

What is the definition of slope in math

Unveiling the Secrets of Slope: A Mathematical Journey Ever gazed at a mountain range and wondered how its incline is measured? Or perhaps you've grappled with a physics problem involving velocity and acceleration? The answer to both lies in a fundamental mathematical concept: slope. This seemingly simple idea unlocks a universe of applications, from navigating intricate terrains to predicting future trends. This will delve into the depths of slope, unraveling its definition, exploring its applications, and empowering you to conquer any mathematical challenge that involves this powerful concept.

Understanding the Essence of Slope

Slope, in its simplest form, describes the steepness of a line. Imagine a road—a gentle incline represents a low slope, while a precipitous drop represents a high slope. Mathematically, slope quantifies this steepness by calculating the ratio of the vertical change to the horizontal change between any two distinct points on the line. This ratio is constant for a straight line, making it a crucial characteristic.

The Formula Unveiled

The fundamental formula for calculating slope is: $\text{Slope (m)} = (y_2 - y_1) / (x_2 - x_1)$ Where: • (x_1, y_1) and (x_2, y_2) are the coordinates of two distinct points on the line. This formula elegantly captures the relationship between the change in y-values (vertical change) and the change in x-values (horizontal change) as you move along the line. This relationship is pivotal in understanding the direction and steepness of the line.

Beyond the Basics: Exploring Applications

Slope transcends the realm of simple geometry. Its applications permeate various fields, including:

1. Graphing and Visualization

Slope is fundamental to understanding graphical representations. By analyzing the slope of a line, we can gain insights into the relationship between two variables. A positive slope signifies a positive correlation, while a negative slope indicates an inverse relationship. A slope of zero represents a horizontal line, implying no change in the dependent variable.

2. Linear Equations

The slope is an integral component of linear equations, often expressed in the form $y = mx + c$, where 'm' represents the slope and 'c' represents the intercept on the y-axis. This form clearly demonstrates the connection between the slope and the line's behavior on the coordinate plane.

3. Physics and Engineering

In physics, slope has profound implications. For example, the slope of a position-time graph represents velocity. The slope of a velocity-time graph represents acceleration. These applications are crucial for understanding motion and predicting future positions based on current trends. Similarly, in engineering, slope analysis is employed to model various phenomena, such as the stress-strain relationship in materials science.

4. Business and Finance

Even in the world of business, slope can offer valuable insights. The slope of a cost-volume graph can help predict production costs. In financial analysis, slope can be utilized to determine the rate of return on investment, aiding in forecasting and decision-making.

Variations and Extensions

While the fundamental slope formula is essential, variations exist depending on the context.

1. Different Representations

Beyond a line, slope concepts can be extended to other shapes and curves. In Calculus, the slope of a curve at a specific point is represented by the derivative of the function at that point. This represents the instantaneous rate of change.

2. Three-Dimensional Space

The concept of slope can be extended to three-dimensional space, where the idea of a line is replaced with a plane. The calculation becomes more intricate, involving the rates of change along both the y and x axes along with the z-axis.

3. Non-Linear Relationships

For non-linear relationships, we don't have a constant slope, but rather a varying slope as the variables change. Calculus is essential for analyzing these complex situations.

Practical Examples

Let's illustrate with practical examples: • **Scenario 1:** A car travels 60 miles in 2 hours. The slope of the distance-time graph is $(60 \text{ miles} - 0 \text{ miles}) / (2 \text{ hours} - 0 \text{ hours}) = 30 \text{ miles per hour}$, representing the constant speed. • **Scenario 2:** A company's revenue increases by \$10,000 for every 100 units sold. The slope of the revenue-volume graph is \$100 per unit, revealing the profit margin.

How to calculate slope

1. **Identify two points:** Locate two distinct points on the line or the graph. 2. **Note coordinates:** Record the coordinates of each point (x_1, y_1) , and (x_2, y_2) . 3. **Apply the formula:** Substitute the coordinates into the formula: $m = (y_2 - y_1) / (x_2 - x_1)$. 4. **Simplify:** Calculate the difference in y-values and divide by the difference in x-values.

