Calculus II
Polar coordinates

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Outline

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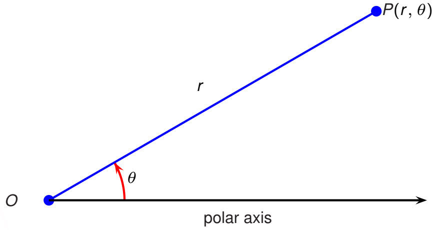
Polar Coordinates

- The polar coordinate system is an alternative to the Cartesian coordinate system.
- Choose a point in the plane called O (the origin).
- Draw a ray starting at O. The ray is called the polar axis. This ray is usually drawn horizontally to the right.



- Let P be a point in the plane.
- Let θ denote the angle between the polar axis and the line OP.
- Let r denote the length of the segment OP.
- Then P is represented by the ordered pair (r, θ).

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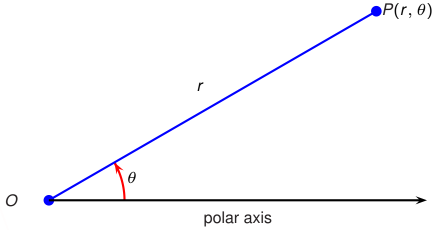
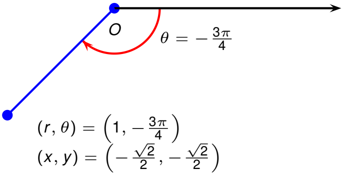
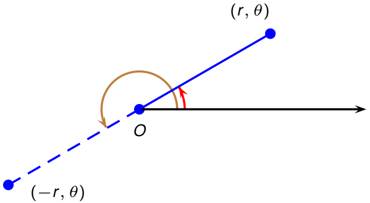


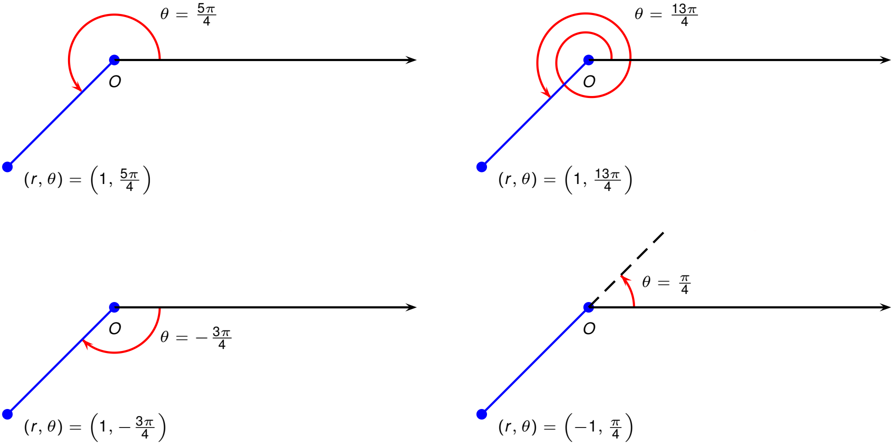
- The letters (x, y) imply Cartesian coordinates and the letters (r, θ)- polar. When we use other letters, it should be clear from context whether we mean Cartesian or polar coordinates. If not, one must request clarification.

1. What if θ is negative?
2. What if r is negative?
3. What if r is 0?





1. Positive angles θ are measured in the counterclockwise direction from O. Negative angles are measured in the clockwise direction.
2. Points with polar coordinates $(-r, \theta)$ and (r, θ) lie on the same line through O and at the same distance from O, but on opposite sides.
3. If $r = 0$, then $(0, \theta)$ represents O for all values of θ.



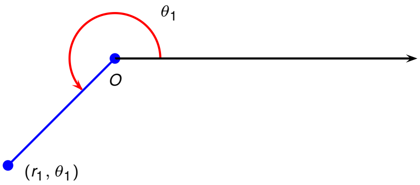
- There are many ways to represent the same point.
- We could use a negative θ.
- We could go around more than once.
- We could use a negative r.

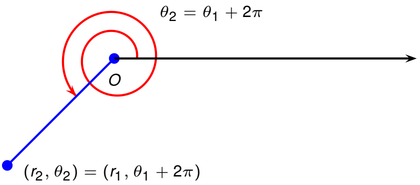
- Let P_1 be point with polar coordinates (r_1, θ_1).
- Let P_2 be point with polar coordinates (r_2, θ_2).

