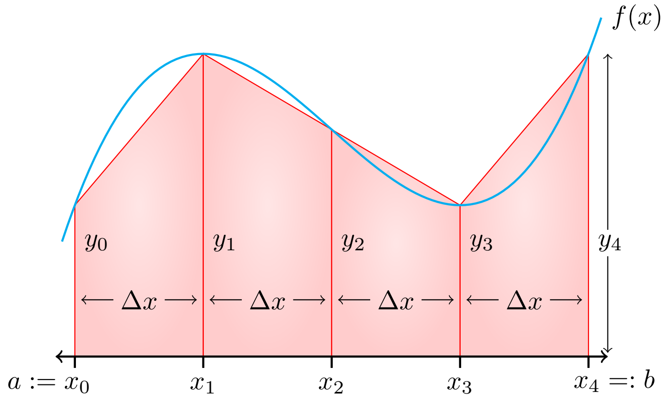
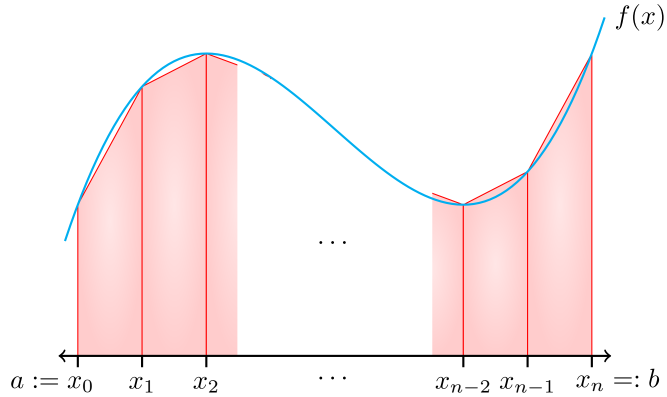
Section 8.7: Numerical Integration

What to do when there's no nice antiderivative? The antiderivatives of some functions, like $\sin(x^2)$, $1/\ln(x)$ and $\sqrt{1+x^4}$ have no elementary formulas/ When we cannot find a workable antiderivative for a function $f(x)$ that we have to integrate, we can partition the interval of integration, replace $f(x)$ by a closely fitting polynomial on each subinterval, integrate the poynomials and add the results to *approximate* the definite integral of $f(x)$. This is an example of numerical integration. There are many methods of numerical integration but we will study only two: the *Trapezium Rule* and *Simpson's Rule*.

Trapezoidal Approximations: As the name implies, the Trapezium Rule for the value of a definite integral is based on approximating the region between a curve and the x-axis with trapeziums instead of rectangles - which, if you recall, we studied when we looked at Riemann integration in Calculus I.





The Trapezium Rule: To approximate $\int_a^b f(x)\,dx$, use

$$\begin{aligned} T &= \frac{\Delta x}{2}\left(y_0 + 2y_1 + 2y_2 + \cdots + 2y_{n-1} + y_n\right) \\ &= \frac{\Delta x}{2}\left(f(x_0) + f(x_n) + 2\sum_{i=1}^{n-1} f\left(x_i\right)\right), \end{aligned}$$