The Significance of Slope

Slope is not merely an abstract mathematical concept; it's a fundamental tool in numerous disciplines. • Understanding and analyzing change • Predicting future trends • Modeling real-world phenomena

Conclusion and Call to Action

Slope is a remarkably versatile tool that underpins a multitude of applications. By mastering the fundamental principles of slope, you gain a powerful key to unlock insights in diverse fields. Are you ready to explore the world of slope further? Dive into the applications of slope by: • Practicing more examples and solving problems • Exploring real-world applications and case studies. • Engaging in discussions and forums on slope, to enhance your understanding. Now, let's explore some advanced questions that push the boundaries of your understanding of slope.

Advanced FAQs on Slope

1. How does slope relate to derivatives?

The derivative of a function at a point represents the instantaneous rate of change, which is equivalent to the slope of the tangent line to the curve at that point.

2. What is the significance of a vertical line in the context of slope?

A vertical line has an undefined slope. This is because the change in x is zero, and division by zero is undefined in mathematics.

3. How does slope relate to parallel and perpendicular lines?

Parallel lines have the same slope, while perpendicular lines have slopes that are negative reciprocals of each other.

4. How can slope be used in optimization problems?

In optimization, the slope of a function can indicate the direction of the steepest ascent or descent, helping to find maximum or minimum values.

5. What are the limitations of using slope to describe non-linear relationships?

Slope only describes the rate of change at a single point or on a straight line. For non-linear relationships, the slope changes continuously, and a derivative or other tools are needed for accurate analysis.

What is the Definition of Slope in Math?

Ever looked at a hill and wondered how steep it is? Or maybe you've seen a graph with a line going upwards or downwards and thought, "What's that telling me?" Well, in the world of mathematics, that "steepness" or "direction" is quantified by something called **slope**. It's a fundamental concept that pops up in algebra, geometry, calculus, and even in real-world applications like engineering and economics. But what exactly **is** the definition of slope in math? Let's break it down in a way that makes sense, without getting bogged down in overly technical jargon. Think of slope as the **rate of change** of a line. It tells you how much the vertical position (the 'y' value) changes for every unit of horizontal movement (the 'x' value).

Understanding Slope: Rise Over Run

The most intuitive way to define slope is by using the phrase **"rise over run"**. Imagine you're walking along a line on a graph. * **The "rise"** is the vertical distance you travel. If you move upwards, the rise is positive. If you move downwards, the rise is negative. * **The "run"** is the horizontal distance you travel. If you move to the right, the run is positive. If you move to the left, the run is negative. So, slope is simply the ratio of the vertical change to the horizontal change between any two points on a line. Mathematically, we often represent this as: **Slope (m) = Change in y / Change in x** Or, using the common notation for "change in," we write: **$m = \Delta y / \Delta x$** Where: * m is the symbol we usually use for slope. * Δy represents the difference in the y-coordinates between two points. * Δx represents the difference in the x-coordinates between the same two points.

Calculating Slope: The Formula in Action

To put this definition into practice, let's say we have two points on a line: Point 1 (x_1, y_1) and Point 2 (x_2, y_2). To find the slope between these two points, we use the following formula: **$m = (y_2 - y_1) / (x_2 - x_1)$** This formula directly translates the "rise over run" concept. $(y_2 - y_1)$ gives us the "rise," and $(x_2 - x_1)$ gives us the "run." Let's try an example. Suppose we have the points (2, 3) and (5, 9). * $x_1 = 2, y_1 = 3$ * $x_2 = 5, y_2 = 9$ Now, plug these values into the formula: $m = (9 - 3) / (5 - 2)$ $m = 6 / 3$ $m = 2$ So, the slope of the line passing through (2, 3) and (5, 9) is 2. This means that for every 1 unit you move to the right horizontally, you move 2 units up vertically.

What Does the Value of the Slope Tell Us?

The numerical value of the slope, and its sign, provide crucial information about the line:

Positive Slope: An Upward Trend

If the slope m is a positive number, it means the line is **increasing** as you move from left to right. This is like walking uphill. The larger the positive slope, the steeper the incline. A slope of 2 is steeper than a slope of 0.5.

Negative Slope: A Downward Trend

If the slope m is a negative number, the line is **decreasing** as you move from left to right. This is like walking downhill. The more negative the slope (e.g., -3 compared to -0.5), the steeper the downward slope.

