

Solutions to Exercises from ‘Algebra: Chapter 0’

ABSTRACT. Solutions to exercises from the book 'Algebra: Chapter 0' by Paolo Aluffi.

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Preface

This document contains my attempt at writing (hopefully correct!) solutions to exercises from Aluffi's book, while engaging in some self-study of modern abstract algebra with the ultimate aim of teaching myself some modern algebraic geometry.

CHAPTER 1

Preliminaries: Set theory and categories

1. Naive set theory

EXERCISE 1.1. Let $U = \{x \mid x \notin x\}$. Then, $U \notin U \iff U \in U$, a contradiction. This is Russell's paradox. Either we assume the *set of all sets* doesn't exist, or we need to give up the axiom of *unrestricted comprehension* in set theory.

EXERCISE 1.2. Suppose \sim is an equivalence relation on a set S . For every element $a \in S$, define the *equivalence class* of a (with respect to \sim) by

$$[a]_{\sim} := \{b \in S \mid b \sim a\}.$$

Then, we note that due to *reflexivity*, the equivalence class $[a]_{\sim}$ of every element $a \in S$ contains a , and hence, is nonempty. Also, $[a]_{\sim} \subset S$, and therefore, $\bigcup_{a \in S} [a]_{\sim} = S$. Finally, we show the equivalence classes are mutually disjoint. Indeed, for any two elements $a, b \in S$, if $[a]_{\sim}$ and $[b]_{\sim}$ are disjoint, then there is nothing to prove. So, suppose $[a]_{\sim} \cap [b]_{\sim}$ is nonempty. Then, there exists some $c \in S$ that belongs to such an intersection. Thus, $c \sim a$ and $c \sim b$. By symmetry, $a \sim c$, and thus, by transitivity, $a \sim b$, which by symmetry again, implies $b \sim a$. Therefore, for all $x \in [a]_{\sim}$, we have $x \sim a$, and since $a \sim b$, by transitivity, $x \sim b$, which implies $x \in [b]_{\sim}$, from which we conclude $[a]_{\sim} \subset [b]_{\sim}$. We can similarly show $[b]_{\sim} \subset [a]_{\sim}$. Hence, $[a]_{\sim} = [b]_{\sim}$. This establishes equivalence classes are mutually disjoint. Hence, the set \mathcal{P}_{\sim} of equivalence classes of S is indeed a partition of S .

EXERCISE 1.3. Suppose \mathcal{P} is a partition on a set S . Define a relation \sim on S as follows: For any two elements $a, b \in S$, $a \sim b$ iff a and b belong to the same set in the partition. Then, it is easy to check \sim is indeed an equivalence relation on S . \mathcal{P} is, therefore, the corresponding partition of the aforesaid equivalence relation, and we are done.

EXERCISE 1.4. Note the set of equivalence relations on a set S are in a one-to-one correspondence with the set of partitions of S . Thus, the number of different equivalence relations that may be defined on $S = \{1, 2, 3\}$ equals the number of partitions of S , and this number equals 5, since the partitions of S are

$$\{\{1\}, \{2\}, \{3\}\}, \{\{1, 2\}, \{3\}\}, \{\{1, 3\}, \{2\}\}, \{\{2, 3\}, \{1\}\}, \{\{1, 2, 3\}\}.$$

The above partitions are also written as 1|2|3, 12|3, 13|2, 23|1, 123.

EXERCISE 1.5. An example of a relation R (defined on a set S) that is reflexive and symmetric but not transitive is the following:

$$R = \{(1, 1), (2, 2), (3, 3), (1, 2), (2, 1), (2, 3), (3, 2)\}, \text{ where } S = \{1, 2, 3\}.$$

EXERCISE 1.6. Define a relation \sim on the set \mathbb{R} of real numbers by setting

$$a \sim b \iff b - a \in \mathbb{Z}.$$

We claim \sim is an equivalence relation. To that end, note, for all $a \in \mathbb{R}$, we have $a \sim a$, since $a - a = 0 \in \mathbb{Z}$. Therefore, \sim is reflexive. Also, if $a \sim b$, then $b - a \in \mathbb{Z}$, which implies $a - b \in \mathbb{Z}$, and thus, $b \sim a$. Therefore, \sim is symmetric. Finally, suppose $a \sim b$ and $b \sim c$. Then, $b - a, c - b \in \mathbb{Z}$, and thus, $c - a = (c - b) + (b - a) \in \mathbb{Z}$. Thus, \sim is transitive. Therefore, \sim is an equivalence relation on \mathbb{R} .

