}, \mathbf{v}, \mathbf{r}(0, 0)]$ are equal. This is the formula in DO CARMO.

I.2 : Parametrized curves

(O'Neill, § 1.4)

There is a great deal of overlap between the contents of this section and certain standard topics in calculus courses. One major difference in this course is the need to work more systematically with some fundamental but relatively complex theoretical points in calculus that can (and in most cases probably should) be overlooked when working most ordinary and multivariable calculus problems. In particular this applies to the definitions of limits and continuity, and accordingly we shall begin with some comments on this background material.

Useful facts about limits

In ordinary and multivariable calculus courses it is generally possible to get by with only a vague understanding of the concept of limit, but in this course a somewhat better understanding is necessary. In particular, the following consequences of the definition arise repeatedly.

FACT I. Let f be a function defined at all points of the interval $(a - h, a + h)$ for some $h > 0$ except possibly at a , and suppose that

$$\lim_{x \rightarrow a} f(x) = b > 0 .$$

Then there is a $\delta > 0$ such that $\delta < h$ and $f(x) > 0$ provided $x \in (a - \delta, a + \delta)$ and $x \neq a$.

FACT II. In the situation described above, if the limit exists but is **negative**, then there is a $\delta > 0$ such that $\delta < h$ and $f(x) < 0$ provided $x \in (a - \delta, a + \delta)$ and $x \neq a$.

FACT III. Each of the preceding statements remains true if 0 is replaced by an arbitrary real number.

Derivation(s). We shall only do the first one; the other two proceed along similar lines. By assumption b is a positive real number. Therefore the definition of limit implies there is some $\delta > 0$ such that $|f(x) - b| < b$ provided $x \in (a - \delta, a + \delta)$ and $x \neq a$. It then follows that

$$f(x) = b + (f(x) - b) \geq b - |f(x) - b| > b - b = 0$$

which is what we wanted to show.■

We shall also need the following statement about infinite limits:

FACT IV. Let f be a continuous function defined on some open interval containing 0 such that f is strictly increasing and $f(0) = 0$. Then for each positive constant C there is a positive real number h sufficiently close to zero such that $x \in (0, h) \implies 1/f(x) > C$ and $x \in (-h, 0) \implies 1/f(x) < -C$.

Proof. Let ε be the positive number $1/C$; by continuity we know that $|f(x)| < \varepsilon$ if $x \in (-h, h)$ for a suitably small $h > 0$. Therefore $x \in (0, h) \implies 0 < f(x) < \varepsilon$ and $x \in (-h, 0) \implies -\varepsilon < f(x) < 0$. The desired inequalities follow by taking reciprocals in each case.■

What is a curve?

There are two different but related ways to think about curves in the plane or 3-dimensional space. One can view a curve simply as a set of points, or one can view a curve more dynamically as a description of the position of a moving object at a given time. In calculus courses one generally adopts the second approach to define curves in terms of parametric equations; from this viewpoint one retrieves the description of curves as sets of points by taking the set of all points traced out by the moving object. For example, the line in \mathbb{R}^2 defined by the equation $y = mx$ is the set of points traced out by the parametrized curve defined by $x(t) = t$ and $y(t) = mt$. Similarly, the unit circle defined by the equation $x^2 + y^2 = 1$ is the set of points traced out by the parametrized curve $x(t) = \cos t$, $y(t) = \sin t$. The set of all points expressible as $\mathbf{x}(t)$ for some $t \in J$ will be called the *image* of the parametrized curve (since it represents all point traced out by the curve this set is sometimes called the *trace* of the curve, but we shall not use this term in order to avoid confusion with the entirely different notion of the trace of a matrix). We shall follow the standard approach of calculus books here unless stated otherwise.

A parametrized curve in the plane or 3-dimensional space may be viewed as a vector-valued function γ or \mathbf{x} defined on some interval of the real line and taking values in $V = \mathbb{R}^2$ or \mathbb{R}^3 . In this course we usually want our curves to be continuous; this is equivalent to saying that each of the coordinate functions is continuous. Given that this is a course in *differential* geometry it should

not be surprising that we also want our curves to have some decent differentiability properties. If \mathbf{x} is the vector function defining our curve and its coordinates are given by x_i , where i runs between 1 and 2 or 1 and 3 depending upon the dimension of V , then the derivative of \mathbf{x} at a point t is defined using the coordinate functions:

$$\mathbf{x}'(t) = (x'_1(t), x'_2(t), x'_3(t))$$

Strictly speaking this is the definition in the 3-dimensional case, but the adaptation to the 2-dimensional case is immediate — one can just suppress the third coordinate or view \mathbb{R}^2 as the subset of \mathbb{R}^3 consisting of all points whose third coordinate is zero.

Definition. A curve \mathbf{x} defined on an interval J and taking values in $V = \mathbb{R}^2$ or \mathbb{R}^3 is *differentiable* if $\mathbf{x}'(t)$ exists for all $t \in J$. The curve is said to be *smooth* if \mathbf{x}' is continuous, and it is said to be a *regular smooth curve* if it is smooth and $\mathbf{x}'(t)$ is nonzero for all $t \in J$. The curve will be said to be *smooth of class \mathcal{C}^r* for some integer $r \geq 1$ if \mathbf{x} has an r^{th} order continuous derivative, and the curve will be said to be smooth of class \mathcal{C}^∞ if it is infinitely differentiable (equivalently, \mathcal{C}^r for all finite r).

The crucial property of regular smooth curves is that they have well defined tangent lines:

Definition. Let \mathbf{x} be a regular smooth curve and let a be a point in the domain J of \mathbf{x} . The *tangent line* to \mathbf{x} at the parameter value $t = a$ is the unique line passing through $\mathbf{x}(a)$ and $\mathbf{x}(a) + \mathbf{x}'(a)$. There is a natural associated parametrization of this line given by

$$T(u) = \mathbf{x}(a) + u\mathbf{x}'(a) .$$

One expects the tangent line to be the “best possible” linear approximation to a smooth curve. The following result confirms this:

PROPOSITION. *In the notation above, if $u \neq 0$ is small and $a + u \in J$ then we have*

$$\mathbf{x}(a + u) = \mathbf{x}(a) + u\mathbf{x}'(a) + u\Theta(u)$$

where $\lim_{u \rightarrow 0} \Theta(u) = \mathbf{0}$. Furthermore, if \mathbf{p} is any vector such that

$$\mathbf{x}(a + u) = \mathbf{x}(a) + u\mathbf{p} + u\mathbf{W}(u)$$

where $\lim_{u \rightarrow 0} \mathbf{W}(u) = \mathbf{0}$, then $\mathbf{p} = \mathbf{x}'(a)$.

Proof. Given a vector \mathbf{a} we shall denote its i^{th} coordinate by a_i .

Certainly there is no problem writing $\mathbf{x}(a + u)$ in the form $\mathbf{x}(a) + u\mathbf{x}'(a) + u\Theta(u)$ for some vector valued function Θ ; the substance of the first part of the proposition is that this function goes to zero as $u \rightarrow 0$. Limit identities for vector valued functions are equivalent to scalar limit identities for every coordinate function of the vectors, so the proof of the first part of the proposition reduces to checking that the coordinates θ_i of Θ satisfy $\lim_{u \rightarrow 0} \theta_i(u) = 0$ for all i . However, by construction we have

$$\theta_i(u) = \frac{x_i(a + u) - x_i(a)}{u} - x'_i(a)$$

and since \mathbf{x} is differentiable at a the limit of the right hand side of this equation is zero. Therefore we have where $\lim_{u \rightarrow 0} \Theta(u) = \mathbf{0}$.

Suppose now that the second equation in the statement of the proposition is valid. As in the previous paragraph we have

$$w_i(u) = \frac{x_i(a+u) - x_i(a)}{u} - p_i(a)$$

but this time we know that $\lim_{u \rightarrow 0} w_i(u) = 0$ for all i . The only way these equations can hold is if $p_i(a) = x'_i(a)$ for all i . ■

Piecewise smooth curves

There are many important geometrical curves that are not smooth but can be decomposed into smooth pieces. One of the simplest examples is the boundary of the square parametrized in a counterclockwise sense. Specifically, take \mathbf{x} to be defined on the interval $[0, 4]$ by the following rules:

- (a) $\mathbf{x}(t) = (t, 0)$ for $t \in [0, 1]$
- (b) $\mathbf{x}(t) = (1, t - 1)$ for $t \in [1, 2]$
- (c) $\mathbf{x}(t) = (2 - t, 1)$ for $t \in [2, 3]$
- (d) $\mathbf{x}(t) = (0, 1 - t)$ for $t \in [3, 4]$

The formulas for (a) and (b) agree when $t = 1$, and likewise the formulas for (b) and (c) agree when $t = 2$, and finally the formulas for (c) and (d) agree when $t = 3$; therefore these formulas define a continuous curve. On each of the intervals $[n, n + 1]$ for $n = 0, 1, 2, 3$ the curve is a regular smooth curve, but of course the tangent vectors coming from the left and the right at these values are perpendicular to each other. Clearly there are many other examples of this sort, and they include all broken line curves. The following definition includes both these types of curves and regular smooth curves as special cases:

Definition. A continuous curve \mathbf{x} defined on an interval $[a, b]$ is said to be a *regular piecewise smooth curve* if there is a partition of the interval given by points

$$a = p_0 < p_1 \cdots < p_{n-1} < p_n = b$$

such that for each i the restriction $\mathbf{x}[i]$ of \mathbf{x} to the subinterval $[p_{i-1}, p_i]$ is a regular smooth curve.

For the boundary of the square parametrized in the counterclockwise sense, the partition is given by

$$0 < 1 < 2 < 3 < 4.$$

Calculus texts give many further examples of such curves, and the references cited at the beginning of this unit also contain a wide assortment of examples. One important thing to note is that at each of the partition points p_i one has a left hand tangent vector $\mathbf{x}'(p_i-)$ obtained from $\mathbf{x}[i]$ and a right hand tangent vector $\mathbf{x}'(p_i+)$ obtained from $\mathbf{x}[i + 1]$, but these two vectors are not necessarily the same. In particular, they do not coincide at the partition points 1, 2, 3 for the parametrized boundary curve for the square that was described above.

Taylor's Formula for vector valued functions

We shall need a vector analog of the usual Taylor's Theorem for polynomial approximations of real valued functions on an interval.

VECTOR VALUED TAYLOR'S THEOREM. *Let \mathbf{g} be a vector valued function defined on an interval $(a - r, a + r)$ that has continuous derivatives of all orders less than or equal to $n + 1$ on that interval. Then for $|h| < r$ we have*

$$\mathbf{g}(a + h) = \mathbf{g}(a) + \sum_{k=1}^n \frac{h^k}{k!} \mathbf{g}^{(k)}(a) + \int_a^{a+h} \frac{(a + h - t)^n}{n!} \mathbf{g}^{(n+1)}(t) dt$$

where $\mathbf{g}^{(k)}$ as usual denotes the k^{th} derivative of \mathbf{g} .

Proof. Let $R_n(h)$ be the integral in the displayed equation. Then integration by parts implies that

$$R_{n-1}(h) = \frac{h^n}{n!} \mathbf{g}^{(n)}(a) + R_n(h)$$

and the Fundamental Theorem of Calculus implies that

$$\mathbf{g}(a + h) = \mathbf{g}(a) + R_1(h) .$$

Therefore if we set $R_0 = 0$ we have

$$\mathbf{g}(a + h) = \mathbf{g}(a) + \sum_{k=1}^n (R_k(h) - R_{k-1}(h)) + R_n(h)$$

and if we use the formulas above to substitute for the terms $R_k(h) - R_{k-1}(h)$ and $R_n(h)$ we obtain the formula displayed above.■

The following consequence of Taylor's Theorem will be particularly useful:

COROLLARY. *Given \mathbf{g} and the other notation as above, let $P_n(h)$ be the sum of*

$$\mathbf{g}(a) + \sum_{k=1}^n \frac{h^k}{k!} \mathbf{g}^{(k)}(a) .$$

Then given $r_0 < r$ and $|h| < r_0 < r$ we have $|\mathbf{g}(a + h) - P_n(h)| \leq C |h|^{n+1}$, for some positive constant C .

