



## Why

We want to build vectors out of other vectors using scalar multiplication and vector addition.

## Definition

A *linear combination* from a  $\mathbf{R}^n$  is an ordered pair: the first coordinate is a sequence of vectors and the second is a sequence in  $\mathbf{R}$  (which we call the *scalars*). The *result* of a linear combination is the sum of the results of scaling each vector by the corresponding scalar in the sequence; itself a vector in the space.

A *trivial linear combination* is one whose sequence of scalars is zero at each coordinate. The result of any trivial linear combination is the zero vector. A *nontrivial linear combination* is one which is not trivial. In other words, to be nontrivial, there must exist at least one index of the scalar sequence whose corresponding value is nonzero.

We say that a given vector *can be written as a linear combination of* a sequence of vectors if there exists a sequence of scalars such that the result of the linear combination of that sequence of vectors and scalars is the given vector. In other words, a vector can be written as a linear combination of some other vectors if there exists scalars for those other vectors such that scaling them and adding the results gives the vector.

## Notation

Let  $v = (v_1, \dots, v_n)$  be a sequence of vectors in  $\mathbf{R}^n$  and  $a = (a_1, \dots, a_n)$  be a sequence of scalars in  $\mathbf{R}$ . Then  $(v, a)$  is a linear combination and we can express its result by

$$a_1v_1 + a_2v_2 + \cdots + a_nv_n.$$

If  $(v, a)$  is trivial, then  $a_i = 0$  for  $i \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$  and the result of  $(v, a)$  is 0 (the zero vector). Otherwise, there exists  $i \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$  such that  $a_i \neq 0$ ; of course, the result of  $(v, a)$  may still be 0. A vector  $u$  can be written as a linear combination of the vectors  $v_1, v_2, \dots, v_n$  if there exists scalars  $a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n$  so that

$$u = a_1v_1 + a_2v_2 + \cdots + a_nv_n.$$

We often number (see **Lists**) a finite set of vectors. In this case, we say “Let  $\{u_1, \dots, u_n\}$  be a (finite) set of vectors.”

