

# “NON-STRICT” L’HOSPITAL-TYPE RULES FOR MONOTONICITY: INTERVALS OF CONSTANCY

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L’Hospital Rules for Monotonicity

Iosif Pinelis

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[Title Page](#)

[Contents](#)

[◀◀](#) [▶▶](#)

[◀](#) [▶](#)

Page 1 of 17

[Go Back](#)

[Full Screen](#)

[Close](#)

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*Abstract:*

Assuming that a “derivative” ratio  $\rho := f'/g'$  of the ratio  $r := f/g$  of differentiable functions  $f$  and  $g$  is strictly monotonic (that is,  $\rho$  is increasing or decreasing), it was shown in previous papers that then  $r$  can switch at most once, from decrease to increase or vice versa. In the present paper, it is shown that, if  $\rho$  is non-strictly monotonic (that is, non-increasing or non-decreasing), then  $r$  can have at most one maximal interval of constancy (m.i.c.); on the other hand, any one m.i.c. of a given derivative ratio  $\rho$  is the m.i.c. of an appropriately constructed original ratio  $r$ .

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**L'Hospital Rules for Monotonicity**

Iosif Pinelis

vol. 8, iss. 1, art. 14, 2007

---

Title Page

Contents



Page 2 of 17

Go Back

Full Screen

Close

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# Contents

1 Introduction

4

2 Results

7



---

L'Hospital Rules for Monotonicity

Iosif Pinelis

vol. 8, iss. 1, art. 14, 2007

---

Title Page

Contents



Page 3 of 17

Go Back

Full Screen

Close

journal of **inequalities**  
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# 1. Introduction

Let  $f$  and  $g$  be differentiable functions defined on the interval  $(a, b)$ , where  $-\infty \leq a < b \leq \infty$ , and let

$$r := \frac{f}{g} \quad \text{and} \quad \rho := \frac{f'}{g'}.$$

It is assumed throughout that  $g$  and  $g'$  do not take on the value zero anywhere on  $(a, b)$ . The function  $\rho$  may be referred to as a *derivative ratio* for the “original” ratio  $r$ . In [16], general “rules” for monotonicity patterns, resembling the usual l’Hospital rules for limits, were given. In particular, according to [16, Proposition 1.9 and Remark 1.14], one has the dependence of the monotonicity pattern of  $r$  (on  $(a, b)$ ) on that of  $\rho$  (and also on the sign of  $gg'$ ) as given by Table 1. The vertical double line in the table separates the conditions (on the left) from the corresponding conclusions (on the right).

| $\rho$     | $gg'$ | $r$        |
|------------|-------|------------|
| $\nearrow$ | $> 0$ | $\searrow$ |
| $\searrow$ | $> 0$ | $\nearrow$ |
| $\nearrow$ | $< 0$ | $\nearrow$ |
| $\searrow$ | $< 0$ | $\searrow$ |

Table 1: “Non-strict” general rules for monotonicity.

Here, for instance,  $r \searrow \nearrow$  means that there is some  $c \in [a, b]$  such that  $r \searrow$  (that is,  $r$  is non-increasing) on  $(a, c)$  and  $r \nearrow$  ( $r$  is non-decreasing) on  $(c, b)$ ; in particular, if  $c = a$  then  $r \searrow \nearrow$  simply means that  $r \nearrow$  on the entire interval  $(a, b)$ ; and if  $c = b$  then  $r \searrow \nearrow$  means that  $r \searrow$  on  $(a, b)$ . Thus, if one also knows whether  $r \nearrow$  or  $r \searrow$  in

Title Page

Contents

◀◀ ▶▶

◀ ▶

Page 4 of 17

Go Back

Full Screen

Close



a right neighborhood of  $a$  and in a left neighborhood of  $b$ , then Table 1 uniquely determines the “non-strict” monotonicity pattern of  $r$ . (The “strict” counterparts of these rules, with terms “increasing” and “decreasing” in place of “non-decreasing” and “non-increasing” respectively, also hold, according to the same Proposition 1.9 of [16].)

Clearly, the stated l’Hospital-type rules for monotonicity patterns are helpful wherever the l’Hospital rules for limits are so, and even beyond that, because these monotonicity rules do not require that both  $f$  and  $g$  (or either of them) tend to 0 or  $\infty$  at any point. (Special rules for monotonicity, which do require that both  $f$  and  $g$  vanish at an endpoint of  $(a, b)$ , were given, in different forms and with different proofs, in [9, 14, 3, 15, 25].)