Proof. The length of the difference vector in the previous sentence is given by

$$\begin{aligned} |R_n(h)| &= \left| \int_a^{a+h} \frac{(a + h - t)^n}{n!} \mathbf{g}^{(n+1)}(t) dt \right| \leq \\ &\text{sign}(h) \cdot \int_a^{a+h} \left| \frac{(a + h - t)^n}{n!} \mathbf{g}^{(n+1)}(t) \right| dt \leq \\ &\left(\max_{|t-a| \leq r_0} |\mathbf{g}^{(n+1)}(t)| \right) \cdot \int_0^{|h|} \frac{u^n}{n!} du \leq M \frac{|h|^{n+1}}{(n+1)!} \end{aligned}$$

At each point where $F(x, y) = 0$ we have $\nabla F(x, y) \neq \mathbf{0}$.

where M is a positive constant at least as large as the maximum value of $|\mathbf{g}^{(n+1)}(t)|$ for $|t - a| < r_0$. ■

Algebraic and transcendental curves

Frequently curves are defined by means of an equation of the form $F(x, y) = 0$, where F is a function of two variables with continuous partial derivatives. Normally one makes the following additional assumption:

If this condition is met at (a, b) such that $F(a, b) = 0$, then the Implicit Function Theorem in Section II.3 of these notes implies that, if we restrict to a small enough region U containing (a, b) , then the set of points in U satisfying $F(x, y) = 0$ is equal to the graph of some function $y = h(x)$ if the first partial derivative of F at (a, b) is nonzero. Similarly, if the second partial derivative of F at (a, b) is nonzero, then there is a small region U containing (a, b) such that the set of points in U satisfying $F(x, y) = 0$ is equal to the graph of some function $x = k(y)$. If we combine the conclusions in the preceding sentences, we may conclude that the set of points satisfying $F(x, y) = 0$ can be split into pieces such that each has a smooth parametrization. The ordinary unit circle defined by $x^2 + y^2 = 1$ is an example of a curve that is near some points as the graph of a function of x and near other points as the graph of a function of y , but cannot be expressed globally as the graph of a function of either x or y (for example, if it were globally the graph of a function of x then every vertical line defined by an equation of the form $x = c$ would meet the curve in at most one point, and clearly there are many values of c for which the curve meets the vertical line in two points).

To indicate the importance of describing curves as sets of points (x, y) such that $F(x, y) = 0$, we need only recall that one way of characterizing lines and conics in the plane is that lines in the planes are the curves whose coordinates (x, y) satisfy a nontrivial first degree polynomial equation $p(x, y) = 0$, and conics are the curves which satisfy a nontrivial polynomial equation $p(x, y) = 0$ such that the polynomial p has degree 2. More generally, one can define a plane curve to be *algebraic* if its coordinates satisfy a nontrivial polynomial equation $p(x, y) = 0$, and similarly a curve is *transcendental* if there is no nonzero polynomial p whose coordinates satisfy the equation $p(x, y) = 0$. A discussion of algebraic and transcendental curves appears in the following online documents:

<http://math.ucr.edu/~res/math153/transcurves.pdf>

<http://math.ucr.edu/~res/math153/transcurves2.pdf>

<http://math.ucr.edu/~res/math153/transcurves3.pdf>

I.3 : Arc length and reparametrization

(O'Neill, §§ 1.4, 2.2)

Given a parametrized smooth regular curve \mathbf{x} defined on a closed interval $[a, b]$, as in calculus we define the *arc length* of \mathbf{x} from $t = a$ to $t = b$ to be the integral

$$L = \int_a^b |\mathbf{x}'(t)| dt .$$

The motivation for this definition is usually discussed in calculus courses, and it is reviewed below in the subsection on arc length for curves that are not necessarily smooth. More generally, if $a \leq t \leq b$ then the length of the curve from parameter value a to parameter value t is given by

$$s(t) = \int_a^t |\mathbf{x}'(u)| du .$$

By the Fundamental Theorem of Calculus, the partial arc length function s is differentiable on $[a, b]$ and its derivative is equal to $|\mathbf{x}'(t)|$. If we have a regular smooth curve, this function is continuous and everywhere positive (hence $s(t)$ is a strictly increasing function of t), and the image of this function is equal to the closed interval $[0, L]$.

COMPUTATIONAL ISSUES. Although the arc length formula is fairly simple to state, it can be extremely difficult to evaluate the integrals which it yields, even for familiar curves with relatively simple parametrizations. For example, if one applies the formula to an arc on an ellipse, the one cannot express the resulting integral in terms of the standard functions considered in first year calculus. Here are some further references:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elliptic_integral

http://math.ucr.edu/~res/math10B/nonelementary_integrals.pdf

A specific example is mentioned in Section I.4 below (see the subheading *Computational techniques*).

Reparametrizations of curves

Given a parametrized curve \mathbf{x} defined on an interval $[a, b]$, it is easy to find other parametrizations by simple changes of variables. For example, the curve $\mathbf{y}(t) = \mathbf{x}(t + a)$ resembles the original curve in many respects: For example, both have the same tangent vectors and images, and the only real difference is that \mathbf{y} is defined on $[0, b - a]$ rather than $[a, b]$. Less trivial changes of variable can be extremely helpful in analyzing the image of a curve. For example, the parametrized curve $\mathbf{x}(t) = (e^t - e^{-t}, e^t + e^{-t})$ has the same image as the the upper piece of the hyperbola $y^2 - x^2 = 4$ (*i.e.*, the graph of $y = \sqrt{4 + x^2}$); as a graph, this curve can also be parametrized using $\mathbf{y}(u) = (u, \sqrt{4 + u^2})$. These parametrizations are related by the change of variables $u = 2 \sinh t$; in other words, we have

$$\mathbf{x}(t) = \mathbf{y}(2 \sinh t) .$$

Note that u varies from $-\infty$ to $+\infty$ as t goes from $-\infty$ to $+\infty$, and $u'(t) = \cosh t > 0$ for all t .

More generally, it is useful to consider reparametrizations of curves corresponding to functions $u(t)$ such that $u'(t)$ is never zero. Of course the sign of u' determines whether u is strictly increasing or decreasing, and it is useful to allow both possibilities. Suppose that we are given a differentiable function u defined on $[a, b]$ such that u' is never zero on $[a, b]$. Then the image of u is some other closed interval, say $[c, d]$; if u is increasing then $u(a) = c$ and $u(b) = d$, while if u is decreasing then $u(a) = d$ and $u(b) = c$. It follows that u has an inverse function t defined on $[c, d]$ and taking values in $[a, b]$. Furthermore, the derivatives dt/du and du/dt are reciprocals of each other by the standard formula for the derivative of an inverse function.

It is important to understand how reparametrization changes geometrical properties of a curve such as tangent lines and arc lengths. The most basic thing to consider is the effect on tangent vectors.

PROPOSITION. Let \mathbf{x} be a regular smooth curve defined on the closed interval $[c, d]$, let $u : [a, b] \rightarrow [c, d]$ be a function with a continuous derivative that is nowhere zero, and let $\mathbf{y}(t) = \mathbf{x}(u(t))$. Then

$$\mathbf{y}'(t) = u'(t) \cdot \mathbf{x}'(u(t)) .$$

This is an immediate consequence of the Chain Rule.■

COROLLARY. For each $t \in [a, b]$ the tangent line to \mathbf{y} at parameter value t is the same as the tangent line to \mathbf{x} at $u(t)$. Furthermore, the standard parametrizations are related by a linear change of coordinates.

Proof. By definition, the tangent line to \mathbf{x} at $u(t)$ is the line joining $\mathbf{x}(u(t))$ and $\mathbf{x}(u(t)) + \mathbf{x}'(u(t))$. Similarly, the tangent line to \mathbf{y} at t is the line joining $\mathbf{y}(t) = \mathbf{x}(u(t))$ and

$$\mathbf{y}(t) + \mathbf{y}'(t) = \mathbf{x}(u(t)) + u'(t) \mathbf{x}'(u(t)) .$$

Since the line joining the distinct points (or vectors) \mathbf{a} and $\mathbf{a} + \mathbf{b}$ is the same as the line joining \mathbf{a} and $\mathbf{a} + c\mathbf{b}$ if $c \neq 0$, it follows that the two tangent lines are the same (take $\mathbf{a} = \mathbf{y}(t)$, $\mathbf{b} = \mathbf{x}'(u)$ and $c = u'(t)$).

In fact, we have obtained standard linear parametrizations of this line given by $\mathbf{f}(z) = \mathbf{a} + z\mathbf{b}$ and $\mathbf{g}(w) = \mathbf{a} + cw\mathbf{b}$. It follows that $\mathbf{g}(w) = \mathbf{f}(cw)$.■

Arc length is another property of a curve that does not change under reparametrization.

PROPOSITION. Let \mathbf{x} be a regular smooth curve defined on the closed interval $[c, d]$, let $u : [a, b] \rightarrow [c, d]$ be a function with a continuous derivative that is nowhere zero, and let $\mathbf{y}(t) = \mathbf{x}(u(t))$. Then

$$\int_c^d |\mathbf{x}'(u)| du = \int_a^b |\mathbf{y}'(t)| dt$$

Proof. The standard change of variables formula for integrals implies that

$$\int_c^d |\mathbf{x}'(u)| du = \int_a^b |\mathbf{x}'(u(t))| |u'(t)| dt .$$

Some comments about this formula and the absolute value sign may be helpful. If u is increasing then the sign is positive and we have $u(a) = c$ and $u(b) = d$, so $|u'(t)| = u'(t)$; on the other hand if u is decreasing, then the Fundamental Theorem of Calculus suggests that the integral on the left hand side should be equal to

$$\int_b^a |\mathbf{x}'(u(t))| \cdot u'(t) dt = - \int_a^b |\mathbf{x}'(u(t))| \cdot u'(t) dt = \int_a^b |\mathbf{x}'(u(t))| \cdot [-u'(t)] dt$$

so that the formula above holds because $u' < 0$ implies $|u'| = -u'$. In any case, the properties of vector length imply that the integrand on the right hand side of the change of variables equation is $|u'(t) \cdot \mathbf{x}'(u)|$, which by the previous proposition is equal to $|\mathbf{y}'(t)|$.■

If \mathbf{v} is a regular smooth curve defined on $[a, b]$, then the arc length function

$$s(t) = \int_a^t |\mathbf{v}'(u)| du$$

often provides an extremely useful reparametrization because of the following result:

PROPOSITION. Let \mathbf{v} be as above, and let \mathbf{x} be the reparametrization defined by $\mathbf{x}(s) = \mathbf{v}(\mu(s))$, where μ is the inverse function to the arc length function $\lambda : [a, b] \rightarrow [0, L]$. Then $|\mathbf{x}'(s)| = 1$ for all s .

