Dummit & Foote Ch. 2.4: Subgroups Generated by Subsets of a Group

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1. (7/13/23)

Prove that if H is a subgroup of G then $\langle H \rangle = H$.

Proof. Let $H \leq G$. To show that $\langle H \rangle = H$, we must show that each is contained in the other. By definition, $H \subseteq \langle H \rangle$, so it remains to be proven that $\langle H \rangle \subseteq H$.

Let $h \in \langle H \rangle$. Recall that:

$$\langle H \rangle = \bigcap_{\substack{H \subseteq K \\ K \leq G}} K,$$

that is, for all subset $K \leq G$ with $H \subseteq K$, we have $h \in K$. In particular, since H is a subgroup of G, we have $h \in H$, since $H \leq G$ and $H \subseteq H$. Therefore $\langle H \rangle \subseteq H$, and it follows that $\langle H \rangle = H$. $\square$

2. (7/17/23)

Prove that if A is a subset of B then $\langle A \rangle \leq \langle B \rangle$. Give an example where $A \subseteq B$ with $A \neq B$ but $\langle A \rangle = \langle B \rangle$.

Proof. Let G be a group and let $A \subseteq B \subseteq G$. Recall that one definition of $\langle A \rangle$ is the set of all finite words of elements and inverses of elements of A, that is, every element of $\langle A \rangle$ can be written $a_1^{\varepsilon_1} a_2^{\varepsilon_2} ... a_n^{\varepsilon_n}$, where $n \in \mathbb{Z}, n \geq 0$ and $a_i \in A, \varepsilon_i = \pm 1$ for each i. Since A is a subset of B, $a_i \in A \Rightarrow a_i \in B$, and so each element $a_1^{\varepsilon_1} a_2^{\varepsilon_2} ... a_n^{\varepsilon_n} \in \langle A \rangle$ is also in $\langle B \rangle$. Therefore $\langle A \rangle \leq \langle B \rangle$.

Now let $G = \mathbb{Z}/3\mathbb{Z}$, $A = \{1\}$, and $B = \{0, 1\}$. Then we have $A \subseteq B$ with $A \neq B$ but $\langle A \rangle = \langle B \rangle = G$. $\square$

3. (7/17/23)

Prove that if H is an abelian subgroup of G then $\langle H, Z(G) \rangle$ is abelian. Give an explicit example of an abelian subgroup H of a group G such that $\langle H, C_G(H) \rangle$ is not abelian.

Proof. Let G be a group and let H be an abelian subgroup of G. Recall that $Z(G) = \{g \in G \mid xg = gx \text{ for all } x \in G\}$, that is, the set of elements of G that commute with every element of G. We will show that $\langle H, Z(G)\rangle$ is an abelian subgroup of G.

First, we will show that the product of any two elements commutes with both elements. Let $a, b \in G$ be commuting elements. Then:

$$(ab)a = aba = aab = a(ab), \text{ and } (ab)b = abb = bab = b(ab),$$

as desired.

Now the generated subgroup $\langle H, Z(G)\rangle$ is constructed from finite words of elements and inverses of elements from H and $Z(G)$. Since H is an abelian subgroup and elements of $Z(G)$ (and therefore their inverses) commute with every element of G (and therefore H), it follows that every element in $\langle H, Z(G)\rangle$ is a product of commuting elements. Every such element therefore commutes with every other element in H and $Z(G)$, as well as any other product of elements of H and $Z(G)$. Thus $\langle H, Z(G)\rangle$ is an abelian subgroup of G.

However, it does not follow that $\langle H, C_G(H)\rangle$ is an abelian subgroup of G. Let $G = D_8$ and $H = \{1, r^2\}$. The centralizer of H in G is all of G, since every element of H commutes with every other element of G (that is, $H = Z(G)$). Then the generated subgroup $\langle H, C_G(H)\rangle = \langle H, G\rangle = G$, which is non-abelian. □

4. (7/17/23)

Prove that if H is a subgroup of G then H is generated by the set $H - \{1\}$.

Proof. Let $H \leq G$ and consider $\langle H - \{1\}\rangle$. If $H = \{1\}$, then $H - \{1\} = \emptyset$, and so by definition $\langle H - \{1\}\rangle = \{1\} = H$.

Suppose $H \neq \{1\}$. Then there exists some $h \in H$ with $h \neq 1$. Since H is a subgroup, it is closed under inverses, so $h^{-1} \in H$. We generate $\langle H - \{1\}\rangle$ by taking finite products of elements of H, and so $hh^{-1} = 1 \in \langle H - \{1\}\rangle$. Further, we cannot construct any element outside of H by taking products of elements of H, so we must therefore have $\langle H - \{1\}\rangle = (H - \{1\}) \cup \{1\} = H$. □

5. (7/20/23)

Prove that the subgroup generated by any two distinct elements of order 2 in S_3 is all of S_3.

Proof. The elements of order 2 in S_3 are $(1, 2), (1, 3)$, and $(2, 3)$. Since any two of these elements permute one of $\{1, 2, 3\}$ to the other two, without loss of generality we can consider the subgroup generated by a single pair of them. We will consider the subgroup generated by $(1, 2)$ and $(1, 3)$.

The subgroup contains the identity element, since $(1, 2)(1, 2) = (1)$. It also contains both elements of order 3, since $(1, 2)(1, 3) = (1, 3, 2)$ and $(1, 3)(1, 2) =$

$(1,2,3)$. Finally, the subgroup contains the third element of order 2, since $(1,2)(1,2,3) = (2,3)$. Together these are all the elements of S_3.

Therefore the subgroup generated by any two elements of S_3 is all of S_3. □

6. (7/20/23)

Prove that the subgroup of S_4 generated by $(1,2)$ and $(1,2)(3,4)$ is a noncyclic group of order 4.

Proof. Let us construct the subgroup of S_4 generated by $(1,2)$ and $(1,2)(3,4)$. Both elements have order 2, so we will not consider any higher powers of each. Their product is $(3,4)$, which also has order 2. At this point the subgroup consists of $\{(1),(1,2),(1,2)(3,4),(3,4)\}$. Taking the product of $(3,4)$ with either of $(1,2)$ or $(1,2)(3,4)$ results in the other element, respectively. Therefore there is no way to obtain new elements not already in this subgroup.

Thus the subgroup of S_4 generated by $(1,2)$ and $(1,2)(3,4)$ has order 4. Further, it is noncyclic, since it contains no elements of order 4 (in fact, it is isomorphic to the Klein 4-group V_4). □