

Part I

Background Topics

1 Linear Algebra

1.1 Preface

THE GOAL OF THIS CHAPTER is not to teach you, the reader, linear algebra from scratch - nor to be a thorough source of information on the topic. Rather, my aim is to introduce important “advanced” concepts for those who took a basic linear algebra course as part of an undergraduate university program. These concepts should help you gain a basic knowledge of the topics needed for understanding the rest of the background material, as well as the topic of spinors itself.

My approach to teaching topics in linear algebra - and in mathematics as a whole - is to first build an intuition and only then formalize and generalize the ideas as needed. In my personal experiences, when I was studying linear algebra I completely failed to understand it (and indeed, failed the course) until it “clicked” for me in regards to 2- and 3-dimensional real spaces, i.e. - visible geometry. After that I didn’t even have to study for exams anymore, as everything became clear enough to grasp and develop on the spot even during an exam (except for later, more advanced concepts). That is why, for example, I absolutely adore courses and study materials of the topic¹ which use animation, such as *3Blue1Brown* great video essay series [Essence of linear algebra](#)².

There are very few proofs in this chapter, and those that are shown are not completely rigorous. For more in-depth materials, see the last section (further read). With that out of the way - let’s begin!

¹ And other mathematical topics as well.

² Temporary sidenote which should become a citation for the mentioned *3B1B* video series

1.2 Dual Vectors and Dual Spaces

1.2.1 Linear measurements and rulers (or: why do we care about dual vectors?)

FREQUENTLY IN LINEAR ALGEBRA we want to measure vectors. A measure in this context is a way to assign each vector a real number which somehow reflects its properties (i.e. direction and/or magnitude). Mathematically, we are looking for a function $\phi : \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ - we feed it a vector, and it returns some measurement.

One common way to measure vectors is using the norm: the norm of a vector in \mathbb{R}^n using the standard basis set e_1, e_2, \dots, e_n is given by

$$\|v\| = \sqrt{v_1^2 + v_2^2 + \dots + v_n^2}, \quad (1.1)$$

where the numbers v_1, v_2, \dots, v_n are the components in each of the respective basis vectors.

While the norm does tell us something useful about a vector, it has two drawbacks: it doesn't tell us anything about the vector's orientation in space, and even worse - it is not linear. We can try and simplify the calculation of the norm by dropping the square root and calculating the *square norm*, but that too isn't linear, nor does it tell us anything about the vector's orientation.

Another way of measuring vectors is by using *rulers*. Rulers are nothing more than a set of graduation lines with an orientation in space (Figure 1.1). We can therefore represent a ruler using a vector: the magnitude of the vector is the frequency of the graduation lines, while its direction is the direction of the ruler (which is orthogonal to the graduation lines). To not confuse ruler vectors with "regular" vectors, I will denote ruler vectors using a greek letter and an asterisk, e.g. α^* .

Now, we usually rotate rulers to align with the orientation of the magnitude we wish to measure - however here we want our rulers to also measure orientation. Therefore, instead of rotating the ruler to align with a vector we wish to measure, we *project* the vector on the ruler and then take our measurement (Figure 1.2).

Since projection in linear algebra is calculated via the inner product, the measurement m of a vector v using a ruler α^* is given by

$$m = \langle \alpha^*, v \rangle. \quad (1.2)$$

However, since we can represent a ruler using a vector, we can use the vector representation in Equation (1.2). And again, to distinguish ruler vectors from "regular" vectors written in an explicit

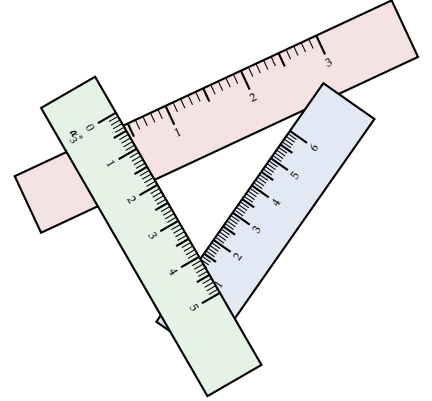


Figure 1.1: Three rulers, $\alpha_1^*, \alpha_2^*, \alpha_3^*$, each with its own orientation and frequency of graduation lines.

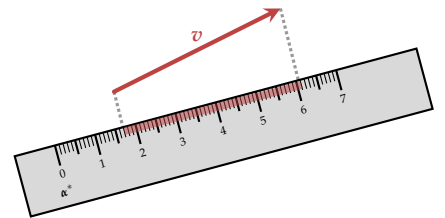


Figure 1.2: Measuring a vector using a ruler by projecting the vector onto the ruler. The result of the projection is drawn as a red line on the ruler.

form, we write the ruler vectors as row vectors:

$$\begin{aligned} \langle \alpha^*, v \rangle &= [\alpha_1, \alpha_2, \dots, \alpha_n] \begin{bmatrix} v_1 \\ v_2 \\ \vdots \\ v_n \end{bmatrix} \\ &= \alpha_1 v_1 + \alpha_2 v_2 + \dots + \alpha_n v_n. \end{aligned} \quad (1.3)$$

Another reason for representing rulers as row vectors is that it corresponds well to matrix multiplication: if we regard a row vector as a $1 \times n$ matrix, and a column vector as an $n \times 1$ matrix, the resulting product is a 1×1 matrix, which is equivalent to a scalar. This will become handy when we discuss higher-order rulers (which in turn can handle higher-order “vectors”).

