1 - Preliminary notions of convex analysis

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Optimization Methods and Game Theory Master of Science in Artificial Intelligence and Data Engineering University of Pisa – A.Y. 2022/23

Contents of the lessons

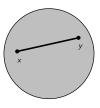
- Convex sets
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Convex sets

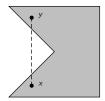
Definition (Convex set)

A set $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$ is convex if, for every $x, y \in C$ and for every $\alpha \in [0, 1]$,

$$\alpha x + (1 - \alpha)y \in C$$
.



convex set



non-convex set

Examples of convex sets: affine sets

Definition (Affine set)

A set $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$ is affine if, for every $x, y \in C$ and every $\alpha \in \mathbb{R}$,

$$\alpha x + (1 - \alpha)y \in C$$
.

Examples of affine sets:

- any single point {x}
- any line
- the solution set of a system of linear equations

$$C = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : Ax = b\},\$$

where A is a $m \times n$ matrix and $b \in \mathbb{R}^m$

any subspace

Examples of convex sets: subspaces

Note that a subspace is a particular affine set.

In fact, a set $S \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$ is a subspace if, for every $x, y \in S$ and every $\alpha, \beta \in \mathbb{R}$,

$$\alpha x + \beta y \in S$$

Examples of subspaces:

- {0}
- any line which passes through zero
- the solution set of a homogeneous system of linear equations

$$S = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : Ax = 0\},\$$

where A is a $m \times n$ matrix.

Definition

A convex combination of the points $x^1, x^2,, x^k$ is a point

$$y = \sum_{i=1}^k \alpha_i x^i$$
 where $\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k \in [0, 1]$ and $\sum_{i=1}^k \alpha_i = 1$.

Remark

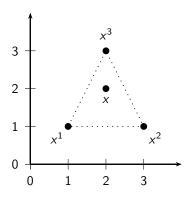
By definition, a set $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$ is convex if it contains all the convex combinations of any two points in C.

Example. Consider the following 3 points in the plane:

$$x^1 = (1, 1),$$
 $x^2 = (3, 1),$ $x^3 = (2, 3).$

x = (2,2) is a convex combination of x^1 , x^2 e x^3 , in fact:

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



A convex set contains any convex combination of its points.

Lemma 1

If C is convex, then for any $x^1, \ldots, x^k \in C$ and $\alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_k \in [0, 1]$ s.t. $\sum_{i=1}^k \alpha_i = 1$,

$$\sum_{i=1}^k \alpha_i x^i \in C.$$

Proof. By induction on k. For k=2, the thesis holds, by definition of convexity. Assume that the thesis holds for a given k and let us prove it holds for k+1.

Let $x^1, \ldots, x^{k+1} \in C$ and $\alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_{k+1} \in [0,1]$ s.t. $\sum_{i=1}^{k+1} \alpha_i = 1$. With no loss of generality, we assume that $\alpha_1 \neq 0$.

$$\sum_{i=1}^{k+1} \alpha_i x^i = \alpha_1 x_1 + \sum_{i=2}^{k+1} \alpha_i x^i = \alpha_1 x_1 + \left(1 - \sum_{i=2}^{k+1} \alpha_i\right) \sum_{i=2}^{k+1} \frac{\alpha_i}{1 - \sum_{i=2}^{k+1} \alpha_i} x^i$$

Since $\sum_{i=2}^{k+1} \frac{\alpha_i}{1-\sum_{i=1}^{k+1} \alpha_i} = 1$, by inductive assumption we have:

$$\bar{x} := \sum_{i=2}^{k+1} \frac{\alpha_i}{1 - \sum_{i=2}^{k+1} \alpha_i} x^i \in C$$

and finally, since C is convex,

$$\alpha_1 x_1 + (1 - \sum_{i=2}^{k+1} \alpha_i) \bar{x} \in C.$$

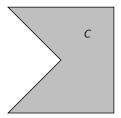
Proposition

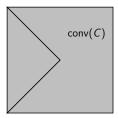
If $\{C_i\}_{i\in I}$ is any (possibly infinite) family of convex sets, then $\bigcap_{i\in I} C_i$ is convex.

