Backward Difference Approximation of the First Derivative

We know

$$f'(x) = \lim_{\Delta x \to 0} \frac{f(x+\Delta x) - f(x)}{\Delta x}$$

For a finite Δx,

$$f'(x) \approx \frac{f(x+\Delta x) - f(x)}{\Delta x}$$

If Δx is chosen as a negative number,

$$f'(x) \approx \frac{f(x+\Delta x) - f(x)}{\Delta x}$$

$$= \frac{f(x) - f(x-\Delta x)}{\Delta x}$$

This is a backward difference approximation as you are taking a point backward from x. To find the value of $f'(x)$ at $x = x_i$, we may choose another point Δx behind as $x = x_{i-1}$. This gives

$$f'(x_i) \approx \frac{f(x_i) - f(x_{i-1})}{\Delta x}$$

$$= \frac{f(x_i) - f(x_{i-1})}{x_i - x_{i-1}}$$

where

$$\Delta x = x_i - x_{i-1}$$

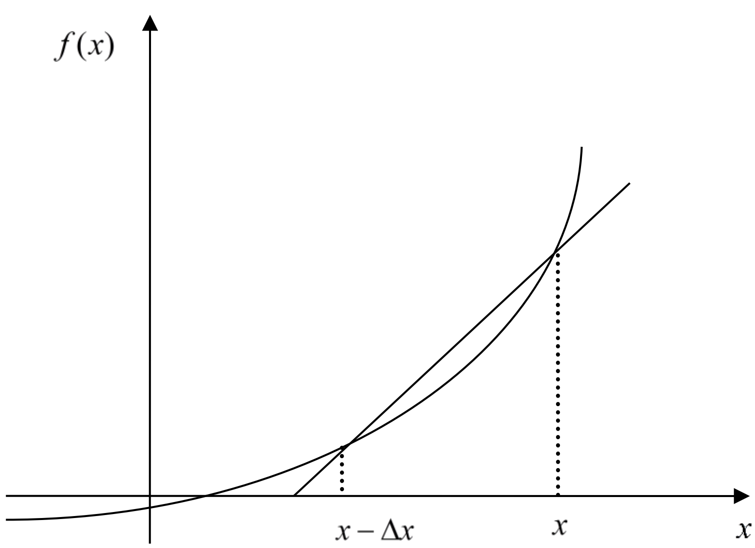

Figure 2 Graphical representation of backward difference approximation of first derivative.