

INTRODUCTION TO CALCULUS

MATH 1A

Unit 31: Calculus and Economics

LECTURE

31.1. Calculus is important in **economics**. This is an opportunity to review extrema problems and get acquainted with jargon in economics. Economists talk differently: $f' > 0$ means **growth** or **boom**, $f' < 0$ means **decline** or **recession**, a vertical asymptote is a **crash**, a horizontal asymptote a **stagnation**, a discontinuity is “**inelastic behavior**”, the derivative of something is the marginal of it: like marginal revenue.

Definition: The **marginal cost** is the derivative of the **total cost**.

31.2. Both, the marginal cost and total cost are functions of the quantity of goods produced.

Example: Assume the total cost function is $C(x) = 10x - 0.01x^2$. Find the marginal cost and the place where the total cost is minimal. **Solution.** Differentiate $C' = 10 + 0.02x$ Now find x which makes this vanish. We have $x = 50$.

Example: You sell spring water. The marginal cost to produce it is given by $f(x) = 10000 - x^4$. For which x is the total cost maximal?

Example: In the book "Dominik Heckner and Tobias Kretschmer: Don't worry about Micro, 2008", where the following strawberry story appears: (verbatim citation in italics):

Suppose you have all sizes of strawberries, from very large to very small. Each size of strawberry exists twice except for the smallest, of which you only have one. Let us also say that you line these strawberries up from very large to very small, then to very large again. You take one strawberry after another and place them on a scale that sells you the average weight of all strawberries. The first strawberry that you place in the bucket is very large, while every subsequent one will be smaller until you reach the smallest one. Because of the literal weight of the heavier ones, average weight is larger than marginal weight. Average weight still decreases, although less steeply than marginal weight. Once you reach the smallest strawberry, every subsequent strawberry will be larger which means that the rate of decrease of the average weight becomes smaller and smaller until eventually, it stands still. At this point the marginal weight is just equal to the average weight.

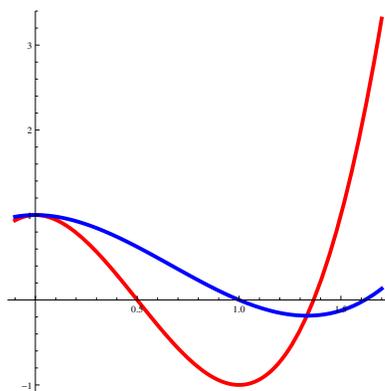


31.3. If $F(x)$ is the **total cost function** in dependence of the quantity x , then $F' = f$ is called the **marginal cost**.

Definition: The function $g(x) = F(x)/x$ is called the **average cost**.

Definition: A point where $f = g$ is called a **break-even point**.

Example: If $f(x) = 4x^3 - 3x^2 + 1$, then $F(x) = x^4 - x^3 + x$ and $g(x) = x^3 - x^2 + 1$. Find the break even point and the points where the average costs are extremal. **Solution:** To get the break even point, we solve $f - g = 0$. We get $f - g = x^2(3x - 4)$ and see that $x = 0$ and $x = 4/3$ are two break even points. The critical point of g are points where $g'(x) = 3x^2 - 4x$. They agree:



The following theorem tells that the marginal cost is equal to the average cost if and only if the average cost has a critical point. Since total costs are typically concave up, we usually have "break even points are minima for the average cost". Since the strawberry story illustrates it well, let's call it the "strawberry theorem":

Strawberry theorem: We have $g'(x) = 0$ if and only if $f = g$.

Proof.

$$g' = (F(x)/x)' = F'/x - F/x^2 = (1/x)(F' - F/x) = (1/x)(f - g).$$

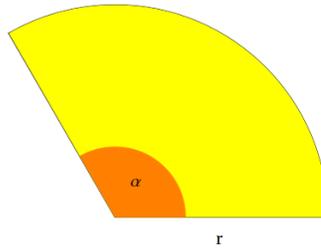
More extremization problems

31.4. In the second part of this lecture we still want to look at more extremization problems, also in the context of data.

Example: Find the rhomboid with side length 1 which has maximal area. Use an angle α to extremize.

Example: Find the sector of radius $r = 1$ and angle α which has minimal circumference $f = 2r + r\alpha$ if the area $r^2\alpha/2 = 1$ is fixed. **Solution.** Find $\alpha = 2/r^2$ from the second equation and plug it into the first equation. We get $f(r) = 2r + 2/r$. Now the task is to find the places where $f'(r) = 0$.

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Example: Find the ellipse of length $2a$ and width $2b$ which has fixed area $\pi ab = \pi$ and for which the sum of diameters $2a + 2b$ is maximal. **Solution.** Find $b = 1/a$ from the first equation and plug into the second equation. Again we have to extremize $f(a) = 2a + 2/a$. The same problem as before.

TO SEE HOW MARGINAL COST CURVES RELATE TO SUPPLY CURVES, LET'S LOOK AT ERNESTO'S COFFEE BUSINESS.

