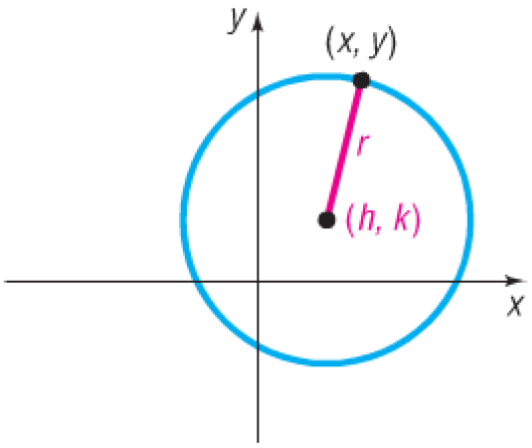
Standard Form of a Circle

The **standard form** of the equation for a circle of radius r with center (h, k) is

$$(x - h)^2 + (y - k)^2 = r^2.$$



THEOREM

The standard form of an equation of a circle of radius r with center at the origin $(0, 0)$ is

$$x^2 + y^2 = r^2$$

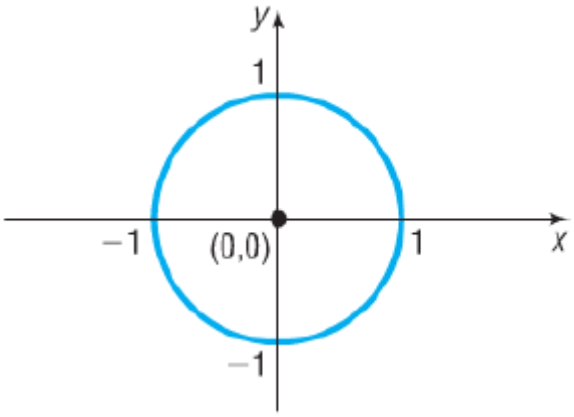
DEFINITION

If the radius $r = 1$, the circle whose center is at the origin is called the **unit circle** and has the equation

$$x^2 + y^2 = 1$$

See Figure 50. Notice that the graph of the unit circle is symmetric with respect to the x-axis, the y-axis, and the origin.

Figure 50
Unit circle $x^2 + y^2 = 1$



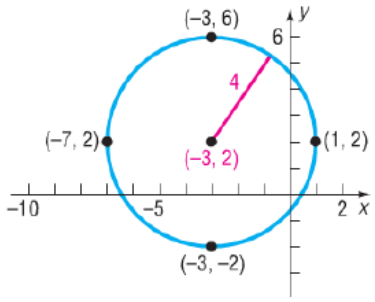
Graph the equation: $(x + 3)^2 + (y - 2)^2 = 16$

Solution Since the equation is in the form of equation (1), its graph is a circle. To graph the equation, compare the given equation to the standard form of the equation of a circle. The comparison yields information about the circle.

$$(x + 3)^2 + (y - 2)^2 = 16$$
$$(x - (-3))^2 + (y - 2)^2 = 4^2$$
$$(x - h)^2 + (y - k)^2 = r^2$$

We see that $h = -3$, $k = 2$, and $r = 4$. The circle has center $(-3, 2)$ and a radius of 4 units. To graph this circle, first plot the center $(-3, 2)$. Since the radius is 4, we can locate four points on the circle by plotting points 4 units to the left, to the right, up, and down from the center. These four points can then be used as guides to obtain the graph. See Figure 51.

Figure 51



DEFINITION

When its graph is a circle, the equation

$$x^2 + y^2 + ax + by + c = 0$$

is referred to as the **general form of the equation of a circle.**

3 Work with the General Form of the Equation of a Circle

If we eliminate the parentheses from the standard form of the equation of the circle given in Example 2, we get

$$(x + 3)^2 + (y - 2)^2 = 16$$
$$x^2 + 6x + 9 + y^2 - 4y + 4 = 16$$

which, upon simplifying, is equivalent to

$$x^2 + y^2 + 6x - 4y - 3 = 0 \qquad \textbf{(2)}$$

It can be shown that any equation of the form

$$x^2 + y^2 + ax + by + c = 0$$

has a graph that is a circle, or a point, or has no graph at all. For example, the graph of the equation $x^2 + y^2 = 0$ is the single point $(0, 0)$. The equation $x^2 + y^2 + 5 = 0$, or $x^2 + y^2 = -5$, has no graph, because sums of squares of real numbers are never negative.

Graphing a Circle Whose Equation Is in General Form

Graph the equation $x^2 + y^2 + 4x - 6y + 12 = 0$

Group the terms involving x, group the terms involving y, and put the constant on the right side of the equation. The result is

$$(x^2 + 4x) + (y^2 - 6y) = -12$$

Next, complete the square of each expression in parentheses. Remember that any number added on the left side of the equation must also be added on the right.

$$(x^2 + 4x + 4) + (y^2 - 6y + 9) = -12 + 4 + 9$$

$\left(\frac{4}{2}\right)^2 = 4$ $\qquad$ $\left(\frac{-6}{2}\right)^2 = 9$

$$(x + 2)^2 + (y - 3)^2 = 1 \quad \text{Factor.}$$

This equation is the standard form of the equation of a circle with radius 1 and center $(-2, 3)$.

To graph the equation use the center $(-2, 3)$ and the radius 1. See Figure 52.

Figure 52