

L1: Definitions and Examples of Rings

Definition 1.1: Rings and Fields

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

$$+ : R \times R \rightarrow R$$

$$\cdot : R \times R \rightarrow R$$

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) \cdot is **associative**, i.e $\forall a, b, c \in R$

$$(a \cdot b) \cdot c = a \cdot (b \cdot c)$$

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

$$a \cdot (b + c) = a \cdot b + a \cdot c$$

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 $\forall a \in R$

$$a \cdot 1_R = 1_R \cdot a = a$$

- We say R is **commutative** if $\forall a, b \in R$

$$a \cdot b = b \cdot a$$

- 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

$$a \cdot (a^{-1}) = (a^{-1}) \cdot a = 1_R$$

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

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

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

Example 1.4. $(\mathbb{R}^3, +, \cdot)$ 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

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

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

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

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

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

where

$$\bar{0} = \{0, 3, 6, 9, \dots\}$$

$$\bar{1} = \{1, 4, 7, 10, \dots\}$$

$$\bar{2} = \{2, 5, 8, 11, \dots\}$$

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

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

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}

$$\mathcal{F} := \{f : X \rightarrow R\}$$

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

$$\begin{aligned} (f + g) : X \rightarrow R & & (f \cdot g) : X \rightarrow R \\ x \mapsto f(x) + g(x) & & x \mapsto f(x) \cdot g(x) \end{aligned}$$

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 i th row and i th column, while the k varies to multiply the k th element of each vector). This is the usual matrix multiplication we are all aware of.

Also, the additive and multiplicative identity are

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