

1 Binary operations (09/20)

This course is about the theory of groups. Groups are sets equipped with extra structure, a binary operation, which satisfies certain conditions, namely associativity, the existence of an identity, and the existence of inverses.

Definition 1.1 (Products). Let S be a set. The **product** of S with itself, written $S \times S$, is the set of ordered pairs (a, b) where a and b are in S . Elements of $S \times S$ are often called **ordered tuples**.

Definition 1.2 (Binary operations). A binary operation on a set S is a function $m: S \times S \rightarrow S$. For $a, b \in S$ we will often write $a \cdot b$ or even ab for $m(a, b)$. This is multiplicative notation. We will also have occasion to use additive notation and write $a + b$ for $m(a, b)$.

Definition 1.3 (Properties of binary operations). Let $m: S \times S \rightarrow S$ be a binary operation on a set S , written $m(a, b) = a \cdot b$.

- (a) We say m is **commutative** if $a \cdot b = b \cdot a$ for all $a, b \in S$.
- (b) We say m is **associative** if $a \cdot (b \cdot c) = (a \cdot b) \cdot c$ for all $a, b, c \in S$.
- (c) We say m is **unitary** if there exists a (two-sided) **identity element**, which is an element $e \in S$ such that $e \cdot a = a = a \cdot e$ for all $a \in S$. If m is unitary, then the identity element e is unique; see Lemma 1.5.
- (d) We say m has the **Latin square property** if for each $a, b \in S$ there exist unique $x, y \in S$ such that $a \cdot x = b$ and $y \cdot a = b$.
- (e) We say that a unitary binary operation m has **inverses** if for each $a \in S$ there exists $b \in S$ such that $a \cdot b = b \cdot a = e$ for an identity element e (which is unique by Lemma 1.5). Such an element b is called a (two-sided) **inverse** of a and is written as a^{-1} . Inverses are unique if m is additionally associative by Exercise 1.3.

Example 1.4. Binary operations can be very simple, too simple to be of interest. For example, let \mathbf{Z} be the **set of integers**. Define $m: \mathbf{Z} \times \mathbf{Z} \rightarrow \mathbf{Z}$ by setting $m(a, b) = 17$ for all integers a, b . In the notation above, we let $a \cdot b = 17$ for all $a, b \in \mathbf{Z}$. This is a binary operation, which is commutative and associative, but not terribly useful.

Lemma 1.5 (Identities are unique). *Suppose that m is a unitary binary operation on a set S . If e and e' are identity elements, then $e = e'$.*

Proof. We have $e = e \cdot e' = e'$, where the first equality uses the identity property of e' and the second equality uses the identity property of e . \square

Notation 1.6. We will sometimes write 1 for the identities with respect to binary operations when writing multiplicatively; and we will sometimes write 0 for the identities with respect to binary operation written additively. Similarly, we might write $-a$ for the inverse of a when writing additively.

Remark 1.7 (Commutative diagrams). Associativity can be expressed as follows. Let $m \times \text{id}_S: S \times S \times S \rightarrow S \times S$ be defined by $(m \times \text{id}_S)(a, b, c) = (m(a, b), c)$ and let $\text{id}_S \times m: S \times S \times S \rightarrow S \times S$ be defined by $(\text{id}_S \times m)(a, b, c) = (a, m(b, c))$. The functions $m \circ (m \times \text{id}_S)$ and $m \circ (\text{id}_S \times m)$ define two functions on the set $S \times S \times S$ of ordered triples of elements of S . (These might be called ternary operations.) The binary

operation m is associative if these two functions are equal. In contemporary mathematics, it is common to express this via a **commutative diagram**. In this case, the diagram would be as follows:

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 S \times S \times S & \xrightarrow{m \times \text{id}_S} & S \times S \\
 \text{id}_S \times m \downarrow & & \downarrow m \\
 S \times S & \xrightarrow{m} & S.
 \end{array}$$

Saying that the diagram is commutative amounts to asserting that the two ways of traversing the diagram from the upper left to the bottom right by composing functions result in the same function $S \times S \times S \rightarrow S$. Commutative diagrams need not be square. For example, let $t: S \times S \rightarrow S \times S$ be defined by $t(a, b) = (b, a)$. Commutativity is the statement that the following triangular diagram commutes:

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 S \times S & \xrightarrow{t} & S \times S \\
 & \searrow m & \swarrow m \\
 & S, &
 \end{array}$$

which means that $m \circ t = m$.

