L'Hôpital's Rule:

When we started in with limits we motivated them by observing we need to deal with $\frac{0}{0}$ to cope with

instantaneous rates of change. And we built derivative technology to avoid dealing with these limits directly

But we get a sort of payback at this point: we can use derivatives to compute $\frac{0}{0}$ limits:

Let's see it in action:

$$\lim_{x\to 0} \frac{\sin(x)}{x} \qquad \lim_{x\to 0} \sin(x) = \sin(0) = 0 \qquad \frac{0}{0}$$

$$\lim_{x\to 0} x = 0$$

$$\lim_{x\to 0} \frac{\sin(x)}{x} = \lim_{x\to 0} \frac{\frac{d}{dx}\sin(x)}{\frac{d}{dx}x} = \lim_{x\to 0} \frac{\cos(x)}{1} = \frac{\cos(0)}{1} = 1.$$

It's gonna be that easy.

L'Hôpital's Rule (Basic Version)

Suppose f, g are differentiable at a and $f(a) = g(a) = 0$, and $g'(x) \neq$ near a, except possibly at a.

Then $$\lim_{x \to a} \frac{f(x)}{g(x)} = \lim_{x \to a} \frac{f'(x)}{g'(x)}$$

so long as the latter limit exists or is $\pm \infty$.

e.g. $$\lim_{x \to 2\pi} \frac{\cos(x) - 1}{x - 2\pi}$$

$\cos(2\pi) - 1 = 0$ ✓

$\cancel{2\pi} - 2\pi = 0$ ✓

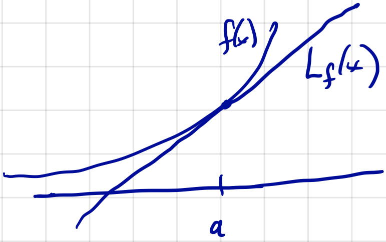
$$\lim_{x \to 2\pi} \frac{\cos(x) - 1}{x - 2\pi} = \lim_{x \to 2\pi} \frac{-\sin(x)}{1} = -\sin(2\pi) = -0 = 0.$$

You absolutely, positively must verify the hypotheses: you're looking for $0/0$.

$$\lim_{x \to 2\pi} \frac{\cos(x)}{x} = \frac{\cos(2\pi)}{2\pi} = \frac{1}{2\pi}$$

not $$\frac{-\sin(2\pi)}{1} = 0$$

Why does this work? Sketch:



$f(x) \approx L_f(x)$ for x near a.

And if $f(a)=0$

$$L_f(x) = f(a) + f'(a)(x-a) \qquad f(a)=0$$

$$L_f(x) = f'(a)(x-a)$$

$$L_g(x) = g'(a)(x-a)$$

x near a

$$\frac{f(x)}{g(x)} \approx \frac{L_f(x)}{L_g(x)} = \frac{f'(a)(x-a)}{g'(a)(x-a)}$$

So $\displaystyle\lim_{x\to a} \frac{f(x)}{g(x)} \approx \lim_{x\to a} \left[\frac{f'(a)(x-a)}{g'(a)(x-a)}\right] = \frac{f'(a)}{g'(a)}$

There are variations on the rule:

1) It applies to limits at ∞:

$$\lim_{x\to\infty} f(x) = 0 \qquad \lim_{x\to\infty} \frac{f(x)}{g(x)} = \lim_{x\to\infty} \frac{f'(x)}{g'(x)}$$

$$\lim_{x\to\infty} g(x) = 0$$

e.g: $\displaystyle \lim_{x\to\infty} \frac{\overset{\to\infty}{x}}{\underset{\to\infty}{e^x}} = \lim_{x\to\infty} \frac{1}{e^x} = \frac{1}{\infty} = 0$

2) You can use it if the result is $\pm\infty$, and for one-sided limits

e.g $\displaystyle \lim_{x\to 0^+} \frac{x}{\cos(x)-1} = \lim_{x\to 0^+} \frac{1}{-\sin(x)} = \frac{1}{0^-} = -\infty$

3) You can use it for indeterminate forms $0 \cdot \infty$ if you can massage into $\frac{0}{0}$ or $\frac{\infty}{\infty}$

e.g. $\lim\limits_{x \to \infty} x^3 e^{-x}$ $\qquad x^3 \to \infty$ $\qquad \infty \cdot 0 = ?$

$\qquad e^{-x} \to 0$

$$= \lim_{x\to\infty} \frac{x^3}{e^x} \underset{\text{l'Hôpital}}{=} \lim_{x\to\infty} \underbrace{\frac{3x^2}{e^x}}_{\frac{\infty}{\infty}} \underset{\text{l'Hôpital}}{=} \lim_{x\to\infty} \underbrace{\frac{6x}{e^x}}_{\frac{\infty}{\infty}} \underset{\text{l'Hôpital}}{=} \lim_{x\to\infty} \frac{6}{e^x} = \frac{6}{\infty} = 0.$$

4) And even 1^∞, 0^0, ∞^0 with more massaging using $\ln$, e^x:

e.g. $\lim_{x\to 0} x^x$

a) apply ln, compute limit

$$\lim_{x\to 0} \ln(x^x) = \lim_{x\to 0} x\ln(x) = \lim_{x\to 0} \frac{\ln(x)}{\frac{1}{x}} = \lim_{x\to 0} \frac{\frac{1}{x}}{-\frac{1}{x^2}}$$

$\frac{-\infty}{\infty}$ ✓

$$= \lim_{x\to 0} \frac{-x^2}{x}$$

$$= 0$$

b) apply e^x

$$\lim_{x\to 0} x^x = \lim_{x\to 0} e^{\ln(x^x)} = e^0 = 1$$

And even $\infty - \infty$ sometimes

$$\lim_{x\to 1^+} \frac{1}{\ln(x)} - \frac{1}{x-1} \qquad \infty - \infty$$

$$= \lim_{x\to 1^+} \frac{(x-1) - \ln(x)}{(x-1)\ln(x)}$$

$\frac{0}{0}$

$$\overset{H}{=} \lim_{x\to 1^+} \frac{1-\frac{1}{x}}{\ln(x) + \frac{x-1}{x}} \overset{H}{=} \lim_{x\to 1^+} \frac{\frac{1}{x^2}}{\frac{1}{x}+\frac{1}{x^2}} = \lim_{x\to 1^+} \frac{1}{x+1} = \frac{1}{2}$$