



Why

We discuss a decomposition using eigenvalues and eigenvectors.¹

Defining result

An *eigenvalue decomposition* of a matrix $A \in \mathbf{R}^{n \times n}$ is an ordered pair (X, Λ) in which X is invertible, Λ is diagonal, and $A = X\Lambda X^{-1}$.

In this case, $AX = X\Lambda$, in other words,

$$\begin{bmatrix} A \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} x_1 & \cdots & x_m \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} x_1 & \cdots & x_m \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \lambda_1 & & \\ & \ddots & \\ & & \lambda_n \end{bmatrix}.$$

in which x_i is the i th column of X and λ_i is the i th diagonal element of Λ . We have $Ax_i = \lambda_i x_i$ for $i = 1, \dots, n$. In other words, the i th column of X is an eigenvector of A and the j th entry of Λ is the corresponding eigenvalue.

If X is orthonormal, so that $X^{-1} = X^\top$, then we can interpret such a decomposition as a change of basis to *eigenvector coordinates*. If $Ax = b$, and $A = X\Lambda X^{-1}$ then $(X^{-1}b) = \Lambda(X^{-1}x)$. Here, $X^{-1}x$ expands x in the basis of columns of X . So to compute Ax , we first expand into the basis of columns of X , scale by Λ , and then interpret the result as the coefficients of a linear combination of the columns of X .

¹Future editions will expand.

In this case that $A = X\Lambda X^\top$ for an eigenvalue decomposition (X, Λ) of A , we can also write

$$A = X\Lambda X^\top = \sum_{i=1}^n \Lambda_{ii} x_i x_i^\top.$$

Proposition 1. *Every real symmetric matrix has an eigenvalue decomposition (X, Λ) in which X is orthonormal.*²

²In future editions, this may be the motivating result for the definition of eigenvalues.

