Definitions and Examples of Rings

Definition 1.1: Rings and Fields

A **ring** R is a set with two binary operations $+, \bullet$ (addition and multiplication), i.e

$$+ : R \times R \to R$$
$$\bullet : R \times R \to R$$

such that:

(i) $(R, +)$ is an **abelian group**, i.e

- (Additive Identity) There exists a unique $0_R \in R$, such that $\forall a \in R$
$$a + 0_R = 0_R + a = a$$
- (Additive Inverse) $\forall a \in R$ there exists a unique $(-a) \in R$ such that
$$a + (-a) = (-a) + a = 0_R$$
- (Associativity) For all $a, b, c \in R$, $(a + b) + c = a + (b + c)$
- (Commutativity) For all $a, b \in R$, $a + b = b + a$

(ii) $\bullet$ is **associative**, i.e $\forall a, b, c \in R$
$$(a \bullet b) \bullet c = a \bullet (b \bullet c)$$

(iii) $\bullet$ is **distributive** over $+$, i.e $\forall a, b, c \in R$
$$a \bullet (b + c) = a \bullet b + a \bullet c$$

Now we see variations and the extension of a ring, the field:

- We say R has an **identity element**, 1_R, if there exists a $1_R \in R$ such that $\forall a \in R$
$$a \bullet 1_R = 1_R \bullet a = a$$
- We say R is **commutative** if $\forall a, b \in R$
$$a \bullet b = b \bullet a$$
- If R is a commutative ring with $1_R \neq 0_R$,then we say R is a **field** if every non-zero element has a multiplicative inverse, i.e $\forall a \neq 0 \in R, \exists\, a^{-1} \in R$ such that
$$a \bullet (a^{-1}) = (a^{-1}) \bullet a = 1_R$$

For the rest of the notes, I will omit the R subscript from the additive and multiplicative identity, unless necessary. Anyways, now we can look at some examples of rings:

Example 1.1. $(\mathbb{Z}, +, \bullet)$, The integers with the usual addition and multiplication is a ring.

Example 1.2. $(\mathbb{R}, +, \bullet)$, $(\mathbb{C}, +, \bullet)$, $(\mathbb{Q}, +, \bullet)$ are fields.

Example 1.3. $(\mathbb{N}, +, \bullet)$ is **not** a ring, since there are no additive inverses.

Example 1.4. $(\mathbb{R}^3, +, \bullet)$ is **not** a ring. It has addition $\mathbf{v}, \mathbf{w} \in \mathbb{R}^3 \Rightarrow \mathbf{v} + \mathbf{w} \in \mathbb{R}^3$, but no proper multiplication operator. You can check that the cross product, $\times$, not distributive.

Definition 1.2: Unit

We say $a \in R$ is a **unit** if there exists a $b \in R$ such that $a \cdot b = b \cdot a = 1$.
Basically, a unit is an element whose multiplicative inverse is also in the ring.

Example 1.5. In $\mathbb{R}$, every element except 0 is a unit.

Example 1.6. In $\mathbb{Z}$, the only units are $\{1, -1\}$.

Now let us look at examples of rings other than the standard number types $\mathbb{Z}, \mathbb{Q}, \mathbb{R}, \mathbb{C}$:

Example 1.7. The integers modulo n are also a ring. This set is written as $\mathbb{Z}/n\mathbb{Z}$. To understand this, first define the set of multiples of an integer n as

$$n\mathbb{Z} := \{n \cdot a | a \in \mathbb{Z}\}$$

Then,

$$\mathbb{Z}/n\mathbb{Z} := \mathbb{Z}/\!\sim$$

where $\sim$ is the equivalence relation for $x, y \in \mathbb{Z}$

$$x \sim y \iff x - y \in n\mathbb{Z}$$

which basically means two integers are equivalent if their difference is a multiple of n. Think about it like this, if x and y are multiples of n plus the same remainder, i.e

$$x = nk + r \quad y = nl + r$$

for some $k, l \in \mathbb{Z}$ then their difference is exactly a multiple of n,

$$x - y = nk + r - (nl + r) = n(k - l) = nm$$

for $m \in \mathbb{Z}$. They are equivalent in the sense of producing the same remainder when n is divided by them. This can be written in modulo arithmetic as

$$x \equiv y \pmod{n}$$

So, $\mathbb{Z}/n\mathbb{Z}$ will contain equivalence classes of remainders when dividing any integer by n, and each of these classes contain all integers that produce such remainder

$$\mathbb{Z}/n\mathbb{Z} := \{\overline{0}, \overline{1}, \overline{2}, \dots, \overline{n-1}\}$$