Zero Slope: A Horizontal Line

When the slope m is **zero**, it indicates a **horizontal line**. This means there is no vertical change (the 'y' values are the same for all points on the line), even though there might be horizontal change. Think of a flat, level surface – there's no rise. In the formula, this happens when $y_2 - y_1 = 0$.

Undefined Slope: A Vertical Line

If the slope m is **undefined**, it signifies a **vertical line**. In this case, the horizontal change ($x_2 - x_1$) is zero, meaning all points on the line have the same x-coordinate. Division by zero is mathematically undefined, hence the slope is also undefined. Imagine trying to walk straight up a wall – you're only moving vertically, no horizontal "run" at all.

The Slope-Intercept Form of a Linear Equation

One of the most common ways you'll encounter slope is within the equation of a line. The **slope-intercept form** is a very handy way to express a linear relationship: $y = mx + b$. In this equation: * y is the dependent variable (usually plotted on the vertical axis). * x is the independent variable (usually plotted on the horizontal axis). * m is the **slope** of the line. * b is the **y-intercept**, which is the point where the line crosses the y-axis (i.e., the value of y when $x = 0$). This form makes it incredibly easy to identify the slope directly from the equation. If you see an equation in this format, the coefficient of x is always the slope. For example, in the equation $y = 3x - 2$: * The slope (m) is 3. * The y-intercept (b) is -2. This tells us the line rises 3 units for every 1 unit it runs to the right, and it crosses the y-axis at the point (0, -2).

Why is Slope Important? Real-World Applications

The definition of slope isn't just an abstract mathematical concept; it has profound implications and applications in the real world. Understanding slope helps us analyze and predict:

Steepness and Inclines

* **Construction and Engineering:** Architects and engineers use slope calculations to design roads, bridges, ramps, and buildings. They need to ensure structures are stable and safe, and that water drains properly. The gradient of a road, for instance, is its slope.
* **Geography and Geology:** Geologists study the slope of landforms like mountains and riverbeds to understand erosion, water flow, and geological processes. A steeper slope means faster water flow and potentially more erosion.

Rates of Change

* **Economics:** Economists use slope to represent rates of change in economic models. For example, the slope of a supply or demand curve shows how quantity changes in response to price changes.
* **Physics:** In physics, the slope of a distance-time graph represents velocity (speed and direction). The slope of a velocity-time graph represents acceleration.
* **Finance:** Financial analysts might look at the slope of a stock price graph to assess market trends and predict future movements.

Linear Relationships

Data Analysis: When plotting data, if the relationship appears linear, the slope provides a measure of how strongly one variable changes with respect to another. This is crucial for identifying correlations and making predictions. **Science:** In scientific experiments, if you plot measured values, a linear relationship with a specific slope can reveal underlying physical laws or chemical reactions.

Different Types of Slopes and Their Visualizations

Let's recap the visual representation of different slopes: **Positive Slope:** A line that goes upwards from left to right. [\[Positive Slope Graph Example\]](https://i.imgur.com/9m8IK6b.png) **Negative Slope:** A line that goes downwards from left to right. [\[Negative Slope Graph Example\]](https://i.imgur.com/8o9m7mF.png) **Zero Slope:** A perfectly horizontal line. [\[Zero Slope Graph Example\]](https://i.imgur.com/7g9b0bM.png) **Undefined Slope:** A perfectly vertical line. [\[Undefined Slope Graph Example\]](https://i.imgur.com/0d5a5xK.png)

Beyond Two Points: Slope in Calculus

While the definition $m = \Delta y / \Delta x$ works perfectly for straight lines, what about curves? This is where calculus comes in. In calculus, the concept of slope is extended to find the instantaneous rate of change at any given point on a curve. This is called the **derivative**. The derivative of a function at a point gives the slope of the tangent line to the curve at that point. This allows us to analyze the changing steepness of curved paths, which is essential for understanding complex phenomena. **Common Pitfalls and Tips for Success** **Order Matters:** When calculating slope, be consistent. If you subtract y_1 from y_2 , you *must* subtract x_1 from x_2 in the denominator. Mixing up the order can lead to the wrong sign. **Watch Out for Horizontal and Vertical Lines:** Remember that horizontal lines have a slope of 0, and vertical lines have an undefined slope. These are special cases that can trip people up. **Label Your Points:** Clearly identifying (x_1, y_1) and (x_2, y_2) for each point will prevent confusion. **Visualize:** Try to sketch the line or at least imagine it based on the coordinates. Does the slope you calculated make sense visually? **Conclusion:** The Power of the Slope In essence, the definition of slope in math boils down to measuring the **steepness and direction** of a line. It's a ratio of vertical change to horizontal change, a fundamental measure of how one variable changes in relation to another. Whether you're navigating the complexities of algebra, analyzing data, or tackling real-world problems, understanding the concept of slope and how to calculate it is an invaluable skill. It's a simple yet powerful tool that helps us interpret the world around us through the lens of mathematics. So, the next time you see a line on a graph or a sloping surface in reality, you'll know precisely what its "slope" is telling you!

