3.9 Related rates

1. find a relation between the given quantities, and take the derivative of both sides of the equation to find the related rate.

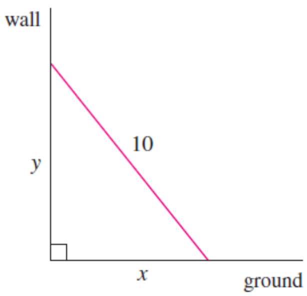

FIGURE 1

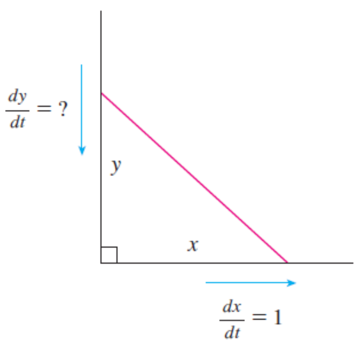

FIGURE 2

EXAMPLE 2 A ladder 10 ft long rests against a vertical wall. If the bottom of the ladder slides away from the wall at a rate of 1 ft/s, how fast is the top of the ladder sliding down the wall when the bottom of the ladder is 6 ft from the wall?

SOLUTION We first draw a diagram and label it as in Figure 1. Let x feet be the distance from the bottom of the ladder to the wall and y feet the distance from the top of the ladder to the ground. Note that x and y are both functions of t (time, measured in seconds).

We are given that $dx/dt = 1$ ft/s and we are asked to find dy/dt when $x = 6$ ft (see Figure 2). In this problem, the relationship between x and y is given by the Pythagorean Theorem:

$$x^2 + y^2 = 100$$

Differentiating each side with respect to t using the Chain Rule, we have

$$2x\frac{dx}{dt} + 2y\frac{dy}{dt} = 0$$

and solving this equation for the desired rate, we obtain

$$\frac{dy}{dt} = -\frac{x}{y}\frac{dx}{dt}$$

When $x = 6$, the Pythagorean Theorem gives $y = 8$ and so, substituting these values and $dx/dt = 1$, we have

$$\frac{dy}{dt} = -\frac{6}{8}(1) = -\frac{3}{4} \text{ ft/s}$$

The fact that dy/dt is negative means that the distance from the top of the ladder to the ground is *decreasing* at a rate of $\frac{3}{4}$ ft/s. In other words, the top of the ladder is sliding down the wall at a rate of $\frac{3}{4}$ ft/s. ■