Forward Difference Approximation of the First Derivative

From differential calculus, we know

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

For a finite Δx,

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

The above is the forward divided difference approximation of the first derivative. It is called forward because you are taking a point ahead of x. To find the value of $f'(x)$ at $x = x_i$, we may choose another point Δx ahead as $x = x_{i+1}$. This gives

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

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

where

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

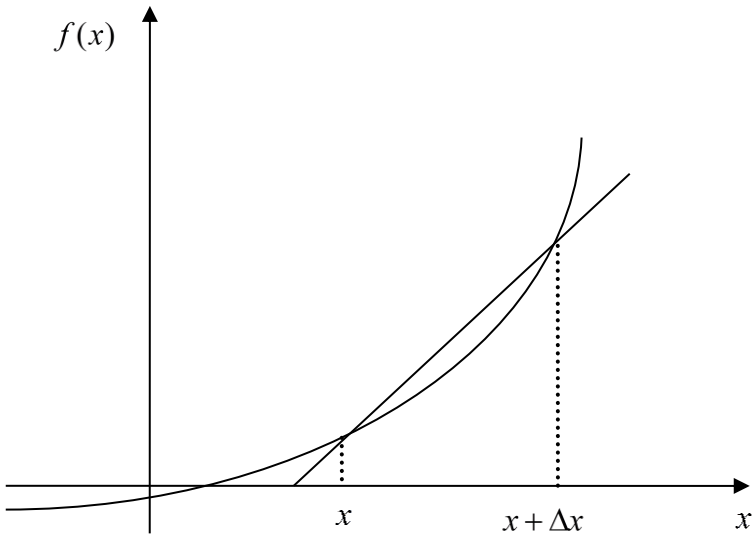

Figure 1 Graphical representation of forward difference approximation of first derivative.