

# Convex Optimization Notes

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February 10, 2026

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# 1 Jan 13

**Definition 1.1.** An *optimization problem* is defined as

$$\min_{x \in \mathcal{C}} f_0(x) \quad \text{where} \quad \forall i \in [m], f_i(x) \leq b_i$$

where  $\mathcal{C}$  is the constraint set and  $f_0: \mathcal{C} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ .

**Definition 1.2.** The *standard form* of an optimization problem is

$$\min_{x \in \mathcal{D}} f_0(x) \quad \text{subject to} \quad \forall i \in [m], f_i(x) \leq 0; \quad \forall j \in [p], h_j(x) = 0$$

where  $x \in \text{dom}(f_i) \cap \text{dom}(h_j) =: \mathcal{D}$ .

$f_0$  is termed the objective function, and  $x$  is the optimization variable.

$f_i$  and  $h_j$  are constraint functions.

**Definition 1.3.** A *feasible solution* is any  $x \in \mathcal{D}$  that satisfies all the constraints.

**Definition 1.4.** The *optimal solution* is  $x^* \in \arg \min_{x \in \mathcal{D}} f_0(x)$ .

**Remark 1.5.** If no feasible solution exists, we define  $\min_{x \in \mathcal{C}} f(x) = +\infty$  and, similarly,  $\max_{x \in \mathcal{C}} f(x) = -\infty$ .

## 2 Jan 15

**Definition 2.1.** A set  $C$  is **convex** if  $\forall x_1, x_2 \in C$  and  $\forall \theta \in [0, 1]$ , we have  $\theta x_1 + (1 - \theta)x_2 \in C$ .

**Definition 2.2.** A function  $f: \mathcal{X} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  is **convex** if for all  $x_1, x_2 \in \mathcal{X}$  and  $\theta \in [0, 1]$ ,

$$f(\theta x_1 + (1 - \theta)x_2) \leq \theta f(x_1) + (1 - \theta)f(x_2) \quad (*)$$

**Remark 2.3.** Convex functions are differentiable almost everywhere.

**Theorem 2.4.** If  $f$  is both convex and concave, then  $f$  is affine (i.e., linear plus constant).

**Definition 2.5.**  $f$  is **strictly convex** if  $(*)$  holds with strict inequality  $<$  whenever  $x_1 \neq x_2$  and  $\theta \in (0, 1)$ .

**Definition 2.6.** A **convex optimization problem** is one where  $f_0$ ,  $f_i$ , and  $C$  are convex, and  $h_j$  are affine/linear. That is,

$$\min_{x \in C} f_0(x) \quad \text{such that} \quad f_i(x) \leq 0 \quad \forall i \in [m], \quad h_j(x) = 0 \quad \forall j \in [p]$$

**Theorem 2.7.** The set of feasible solutions in Definition 2.6 is convex.

**Theorem 2.8.**  $x^*$  is a **local minimizer** if there exists  $\epsilon > 0$  such that for all  $y$  with  $\|x^* - y\| \leq \epsilon$ ,

$$f(x^*) \leq f(y)$$

**Theorem 2.9.**  $x^*$  is a **local maximizer** if there exists  $\epsilon > 0$  such that for all  $y$  with  $\|x^* - y\| \leq \epsilon$ ,

$$f(x^*) \geq f(y)$$

**Theorem 2.10.** For any convex optimization problem, every local minimum is a global minimum.

*Proof.* Suppose  $\hat{x}$  is a local minimizer not equal to global minimizer  $x^*$ . Take  $\epsilon$  as any witness to  $\hat{x}$  being a local minimum. Let

$$y = \frac{\epsilon}{\|\hat{x} - x^*\|} x^* + \left(1 - \frac{\epsilon}{\|\hat{x} - x^*\|}\right) \hat{x}$$

Note:  $\|\hat{x} - x^*\| \leq \epsilon$ , otherwise  $\hat{x}$  is not a local minimizer in that neighborhood.

$$y - \hat{x} = \frac{\epsilon(x^* - \hat{x})}{\|x^* - \hat{x}\|} \quad ; \quad \|y - \hat{x}\| = \epsilon$$

