

Exercise 65

Use the definition of a derivative to show that if $f(x) = 1/x$, then $f'(x) = -1/x^2$. (This proves the Power Rule for the case $n = -1$.)

Solution

Use the definition of the derivative to establish the power rule for the case $n = -1$.

$$\begin{aligned} f'(x) &= \lim_{h \rightarrow 0} \frac{f(x+h) - f(x)}{h} \\ &= \lim_{h \rightarrow 0} \frac{\frac{1}{x+h} - \frac{1}{x}}{h} \\ &= \lim_{h \rightarrow 0} \frac{\frac{x}{x(x+h)} - \frac{x+h}{x(x+h)}}{h} \\ &= \lim_{h \rightarrow 0} \frac{\frac{x-(x+h)}{x(x+h)}}{h} \\ &= \lim_{h \rightarrow 0} \frac{\frac{-h}{x(x+h)}}{h} \\ &= \lim_{h \rightarrow 0} \frac{-h}{hx(x+h)} \\ &= \lim_{h \rightarrow 0} \frac{-1}{x(x+h)} \\ &= \frac{-1}{x(x+0)} \\ &= -\frac{1}{x^2} \end{aligned}$$