Proof. By the Fundamental Theorem of Calculus we know that $\lambda'(t) = |\mathbf{v}'(t)|$. Therefore by the Chain Rule we know that

$$\mathbf{x}'(s) = \mu'(s) \mathbf{v}'(\mu(s))$$

and by the differentiation formula for inverse functions we know that

$$\mu'(s) = \frac{1}{\lambda'(\mu(s))} = T'(s) = \frac{1}{|\mathbf{v}'(T(s))|}$$

and if we substitute this into the expression given by the chain rule we see that

$$|\mathbf{x}'(s)| = |T'(s)| |\mathbf{v}'(T(s))| = \frac{1}{|\mathbf{v}'(T(s))|} \cdot |\mathbf{v}'(T(s))| = 1 \blacksquare$$

Arc length for more general curves

The geometric motivation for the definition of arc length is described in Exercises 8–0 on pages 10–11 OF DO CARMO; specifically, given a parametrized curve \mathbf{x} defined on $[a, b]$ one picks a finite set of points t_i such that

$$a = t_0 < t_1 < \cdots < t_m = b$$

and views the length of the inscribed broken line joining t_0 to t_1 , t_1 to t_2 etc. as an approximation to the length of the curve. In favorable circumstances if one refines the finite set of points by taking more and more of them and making them closer and closer together, the lengths of these broken line curves will have a limiting value which is the arc length. Exercise 9(b) on page 11 of DO CARMO gives one example of a curve for which no arc length can be defined. During the time since do Carmo's book was published, a special class of such curves known as *fractal curves* has received considerable attention. The parametric equations defining such curves all have the form $\mathbf{x}(t) = \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \mathbf{x}_n(t)$, where each \mathbf{x}_n is a piecewise smooth regular curve and for each n one obtains \mathbf{x}_n from \mathbf{x}_{n-1} by making some small but systematic changes. Some online references with more information on such curves are given below.

<http://mathworld.wolfram.com/Fractal.html>

<http://academy.wolfram.agnescott.edu/~lriddle/ifs/ksnow/lsnow/htm>

http://en2.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koch_snowflake

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fractal_geometry

The preceding discussion illustrates that parametrized curves include a wide range of objects which do not have piecewise smooth reparametrizations. However, thus far the images of the parametrizations “look like” the standard examples in some vague sense; namely, they are topologically equivalent to intervals in the real line or circles in the plane. It is possible to find even more bizarre examples of parametrized curves. In particular, one can construct parametrized

curves whose image is the entire coordinate plane or 3-space. Here is an online reference for such space-filling curves:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Space-filling_curve

A more formal account appears in Section 44 of the following graduate level textbook:

J. R. Munkres. Topology. (Second Edition), *Prentice-Hall, Saddle River NJ*, 2000. ISBN: 0-13-181629-2.

I.4: Curvature and torsion

(O'Neill, § 2.3)

Many calculus courses include a brief discussion of curvature, but the approaches vary and it will be better to make a fresh start.

Definition. Let \mathbf{x} be a regular smooth curve, and assume it is parametrized by arc length plus a constant (*i.e.*, $|\mathbf{x}'(s)| = 1$ for all s). The *curvature* of \mathbf{x} at parameter value s is equal to $\kappa(s) = |\mathbf{x}''(s)|$.

The most immediate question about this definition is why it has anything to do with our intuitive idea of curvature. The best way to answer this is to look at some examples.

Suppose that we are given a parametrized line with an equation of the form $\mathbf{x}(t) = \mathbf{a} + t\mathbf{b}$ where $|\mathbf{b}| = 1$. It then follows that \mathbf{x} is parametrized by arc length by means of t , and clearly we have $\mathbf{x}''(t) = \mathbf{0}$. This means that the curvature of the line is zero at all points, which is what we expect.

Consider now an example that is genuinely curved; namely, the circle of radius r about the origin. The arc length parametrization for this curve has the form

$$\mathbf{x}(s) = \left(r \cos(s/r), r \sin(s/r) \right)$$

and one can check directly that its first two derivatives are given as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{x}''(s) &= \left(-\sin(s/r), \cos(s/r) \right) \\ \mathbf{x}(s) &= \left(-\frac{\cos(s/r)}{r}, -\frac{\sin(s/r)}{r} \right) \end{aligned}$$

It follows that *the curvature of the circle at all points is given by the reciprocal of the radius.*■

The following simple property of the “acceleration” function $\mathbf{x}''(s)$ turns out to be quite important for our purposes:

PROPOSITION. *The vectors $\mathbf{x}''(s)$ and $\mathbf{x}'(s)$ are perpendicular.*

Proof. We know that $|\mathbf{x}'(s)|$ is always equal to 1, and thus the same is true of its square, which is just the dot product of $\mathbf{x}'(s)$ with itself. The product rule for differentiating dot products of two functions then implies that

$$0 = \frac{d}{ds}(\mathbf{x}'(s) \cdot \mathbf{x}'(s)) = 2(\mathbf{x}'(s) \cdot \mathbf{x}''(s))$$

and therefore the two vectors are indeed perpendicular.■

Geometric interpretation of curvature

We begin with a very simple observation.

PROPOSITION. *If $\mathbf{x}(s)$ is a smooth curve (parametrized by arc length) whose curvature $\kappa(s)$ is zero for all s , then $\mathbf{x}(s)$ is a straight line curve of the form $\mathbf{x}(s) = \mathbf{x}(0) + s\mathbf{x}'(0)$.*

Proof. Since $\kappa(s)$ is the length of $\mathbf{x}''(s)$, if the curvature is always zero then the same is true for $\mathbf{x}''(s)$. But this means that $\mathbf{x}'(s)$ is constant and hence equal to $\mathbf{x}'(0)$ for all s , and the latter in turn implies that $\mathbf{x}(s) = \mathbf{x}(0) + s\mathbf{x}'(0)$.■

Given a smooth curve, the tangent line to the curve at a point t may be viewed as a first order linear approximation to the curve. The notion of curvature is related to a corresponding second order approximation to the curve at parameter value t by a line or circle. We begin by making this notion precise:

Defintion. Let n be a positive integer. Given two curves $\mathbf{a}(t)$ and $\mathbf{b}(t)$ defined on an interval J containing t_0 such that $\mathbf{a}(t_0) = \mathbf{b}(t_0)$, we say that \mathbf{a} and \mathbf{b} are strong n^{th} order approximations to each other if there is an $\varepsilon > 0$ such that $|h| < \varepsilon$ and $t_0 + h \in J$ imply

$$|\mathbf{b}(t_0 + h) - \mathbf{a}(t_0 + h)| \leq C|h|^{n+1}$$

for some constant $C > 0$. The analytic condition on the order of approximation is often formulated geometrically as the order of contact that two curves have with each other at a given point; as the order of contact increases, so does the speed at which the curves approach each other. The most basic visual examples here are the x -axis and the graphs of the curves x^n near the origin. Further information relating geometric ideas of high order contact and Taylor polynomial approximations is presented on pages 87–91 of the Schaum's Outline Series book on differential geometry (bibliographic information is given at the beginning of these notes).

LEMMA. *Suppose that the curves $\mathbf{a}(t)$ and $\mathbf{b}(t)$ are defined on an interval J containing t_0 such that $\mathbf{a}(t_0) = \mathbf{b}(t_0)$, and assume also that \mathbf{a} and \mathbf{b} are strong n^{th} order approximations to each other at t_0 . Then for each regular smooth reparametrization $t(u)$ with $t_0 = t(u_0)$ the curves $\mathbf{a} \circ t$ and $\mathbf{b} \circ t$ are strong n^{th} order approximations to each other at u_0 .*

Proof. Let J_0 be the domain of the function $t(u)$, and let K_0 be a closed bounded subinterval containing u_0 such that the latter is an endpoint of K_0 if and only if it is an endpoint of J_0 . Denote the maximum value of $|t'(u)|$ on this interval by M . Then by hypothesis and the Mean Value Theorem we have

$$|\mathbf{b}(t(u_0 + h)) - \mathbf{a}(t(u_0 + h))| \leq C|t(u_0 + h) - t(u_0)|^{n+1} \leq CM^{n+1} \cdot |h|^{n+1}$$

which proves the assertion of the lemma.■

In the terminology of n^{th} order approximations, if we are given a regular smooth curve \mathbf{x} then a strong first order approximation to it is given by the tangent line with the standard linear parametrization

$$\mathbf{L}(t_0 + h) = \mathbf{x}(t_0) + h\mathbf{x}'(t_0) .$$

Furthermore, this line is the unique strong first order linear approximation to \mathbf{x} .

Here is the main result on curvature and strong second order approximations.

THEOREM. *Let \mathbf{x} be a regular smooth curve defined on an interval J containing 0 such that \mathbf{x}' has a continuous **second** derivative and $|\mathbf{x}'| = 1$ (hence \mathbf{x} is parametrized by arc length plus a constant).*

(i) *If the curvature of \mathbf{x} at 0 is zero, then the tangent line is a strong second order approximation to \mathbf{x} .*

(ii) *Suppose that the curvature of \mathbf{x} at 0 is nonzero, let \mathbf{N} be the unit vector pointing in the same direction as $\mathbf{x}''(0)$ (the latter is nonzero by the definition and nonvanishing of the curvature at parameter value 0). If Γ is the circle through $\mathbf{x}(0)$ such that [1] its center is $\mathbf{x}(0) + (\kappa(0))^{-1}\mathbf{N}$, [2] it lies in the plane containing this center and the tangent line to the curve at parameter value zero, then Γ is a strong second order approximation to \mathbf{x} .*

For the sake of completeness, we shall describe the unique plane containing a given line and an external point explicitly as follows. If \mathbf{a} , \mathbf{b} and \mathbf{c} are noncollinear points in \mathbb{R}^3 then the plane containing them consists of all \mathbf{x} such that $\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{a}$ is perpendicular to

$$(\mathbf{b} - \mathbf{a}) \times (\mathbf{c} - \mathbf{a})$$

which translates to the triple product equation

$$[(\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{a}), (\mathbf{b} - \mathbf{a}), (\mathbf{c} - \mathbf{a})] = 0.$$

Suppose now that \mathbf{b}_1 and \mathbf{c}_1 are points on the line containing \mathbf{b} and \mathbf{c} . Then we may write

$$\mathbf{b}_1 = u\mathbf{b} + (1-u)\mathbf{c}, \quad \mathbf{c}_1 = v\mathbf{b} + (1-v)\mathbf{c}$$

for suitable real numbers u and v . The equations above immediately imply the following identities:

$$(\mathbf{b}_1 - \mathbf{a}) = u(\mathbf{b} - \mathbf{a}) + (1-u)(\mathbf{c} - \mathbf{a})$$

$$(\mathbf{c}_1 - \mathbf{a}) = v(\mathbf{b} - \mathbf{a}) + (1-v)(\mathbf{c} - \mathbf{a}).$$

These formulas and the basic properties of determinants imply

$$\begin{aligned} & [(\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{a}), (\mathbf{b}_1 - \mathbf{a}), (\mathbf{c}_1 - \mathbf{a})] = \\ & [(\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{a}), u(\mathbf{b}_1 - \mathbf{a}), v(\mathbf{c}_1 - \mathbf{a})] + [(\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{a}), (1-u)(\mathbf{b}_1 - \mathbf{a}), (1-v)(\mathbf{c}_1 - \mathbf{a})] = \\ & uv [(\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{a}), (\mathbf{b} - \mathbf{a}), (\mathbf{c} - \mathbf{a})] + (1-u)(1-v) [(\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{a}), (\mathbf{c} - \mathbf{a}), (\mathbf{b} - \mathbf{a})] = \\ & uv0 - (1-u)(1-v)0 = 0 \end{aligned}$$

and hence the equation

$$[(\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{a}), (\mathbf{b} - \mathbf{a}), (\mathbf{c} - \mathbf{a})] = 0$$

implies the corresponding equation if \mathbf{b} and \mathbf{c} are replaced by two arbitrary points on the line containing \mathbf{b} and \mathbf{c} . ■

Proof of Proposition. Consider first the case where $\kappa(0) = 0$. Then the tangent line to the curve has equation $\mathbf{L}(s) = s\mathbf{x}'(0)$ and the second order Taylor expansion for \mathbf{x} has the form $\mathbf{x}(s) = s\mathbf{x}'(0) + \frac{1}{2}s^2\mathbf{x}''(0) + s^3\theta(s)$ where $\theta(s)$ is bounded for s sufficiently close to zero. The assumption $\kappa(0) = 0$ implies that $\mathbf{x}''(0) = 0$ and therefore we have $\mathbf{x}(s) - \mathbf{L}(s) = s^3\theta(s)$ where

$\theta(s)$ is bounded for s sufficiently close to zero. Therefore the tangent line is a strong second order approximation to the curve if the curvature is equal to zero.

