Section 8.4: Trigonometric Substitution

Motivation: If we want to find the area of a circle or ellipse, we have an integral of the form

$$\int \sqrt{a^2 - x^2}\, dx$$

where $a > 0$. Regular substitution will not work here, observe:

$$u = a^2 - x^2$$
$$du = -2x\, dx \longleftarrow \text{ extra factor of } x \ldots$$

Solution: Parametrise! We change x to a function of θ by letting $x = a\sin(\theta)$ so,

Generally, we use an injective (one-to-one) function (so it has an inverse) to simplify calculations. Above, we ensure $a\sin(\theta)$ is invertible by restricting the domain to $\left[-\frac{\pi}{2}, \frac{\pi}{2}\right]$.

Common Trig Substitutions: The following is a summary of when to use each trig substitution.

Integral contains:	Substitution	Domain	Identity
$\sqrt{a^2 - x^2}$	$x = a\sin(\theta)$	$\left[-\frac{\pi}{2}, \frac{\pi}{2}\right]$	$1 - \sin^2(\theta) = \cos^2(\theta)$
$\sqrt{a^2 + x^2}$	$x = a\tan(\theta)$	$\left(-\frac{\pi}{2}, \frac{\pi}{2}\right)$	$1 + \tan^2(\theta) = \sec^2(\theta)$
$\sqrt{x^2 - a^2}$	$x = a\sec(\theta)$	$\left[0, \frac{\pi}{2}\right)$	$\sec^2(\theta) - 1 = \tan^2(\theta)$

If you are worried about remembering the identities, then don't! They can all be derived easily, assuming you know three basic ones (which by now you should):

$$\sin^2(\theta) + \cos^2(\theta) = 1, \qquad \sec(\theta) = \frac{1}{\cos(\theta)}, \qquad \tan(\theta) = \frac{\sin(\theta)}{\cos(\theta)}$$

Example 1: Evaluate

$$\int \frac{\sqrt{9 - x^2}}{x^2}\, dx.$$

Example 2: Find

$$\int \frac{1}{x^2\sqrt{x^2+4}}\,dx.$$

Example 3: Evaluate

$$\int \frac{x^2}{\sqrt{9-x^2}}\,dx.$$