Definition (Convex hull)

The convex hull conv(C) of a set C is the intersection of all the convex sets containing C.

In other words, it is the smallest convex set containing C.

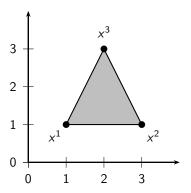




The convex hull of the points

$$x^1 = (1, 1),$$
 $x^2 = (3, 1),$ $x^3 = (2, 3).$

is the grey triangle with vertexes the three points:



Proposition

$$conv(C) = \{all convex combinations of points in C\}$$

Proof. It can be proved that the set of convex combinations of points in C is a convex set containing C, so that

$$conv(C) \subseteq \{all\ convex\ combinations\ of\ points\ in\ C\}.$$

Since $C \subseteq \text{conv}(C)$ and conv(C) is convex, by Lemma 1 it contains any convex combination of its points, and therefore

 $conv(C) \supseteq \{all convex combinations of points in C\}.$

Remark

Observe that C is convex if and only if C = conv(C).

Examples of convex sets: Polyhedra

Definition (Polyhedron)

A polyhedron P is the intersection of a finite number of closed halspaces in \mathbb{R}^n .

A closed halfspace is the set of solutions of a linear inequality:

$$a^{\mathsf{T}}x \leq \beta$$
, where $a \in \mathbb{R}^n$ e $\beta \in \mathbb{R}$.

Consequently, a polyhedron

$$P = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : Ax \le b\}$$

is the solution set of a system of linear inequalities where A is a $m \times n$ matrix and $b \in \mathbb{R}^m$.

A polyhedron P is convex since any closed halfspace is a convex set and the intersection of convex sets is convex.

Examples of convex sets: Balls

• A ball is defined by $B(\bar{x},r) := \{z \in \mathbb{R}^n : ||z - \bar{x}|| \le r\}$, where $||\cdot||$ is any norm, e.g.

$$\begin{split} \|x\|_2 &= \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n x_i^2} \text{ (Euclidean norm)} \\ \|x\|_1 &= \sum_{i=1}^n |x_i| \text{ (Manhattan distance)} \\ \|x\|_\infty &= \max_{i=1,\dots,n} |x_i| \text{ (Chebyshev norm)} \\ \|x\|_p &= \sqrt[p]{\sum_{i=1}^n |x_i|^p}, \text{ with } 1 \leq p < +\infty \\ \|x\|_A &= \sqrt{x^T A x}, \text{ where } A \text{ is a symmetric and positive definite matrix, i.e.,} \\ x^T A x > 0 \qquad \forall \ x \neq 0. \end{split}$$

Norms

Recall that a norm on a real vector space X is a function $p: X \to \mathbb{R}$ such that:

By the previous conditions it follows that $p(x) \ge 0$, $\forall x \in X$.

Exercise 1.1 Find the unit ball B(0,1) w.r.t. $\|\cdot\|_1$, $\|\cdot\|_\infty$ and $\|\cdot\|_A$, where

$$A = \left(\begin{array}{cc} 4 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{array}\right).$$

Operations that preserve convexity

Algebraic operations

Sum and product by a constant

If C_1 and C_2 are convex, then $C_1 + C_2 := \{x + y : x \in C_1, y \in C_2\}$ is convex.

If C is convex and $\alpha \in \mathbb{R}$, then $\alpha C := \{\alpha x : x \in C, \}$ is convex.

Consequently, if C_1 and C_2 are convex, then $C_1 - C_2 := \{x - y : x \in C_1, y \in C_2\}$ is convex.

Topological operations

Closure and interior

If C is convex, then cl(C) is convex.

If C is convex, then int(C) is convex, provided that $int(C) \neq \emptyset$.

Relative interior

Given a set $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$ we denote by aff(C) the smallest affine set containing C.

Definition (relative interior)

Let $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$ be a convex set.

