8.1 SEQUENCES

EXAMPLE A Investigate the sequence $\{a_n\}$ defined by the *recurrence relation*

$$a_1 = 2 \qquad a_{n+1} = \tfrac{1}{2}(a_n + 6) \qquad \text{for } n = 1, 2, 3, \ldots$$

SOLUTION We begin by computing the first several terms:

$$a_1 = 2 \qquad a_2 = \tfrac{1}{2}(2 + 6) = 4 \qquad a_3 = \tfrac{1}{2}(4 + 6) = 5$$

$$a_4 = \tfrac{1}{2}(5 + 6) = 5.5 \qquad a_5 = 5.75 \qquad a_6 = 5.875$$

$$a_7 = 5.9375 \qquad a_8 = 5.96875 \qquad a_9 = 5.984375$$

■ Mathematical induction is often used in dealing with recursive sequences. For a discussion of the Principle of Mathematical Induction see *Additional Topics: Principles of Problem Solving.*

These initial terms suggest that the sequence is increasing and the terms are approaching 6. To confirm that the sequence is increasing, we use mathematical induction to show that $a_{n+1} > a_n$ for all $n \geqslant 1$. This is true for $n = 1$ because $a_2 = 4 > a_1$. If we assume that it is true for $n = k$, then we have

$$a_{k+1} > a_k$$

so $$a_{k+1} + 6 > a_k + 6$$

and $$\tfrac{1}{2}(a_{k+1} + 6) > \tfrac{1}{2}(a_k + 6)$$

Thus $$a_{k+2} > a_{k+1}$$

We have deduced that $a_{n+1} > a_n$ is true for $n = k + 1$. Therefore, the inequality is true for all n by induction.

Next we verify that $\{a_n\}$ is bounded by showing that $a_n < 6$ for all n. (Since the sequence is increasing, we already know that it has a lower bound: $a_n \geqslant a_1 = 2$ for all n.) We know that $a_1 < 6$, so the assertion is true for $n = 1$. Suppose it is true for $n = k$. Then

$$a_k < 6$$

so $$a_k + 6 < 12$$

and $$\tfrac{1}{2}(a_k + 6) < \tfrac{1}{2}(12) = 6$$

Thus $$a_{k+1} < 6$$

This shows, by mathematical induction, that $a_n < 6$ for all n.

Since the sequence $\{a_n\}$ is increasing and bounded, the Monotonic Sequence Theorem guarantees that it has a limit. The theorem doesn't tell us what the value of the limit is. But now that we know $L = \lim_{n\to\infty} a_n$ exists, we can use the given recurrence relation to write

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} a_{n+1} = \lim_{n\to\infty} \tfrac{1}{2}(a_n + 6) = \tfrac{1}{2}\left(\lim_{n\to\infty} a_n + 6\right) = \tfrac{1}{2}(L + 6)$$

Since $a_n \to L$, it follows that $a_{n+1} \to L$ too (as $n \to \infty$, $n + 1 \to \infty$ also). So we have

$$L = \tfrac{1}{2}(L + 6)$$

Solving this equation for L, we get $L = 6$, as we predicted. ■