A convenient visualization for rulers in \mathbb{R}^2 is their representation as a set of parallel lines which are the extensions of the ruler’s graduation marks. We draw the first line going through the origin and orthogonal to the orientation of the vector representation of the ruler. Then, we draw a line for each integer multiple of the frequency of the ruler’s graduation marks. This results in a set of evenly spaced and parallel lines, which fit precisely with the main graduation mark of the ruler they represent (Figure 1.3).

In \mathbb{R}^3 a ruler is represented in a similar way, but with *planes* instead of lines (Figure 1.4). And in general, the rulers for a space \mathbb{R}^n can be represented using an infinite set of $(n - 1)$ -dimensional *hyperplanes*.

From Equation (1.4) we can see that any ruler α^* can be written as the left half of an inner product, i.e. $\langle \alpha^*, \cdot \rangle$. This hints that the ruler is *acting* on vectors, yielding a scalar. Looking at the explicit form of a ruler acting on a vector, we can see that not only do rulers represent linear functions, but they in-fact represent *all* the possible *linear* functions of the type $\phi : \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$. Such functions are called *linear forms*, or more specifically in this case a *1-form*.

Since rulers can be represented as vectors but aren’t exactly the same as “regular” vectors, they are also called *dual vectors*, which is the name I will use for them from now on. For any vector space \mathbb{R}^n , the dual vectors form a vector space of their own, called the *dual space* to \mathbb{R}^n .

The linearity of the dual vectors space simplifies many calculations - foremost, it allows us to construct dual vectors from other dual vectors using linear combinations. For example, suppose we have two dual vectors

$$\begin{aligned} \alpha^* &= [1, -4, 0], \\ \beta^* &= [2, 1, 3]. \end{aligned} \quad (1.4)$$

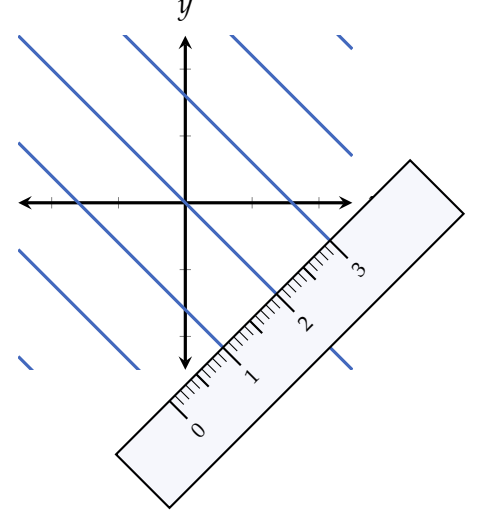


Figure 1.3: The graphical representation of a ruler shown next to the ruler, such that the infinite set of lines drawn match the ruler’s graduation marks.

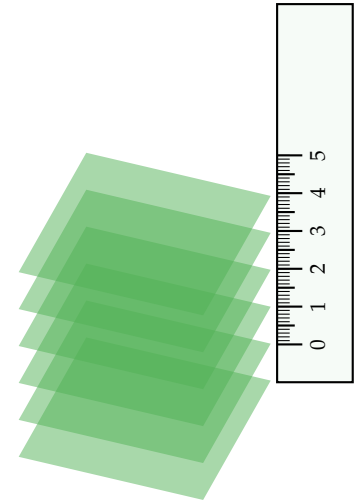


Figure 1.4: Representation of rulers in \mathbb{R}^3 as planes.

We can use α^* and β^* to create a third dual vector γ^* :

$$\begin{aligned}\gamma^* &= 5 \begin{bmatrix} 1, & -4, & 0 \end{bmatrix} + 2 \begin{bmatrix} 2, & 1, & 3 \end{bmatrix} \\ &= \begin{bmatrix} 5 + 4, & -20 + 2, & 0 + 6 \end{bmatrix} \\ &= \begin{bmatrix} 9, & -18, & 6 \end{bmatrix}.\end{aligned}\tag{1.5}$$

The application of γ^* on any vector $v \in \mathbb{R}^3$ is then given by

$$\langle \gamma^*, v \rangle = 9v_1 - 18v_2 + 6v_3,\tag{1.6}$$

which is exactly the application of α^* on the vector five times followed by the application of β^* twice.

1.2.2 Introducing some formalism

Now that we know *why* we use dual vectors, we can formalize the concept and find useful properties. Given a vector space V over a field \mathbb{F} , its dual space (denoted V^*) is the set of all the linear functions $\phi : V \rightarrow \mathbb{F}$.

1. Dual vectors form a vector space V^* .
2. Formal definition of dual spaces.
3. Examples of dual vectors of functions?..

1.2.3 Basis sets and coordinate transformations

1. Dual basis: converting from a basis set in V to its dual in V^* .
2. Covariance of dual vectors basis change vs. contra-variance of vectors.

1.3 Further Reading

2 *Geometric Algebra*

2.1 *Preface*

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3 *Abstract Algebra*

3.1 *Preface*

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4 Lie Groups and Algebras

4.1 Preface

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Part II

Spinors