The relative interior points of C is defined by

$$ri(C) = \{x \in C : \exists \epsilon > 0 : aff(C) \cap B(x, \epsilon) \subseteq C\}$$

Examples

• Let $C := \{(x_1, x_2) \in \mathbb{R}^2 : 1 \le x_1 \le 3, x_2 = 0\}$. Then

$$ri(C) := \{(x_1, x_2) \in \mathbb{R}^2 : 1 < x_1 < 3, x_2 = 0\}.$$

• Let $C = \{\bar{x}\}$, then ri(C) = C.

Theorem

Let C be a nonempty convex set in \mathbb{R}^n . Then the relative interior of C is a nonempty convex set.

Separation of convex sets

The sets A and B in \mathbb{R}^n are said to be linearly separable if there exists $a \in \mathbb{R}^n$, $a \neq 0$, $\beta \in \mathbb{R}$, such that

$$a^T x \ge \beta \quad \forall x \in A, \qquad a^T x \le \beta \quad \forall x \in B,$$

The separation is said to be proper if strict inequality holds for at least one $x \in A \cup B$.

Theorem

Let A, B be nonempty convex sets in \mathbb{R}^n . Then A and B are properly linearly separable if and only if

$$ri(A) \cap ri(B) = \emptyset$$
.

In particular two disjoint convex sets are always properly linearly separable.

Example Let
$$A := \{(x_1, x_2) \in \mathbb{R}^2 : 1 \le x_1 \le 2, x_2 = 0\},$$

 $B:=\{(x_1,x_2)\in\mathbb{R}^2:2\leq x_1\leq 4,x_2=0\}.$

Then $ri(A) \cap ri(B) = \emptyset$ and the sets are properly separable by the hyperplane of equation $x_1 = 2$.

Operations that preserve convexity

Affine functions

Let $f: \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}^m$ be affine, i.e. f(x) = Ax + b, with $A \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times n}$, $b \in \mathbb{R}^m$.

- If $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$ is convex, then $f(C) = \{f(x) : x \in C\}$ is convex
- If $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^m$ is convex, then $f^{-1}(C) = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : f(x) \in C\}$ is convex

Examples:

- $f(x) = \alpha x$, with $\alpha \in \mathbb{R}$
- f(x) = x + b, with $b \in \mathbb{R}^n$
- $\bullet \ f(x) = \left(\begin{array}{cc} \cos\theta & -\sin\theta \\ \sin\theta & \cos\theta \end{array} \right) x \text{, with } \theta \in (0,2\pi) \text{ (rotation)}$

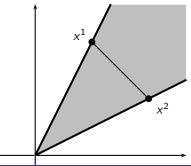
Definition (Cone)

A set $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$ is a cone if, for every $x \in C$ and for every $\lambda \geq 0$, it results

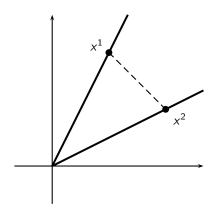
$$\lambda x \in C$$
.

In other words, if C contains a point x different from 0, then it contains the whole halfline starting from 0 and passing through x.

Example. A cone may be convex



or non convex:



Examples of cones

- \mathbb{R}^n_+ is a convex cone.
- $\{x \in \mathbb{R}^2 : x_1 x_2 = 0\}$ is a non-convex cone.
- Given a polyhedron $P = \{x : Ax \le b\}$, the recession cone of P is defined as

$$rec(P) := \{d: x + \alpha d \in P \text{ for any } x \in P, \alpha \ge 0\}.$$

It can be proved that $rec(P) = \{d : Ad \le 0\}$, thus it is a polyhedral cone.

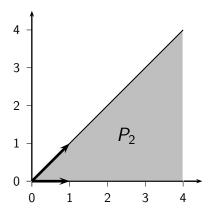
- $\left\{x \in \mathbb{R}^3 : x_3 \ge \sqrt{x_1^2 + x_2^2}\right\}$ is a non-polyhedral cone.
- Given $\bar{x} \in cl(C) \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$, the set

$$T_C(\bar{x}) = \left\{ d \in \mathbb{R}^n : \exists \{z_k\} \subset C, \exists \{t_k\} > 0, \ z_k \to \bar{x}, \ t_k \to 0, \lim_{k \to \infty} \frac{z_k - \bar{x}}{t_k} = d \right\}$$

is called the *tangent cone* to C at \bar{x} .