(Description of \sim) Note all reals that have the same decimal expansion belong to the same equivalence class under \sim . Thus, $[0]_\sim = \mathbb{Z}$, and for any $0 < \alpha < 1$, $[\alpha]_\sim = \{n + \alpha \mid n \in \mathbb{Z}\}$. This takes care of all the reals, since each real can always be written as $n + \alpha$, for some $n \in \mathbb{Z}$ and $0 < \alpha < 1$. Therefore, a ‘compelling’ description for \mathbb{R}/\sim is the unit interval $[0, 1]$, such that the endpoints, 0 and 1, are ‘glued’ together. In other words, it is a ‘loop’ or a 1-sphere.

Define a relation \approx on the plane $\mathbb{R} \times \mathbb{R}$ as follows:

$$(a_1, a_2) \approx (b_1, b_2) \iff b_1 - a_1 \in \mathbb{Z} \text{ and } b_2 - a_2 \in \mathbb{Z}.$$

Then, just as above, it is easy to show \approx defines an equivalence relation on $\mathbb{R} \times \mathbb{R}$. We note $[(0, 0)]_\approx = \{(m, n) \mid m, n \in \mathbb{Z}\}$, and for any $0 < \alpha, \beta < 1$, $[(\alpha, \beta)]_\approx = \{(m + \alpha, n + \beta) \mid m, n \in \mathbb{Z}\}$. Thus, a ‘compelling’ description of $\mathbb{R} \times \mathbb{R}/\approx$ is the unit square $[0, 1] \times [0, 1]$ with the four corners joined together, so that it forms a 2-sphere.

2. Functions between sets

EXERCISE 2.1. We claim the number of bijections from a set S with n elements to itself is $n!$. To begin with, any element in S can be mapped to any of the n possible elements in S . Then, the next element in S can be mapped to any of the remaining $n - 1$ elements in S , and so on, with the last element in S being mapped to the last remaining element in S . Thus, the number of bijections equals $n \cdot (n - 1) \cdot \dots \cdot 1 = n!$, which proves our claim.

EXERCISE 2.2. Assume $A \neq \emptyset$, and let $f : A \rightarrow B$ be a function. We claim f has a right inverse iff it is surjective.

(\Leftarrow) Suppose f has a right inverse, $g : B \rightarrow A$, say. Then, $f \circ g = 1_B$. Thus, for all $b \in B$, $b = 1_B(b) = (f \circ g)(b) = f(g(b)) = f(a)$, where $g(b) = a \in A$. This shows f is surjective.

(\Rightarrow) Suppose f is surjective. Then, for any $b \in B$, the fiber of f over b is nonempty. Thus, $\{f^{-1}(b)\}_{b \in B}$ is a family of nonempty sets, and therefore, using the *axiom of choice*, we can construct a function $g : B \rightarrow A$ as follows: For all $b \in B$, $g(b) = a$ for some $a \in f^{-1}(b)$. Hence, for all $b \in B$, $(f \circ g)(b) = f(g(b)) = f(a) = b = 1_B(b)$, and so, $f \circ g = 1_B$. This establishes g is the right inverse of f , and we are done.

EXERCISE 2.3. Suppose $f : A \rightarrow B$ is a bijection. Then, f has an inverse $f^{-1} : B \rightarrow A$ such that $f^{-1} \circ f = 1_A$ and $f \circ f^{-1} = 1_B$. Clearly, f is an inverse of f^{-1} , showing f^{-1} is also a bijection.

