In Exercises 5–8, solve the system by Gaussian elimination.

7.
$$\begin{aligned} x - y + 2z - w &= -1 \\ 2x + y - 2z - 2w &= -2 \\ -x + 2y - 4z + w &= 1 \\ 3x \qquad\qquad - 3w &= -3 \end{aligned}$$

Solution:

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & -1 & 2 & -1 & -1 \\ 2 & 1 & -2 & -2 & -2 \\ -1 & 2 & -4 & 1 & 1 \\ 3 & 0 & 0 & -3 & -3 \end{bmatrix} \longleftarrow \text{The augmented matrix for the system.}$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & -1 & 2 & -1 & -1 \\ 0 & 3 & -6 & 0 & 0 \\ -1 & 2 & -4 & 1 & 1 \\ 3 & 0 & 0 & -3 & -3 \end{bmatrix} \longleftarrow -2 \text{ times the first row was added to the second row.}$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & -1 & 2 & -1 & -1 \\ 0 & 3 & -6 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & -2 & 0 & 0 \\ 3 & 0 & 0 & -3 & -3 \end{bmatrix} \longleftarrow \text{The first row was added to the third row.}$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & -1 & 2 & -1 & -1 \\ 0 & 3 & -6 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & -2 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 3 & -6 & 0 & 0 \end{bmatrix} \longleftarrow -3 \text{ times the first row was added to the fourth row.}$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & -1 & 2 & -1 & -1 \\ 0 & 1 & -2 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & -2 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 3 & -6 & 0 & 0 \end{bmatrix} \longleftarrow \text{The second row was multiplied by } \tfrac{1}{3}.$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & -1 & 2 & -1 & -1 \\ 0 & 1 & -2 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 3 & -6 & 0 & 0 \end{bmatrix} \longleftarrow -1 \text{ times the second row was added to the third row.}$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & -1 & 2 & -1 & -1 \\ 0 & 1 & -2 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \end{bmatrix} \longleftarrow -3 \text{ times the second row was added to the fourth row.}$$

The system of equations corresponding to this augmented matrix in row echelon form is

$$\begin{array}{rcrcrcrcr} x & - & y & + & 2z & - & w & = & -1 \\ & & y & - & 2z & & & = & 0 \\ & & & & & & 0 & = & 0 \\ & & & & & & 0 & = & 0 \end{array}$$

Solve the equations for the leading variables

$$\begin{aligned} x &= -1 + y - 2z + w \\ y &= 2z \end{aligned}$$

then substitute the second equation into the first

$$\begin{aligned} x &= -1 + 2z - 2z + w = -1 + w \\ y &= 2z \end{aligned}$$

If we assign z and w the arbitrary values s and t, respectively, the general solution is given by the formulas

$$x = -1 + t, \quad y = 2s, \qquad z = s, \qquad w = t$$

Some Facts About Echelon Forms

There are three facts about row echelon forms and reduced row echelon forms that are important to know but we will not prove:

1. Every matrix has a unique reduced row echelon form; that is, regardless of whether you use Gauss–Jordan elimination or some other sequence of elementary row operations, the same reduced row echelon form will result in the end.*
2. Row echelon forms are not unique; that is, different sequences of elementary row operations can result in different row echelon forms.
3. Although row echelon forms are not unique, the reduced row echelon form and all row echelon forms of a matrix A have the same number of zero rows, and the leading 1's always occur in the same positions. Those are called the ***pivot positions*** of A. The columns containing the leading 1's in a row echelon or reduced row echelon form of A are called the ***pivot columns*** of A, and the rows containing the leading 1's are called the ***pivot rows*** of A. A *nonzero* entry in a pivot position of A is called a ***pivot*** of A.