Example

$$P_1 = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^2: \ x_2 \leq x_1, \quad x_2 \geq 0\}$$

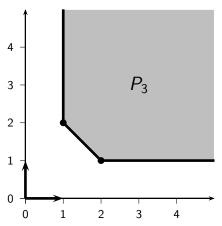


is a polyhedral cone.

$$rec(P_1) = P_1, \quad T_{P_1}((0,0)) = P_1.$$

Example

$$P_2 = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^2: \ x_1 \geq 1, \quad x_2 \geq 1, \quad x_1 + x_2 \geq 3\}$$



$$rec(P_2) = \{ d \in \mathbb{R}^2 : d_1 \ge 0, d_2 \ge 0 \}$$

$$T_{P_2}((1,2)) = \{ d \in \mathbb{R}^2 : d_1 \ge 0, d_1 + d_2 \ge 0 \}$$

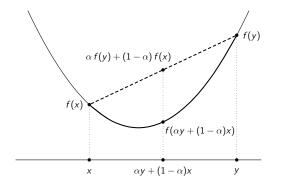
Exercises

- **1.2** Let $P = \{x : Ax \le b\}$ where $A \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times n}, b \in \mathbb{R}^m$. Prove that $rec(P) = \{d \in \mathbb{R}^n : Ad \le 0\}$.
- **1.3** If C_1 and C_2 are convex, then is $C_1 \cup C_2$ convex?
- **1.4** Prove that $B(\bar{x}, r) := \{z \in \mathbb{R}^n : ||z \bar{x}|| \le r\}$, is a convex set, whatever the norm $||\cdot||$ may be.
- **1.5** Write the vector (1,1) as a convex combination of the vectors (0,0),(3,0),(0,2),(3,2).

Definition (Convex function)

Let $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$ be convex. A function $f : \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$ is convex on C if

$$f(\alpha y + (1 - \alpha)x) \le \alpha f(y) + (1 - \alpha)f(x)$$
 $\forall x, y \in C, \forall \alpha \in [0, 1]$



Remark

When $C = \mathbb{R}^n$ we will simply say that f is convex.

Theorem

A function $f: \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$ is convex on \mathbb{R}^n if and only if the set

$$epi f_C := \{(x,y) \in C \times \mathbb{R} : y \ge f(x)\}$$

is convex.

Definition (Concave function)

Given a convex set $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$, a function $f : \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$ is concave on C if -f is convex, i.e.,

$$f(\alpha y + (1 - \alpha)x) \ge \alpha f(y) + (1 - \alpha)f(x)$$
 $\forall x, y \in C, \forall \alpha \in [0, 1]$

Examples.

- A linear (affine) function $f(x) = c^{T}x + b$ is both convex and concave.
- Let $\|\cdot\|$ be any norm, then $f(x) = \|x\|$ is convex.

Theorem (continuity of convex functions)

Let $f: \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$ be convex on the convex set $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$. Then f is continuous on ri(C).

Strictly convex and strongly convex functions

Definition (strictly convex function)

Given a convex set $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$, a function $f : \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$ is strictly convex on C if

$$f(\alpha y + (1 - \alpha)x) < \alpha f(y) + (1 - \alpha)f(x)$$
 $\forall x, y \in C, x \neq y, \forall \alpha \in (0, 1)$

Definition (strongly convex function)

Given a convex set $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$, a function $f : \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$ is strongly convex on C if there exists $\tau > 0$ s.t.

$$f(\alpha y + (1 - \alpha)x) \le \alpha f(y) + (1 - \alpha)f(x) - \frac{\tau}{2}\alpha(1 - \alpha)\|y - x\|_2^2$$
$$\forall x, y \in C, \forall \alpha \in [0, 1]$$

Remark

Similarly to convex functions, we say that f is strictly (strongly) concave on C if -f is strictly (strongly) convex on C.