IT TURNS OUT THAT EVERY POINT ON ERNESTO'S SUPPLY CURVE...

MY SUPPLY CURVE SAYS THAT IF THE MARKET PRICE WERE \$2 PER CUP, ...

... I'D MAXIMIZE MY PROFIT BY SELLING 100 CUPS OF COFFEE PER HOUR.

... IS ALSO A POINT ON HIS MARGINAL COST CURVE!

THE MARGINAL COST OF PRODUCING THE 100TH CUP IS \$2.

THAT'S THE DIFFERENCE IN MY TOTAL COSTS BETWEEN PRODUCING 99 CUPS ...

... AND PRODUCING 100 CUPS!

THIS IS TRUE BECAUSE ERNESTO WANTS TO MAXIMIZE HIS PROFIT.

ERNESTO'S SUPPLY CURVE SAYS THAT IF THE MARKET PRICE WERE \$2 PER CUP, HE'D MAXIMIZE HIS PROFIT BY SELLING 100 CUPS.

BUT IF THE 100TH CUP COST MORE THAN \$2 TO PRODUCE...

... I COULD MAKE MORE PROFIT BY SELLING FEWER THAN 100 CUPS AT A MARKET PRICE OF \$2 PER CUP.

AND IF THE 100TH CUP COST LESS THAN \$2 TO PRODUCE...

... I COULD MAKE MORE PROFIT BY SELLING MORE THAN 100 CUPS AT A MARKET PRICE OF \$2 PER CUP.

SINCE HE'S PROFIT-MAXIMIZING, HIS COST OF PRODUCING THE 100TH CUP MUST BE \$2.

IF WE LOOK AT ERNESTO AND ALL THE OTHER COFFEE SELLERS TOGETHER, WE CAN SEE THAT EVERY POINT ON THE MARKET SUPPLY CURVE IS ALSO A POINT ON THE MARKET MARGINAL COST CURVE.

IF THE MARKET SUPPLY CURVE SAYS THAT AT A PRICE OF \$2 ALL THE SELLERS TOGETHER WANT TO SELL 20,000 CUPS OF COFFEE PER HOUR ...

... THEN THE MARKET MARGINAL COST OF PRODUCING THE 20,000TH CUP MUST BE \$2.

AGAIN, THE REASON IS PROFIT MAXIMIZATION.

IF THE 20,000TH CUP COST MORE THAN \$2 TO PRODUCE ...

... AT LEAST ONE OF US COULD MAKE MORE PROFIT BY SELLING FEWER CUPS AT A MARKET PRICE OF \$2!

AND IF THE 20,000TH CUP COST LESS THAN \$2 TO PRODUCE ...

... AT LEAST ONE OF US COULD MAKE MORE PROFIT BY SELLING MORE CUPS AT A MARKET PRICE OF \$2!

ALL THESE LOGICAL ARGUMENTS CAN BE BACKED UP WITH ROCK-SOLID MATHEMATICS ...

... BUT WE'D NEED TO DO SOME CALCULUS.

Facing market price p , a firm in a competitive market chooses quantity q to maximize profit π :

$$\pi = pq - c(q)$$

$$\frac{d\pi}{dq} = 0 \Rightarrow p = c'(q)$$

So either $q=0$ or the firm produces until marginal cost equals the market price!



Source: Grady Klein and Yoram Bauman, The Cartoon Introduction to Economics: Volume One Microeconomics, published by Hill and Wang. You can detect the strawberry theorem ($g' = 0$ is equivalent to $f = g$) can be seen on the blackboard.

Homework

Problem 31.1: a) Find the break-even point for an economic system if the marginal cost is $f(x) = 1/x$.
 b) Assume the marginal cost is $f(x) = x^7$. Verify that the average cost $g(x) = F(x)/x$ satisfies $8g(x) = f(x)$ and that $x = 0$ is the only break even point.

Problem 31.2: Let $f(x) = \cos(x)$. Compute $F(x)$ and $g(x)$ and verify that $f = g$ agrees with $g' = 0$.

Problem 31.3: The **production function** in an office gives the production $Q(L)$ in dependence of labor L . Assume

$$Q(L) = 5000L^3 - 3L^5 .$$

Find L which gives the maximal production.

This can be typical: For smaller groups, production usually increases when adding more workforce. After some point, bottle necks occur, not all resources can be used at the same time, management and bureaucracy is added, each person has less impact and feels less responsible, meetings slow down production etc. In this range, adding more people will decrease the productivity.



Problem 31.4: **Marginal revenue** f is the rate of change in **total revenue** F . As total and marginal cost, these are functions of the **cost** x . Assume the total revenue is $F(x) = -5x - x^5 + 9x^3$. Find the points, where the total revenue has a local maximum.

Problem 31.5: Find a line $y = mx$ through the points

$$(3, 4), (6, 3), (2, 5) ,$$

which minimize the function

$$f(m) = (3m - 4)^2 + (6m - 3)^2 + (2m - 5)^2 .$$