



Why

We generalize the notion of angle between vectors in \mathbf{R}^2 and \mathbf{R}^3 to vectors in \mathbf{R}^n .

Definition

The *angle* (*unsigned angle*) between the nonzero vectors $x, y \in \mathbf{R}^n$, is the real knumber

$$\theta = \angle(x, y) = \cos^{-1} \frac{x^\top y}{\|x\| \|y\|}.$$

In the case that one (or both) of the vectors is zero, we define the angle between them to be 0. Thus, $x^\top y = \|x\| \|y\| \cos \theta$, which is a convenient way to remember the inner product norm inequality.

Terminology

x and y are *aligned* if $\theta = 0$, in which case $x^\top y = \|x\| \|y\|$. In the case that $x \neq 0$, x and y are aligned if $x = \alpha y$ for some $\alpha \geq 0$. x and y are *opposed* if $\theta = \pi$, in which case $x^\top y = -\|x\| \|y\|$. In the case that $x \neq 0$, x and y are opposed if $x = -\alpha y$ for some $\alpha \geq 0$. Two nonnzero vectors x and y are *orthogonal* if $\theta = \pi/2$ or $-\pi/2$, in which case $x^\top y = 0$. The origin is orthogonal to every other vector. We denote that two vectors x and y are orthogonal by $x \perp y$.