Since  $f$  is convex,

$$f(y) \leq \frac{\epsilon}{\|\hat{x} - x^*\|} f(x^*) + \left(1 - \frac{\epsilon}{\|\hat{x} - x^*\|}\right) f(\hat{x}) < f(\hat{x})$$

Thus, a contradiction. □

### 3 Jan 20

**Definition 3.1.** A **convex combination** of  $x_1, x_2$  is  $\theta_1 x_1 + \theta_2 x_2$  where  $\theta_1, \theta_2 \geq 0$  and  $\theta_1 + \theta_2 = 1$ .

**Definition 3.2.** An **affine combination** of  $x_1, x_2$  is  $\theta_1 x_1 + \theta_2 x_2$  where  $\theta_1 + \theta_2 = 1$ .

**Definition 3.3.** A **linear combination** of  $x_1, x_2$  is  $\theta_1 x_1 + \theta_2 x_2$  where  $\theta_1, \theta_2 \in \mathbb{R}$ .

**Definition 3.4.** A **conic combination** of  $x_1, x_2$  is  $\theta_1 x_1 + \theta_2 x_2$  where  $\theta_1, \theta_2 \geq 0$ .

**Definition 3.5.** Given a set  $C$ , the **convex hull** of  $C$  is

$$\text{conv}(C) = \left\{ \sum_{i=1}^k \theta_i x_i \mid x_i \in C, \theta_i \in [0, 1], \sum_{i=1}^k \theta_i = 1 \right\}$$

**Remark 3.6.** The following are true:

1.  $C \subseteq \text{conv}(C)$
2.  $\text{conv}(C)$  is convex
3. It is the smallest convex set containing  $C$
4. If a convex set  $S \supseteq C$  then  $S \supseteq \text{conv}(C)$

**Theorem 3.7.** Any closed convex set can be written as  $\overline{\text{conv}}(C)$  for some set  $C$ .

**Definition 3.8.** The **relative interior** of  $C$  is defined as

$$\text{relint}(C) = \{x \in C : \exists \epsilon > 0, B(x, \epsilon) \cap \text{Aff}(C) \subseteq C\}$$

**Definition 3.9.**  $C$  is a **cone** if  $\alpha x \in C$  whenever  $x \in C$  and  $\alpha \geq 0$ .

**Definition 3.10.** Given a set  $C$ , the **conic hull** of  $C$  is

$$\text{conic}(C) = \left\{ \sum_{i=1}^k \theta_i x_i : x_i \in C, \theta_i \geq 0 \right\}$$

**Theorem 3.11.** The conic hull of  $C$  is the smallest convex cone containing  $C$ .

**Definition 3.12.** The  $\ell_p$  **norm** is defined as

$$\|x\|_p = \left( \sum_{i=1}^d |x_i|^p \right)^{1/p}$$

**Remark 3.13.** The following are true:

1. For  $p \in (0, 1)$ :  $\|x\|_p$  is not a convex function
2. For  $p \geq 1$ :  $\|x\|_p$  is convex
3. For  $p > 1$ :  $\|x\|_p$  is strictly convex

**Example 3.14.** Examples of convex sets:

1. Hyperplane:  $\{x : a^T x = b\}$
2. Halfspace:  $\{x : a^T x \leq b\}$
3. Polyhedron:  $\{x \in \mathbb{R}^d : Ax \leq b, Cx = d\}$
4. Polytope: a bounded polyhedron.

**Theorem 3.15.** A set  $S$  is **strictly convex** if for all  $x_1 \neq x_2$  and  $\theta \in (0, 1)$ ,  $\theta x_1 + (1 - \theta)x_2 \in \text{int}(S)$ .

**Definition 3.16.** The **normal cone** is defined to be

$$N_C(x) = \{g : g^T(y - x) \leq 0, \forall y \in C\}$$

**Remark 3.17.** If  $x \in \text{int}(C)$  then  $N_C(x) = \{0\}$ .

**Theorem 3.18.** If  $f$  is differentiable, then  $x^*$  is optimal if and only if  $-\nabla f(x^*) \in N_C(x^*)$ .

## 4 Jan 22

**Theorem 4.1.** If  $f$  is convex and differentiable, and  $C$  is a convex set, then any optimal solution  $x^*$  to  $\min_{x \in C} f(x)$  must satisfy  $-\nabla f(x^*) \in N_C(x^*)$ .