Remark 1.8. If m is a binary operation on S satisfying the Latin square property, then the multiplication table of m is a Latin square: each element of S appears exactly once in each row and column. In the context of binary operations, these are called Cayley tables. For example, the Latin square of Figure 1 can be viewed

+	0	1	2
0	0	1	2
1	1	2	0
2	2	0	1

Table 1: A Cayley table, which in this case represents a Latin square (the bottom right 3×3 part of the table).

as the “addition table” of a binary operation m on the set $S = \{0, 1, 2\}$.

Example 1.9. Let $\mathbf{N} = \{0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, \dots\}$ be the set of **natural numbers**, which we take to be the non-negative integers. On \mathbf{N} we have the binary operation of addition, given by $m(a, b) = a + b$. This binary operation is commutative, associative, and unital; it has neither the Latin square property nor inverses.

Example 1.10. Let \mathbf{Z} be the set of integers. On \mathbf{Z} the binary operation of addition has all of the properties (a)-(e) of Definition 1.3. We can also multiply integers: the binary operation of multiplication satisfies properties (a)-(c) but not (d) or (e).

Example 1.11. We can construct Cayley tables for the outcomes of simple games. For example, consider the two-player game of rock, paper, scissors. The plays are denoted by r , p , and s . The outcomes of possible plays are listed in Figure 2. For example, if $p \cdot s = s = s \cdot p$ represents the fact that scissor beats paper, no matter who plays it. Now, consider

$$(r \cdot p) \cdot s = p \cdot s = s \quad \text{and} \quad r \cdot (p \cdot s) = r \cdot s = r,$$

which shows that this commutative binary operation is not associative.

\cdot	r	p	s
r	r	p	r
p	p	p	s
s	r	s	s

Table 2: A Cayley table for rock, paper, scissors. The associated binary operation is commutative, but not associative.

1.1 Exercises

Exercise 1.1. If S and I are sets, let S^I be the set of functions $f: I \rightarrow S$. Let $I = \{0, 1\}$. Prove that for any set S there is a bijection $p: S^I \rightarrow S \times S$.

Exercise 1.2. Let $S = \{1, \dots, n\}$ for some positive integer n . Compute the number of binary operations on S .

Exercise 1.3. Show that if m is a unital, associative binary operation on a set S , then inverses are unique when they exist: if $a \in S$ and $x, y \in S$ are inverses of a , then $x = y$.

Exercise 1.4 (The Eckmann–Hilton argument). Let S be a set with two binary operations \bullet and \circ satisfying the following two axioms:

- (i) \bullet and \circ each has a two-sided identity element, $\mathbf{1}_\bullet$ and $\mathbf{1}_\circ$, respectively;
- (ii) for each $a, b, c, d \in S$, there is the identity $(a \circ b) \bullet (c \circ d) = (a \bullet c) \circ (b \bullet d)$.

Prove that (a) $\mathbf{1}_\bullet = \mathbf{1}_\circ$, (b) $\bullet = \circ$, (c) \bullet is associative, and (d) \bullet is commutative.

Exercise 1.5. Find a binary operation which is not commutative and not associative.

2 Groups (09/22)

Algebraic structures are sets equipped with additional structures, often binary operations, which satisfy certain properties and are viewed as being part of the data of the algebraic structure.

Definition 2.1 (Magma). A **magma** M is a pair (S, \cdot) where S is a set and \cdot is a binary operation on S . The binary operation could also be written as $+$ or \bullet or \star , etc.

Notation 2.2. It is very convenient to write M for the magma *and* the underlying set. So, a magma M will be a set M equipped with a binary operation on M . This is an abuse of notation, but is harmless and will make everything a bit prettier.

Remark 2.3. While a set has varying binary operations, a magma has a single binary operation which is singled out and viewed as fixed.