Suppose now that $\kappa(0) \neq 0$, and let \mathbf{N} be the unit vector pointing in the same direction as $\mathbf{x}''(0)$. Define \mathbf{z} by the formula

$$\mathbf{z} = \mathbf{x}(0) + \frac{1}{\kappa(0)} \mathbf{N}$$

and consider the circle in the plane of \mathbf{z} and the tangent line to \mathbf{x} at parameter value $s = 0$ such that the center is \mathbf{z} and the radius is $1/\kappa(0)$. If we set r equal to $1/\kappa(0)$ and $\mathbf{T} = \mathbf{x}'(0)$, then a parametrization of this circle in terms of arc length is given by

$$\Gamma(s) = \mathbf{z} - r \cos(s/r) \mathbf{N} + r \sin(s/r) \mathbf{T} .$$

Using the standard power series expansions for the sine and cosine function and the identity $\mathbf{z} = \mathbf{x}(0) - r \mathbf{N}$, we may rewrite this in the form

$$\Gamma(s) = \mathbf{x}(0) + \frac{s^2}{2r} \mathbf{N} + s^3 \alpha(s) \mathbf{N} + s \mathbf{T} + s^3 \beta(s) \mathbf{T}$$

where $\alpha(s)$ and $\beta(s)$ are continuous functions and hence are bounded for s close to zero. On the other hand, using the Taylor expansion of $\mathbf{x}(s)$ near $s = 0$ we may write $\mathbf{x}(s)$ in the form

$$\mathbf{x}(0) + s \mathbf{x}'(0) + \frac{s^2}{2} \mathbf{x}''(0) + s^3 \mathbf{W}(s)$$

where $\mathbf{W}(s)$ is bounded for s close to zero. But $\mathbf{x}'(0) = \mathbf{T}$ and

$$\mathbf{x}''(0) = \kappa(0) \mathbf{N} = \frac{1}{r} \mathbf{N}$$

so that $\Gamma(s) - \mathbf{x}(s)$ has the form $s^3 \mathbf{W}_1(s)$ where $\mathbf{W}_1(s)$ is a bounded function of s . Therefore the circle defined by Γ is a strong second order approximation to the original curve at the parameter value $s = 0$. ■

Notation. If the curvature of \mathbf{x} is nonzero near parameter value s as in the proposition, then the center of the strong second order circle approximation

$$\mathbf{z}(s) = \mathbf{x}(s) + \frac{1}{(\kappa(s))^2} \mathbf{x}''(s)$$

is called the *center of curvature* of \mathbf{x} at parameter value s . The circle itself is called the *osculating circle* to the curve at parameter value s (in Latin, *osculare* = to kiss).

Complementary result. A more detailed analysis of the situation shows that if $\kappa(0) \neq 0$ then the circle given above is the unique circle that is a second order approximation to the original curve at the given point. ■

Computational techniques

Although the description of curvature in terms of arc length parametrizations is important for theoretical purposes, it is usually not particularly helpful if one wants to compute the curvature of

a given curve at a given point. One major reason for this is that the arc length function $s(t)$ can only be written down explicitly in a very restricted class of cases. In particular, if we consider the graph of the cubic polynomial $y = x^3$ with parametrization (t, t^3) on some interval $[0, a]$ then the arc length parameter is given by the formula

$$s(t) = \int_0^t \sqrt{1 + 9u^4} du$$

and results of P. Chebyshev from the nineteenth century show that there is no “nice” formula for this function in terms of the usual functions one studies in first year calculus. Therefore it is important to have formulas for curvature in terms of arbitrary parametrizations of a regular smooth curve.

Remarks.

1. The statement about the antiderivative of $\sqrt{1 + 9x^4}$ is stronger than simply saying that no one has been able to find a nice formula for the antiderivative. It is just as impossible to find one as it is to find two positive whole numbers a and b such that $\sqrt{2} = a/b$ or to find two even positive integers whose sum is an odd integer.

2. A detailed statement of Chebyshev’s result can be found on the web link

<http://mathworld.wolfram.com/Integral.html>

and further references are also given there.

The following formula appears in many calculus texts:

FIRST CURVATURE FORMULA. *Let \mathbf{x} be a smooth regular curve, let s be the arc length function, let $k(t) = \kappa(s(t))$, and let $\mathbf{T}(t)$ be the unit tangent vector function obtained by multiplying $\mathbf{x}'(t)$ by the reciprocal of its length. Then we have*

$$k(t) = \frac{|\mathbf{T}'(t)|}{|\mathbf{x}'(t)|} .$$

Derivation. We have seen that $\mathbf{T}(s)$ is equal to $\mathbf{x}'(s)$, and therefore by the chain rule we have

$$\mathbf{T}'(t) = s'(t) \mathbf{T}'(s(t)) = |\mathbf{x}'(t)| \mathbf{x}''(s) .$$

Taking lengths of the vectors on both sides of this equation we see that

$$|\mathbf{T}'(t)| = |\mathbf{x}'(t)| \cdot |\mathbf{x}''(s)| = |\mathbf{x}'(t)| k(t)$$

which is equivalent to the formula for $k(t)$ displayed above. ■

Here is another formula for curvature that is often found in calculus textbooks.

SECOND CURVATURE FORMULA. *Let \mathbf{x} be a smooth regular curve, let s be the arc length function, let $\mathbf{T}(t)$ be the unit length tangent vector function, and let $k(t) = \kappa(s(t))$. Then we have*

$$k(t) = \frac{|\mathbf{x}'(t) \times \mathbf{x}''(t)|}{|\mathbf{x}'(t)|^3} .$$

Derivation. As in the derivation of the First Curvature Formula we have $\mathbf{x}' = s'\mathbf{T}$. Therefore the Leibniz product rule for differentiating the product of a scalar function and a vector function yields

$$\mathbf{x}'' = s''\mathbf{T} + s'\mathbf{T}' .$$

Since $\mathbf{T} \times \mathbf{T} = \mathbf{0}$ the latter implies

$$\mathbf{x}' \times \mathbf{x}'' = (s'')^2 (\mathbf{T} \times \mathbf{T}') .$$

Since $|\mathbf{T}| = 1$ it follows that $\mathbf{T} \cdot \mathbf{T}' = 0$; *i.e.*, the vectors \mathbf{T} and \mathbf{T}' are orthogonal. This in turn implies that $|\mathbf{T} \times \mathbf{T}'|$ is equal to $|\mathbf{T}| \cdot |\mathbf{T}'|$ so that

$$|\mathbf{x}' \times \mathbf{x}''| = |s''|^2 |\mathbf{T} \times \mathbf{T}'| = |s''|^2 |\mathbf{T}| \cdot |\mathbf{T}'| = (s'')^2 |\mathbf{T}| = |\mathbf{x}'|^2 |\mathbf{T}'|$$

(at the next to last step we again use the identity $|\mathbf{T}| = 1$). It follows that

$$|\mathbf{T}'| = \frac{|\mathbf{x}'(t) \times \mathbf{x}''(t)|}{|\mathbf{x}'(t)|^2}$$

and the Second Curvature Formula follows by substitution of this expression into the First Curvature Formula.■

Osculating planes

Thus far we have discussed lines and circles that are good approximations to a curve. Given a curve in 3-dimensional space one can also ask whether there is some plane that comes as close as possible to containing the given curve. Of course, for curves that lie entirely in a single plane, the definition should yield this plane.

Given a continuous curve $\mathbf{x}(t)$, and a plane Π , one way of making this notion precise is to consider the function $\Delta(t)$ giving the distance from $\mathbf{x}(t)$ to Π . If the point $\mathbf{x}(t_0)$ lies on Π , then $\Delta(t_0) = 0$ and one test of how close the curve comes to lying in the plane is to determine the extent to which the zero function is an n^{th} order approximation to $\Delta(t)$ for various choices of n . In fact, if $\kappa(t_0) \neq 0$ then there is a unique plane such that the zero function is a second order approximation to $\Delta(t)$, and this plane is called the *osculating plane* to \mathbf{x} at parameter value $t = t_0$. Formally, we proceed as follows:

Definition. Let $\mathbf{x}(s)$ be a regular smooth curve parametrized by arc length (so that $|\mathbf{x}'| = 1$), and assume that $\kappa(s_0) \neq 0$. Let $\mathbf{a} = \mathbf{x}(s_0)$, let $\mathbf{T} = \mathbf{x}'(s_0)$, and let \mathbf{N} be the unit vector pointing in the same direction as $\mathbf{x}''(s_0)$. The *osculating plane* to the curve at parameter value s_0 is the unique plane containing the three noncollinear vectors \mathbf{a} , $\mathbf{a} + \mathbf{T}$, and $\mathbf{a} + \mathbf{N}$.

It follows that the equation defining the osculating plane may be written in the form

$$[(\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{a}), \mathbf{T}, \mathbf{N}] = 0 .$$

We can now state the result on the order of contact between curves and their osculating planes.

PROPOSITION. Let \mathbf{x} be a regular smooth curve parametrized by arc length (hence $|\mathbf{x}'| = 1$), assume that \mathbf{x} has a continuous third derivative, and assume also that $\kappa(s_0) \neq 0$. Let Π be the osculating plane of \mathbf{x} at parameter value s_0 , and let $\Delta(s)$ denote the distance between $\mathbf{x}(s)$ and Π . Then the osculating plane is the unique plane through $\mathbf{x}(s_0)$ such that the zero function is a second order approximation to the distance function $\Delta(s)$ at s_0 .

Proof. Let $\mathbf{a} = \mathbf{x}(s_0)$, let $\mathbf{T} = \mathbf{x}'(s_0)$, let \mathbf{N} be the unit vector pointing in the same direction as $\mathbf{x}''(s_0)$, and let \mathbf{B} be the cross product $\mathbf{T} \times \mathbf{N}$. Then the osculating plane is the unique plane

containing \mathbf{a} , $\mathbf{a} + \mathbf{T}$, and $\mathbf{a} + \mathbf{N}$, and the distance between a point \mathbf{y} and the osculating plane is the absolute value of the function $\widetilde{D}(\mathbf{y}) = (\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{a}) \cdot \mathbf{B}$. The second order Taylor approximation to $\mathbf{x}(s)$ with respect to s_0 is then given by the formula

$$\mathbf{x}(s) = \mathbf{a} + (s - s_0) \cdot \mathbf{T} + \frac{(s - s_0)^2 \kappa(s_0)}{2} \cdot \mathbf{N} + (s - s_0)^3 \mathbf{W}(s)$$

where $\mathbf{W}(s)$ is bounded for s sufficiently close to s_0 . Therefore since \mathbf{B} is perpendicular to \mathbf{T} and \mathbf{N} we have

$$\widetilde{D}(\mathbf{x}(s)) = (s - s_0)^3 \mathbf{W}(s) \cdot \mathbf{B}$$

where $\mathbf{W}(s) \cdot \mathbf{B}$ is bounded for s sufficiently close to s_0 . Therefore the given curve has order of contact at least two with respect to its osculating plane.