**Theorem 4.2.** The set of optimal solutions to a convex optimization problem is a convex set.

**Definition 4.3.** If  $C$  is convex then

1. **Translation:**  $C + a = \{x : x - a \in C\}$
2. **Scaling:**  $\alpha C = \{x : \frac{x}{\alpha} \in C\}$
3. **Intersection:** If  $\{C_\alpha\}_{\alpha \in A}$  is a collection of convex sets, then  $\bigcap_{\alpha \in A} C_\alpha$  is convex.

**Theorem 4.4.** The following are true:

1. If  $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$  is convex,  $A \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times n}$  and  $b \in \mathbb{R}^m$ , then  $AC + b = \{Ax + b : x \in C\}$  is a convex set.
2. If  $f(x) = Ax + b$ , then  $f^{-1}(C)$  is convex.
3.  $C_1 + C_2 = \{x + y : x \in C_1, y \in C_2\}$  is convex.
4. If  $C_1 \subseteq \mathbb{R}^m$ ,  $C_2 \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$  then  $C_1 \times C_2 = \{(x, y) \in \mathbb{R}^{m+n} : x \in C_1, y \in C_2\}$  is convex.
5. For any  $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n \times \mathbb{R}_{>0}^m$ , define

$$P(C) = \left\{ \left( \frac{x_1}{t}, \dots, \frac{x_n}{t} \right) : (x_1, \dots, x_n, t) \in C \right\}$$

If  $C$  is convex, so are  $P(C)$  and  $P^{-1}(C)$ .

**Definition 4.5.**

$$\text{epi}(f) = \{(x, t) : x \in \text{dom}(f), t \geq f(x)\}$$

**Definition 4.6. First Order Definition of Convexity:** If  $f$  is differentiable, then  $f$  is convex if and only if for all  $x, y \in \text{dom}(f)$ ,

$$f(y) \geq f(x) + \nabla f(x)^T (y - x)$$



Figure 1: First Order Definition of Convexity

**Second Order Definition of Convexity:** If  $f$  is twice differentiable, then  $f$  is convex if and only if  $\nabla^2 f(x) \succeq 0$ .

**Definition 4.7.** We say  $A \succeq B$  if  $A - B$  is positive semi-definite. This is equivalent to

$$a^T \nabla^2 f(x) a \geq 0 \quad \text{for all } a \in \mathbb{R}^d$$

**Definition 4.8.** The *subdifferential* is

$$\partial f(x) = \{g : f(y) \geq f(x) + g^T(y - x), \forall y \in C\}$$

Any such  $g \in \partial f(x)$  is called a **subgradient**.

If  $f$  is differentiable at  $x$  then  $\partial f(x) = \{\nabla f(x)\}$ .

**Theorem 4.9.**  $f$  is convex if and only if  $\partial f$  is non-empty.

## 5 Jan 27

**Definition 5.1.** *Gradient Monotonicity:* If  $f$  is differentiable, then  $f$  is convex if and only if  $\nabla f(x)$  is monotone. So we can conclude

$$(\nabla f(x) - \nabla f(y))^T(x - y) \geq 0 \iff f \text{ is convex.}$$

**Theorem 5.2.** For a  $A \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times n}$  we can decompose

$$A = U \sum V^t.$$

where  $U \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times k}$  with orthonormal column,  $\sigma \in \mathbb{R}^{k \times k}$  is a diagonal matrix with non-negative entries, and  $V \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times k}$  with orthonormal column.