Definition 2.4 (Types of magmas). In general, one can say that a magma is commutative, associative, unital, and so forth if its binary operation has that property. In many cases, magmas possessing these properties have special names.

- (a) A **semigroup** is an associative magma.
- (b) A **monoid** is a unital semigroup (a unital associative magma).
- (c) A **group** is a monoid which has inverses (a unital associative magma with inverses).
- (d) An **abelian group** is a group whose underlying magma is commutative.¹
- (e) A **quasigroup** is a magma with the Latin square property.
- (f) A **loop** is a unital quasigroup.

This course will focus on the theory of groups, although monoids are also sometimes useful.

Definition 2.5. A **finite group** is a group whose underlying set is finite.

Example 2.6. The set $\mathbf{N} = \{0, 1, 2, \dots\}$ of natural numbers is a commutative monoid under addition. It is not a group.

Example 2.7. The set $\mathbf{Z} = \{0, \pm 1, \pm 2, \dots\}$ of integers under addition is an abelian group. Unless otherwise specified, when we speak of \mathbf{Z} we will always mean this particular group.

Warning 2.8. There is another natural binary operation on \mathbf{Z} : multiplication. Under this operation, (\mathbf{Z}, \cdot) is a commutative monoid, but it is not a group. Taken together, the triple $(\mathbf{Z}, +, \cdot)$ forms a **ring**: a set with an abelian group structure under $+$, a monoid structure under \cdot , and where $+$ and \cdot interact in a prescribed way via the **distributivity laws**: $(a + b) \cdot c = a \cdot c + b \cdot c$ and $a \cdot (b + c) = a \cdot b + a \cdot c$. This particular ring is commutative because the multiplicative monoid is. These algebraic structures are the subject of the second quarter of this sequence.

Example 2.9. The sets \mathbf{Q} , \mathbf{R} , \mathbf{C} , and \mathbf{R}^n under (vector) addition are abelian groups.

Example 2.10. If k is a field and V is a k -vector space, then addition makes V into an abelian group.

Example 2.11. If $G = \{e\}$ is a set with a single element, e , then the unique binary operation on G (specified by $e \cdot e = e$) makes G into a group (with identity element e).

¹One could call these commutative groups, but for historical reasons, abelian groups are used instead.

Example 2.12. The empty set \emptyset also admits a unique binary operation $\emptyset \times \emptyset \rightarrow \emptyset$. It is commutative, associative, and has the Latin square property, but is not unital as unitality asserts the existence of an element. So, it is a semigroup and a quasigroup, but it is not a group.

Now, we introduce two of the most important examples of groups: addition modulo N and symmetric groups.

Lemma 2.13. Fix a positive integer $N \geq 1$. Let \mathbf{Z}/N be the set $\{0, 1, \dots, N-1\}$. The binary operation on \mathbf{Z}/N defined by letting $a +_N b = r$ where r is the unique integer in $\{0, \dots, N-1\}$ such that $a + b \equiv r \pmod{N}$ makes \mathbf{Z}/N into an abelian group.

Proof. The existence and uniqueness of c follows from the fact that for $c \in \mathbf{Z}$ there are unique integers q and $r \in \{0, \dots, N-1\}$ such that $c = qN + r$ (this is often called **Euclidean division**). Applying this to $c = a + b$ (where the sum is computed in \mathbf{Z}) produces q and r such that $a + b = qN + r$. We define $a +_N b = r$. This operation is commutative since $a + b = b + a = qN + r$, so $a +_N b = b +_N a$ and unital since $a + 0 = 0 + a = 0 \cdot N + a = a$ for $a \in \{0, \dots, N-1\}$, so $a +_N 0 = 0 +_N a = a$. The inverse of a is computed by finding $r \in \{0, \dots, N-1\}$ such that $-a = qN + r$. Then, $0 = a + r = a + qN + r$ is divisible by N so that $a + r = N$ and hence $a + r = (q+1)N + 0$, so $a +_N r = 0$. Thus, $+_N$ has inverses. For associativity, suppose that $a + b = q_0N + r_0$ and $b + c = q_1N + r_1$, where $r_0, r_1 \in \{0, \dots, N-1\}$. Then, assume that $r_0 + c = q_2N + r_2$ and $a + r_1 = q_3N + r_3$ for $r_2, r_3 \in \{0, \dots, N-1\}$. Then, by associativity of addition on \mathbf{Z} ,

$$(q_1 + q_3)N + r_3 = a + q_1N + r_1 = a + b + c = q_0N + r_0 + c = (q_0 + q_1)N + r_2.$$