Suppose now that we are given some other plane through \mathbf{a} ; then one has a normal vector \mathbf{V} to the plane of the form $\mathbf{B} + p\mathbf{T} + q\mathbf{N}$ where p and q are not both zero. The distance between $\mathbf{x}(s)$ and plane through \mathbf{a} with normal vector \mathbf{V} will then be the absolute value of a nonzero multiple of the function

$$\left((\mathbf{x}(s) - \mathbf{a}) \cdot \mathbf{V} \right)$$

which is equal to

$$g(s - s_0) = (s - s_0) (\mathbf{T} \cdot \mathbf{V}) + \frac{(s - s_0)^2 \kappa(s_0)}{2} (\mathbf{N} \cdot \mathbf{V}) + (s - s_0)^3 (\mathbf{W}(s) \cdot \mathbf{V}) .$$

We then have

$$\frac{g(s - s_0)}{(s - s_0)^3} = \frac{p}{(s - s_0)^2} + \frac{q}{(s - s_0)} + (\mathbf{W}(s) \cdot \mathbf{V})$$

where the third term on the right is bounded. But since at least one of p and q is nonzero, it follows that the entire sum is not a bounded function of s if s is close to s_0 . Therefore the curve cannot have order of contact at least two with any other plane through \mathbf{a} . ■

Torsion

Curvature may be viewed as reflecting the rate at which a curve moves off its tangent line. The notion of torsion will reflect the rate at which a curve moves off its osculating plane. In order to define this quantity we first need to give some definitions that play an important role in the theory of curves.

Definitions. Let \mathbf{x} be a regular smooth curve parametrized by arc length plus a constant (hence $|\mathbf{x}'| = 1$), assume that \mathbf{x} has a continuous third derivative, and assume also that $\kappa \neq 0$ near the parameter value s_0 . The *principal unit normal vector* at parameter value s is $\mathbf{N}(s) = |\mathbf{x}''(s)|^{-1} \mathbf{x}''(s)$. We have already encountered a special case of this vector in the study of curvatures and osculating planes, and if $\mathbf{T}(s) = \mathbf{x}'(s)$ denotes the unit tangent vector then we know that $\{\mathbf{T}(s), \mathbf{N}(s)\}$ is a set of perpendicular vectors with unit length (an *orthonormal set*).

If \mathbf{x} is a space curve (*i.e.*, its image lies in 3-space), the *binormal* vector at parameter value s is defined to be $\mathbf{B}(s) = \mathbf{T}(s) \times \mathbf{N}(s)$. It then follows that $\{\mathbf{T}(s), \mathbf{N}(s), \mathbf{B}(s)\}$ is an orthonormal basis for \mathbb{R}^3 , and it is called the *Frenet trihedron* (or frame) at parameter value s .

One can frequently define a Frenet trihedron at a parameter value s_0 even if the curvature vanishes at s_0 , but there are examples where it is not possible to do so. In particular, consider the

curve given by $\mathbf{x}(t) = (t, 0, \exp(-1/t^2))$ if $t > 0$ and $\mathbf{x}(t) = (t, \exp(-1/t^2), 0)$ if $t < 0$. If we set $\mathbf{x}(t) = \mathbf{0}$, then \mathbf{x} will be infinitely differentiable because for each $k \geq 0$ we have

$$\lim_{t \rightarrow 0} \frac{d^k}{dt^k} \exp(-1/t^2) = 0$$

(this is true by repeated application of L'Hospital's Rule) and in fact the curvature is also nonzero if $t \neq 0$ and $t^2 \neq 2/3$. Therefore one can define a principal unit normal vector $\mathbf{N}(t)$ when $t \neq 0$ but, say, $|t| < \frac{1}{2}$. However, if $t > 0$ this vector lies in the xz -plane while if $t < 0$ it lies in the xy -plane, and if one could define a continuous unit normal at $t = 0$ it would have to lie in both of these planes. Now the unit tangent at $t = 0$ is the unit vector \mathbf{e}_1 , and there are no unit vectors that are perpendicular to \mathbf{e}_1 that lie in both the xy - and xz -planes. Therefore there is no way to define a continuous extension of \mathbf{N} to all values of t . On the other hand, Problem 4.15 on pages 75–76 of Schaum's Outline Series on Differential Geometry provides a way to define principal normals in some situations when the curvature vanishes at a given parameter value.■

The following online notes contain further information on defining a parametrized family of moving orthonormal frames associated to a regular smooth curve:

<http://ada.math.uga.edu/teaching/math4250/Html/Bishop.htm>

One can retrieve the Frenet trihedron from an arbitrary regular smooth reparametrization with a continuous second derivative.

LEMMA. *In the setting above, suppose that we are given an arbitrary reparametrization with continuous second derivative, and let $s(t)$ denote the arc length function. Then the Frenet trihedron at parameter value t_0 is given by the unit vectors pointing in the same directions as $\mathbf{T}(t)$, $\mathbf{T}'(t)$, and their cross product. Furthermore, if one considers the reoriented curve \mathbf{y} with parametrization $\mathbf{y}(t) = \mathbf{x}(-t)$, then the effect on the Frenet trihedron is that the first two unit vectors are sent to their negatives and the third remains unchanged.*

Proof. It follows immediately from the Chain Rule that the unit tangent \mathbf{T} remains unchanged under a standard reparametrization with $s' > 0$. Furthermore, the derivation of the formulas for curvature under reparametrization show that $\mathbf{T}'(t)$ is a positive multiple of $\mathbf{x}''(s)$. This proves the assertion regarding the principal normals. Finally, if we are given two ordered sets of vectors $\{\mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b}\}$ and $\{\mathbf{c}, \mathbf{d}\}$ such that \mathbf{c} and \mathbf{d} are positive multiples of \mathbf{a} and \mathbf{b} respectively, then $\mathbf{c} \times \mathbf{d}$ is a positive multiple of $\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}$, and this implies the statement regarding the binormals.

If one reverses orientations by the reparametrization $t \mapsto -t$, then the Chain Rule implies that \mathbf{T} and its derivative are sent to their negatives, and this proves the statement about the first two vectors in the trihedron. The statement about the third vector follows from these and the cross product identity $\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b} = (-\mathbf{a}) \times (-\mathbf{b})$.■

We are finally ready to define torsion.

Definition. In the setting above the *torsion* of the curve is given by $\tau(s) = \mathbf{B}'(s) \cdot \mathbf{N}(s)$.

The following alternate characterization of torsion is extremely useful in many contexts.

LEMMA. *The torsion of the curve is given by the formula $\mathbf{B}'(s) = \tau(s)\mathbf{N}(s)$.*

Proof. If we can show that the left hand side is a multiple of $\mathbf{N}(s)$, then the formula will follow by taking dot products of both sides of the equation with $\mathbf{N}(s)$ (note that the dot product of the latter with itself is equal to 1). To show that the left hand side is a multiple of $\mathbf{N}(s)$, it suffices to show that it is perpendicular to $\mathbf{T}(s)$ and $\mathbf{B}(s)$. The second of these follows because

$$0 = \frac{d}{ds}(1) = \frac{d}{ds}(\mathbf{B} \cdot \mathbf{B}) = 2\mathbf{B} \cdot \left(\frac{d\mathbf{B}}{ds}\right)$$

and the first follows because

$$\frac{d\mathbf{B}}{ds} = \frac{d}{ds}(\mathbf{T} \times \mathbf{N}) = (\kappa \mathbf{N} \times \mathbf{N}) + \left(\mathbf{T} \times \frac{d\mathbf{N}}{ds} \right) = \mathbf{T} \times \left(\frac{d\mathbf{N}}{ds} \right)$$

which implies that the left hand side is perpendicular to \mathbf{T} . ■

We had mentioned that the torsion of a curve is related to the rate at which a curve moves away from its osculating plane. Here is a more precise statement about the relationship:

PROPOSITION. *Let \mathbf{x} be a regular smooth curve parametrized by arc length plus a constant (hence $|\mathbf{x}'| = 1$), assume that \mathbf{x} has a continuous third derivative, and assume also that $\kappa(s_0) \neq 0$. Let Π be the osculating plane of \mathbf{x} at parameter value s_0 . Then the image of \mathbf{x} is contained in Π for all s sufficiently close to s_0 if and only if the torsion vanishes for these parameter values.*

Proof. Suppose first that the curve is entirely contained in the osculating plane for s close to s_0 . The osculating plane at s_0 is defined by the equation

$$[(\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{a}), \mathbf{T}_0, \mathbf{N}_0] = 0$$

where $\mathbf{a} = \mathbf{x}(s_0)$ and \mathbf{T}_0 and \mathbf{N}_0 represent the unit tangent and principal normal vectors at parameter value s_0 . If we set $\mathbf{y} = \mathbf{x}(s)$ and simplify this expression, we see that the curve \mathbf{x} satisfies the equation

$$\mathbf{x}(s) \cdot \mathbf{B}_0 = \mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{B}_0$$

where $\mathbf{B}_0 = \mathbf{T}_0 \times \mathbf{N}_0$. If we differentiate both sides with respect to s we obtain the equation $\mathbf{x}'(s) \cdot \mathbf{B}_0 = 0$. Differentiating once again we see that $\mathbf{x}''(s) \cdot \mathbf{B}_0 = 0$. Since $\mathbf{x}'(s) = \mathbf{T}(s)$ and $\mathbf{N}(s)$ is a positive multiple of $\mathbf{x}''(s)$ for s close to s_0 (specifically at least close enough so that $\kappa(s)$ is never zero), then \mathbf{B}_0 is perpendicular to both $\mathbf{T}(s)$ and $\mathbf{N}(s)$. Therefore $\mathbf{B}(s)$ must be equal to $\pm \mathbf{B}_0$. By continuity we must have that $\mathbf{B}(s) = \mathbf{B}_0$ for all s close to s_0 (Here are the details: Look at the function $\mathbf{B}(s) \cdot \mathbf{B}_0$ on some small interval containing s_0 ; its value is ± 1 , and its value at s_0 is $+1$ — if its value somewhere else on the interval were -1 , then by the Intermediate Value Theorem there would be someplace on the interval where its value would be zero, and we know this is impossible). Thus $\mathbf{B}(s)$ is constant, and by the preceding formulas this means that the torsion of the curve must be equal to zero.

Conversely, suppose that the torsion is identically zero. Then by alternate description of torsion in the lemma we know that $\mathbf{B}'(s) \equiv \mathbf{0}$, So that $\mathbf{B}(s) \equiv \mathbf{B}_0$. We then have the string of equations

$$0 = \mathbf{T} \cdot \mathbf{B}_0 = \mathbf{x}' \cdot \mathbf{B}_0 = \frac{d}{ds}(\mathbf{x} \cdot \mathbf{B}_0)$$

which in turn implies that $\mathbf{x} \cdot \mathbf{B}_0$ is a constant. Therefore the curve \mathbf{x} lies entirely in the unique plane containing $\mathbf{x}(s_0)$ with normal direction \mathbf{B}_0 . ■

Other planes associated to a curve

In addition to the osculating plane, there are two other associated planes through a point on the curve \mathbf{x} at parameter value s_0 that are mentioned frequently in the literature. As above we assume that the curve is a regular smooth curve with a continuous third derivative i arc length parametrization, and nonzero curvature at parameter value s_0 .

