Why

We want to describe how fast a function grows or declines.[1]

Definition

Let $f : \mathbf{R} \to \mathbf{R}$. The *lower growth class* of f (*toward infinity*) is the set of all functions $g : \mathbf{R} \to \mathbf{R}$ for which there exists $C, M > 0$ so that $|g(x)| \leq C|f(x)|$ for all $x > M$. The intuition is that if $h : \mathbf{R} \to \mathbf{R}$ is in the lower growth class of f, h does not grow faster than f. In this case we say that h *grows at order* f.

The *lower limit class of* f *at* x_0 is the set of all functions $g : \mathbf{R} \to \mathbf{R}$ for which there exists $C, \varepsilon > 0$ so that $|g(x)| \leq C|f(x)|$ for all $|x - x_0| < \varepsilon$. The intuition is that for x sufficiently close to x_0, the magnitude of f is bounded by a constant times the magnitude of g. Often x_0 is 0.

The *upper growth class* of f (*toward infinity*) is the set of all functions $g : \mathbf{R} \to \mathbf{R}$ for which there exists $C, M > 0$ so that $|g(x)| \geq C|f(x)|$ for all $x > M$. The intuition is that if h is in the upper growth class of f, h grows at least as fast as f. We similarly define the *upper growth class at a limit* x_0.

The *(exact) growth class* of f is the set of all functions $g : \mathbf{R} \to \mathbf{R}$ for which there exists C_1, C_2, M so that $C_1|f(x)| \leq |g(x)| \leq C_2|f(x)|$ for all $x > M$. The intuition is that if h is in the growth class of f, then h and f grow at the same rate. Again, we similarly define the *growth class at limit* x_0.

Notation

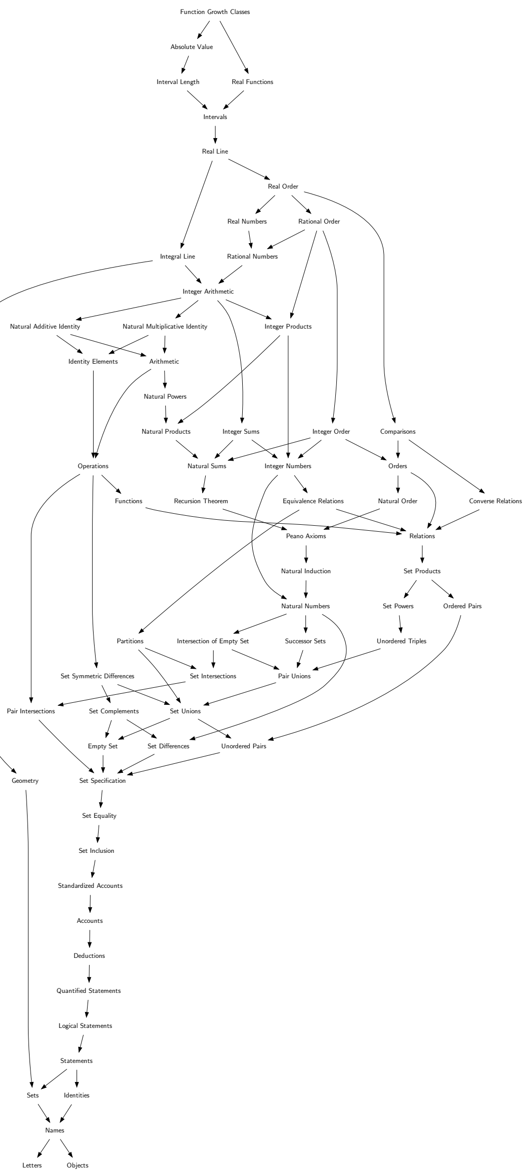
We denote the upper, lower and exact growth classes of a function $f : \mathbf{R} \to \mathbf{R}$ by of f by $O(f)$, $\Omega(f)$ and $\Theta(f)$, respectively. We read the notation $O(f)$ as "order at most f," we read $\Omega(f)$ as "order at least f," and $\Theta(f)$ as "order exactly f."

[1] Future editions will expand this vague introduction.

The letter O is a mnemonic for order, and Ω and Θ build on this mnemonic. The term order appears to arise from the use of growth classes when discussing Taylor approximations. In this case of small x (i.e., $|x| < 1$), $|x^p| < |x^q|$ if $q < p$ and so higher order terms are "smaller" and "negligible." This notation is sometimes called *Big O notation*,*Landau's symbol*, *Landau notation* or *Landau's notation*.

Let $\phi, \psi : \mathbf{R} \to \mathbf{R}$. Many authors use $\phi = O(\psi)$ or $\phi(t) = O(\psi(t))$ to assert that ϕ is in the upper growth class of ψ at some understood limit (e.g., 0 or ∞). In other words, the equation asserts that there exists some positive constant $C > 0$ sot that, for all t sufficiently close to the understood limit, $|\phi(t)| \leq C|\psi(t)|$.[2] For example, the statement $\sin^2(t) = P(t^2)$ as $t \to 0$ (or for $t \to 0$) means that there exists constants $C, \varepsilon > 0$ so that, $|t| < \varepsilon \longrightarrow |\sin^2(t)| \leq Ct^2$.

[2]Often also defined $|\phi(t)| < C\psi(t)$, with no absolute value on ψ.


Function Growth Classes
Absolute Value
Interval Length
Real Functions
Intervals
Real Line
Real Order
Real Numbers
Rational Order
Integral Line
Rational Numbers
Integer Arithmetic
Natural Additive Identity
Natural Multiplicative Identity
Integer Products
Identity Elements
Arithmetic
Natural Powers
Natural Products
Integer Sums
Integer Order
Comparisons
Operations
Natural Sums
Integer Numbers
Orders
Functions
Recursion Theorem
Equivalence Relations
Natural Order
Converse Relations
Peano Axioms
Relations
Natural Induction
Set Products
Natural Numbers
Set Powers
Ordered Pairs
Partitions
Intersection of Empty Set
Successor Sets
Unordered Triples
Set Symmetric Differences
Set Intersections
Pair Unions
Pair Intersections
Set Complements
Set Unions
Empty Set
Set Differences
Unordered Pairs
Geometry
Set Specification
Set Equality
Set Inclusion
Standardized Accounts
Accounts
Deductions
Quantified Statements
Logical Statements
Statements
Sets
Identities
Names
Letters
Objects