By uniqueness of the remainder, we must have $r_3 = r_2$, so that $a +_N (b +_N c) = (a +_N b) +_N c$, which proves associativity and finally that \mathbf{Z}/N is an abelian group. \square

Notation 2.14. We will typically write $a + b \equiv c \pmod{N}$ instead of $a +_N b = c$ when working in \mathbf{Z}/N .

Example 2.15. The Cayley table of $\mathbf{Z}/3$ was already introduced in Remark 1.8. We reproduce it here for convenience.

+	0	1	2
0	0	1	2
1	1	2	0
2	2	0	1

Table 1: The Cayley table of $\mathbf{Z}/3$.

2.1 Exercises

Exercise 2.1. An associative loop is a group. Show that there exist non-associative loops.

Exercise 2.2. Let G be a group and fix $a \in G$. Prove that $(a^{-1})^{-1} = a$.

Exercise 2.3. Let G be a group and fix $a, b \in G$. Prove that $(a \cdot b)^{-1} = b^{-1} \cdot a^{-1}$.

Exercise 2.4. Let G be a group with identity element e and fix $a \in G$ and $n \in \mathbf{Z}$. Set $a^0 = e$. For $n > 0$, define a^n inductively by $a^n = a \cdot a^{n-1}$. For $n < 0$, define $a^n = (a^{-n})^{-1}$. One has $a^m \cdot a^n = a^{m+n}$ and $(a^m)^n = a^{mn}$ for $m, n \in \mathbf{Z}$. Prove that if G is abelian, then $(a \cdot b)^n = a^n \cdot b^n$ for all $a, b \in G$.

Exercise 2.5. Let G be a finite group with identity element e . Show that there exists an integer $n > 0$ such that $a^n = e$ for all $a \in G$.

3 Symmetric groups (09/25)

Lemma 3.1. *Let X be a set. Let S_X be the set of bijections $f: X \rightarrow X$. On S_X we define a binary operation via $f \circ g$, the composition of f and g . This makes S_X into a group.*

Proof. Let $\text{id}_X: X \rightarrow X$ be the function $\text{id}_X(x) = x$ for all $x \in X$. This is an identity element for S_X . Indeed, if $f: X \rightarrow X$ is another function, then $(f \circ \text{id}_X)(x) = f(\text{id}_X(x)) = f(x) = \text{id}_X(f(x)) = (\text{id}_X \circ f)(x)$ for all $x \in X$, so $f \circ \text{id}_X = \text{id}_X \circ f = f$.¹ Associativity follows from the fact that $(f \circ (g \circ h))(x) = f((g \circ h)(x)) = f(g(h(x))) = (f \circ g)(h(x)) = ((f \circ g) \circ h)(x)$. Finally, the existence of inverses follows because each $f \in S_X$ is a bijection; the inverse of f is the inverse function f^{-1} . \square

Definition 3.2. The group S_X is called the **group of permutations of X** . When $X = \{1, \dots, n\}$, we write S_n for S_X . This is called the **permutation group on n symbols** or the **symmetric group of degree n** . We write e for the identity element of S_n .

Lemma 3.3. *The symmetric group S_n on degree n has $n! = n(n-1)(n-2) \cdots 1$ elements for $n \geq 1$.²*

Proof. We prove the result by induction. Let s_n be the number of bijections from a set with n elements to another set with n elements. We want to show $s_n = n!$. When $n = 1$, this is true because there is exactly 1 function from a set with 1 element to another set with 1 element. Now, suppose the result is true for $1, \dots, n-1$. In particular, $s_{n-1} = (n-1)!$. To specify a bijection $f: \{1, \dots, n\} \rightarrow \{1, \dots, n\}$, we must choose $f(1)$. Let $Y = \{1, \dots, n\} - \{f(1)\}$. Then, the rest of the values of f are determined by a bijective function $f': \{2, \dots, n\} \rightarrow Y$. There are n choices of $f(1)$ and for each such choice $s_{n-1} = (n-1)!$ for f' . Thus, there are $n \cdot (n-1)! = n!$ bijections f , so $s_n = n!$, as desired. \square

