

Proofs

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Abstract

These notes correspond to the *Proofs* portion of the *Number and Algebra* section of the IB AA HL Mathematics syllabus. These notes are not mathematically rigorous, but I believe them to be exhaustive of the syllabus content. These notes are part of a series of notes on various topics in the syllabus. The complete repository of notes can be found at:

<https://github.com/aryakakodkar/ibmathnotes/>

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Proofs

In Mathematics, it is usually not sufficient to simply state that some is true; We must also provide a *proof* that the statement is indeed true. A proof is a logical argument that demonstrates the truth of a mathematical statement, based on previously established statements. A number of different kinds of proofs exist, each with its own nuances. We will begin with the simplest kind:

Definition 1.1.1 (Direct Proof). A *direct proof* is a method of proving a mathematical statement by assuming the premises are true and using logical reasoning to arrive at the conclusion.

When I say *premises*, I mean the initial assumptions or conditions of the statement. For those confused, an example may clear things up:

Example. Prove that if n is an even integer, then n^2 is also even.

Let's break down the statement in the above example to determine what the premises are, and what the conclusion of our proof must be. The statement begins with "if n is an even integer", which is our premise. We assume that n is indeed an even integer, because we don't need to consider the alternative case (that n is odd), since the statement in the example doesn't concern it.

Our conclusion will be that n^2 is even, if n is even. For a direct proof, we must show this to be true using logical reasoning. Enough talk, let's get to the proof itself:

Proposition 1.1.1. If n is an even integer, then n^2 is also even.

Proof. Let n be an even integer. By definition, an even integer is a multiple of 2. Therefore, we can express n as:

$$n = 2k$$

for any integer k (e.g. if $n = 8$, then $k = 4$ — this can be done for any even n). Now, we will compute n^2 :

$$\begin{aligned} n^2 &= (2k)^2 \\ &= 4k^2 \\ &= 2(2k^2) \end{aligned}$$

We clearly see that n^2 is a multiple of 2 (since $2k^2$ is an integer). Therefore, by definition, n^2 is even. ■

In the above proof, we have mathematically re-written our premise (n even $\rightarrow n = 2k$), and used it to logically arrive at our conclusion. It is common to be uncomfortable with how I came up with the first line of this proof (rewriting n as $2k$). This is a skill that comes with practice, and simply being exposed to many proofs. Let's look at a few more examples of direct proofs, and the most common examples of premises.

Exercise (Easy). Prove that the sum of any 3 consecutive integers is divisible by 3.

Answer. Let us begin by defining our premise. It is possible to rewrite this statement as: if 3 integers are consecutive, prove that their sum is divisible by 3. Therefore, our premise is that we have 3 consecutive integers. We can write this by considering the first integer to be some integer n . Then, the next two consecutive integers are $n + 1$ and $n + 2$. The sum of these integers is:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Sum} &= n + (n + 1) + (n + 2) \\ &= 3n + 3 \\ &= 3(n + 1)\end{aligned}$$

Since $n + 1$ is an integer, we see that the sum of the 3 consecutive integers is a multiple of 3. Therefore, the sum is divisible by 3. \circledast

Exercise (Easy). Prove that $x^2 - 3x + 3$ is always positive for all real values of x .

Answer. Again, it may help to re-write the statement in our ‘if-then’ format. This one becomes: if x is a real number, prove that $x^2 - 3x + 3 > 0$. Therefore, our premise is that x is a real number.

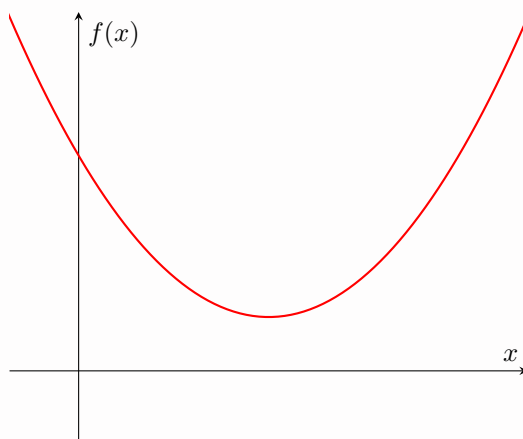


Figure 1.1: The graph of the quadratic function $f(x) = x^2 - 3x + 3$.

For those familiar with quadratics (if you aren't, see my notes on functions), we note that this function is concave up. For it to be positive at all real x , it cannot cross the x-axis (if it does, the value of $f(x)$ reaches 0, which is not positive). Equivalently, the function must have no real roots. Its discriminant must therefore be less than 0:

$$\begin{aligned}D &= b^2 - 4ac \\ &= (-3)^2 - 4(1)(3) \\ &= 9 - 12 \\ &= -3\end{aligned}$$

Since $D < 0$, the quadratic has no real roots, and is therefore always positive for all real values of x . \circledast

Chapter 2

Proofs by Counterexample and Contradiction

2.1 Proof by Counterexample

Definition 2.1.1 (Proof by Counterexample). A *proof by counterexample* is a method of disproving a mathematical statement by providing a specific example that contradicts the statement.

