Math 1231: Single-Variable Calculus 1

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Recitation 2

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Today we want to practice the way we actually compute limits.

Problem 1 (Warmup)**.** Let $f(x) = \frac{x^2+\sin(x)+3}{x^2-x-2}$.

(a) Where is f continuous? Where is it discontinuous?

(b) What is $\lim_{x\to 0} f(x)$?

Solution:

(a) This function is made of algebra and trigonometry, so it's continuous where it's defined. The denominator is $x^2 - x - 2 = (x-2)(x+1)$ so the function is undefined at 2 and -1.

(b) Because this function is continuous at 0, we can just plug in:

$$\lim_{x\to 0} f(x) = f(0) = \frac{0^2 + \sin(0) + 3}{0^2 - 0 - 2} = -3/2.$$

Problem 2. Let $f(x) = \frac{x-1}{x^2-1}$.

(a) What is $f(2)$? Is f continuous at 2?

(b) What is $\lim_{x\to 2} f(x)$?

(c) What is $f(1)$? Is f continuous at 1?

(d) What function can we find that's almost the same as f, but defined and continuous at 1? (Is this function the same as f?)

(e) What is $\lim_{x\to 1} f(x)$?

Solution:

(a) $f(2) = 1/3$, and f is continuous here since it's a reasonable functions.

(b) $\lim_{x\to 2} f(x) = 1/3$.

(c) $f(1)$ isn't defined, and thus f is not continuous at 1.

(d) $\frac{x-1}{x^2-1} = \frac{x-1}{(x-1)(x+1)}$ is almost the same as $\frac{1}{x+1}$.

(e) $\lim_{x\to 1} f(x) = \lim_{x\to 1} \frac{1}{x+1} = \frac{1}{2}$.

Note we're using the Almost Identical Functions principle here. The function f was *not* continuous at 1, because it's not defined there. But we can replace it by an almost identical function that is continuous, and then that limit is simple to compute.

Problem 3. Let $g(x) = \frac{(x+1)^2-1}{x+2}$.

(a) Is g continuous where it's defined? Where is it undefined?

(b) Can you find a function that's almost identical to g but continuous everywhere?

(c) What is $\lim_{x\to -2} g(x)$?

Solution:

(a) g is a reasonable function so it's continuous where it's defined, but it isn't defined at $x = -2$.

(b) $\frac{x^2+2x+1-1}{x+1} = \frac{x(x+2)}{x+2}$ is almost the same as x. So $g(x)$ is almost the same as x.

(c) $\lim_{x\to -2} g(x) = \lim_{x\to -2} x = -2$.

Note that $\frac{x(x+2)}{x+2} \neq x$, but their limits at 0 are the same because the functions are the same near 0 (and in fact everywhere except at 0).

Problem 4. Let $h(x) = \frac{x-1}{\sqrt{5-x}-2}$.

(a) Is this function continuous where it's defined? Where is it undefined?

(b) We can factor an $x - 1$ out of the top, but we can't obviously factor one out of the bottom. We need to use an algebraic trick make the $x - 1$ appear. What tricks do we have that might work?

(c) What is $\lim_{X\to 1} h(x)$?

Solution:

(a) The function is reasonable, so it's continuous where defined. IT's undefined at $x = 1$ and also at $x > 5$.

(b) Here we need to multiply by the conjugate. We can compute

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{x-1}{\sqrt{5-x}-2} &= \frac{x-1}{\sqrt{5-x}-2}\frac{\sqrt{5-x}+2}{\sqrt{5-x}+2} \\ &= \frac{(x-1)(\sqrt{5-x}+2)}{(5-x)-4} \\ &= \frac{(x-1)(\sqrt{5-x}+2)}{-(x-1)}. \end{aligned}$$

This function is not the same as $-\sqrt{5-x}-2$, but it's very close.

(c)

$$\begin{aligned} \lim_{x\to 1} \frac{x-1}{\sqrt{5-x}-2} &= \lim_{x\to 1} \frac{x-1}{\sqrt{5-x}-2}\frac{\sqrt{5-x}+2}{\sqrt{5-x}+2} \\ &= \lim_{x\to 1} \frac{(x-1)(\sqrt{5-x}+2)}{(5-x)-4} \\ &= \lim_{x\to 1} \frac{(x-1)(\sqrt{5-x}+2)}{-(x-1)} \\ &= \lim_{x\to 1} -(\sqrt{5-x}+2) = -4. \end{aligned}$$

Problem 5. Let

$$f(x) = \begin{cases} x^2+1 & x > 2 \\ 9-2x & x < 2 \end{cases}$$

Can we extend this to a continuous function on all reals?

(a) Where is f continuous? Where is it discontinuous?

(b) What value "should" $f(x)$ have for $x = 2$?

(c) Can you define a function that's Almost Identical to $f(x)$, but continuous at all reals?

Solution:

(a) f is continuous everywhere it's given by algebra, so everywhere except at $x = 2$.

(b) We can compute $\lim_{x \to 2^-} f(x) = \lim_{x \to 2^-} 9 - 2x = 5$, and $\lim_{x \to 2^+} f(x) = \lim_{x \to 2^+} x^2 + 1 = 5$, so the limit at 2 exists and we have $\lim_{x \to 2} f(x) = 5$.

(c)

$$g(x) = \begin{cases} x^2 + 1 & x \geq 2 \\ 9 - 2x & x \leq 2 \end{cases}$$