

Dummit & Foote Ch. 1.7: Group Actions

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Apr. 2023

1. (4/27/23)

Let F be a field. Show that the multiplicative group of nonzero elements of F (denoted by F^\times) acts on the set F by $g \cdot a = ga$, where $g \in F^\times, a \in F$ and ga is the usual product in F of the two field elements.

Proof. To show that F^\times acts on F , we must show that $g_1 \cdot (g_2 \cdot a) = (g_1 g_2) \cdot a$ for all $g_1, g_2 \in F^\times, a \in F$, and $1 \cdot a = a$ for all $a \in F$.

First, let $g_1, g_2 \in F^\times$ and $a \in F$. By the definition of the action, $g_1 \cdot (g_2 \cdot a) = g_1 \cdot (g_2 a) = g_1 g_2 a$. By the associativity of multiplication, $g_1 g_2 a = (g_1 g_2) a$. Again by the action definition, this equals $(g_1 g_2) \cdot a$.

It follows directly from the field axiom of multiplicative identity that $1 \cdot a = a$ for all $a \in A$. Thus F^\times acts on F by $g \cdot a = ga$. \square

2. (4/27/23)

Show that the additive group \mathbb{Z} acts on itself by $z \cdot a = z + a$ for all $z, a \in \mathbb{Z}$.

Proof. First, $z_1 \cdot (z_2 \cdot a) = z_1 \cdot (z_2 + a) = z_1 + z_2 + a = (z_1 + z_2) + a = (z_1 + z_2) \cdot a$.

Also, $0 \cdot a = 0 + a = a$ for all $a \in \mathbb{Z}$. Thus \mathbb{Z} acts on itself by $z \cdot a = z + a$. \square

3. (4/27/23)

Show that the additive group \mathbb{R} acts on the x, y plane $\mathbb{R} \times \mathbb{R}$ by $r \cdot (x, y) = (x + ry, y)$.

Proof. First, $r_1 \cdot (r_2 \cdot (x, y)) = r_1 \cdot (x + r_2 y, y) = (x + r_2 y + r_1 y, y) = (x + (r_1 + r_2)y, y) = (r_1 + r_2) \cdot (x, y)$.

Also, $0 \cdot (x, y) = (x + 0y, y) = (x, y)$ for all $(x, y) \in \mathbb{R} \times \mathbb{R}$. Thus \mathbb{R} acts on $\mathbb{R} \times \mathbb{R}$ by $r \cdot (x, y) = (x + ry, y)$. \square

4. (4/27/23)

Let G be a group acting on a set A and fix some $a \in A$. Show that the following sets are subgroups of G :

- (a) the kernel of the action,

Proof. The kernel of G is the set $\{g \in G \mid g \cdot a = a \text{ for all } a \in A\}$. It is closed under the binary operation of G : If g_1, g_2 are in the kernel, then $g_1 \cdot (g_2 \cdot a) = g_1 \cdot a = a$ for all $a \in A$. And, by definition of a group action, $g_1 \cdot (g_2 \cdot a) = (g_1 g_2) \cdot a$, which implies that $(g_1 g_2) \cdot a = a$, so $g_1 g_2$ is in the kernel of G .

The kernel is also closed under inverses: Let g be in the kernel of G . Then $1 \cdot a = (g^{-1} g) \cdot a = g^{-1} \cdot (g \cdot a) = g^{-1} \cdot a$. By definition, $1 \cdot a = a$, so $g^{-1} \cdot a = a$ for all a , so g^{-1} is in the kernel. Thus the kernel of the action is a subgroup of G . \square

- (b) $\{g \in G \mid ga = a\}$ — this subgroup is called the *stabilizer* of G .

Proof. The proof that this set of elements is a subgroup is identical to the one immediately above, but for a fixed a as opposed to all $a \in A$. \square

5. (4/28/23)

Prove that the kernel of an action of the group G on the set A is the same as the kernel of the corresponding permutation representation $G \rightarrow S_A$.