Theorem

f is strongly convex if and only if $\exists \ \tau > 0$ such that $f(x) - \frac{\tau}{2} \|x\|_2^2$ is convex

Remark

By the previous theorem it follows that f is strongly convex if and only if there exists a convex function ψ and $\tau > 0$ such that $f(x) = \psi(x) + \frac{\tau}{2} \|x\|_2^2$.

Exercise 1.6

- Prove that: strongly convex ⇒ strictly convex ⇒ convex
- convex ⇒ strictly convex ?
- strictly convex ⇒ strongly convex ?

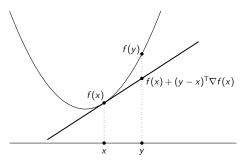
First order conditions

Assume that $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$ is open and convex, $f : \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$ is continuously differentiable on C.

Theorem

f is convex on C if and only if

$$f(y) \ge f(x) + (y - x)^{\mathsf{T}} \nabla f(x) \qquad \forall \ x, y \in C.$$



First-order approximation of f is a global understimator

First order conditions

Theorem

• f is strictly convex on C if and only if

$$f(y) > f(x) + (y - x)^{\mathsf{T}} \nabla f(x)$$
 $\forall x, y \in C$, with $x \neq y$.

• f is strongly convex on C if and only if there exists $\tau > 0$ such that

$$f(y) \ge f(x) + (y - x)^{\mathsf{T}} \nabla f(x) + \frac{\tau}{2} ||y - x||_2^2 \qquad \forall \ x, y \in C.$$

Second order conditions

Assume that $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$ is open and convex, $f : \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$ is twice continuously differentiable on C.

Theorem

• f is convex on C if and only if for all $x \in C$ the Hessian matrix $\nabla^2 f(x)$ is positive semidefinite, i.e.

$$v^{\mathsf{T}} \nabla^2 f(x) v \ge 0 \qquad \forall \ v \in \mathbb{R}^n, \ \forall x \in C,$$

or, equivalently, the eigenvalues of $\nabla^2 f(x)$ are ≥ 0 , $\forall x \in C$.

- If $\nabla^2 f(x)$ is positive definite for all $x \in C$, then f is strictly convex on C.
- f is strongly convex on C if and only if there exists $\tau > 0$ such that $\nabla^2 f(x) \tau I$ is positive semidefinite for all $x \in C$, i.e.

$$v^{\mathsf{T}} \nabla^2 f(x) v \ge \tau ||v||_2^2 \qquad \forall \ v \in \mathbb{R}^n, \quad \forall \ x \in C,$$

or, equivalently, the eigenvalues of $\nabla^2 f(x)$ are $\geq \tau$, $\forall x \in C$.

Convexity of quadratic functions

Let $f: \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$ be defined by

$$f(x) = \frac{1}{2}x^{\mathsf{T}}Qx + c^{\mathsf{T}}x$$

where Q is a $n \times n$ symmetric matrix, $c \in \mathbb{R}^n$. It is easy to check that

- $\nabla f = \frac{1}{2}(Qx + (x^{T}Q)^{T}) + c = Qx + c$
- Q is the Hessian of f.

Then f is:

- o convex iff Q is positive semidefinite
- strongly convex iff Q is positive definite
- concave iff Q is negative semidefinite
- strongly concave iff Q is negative definite

Examples

Let $f: \mathbb{R} \to \mathbb{R}$ and $C:= \mathbb{R}_+ \setminus \{0\}$.

- $f(x) = e^{px}$ for any $p \in \mathbb{R} \setminus \{0\}$ is strictly convex (on \mathbb{R}), but not strongly convex
- $f(x) = x^p$ is strictly convex on C if p > 1 or p < 0. Is it strongly convex?
- $f(x) = x^p$ is strictly concave on C if 0
- $f(x) = \log(x)$ is strictly concave, but not strongly concave on C

Let $f: \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$.

- f(x) = ||x|| is convex, but not strictly convex
- $f(x) = \max\{x_1, \dots, x_n\}$ is convex, but not strictly convex

Exercises

- **1.7** Prove that f(x) = ||x|| is convex, whatever the norm $||\cdot||$ may be.
- **1.8** Prove that if f is convex, then for any $x^1, \ldots, x^k \in C$ and $\alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_k \in (0,1)$

s.t.
$$\sum_{i=1}^k \alpha_i = 1$$
, one has $f\left(\sum_{i=1}^k \alpha_i x^i\right) \leq \sum_{i=1}^k \alpha_i f(x^i)$.