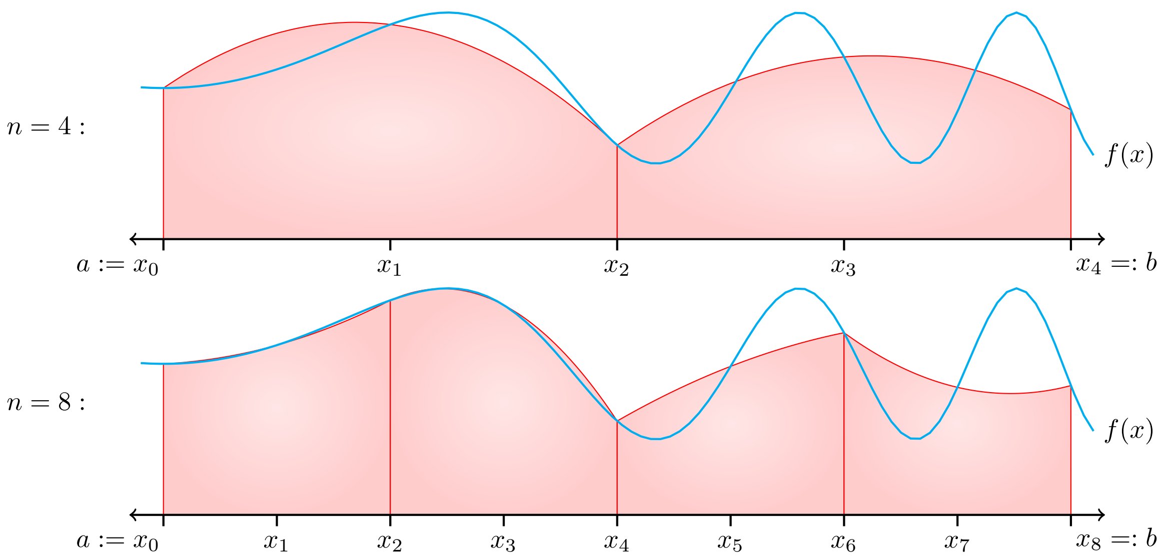
where the y's are the values of f at the partition points

$$x_0 := a,\ x_1 := a + \Delta x,\ x_2 := a + 2\Delta x,\ \ \ldots,\ x_{n-1} := a + (n-1)\Delta x,\ x_n := a + n\Delta x = b,$$

and $\Delta x = \dfrac{b-a}{n}$.

Example 1: Use the Trapezium Rule with $n = 4$ to estimate $\int_1^2 x^2\,dx$. Compare the estimate with the exact value.

Parabolic Approximations: Instead of using the straight-line segments that produced the trapeziums, we can use parabolas to approximate the definite integral of a continuous function. We partition the interval $[a, b]$ into n subintervals of equal length $\Delta x = \dfrac{b-a}{n}$ but this time we require n to be an even number. On each consecutive pair of intervals we approximate the curve $y = f(x) \geq 0$ by a parabola. A typical parabola passed through three consecutive points: (x_{i-1}, y_{i-1}), (x_i, y_i) and (x_{i+1}, y_{i+1}) on the curve.



Simpson's Rule: To approximate $\int_a^b f(x)\,dx$, use

$$\begin{aligned} S &= \frac{\Delta x}{3}\left(y_0 + 4y_1 + 2y_2 + 4y_3 + \cdots + 2y_{n-2} + 4y_{n-1} + y_n\right) \\ &= \frac{\Delta x}{3}\left(f\left(x_0\right) + f\left(x_n\right) + 2\left(\sum_{i=1}^{\frac{n-1}{2}} f\left(x_{2i-1}\right) + 2f\left(x_{2i}\right)\right)\right), \end{aligned}$$

where the y's are the values of f at the partition points

$$x_0 := a,\ x_1 := a + \Delta x,\ x_2 := a + 2\Delta x,\ \ldots,\ x_{n-1} := a + (n-1)\Delta x,\ x_n := a + n\Delta x = b,$$

and $\Delta x = \dfrac{b-a}{n}$ with n an *even* number.

Example 2: Use the Simpson's Rule with $n = 4$ to approximate $\int_0^2 5x^4\,dx$. Compare the estimate with the exact value.

Error Estimates in the Trapezium and Simpson's Rules If $f''(x)$ is continuous and M is any upper bound for the values of $|f''(x)|$ on $[a, b]$, then the error E_T in the Trapezium Rule for approximating the definite integral of $f(x)$ over the interval $[a, b]$ using n trapeziums satisfies the inequality

$$|E_T| \leq \frac{M(b-a)^3}{12n^2}.$$

If $f^{(4)}(x)$ is continuous and M is any upper bound for the values of $|f^{(4)}(x)|$ on $[a, b]$, then the error E_S in Simpson's Rule for approximating the definite integral of $f(x)$ over the interval $[a, b]$ using $\frac{n}{2}$ parabolas satisfies the inequality

$$|E_S| \leq \frac{M(b-a)^5}{180n^4}.$$

Example 3: Find an upper bound for the error in estimating $\int_0^2 5x^4\,dx$ using Simpson's Rule with $n = 4$. What value of n should we pick so that the error is within 0.001 of the true value?