The Definition of Slope in Mathematics Slope is a fundamental concept in mathematics, particularly within the realm of algebra and geometry, serving as a quantitative measure of how steep or incline a straight line appears on a coordinate plane. At its core, the slope represents the ratio of the vertical change, known as the rise, to the horizontal change, referred to as the run, between any two distinct points on a line. This simple yet powerful idea allows students and professionals alike to interpret and analyze linear relationships in graphs, equations, and real-world data.

In formal terms, the slope (m) of a line passing through two points (x_1, y_1) and (x_2, y_2) is defined by the formula $m = \frac{y_2 - y_1}{x_2 - x_1}$, provided that $x_1 \neq x_2$. When the denominator is zero—meaning the line is vertical—the slope is considered undefined, reflecting the infinite steepness that such a line possesses. The sign of the slope conveys crucial directional information: a positive slope indicates a line rising from left to right, while a negative slope shows a line falling in that same direction. A slope of zero corresponds to a horizontal line, indicating no vertical change across the interval.

Understanding slope goes beyond mere computation; it unlocks deeper insights into the behavior of linear functions. Slope directly influences the steepness of a line—steeper lines have larger absolute values of slope, positive or negative. This property enables mathematicians and data analysts to compare trends, predict outcomes, and model real-life phenomena ranging from financial growth to physical motion. For instance, in economics, slope helps interpret the rate of change in cost versus production, while in physics, it may represent velocity or acceleration over time.

Beyond classification, the slope plays a pivotal role in linear equations and graphing. In the slope-intercept form ($y = mx + b$), the slope (m) explicitly defines the line's inclination, while the y-intercept (b) marks where the line crosses the y-axis. This standard

form simplifies visualization and manipulation, making it easier to sketch graphs and solve equations. Furthermore, the concept extends to systems of linear equations, where the slope helps determine whether lines intersect, are parallel, or coincide—essential for solving real-world optimization and comparative problems.

Applications of slope are vast and foundational across multiple disciplines. In engineering, slope calculations underpin structural design, road grading, and mechanical systems. In environmental science, slope influences modeling of erosion, water flow, and landform changes. In everyday life, understanding slope aids in interpreting data trends, from tracking fitness progress to analyzing stock market movements. As technology advances, the principles of slope remain integral to machine learning algorithms, data visualization tools, and predictive analytics, where accurate modeling of linear trends drives informed decision-making.

Looking ahead, the relevance of slope in mathematics continues to grow. With the rise of data-driven fields and artificial intelligence, slope remains a cornerstone concept for grasping linear patterns that form the basis of complex models. Educators emphasize its intuitive nature to build strong foundational skills, while researchers leverage refined analytical techniques to apply slope concepts in higher-dimensional spaces and non-linear contexts. As learning tools evolve, interactive graphing platforms and dynamic visualizations enhance comprehension, ensuring that the definition and understanding of slope remain accessible, meaningful, and eternally valuable in both academic and professional arenas.

What is the Definition of Slope in Math? A Deep Dive into Inclination and Rate of Change

In the vast landscape of mathematics, certain concepts serve as fundamental building blocks, underpinning a multitude of more complex ideas. The definition of slope in math is one such cornerstone. More than just a simple measurement, slope represents the inclination of a line, a visual cue that tells us how steep it is and in which direction it's heading. But its significance extends far beyond geometry; slope is a powerful tool for understanding rates of change in a variety of real-world applications, from economics to physics.

For students encountering this concept for the first time, the definition of slope can initially seem abstract. However, by breaking it down into its core components and exploring its various interpretations, its importance and versatility become clear. This article will delve deep into the definition of slope in math, exploring its graphical representation, its mathematical formulas, and its critical role in analyzing trends and predicting outcomes.