Definitions. In the above setting the *normal plane* is the unique plane containing $\mathbf{x}(s_0)$, $\mathbf{x}(s_0) + \mathbf{N}(s_0)$, and $\mathbf{x}(s_0) + \mathbf{B}(s_0)$, and the *rectifying plane* is the unique plane containing $\mathbf{x}(s_0)$, $\mathbf{x}(s_0) + \mathbf{T}(s_0)$, and $\mathbf{x}(s_0) + \mathbf{B}(s_0)$. These three mutually perpendicular planes meet at the point $\mathbf{x}(s_0)$ in the same way that the usual xy -, yz -, and xz -planes meet at the origin.

Oriented curvature for plane curves

For an arbitrary regular curve in 3-space one does not necessarily have normal directions when the curvature is zero, but for plane curves there is a unique normal direction up to sign. Specifically, if \mathbf{x} is a regular smooth plane curve parametrized by arc length and \mathbf{B} is a unit normal vector to a plane Π containing the image of \mathbf{x} , then one has an *associated oriented principal normal direction* at parameter value given by the cross product formula

$$\widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s) = \mathbf{B} \times \mathbf{x}'(s)$$

and by construction Π is the unique plane passing through $\mathbf{x}(s)$, $\mathbf{x}(s) + \mathbf{x}'(s)$, and $\mathbf{x}(s) + \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s)$. There are two choices of \mathbf{B} (the two unit normals for π are negatives of each other) and thus there are two choices for $\widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s)$ such that each is the negative of the other. One can then define a *signed curvature* associated to the oriented principal normal $\widehat{\mathbf{N}}$ given by the formula

$$k(s) = \left(\mathbf{x}''(s) \cdot \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s) \right)$$

and since $\mathbf{x}''(s)$ is perpendicular to $\mathbf{x}'(s)$ and \mathbf{B} this may be rewritten in the form

$$\mathbf{x}''(s) = k(s) \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s).$$

An obvious question is to ask what happens if $\kappa(s_0) = 0$ (which also equals $k(s)$ in this case) and the sign of $k(s)$ is negative for $s < s_0$ and positive for $s > s_0$. A basic example of this sort is given by the graph of $f(x) = x^3$ near $x = 0$, whose standard parametrization is given by $\mathbf{x}(t) = (t, t^3)$. In this situation the graph lies in the lower half plane $y < 0$ for $t < 0$ and in the upper half plane $y > 0$ for $t > 0$, and the curve switches from being concave upward for $t < 0$ to concave downward (generally called *convex* beyond first year calculus courses). More generally, one usually says that f has a *point of inflection* in such cases. The following result shows that more general plane curves behave similarly provided the curvature has a nonvanishing derivative:

PROPOSITION. *Let \mathbf{x} be a regular plane smooth curve parametrized by arc length plus a constant (hence $|\mathbf{x}'| = 1$), assume that \mathbf{x} has a continuous fourth derivative, let $\widehat{\mathbf{N}}$ define a family of oriented principal normals for \mathbf{x} , and assume that that $k(s_0) = 0$ but $k'(s_0) > 0$. Then $\mathbf{x}(s)$ is contained in the half plane*

$$\widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s_0) \cdot (\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}(s_0)) < 0$$

for s sufficiently close to s_0 satisfying $s < s_0$, and $\mathbf{x}(s)$ is contained in the half plane

$$\widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s_0) \cdot (\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}(s_0)) > 0$$

for s sufficiently close to s_0 satisfying $s > s_0$.

A similar result holds if $k'(s_0) < 0$, and the necessary modifications of the statement and proof for that case are left to the reader as an exercise.

Proof. To simplify the computations we shall choose coordinate systems such that $\mathbf{x}(s_0) = \mathbf{0}$ and the plane is the standard coordinate plane through the origin with chosen unit normal vector \mathbf{e}_3 . It will also be convenient to denote the unit vector $\mathbf{x}'(s)$ by $\mathbf{T}(s)$. We shall need to work with a third order approximation to the curve, which means that we are going to need some information about $\mathbf{x}'''(s_0)$. Therefore the first step will be to establish the following formula:

$$k'(s_0) = \mathbf{x}'''(s_0) \cdot \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s_0)$$

To see this, note that

$$\begin{aligned} k'(s) &= \frac{d}{ds} (\mathbf{x}''' \cdot \widehat{\mathbf{N}}) = \\ & (\mathbf{x}'''(s) \cdot \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s)) + (\mathbf{x}''(s) \cdot \widehat{\mathbf{N}}'(s)) = (\mathbf{x}'''(s) \cdot \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s)) + (\widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s) \cdot \widehat{\mathbf{N}}'(s)) \end{aligned}$$

and the second summand in the right hand expression vanishes because $|\widehat{\mathbf{N}}|^2$ is always equal to 1 (this is the same argument which implies that the unit tangent vector function is perpendicular to its derivative).

Turning to the proof of the main result, the preceding paragraph and earlier consideration show that the curve \mathbf{x} is given near s_0 by the formula

$$\mathbf{x}(s) = (s - s_0) \mathbf{T}(s_0) + \frac{k(s)(s - s_0)^2}{2} \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s_0) + \frac{(s - s_0)^3}{3!} \mathbf{x}'''(s_0) + (s - s_0)^4 \theta(s)$$

where $\theta(s)$ is bounded for s sufficiently close to zero. To simplify notation further we shall write $\Delta s = s - s_0$.

If we take the dot product of the preceding equation with $\widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s_0)$ we obtain the formula, in which $y(s)$ is the dot product of $\theta(s)$ and $\widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s_0)$, so that $y(s)$ is also bounded for s sufficiently close to s_0 :

$$(\mathbf{x}(s) \cdot \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s_0)) = \frac{k'(s_0)}{3!} (\Delta s)^3 + y(s) (\Delta s)^4$$

If s is nonzero but sufficiently close to zero then the sign of the right hand side is equal to the sign of Δs because

- (i) the sign of the first term is equal to the sign of Δs ,
- (ii) if we let M be a positive upper bound for $|y(s)|$ and further restrict Δs so that

$$|\Delta s| < \frac{k'(s_0)}{6B}$$

then the absolute value of the second term in the dot product formula will be less than the absolute value of the first term.

It follows that the sign of the dot product

$$(\mathbf{x}(s) \cdot \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s_0))$$

is the same as the sign of the initial term

$$\frac{k'(s_0)}{3!} (\Delta s)^3$$

which in turn is equal to the sign of Δs . Since the dot product has the same sign as Δs for $s \neq 0$ and s sufficiently small, it follows that $\mathbf{x}(s)$ lies on the half plane defined by the inequality $\mathbf{y} \cdot \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s_0) < 0$ if $s < s_0$ and $\mathbf{x}(s)$ lies on the half plane defined by the inequality $\mathbf{y} \cdot \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s_0) > 0$ if $s > s_0$. ■

In fact, the center of the osculating circle also switches sides when one goes from values of s that are less than s_0 to values of s that are greater than s_0 . However, the proof takes considerably more work.

COMPLEMENT. *In the setting above, let $\mathbf{z}(s)$ denote the center of the osculating circle to \mathbf{x} at parameter value at parameter value $s \neq s_0$ close to s_0 (this exists because the curvature is nonzero at such points). Then $\mathbf{z}(s)$ is contained in the half plane*

$$\widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s_0) \cdot (\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}(s_0)) < 0$$

for s sufficiently close to s_0 satisfying $s < s_0$, and $\mathbf{z}(s)$ is contained in the half plane

$$\widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s_0) \cdot (\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}(s_0)) > 0$$

for s sufficiently close to s_0 satisfying $s > s_0$.

Proof. We need to establish similar inequalities to those derived above if $\mathbf{x}(s)$ is replaced by $\mathbf{z}(s)$; note that the latter is not defined for parameter value s_0 because the formula involves the reciprocal of the curvature and the latter is zero at s_0 .

The center of the osculating circle at parameter value $s \neq s_0$ was defined to be $\mathbf{x} + \kappa^{-1}\mathbf{N}$, where \mathbf{N} is the ordinary principal normal; we claim that the latter is equal to $\mathbf{x} + k^{-1}\widehat{\mathbf{N}}$. By definition we have

$$\mathbf{x}'' = \kappa \mathbf{N} = k \widehat{\mathbf{N}}$$

and since $\kappa = \pm k$ is nonzero we know that $\kappa^2 = k^2$. Dividing the displayed equation by this common quantity yields the desired formula

$$\kappa^{-1}\mathbf{N} = k^{-1}\widehat{\mathbf{N}}.$$

Therefore the proof reduces to showing that the sign of

$$\left(\mathbf{x}(s) + \frac{1}{k(s)} \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s) \right) \cdot \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s_0)$$

is equal to the sign of Δs .

Using the formula for $\mathbf{x}(s)$ near s_0 that was derived before, we may rewrite the preceding expression as

$$h(s) = \frac{k'(s_0)}{3!} (\Delta s)^3 + y(s) (\Delta s)^4 + \frac{1}{k(s)} \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s) \cdot \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s_0).$$

We need to show that $h(s)$ has the same sign as $k(s)$ and its reciprocal, and this will happen if

$$\ell(s) = h(s) - \frac{1}{k(s)} = \frac{k'(s_0)}{3!} (\Delta s)^3 + y(s) (\Delta s)^4 + \frac{1}{k(s)} \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s) \cdot \left(\widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s_0) - \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s) \right)$$

is bounded for $s \neq s_0$ sufficiently close to zero. To see, this, suppose that $|\ell(s)| \leq A$ for some $A > 0$. If we then choose $\delta > 0$ so that $|k(s)| < 1/A$ for $|\Delta s| < \delta$ but $\Delta s \neq 0$, it will follow that

$$\Delta s > 0 \implies h(s) = \frac{1}{k(s)} + \left(h(s) - \frac{1}{k(s)} \right) > A + (-A) > 0$$

and similarly with all inequalities reversed and A switched with $-A$ if $\Delta s < 0$.

In order to prove that $\ell(s)$ is bounded, it suffices to prove that each of the three summands is bounded for, say, $|\Delta s| \leq r$. The absolute value of the first is bounded by $k'(s_0)r^3/6$ and the absolute value of the second is bounded by $B r^4$ where B is a positive upper bound for $|y(s)|$. By the Cauchy-Schwarz inequality the absolute value of the third is bounded from above by

$$\frac{|\widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s) - \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s_0)|}{|k(s)|}$$

and using the Mean Value Theorem we may estimate the numerator and denominator of this expression separately as follows:

- (i) $|\widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s) - \widehat{\mathbf{N}}(s_0)| \leq P \cdot |\Delta s|$, where P is the maximum value of $|\widehat{\mathbf{N}}'|$ on $[s_0 - r, s_0 + r]$.
- (ii) $k(s) = k'(S_1) \Delta s$ for some S_1 between s_0 and s , so if we choose r so small that $k' > 0$ on $[s_0 - r, s_0 + r]$, then $|k(s)| \geq Q \Delta s$, where $Q > 0$ is the minimum of k' on that interval.

It then follows that the quotient P/Q is an upper bound for the absolute value of the third term in the formula for $\ell(s)$, and therefore the latter itself is bounded. This completes the proof that $z(s)$ lies on the half plane described in the statement of the result. ■

I.5 : Frenet-Serret Formulas

(O'Neill, §§ 2.3–2.4)

In ordinary and multivariable calculus courses, a great deal of emphasis is often placed upon working specific examples, and as indicated in the discussion preceding Section I.1 of these notes there is a wide assortment of interesting curves that can be studied using the methods of the preceding sections. However, the course notes up to this point have not included the sorts of worked out examples that one sees in a calculus book. The book by O'NEILL does include a few examples, but far fewer than one might expect in comparison to standard calculus texts. We have reached a point in this course where the reasons for this difference should be explained.