**Definition 5.3.**  $(u_i, v_i, \sigma_i)$  form a s.v. triplet if  $Av_i = \sigma_i u_i$  and  $A^T u_i = \sigma_i v_i$   
 $\|u_i\| = \|v_i\| = 1$  and  $\sigma_i \geq 0$

**Theorem 5.4.** For any  $A \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times n}$  then  $A^T A$  is always positive semi definite

*Proof.* We can write  $A = V \sum U$  then  $A^T A = V \sum U^T U \sum V^T = V \sum^2 V^T$  □

**Definition 5.5.** *Spectral Radius:*  $\max_i \{|\lambda_i| : \lambda_i \in \Lambda(A)\} = \rho(A)$

**Definition 5.6.** The norm must satisfy the following properties:

1.  $\|A\| \geq 0$
2.  $\|\alpha A\| = |\alpha| \|A\|$
3.  $\|A\| = 0$  if and only if  $A = 0$
4.  $\|A + A'\| \leq \|A\| + \|A'\|$

**Definition 5.7.** *Operator/Spectral Norm:*

$$\|A\|_{op} = \|A\|_2 = \max_{\|x\|=1} \|Ax\|_2.$$

**Definition 5.8.** *Frobenius Norm:*

$$\|A\|_F = \sqrt{\sum_{i,j} A_{ij}^2}.$$

**Definition 5.9.**  $f$  is  $L$ -Lipschitz if

$$|f(x) - f(y)| \leq L \|x - y\|_2 \quad \forall x, y \in \text{dom}(f).$$

If  $f$  is differentiable then  $f$  is  $L$ -Lipschitz if and only if  $|\nabla f| \leq L$

**Definition 5.10.** Differentiable  $f$  is  $\beta$ -smooth if

$$\|\nabla f(x) - \nabla f(y)\|_2 \leq \beta \|x - y\|_2 \quad \forall x, y \in \text{dom}(f).$$

If  $f$  is twice differentiable then  $f$  is  $\beta$ -smooth if and only if  $\nabla^2 f(x) \preceq \beta I$ .

**Theorem 5.11.** If  $f$  is twice differentiable and  $\beta$ -smooth then

$$f(y) \leq f(x) + \nabla f(x)^T(y - x) + \frac{\beta}{2} \|y - x\|_2^2 \quad \forall x, y \in \text{dom}(f).$$

## 6 Feb 3

**Definition 6.1.** "Descent Direction" any  $h$  for which  $f(x + \eta h) \leq f(x)$ .

**Theorem 6.2.** Assume  $f$  differentiable and  $\beta$ -smooth with  $x_{t+1} \leftarrow x_t - \eta \nabla f(x_t)$ .

1. If  $\eta \leq \frac{2}{\beta}$  then  $f(x_{t+1}) \leq f(x_t)$
2. If  $\eta \leq \frac{1}{\beta}$  then  $f(x_{t+1}) \leq f(x_t) - \frac{\eta}{2} \|\nabla f(x_t)\|_2^2$

*Proof.* Recall

$$f(y) \leq f(x) + \nabla f(x)^T(y - x) + \frac{\beta}{2} \|y - x\|_2^2.$$

and

$$\|\nabla f(y) - \nabla f(x)\|_2 \leq \beta \|y - x\|_2.$$

Let  $y \leftarrow x + h$  then  $f(x + h) \leq f(x) + \nabla f(x)^T h + \frac{\beta}{2} \|h\|_2^2$

1. If  $h = -\frac{2}{\beta} \nabla f(x)$  then  $\nabla f(x)^T h = -\frac{2}{\beta} \|\nabla f(x)\|_2^2$  and  $\frac{\beta}{2} \|h\|_2^2 = \frac{2}{\beta} \|\nabla f(x)\|_2^2$  so  $f(x + h) \leq f(x)$
2. If  $h = -\frac{1}{\beta} \nabla f(x)$  then  $\nabla f(x)^T h = -\frac{1}{\beta} \|\nabla f(x)\|_2^2$  and  $\frac{\beta}{2} \|h\|_2^2 = \frac{1}{2\beta} \|\nabla f(x)\|_2^2$ .