Suppose $f : A \rightarrow B$ and $g : B \rightarrow C$ are bijections. We claim $g \circ f : A \rightarrow C$ is also a bijection. To that end, we show $f^{-1} \circ g^{-1} : C \rightarrow A$ is the inverse of $g \circ f$. Indeed, $(g \circ f) \circ (f^{-1} \circ g^{-1}) = g \circ (f \circ f^{-1}) \circ g^{-1} = g \circ 1_B \circ g^{-1} = g \circ g^{-1} = 1_C$. And, $(f^{-1} \circ g^{-1}) \circ (g \circ f) = f^{-1} \circ (g^{-1} \circ g) \circ f = f^{-1} \circ 1_B \circ f = f^{-1} \circ f = 1_A$, and we are done.

EXERCISE 2.4. We show ‘isomorphism’ is an equivalence relation on any set of sets.

(Reflexivity) For all sets A , $1_A : A \rightarrow A$ is a natural bijection, and thus, $A \cong A$.

(Symmetry) Suppose $A \cong B$ for any two sets A, B . Then, there exists a bijection $f : A \rightarrow B$, such that its inverse $f^{-1} : B \rightarrow A$ is also a bijection (as shown in the above exercise.) Thus, $B \cong A$.

(Transitivity) Finally, suppose for any three sets, A, B and C , $A \cong B$ and $B \cong C$, with $f : A \rightarrow B$ and $g : B \rightarrow C$ as bijections. Then, from the previous exercise, $g \circ f : A \rightarrow C$ is also a bijection, and thus $A \cong C$.

Thus, our original claim is established.

EXERCISE 2.5. (**Epimorphism**) A function $f : A \rightarrow B$ is an *epimorphism* (or *epi*) if the following holds: For all sets Z and all functions $\alpha', \alpha'' : B \rightarrow Z$,

$$\alpha' \circ f = \alpha'' \circ f \implies \alpha' = \alpha''.$$

In other words, an epimorphism f is *right cancellative*.

Proposition: A function is surjective iff it is an epimorphism.

Proof. (\implies) Suppose $f : A \rightarrow B$ is an epimorphism. Assume, for the sake of contradiction, f is *not* surjective. Then, there exists an element $b_0 \in B$, such that, for all $a \in A$, $f(a) \neq b_0$. We now construct two distinct functions $\alpha', \alpha'' : B \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$ as follows:

$$\alpha'(b) = 0$$

$$\alpha''(b) = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } b \neq b_0 \\ 1 & \text{if } b = b_0 \end{cases}$$

Then, it is easy to check that, for all $a \in A$, $(\alpha'' \circ f)(a) = \alpha''(f(a)) = 0 = \alpha'(f(a)) = (\alpha' \circ f)(a)$, which implies $\alpha' \circ f = \alpha'' \circ f$. However, $\alpha' \neq \alpha''$, which contradicts our assumption that f is an epimorphism. Hence, we conclude f is surjective.

(\impliedby) Suppose $f : A \rightarrow B$ is surjective. Then, it has a right inverse $g : B \rightarrow A$ such that $f \circ g = 1_B$. Now, assume, for any set Z and any two functions $\alpha', \alpha'' : B \rightarrow Z$, $\alpha' \circ f = \alpha'' \circ f$. Then, $\alpha' = \alpha' \circ 1_B = \alpha' \circ (f \circ g) = (\alpha' \circ f) \circ g = (\alpha'' \circ f) \circ g = \alpha'' \circ (f \circ g) = \alpha'' \circ 1_B = \alpha''$, thus proving f is an epimorphism.

EXERCISE 2.6. Any function $f : A \rightarrow B$ determines a section $g : A \rightarrow A \times B$ of $\pi_A : A \times B \rightarrow A$ by defining g as follows:

$$a \mapsto (a, f(a))$$

Then, for all $a \in A$, $(\pi_A \circ g)(a) = \pi_A(g(a)) = \pi_A(a, f(a)) = a = 1_A(a)$, which implies $\pi_A \circ g = 1_A$, thereby showing g as defined above is indeed a section of π_A .