The numbers with bars indicate the equivalence classes generated when taking the integers modulo n. For example $\mathbb{Z}/3\mathbb{Z}$ are the integers modulo 3

$$\mathbb{Z}/3\mathbb{Z} = \{\overline{0}, \overline{1}, \overline{2}\}$$

where

$$\begin{aligned} \overline{0} &= \{0, 3, 6, 9, \dots\} \\ \overline{1} &= \{1, 4, 7, 10, \dots\} \\ \overline{2} &= \{2, 5, 8, 11, \dots\} \end{aligned}$$

Now, if $\overline{a}, \overline{b} \in \mathbb{Z}/n\mathbb{Z}$ and $a \in \overline{a}, b \in \overline{b}$ then we define

$$\overline{a} + \overline{b} = \overline{a + b}, \quad \overline{a} \cdot \overline{b} = \overline{a \cdot b}$$

This set with the two operations is a ring. (Exercise to show these operations are well defined).

Example 1.8. We can also have a rings of functions. Let R be a ring and X a set, define the set $\mathfrak{F}$

$$\mathcal{F} \coloneqq \{f : X \to R\}$$

which is the set of functions which take elements of the set X to elements of the ring R. Then

$$\begin{aligned}(f+g) :&X \to R \\ &x \mapsto f(x)+g(x)\end{aligned} \qquad \begin{aligned}(f \bullet g) :&X \to R \\ &x \mapsto f(x) \bullet g(x)\end{aligned}$$

are operations which with $\mathfrak{F}$, form a ring.

Example 1.9. Define the set of continuous functions on the closed interval $[0,1]$

$$C[0,1] \coloneqq \{f : [0,1] \to \mathbb{R} | f \text{ continuous}\}$$

We know from calculus that if $f, g \in C[0,1]$, then $f+g$ and $f \bullet g$ are also in $C[0,1]$. Hence, $C[0,1]$ is a ring.

Example 1.10. Sets of matrices can also be rings. Define

$$M_n(\mathbb{R}) \coloneqq \{n \times n \text{ matrices with real coefficients}\}$$

Then for matrices A, B:

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} a_{11} & a_{12} & \cdots & a_{1n} \\ a_{21} & a_{22} & \cdots & a_{2n} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ a_{n1} & a_{n2} & \cdots & a_{nn} \end{pmatrix}, B = \begin{pmatrix} b_{11} & b_{12} & \cdots & b_{1n} \\ b_{21} & b_{22} & \cdots & b_{2n} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ b_{n1} & b_{n2} & \cdots & b_{nn} \end{pmatrix}$$

we have

$$\begin{aligned} A+B &\coloneqq \begin{pmatrix} a_{11}+b_{11} & a_{12}+b_{12} & \cdots & a_{1n}+b_{1n} \\ a_{21}+b_{21} & a_{22}+b_{22} & \cdots & a_{2n}+b_{2n} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ a_{n1}+b_{n1} & a_{n2}+b_{n2} & \cdots & a_{nn}+b_{nn} \end{pmatrix} \\ A \bullet B &\coloneqq (a_{ik} \bullet b_{ki}) \end{aligned}$$

In the product, the notation indicates that each element is the dot product of a row vector in A and a column vector in B (the variable i indicates the ith row and ith column, while the k varies to multiply the kth element of each vector). This is the usual matrix multiplication we are all aware of.
Also, the additive and multiplicative identity are

$$0 = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 & \cdots & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & \cdots & 0 \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ 0 & 0 & \cdots & 0 \end{pmatrix}, 1 = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & \cdots & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & \cdots & 0 \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ 0 & 0 & \cdots & 1 \end{pmatrix}$$