Primes and Greatest Common Divisors

Section 4.3

Section Summary

- Prime Numbers and their Properties
- Conjectures and Open Problems About Primes
- Greatest Common Divisors and Least Common Multiples
- The Euclidian Algorithm
- gcds as Linear Combinations

Primes

Definition: A positive integer *p* greater than 1 is called *prime* if the only positive factors of *p* are 1 and *p*. A positive integer that is greater than 1 and is not prime is called *composite*.

Example: The integer 7 is prime because its only positive factors are 1 and 7, but 9 is composite because it is divisible by 3.

The Fundamental Theorem of Arithmetic

Theorem: Every positive integer greater than 1 can be written uniquely as a prime or as the product of two or more primes where the prime factors are written in order of nondecreasing size.

Examples:

- $100 = 2 \cdot 2 \cdot 5 \cdot 5 = 2^2 \cdot 5^2$
- $641 = 641$
- $999 = 3 \cdot 3 \cdot 3 \cdot 37 = 3^3 \cdot 37$
- $1024 = 2 \cdot 2 \cdot 2 \cdot 2 \cdot 2 \cdot 2 \cdot 2 \cdot 2 \cdot 2 \cdot 2 = 2^{10}$

Erastothenes
(276-194 B.C.)

The Sieve of Erastosthenes

- The *Sieve of Erastosthenes* can be used to find all primes not exceeding a specified positive integer. For example, begin with the list of integers between 1 and 100.
  a. Delete all the integers, other than 2, divisible by 2.
  b. Delete all the integers, other than 3, divisible by 3.
  c. Next, delete all the integers, other than 5, divisible by 5.
  d. Next, delete all the integers, other than 7, divisible by 7.
  e. Since all the remaining integers are not divisible by any of the previous integers, other than 1, the primes are:

{2,3,7,11,19,23,29,31,37,41,43,47,53,59,61,67,71,73,79,83,89, 97}

continued →

The Sieve of Erastosthenes

TABLE 1 The Sieve of Eratosthenes.

Integers divisible by 2 other than 2 receive an underline.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80
81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90
91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100

Integers divisible by 3 other than 3 receive an underline.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80
81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90
91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100

Integers divisible by 5 other than 5 receive an underline.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80
81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90
91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100

Integers divisible by 7 other than 7 receive an underline; integers in color are prime.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80
81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90
91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100

If an integer n is a composite integer, then it has a prime divisor less than or equal to $\sqrt{n}$.

To see this, note that if $n = ab$, then $a \leq \sqrt{n}$ or $b \leq \sqrt{n}$.

Trial division, a very inefficient method of determining if a number n is prime, is to try every integer $i \leq \sqrt{n}$ and see if n is divisible by i.

Infinitude of Primes

Euclid
(325 B.C.E. – 265 B.C.E.)

Theorem: There are infinitely many primes. (Euclid)

Proof: Assume finitely many primes: $p_1, p_2, \ldots, p_n$

- Let $q = p_1 p_2 \cdots p_n + 1$
- Either q is prime or by the fundamental theorem of arithmetic it is a product of primes.
  - But none of the primes p_j divides q since if $p_j \mid q$, then p_j divides $q - p_1 p_2 \cdots p_n = 1$.
  - Hence, there is a prime not on the list $p_1, p_2, \ldots, p_n$. It is either q, or if q is composite, it is a prime factor of q. This contradicts the assumption that $p_1, p_2, \ldots, p_n$ are all the primes.
- Consequently, there are infinitely many primes.

This proof was given by Euclid *The Elements*. The proof is considered to be one of the most beautiful in all mathematics. It is the first proof in *The Book,* inspired by the famous mathematician Paul Erdős' imagined collection of perfect proofs maintained by God.

Paul Erdős
(1913-1996)

Distribution of Primes

- Mathematicians have been interested in the distribution of prime numbers among the positive integers. In the nineteenth century, the *prime number theorem* was proved which gives an asymptotic estimate for the number of primes not exceeding x.

  Prime Number Theorem: The ratio of the number of primes not exceeding x and $x/\ln x$ approaches 1 as x grows without bound. ($\ln x$ is the natural logarithm of x)
  - The theorem tells us that the number of primes not exceeding x, can be approximated by $x/\ln x$.
  - 10/log(10)=4.34; 20/log(20)=6.7; 30/log(30)=8.8

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  - The theorem tells us that the number of primes not exceeding x, can be approximated by $x/\ln x$.
  - The odds that a randomly selected positive integer less than n is prime are approximately $(n/\ln n)/n = 1/\ln n$.

