

Algebra II: Introduction to Rings

Arjun Vardhan

†

Created: 9th January 2022

Last updated: 12th March 2022

1 Basic Definitions

- $(R, +, \cdot)$ is a ring if:
 1. R is an abelian group with respect to $+$.
 2. $(a \cdot b) \cdot c = (a \cdot b) \cdot c$ for all $a, b, c \in R$.
 3. $a \cdot (b + c) = a \cdot b + a \cdot c$ for all $a, b, c \in R$.
 4. $(b + c) \cdot a = b \cdot a + c \cdot a$ for all $a, b, c \in R$.
- R is a commutative ring if $a \cdot b = b \cdot a$ for all $a, b \in R$.
- R is said to have an identity if there exists $1 \in R$ such that $1 \cdot a = a \cdot 1 = a$ for all $a \in R$. In such a case R is also called a ring with unity.
- A ring R with identity 1 , where $1 \neq 0$, is called a division ring or a skew field if for all $a \neq 0, a \in R$, there exists $b \in R$ such that $a \cdot b = b \cdot a = 1$.
- Trivial rings are those obtained by taking any abelian group and letting $a \cdot b = 0$ for all $a, b \in R$. The simplest example is the zero ring, $\{0\}$. Trivial rings are commutative.
- **Let R be a ring. Then:**
 1. $a \cdot 0 = 0$ for all $a \in R$. *Proof:* $a \cdot 0 = a \cdot (0 + 0) = a \cdot 0 + a \cdot 0$. So $a \cdot 0 = 0$. ■
 2. $(-a) \cdot b = a \cdot (-b) = -(a \cdot b)$, for all $a, b \in R$. *Proof:* $a \cdot b + (-a) \cdot b = b \cdot (a + (-a)) = b \cdot 0 = 0$. So $(-a) \cdot b = -(a \cdot b)$. ■
 3. $(-a) \cdot (-b) = ab$ for all $a, b \in R$. *Proof:* $(-a) \cdot (-b) = -(a \cdot (-b)) = -(-(a \cdot b)) = a \cdot b$. ■
 4. **If R has an identity 1 , then that identity is unique and $-a = (-1) \cdot a$.** *Proof:* Suppose there exists another identity $\psi \in R$. Then $\psi \cdot 1 = 1 \cdot \psi = \psi = 1$. $a + (-1) \cdot a = a \cdot (1 + (-1)) = a \cdot 0 = 0$. So $-a = (-1) \cdot a$. ■
- $a \in R, a \neq 0$ is called a zero divisor if there exists $b \in R$ such that $ab = 0$ or $ba = 0$.
- Let R have an identity $1 \neq 0$. $u \in R$ is called a unit in R if there exists $v \in R$ such that $uv = vu = 1$.
- The set of all units in a ring R is a group under multiplication. It is denoted R^\times .
- **If u is a unit in R , then so is $-u$.** *Proof:* There exists $v \in R$ such that $uv = vu = 1$. Then $(-u)(-v) = uv = 1$. ■
- **Let R be a ring with identity and let S be a subring of R such that $1 \in S$. If u is a unit in S then u is a unit in R . The converse is not necessarily true.** *Proof:* Let u be a unit in S . Then there exists $v \in S$ such that $uv = 1$. Since $u, v \in S, u, v \in R$ and thus u is a unit in R . Consider \mathbb{R} and \mathbb{Z} . \mathbb{Z} is a subring of \mathbb{R} . 2 is a unit in \mathbb{R} but not in \mathbb{Z} . ■
- **A zero divisor cannot be a unit.** *Proof:* Suppose a is a unit in R and that $ab = 0$ for some $b \in R, b \neq 0$. Then $va = 1$ for some $v \in R$, so $b = 1b = vab = v(ab) = v0 = 0$, which is a contradiction. Similarly, if $ba = 0$ then a cannot be a unit. ■