Thus, it should not be surprising that a wide variety of applications of the l’Hospital-type rules for monotonicity patterns were given: in areas of analytic inequalities [10, 6, 15, 16, 22, 1, 13, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35]; approximation theory [17]; differential geometry [8, 9, 11, 24], information theory [15, 16]; (quasi)conformal mappings [2, 3, 4, 5]; probability and statistics [14, 16, 17, 20, 26, 27, 28, 29], including the very recent papers [26, 27, 28, 29], where these monotonicity rules have become a standard tool. (For the references to [13, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35] I thank a referee.)

The mentioned rules for monotonicity, both general and special, are potentially helpful when  $f'$  or  $g'$  can be expressed simpler than or similarly to  $f$  or  $g$ , respectively. Such functions  $f$  and  $g$  are essentially the same as the functions that could be taken to play the role of  $u$  in the integration-by-parts formula  $\int u dv = uv - \int v du$ ; this class of functions includes algebraic, exponential, trigonometric, logarithmic, inverse trigonometric and inverse hyperbolic functions, and as well as non-elementary “anti-derivative” functions of the form  $x \mapsto c + \int_a^x h(u) du$  or  $x \mapsto c + \int_x^b h(u) du$ .

“Discrete” analogues, for  $f$  and  $g$  defined on  $\mathbb{Z}$ , of the l’Hospital-type rules for

Title Page

Contents



Page 5 of 17

Go Back

Full Screen

Close



monotonicity are available as well [23].

In this paper, we describe different facets of the relation of the (maximal) interval(s) of constancy of the original ratio  $r$  with those of the derivative ratio  $\rho$ . In particular, it may seem quite surprising that, as it turns out, the assumption of only non-strict monotonicity of  $\rho$  results necessarily in a significant degree of strictness on the monotonicity pattern of  $r$ ; namely,  $r$  can then have at most one maximal interval of constancy. Thus, new insight into the nature of the general rules for monotonicity is provided, which complements the previously made observation (see e.g. [25, paragraph around (5.1)]) that “the relation between the monotonicity patterns of  $r$  and  $\rho$  is not reversible in any reasonable sense”.

The question of strictness of inequalities plays a prominent role in the fundamental monograph by Hardy, Littlewood and Pólya [12]. This question has been of significant interest in various problems; e.g. see [30, 7, 19, 18]; in particular, the investigation of the problem of strictness in [19] led to an extension [18] of the well-known theorem by P. Hall in combinatorial theory; other extensions of P. Hall’s theorem were subsequently given in [21].

[Title Page](#)

[Contents](#)



Page 6 of 17

[Go Back](#)

[Full Screen](#)

[Close](#)



Title Page

Contents

◀ ▶

◀ ▶

Page 7 of 17

Go Back

Full Screen

Close

## 2. Results

In what follows, let us always assume that  $\rho$  is (not necessarily strictly) monotonic (that is,  $\nearrow$  or  $\searrow$ ) on  $(a, b)$ .

Let us say that an interval  $I \subseteq (a, b)$  is an *interval of constancy (i.c.)* of a function  $h: (a, b) \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  if  $I$  is of nonzero length and  $h$  is constant on  $I$ . If an i.c.  $I$  is not contained in any other i.c., let us say that  $I$  is a *maximal i.c. (m.i.c.)* It is easy to see that any i.c. is contained in a unique m.i.c. (which is simply the union of all i.c.'s containing the given i.c.).

It is easy to see that every i.c. of  $r$  is an i.c. of  $\rho$ . One might think that, if  $\rho$  has more than one m.i.c., then this can also be the case for the original ratio  $r$ . It may therefore be unexpected that the opposite is true, and even in the following strong sense.

**Proposition 2.1.** *The rules given by Table 1 can be strengthened as shown in Table 2.*

| $\rho$     | $gg'$ | $r$        |
|------------|-------|------------|
| $\nearrow$ | $> 0$ | $\searrow$ |
| $\searrow$ | $> 0$ | $\nearrow$ |
| $\nearrow$ | $< 0$ | $\nearrow$ |
| $\searrow$ | $< 0$ | $\searrow$ |

Table 2: Improved “non-strict” general rules for monotonicity.