Definition 3.4. Fix $n \geq 1$ and consider the symmetric group S_n of degree n . A **cycle** of order k is an ordered string $(a_1 a_2 \cdots a_k)$ where $a_1, \dots, a_k \in \{1, \dots, n\}$ are distinct. We view a cycle as a bijection $\sigma = (a_1 \cdots a_k): \{1, \dots, n\} \rightarrow \{1, \dots, n\}$, and hence as an element of S_n , by letting

$$\sigma(x) = \begin{cases} a_{k+1} & \text{if } x = a_1, \dots, a_{k-1}, \\ a_1 & \text{if } x = a_k, \text{ and} \\ x & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

In words, $\sigma = (a_1 \cdots a_k)$ is the function which takes a_1 to a_2 , a_2 to a_3 and so on, all the way to a_k to a_1 . It does not change other elements.

Example 3.5. If $i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$, then the cycle (i) of length 1 is equal to the identity element of S_n .

Example 3.6. Recall that if G is a group and $a \in G$, then the **order of a** , if it exists, is the least integer $k \geq 1$ such that $a^k = e$. Write $|a| = k$ for the order of a . (Written additively, this would be the least $n \geq 1$ such that $na = 0$.) If $f = (a_1 \cdots a_k)$ is a cycle, then its order is k .

Definition 3.7. A **transposition** is a cycle (ab) of length 2. If $f = (ab)$, then $f^2 = e$, so $f^{-1} = f$.

Proposition 3.8. *If X is a set with at least 3 elements, then S_X is not abelian. In particular, if $n \geq 3$ be an integer, then S_n is not abelian.*

¹We use throughout that two functions f and g from X to Y are equal if and only if $f(x) = g(x)$ for all $x \in X$.

²It also makes sense to write S_0 for S_\emptyset ; this group has 1 element.

Proof. We can assume that X contains the set $\{1, 2, 3\}$. We compute the compositions

$$(12) \circ (23) = (123) \quad \text{and} \quad (23) \circ (12) = (132).$$

These cycles represent different functions on $\{1, \dots, n\}$, so $(12) \circ (23) \neq (23) \circ (12)$. (Here, as in Definition 3.4, the cycles given act as the identity away from $\{1, 2, 3\}$.) \square

Remark 3.9. Note that as an element of S_n there is no difference between $(a_1 a_2 \cdots a_n)$ and $(a_2 a_3 \cdots a_n a_1)$. But, as in the previous proof, if two cycles $(a_1 \cdots a_k)$ and $(b_1 \cdots b_m)$ start with the same element $a_1 = b_1$, then they are the same if and only if $m = k$ and $b_i = a_i$ for $1 \leq i \leq k$.

Lemma 3.10 (Disjoint cycles commute). *Suppose that $f = (a_1 \cdots a_k)$ and $g = (b_1 \cdots b_m)$ are disjoint cycles, meaning that $a_i \neq b_j$ for all $1 \leq i \leq k$ and $1 \leq j \leq m$. Then, $f \circ g = g \circ f$.*

Proof. Fix $x \in \{1, \dots, n\}$. If x is not in $\{a_1, \dots, a_k\}$, then $f(x) = x$ and $g(x)$ is also not in $\{a_1, \dots, a_k\}$ so that $(f \circ g)(x) = f(g(x)) = g(x) = g(f(x)) = (g \circ f)(x)$. The same holds if x is not in $\{b_1, \dots, b_m\}$. But, the union of the complements of $\{a_1, \dots, a_k\}$ and $\{b_1, \dots, b_m\}$ is all of $\{1, \dots, n\}$. So, $f \circ g$ and $g \circ f$ are equal on all of $\{1, \dots, n\}$ and hence are equal. \square

Notation 3.11. Since disjoint cycles commute, if $(a_1 \cdots a_k)$ and $(b_1 \cdots b_m)$ are disjoint cycles, we write $(a_1 \cdots a_k)(b_1 \cdots b_m)$ for their composition, in any order. Thus, for example, $(12)(34) = (12) \circ (34) = (34) \circ (12)$. We also make this convention for compositions of multiple pairwise disjoint cycles.