Proof. Let φ be the permutation representation $G \rightarrow S_A$ corresponding to G acting on A . Let g be in the kernel of the action of G (to show that $\varphi(g)$ is in the kernel of φ). Then $g \cdot a = a$ for all $a \in A$. If σ_g is the permutation of S_A corresponding to g , then σ_g is the identity permutation, because $\sigma_g(a) = a$ for all $a \in A$. Thus $\sigma_g = \varphi(g)$ is in the kernel of φ .

Next, let $\varphi(g)$ be in the kernel of φ (to show that g is in the kernel of G). Then $\varphi(g)$ is the identity permutation, so $\varphi(g) \cdot a = \sigma_g(a) = a$ for all $a \in A$. Also, by definition, $\sigma_g(a) = g \cdot a$, so $g \cdot a = a$ for all $a \in A$. Thus g is in the kernel of the action of G .

Having shown that membership in one implies membership in the other, this proves that the kernel of G acting on A is thus equal to the kernel of the permutation representation $\varphi : G \rightarrow S_A$. \square

6. (4/28/23)

Prove that a group G acts faithfully on a set A if and only if the kernel of the action is the set consisting of only the identity.

Proof. First, let G act on A . Suppose that G acts on A faithfully (to show that the kernel of the action of G is the set consisting of only the identity). Consider the permutation representation $\varphi : G \rightarrow S_A$. Since G acts on A faithfully, φ is injective (that is, $g_1, g_2 \in G$ induce different permutations $\varphi(g_1), \varphi(g_2)$). Thus the identity permutation $\varphi(1)$ is the only permutation that assigns a to a for all $a \in A$. From 5., the kernel of the action of G is the same as the kernel of φ , so the identity of G is the only element in the kernel of the action of G .

Next, suppose that the kernel of the action of $G = \{1\}$ (to show that G acts on A faithfully). Suppose for some $g_1, g_2 \in G$, we have $\varphi(g_1) = \varphi(g_2)$, that is, $\sigma_{g_1}(a) = \sigma_{g_2}(a)$ for all $a \in A$. Consider the permutation obtained by composing $\varphi(g_1)^{-1} \circ \varphi(g_2)$. Applying the resulting permutation to some $a \in A$ (and saying that $\sigma_{g_1}(a) = \sigma_{g_2}(a) = b$), we obtain $(\varphi(g_1)^{-1} \circ \varphi(g_2))(a) = \sigma_{g_1}^{-1}(\sigma_{g_2}(a)) = \sigma_{g_1}^{-1}(b) = a$. This implies that $\varphi(g_1)^{-1} \circ \varphi(g_2)$ is the identity permutation. Since φ is a homomorphism, $\varphi(g_1)^{-1} \circ \varphi(g_2) = \varphi(g_1^{-1}) \circ \varphi(g_2) = \varphi(g_1^{-1}g_2)$. However, because the kernel of the action of G is $\{1\}$, and from 5., the kernel of φ is also $\{1\}$, this implies that $g_1^{-1}g_2 = 1 \Rightarrow g_1 = g_2$. \square

7. (4/29/23)

Prove that the action of the multiplicative group \mathbb{R}^\times on \mathbb{R}^n defined by $\alpha \cdot (r_1, r_2, \dots, r_n) = (\alpha r_1, \alpha r_2, \dots, \alpha r_n)$ is faithful.

Proof. From 6., a group acts faithfully on a set if and only if the kernel of the action consists only of the group's identity. Therefore, to show that the given action of \mathbb{R}^\times on \mathbb{R}^n is faithful, it suffices to show that the kernel of the action is $\{1\}$.