Here, for instance,  $r \searrow$  means that there is a subinterval  $[c, d] \subseteq [a, b]$  (possibly of length 0) such that  $r' < 0$  on  $(a, c)$ ,  $r$  is constant on  $(c, d)$ , and  $r' > 0$  on  $(d, b)$ .

Why is this proposition true? The key notion here is that of the function

$$\tilde{\rho} := r' \frac{g^2}{|g'|},$$

introduced in [16] and further studied in [25]. The key lemma concerning  $\tilde{\rho}$  [25, Lemma 1 and Remark 4] states, as presented in Table 3 here, that the monotonicity pattern of  $\tilde{\rho}$  is the same as that of  $\rho$  if  $gg' > 0$ , and opposite to the pattern of  $\rho$  if  $gg' < 0$ .

| $\rho$     | $gg'$ | $\tilde{\rho}$ |
|------------|-------|----------------|
| $\nearrow$ | $> 0$ | $\nearrow$     |
| $\searrow$ | $> 0$ | $\searrow$     |
| $\nearrow$ | $< 0$ | $\searrow$     |
| $\searrow$ | $< 0$ | $\nearrow$     |

Table 3: The monotonicity patterns of  $\rho$  and  $\tilde{\rho}$  mirror each other

From this relation between  $\rho$  and  $\tilde{\rho}$ , the rules given by Table 1 can be easily deduced, since

$$\text{sign}(r') = \text{sign } \tilde{\rho}.$$

A simple but important observation is that the derivative ratio  $\rho$  and its counterpart  $\tilde{\rho}$  are continuous functions [25, Remark 4]. Since the ratio  $r$  is differentiable, it is continuous as well. Therefore, any m.i.c.  $I$  of  $r$  or  $\rho$  or  $\tilde{\rho}$  is closed (as a set) in  $(a, b)$ ; that is,  $I$  has the form  $[c, d]$  or  $(a, c]$  or  $[d, b)$  or  $(a, b)$ , for some  $c$  and  $d$  such that  $a < c < d < b$ . Moreover, it is seen from Table 3 that the m.i.c.'s of  $\tilde{\rho}$  are the same



Title Page

Contents



Page 8 of 17

Go Back

Full Screen

Close



as those of  $\rho$ , because any real function  $h$  is constant on an interval  $I$  if and only if  $h$  is both non-decreasing and non-increasing on  $I$ .

Proposition 2.1 now follows easily.

*Proof of Proposition 2.1.* It suffices to consider only the first line of Table 2 (since the other three lines can then be obtained by “vertical” reflection  $f \leftrightarrow -f$  and/or “horizontal” reflection  $x \leftrightarrow -x$ ). So, assume that  $\rho r'$  on  $(a, b)$  and  $gg' > 0$ . Then  $\tilde{\rho} r'$  on  $(a, b)$ . If  $\tilde{\rho} > 0$  and hence  $r' > 0$  on the entire interval  $(a, b)$ , let  $c := d := a$ , to obtain the conclusion that  $r \searrow$  on  $(a, b)$ . If  $\tilde{\rho} < 0$  and hence  $r' < 0$  on  $(a, b)$ , let  $c := d := b$ . It remains to consider the case when the sign of  $\tilde{\rho}$  takes on at least two different values (of the set  $\{-1, 0, 1\}$  of all sign values). Then, since the function  $\tilde{\rho}$  is non-decreasing and continuous on  $(a, b)$ , the level-0 set  $\ell_0(\tilde{\rho}) := \{u \in (a, b) : \tilde{\rho}(u) = 0\}$  of  $\tilde{\rho}$  must be a non-empty interval (which in fact must be an m.i.c. of  $\tilde{\rho}$  and hence a set closed in  $(a, b)$ ); in this case, take  $c$  and  $d$  to be the left and right endpoints, respectively, of the interval  $\ell_0(\tilde{\rho})$  (at that, it is possible that  $c = a$  and/or  $d = b$ ). Then  $\tilde{\rho} < 0$  and hence  $r' < 0$  on  $(a, c)$ ;  $\tilde{\rho} = 0$  and hence  $r' = 0$  and  $r = \text{const}$  on  $(c, d)$ ; and  $\tilde{\rho} > 0$  and hence  $r' > 0$  on  $(d, b)$ . ■

