Combinations of Functions

Two functions f and g can be combined to form new functions $f + g$, $f - g$, fg, and f/g in a manner similar to the way we add, subtract, multiply, and divide real numbers. The sum and difference functions are defined by

$$(f + g)(x) = f(x) + g(x) \qquad (f - g)(x) = f(x) - g(x)$$

If the domain of f is A and the domain of g is B, then the domain of $f + g$ is the intersection $A \cap B$ because both $f(x)$ and $g(x)$ have to be defined. For example, the domain of $f(x) = \sqrt{x}$ is $A = [0, \infty)$ and the domain of $g(x) = \sqrt{2 - x}$ is $B = (-\infty, 2]$, so the domain of $(f + g)(x) = \sqrt{x} + \sqrt{2 - x}$ is $A \cap B = [0, 2]$.

Similarly, the product and quotient functions are defined by

$$(fg)(x) = f(x)g(x) \qquad \left(\frac{f}{g}\right)(x) = \frac{f(x)}{g(x)}$$

The domain of fg is $A \cap B$, but we can't divide by 0 and so the domain of f/g is $\{x \in A \cap B \mid g(x) \neq 0\}$. For instance, if $f(x) = x^2$ and $g(x) = x - 1$, then the domain of the rational function $(f/g)(x) = x^2/(x - 1)$ is $\{x \mid x \neq 1\}$, or $(-\infty, 1) \cup (1, \infty)$.

There is another way of combining two functions to obtain a new function. For example, suppose that $y = f(u) = \sqrt{u}$ and $u = g(x) = x^2 + 1$. Since y is a function of u and u is, in turn, a function of x, it follows that y is ultimately a function of x. We compute this by substitution:

$$y = f(u) = f(g(x)) = f(x^2 + 1) = \sqrt{x^2 + 1}$$

The procedure is called *composition* because the new function is *composed* of the two given functions f and g.

In general, given any two functions f and g, we start with a number x in the domain of g and calculate $g(x)$. If this number $g(x)$ is in the domain of f, then we can calculate the value of $f(g(x))$. Notice that the output of one function is used as the input to the next function. The result is a new function $h(x) = f(g(x))$ obtained by substituting g into f. It is called the *composition* (or *composite*) of f and g and is denoted by $f \circ g$ ("f circle g").

Definition Given two functions f and g, the **composite function** $f \circ g$ (also called the **composition** of f and g) is defined by

$$(f \circ g)(x) = f(g(x))$$

The domain of $f \circ g$ is the set of all x in the domain of g such that $g(x)$ is in the domain of f. In other words, $(f \circ g)(x)$ is defined whenever both $g(x)$ and $f(g(x))$ are defined. Figure 6 shows how to picture $f \circ g$ in terms of machines.

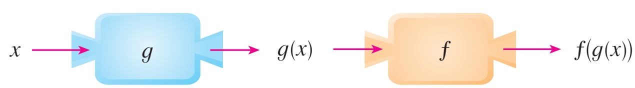

FIGURE 6
The $f \circ g$ machine is composed of the g machine (first) and then the f machine.

EXAMPLE 4 If $f(x) = x^2$ and $g(x) = x - 3$, find the composite functions $f \circ g$ and $g \circ f$.

SOLUTION We have

$$(f \circ g)(x) = f(g(x)) = f(x - 3) = (x - 3)^2$$

$$(g \circ f)(x) = g(f(x)) = g(x^2) = x^2 - 3$$ ■

NOTE You can see from Example 4 that, in general, $f \circ g \neq g \circ f$. Remember, the notation $f \circ g$ means that the function g is applied first and then f is applied second. In Example 4, $f \circ g$ is the function that *first* subtracts 3 and *then* squares; $g \circ f$ is the function that *first* squares and *then* subtracts 3.

EXAMPLE 5 If $f(x) = \sqrt{x}$ and $g(x) = \sqrt{2 - x}$, find each of the following functions and their domains.

(a) $f \circ g$ (b) $g \circ f$ (c) $f \circ f$ (d) $g \circ g$

SOLUTION

(a) $$(f \circ g)(x) = f(g(x)) = f\left(\sqrt{2 - x}\right) = \sqrt{\sqrt{2 - x}} = \sqrt[4]{2 - x}$$

The domain of $f \circ g$ is $\{x \mid 2 - x \geqslant 0\} = \{x \mid x \leqslant 2\} = (-\infty, 2]$.

(b) $$(g \circ f)(x) = g(f(x)) = g\left(\sqrt{x}\right) = \sqrt{2 - \sqrt{x}}$$

For $\sqrt{x}$ to be defined we must have $x \geqslant 0$. For $\sqrt{2 - \sqrt{x}}$ to be defined we must have $2 - \sqrt{x} \geqslant 0$, that is, $\sqrt{x} \leqslant 2$, or $x \leqslant 4$. Thus we have $0 \leqslant x \leqslant 4$, so the domain of $g \circ f$ is the closed interval $[0, 4]$.

(c) $$(f \circ f)(x) = f(f(x)) = f\left(\sqrt{x}\right) = \sqrt{\sqrt{x}} = \sqrt[4]{x}$$

The domain of $f \circ f$ is $[0, \infty)$.

(d) $$(g \circ g)(x) = g(g(x)) = g\left(\sqrt{2 - x}\right) = \sqrt{2 - \sqrt{2 - x}}$$

This expression is defined when both $2 - x \geqslant 0$ and $2 - \sqrt{2 - x} \geqslant 0$. The first inequality means $x \leqslant 2$, and the second is equivalent to $\sqrt{2 - x} \leqslant 2$, or $2 - x \leqslant 4$, or $x \geqslant -2$. Thus $-2 \leqslant x \leqslant 2$, so the domain of $g \circ g$ is the closed interval $[-2, 2]$. ■

It is possible to take the composition of three or more functions. For instance, the composite function $f \circ g \circ h$ is found by first applying h, then g, and then f as follows:

$$(f \circ g \circ h)(x) = f(g(h(x)))$$

EXAMPLE 6 Find $f \circ g \circ h$ if $f(x) = x/(x + 1)$, $g(x) = x^{10}$, and $h(x) = x + 3$.

SOLUTION

$$(f \circ g \circ h)(x) = f(g(h(x))) = f(g(x + 3))$$

$$= f((x + 3)^{10}) = \frac{(x + 3)^{10}}{(x + 3)^{10} + 1}$$ ■

So far we have used composition to build complicated functions from simpler ones. But in calculus it is often useful to be able to *decompose* a complicated function into simpler ones, as in the following example.

EXAMPLE 7 Given $F(x) = \cos^2(x + 9)$, find functions f, g, and h such that $F = f \circ g \circ h$.

SOLUTION Since $F(x) = [\cos(x + 9)]^2$, the formula for F says: First add 9, then take the cosine of the result, and finally square. So we let

$$h(x) = x + 9 \qquad g(x) = \cos x \qquad f(x) = x^2$$

Then

$$\begin{aligned}(f \circ g \circ h)(x) &= f(g(h(x))) = f(g(x + 9)) = f(\cos(x + 9)) \\ &= [\cos(x + 9)]^2 = F(x)\end{aligned}$$

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