By definition, the kernel of the action is the set of all $\alpha \in \mathbb{R}$ such that $\alpha \cdot (r_1, r_2, \dots, r_n) = (r_1, r_2, \dots, r_n)$ for all such elements of \mathbb{R}^n . By definition of the group action, then, for an element α of \mathbb{R}^\times to be in the kernel of the action, we must have $\alpha r_1 = r_1, \alpha r_2 = r_2, \dots, \alpha r_n = r_n$. The only element for which this holds is 1. Thus the kernel of the action is $\{1\}$, and so \mathbb{R}^\times acts faithfully on \mathbb{R}^n . \square

8. (4/30/23)

Let A be a nonempty set and let k be a positive integer with $k \leq |A|$. The symmetric group S_A acts on B consisting of all subsets of A of cardinality k by $\sigma \cdot \{a_1, \dots, a_k\} = \{\sigma(a_1), \dots, \sigma(a_k)\}$.

(a) Prove that this is a group action.

Proof. The identity permutation acts on an arbitrary element of B by $(1) \cdot \{a_1, \dots, a_k\} = \{a_1, \dots, a_k\}$, as desired.

Further, $\sigma_1 \cdot (\sigma_2 \cdot \{a_1, \dots, a_k\}) = \sigma_1 \cdot \{\sigma_2(a_1), \dots, \sigma_2(a_k)\} = \{\sigma_1(\sigma_2(a_1)), \dots, \sigma_1(\sigma_2(a_k))\} = \{(\sigma_1 \circ \sigma_2)(a_1), \dots, (\sigma_1 \circ \sigma_2)(a_k)\} = (\sigma_1 \circ \sigma_2) \cdot \{a_1, \dots, a_k\}$.

Together these two equations prove that this action of S_A on B is a group action. \square

- (b) Describe exactly how the permutations $(1, 2)$ and $(1, 2, 3)$ act on the six 2-element subsets of $\{1, 2, 3, 4\}$.

- $(1, 2) \cdot \{1, 2\} = \{2, 1\} = \{1, 2\}$
- $(1, 2) \cdot \{1, 3\} = \{2, 3\}$
- $(1, 2) \cdot \{1, 4\} = \{2, 4\}$
- $(1, 2) \cdot \{2, 3\} = \{1, 3\}$
- $(1, 2) \cdot \{2, 4\} = \{1, 4\}$
- $(1, 2) \cdot \{3, 4\} = \{3, 4\}$
- $(1, 2, 3) \cdot \{1, 2\} = \{2, 3\}$
- $(1, 2, 3) \cdot \{1, 3\} = \{2, 1\} = \{1, 2\}$
- $(1, 2, 3) \cdot \{1, 4\} = \{2, 4\}$
- $(1, 2, 3) \cdot \{2, 3\} = \{3, 1\} = \{1, 3\}$
- $(1, 2, 3) \cdot \{2, 4\} = \{3, 4\}$
- $(1, 2, 3) \cdot \{3, 4\} = \{1, 4\}$

9. (4/30/23)

Do both parts of the preceding exercise with "ordered k -tuples" in place of " k -element subsets," where the action on k -tuples is defined as above but with set braces replaced by parentheses (note that, for example, the 2-tuples $(1, 2)$ and $(2, 1)$ are different even though the sets $\{1, 2\}$ and $\{2, 1\}$ are the same).

- (a) The proof is identical to that in 8., but with set braces replaced by parentheses. For the identity permutation, $(1) \cdot (a_1, \dots, a_k) = (a_1, \dots, a_k)$. Similarly for arbitrary σ_1, σ_2 and (a_1, \dots, a_k) , the logic holds.
- (b) Describe exactly how the permutations $(1, 2)$ and $(1, 2, 3)$ act on the twelve 2-element tuples of $(1, 2, 3, 4)$.