Understanding the Intuitive Meaning of Slope

Before diving into precise mathematical definitions, let's grasp the intuitive meaning of slope. Imagine yourself walking on a hilly terrain. The steepness of the hill is akin to slope. A steeper hill has a higher slope, meaning you have to exert more effort to ascend it. Conversely, a gentle slope indicates a less demanding climb.

In a two-dimensional Cartesian coordinate system, where we plot points using (x, y) coordinates, a line can be visualized as traversing across this plane. Slope quantifies how much the y -value (vertical position) changes for every unit of change in the x -value (horizontal position). This change in the y -value is often referred to as the "rise," and the corresponding change in the x -value is called the "run."

The Mathematical Definition of Slope

Formally, the definition of slope in math is the ratio of the vertical change (rise) to the horizontal change (run) between any two distinct points on a line. This ratio is typically denoted by the letter 'm'.

The Rise Over Run Formula

Let's consider two points on a line, Point 1 with coordinates (x_1, y_1) and Point 2 with coordinates (x_2, y_2) . The change in the y -values (rise) is calculated as the difference between the y -coordinates: $\Delta y = y_2 - y_1$.

The change in the x-values (run) is calculated as the difference between the x-coordinates: $\Delta x = x_2 - x_1$.

Therefore, the slope 'm' is defined as:

$$m = \text{rise} / \text{run} = (y_2 - y_1) / (x_2 - x_1)$$

This formula is the bedrock of understanding and calculating slope. It's crucial to remember that the order of subtraction matters. If you subtract y_1 from y_2 , you must also subtract x_1 from x_2 for the calculation to be consistent. Switching the order of points (i.e., using (x_1, y_1) as Point 2 and (x_2, y_2) as Point 1) will yield the same slope value.

Interpreting Different Slope Values

The value of 'm' provides significant insights into the behavior of a line:

1. **Positive Slope:** If 'm' is positive ($m > 0$), the line rises from left to right. This means as the x-value increases, the y-value also increases. This signifies a direct or proportional relationship where both variables are moving in the same direction.
2. **Negative Slope:** If 'm' is negative ($m < 0$), the line falls from left to right. As the x-value increases, the y-value decreases. This indicates an inverse relationship where the variables are moving in opposite directions.
3. **Zero Slope:** If 'm' is zero ($m = 0$), the line is horizontal. This means there is no change in the y-value, regardless of the change in the x-value. The rise is zero, hence the slope is zero. This represents a constant y-value.
4. **Undefined Slope:** If the denominator ($x_2 - x_1$) is zero, the slope is undefined. This occurs when the line is vertical. Division by zero is mathematically impossible, hence the slope is considered undefined. In a vertical line, there is a change in the y-value, but no change in the x-value.

Slope in Linear Equations: The Slope-Intercept Form

The definition of slope is intimately connected with linear equations. The slope-intercept form of a linear equation is a widely used representation: $y = mx + b$.

In this equation:

1. 'm' represents the slope of the line.
2. 'b' represents the y-intercept, which is the point where the line crosses the y-axis (where $x = 0$).

This form directly highlights the slope as a coefficient of the 'x' term. For example, in the equation $y = 2x + 3$, the slope (m) is 2. This tells us that for every one-unit increase in x, the y-value increases by 2 units. The y-intercept (b) is 3, meaning the line crosses the y-axis at the point (0, 3).

Understanding the slope-intercept form allows for quick identification of a line's steepness and direction without needing to plot points. It's a crucial concept in algebra and precalculus.

The Role of Slope in Understanding Rate of Change

Beyond its geometric interpretation, the definition of slope in math is fundamentally about understanding **rate of change**. This is where its real-world applicability shines.

Average Rate of Change vs. Instantaneous Rate of Change

In many contexts, slope represents the **average rate of change** over a specific interval. For instance, if we are tracking a car's journey, the slope of the line connecting two points on a distance-time graph would represent the average speed of the car between those two times. If the distance is plotted on the y-axis and time on the x-axis, the slope (distance/time) is indeed speed.

In calculus, the concept of slope is extended to define the **instantaneous rate of change** at a specific point on a curve. This is achieved by considering an infinitely small change in x, leading to the concept of the derivative. The derivative of a function at a point is essentially the slope of the tangent line to the function's graph at that point, representing the rate of change at that precise moment.