3.1 Exercises

Exercise 3.1. Let $f = (a_1 \cdots a_k)$ be a cycle of length k in S_n . Write the inverse of f as a cycle.

Exercise 3.2. Let $f = (a_1 \cdots a_k)$ be a cycle of length k in S_n . Prove that f has order k .

Exercise 3.3. Let $f = (a_1 \cdots a_k)$ be a cycle of length k in S_n . Fix $s \geq 1$. Find (and prove) necessary and sufficient conditions for f^s to be a cycle. Hint: first consider the case of $s = 2$.

Exercise 3.4. Let $\mathbf{Z}/N = \{0, \dots, N-1\}$. Equip \mathbf{Z}/N with the binary operation given by multiplication modulo N , so that if $a, b \in \mathbf{Z}/N$, then $a \cdot_N b = r$ where $ab = qN + r$ where $r \in \{0, \dots, N-1\}$. We write $ab \equiv r \pmod{N}$.

(a) Show that this binary operation makes \mathbf{Z}/N into a commutative monoid with identity element 1.

Let $(\mathbf{Z}/N)^\times \subseteq \mathbf{Z}/N$ be the subset of elements $a \in \mathbf{Z}/N$ such that there exists $b \in \mathbf{Z}/N$ with $ab \equiv ba \equiv 1 \pmod{N}$.

(b) Show that $(\mathbf{Z}/N)^\times$ is an abelian group.

(c) Show that $(\mathbf{Z}/N)^\times$ consists of the elements of \mathbf{Z}/N which are relatively prime to N .

4 Cycle decomposition in cyclic groups (09/27)

Theorem 4.1 (Cycle decomposition). *Let $f \in S_n$ be an element of S_n . Then, for some $1 \leq r \leq n$ there are r pairwise disjoint cycles $(a_{11} \cdots a_{1,k_1}), (a_{21} \cdots a_{2,k_2}), \dots, (a_{r1} \cdots a_{r,k_r})$ such that*

$$f = (a_{11} \cdots a_{1,k_1}) \cdots (a_{r1} \cdots a_{r,k_r}).$$

Proof. As $\{1, \dots, n\}$ is finite, there is some smallest $k \geq 1$ for which $f^{(k)}(1) = 1$. Then, $(1 f(1) f(f(1)) \cdots f^{(k-1)}(1))$ is a cycle of length k . Let this be $(a_{11} \cdots a_{1,k_1})$. Let a_{21} be the first element in $\{1, \dots, n\}$ not in the cycle $(a_{11} \cdots a_{1,k_1})$ and consider the cycle generated by a_{21} , say $(a_{21} \cdots a_{2,k_2})$. This is a disjoint cycle. Continue on in this way until every element of $\{1, \dots, n\}$ appears in a cycle. \square

Remark 4.2. As cycles of length 1 all correspond to the identity element of S_n it is standard to omit them from the final cycle decomposition of f . The cycle decomposition of f is unique up to cyclically rotating the terms in the cycles (Remark 3.9) and reordering the cycles themselves (Lemma 3.10).

Example 4.3. If $f = (a_{11} \cdots a_{1,k_1}) \cdots (a_{r1} \cdots a_{r,k_r})$ is a decomposition of f into disjoint cycles, then the order of f is the least common multiple of k_1, \dots, k_r . For example, if $f = (1\ 12\ 8\ 10\ 4)(2\ 13)(5\ 11\ 7)(6\ 9)$, then $|f| = 30$.

Recall the following definition from last time.

Definition 4.4. A **transposition** is a cycle (ab) of length 2. If $f = (ab)$, then $f^2 = e$, so $f^{-1} = f$.