□

**Theorem 6.3.** If  $f$  is differentiable,  $\beta$  smooth, and  $x^*$  be any optimizer. For any  $k > 0$

$$\min_{i=0, \dots, k} \|\nabla f(x_i)\|_2 \leq \sqrt{\frac{2\beta}{k} \left( \underbrace{f(x_0) - f(x^*)}_{\Delta_0} \right)}.$$

*Proof.* AFSOC  $\forall i \in \{0, \dots, k\}$ ,  $\|\nabla f(x_i)\|_2 > \sqrt{\frac{2\beta}{k} \Delta_0}$  Then we have

$$f(x_{i+1}) < f(x_i) - \frac{1}{2\beta} \left( \frac{2\beta \Delta_0}{k} \right). \quad (\forall i \in \{0, \dots, k\})$$

Continuing down the chain we have

$$f(x_{k+1}) < f(x_0) - \Delta_0 < f(x^*).$$

Thus a contradiction. □

**Theorem 6.4.** If  $f$  is  $\beta$ -smooth and convex,  $\eta = \frac{1}{\beta}$  and  $x^*$  any minimum then

$$f(x_k) - f(x^*) \leq \frac{\beta \|x_0 - x^*\|_2^2}{2k}.$$

*Proof.* Observe that

$$\|x_{t+1} - x^*\|^2 = \|x_t - x^* - \eta \nabla f(x_t)\|^2 = \|x_t - x^*\|^2 - \eta^2 \|\nabla f(x_t)\|^2 - 2\eta \nabla f(x_t)^T (x_t - x^*).$$

Rearranging and by convexity we have

$$\begin{aligned} f(x_t) - f(x^*) &\leq \nabla f(x_t)^T (x_t - x^*) = \frac{1}{2\eta} \left[ \underbrace{\|x_t - x^*\|^2}_{\delta_t} - \underbrace{\|x_{t+1} - x^*\|^2}_{\delta_{t+1}} + \frac{\eta}{2} \|\nabla f(x_t)\|^2 \right] \\ &\leq \frac{1}{2\eta} [\delta_t - \delta_{t+1} + 2\eta(f(x_t) - f(x_{t+1}))] \\ &= \frac{1}{2\eta} (\delta_t - \delta_{t+1}) + f(x_t) - f(x_{t+1}) \end{aligned}$$

So we have

$$f(x_{t+1}) - f(x^*) \leq \frac{\beta}{2} (\delta_t - \delta_{t+1}).$$



Adding across all terms

$$\sum_{i=0}^{k-1} f(x_{i+1}) - f(x^*) \leq \frac{\beta}{2} (\|x_0 - x^*\|^2).$$

So we have the relation

$$k(f(x_k) - f(x^*)) \leq \sum_{i=0}^{k-1} f(x_{i+1}) - f(x^*) \leq \frac{\beta}{2} \|x_0 - x^*\|^2.$$

□

**Definition 6.5.**  $f$  is  $\alpha$ -strongly convex if

$$f(tx + (1-t)y) \leq tf(x) + (1-t)f(y) - \frac{\alpha}{2}t(1-t)\|x - y\|_2^2.$$

Additionally, if  $f$  is differentiable then

$$f(y) \geq f(x) + \nabla f(x)^T(y - x) + \frac{\alpha}{2}\|y - x\|_2^2.$$

If  $f$  is twice differentiable then  $f$  is  $\alpha$ -strongly convex if and only if  $\nabla^2 f(x) \succeq \alpha I$ .

**Theorem 6.6.** Assume  $f$  is  $\beta$ -smooth,  $\alpha$ -strongly convex,  $\eta = \frac{1}{\beta}$  then  $\|x_k - x^*\|^2 \leq \left(1 - \frac{1}{\gamma}\right)^k \|x_0 - x^*\|^2$ .