Real-World Applications of Slope

The definition of slope and its implications permeate numerous fields:

Economics and Business

In economics, slope is used to analyze concepts like marginal cost, marginal revenue, and elasticity. For example, the slope of a cost function reveals how much the total cost increases for each additional unit produced. A steeper slope indicates a higher marginal cost.

Physics and Engineering

Physics heavily relies on slope. As mentioned, the slope of a distance-time graph is velocity, and the slope of a velocity-time graph represents acceleration. In engineering, slope calculations are vital for designing structures, understanding material stress, and analyzing fluid dynamics.

Environmental Science

Environmental scientists use slope to model pollution dispersion, analyze population growth rates, and understand land degradation. For instance, the rate of deforestation or the spread of a disease can be represented and analyzed using slope.

Finance and Investment

The performance of investments can be tracked using slope. The slope of a stock price over time can indicate its trend (bullish or bearish). Financial analysts use slope to predict future market movements and assess risk.

Statistics and Data Analysis

In statistics, regression analysis, a fundamental tool for data analysis, relies heavily on calculating the slope of the best-fit line. This slope quantifies the linear relationship between two variables, allowing for predictions and inferences. Understanding the statistical significance of a slope is also crucial.

Key Takeaways and Conclusion

In summary, the definition of slope in math is multifaceted. At its core, it is the ratio of vertical change to horizontal change between two points on a line (rise over run). This fundamental concept provides a visual representation of a line's inclination and direction.

Key takeaways about the definition of slope include:

1. **Mathematical Formula:** $m = (y_2 - y_1) / (x_2 - x_1)$
2. **Interpretation of Values:** Positive slope (rising), negative slope (falling), zero slope (horizontal), and undefined slope (vertical).
3. **Role in Linear Equations:** The 'm' in $y = mx + b$ directly represents the slope.
4. **Rate of Change:** Slope is a critical measure of how one variable changes in relation to another.
5. **Wide Applicability:** From science and engineering to economics and finance, slope is a ubiquitous and indispensable mathematical tool.

By mastering the definition of slope, students gain a powerful lens through which to understand the world around them, to analyze patterns, and to make informed predictions. It's a concept that, while seemingly simple, unlocks a deeper understanding of change and relationships in mathematics and beyond.

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Questions & Answers About what is the definition of slope in math

No	Question	Answer
1	So, what exactly is 'slope' in the world of math?	Slope is a fundamental concept in math that measures the steepness and direction of a line. It tells us how much the vertical position (y-value) changes for every unit of horizontal change (x-value).
2	How do mathematicians actually calculate slope?	The most common way to calculate slope is using the formula: $m = (y_2 - y_1) / (x_2 - x_1)$. This represents the 'rise' (change in y) over the 'run' (change in x) between any two distinct points on a line.
3	What does a positive slope mean for a line?	A positive slope means the line is trending upwards as you move from left to right. For every increase in x, the y-value also increases.
4	And what about a negative slope – what's going on there?	A negative slope indicates that the line is trending downwards as you move from left to right. For every increase in x, the y-value decreases.
5	Can a line have a slope of zero? If so, what does that look like?	Yes, a slope of zero means the line is perfectly horizontal. The y-value doesn't change regardless of the x-value.
6	What if a line goes straight up and down? What's its slope?	A vertical line has an undefined slope. This is because the change in x (the 'run') is zero, and you can't divide by zero in mathematics.
7	Is there a special name for the 'm' in slope equations?	Yes, the letter 'm' is conventionally used to represent the slope of a line in algebraic equations, often seen in the slope-intercept form: $y = mx + b$.
8	How does slope relate to real-world scenarios?	Slope is used everywhere! Think about the incline of a road, the pitch of a roof, the rate of change in stock prices, or even how quickly a race car is accelerating.
9	What's the difference between slope and the y-intercept?	Slope (m) tells you the steepness and direction of a line, while the y-intercept (b) tells you where the line crosses the y-axis (the point where $x = 0$).

10	Can we determine the slope just by looking at a graph?	Absolutely! You can visually estimate slope by observing its direction (up/down) and how steeply it rises or falls. For precise calculations, you'd pick two points and use the formula.
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