

Vertical Asymptotes

Remember from Precalculus 1 that

the graph of a function $y = \frac{N(x)}{D(x)}$ will usually have a vertical asymptote at $x = a$

if the denominator $D(a) = 0$ and the numerator $N(a)$ is a non-zero number.

Since $\csc x = \frac{1}{\sin x}$, $\cot x = \frac{\cos x}{\sin x}$, $\sec x = \frac{1}{\cos x}$ and $\tan x = \frac{\sin x}{\cos x}$,

$\csc x$ and $\cot x$ will have the same vertical asymptotes since they have the same denominator, and $\sec x$ and $\tan x$ will have the same vertical asymptotes since they have the same denominator.

If you want to find the vertical asymptotes of $y = A \csc(Bx + C) + D$ or $y = A \sec(Bx + C) + D$, there is an algebraic way and a graphical way.

Algebraic way

The algebraic way relies on your knowledge of which angles sine and cosine are equal to 0 at.

$y = A \csc(Bx + C) + D = \frac{A}{\sin(Bx + C)} + D$ has a vertical asymptote at all x -values where $\sin(Bx + C) = 0$.

From section 4.2 and the unit circle, the sine of an angle is a y -coordinate on the unit circle, and the y -coordinate is only 0 on the unit circle at the far left and far right of the unit circle.

These correspond to the angles which are coterminal with 0 or π .

However, all these angles are separated from each other by exactly one semi-circle or π radians.

So, the sine of an angle is 0 exactly when $x = 0 + k\pi = k\pi$ where $k \in \mathbf{Z}$.

So, $\sin(Bx + C) = 0$ exactly when $Bx + C = k\pi$ where $k \in \mathbf{Z}$.

So, $y = A \csc(Bx + C) + D$ has vertical asymptotes where $Bx + C = k\pi$ where $k \in \mathbf{Z}$.

(Solve that last equation for x to get the equations of the vertical asymptotes.)

Since cosecant and cotangent have the same denominator (sine), the vertical asymptotes of a cotangent graph can be found using the same equation.

Similarly, $y = A \sec(Bx + C) + D = \frac{A}{\cos(Bx + C)} + D$ has a vertical asymptote at all x -values where $\cos(Bx + C) = 0$.

From section 4.2 and the unit circle, the cosine of an angle is an x -coordinate on the unit circle, and the x -coordinate is only 0 on the unit circle at the top and bottom of the unit circle.

These correspond to the angles which are coterminal with $\frac{\pi}{2}$ or $\frac{3\pi}{2}$.

However, all these angles are separated from each other by exactly one semi-circle or π radians.

So, the cosine of an angle is 0 exactly when $x = \frac{\pi}{2} + k\pi$ where $k \in \mathbf{Z}$.

So, $\cos(Bx + C) = 0$ exactly when $Bx + C = \frac{\pi}{2} + k\pi$ where $k \in \mathbf{Z}$.

So, $y = A \sec(Bx + C) + D$ has vertical asymptotes where $Bx + C = \frac{\pi}{2} + k\pi$ where $k \in \mathbf{Z}$.

(Solve that last equation for x to get the equations of the vertical asymptotes.)

Since secant and tangent have the same denominator (cosine), the vertical asymptotes of a tangent graph can be found using the same equation.

Graphical way

The graphical way relies on your knowledge of the shape of sine and cosine graphs, how the middle y – value, starting point/phase shift and quarter-period are related, and how the sine and cosecant graphs are related, and how the cosine and secant graphs are related.

Remember that $y = A \csc(Bx + C) + D$ has a vertical asymptote at all x – values where $y = A \sin(Bx + C) + D$ passes through its middle y – value.

That is, at the starting point/phase shift,

and then every 2^{nd} quarter-period either to the left or to the right of that.

So, the equations of the vertical asymptotes would be

$x = \text{PHASE SHIFT} + 2(\frac{1}{4} \text{PERIOD})k$ or $x = \text{PHASE SHIFT} + (\frac{1}{2} \text{PERIOD})k$ where $k \in \mathbf{Z}$.

Similarly, $y = A \sec(Bx + C) + D$ has a vertical asymptote

at all x – values where $y = A \cos(Bx + C) + D$ passes through its middle y – value.

That is, at the first quarter-period after the starting point/phase shift,

and then every 2^{nd} quarter-period either to the left or to the right of that.

So, the equations of the vertical asymptotes would be

$x = \text{PHASE SHIFT} + \frac{1}{4} \text{PERIOD} + 2(\frac{1}{4} \text{PERIOD})k$ or $x = \text{PHASE SHIFT} + \frac{1}{4} \text{PERIOD} + (\frac{1}{2} \text{PERIOD})k$ where $k \in \mathbf{Z}$.