- **If $\bar{a} \neq \bar{0}$ and $\gcd(a, n) \neq 1$, then \bar{a} is a zero divisor in $\mathbb{Z}/n\mathbb{Z}$.** *Proof:* Let $d = \gcd(a, n)$ and let $b = \frac{n}{d}$. $d > 1$ so $0 < b < n$ and thus $\bar{b} \neq \bar{0}$. But since $\frac{ab}{bd} = \frac{a}{d}$, $n \mid ab$ and so $\overline{ab} = \bar{0}$. Thus \bar{a} is a zero divisor. ■
- A field is a commutative ring with identity $1 \neq 0$ where every nonzero element is a unit.
- A commutative ring with identity $1 \neq 0$ is called an integral domain if it has no zero divisors.
- **Suppose a, b, c belong to a ring R such that a is not a zero divisor and $ab = ac$. Then, either $a = 0$ or $b = c$. In particular, if R is an integral domain, then $a = 0$ or $b = c$.** *Proof:* If $ab = ac$ then $a(b - c) = 0$. Since a is not a zero divisor, $a = 0$ or $b - c = 0$. The second part follows from the definition of an integral domain. ■
- **Any finite integral domain is a field.** *Proof:* Let R be a finite integral domain and let $a \in R$, $a \neq 0$. By the cancellation law, the map $f : R \rightarrow R$, $f(x) = ax$ is an injective function. Since R is finite this map is also surjective. So there exists some $b \in R$ such that $ab = 1$, thus a is a unit. ■
- A subring of R is a subgroup of R that is closed under multiplication.
- To check that $S \subset R$ is a subring of R , it suffices to check that $S \neq \emptyset$ and that S is closed under subtraction and multiplication.
- **Let $\{S_i\}$ be a nonempty collection of subrings of R . Then $\bigcap_i S_i$ is also a subring of R .** *Proof:* Every subring of R must contain 0, so $\bigcap_i S_i$ is nonempty. Suppose $a, b \in \bigcap_i S_i$. Then $a, b \in S_i$ for all i , so $a - b, ab \in S_i$ for all i . ■
- The center of a ring R is the set of all elements that commute with every element of R , i.e., $\{z \in R : zr = rz, \forall r \in R\}$.
- **The center of a ring R is a subring of R .** *Proof:* Let the center of R be denoted by C . $0r = r0 = 0$ for all $r \in R$ so $0 \in C$. Suppose $a, b \in C$. Then $(a - b)r = ar - br = ra + (-1)br = ra + (-1)rb = ra - rb = r(a - b)$ for all $r \in R$. So $a - b \in C$. Also, $abr = arb = rab$ for all $r \in R$. Thus $ab \in C$. ■
- **The center of a division ring is a field.** *Proof:* Let R be a division ring and let C be the center of R . Every nonzero element in R is a unit so the same is true for C . $1r = r1 = r$ for all $r \in R$ so $1 \in C$. C is commutative by definition. Therefore C is a field. ■
- **Any subring of a field which contains 1 is an integral domain.** *Proof:* Let F be a field and let $S \subset F$ be a subring of F such that $1 \in S$. Since F is commutative, so is S . Every nonzero element in F is a unit in F , and a unit cannot be a zero divisor, so S has no zero divisors. Thus S is an integral domain. ■
- An element $x \in R$ is called nilpotent if $x^m = 0$ for some $m \in \mathbb{Z}^+$.
- **Let x be a nilpotent element of a commutative ring R . Then,**
 1. **x is either 0 or a zero divisor.** *Proof:* Suppose $x \neq 0$ and $x^n = 0$, where n is the smallest such integer. Then $xx^{n-1} = 0$, where $x^{n-1} \neq 0$. So x is a zero divisor. Now suppose that x is not a zero divisor and $x^n = 0$ and n is the smallest such integer. Then $xx^{n-1} = 0$ where $x^{n-1} \neq 0$. If $x \neq 0$ then x would be a zero divisor, which is a contradiction. So $x = 0$. ■
 2. **rx is nilpotent for all $r \in R$.** *Proof:* Suppose $x^n = 0$. Then $(rx)^n = r^n x^n = r^n 0 = 0$. So rx is nilpotent. ■
 3. **$1 + x$ is a unit in R .** *Proof:* Suppose $x^k = 0$, where k is the smallest such integer. Then $(1 - x)(1 - x + x^2 - x^3 + \dots + (-1)^k x^{k+1}) = 1 + (-1)^k x^{k+1} = 1 + 0 = 1$. ■
 4. **If u is a unit, then $u + x$ is a unit.** *Proof:* Suppose $x^k = 0$, where k is the smallest such integer and $uv = vu = 1$. Then $(u + x)v = 1 + vx$. Since vx is nilpotent, $1 + vx$ is a unit. So $u + x = u(1 + vx)$. Since the set of all units is closed under multiplication, $u + x$ is a unit. ■
- A ring R is called a Boolean ring if $a^2 = a$ for all $a \in R$.
- **Every Boolean ring is commutative.** *Proof:* Let $a, b \in R$, where R is a boolean ring. First we show that every element in a Boolean ring is its own additive inverse. $(a + a) = (a + a)^2 = a^2 + 2a^2 + a^2 = (a + a) + (a + a) \implies a + a = 0$. Now, $a + b = (a + b)^2 = a^2 + ab + ba + b^2 = (a + b) + (ab + ba) \implies ab = -ba = ba$. ■