- $(1, 2) \cdot (1, 2) = (2, 1); (1, 2) \cdot (2, 1) = (1, 2)$
- $(1, 2) \cdot (1, 3) = (2, 3); (1, 2) \cdot (3, 1) = (3, 2)$
- $(1, 2) \cdot (1, 4) = (2, 4); (1, 2) \cdot (4, 1) = (4, 2)$
- $(1, 2) \cdot (2, 3) = (1, 3); (1, 2) \cdot (3, 2) = (3, 1)$
- $(1, 2) \cdot (2, 4) = (1, 4); (1, 2) \cdot (4, 2) = (4, 1)$
- $(1, 2) \cdot (3, 4) = (3, 4); (1, 2) \cdot (4, 3) = (4, 3)$
- $(1, 2, 3) \cdot (1, 2) = (2, 3); (1, 2, 3) \cdot (2, 1) = (3, 2)$
- $(1, 2, 3) \cdot (1, 3) = (2, 1); (1, 2, 3) \cdot (3, 1) = (1, 2)$

- $(1, 2, 3) \cdot (1, 4) = (2, 4); (1, 2, 3) \cdot (4, 1) = (4, 2)$
- $(1, 2, 3) \cdot (2, 3) = (3, 1); (1, 2, 3) \cdot (3, 2) = (1, 3)$
- $(1, 2, 3) \cdot (2, 4) = (3, 4); (1, 2, 3) \cdot (4, 2) = (4, 3)$
- $(1, 2, 3) \cdot (3, 4) = (1, 4); (1, 2, 3) \cdot (4, 3) = (4, 1)$

10. (5/4/23)

With reference to the two preceding exercises determine:

- for which values of k the action of S_n on k -element subsets is faithful, and
- for which values of k the action of S_n on ordered k -tuples is faithful.

For the action of S_n on k -element subsets, the action is faithful if $n > 1$ and $k < n$.

Proof. In the case where $n = 1$, then the action is trivially faithful (because the symmetric group S_n consists only of the identity).

So suppose that $n > 1$ and let $k < n$, with B the set of all k -element subsets of $A = \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$. Let $\sigma \in S_n$ be a non-identity permutation. Then σ assigns at least one element of A to a different element of A . Suppose that $\sigma(a_1) = a_2$ for some $a_1, a_2 \in A$. Because $k < n$, there exists a subset $b \in B$ such that $a_1 \in b$ and $a_2 \notin b$. Then $\sigma \cdot b = \{\sigma(a_1), \dots\} = \{a_2, \dots\} \neq b$, and so σ is not in the kernel of the action. Therefore the kernel of the action consists only of the identity permutation, and so the action is faithful.

Now, let $n > 1$ and let $k = n$. Then B , the set of all k -element subsets of $A = \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$, consists only of A itself. Now let $\sigma \in S_n$ and let $a_1, a_2 \in A$ with $\sigma(a_1) = a_2$. For all $b \in B$ (because $b = A$), $a_1, a_2 \in b \Rightarrow \sigma(a_2) \in b$. Therefore $\sigma \cdot b = b$ for all $b \in B$. Thus every permutation of S_n is in the kernel of the action, and so the action is not faithful.

This proves that the action of S_n on k -element subsets is faithful if and only if $n > 1$ and $k < n$. \square

For the action of S_n on ordered k -tuples, the action is faithful for all values of k (if $n > 1$).

Proof. As above, the action is trivially faithful if $n = 1$, so suppose that $n > 1$, let σ be a non-identity permutation in S_n , and let $1 \leq k \leq n$, such that B is the set of all k -element tuples of $A = \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$ (ex. $(1, 2)$ and $(2, 1) \in B$). Let $a_1 \in A$ and let $a_2 = \sigma(a_1)$. Let b be the k -tuple consisting only of a_1 , that is, $\underbrace{(a_1, \dots, a_1)}_{k \text{ times}}$. Then $\sigma \cdot b = \sigma \cdot (a_1, \dots, a_1) = (\sigma(a_1), \dots, \sigma(a_1)) = (a_2, \dots, a_2)$. Then

for all non-identity $\sigma \in S_n$, there exists a $b \in B$ such that $\sigma \cdot b \neq b$. Therefore the only permutation in the kernel of the action is the identity permutation, and so the action is faithful for all values of k . \square