By Proposition 2.1,  $r$  can have no more than one m.i.c. On the other hand, one has

**Proposition 2.2.** *If  $r$  has an m.i.c.  $I$ , then  $I$  must be an m.i.c. of  $\rho$  and  $\tilde{\rho}$  as well.*

*Proof.* Suppose that  $I$  is the (necessarily unique) m.i.c. of  $r$ , so that  $\frac{f}{g} = r = K$  on  $I$  for some constant  $K$ . Then obviously  $\rho = K$  and  $\tilde{\rho} = 0$  on  $I$ , so that  $I$  is an i.c. of  $\rho$  and  $\tilde{\rho}$ . Let then  $J$  be the unique m.i.c. of  $\rho$  such that  $J \supseteq I$ , whence  $\frac{f'}{g'} = \rho = K_1$  on  $J$  for some constant  $K_1$ , and so,  $f = K_1 g + C$  and  $r = K_1 + \frac{C}{g}$  on  $J$ , and hence on  $I$ , for some constant  $C$ . But  $r$  is constant on the nonzero-length interval  $I$ , while  $g$  is not constant on  $I$  (because  $g'(x) \neq 0$  for any  $x \in (a, b)$ ). It follows that  $C = 0$

Title Page

Contents



Page 9 of 17

Go Back

Full Screen

Close



and thus  $r = K_1$  on  $J$ . Finally, since  $I$  is an m.i.c. of  $r$  and  $J \supseteq I$ , one concludes that  $J = I$ , and so,  $I$  is an m.i.c. of  $\rho$  and hence of  $\tilde{\rho}$ . ■

We complete the description of the relation between the m.i.c.'s of  $r$  and  $\rho$  by observing that any one m.i.c.  $I$  of a given derivative ratio  $\rho$  is the m.i.c. of an appropriately constructed original ratio  $r$  (which must, in view of Proposition 2.1, depend on the choice of  $I$ ):

**Proposition 2.3.** *For*

- any differentiable function  $g: (a, b) \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  such that  $gg'(x) \neq 0$  for each  $x \in (a, b)$ ,
- any (not necessarily strictly) monotonic continuous function  $\rho: (a, b) \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ , and
- any m.i.c.  $I$  of  $\rho$

there exists a differentiable function  $f: (a, b) \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  such that  $\frac{f'}{g'} = \rho$  and the only m.i.c. of  $r := \frac{f}{g}$  is  $I$ .

*Proof.* Let  $g$ ,  $\rho$ , and  $I$  satisfy the conditions listed in Proposition 2.3, so that  $\rho = K$  on  $I$  for some constant  $K$ . Note that the condition on  $g$  implies that either  $g' > 0$  on the entire interval  $(a, b)$  or  $g' < 0$  on  $(a, b)$  (see e.g. [25, Remark 3]), so that  $g$  is monotonic and hence of locally bounded variation on  $(a, b)$ . Take any point  $z$  in the interval  $I$  (which is an i.c. and hence non-empty) and define  $f$  by the formula

$$f(x) := Kg(z) + \int_z^x \rho(u) dg(u)$$

for all  $x$  in  $(a, b)$ , where the integral may be understood in the Riemann-Stieltjes sense, with the convention that  $\int_z^x := -\int_x^z$  if  $x < z$ . Because  $\rho$  is continuous and  $g$  is differentiable, it follows that for the so defined function  $f$  one has  $\frac{f'}{g'} = \rho$ ; moreover,  $f = Kg$  on  $I$ , so that  $I$  is an i.c. of  $r$ . But any i.c. of  $r$  is also an i.c. of  $\rho$ ,

Title Page

Contents

◀▶

◀▶

Page 10 of 17

Go Back

Full Screen

Close

and  $I$  was assumed to be an m.i.c. of  $\rho$ . It follows that  $I$  is *an* m.i.c. (and hence *the only* m.i.c.) of  $r$ . ■

Let us summarize our findings as

### Theorem 2.4.

- *The set of all m.i.c.'s of  $\tilde{\rho}$  is the same as that of  $\rho$ .*
- *The “original” ratio  $r$  can have at most one m.i.c., and its m.i.c. must also be an m.i.c. of  $\rho$  and thus of  $\tilde{\rho}$ ; moreover, then the m.i.c. of  $r$  is the level-0 set of  $\tilde{\rho}$ .*
- *Any one m.i.c. of a given derivative ratio  $\rho$  is the m.i.c. of an appropriately constructed original ratio  $r$ .*

