

Definition (Monoidal category). A *monoidal structure* on a category \mathbf{C} is specified by:

Constituents

1. A functor $\otimes : \mathbf{C} \times \mathbf{C} \rightarrow \mathbf{C}$, called the *monoidal product*.
2. An object $\mathbf{1} \in \mathbf{Ob}_{\mathbf{C}}$, called the *monoidal unit*.
3. A natural isomorphism, called the *associator*, whose components are of the type

$$\text{as}_{X,Y,Z} : (X \otimes Y) \otimes Z \xrightarrow{\cong} X \otimes (Y \otimes Z) \quad X, Y, Z \in \mathbf{Ob}_{\mathbf{C}}.$$

4. A natural isomorphism, called the *left unitor*, whose components are of the type

$$\text{lu}_X : \mathbf{1} \otimes X \xrightarrow{\cong} X \quad X \in \mathbf{Ob}_{\mathbf{C}}.$$

5. A natural isomorphism, called the *right unitor*, whose components are of the type

$$\text{ru}_X : X \otimes \mathbf{1} \xrightarrow{\cong} X \quad X \in \mathbf{Ob}_{\mathbf{C}}.$$

Conditions

For all $X, Y, Z, W \in \mathbf{Ob}_{\mathbf{C}}$, the following diagrams must commute:

1. Triangle identities.

$$\begin{array}{ccc} (X \otimes \mathbf{1}) \otimes Y & \xrightarrow{\text{as}_{X,\mathbf{1},Y}} & X \otimes (\mathbf{1} \otimes Y) \\ & \searrow \text{ru}_X \otimes \mathbf{1} \quad \swarrow \mathbf{1} \otimes \text{lu}_Y & \\ & X \otimes Y & \end{array}$$

2. Pentagon identities.

$$\begin{array}{ccc} & (X \otimes Y) \otimes (Z \otimes W) & \\ \text{as}_{X \otimes Y, Z, W} \nearrow & & \searrow \text{as}_{X, Y, Z \otimes W} \\ ((X \otimes Y) \otimes Z) \otimes W & & (X \otimes (Y \otimes (Z \otimes W))) \\ \downarrow \text{as}_{X,Y,Z} \otimes \text{Id}_W & & \text{Id}_X \otimes \text{as}_{Y,Z,W} \uparrow \\ (X \otimes (Y \otimes Z)) \otimes W & \xrightarrow{\text{as}_{X,Y \otimes Z, W}} & X \otimes ((Y \otimes Z) \otimes W) \end{array}$$

A category equipped with a monoidal structure is called a *monoidal category*. If the components of the associator, left unitor, and right unitor are all equalities, one calls the category *strict monoidal*.