Lemma 4.5. *Every element $f \in S_n$ can be written as a product of transpositions.*

Proof. Using cycle decomposition, it is enough to prove the result for cycles. Thus, assume that $f = (a_1 \cdots a_k)$. Then, $f = (a_1 a_2) \circ (a_2 a_3) \circ \cdots \circ (a_{k-1} a_k)$. Indeed, for a_i with $1 \leq i \leq k-1$, it is unchanged except by $(a_i a_{i+1})$, which sends it to a_{i+1} . For a_k , $(a_{k-1} a_k)$ sends it to a_{k-1} , then $(a_{k-2} a_{k-1})$ sends it to a_{k-2} . This continues until finally $(a_1 a_2)$ sends the result to a_1 . \square

Example 4.6. Write down the cycle decomposition of each element of S_3 and compute the order of each element. See Table 1 for the solution.

e	1
$(1\ 2)$	2
$(1\ 3)$	2
$(2\ 3)$	2
$(1\ 2\ 3)$	3
$(1\ 3\ 2)$	3

Table 1: The cycle decompositions and orders of the $6 = 3!$ elements of S_3 .

Example 4.7. If $f = (a_{11} \cdots a_{1,k_1}) \cdots (a_{r1} \cdots a_{r,k_r})$ is a decomposition of f into disjoint cycles, then the order of f is the least common multiple of k_1, \dots, k_r . For example, if $f = (1\ 12\ 8\ 10\ 4)(2\ 13)(5\ 11\ 7)(6\ 9)$, then $|f| = 30$.

Example 4.8 (Dummit–Foote, Exercise 1.3.1). One way to write down permutations is using a kind of matrix notation: the permutation $f \in S_5$ given by

$$1 \mapsto 3 \quad 2 \mapsto 4 \quad 3 \mapsto 5 \quad 4 \mapsto 2 \quad 5 \mapsto 1$$

can be written efficiently as

$$f = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 \\ 3 & 4 & 5 & 2 & 1 \end{pmatrix},$$

which is just a lookup table. The cycle decomposition of f is $f = (1\ 3\ 5)(2\ 4)$. If we consider

$$g = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 \\ 5 & 3 & 2 & 4 & 1 \end{pmatrix},$$

which has cycle decomposition $g = (1\ 5)(2\ 3)$, then we can compute the cycle decompositions

$$\begin{aligned} f^2 &= (1\ 5\ 3) \\ fg &= (2\ 5\ 3\ 4) \\ gf &= (1\ 2\ 4\ 3) \\ g^2f &= f = (1\ 3\ 5)(2\ 4). \end{aligned}$$

4.1 Exercises

Exercise 4.1. Justify Example 4.7. Fix pairwise commuting elements f_1, \dots, f_r of a group G , i.e., elements such that $f_i f_j = f_j f_i$ for all $1 \leq i, j \leq r$. Prove that if each f_i has finite order n_i , then $f = f_1 \cdots f_r$ has order the least common multiple of f_1, \dots, f_r .

Exercise 4.2. By Lemma 4.5, every element $f \in S_n$ can be written as a product of transpositions. Suppose that $f = g_1 \circ \cdots \circ g_k$ where g_1, \dots, g_k are transpositions. We say that f is **even** if k is even and we say that f is **odd** if k is odd. Show that this is well-defined by proving that if $f = h_1 \circ \cdots \circ h_m$ is another way of writing f as a product of transpositions, then $k \equiv m \pmod{2}$.

Exercise 4.3. Let $f = (a_1 \cdots a_k)$ be a cycle. Show that f is even if k is odd and that f is odd if k is even.

Exercise 4.4. Write down the cycle decomposition of each element of S_4 and compute the order of each element.

Exercise 4.5 (Dummit–Foote, Exercise 1.3.2). Let

$$f = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 10 & 11 & 12 & 13 & 14 & 15 \\ 13 & 2 & 15 & 14 & 10 & 6 & 12 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 7 & 9 & 5 & 11 & 8 \end{pmatrix}$$

and

$$g = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 10 & 11 & 12 & 13 & 14 & 15 \\ 14 & 9 & 10 & 2 & 12 & 6 & 5 & 11 & 15 & 3 & 8 & 7 & 4 & 1 & 13 \end{pmatrix}$$

be two elements of S_{15} . Find cycle decompositions for f , g , f^2 , $f \circ g$, $g \circ f$, and $g^2 \circ f$.