This result can be illustrated by

*Example 2.1.* Let the derivative ratio  $\rho: (0, \infty) \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  for a ratio  $r = f/g$  be given by the formula

$$\rho(x) := \min(x - k, k + 1) = \begin{cases} x - k & \text{if } 2k \leq x < 2k + 1, \\ k + 1 & \text{if } 2k + 1 \leq x < 2k + 2, \end{cases}$$

where  $k := \lfloor \frac{x}{2} \rfloor$ . Let  $g(x) := x + 1$  for all  $x \in (0, \infty)$ . Then, for the formula  $\rho = f'/g'$  to hold, the corresponding function  $f: (0, \infty) \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  must be given by

$$\begin{aligned} f(x) = f_c(x) &:= c + \int_0^x \rho(u) g'(u) du \\ &= \begin{cases} c + \frac{1}{2}((x - m)^2 + m(m + 1)) & \text{if } 2m \leq x < 2m + 1, \\ c + (m + 1)(x - m - \frac{1}{2}) & \text{if } 2m + 1 \leq x < 2m + 2, \end{cases} \end{aligned}$$



Title Page

Contents

◀◀ ▶▶

◀ ▶

Page 11 of 17

Go Back

Full Screen

Close



where  $m := \lfloor \frac{x}{2} \rfloor$  and  $c$  is any real number (which obviously equals  $f_c(0)$ ). Letting now  $r_c := f_c/g$ , one sees that the derivative ratio  $f'_c/g'$  of  $r_c$  equals the given function  $\rho$ , for every value of  $c$ . This derivative ratio,  $\rho$ , is nondecreasing (and continuous) on  $(0, \infty)$ , with infinitely many m.i.c.'s:  $[1, 2], [3, 4], \dots$ . In contrast,  $r_c$  may have at most one m.i.c. More specifically,  $r_c$  has exactly one m.i.c.,  $[2m + 1, 2m + 2]$  (which is also one of the infinitely many m.i.c.'s of  $\rho$ ), if  $c = c_{2m+1} := \frac{1}{2}(m + 1)(2m + 3)$  – the root of the equation  $r_c(2m + 1) = \rho(2m + 1)$ , for each  $m = 0, 1, \dots$ ; and  $r_c$  has no m.i.c. for any real value of  $c$  different from all the  $c_m$ 's. Figure 1 shows the graphs of  $\rho$  and the “original” ratios  $r_c$ , for the values  $c = -1, 0, \frac{3}{4}, \frac{3}{2}, 3$ , and  $5$ . For these selected values of  $c$ , the ratio  $r_c$  has exactly one m.i.c. –  $[1, 2]$  or  $[3, 4]$  – only if  $c = \frac{3}{2} = c_1$  or  $c = 5 = c_3$ , respectively; and  $r_c$  has no m.i.c. if  $c = -1, 0, \frac{3}{4}$ , or  $3$ .

To visualize this example in particular and the monotonicity rules in general, one can imagine a tank with the solution of a liquid in water. Initially, at time  $x = 0$ , the amounts in the tank of the liquid and water (not necessarily measured in the same units) are  $f_c(0) = c$  and  $g(0) = 1$ , respectively, so that the relative concentration  $r_c = f_c/g$  of the liquid (with respect to water) is initially  $r_c(0) = c$ . The liquid and water are added to the tank continuously through a pipe so that water is added at a constant rate 1. The relative concentration  $\rho$  of the liquid in the pipe is initially 0 (that is,  $\rho(0) = 0$ ); moreover,  $\rho$  increases at a constant rate 1 in each of the “odd” unit time intervals  $[0, 1], [2, 3], \dots$  and remains constant in each of the “even” unit time intervals  $[1, 2], [3, 4], \dots$ .