Observation

P_1 coincides with P_2 if one of the three mutually exclusive possibilities holds:

- $r_1 = r_2 \neq 0$ *and* $\theta_2 = \theta_1 + 2k\pi, k \in \mathbb{Z}$,
- $r_1 = -r_2 \neq 0$ *and* $\theta_2 = \theta_1 + (2k+1)\pi, k \in \mathbb{Z}$,
- $r_1 = r_2 = 0$ *and* θ *is arbitrary.*





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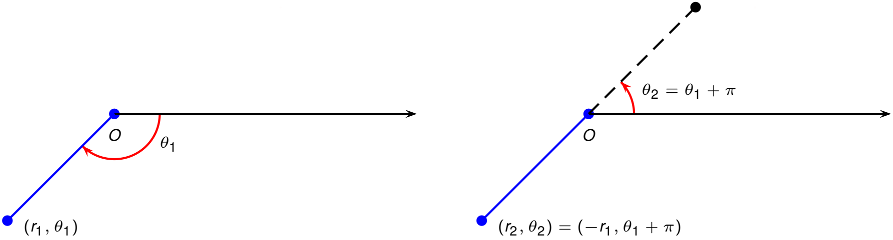
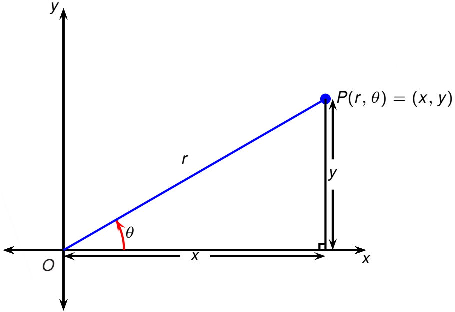


- How do we go from polar coordinates to Cartesian coordinates?
- Suppose a point has polar coordinates (r, θ) and Cartesian coordinates (x, y).
- How do we go from Cartesian coordinates to polar coordinates?



$$\begin{aligned} x &= r\cos\theta \\ y &= r\sin\theta \\ \hline \cos\theta &= \frac{x}{r} \\ \sin\theta &= \frac{y}{r} \\ r^2 &= x^2+y^2 \\ \hline r &= \sqrt{x^2+y^2} \\ \theta &= \arcsin\left(\frac{y}{r}\right) \quad \text{if } x>0 \\ &= \arccos\left(\frac{x}{r}\right) \quad \text{if } y>0 \\ &= \arctan\left(\frac{y}{x}\right) \quad \text{if } x>0 \end{aligned}$$

Example

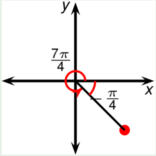
Convert the point $(2, \frac{\pi}{3})$ from polar to Cartesian coordinates.

$$x = r\cos\theta = 2\cos\frac{\pi}{3} = 2\left(\frac{1}{2}\right) = 1$$

$$y = r\sin\theta = 2\sin\frac{\pi}{3} = 2\left(\frac{\sqrt{3}}{2}\right) = \sqrt{3}$$

Therefore the point with polar coordinates $(2, \frac{\pi}{3})$ has Cartesian coordinates $(1, \sqrt{3})$.

Example



Represent the point with Cartesian coordinates $(1, -1)$ in terms of polar coordinates.

- Suppose r is positive.
- $\tan\theta = -1$ for $\theta = \frac{3\pi}{4}, \frac{7\pi}{4}$, and many other angles.
- $(1, -1)$ is in the fourth quadrant.
- Of the two values above, only $\theta = \frac{7\pi}{4}$ gives a point in the fourth quadrant.
- $\Rightarrow$ one representation of $(1, -1)$ in polar coordinates is $\left(\sqrt{2}, \frac{7\pi}{4}\right)$.
- $\left(\sqrt{2}, -\frac{\pi}{4}\right)$ is another.

$$\begin{aligned} r &= \pm\sqrt{x^2 + y^2} \\ &= \sqrt{1^2 + (-1)^2} \\ &= \sqrt{2} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \tan\theta &= \frac{y}{x} \\ &= -1 \end{aligned}$$