Conjectures about Primes

- Even though primes have been studied extensively for centuries, many conjectures about them are unresolved, including:
- *The Twin Prime Conjecture*: The twin prime conjecture is that there are infinitely many pairs of twin primes. Twin primes are pairs of primes that differ by 2. Examples are 3 and 5, 5 and 7, 11 and 13, etc. The current world's record for twin primes (as of mid 2011) consists of numbers $65{,}516{,}468{,}355 \cdot 23^{33{,}333} \pm 1$, which have 100,355 decimal digits.
- Infinitely many pairs p_n and p_{n+1} such that

$$p_n - p_{n+1} < \infty$$

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- *Goldbach's Conjecture*: Every even integer n, $n > 2$, is the sum of two primes. It has been verified by computer for all positive even integers up to $1.6 \cdot 10^{18}$. The conjecture is believed to be true by most mathematicians.

Greatest Common Divisor

Definition: Let a and b be integers, not both zero. The largest integer d such that $d \mid a$ and also $d \mid b$ is called the greatest common divisor of a and b. The greatest common divisor of a and b is denoted by $\gcd(a,b)$.

One can find greatest common divisors of small numbers by inspection.

Example:What is the greatest common divisor of 24 and 36?

Solution: gcd(24,26) = 12

Example:What is the greatest common divisor of 17 and 22?

Solution: gcd(17,22) = 1

Greatest Common Divisor

Definition: The integers a and b are *relatively prime* if their greatest common divisor is 1.

Example: 17 and 22

Definition: The integers $a_1, a_2, \ldots, a_n$ are *pairwise relatively prime* if $\gcd(a_i, a_j) = 1$ whenever $1 \leq i < j \leq n$.

Example: Determine whether the integers 10, 17 and 21 are pairwise relatively prime.

Solution: Because $\gcd(10,17) = 1$, $\gcd(10,21) = 1$, and $\gcd(17,21) = 1$, 10, 17, and 21 are pairwise relatively prime.

Example: Determine whether the integers 10, 19, and 24 are pairwise relatively prime.

Solution: Because $\gcd(10,24) = 2$, 10, 19, and 24 are not pairwise relatively prime.

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Finding the Greatest Common Divisor Using Prime Factorizations

- Suppose the prime factorizations of a and b are:

$$a = p_1^{a_1} p_2^{a_2} \cdots p_n^{a_n}, \qquad b = p_1^{b_1} p_2^{b_2} \cdots p_n^{b_n},$$

where each exponent is a nonnegative integer, and where all primes occurring in either prime factorization are included in both. Then:

$$\gcd(a,b) = p_1^{\min(a_1,b_1)} p_2^{\min(a_2,b_2)} \cdots p_n^{\min(a_n,b_n)}.$$

- This formula is valid since the integer on the right (of the equals sign) divides both a and b. No larger integer can divide both a and b.

Example: $120 = 2^3 \cdot 3 \cdot 5$ $\quad 500 = 2^2 \cdot 5^3$

$\gcd(120,500) = 2^{\min(3,2)} \cdot 3^{\min(1,0)} \cdot 5^{\min(1,3)} = 2^2 \cdot 3^0 \cdot 5^1 = 20$

- Finding the gcd of two positive integers using their prime factorizations is not efficient because there is no efficient algorithm for finding the prime factorization of a positive integer.

Least Common Multiple

Definition: The least common multiple of the positive integers a and b is the smallest positive integer that is divisible by both a and b. It is denoted by $\text{lcm}(a,b)$.

- The least common multiple can also be computed from the prime factorizations.

$$\text{lcm}(a,b) = p_1^{\max(a_1,b_1)} p_2^{\max(a_2,b_2)} \cdots p_n^{\max(a_n,b_n)}$$

This number is divided by both a and b and no smaller number is divided by a and b.

Example: $\text{lcm}(2^3 3^5 7^2, 2^4 3^3) = 2^{\max(3,4)} 3^{\max(5,3)} 7^{\max(2,0)} = 2^4 3^5 7^2$

- The greatest common divisor and the least common multiple of two integers are related by:

Theorem 5: Let a and b be positive integers. Then

$ab = \gcd(a,b) \cdot \text{lcm}(a,b)$

(*proof is Exercise* 31)