Hint. Follow the proof given in Lemma 1.

- **1.9** Prove that $f(x_1, x_2) = \frac{1}{x_1 x_2}$ is convex on the set $\{x \in \mathbb{R}^2 : x_1, x_2 > 0\}$.
- 1.10 Analyse the convexity properties of the function

$$f(x_1, x_2, x_3) = 2x_1^2 + 2x_2^2 + x_3^2 + 3x_1x_2 + x_2x_3 - 6x_1 - 4x_2 - 3x_3$$

1.11 Let f_1 and f_2 be convex, then is the product f_1 f_2 convex?

Operations that preserve convexity

Theorem

- If f is convex and $\alpha > 0$, then αf is convex
- If f_1 and f_2 are convex, then $f_1 + f_2$ are convex
- If f is convex, then f(Ax + b) is convex

Examples

Log barrier for linear inequalities:

$$f(x) = -\sum_{i=1}^{m} log(b_i - a_i^{\mathsf{T}} x)$$
 $C = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : b_i - a_i^{\mathsf{T}} x > 0 \quad \forall i = 1, ..., m\}$

• Norm of affine function: f(x) = ||Ax + b||

Pointwise maximum

Theorem

- If f_1, \ldots, f_m are convex, then $f(x) = \max\{f_1(x), \ldots, f_m(x)\}$ is convex.
- If $\{f_i\}_{i\in I}$ is a family of convex functions, then $f(x) = \sup_{i\in I} f_i(x)$ is convex.

Example. If $\psi(x,\lambda): \mathbb{R}^n \times \mathbb{R}^m \to \mathbb{R}$ is convex in x and concave in λ , then

$$\begin{split} p(x) &= \sup_{\lambda} \psi(x,\lambda) & \text{ is convex} \\ d(\lambda) &= \inf_{x} \psi(x,\lambda) & \text{ is concave} \end{split}$$

Composition

 $f: \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$ and $g: \mathbb{R} \to \mathbb{R}$.

Theorem

- If f is convex and g is convex and nondecreasing, then $g \circ f$ is convex.
- If f is concave and g is convex and nonincreasing, then $g \circ f$ is convex.
- If f is concave and g is concave and nondecreasing, then $g \circ f$ is concave.
- If f is convex and g is concave and nonincreasing, then $g \circ f$ is concave.

Examples Let $f: \mathbb{R} \to \mathbb{R}$.

- If f is convex, then $e^{f(x)}$ is convex
- If f is concave and positive, then $\log f(x)$ is concave
- If f is convex, then $-\log(-f(x))$ is convex on $\{x: f(x) < 0\}$
- If f is concave and positive, then $\frac{1}{f(x)}$ is convex
- If f is convex and nonnegative, then $f(x)^p$ is convex for all $p \ge 1$

Sublevel sets

Given $f: \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$ and $k \in \mathbb{R}$, the set

$$S_k(f) = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : f(x) \le k\}$$

is said the k-sublevel set of f.

Exercise 1.12 Prove that if f is convex, then $S_k(f)$ is a convex set for any $k \in \mathbb{R}$.

Is the converse true?

Quasiconvex functions

Definition (Quasiconvex convex function)

Given a convex set $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$, $f : \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$ is said quasiconvex on C if the sets

$$S_k(f) \cap C = \{x \in C : f(x) \le k\}$$

are convex for all $k \in \mathbb{R}$.

f is said quasiconcave on C if -f is quasiconvex on C.

Examples

- $f(x) = \sqrt{|x|}$ is quasiconvex on \mathbb{R}
- $f(x_1, x_2) = x_1 x_2$ is quasiconcave on $\{x \in \mathbb{R}^2 : x_1 > 0, x_2 > 0\}$
- $f(x) = \log x$ is quasiconvex and quasiconcave