Then for any strictly positive value  $c = r_c(0)$ , the relative concentration  $\rho$  of the liquid in the pipe is initially less than the relative concentration  $r_c$  of the liquid in the tank, so that  $r_c$  will initially be decreasing. However, since  $\rho$  is non-decreasing to  $\infty$  in time,  $\rho$  will eventually overtake  $r_c$ , and the latter will then be forever strictly increasing (after possibly staying constant, together with  $\rho$ , over the unit time interval  $[2m + 1, 2m + 2]$  for some  $m = 0, 1, \dots$ , provided that  $c = \frac{1}{2}(m + 1)(2m + 3)$ ). However, if the initial relative concentration  $c$  in the tank is 0 (or, somehow, nega-

Title Page

Contents



Page 12 of 17

Go Back

Full Screen

Close



[Title Page](#)

[Contents](#)



Page 13 of 17

[Go Back](#)

[Full Screen](#)

[Close](#)

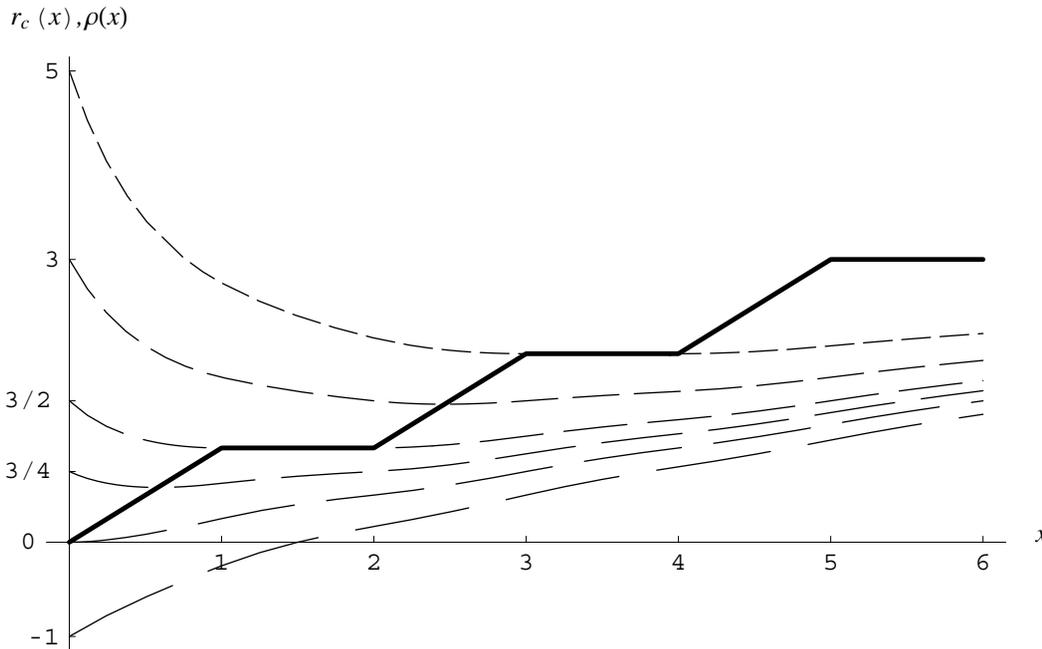


Figure 1: Graphs of  $\rho$  and  $r_c$ :  $\rho$ , thick, solid;  $r_c$ , dashed, with dash length decreasing in  $c$ .

tive), then the relative concentration  $r_c$  in the tank will be always strictly increasing, yet never reaching the relative concentration  $\rho$  in the pipe (cf. [16, Proposition 1.18] or identity [25, (1.1)]).

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---

L'Hospital Rules for Monotonicity

Iosif Pinelis

vol. 8, iss. 1, art. 14, 2007

---

[Title Page](#)

[Contents](#)



Page 14 of 17

[Go Back](#)

[Full Screen](#)

[Close](#)

journal of **inequalities**  
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mathematics

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L'Hospital Rules for Monotonicity

Iosif Pinelis

vol. 8, iss. 1, art. 14, 2007

---

Title Page

Contents



Page 15 of 17

Go Back

Full Screen

Close

journal of **inequalities**  
in pure and applied  
mathematics

issn: 1443-5756

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L'Hospital Rules for Monotonicity

Isosif Pinelis

vol. 8, iss. 1, art. 14, 2007

---

Title Page

Contents

◀◀ ▶▶

◀ ▶

Page 16 of 17

Go Back

Full Screen

Close

journal of **inequalities**  
in pure and applied  
mathematics

issn: 1443-5756

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Title Page

Contents



Page 17 of 17

Go Back

Full Screen

Close