

7.4 Solving Rational Equations

In Section 3 of Chapter 2, we showed that the most efficient way to solve an equation containing fractions was to first clear the fractions by multiplying both sides of the equation by the least common denominator. For example, given the equation

$$\frac{1}{2}x + \frac{1}{3} = \frac{1}{4},$$

we would first clear the fractions by multiplying both sides by 12.

$$\begin{aligned} 12 \left[\frac{1}{2}x + \frac{1}{3} \right] &= \left[\frac{1}{4} \right] 12 \\ 6x + 4 &= 3 \end{aligned}$$

This procedure works equally well when the the denominators contain a variable.

You Try It!

Solve for x : $1 - \frac{6}{x} = -\frac{8}{x^2}$

EXAMPLE 1. Solve for x : $1 - \frac{2}{x} = \frac{3}{x^2}$

Solution: The common denominator is x^2 . We begin by clearing fractions, multiplying both sides of the equation by x^2 .

$$\begin{aligned} 1 - \frac{2}{x} &= \frac{3}{x^2} && \text{Original equation.} \\ x^2 \left[1 - \frac{2}{x} \right] &= \left[\frac{3}{x^2} \right] x^2 && \text{Multiply both sides by } x^2. \end{aligned}$$

Now we use the distributive property.

$$x^2 [1] - x^2 \left[\frac{2}{x} \right] = \left[\frac{3}{x^2} \right] x^2 \quad \text{Distribute } x^2.$$

Now we cancel common factors and simplify.

$$x^2 - 2x = 3 \quad \text{Cancel. Simplify.}$$

The resulting equation is nonlinear (x is raised to a power larger than 1. Make one side zero, then factor.

$$\begin{aligned} x^2 - 2x - 3 &= 0 && \text{Nonlinear. Make one side zero.} \\ (x - 3)(x + 1) &= 0 && \text{Factor.} \end{aligned}$$

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