

# Alternating Series and Conditional Convergence

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# A Series

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Consider the following series:

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Consider the following series:

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{(-1)^{n+1}}{n} = 1 - \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{3} - \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{5} - \dots$$

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Consider the following series:

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{(-1)^{n+1}}{n} = 1 - \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{3} - \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{5} - \dots$$

This series appears to be related to the harmonic series, but also very different:

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n} = 1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{4} + \dots$$

Harmonic Series

# Divergence of the Harmonic Series

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We can show that the harmonic series is divergent as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n} &= 1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{5} + \dots \\ &\geq 1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{8} + \dots \\ &= 1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} + \dots \\ &= \infty\end{aligned}$$

# Differences

However, our alternating harmonic series is different. Taking partial sums, we get the following sequence:

$$s_n = \sum_{k=1}^n \frac{(-1)^{k+1}}{k}$$

$$s_1 = 1$$

$$s_2 = \frac{1}{2}$$

$$s_3 = \frac{5}{6}$$

$$s_4 = \frac{7}{12}$$

$$\vdots$$



Clearly, this sequence does not grow without bound — it is bounded above by 1, and doesn't seem to dip below  $\frac{1}{2}$

# Convergence

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The alternating harmonic does converge. Courtesy of Wolfram MathWorld, we know that the series converges to the following:

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{(-1)^{n+1}}{n} = \ln 2$$

# Convergence

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The alternating harmonic does converge. Courtesy of Wolfram MathWorld, we know that the series converges to the following:

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{(-1)^{n+1}}{n} = \ln 2$$

...or does it?

# Rearranging the Alternating Harmonic Series

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Rearrange the series as follows:

$$1 - \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{3} - \frac{1}{4} + \dots = \left(1 - \frac{1}{2}\right) - \frac{1}{4} + \left(\frac{1}{3} - \frac{1}{6}\right) - \frac{1}{8} + \dots$$

# Rearranging the Alternating Harmonic Series

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Rearrange the series as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} 1 - \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{3} - \frac{1}{4} + \dots &= \left(1 - \frac{1}{2}\right) - \frac{1}{4} + \left(\frac{1}{3} - \frac{1}{6}\right) - \frac{1}{8} + \dots \\ &= \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{6} - \frac{1}{8} + \dots \end{aligned}$$

# Rearranging the Alternating Harmonic Series

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Rearrange the series as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}1 - \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{3} - \frac{1}{4} + \dots &= \left(1 - \frac{1}{2}\right) - \frac{1}{4} + \left(\frac{1}{3} - \frac{1}{6}\right) - \frac{1}{8} + \dots \\&= \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{6} - \frac{1}{8} + \dots \\&= \frac{1}{2} \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{(-1)^{n+1}}{n} \\&= \frac{1}{2} \ln 2\end{aligned}$$

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# Introduction to Conditional Convergence

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- We saw that our alternating harmonic series converges to  $\ln 2$ , but should it not converge to  $\ln 2$  all the time?



# Introduction to Conditional Convergence

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- We saw that our alternating harmonic series converges to  $\ln 2$ , but should it not converge to  $\ln 2$  all the time?
- For example, no matter how we arrange

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2^n},$$

The sum should always equal 1.

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- We saw that our alternating harmonic series converges to  $\ln 2$ , but should it not converge to  $\ln 2$  all the time?
- For example, no matter how we arrange

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2^n},$$

The sum should always equal 1.

- Maybe we should redefine convergence?

# Alternating Series

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- The answer is that the alternating harmonic series is *conditionally* convergent.

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- The answer is that the alternating harmonic series is *conditionally* convergent.
- We can always rearrange the terms of the alternating harmonic series to form whatever sum we want.

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- The answer is that the alternating harmonic series is *conditionally* convergent.
- We can always rearrange the terms of the alternating harmonic series to form whatever sum we want.
- In general, alternating series, of the form

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} (-1)^{n+1} a_n$$

can be convergent, while at the same time

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} a_n$$

is divergent.

# Alternating Series Test

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- In general, we can find if an alternating series is *conditionally* convergent as follows:

# Alternating Series Test

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- In general, we can find if an alternating series is *conditionally* convergent as follows:
  - The (absolute value) series terms are strictly positive and decreasing.

$$0 < a_{n+1} < a_n$$

# Alternating Series Test

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- In general, we can find if an alternating series is *conditionally* convergent as follows:
  - The (absolute value) series terms are strictly positive and decreasing.

$$0 < a_{n+1} < a_n$$

- The series terms tend to zero:

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} a_n = 0$$



# Questions?

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Thank you for listening. Any questions?