Solving Differential Equations: Graphically and Numerically
Slope Fields

At every point (x, y) a differential equation of the form $\dfrac{dy}{dx} = f(x, y)$ gives the slope of the member of the family of solutions that contains that point. A slope field is a graphical representation of this family of curves. At each point in the plane, a short segment is drawn whose slope is equal to the value of the derivative at that point. These segments are tangent to the solution's graph at the point.

The slope field allows you to sketch the graph of the solution curve even though you do not have its equation. This is done by starting at any point (usually the point given by the initial condition), and moving from one point to the next in the direction indicated by the segments of the slope field.

Some calculators have built in operations for drawing slope fields; for calculators without this feature there are programs available for drawing them.