When proving a statement to be true, we must show that it holds for all possible cases. When proving it to be false, we need only to find a single case where the statement does not hold. For example, the statement "All prime numbers are odd" can be disproven by providing a single counterexample: the number 2, which is prime but not odd. Proofs by counterexample are most useful when you are asked to disprove a statement (they are not particularly useful for proving statements to be true).

2.2 Proof by Contradiction

Definition 2.2.1 (Proof by Contradiction). A *proof by contradiction* is a method of proving a mathematical statement by assuming the negation of the statement is true, and showing that this assumption leads to a logical contradiction.

The definition of a *proof by contradiction* is rather abstract. In the case of a *direct proof*, we assume the premises are true and use logical reasoning to arrive at the conclusion. In a proof by contradiction, we still assume that the premises are true, but that the conclusion is false. We then use logical reasoning to arrive at a contradiction (we will arrive at a statement which contradicts the premises which we assumed to be true).

Proposition 2.2.1. $\sqrt{2}$ is irrational.

Proof. We first remind ourselves of the definition of a rational number (and indirectly, an irrational number):

Definition 2.2.2 (Rational Number). A *rational number* is a number that can be expressed as the quotient or fraction $\frac{p}{q}$ of two integers, where p and q are integers and $q \neq 0$. An *irrational number* is a number that cannot be expressed as such a quotient.

An *irrational number* is a number that cannot be expressed as such a quotient. To prove that $\sqrt{2}$ is irrational, we will use a proof by contradiction. We will assume that $\sqrt{2}$ is rational, and show that this assumption leads to a contradiction.

If $\sqrt{2}$ is rational, then we can express it as:

$$\sqrt{2} = \frac{p}{q}$$

where p and q are integers with no common factors (i.e., the fraction is in simplest form), and $q \neq 0$. Squaring both sides, we get:

$$2 = \frac{p^2}{q^2}$$

Multiplying both sides by q^2 , we have:

$$2q^2 = p^2$$

This implies that p^2 is even (since it is equal to $2q^2$, which is a multiple of 2). Therefore, p must also be even (because the square of an odd number is odd, as you can hopefully prove yourself). We can express p as:

$$p = 2k$$

for some integer k . Substituting this back into the equation $2q^2 = p^2$, we get:

$$2q^2 = (2k)^2$$

Simplifying, we have:

$$2q^2 = 4k^2$$

Dividing both sides by 2, we get:

$$q^2 = 2k^2$$

This implies that q^2 is even, and therefore q must also be even. However, this contradicts our initial assumption that p and q have no common factors (since both are even, they share a factor of 2). Therefore, we conclude that the assumptions we made at the start of this proof do not apply: $\sqrt{2}$ is not rational (i.e. it is irrational). ■

Chapter 3

Induction

3.1 Proofs by Induction

Proofs by induction are a powerful method of proving statements that are asserted to be true for all natural numbers (or some well-defined subset of them). We remind ourselves:

Definition 3.1.1 (Natural Numbers). The set of positive integers: $\{1, 2, 3, \dots\}$.

Sometimes, the natural numbers are defined to include 0, but we will not consider this definition here. A proof by induction is defined as follows:

Definition 3.1.2 (Proof by Induction). A *proof by induction* is a method of proving a statement by showing that if it holds for a natural number n , then it also holds for $n + 1$. The proof consists of two main steps:

1. **Base Case:** Prove that the statement holds for the initial value (usually $n = 1$).
2. **Inductive Step:** Assume the statement holds for some arbitrary natural number $n = k$, and then prove it holds for $n = k + 1$.

Proofs by induction are far more intuitive than their definition suggests. Let us first consider the concept of an inductive step: if we can show that the statement holds for $n = k + 1$, assuming it holds for $n = k$, then we can conclude that the statement holds for all natural numbers greater than or equal to k . We could define another variable, m ,

$$m = k + 1$$

We know that if the statement holds for $n = k$, then it must also hold for $n = m$. But then, we can apply the same logic to m : if the statement holds for $n = m$, then it must also hold for $n = m + 1$. Of course:

$$m + 1 = (k + 1) + 1 = k + 2$$

Therefore, if the statement holds for $n = k$, it must also hold for $n = k + 2$. We can repeat this process indefinitely, showing that if the statement holds for $n = k$, it must also hold for all natural numbers greater than k .

The keen observer will note that we made an assumption at the beginning of this process: we assumed that the statement holds for $n = k$. What ensures that this assumption is valid? This is where the base case comes in. By proving the base case (that the statement holds for $n = 1$), we establish a starting point for our inductive step. From the base case, we know that the statement holds for $n = 1$. Therefore, by the inductive step, it must also hold for $n = 1 + 1 = 2$. Then, by applying the inductive step again, it must hold for $n = 3$, and so on. Thus, by proving both the base case and the inductive step, we can conclude that the statement holds for all natural numbers.