Section 1.2

Row Reduction and Echelon Forms

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Picture:

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$\star$ = any number

$\boxed{\star}$ = any nonzero number

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Definition

A **pivot** $\boxed{\star}$ is the first nonzero entry of a row of a matrix in row echelon form.

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$$\begin{pmatrix} \color{red}{1} & 0 & \star & 0 & \star \\ 0 & \color{red}{1} & \star & 0 & \star \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & \color{red}{1} & \star \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \qquad \begin{array}{l} \star = \text{any number} \\ \color{red}{1} = \text{pivot} \end{array}$$

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Can every matrix be put into reduced row echelon form only using row operations?

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Answer: Yes! Stay tuned.

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But what happens if there are fewer pivots than rows? . . . parametrized solution set (later).

Poll

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Which of the following matrices are in reduced row echelon form?

A. $\begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 2 \end{pmatrix}$ B. $\begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$

C. $\begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 1 \\ 0 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}$ D. $\begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$ E. $\begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 & 8 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$

F. $\left(\begin{array}{cc|c} 1 & 17 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 \end{array}\right)$

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Maybe you can figure out why it's true!

Row Reduction Algorithm

Step 1a Swap the 1st row with a lower one so a leftmost nonzero entry is in 1st row (if necessary).

Example

$$\left(\begin{array}{ccc|c} 0 & -7 & -4 & 2 \\ 2 & 4 & 6 & 12 \\ 3 & 1 & -1 & -2 \end{array}\right)$$

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Example, continued

$$\left(\begin{array}{rrr|r} 1 & 2 & 3 & 6 \\ 0 & -5 & -10 & -20 \\ 0 & -7 & -4 & 2 \end{array}\right)$$

Row Reduction

Example, continued

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Note: Step 2 never messes up the first (nonzero) column of the matrix, because it looks like this:

$$\begin{array}{r} \\ \text{“Active” row} \longrightarrow \\ \\ \end{array} \left(\begin{array}{ccc|c} 1 & \star & \star & \star \\ 0 & \star & \star & \star \\ 0 & \star & \star & \star \end{array}\right)$$

Row Reduction

Example, continued

$$\left(\begin{array}{ccc|c} 1 & 0 & -1 & -2 \\ 0 & 1 & 2 & 4 \\ 0 & 0 & 10 & 30 \end{array}\right)$$

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Note: Step 3 never messes up the columns to the left.

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Success! The reduced row echelon form is

$$\left(\begin{array}{ccc|c} 1 & 0 & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 & -2 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & 3 \end{array}\right) \implies \begin{cases} x & & & = & 1 \\ & y & & = & -2 \\ & & z & = & 3 \end{cases}$$

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Step 4: profit?

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The row reduced matrix

$$\left(\begin{array}{cc|c} 1 & 5 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 \end{array}\right)$$

corresponds to the *inconsistent* system

$$\begin{aligned} x + 5y &= 0 \\ 0 &= 1. \end{aligned}$$

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Answer:

$$\left(\begin{array}{cccc|c} 1 & 0 & \star & \star & \color{red}{0} \\ 0 & 1 & \star & \star & \color{red}{0} \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & \color{red}{1} \end{array}\right)$$

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An augmented matrix corresponds to an inconsistent system of equations if and only if *the last* (i.e., the augmented) *column is a pivot column.*

Another Example

The linear system

$$\begin{aligned} 2x + y + 12z &= 1 \\ x + 2y + 9z &= -1 \end{aligned} \quad \text{gives rise to the matrix} \quad \left(\begin{array}{ccc|c} 2 & 1 & 12 & 1 \\ 1 & 2 & 9 & -1 \end{array}\right).$$

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$$\left(\begin{array}{ccc|c} 1 & 0 & 5 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 & 2 & -1 \end{array}\right)$$

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$$\begin{cases} x + 5z = 1 \\ y + 2z = -1 \end{cases}$$

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Continued

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comes from a matrix in reduced row echelon form.

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Yes! Rewrite:

$$\begin{aligned} x &= 1 - 5z \\ y &= -1 - 2z \end{aligned}$$

For any value of z, there is exactly one value of x and y that makes the equations true. But z can be *anything we want*!

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So we have found the solution set: it is all values x, y, z where

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This is called the **parametric form** for the solution.

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the free variables are x_2 and x_4.

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1. You can choose *any value* for the free variables in a (consistent) linear system.
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In the previous example, z was free because the reduced row echelon form matrix was

$$\left(\begin{array}{ccc|c} 1 & 0 & 5 & 4 \\ 0 & 1 & 2 & -1 \end{array}\right).$$

In this matrix:

$$\left(\begin{array}{cccc|c} 1 & \star & 0 & \star & \star \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & \star & \star \end{array}\right)$$

the free variables are x_2 and x_4. (What about the last column?)

One More Example

The reduced row echelon form of the matrix for a linear system in x_1, x_2, x_3, x_4 is

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The boxed equation is called the **parametric form** of the general solution to the system of equations. It is obtained by moving all free variables to the right-hand side of the $=$.

Poll

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Is it possible for a system of linear equations to have exactly two solutions?

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3. The last column is not a pivot column, and some other column isn't either.
   In this case, the system has *infinitely many* solutions, corresponding to the infinitely many possible values of the free variable(s). Picture:

$$\left(\begin{array}{cccc|c} 1 & \star & 0 & \star & \star \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & \star & \star \end{array}\right)$$