We already touched upon one reason when we described computational techniques for finding the curvature of a curve. Even in simple cases, it can be extremely difficult — if not impossible — to write things out explicitly using pencil and paper along with the techniques and results that are taught in multivariable calculus courses. For example, we noted that arc length reparametrizations often involve functions that ordinary calculus cannot handle in a straightforward manner. And the situation gets even worse when one considers certain types of curves that arise naturally in classical physics, most notably those arising when one attempts to describe the motions of a gravitational system involving three heavenly bodies. In these cases it is not even possible to give explicit

formulas for the motion of the curves themselves, without even thinking about the added difficulty of describing quantities like curvature and torsion. During the past quarter century, spectacular advances in computer technology have provided powerful new tools for studying examples. A few comments on the use of computer graphics in differential geometry appear in O'NEILL. The following book is an excellent reference for further information on studying curves and surfaces using the software package *Mathematica*:

A. Gray. *Modern Differential Geometry of Curves and Surfaces*. (Studies in Advanced Mathematics.) *CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL etc.*, 1993. ISBN: 0-8493-7872-9.

The emphasis in this course will be on *qualitative* aspects of the differential geometry of curves and surfaces in contrast to the *quantitative* emphasis that one sees in ordinary and multivariable calculus. In particular, we are interested in the following basic sort of question:

Reconstructing curves from partial data. *To what extent can one use geometric invariants of a curve such as curvature and torsion to retrieve the original curve?*

Both curvature and torsion are defined so that they do not change if one replaces a curve by its image under some rigid motion of \mathbb{R}^2 or \mathbb{R}^3 , so clearly the best we can hope for is to retrieve a curve up to some transformation by a rigid motion. The main results of this section show that curvature and torsion suffice to recover the original curve in a wide range of “reasonable” cases.

The crucial input needed to prove such results comes from the *Frenet-Serret Formulas*, which describe the derivatives of the three fundamental unit vectors in the Frenet trihedron associated to a regular smooth curve.

FRENET-SERRET FORMULAS. *Let \mathbf{x} be a regular smooth curve parametrized by arc length (hence $|\mathbf{x}'| = 1$), assume that \mathbf{x} has a continuous third derivative, and assume also that $\kappa(s_0) \neq 0$. Let $\mathbf{T}(s)$, $\mathbf{N}(s)$ and $\mathbf{B}(s)$ be the tangent, principal normal and binormal vectors in the Frenet trihedron for \mathbf{x} at parameter value s_0 . Then the following equations describe the derivatives of the vectors in the Frenet trihedron:*

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{T}' &= && \kappa \mathbf{N} \\ \mathbf{N}' &= -\kappa \mathbf{T} && -\tau \mathbf{B} \\ \mathbf{B}' &= && \tau \mathbf{N} \end{aligned}$$

Proof. We have already noted that the first and third equations are direct consequences of the definition of curvature and torsion. To derive the second equation, we take the identity $\mathbf{N} = \mathbf{B} \times \mathbf{T}$ and differentiate it with respect to s :

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{N}'(s) &= \mathbf{B}'(s) \times \mathbf{T}(s) + \mathbf{B}(s) \times \mathbf{T}'(s) = \\ &\tau(s) (\mathbf{N}(s) \times \mathbf{T}(s)) + \kappa (\mathbf{B}(s) \times \mathbf{N}(s)) \end{aligned}$$

Since \mathbf{T} , \mathbf{N} and \mathbf{B} are mutually perpendicular unit vectors such that $\mathbf{B} = \mathbf{T} \times \mathbf{N}$, as usual the “BAC-CAB” rule for threefold cross products implies that $\mathbf{N} \times \mathbf{T} = -\mathbf{B}$ and $\mathbf{B} \times \mathbf{N} = -\mathbf{T}$. If we make these substitutions into the displayed equations we obtain the second of the Frenet-Serret Formulas. ■

The significance of the Frenet-Serret formulas is that they allow one to describe a curve in terms of its curvature and torsion in an essentially complete manner.

LOCAL UNIQUENESS FOR CURVES. *Suppose that we are given two regular smooth curves \mathbf{x} and \mathbf{y} defined on the same open interval containing s_0 , where both curves are parametrized by*

arc length, both have continuous third derivatives and everywhere nonzero curvatures, and their curvature and torsion functions of both curves are equal. Assume further that the Frenet trihedra for both curves at s_0 are equal. Then $\mathbf{y} = \mathbf{x}$ on some open interval containing s_0 .

Proof. Let \mathbf{e}_1 , \mathbf{e}_2 and \mathbf{e}_3 be the standard unit vectors. We shall only consider the simplified situation where $\mathbf{x}(s_0) = \mathbf{y}(0) = \mathbf{0}$ and the Frenet trihedra for \mathbf{x} and \mathbf{y} at parameter value s_0 are given by \mathbf{e}_1 , \mathbf{e}_2 and \mathbf{e}_3 (one can always use a rigid motion to move the original curves into such positions, and the motion will not change the curvature or torsion of either curve — this is not really difficult to prove but it is a bit tedious and distracting).

Let $\{\mathbf{T}_x(s), \mathbf{N}_x(s), \mathbf{B}_x(s)\}$ and $\{\mathbf{T}_y(s), \mathbf{N}_y(s), \mathbf{B}_y(s)\}$ be the Frenet trihedra for \mathbf{x} and \mathbf{y} respectively, and let

$$g(s) = |\mathbf{T}_x(s) - \mathbf{T}_y(s)|^2 + |\mathbf{N}_x(s) - \mathbf{N}_y(s)|^2 + |\mathbf{B}_x(s) - \mathbf{B}_y(s)|^2 .$$

By the Frenet-Serret Formulas we then have that g' is equal to

$$\begin{aligned} 2 \left(\left((\mathbf{T}_x - \mathbf{T}_y) \cdot (\mathbf{T}'_x - \mathbf{T}'_y) \right) + \left((\mathbf{N}_x - \mathbf{N}_y) \cdot (\mathbf{N}'_x - \mathbf{N}'_y) \right) + \left((\mathbf{B}_x - \mathbf{B}_y) \cdot (\mathbf{B}'_x - \mathbf{B}'_y) \right) \right) = \\ 2 \left(\left(\kappa (\mathbf{T}_x - \mathbf{T}_y) \cdot (\mathbf{N}_x - \mathbf{N}_y) \right) + \left(\tau (\mathbf{B}_x - \mathbf{B}_y) \cdot (\mathbf{N}_x - \mathbf{N}_y) \right) - \right. \\ \left. \left(\kappa (\mathbf{N}_x - \mathbf{N}_y) \cdot (\mathbf{T}_x - \mathbf{T}_y) \right) - \left(\tau (\mathbf{N}_x - \mathbf{N}_y) \cdot (\mathbf{B}_x - \mathbf{B}_y) \right) \right) . \end{aligned}$$

It is an elementary but clearly messy exercise in algebra to simplify the right hand side of the preceding equation, and the expression in question turns out to be zero. Therefore the function g must be a constant, and since our assumptions imply $g(s_0) = 0$, it follows that $g(s) = 0$ for all s . The latter in turn implies that each summand

$$|\mathbf{T}_x - \mathbf{T}_y|^2 , |\mathbf{N}_x - \mathbf{N}_y|^2 , |\mathbf{B}_x - \mathbf{B}_y|^2$$

must be zero and hence that the Frenet trihedra for \mathbf{x} and \mathbf{y} must be the same. The first Frenet-Serret Formula then implies $\mathbf{x}' = \mathbf{y}'$, and since the two curves both go through the origin at parameter value s_0 it follows that \mathbf{x} and \mathbf{y} must be identical. ■

There is in fact a converse to the preceding result.

FUNDAMENTAL EXISTENCE THEOREM OF LOCAL CURVE THEORY. *Given sufficiently differentiable functions κ and τ on some interval $(-c, c)$ such that $\kappa > 0$, there is an $h \in (0, c)$ and a sufficiently differentiable curve \mathbf{x} defined on $(0, h)$ such that $\mathbf{x}(0) = \mathbf{0}$, the tangent vectors to \mathbf{x} at all point have unit length, the Frenet trihedron of \mathbf{x} at 0 is given by the standard unit vectors*

$$\left(\mathbf{T}(0), \mathbf{N}(0), \mathbf{B}(0) \right) = \left(\mathbf{e}_1, \mathbf{e}_2, \mathbf{e}_3 \right)$$

and the curvature and torsion functions are given by the restrictions of κ and τ respectively. ■

This is a consequence of the fundamental existence theorem for systems of linear differential equations. If the curve exists, then the Frenet-Serret formulas yield a system of nine first order linear differential equations for the vector valued functions \mathbf{T} , \mathbf{N} , and \mathbf{B} in the Frenet trihedron

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{T}' &= && \kappa \mathbf{N} \\ \mathbf{N}' &= -\kappa \mathbf{T} && -\tau \mathbf{B} \\ \mathbf{B}' &= && \tau \mathbf{N} \end{aligned}$$

and if one is given κ and τ the goal is to see whether this system of first order linear differential equations can be solved for \mathbf{T} , \mathbf{N} , and \mathbf{B} , at least on some smaller interval $(-h, h)$. If one has such a solution then the curve \mathbf{x} can be retrieved using the elementary formula

$$\mathbf{x}(s) = \int_0^s \mathbf{T}(u) du$$

where $|s| < h$ (with the usual convention that $\int_0^s = -\int_s^0$ if $s < 0$). A proof of the existence of a solution to the system of differential equations is given on pages 309–311 in the Appendix to Chapter 4 of DO CARMO. These results are also discussed in the files `frenetnote.pdf` and `expmatrix.pdf` in the course directory.■

The preceding two results combine to yield the **Fundamental Theorem of Local Curve Theory**:

Given κ and τ as in the statement of the Existence Theorem, an initial vector \mathbf{x}_0 and an orthonormal set of vectors $(\mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b}, \mathbf{c})$ such that $\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b} = \mathbf{c}$, then there is a positive real number h_1 and a unique (sufficiently differentiable) curve \mathbf{x} such that the tangent vectors to \mathbf{x} at all point have unit length, the Frenet trihedron of \mathbf{x} at 0 is given by the standard unit vectors

$$\left(\mathbf{T}(0), \mathbf{N}(0), \mathbf{B}(0) \right) = (\mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b}, \mathbf{c})$$

and the curvature and torsion functions are respectively given by the restrictions of κ and τ to $(-h_1, h_1)$.■

In particular, this result implies that *space curves are completely determined by their curvature and torsion functions together with the Frenet trihedron at some initial value*. The following special case is a companion to our earlier characterization of lines as curves whose curvature is identically zero:

CHARACTERIZATION OF CIRCULAR ARCS. *Let \mathbf{x} be a curve satisfying the conditions in the statement of the Frenet-Serret Formulas. Then the restriction of \mathbf{x} to some small interval $(s_0 - \delta, s_0 + \delta)$ is a circular arc if and only if the curvature is a positive constant and the torsion is identically zero.*

This follows immediately because we can always find a circular arc with given initial value \mathbf{x}_0 , initial Frenet trihedron $(\mathbf{T}_0, \mathbf{N}_0, \mathbf{B}_0)$ and constant curvature $\kappa > 0$ (and also of course with vanishing torsion); in fact, the equations for an osculating circle provide an explicit construction.■

A strengthened Fundamental Theorem for plane curves

Since plane curves may be viewed as space curves whose third coordinates are zero (and whose torsion functions are zero), the Fundamental Theorem of Local Curve Theory also applies to plane curves, and in fact the Fundamental Theorem amounts to saying that there is a unique curve with a given (nonzero) curvature function κ , initial value \mathbf{x}_0 and initial unit tangent vector \mathbf{T}_0 ; in this case the principal normal \mathbf{N}_0 is completely determined by the perpendicularity condition and the Frenet-Serret Formulas.