2 Polynomial Rings, Matrix Rings, Group Rings

- Let R be a commutative ring with unity. Let x be an indeterminate. A polynomial is a sum of the form $a_0 + a_1x + a_2x^2 + \dots + a_nx^n$, where $n \geq 0$ and $a_i \in R$.
- If $n \neq 0$, then the polynomial is said to be of degree n , a_nx^n is called the leading term, and a_n is called the leading coefficient. If $a_n = 1$, the polynomial is said to be monic.
- The set of all such polynomials is called the ring of polynomials in the variable x with coefficients in R , and denoted $R[x]$.
- Addition in $R[x]$ is component-wise, so $(a_0 + a_1x + \dots + a_nx^n) + (b_0 + b_1x + \dots + b_nx^n) = (a_0 + b_0) + (a_1 + b_1)x + \dots + (a_n + b_n)x^n$. When multiplying the previous two polynomials, the coefficient of x^k in the product will be $\sum_{i=0}^k a_ib_{k-i}$.
- The set of all constant polynomials in $R[x]$ is just R . So $R \subset R[x]$.
- Since R is commutative with identity, so is $R[x]$.
- **Let R be an integral domain and let $p(x), q(x)$ be non-zero elements of R . Then, $\deg(p(x)q(x)) = \deg(p(x)) + \deg(q(x))$, the units of $R[x]$ are the same as the units of R , and $R[x]$ is also an integral domain.** *Proof:* If the leading terms of $p(x)$ and $q(x)$ are a_nx^n and b_mx^m respectively, then the leading term of their product will be $a_nb_mx^{m+n}$, where $a_nb_m \neq 0$, since R is an integral domain. If $p(x)$ is a unit, then $p(x)f(x) = 1$ for some $f \in R[x]$, then $\deg(p(x)f(x)) = \deg(p(x)) + \deg(f(x)) = 0$, thus $\deg(p(x)) = 0$ and so $p(x) \in R$. Suppose $p(x)f(x) = 0$ for some $f \in R[x]$, $f \neq 0$. Then $a_nb_m = 0$, which is a contradiction since R is an integral domain. So $R[x]$ has no zero divisors. ■
- Let R be a ring and $n \in \mathbb{N}$. Then, $M_n(R)$ denotes the set of all $n \times n$ matrices with elements from R . $M_n(R)$ is a ring.
- If R is a non-trivial ring and $n \geq 2$, even if R is commutative, $M_n(R)$ is not commutative.
- An element (a_{ij}) of $M_n(R)$ is called a scalar matrix if for some $a \in R$, $a_{ii} = a$ for all $1 \leq i \leq n$ and $a_{ij} = 0$ when $i \neq j$. That is, all diagonal entries are the same and all non-diagonal entries are 0. The set of scalar matrices is a subring of $M_n(R)$.
- If R is commutative, then scalar matrices commute with all elements of $M_n(R)$.
- If R has 1, then the scalar matrix with all diagonal entries equal to 1 is the identity of $M_n(R)$. In this case the units of $M_n(R)$ are all invertible $n \times n$ matrices.

