9.5

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9.5 Alternating Series

- **Use the Alternating Series Test to determine whether an infinite series converges.**
- **Use the Alternating Series Remainder to approximate the sum of an alternating series.**
- **Classify a convergent series as absolutely or conditionally convergent.**
- **Rearrange an infinite series to obtain a different sum.**

Alternating Series

So far, most series you have dealt with have had positive terms. In this section and the next section, you will study series that contain both positive and negative terms. The simplest such series is an **alternating series,** whose terms alternate in sign. For example, the geometric series

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty}\left(-\frac{1}{2}\right)^n = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty}(-1)^n\frac{1}{2^n}$$
$$= 1 - \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} - \frac{1}{8} + \frac{1}{16} - \cdots$$

is an *alternating geometric series* with $r = -\frac{1}{2}$. Alternating series occur in two ways: either the odd terms are negative or the even terms are negative.

THEOREM 9.14 Alternating Series Test

Let $a_n > 0$. The alternating series

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty}(-1)^n a_n \quad \text{and} \quad \sum_{n=1}^{\infty}(-1)^{n+1} a_n$$

converge when the two conditions listed below are met.

1. $\lim_{n\to\infty} a_n = 0$

2. $a_{n+1} \le a_n$, for all n

REMARK The second condition in the Alternating Series Test can be modified to require only that $0 < a_{n+1} \le a_n$ for all n greater than some integer N.

Proof Consider the alternating series $\Sigma(-1)^{n+1}a_n$. For this series, the partial sum (where $2n$ is even)

$$S_{2n} = (a_1 - a_2) + (a_3 - a_4) + (a_5 - a_6) + \cdots + (a_{2n-1} - a_{2n})$$

has all nonnegative terms, and therefore $\{S_{2n}\}$ is a nondecreasing sequence. But you can also write

$$S_{2n} = a_1 - (a_2 - a_3) - (a_4 - a_5) - \cdots - (a_{2n-2} - a_{2n-1}) - a_{2n}$$

which implies that $S_{2n} \le a_1$ for every integer n. So, $\{S_{2n}\}$ is a bounded, nondecreasing sequence that converges to some value L. Because $S_{2n-1} - a_{2n} = S_{2n}$ and $a_{2n} \to 0$, you have

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} S_{2n-1} = \lim_{n\to\infty} S_{2n} + \lim_{n\to\infty} a_{2n}$$
$$= L + \lim_{n\to\infty} a_{2n}$$
$$= L.$$

Because both S_{2n} and S_{2n-1} converge to the same limit L, it follows that $\{S_n\}$ also converges to L. Consequently, the given alternating series converges. ■

See LarsonCalculus.com for Bruce Edwards's video of this proof.