In fact, there is actually a stronger version of the Fundamental Theorem in the planar case. In order to state and prove the Fundamental Theorem for space curves we needed to assume the

curvature was positive so that the principal normal \mathbf{N} could be defined. We have already noted that one can define \mathbf{N} for plane curves even if the curvature is equal to zero. Geometrically, a standard way of doing this is to rotate the unit tangent \mathbf{T} in the counterclockwise direction through an angle of $\pi/2$; in terms of equations this means that $\mathbf{N} = J(\mathbf{T})$, where J is the linear transformation

$$J(x, y) = (y, -x).$$

As noted in the previous section, if \mathbf{x} is a regular smooth curve in \mathbb{R}^2 parametrized by arc length plus a constant, this means that if we define an associated *signed curvature* by the formula

$$k(s) = \mathbf{x}''(s) \cdot \mathbf{N}(s) = \mathbf{x}''(s) \cdot [J(\mathbf{T})](s)$$

then $|k(s)| = \kappa(s)$.

For the sake of completeness, we shall formally state and prove the modified version of the Frenet-Serret Formulas that holds in the 2-dimensional setting with \mathbf{N} defined as above.

PLANAR FRENET-SERRET FORMULAS. *Let \mathbf{x} be a regular smooth curve parametrized by arc length (hence $|\mathbf{x}'| = 1$), assume that \mathbf{x} has a continuous third derivative. Let $\mathbf{T}(s)$ and $\mathbf{N}(s)$ and be the tangent and principal normal vectors for \mathbf{x} at parameter value s_0 . Then the following equations describe the derivatives of \mathbf{T} and \mathbf{N} :*

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{T}' &= k \mathbf{N} \\ \mathbf{N}' &= -k \mathbf{T} \end{aligned}$$

Proof. By definition the first equation is a direct consequence of the definition of signed curvature. To derive the second equation, we take the identity $\mathbf{N}(s) = J(\mathbf{T}(s))$ and differentiate it with respect to s , obtaining

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{N}'(s) &= J(\mathbf{T}'(s)) = J(k(s)\mathbf{N}(s)) = k(s)J(J(\mathbf{T}(s))) = \\ &k(s)J^2(\mathbf{T}(s)) = -k(s)\mathbf{T}(s) \end{aligned}$$

where the last equation follows because $J^2 = -I$. ■

One can use the notion of signed curvature to state and prove the following version of the fundamental theorem for plane curves:

FUNDAMENTAL THEOREM OF LOCAL PLANE CURVE THEORY. *Given a sufficiently differentiable function κ on some interval $(-c, c)$, an initial vector \mathbf{x}_0 and an orthonormal set of vectors (\mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b}) such that $\mathbf{b} = J(\mathbf{a})$, then there is an $h \in (0, c)$ and a sufficiently differentiable curve \mathbf{x} defined on $(-h, h)$ such that $\mathbf{x}(0) = \mathbf{x}_0$, the tangent vectors to \mathbf{x} at all point have unit length, the tangent-normal pair of \mathbf{x} at at 0 is given by the standard unit vectors*

$$(\mathbf{T}(0), \mathbf{N}(0)) = (\mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b})$$

and the curvature function is given by the restriction of κ to $(-h, h)$. ■

The proof of this result is a fairly straightforward modification of the argument for space curves and will not be worked out explicitly for that reason.

Local canonical forms

One application of the Frenet-Serret formulas is a description of a strong third order approximation to a curve in terms of curvature and torsion.

PROPOSITION. *Let \mathbf{x} be a regular smooth curve parametrized by arc length plus a constant (hence $|\mathbf{x}'| = 1$) such that \mathbf{x} has a continuous fourth derivative and $\kappa(0) \neq 0$, and let $\{\mathbf{T}, \mathbf{N}, \mathbf{B}\}$ be the Frenet trihedron at parameter value $s = 0$. Then a strong third order approximation to \mathbf{x} is given by*

$$\mathbf{x}(0) + \left(s - \frac{s^2\kappa^2}{3!}\right) \mathbf{T} + \left(\frac{s^2\kappa}{2} - \frac{s^3\kappa'}{3!}\right) \mathbf{N} - \frac{s^3\kappa\tau}{3!} \mathbf{B}.$$

Proof. We already know that $\mathbf{x}'(0) = \mathbf{T}$ and $\mathbf{x}''(0) = \kappa \mathbf{N}$. It suffices to compute $\mathbf{x}'''(0)$, and the latter is given by

$$(\kappa \mathbf{N})' = \kappa' \mathbf{N} + \kappa \mathbf{N}' = \kappa' \mathbf{N} - \kappa^2 \mathbf{T} - \kappa \tau \mathbf{B}$$

where the last is derived using the Frenet-Serret Formulas. ■

Here are two significant applications of the canonical form for the strong third order approximation. By the basic assumptions for the Frenet-Serret Formulas we have $\kappa > 0$.

APPLICATION 1. *In the setting above, if $\tau(0) > 0$ then the point $\mathbf{x}(s)$ lies on the side of the osculating plane defined by the inequality $(\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}(0)) \cdot \mathbf{B} < 0$, when $s > 0$ and s is sufficiently close to 0, and $\mathbf{x}(s)$ lies on the side of the osculating plane defined by the inequality $(\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}(0)) \cdot \mathbf{B} > 0$ when $s < 0$ and s is sufficiently close to 0. Similarly, if $\tau(0) < 0$ then the point $\mathbf{x}(s)$ lies on the side of the osculating plane defined by the inequality $(\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}(0)) \cdot \mathbf{B} > 0$ when $s < 0$, and $\mathbf{x}(s)$ lies on the side of the osculating plane defined by the inequality $(\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}(0)) \cdot \mathbf{B} < 0$ when $s > 0$. ■*

Derivation. We shall only do the case where $\tau > 0$ and $s > 0$. The arguments in the other cases are basically the same, the main difference being that certain signs and inequality directions must be changed.

Let $g(s) = (\mathbf{x}(s) - \mathbf{x}(0)) \cdot \mathbf{B}$; then the orthonormality of the Frenet trihedron $\{\mathbf{T}, \mathbf{N}, \mathbf{B}\}$ and the canonical form yield the equation

$$g(s) = -\frac{s^3\kappa\tau}{3!} + \theta(s)$$

where $|\theta(s)| \leq |s|^4 \cdot M$ for some positive constant M . It follows that if $|s|$ is small and $s > 0$ then we have

$$g(s) \geq -\frac{s^3\kappa\tau}{3!} + M \cdot s^4$$

and the right hand side (hence also $g(s)$) is negative provided

$$s < \frac{\kappa\tau}{3!M}. \blacksquare$$

APPLICATION 2. *In the setting above, if $\kappa' \neq 0$ and $s \neq 0$ is sufficiently close to zero then $\mathbf{x}(s)$ lies on the side of the rectifying plane defined by the inequality*

$$(\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}(0)) \cdot \mathbf{N} < 0. \blacksquare$$

Derivation. Let $g(s) = (\mathbf{x}(s) - \mathbf{x}(0)) \cdot \mathbf{N}$; then the canonical form implies an equation

$$g(s) = - \left(\frac{s^2 \kappa}{2} + -\frac{s^3 \kappa'}{3!} \right) + \theta(s)$$

where $|\theta(s)| \leq |s|^4 \cdot M$ for some positive constant M . We might as well assume that $M \geq 1$. It follows that if $|s|$ is small and nonzero then we have

$$|g(s)| \geq \left(\frac{s^2 \kappa}{2} - \frac{|s|^3 |\kappa'|}{3!} \right) - M \cdot |s|^4$$

and the right hand side is positive provided

$$|s| < \min \left(\frac{\kappa}{\kappa'}, \frac{\sqrt{\kappa}}{2M} \right).$$

It follows that $g(s)$ is nonzero (and in fact negative) under the same conditions. ■

Regular smooth curves in hyperspace

During the nineteenth century mathematicians and physicists encountered numerous questions that had natural interpretations in terms of spaces of dimension greater than three (incidentally, in physics this began long before the viewing of the universe as a 4-dimensional space-time in relativity theory). In particular, coordinate geometry gave a powerful means of dealing with such objects by analogy. For example, Euclidean n -space for an arbitrary finite n is given by the vector space \mathbb{R}^n , lines, planes, and various sorts of hyperplanes can be defined and studied by algebraic methods (although geometric intuition often plays a key role in formulating, proving, and interpreting results!), and distances and angles can be defined using a simple generalization of the standard dot product. Furthermore, objects like a 4-dimensional hypercube or a 3-dimensional hypersphere can be described using familiar sorts of equations. For example, a typical hypercube is given by all points $\mathbf{x} = (x_1, x_2, x_3, x_4)$ such that $0 \leq x_i \leq 1$ for all i , and a typical hypersphere is given by all points \mathbf{x} such that

$$|\mathbf{x}|^2 = x_1^2 + x_2^2 + x_3^2 + x_4^2 = 1.$$

A full investigation of differential geometry in Euclidean spaces of dimension ≥ 4 is beyond the scope of this course, but some comments about the differential geometry of curves in 4-space seem worth mentioning.

One can define regular smooth curves, arc length and curvature for parametrized 4-dimensional curves exactly as for curves in 3-dimensional space. In fact, there are generalizations of the Frenet-Serret formula and the Fundamental Theorem of Local Curve Theory. One complicating factor is that the 3-dimensional cross product does not generalize to higher dimensions in a particularly neat fashion, but one can develop algebraic techniques to overcome this obstacle. In any case, in four dimensions if a sufficiently differentiable regular smooth curve \mathbf{x} is parametrized by arc length plus a constant and has nonzero curvature and a nonzero secondary curvature (which is similar to the torsion of a curve in 3-space), then for each parameter value s there is an ordered orthonormal set of vectors $\mathbf{F}_i(s)$, where $1 \leq i \leq 4$, such that \mathbf{F}_1 is the unit tangent vector and the sequence of vector valued functions (the *Frenet frame* for the curve) satisfies the following system

of differential equations, where κ_1 is curvature, κ_2 is positive valued, and the functions $\kappa_1, \kappa_2, \kappa_3$, all have sufficiently many derivatives:

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{F}'_1 &= \kappa_1 \mathbf{F}_2 \\ \mathbf{F}'_2 &= -\kappa_1 \mathbf{F}_1 + \kappa_2 \mathbf{F}_3 \\ \mathbf{F}'_3 &= -\kappa_2 \mathbf{F}_2 + \kappa_3 \mathbf{F}_4 \\ \mathbf{F}'_4 &= -\kappa_3 \mathbf{F}_3 \end{aligned}$$

The Fundamental Theorem of Local Curve Theory in 4-dimensional space states that locally there is a unique curve with prescribed higher curvature functions $\kappa_1 > 0$, $\kappa_2 > 0$ and κ_3 , prescribed initial value $\mathbf{x}(s_0)$, and whose Frenet orthonormal frame satisfies $\mathbf{F}_i(s_0) = \mathbf{v}_i$ for some orthonormal basis $\{\mathbf{v}_1, \mathbf{v}_2, \mathbf{v}_3, \mathbf{v}_4\}$. An online description and derivation of such formulas in arbitrary dimensions is available at the sites

<http://www.math.technion.ac.il/~rbrooks/dgeo1.7.ps>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Differential_geometry_of_curves

and a discussion of such formulas in complete generality (*i.e.*, appropriate for a graduate level course) appears on page 74 of HICKS.