3 Ring Homomorphisms and Quotient Rings

- Let R and S be rings. A ring homomorphism is a map $\gamma : R \rightarrow S$ such that $\gamma(a+b) = \gamma(a) + \gamma(b)$ and $\gamma(ab) = \gamma(a)\gamma(b)$ for all $a, b \in R$.
- The kernel of the ring homomorphism γ , denoted $\text{Ker}(\gamma)$, is the set of all elements in R that map to 0 in S .
- A bijective ring homomorphism is called an isomorphism.
- **If $\gamma : R \rightarrow S$ is a homomorphism, then the image of γ is a subring of S .** *Proof:* $\text{Im}(\gamma) = \{s \in S : \exists r \in R, \gamma(r) = s\}$. Let $a, b \in \text{Im}(\gamma)$. Then there exist $r_1, r_2 \in R$ such that $\gamma(r_1) = a$ and $\gamma(r_2) = b$. Then, $a - b = \gamma(r_1) - \gamma(r_2) = \gamma(r_1 - r_2)$, so $a - b \in \text{Im}(\gamma)$. Also, $ab = \gamma(r_1)\gamma(r_2) = \gamma(r_1r_2)$, so $ab \in \text{Im}(\gamma)$. ■
- **If $\gamma : R \rightarrow S$ is a homomorphism, then the kernel of γ is a subring of R .** *Proof:* $\text{Ker}(\gamma) = \{r \in R : \gamma(r) = 0\}$. Let $a, b \in \text{Ker}(\gamma)$. Then $\gamma(a - b) = \gamma(a) - \gamma(b) = 0$ and $\gamma(ab) = \gamma(a)\gamma(b) = 0$. So $a - b, ab \in \text{Ker}(\gamma)$. ■
- Let R be a ring, $I \subseteq R$ and $r \in R$. Then,
 1. $rI = \{ra : a \in I\}$ and $Ir = \{ar : a \in I\}$

2. I is a left ideal of R if I is a subring of R and if it is closed under left multiplication by elements from R , i.e, $rI \subseteq I$.
 3. I is a right ideal of R if I is a subring of R and if it is closed under right multiplication by elements from R , i.e, $Ir \subseteq I$.
 4. If I is both a left and right ideal, we say it is an ideal of R .
 5. In a commutative ring, the above three notions are the same thing.
- Let R be a ring and I be an ideal of R . Then the additive quotient group R/I is a ring under the binary operations: $(r + I) + (s + I) = (r + s) + I$ and $(r + I)(s + I) = rs + I$, for all $r, s \in R$. R/I is called the quotient ring of R by I .
 - **First Isomorphism Theorem for Rings:** If $f : R \rightarrow S$ is a ring homomorphism, then $\text{Ker}(f)$ is an ideal of R , $\text{Im}(f)$ is a subring of S , and $f(R)$ is isomorphic to $R/\text{Ker}(f)$.
Proof:

4 Properties of Ideals

- Let R be a commutative ring with unity, and $A \subseteq R$. Then,
 1. The smallest ideal of R containing A is called the ideal generated by A , and denoted (A) .
 2. An ideal generated by a single element is called a principal ideal.
 3. An ideal generated by a finite set is called a finitely generated ideal.
-

5 Rings of Fractions

6 Chinese Remainder Theorem