

Representing a permutation using
cycles

Cycles

Let $n \geq 1$ be an integer and consider the set $\{1, 2, \dots, n\}$. An n -cycle refers to

$$\sigma = [a_1 \cdots a_n]$$

with $\{a_1, \dots, a_n\} = \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$. We interpret it as a permutation acting on letters by

$$a_1 \mapsto a_2$$

$$\vdots$$

$$a_{n-1} \mapsto a_n$$

$$a_n \mapsto a_1.$$

We call σ a cycle of length n .

Abuse of notation

Sometimes, 3-cycle $[123]$ may denote something like

$$[123][4][5] \in S_5$$

by abuse of notation, omitting all 1-cycles.

One can say that we implicitly use embeddings

$$\text{Perm}(\{1, 2, 3\}) \times \text{Perm}(\{4\}) \times \text{Perm}(\{5\}) \hookrightarrow \text{Perm}(\{1, 2, 3, 4, 5\})$$

Cycle decomposition

Let $n \geq 1$ be an integer and σ be a permutation on the set $\{1, 2, \dots, n\}$. Then, we have the orbit decomposition

$$\{1, 2, \dots, n\} = \coprod_x O_x$$

Each orbit is also called a cycle for σ . Then, the restriction

$$\sigma_x = \sigma|_{O_x}$$

is a cycle of length equal to the cardinality of O_x . The cycle decomposition refers to

$$\sigma = \prod_x \sigma_x.$$

Question

In the cycle decomposition of a permutation, do we need to worry about the order of multiplication?