CS260
Lecture 2: Differential Equation Basics
A Canonical Differential Equation

\[
\dot{x} = f(x, t)
\]

- \(x(t)\): a moving point.
- \(f(x,t)\): x’s velocity.
Vector Field

The differential equation

\[ \dot{x} = f(x, t) \]

defines a vector field over \( x \).
Integral Curves

Start Here

Pick any starting point, and follow the vectors.
Initial Value Problems

Given the starting point, follow the integral curve.

\[
\begin{align*}
\dot{x}(t) &= f(x, t) \\
x(t_0) &= x_0
\end{align*}
\Rightarrow \quad x(t), \ t \geq t_0
Some simpler IVPs have closed form solutions

\[
\begin{aligned}
\dot{x}(t) &= -k x(t) \\
 x(t_0) &= x_0
\end{aligned}
\]

\[\Rightarrow x(t) = x_0 e^{-k(t-t_0)}, \quad t \geq t_0\]
Numerical Solutions

$x_0, t_0$
Numerical Solutions

\[ x_0, t_0 \]

\[ f(x_0, t_0) \]
Numerical Solutions

\[ \Delta x = \Delta t f(x_0, t_0) \]

\( x_0, t_0 \)

\( x_1, t_1 \)
Numerical Solutions

\[ x_0, t_0 \]

\[ x_1, t_1 \]

\[ f(x_1, t_1) \]
Numerical Solutions

\[ x_0, t_0 \quad \Delta t f(x_1, t_1) \quad x_1, t_1 \quad x_2, t_2 \]
Numerical Solutions
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Euler’s Method

• Simplest numerical solution method
• Discrete time steps
• Bigger steps, bigger errors.

\[ x(t + \Delta t) = x(t) + \Delta t f(x, t) \]
Efficiency

cost = $\frac{\text{cost}}{\text{step}} \times \# \text{ steps}$
Problem I: Inaccuracy

Error turns $x(t)$ from a circle into the spiral of your choice.
The Midpoint Method

a. Compute an Euler step
\[ \Delta x = \Delta t f(x, t) \]

b. Evaluate \( f \) at the midpoint
\[ f_{\text{mid}} = f \left( x + \frac{\Delta x}{2}, t + \frac{\Delta t}{2} \right) \]

c. Take a step using the midpoint value
\[ x(t + \Delta t) = x(t) + \Delta t f_{\text{mid}} \]
Adaptive Time Stepping

smaller step

larger step
More methods...

• Euler’s method is 1st Order.
• The midpoint method is 2nd Order.
• Just the tip of the iceberg. See *Numerical Recipes* for more.
• Helpful hints:
  – *Don’t* use Euler’s method (you will anyway.)
  – *Do* use adaptive step size.
Problem II: Instability

to Neptune!
As unresolved surface features accumulate, they can cause instability.
Convergence

consistency + stability \rightarrow \text{convergence}

\textbf{see also:} Dahlquist equivalence theorem, and Lax equivalence theorem
Modular Implementation

- Generic operations:
  - Get dim(x)
  - Get/set x and t
  - Deriv Eval at current (x,t)

- Write solvers in terms of these.
  - Re-usable solver code.
  - Simplifies model implementation.
Solver Interface

System

Solver

Dim(state)

Get/Set State

Deriv Eval
void eulerStep(Sys sys, float dt)
{
    float t;
    vector<float> x, dx;
    t = getTime(sys);
    x = getState(sys);
    dx = dt * derivEval(sys, x, t);
    setState(sys, x + dx, t + dt);
}