

L'Hôpital's rule

This rule can be applied to compute limits when:

1. the limit is written as a quotient of the form $\frac{0}{0}$ or $\frac{\infty}{\infty}$,
2. $f(x)$ and $g(x)$ are differentiable on a open interval I that contains the point a and $g'(x) \neq 0$ on I except possibly at a ,
3. the limit $\lim_{x \rightarrow a} \frac{f'(x)}{g'(x)}$ exists.

Then

$$\lim_{x \rightarrow a} \frac{f(x)}{g(x)} = \lim_{x \rightarrow a} \frac{f'(x)}{g'(x)}.$$

L'Hôpital's rule can be applied several times as long as the quotient is $\frac{0}{0}$ or $\frac{\infty}{\infty}$ and the other conditions hold as well (of course).

It also holds for one-sided limits.

Compute the following limits:

a) $\lim_{x \rightarrow 0} \frac{e^x - 1}{\tan x}$

b) $\lim_{x \rightarrow \infty} \frac{x}{e^x}$

c) $\lim_{x \rightarrow \infty} \frac{x^2}{e^x}$

Let us now consider the following limits. What are their “types”?

What do we need to do to apply L'Hôpital's rule to compute these limits?

d) $\lim_{x \rightarrow 0^+} x \ln x$

e) $\lim_{x \rightarrow \infty} x^{1/x}$

f) $\lim_{x \rightarrow \infty} \left(1 + \frac{1}{x}\right)^x$

- g) A student wants to compute the limit $\lim_{x \rightarrow \infty} \frac{x + \sin x}{x}$.
To do so, he uses L'Hôpital's rule and gets:

$$\begin{aligned} \lim_{x \rightarrow \infty} \frac{x + \sin x}{x} &= \frac{\infty}{\infty}, \text{ use L'Hôpital's rule} \\ &= \lim_{x \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1 + \cos x}{1} \\ &= \lim_{x \rightarrow \infty} 1 + \cos x. \end{aligned}$$

As $\cos x$ oscillates when x goes to infinity, he concludes that the limit $\lim_{x \rightarrow \infty} \frac{x + \sin x}{x}$ does not exist.

Do you agree with this reasoning? If so, explain why you think it is correct. If not, explain where there is a flaw.

- h) Explain in words (and without mathematical symbols) what L'Hôpital's rule means in geometrical terms.