We define the conditional number as  $\gamma = \frac{\beta}{\alpha}$

*Proof.*

$$\frac{\alpha}{2}\|x_k - x^*\|^2 \leq \frac{\beta}{2} (\|x_t - x^*\|^2 - \|x_{t+1} - x^*\|^2) \leq \left(1 - \frac{\alpha}{\beta}\right) \|x_t - x^*\|^2 \leq \left(1 - \frac{1}{\gamma}\right) \|x_k - x^*\|^2.$$

□

## 7 Feb 5

**Recall 7.1.** From previous class

1.  $f(x + \eta h) \approx f(x) + \eta h^T \nabla f(x)$  and when we set  $h = -\nabla f(x)$  we have

$$f(x - \eta \nabla f(x)) \approx f(x) - \eta \|\nabla f(x)\|_2^2.$$

**Backtracking Line Search:** Pick  $\gamma_1 \in (0, 1)$  and  $\gamma_2 \in (0, 1)$ , start with initial step size  $\eta$ . While  $f(x - \eta \nabla f(x)) > f(x) - \gamma_1 \eta \|\nabla f(x)\|_2^2$  (Armijo condition not satisfied), set  $\eta \leftarrow \gamma_2 \eta$  and retry. Once the condition is satisfied, use step size  $\eta$  to update  $x \leftarrow x - \eta \nabla f(x)$ .

**Recall 7.2.**  $g$  is a subgradient of  $f$  at  $x$  if

$$f(y) \geq f(x) + g^T(y - x) \quad \forall y \in \text{dom}(f).$$

**Lemma 7.3.** The following are true:

1.  $\partial f(x)$  makes sense for non convex functions too, could be empty
2. If  $f$  is convex, then for  $x \in \text{RelInt}(\text{dom}(f))$  we have that  $\partial f(x)$  is non-empty
3.  $\partial f(x)$  is a convex
4. If  $f$  is convex and differentiable at  $x$  then  $\partial f(x) = \{\nabla f(x)\}$
5. If  $\partial f(x)$  is non-empty everywhere,  $f$  is convex.

**Theorem 7.4.** The following are true:

1.  $\partial(af) = a\partial f(x)$
2.  $\partial(f + g) = \partial f(x) + \partial g(x)$
3. If  $g(x) = f(Ax + b)$  then  $\partial g(x) = A^T \partial f(Ax + b)$

**Example 7.5.** For  $f(x) = \max_{i=1, \dots, n} f_i(x)$  we have  $\partial f(x) = \text{Conv} \left( \bigcup_{i=1, \dots, n} \partial f_i(x) \right)$

**Example 7.6.** For  $f(x) = |x|$  we have  $\partial f(x) = \text{sign}(x) = \max -x, x$  so  $\partial f(0) = [-1, 1]$ .

**Example 7.7.** Let  $C$  be a convex set and  $I_C(x) = \begin{cases} 0 & x \in C \\ \infty & x \notin C \end{cases}$  is convex. Additionally, for  $x \in C$ ,  $\partial I_C(x) = N_C(x) = \{g : g^T(y - x) \leq 0 \forall y \in C\}$

*Proof.* For  $x \in C$ ,  $I_C(y) \geq I_C(x) + g^T(y - x)$  for all  $y \in C$  then we have

$$0 \geq 0 + g^T(y - x).$$

□

**Definition 7.8.** Subgradient Method:  $x_{t+1} \leftarrow x_t - \eta g_x$  for some  $g_x \in \partial f(x)$

1. Subgradients are in general not descent directions
2. The min norm subgradient is a descent direction

**Example 7.9.**  $f(x) = \|x\|_2 = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n x_i^2}$  is convex, then for  $x \neq 0$  we have  $\partial f(x) = \frac{x}{\|x\|_2}$ .

$$\partial f(0) = \{g : \|g\|_2 \leq 1\}.$$

## 8 Feb 10

**Definition 8.1.** For the subgradient method where

$$X_{t+1} = X_t - \eta_t g_t \text{ where } g_t \in \partial f(X_t).$$

We define the best iterate as

$$X_t^{(\text{best})} = \arg \min_{i=0, \dots, t} f(X_i).$$

**Theorem 8.2.** Assume  $f$  is  $G$ -lipschitz and convex. Let  $\|x_0 - x^*\| \leq R$  then pick

$$\eta_t = \frac{R}{G\sqrt{T}} \text{ guarantees that } f\left(x_T^{(\text{best})}\right) - f(x^*) \leq \frac{GR}{\sqrt{T}}.$$