EXERCISE 2.7. Let $f : A \rightarrow B$ by any function. We show the graph Γ_f of f is isomorphic to A . First, recall the definition of Γ_f :

$$\Gamma_f := \{(a, b) \in (A, B) \mid b = f(a)\} \subseteq A \times B.$$

We define a function $g : A \rightarrow \Gamma_f$ by

$$a \mapsto (a, f(a)).$$

Then, for any $(a, b) \in \Gamma_f$, we have $b = f(a)$, which implies $g(a) = (a, f(a)) = (a, b)$, proving g is surjective. Next, for any $a', a'' \in A$, suppose $g(a') = g(a'')$. This implies $(a', f(a')) = (a'', f(a''))$, which implies $a' = a''$, thus proving g is injective. Hence, g is an isomorphism, and so, $A \cong \Gamma_f$.

EXERCISE 2.8. We describe below explicitly all the terms in the canonical decomposition of the function $f : \mathbb{R} \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$ defined by

$$r \mapsto e^{2\pi i r}.$$

Note f determines an equivalence relation \sim on \mathbb{R} as follows: For all $r', r'' \in \mathbb{R}$,

$$r' \sim r'' \iff f(r') = f(r'').$$

Now, $f(r') = f(r'')$ whenever $e^{i2\pi r'} = e^{i2\pi r''}$, i.e. $e^{i2\pi(r' - r'')} = e^0$; that is, $2\pi(r' - r'') = 2\pi k$, where $k \in \mathbb{Z}$. In other words, $f(r') = f(r'')$ iff $r' - r'' = k$, where $k \in \mathbb{Z}$. This implies

$$r' \sim r'' \iff r' - r'' \in \mathbb{Z}.$$

The above equivalence relation matches the one stated in Exercise 1.6 of Chapter 1. And, from the solution to the aforesaid exercise, we note that all equivalence classes are of the form $[\alpha]_\sim$, where $\alpha \in [0, 1)$. Therefore, the isomorphism $\tilde{f} : \mathbb{R}/\sim \xrightarrow{\sim} \text{im } f$ is defined by

$$\tilde{f}(\alpha) = e^{2\pi i \alpha}, \alpha \in [0, 1).$$

Also, note $\text{im } f$ is the unit circle on the complex plane. So, the entire decomposition of $f : \mathbb{R} \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$ is as shown below:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} & & & f & & & \\ & & \curvearrowright & & \curvearrowleft & & \\ \mathbb{R} & \longrightarrow & \mathbb{R}/\sim & \xrightarrow[\tilde{f}]{\sim} & \text{im } f & \hookrightarrow & \mathbb{C} \end{array},$$

where \mathbb{R}/\sim is a ‘loop’ (1-sphere.)

EXERCISE 2.9. Suppose $A' \cong A''$ and $B' \cong B''$, and further $A' \cap B' = \emptyset$ and $A'' \cap B'' = \emptyset$. Then, there exist isomorphisms $f : A' \rightarrow A''$ and $g : B' \rightarrow B''$. Define a piecewise function $h : A' \cup B' \rightarrow A'' \cup B''$ as follows:

$$h(x) = \begin{cases} f(x) & \text{if } x \in A' \\ g(x) & \text{if } x \in B' \end{cases}$$

We claim h is an isomorphism. Indeed, let $y \in A'' \cup B''$. Since A'' and B'' are disjoint, there are two cases to consider. Either, $y \in A''$, in which case, since f is surjective there exists some $x_1 \in A'$ such that $f(x_1) = y$, which implies $h(x_1) = y$. Or, $y \in B''$, in which case, since g is surjective there exists some $x_2 \in B'$ such that $g(x_2) = y$, which implies $h(x_2) = y$. Thus, in either case, h maps some $x \in A' \cup B'$ to $y \in A'' \cup B''$, thus showing h is surjective.

Now, suppose $h(x_1) = h(x_2)$ for any $x_1, x_2 \in A' \cup B'$. There are three cases to consider. First, if both $x_1, x_2 \in A'$, then $f(x_1) = f(x_2)$, and since f is injective, $x_1 = x_2$. Second, if both $x_1, x_2 \in B'$, then $g(x_1) = g(x_2)$, and since g is injective, $x_1 = x_2$. Finally, without loss of generality, we can assume $x_1 \in A'$ and $x_2 \in B'$, which implies $f(x_1) = g(x_2)$, but this is impossible, since $f(x_1) \in A''$ and $f(x_2) \in B''$, but A'', B'' are disjoint. Thus, we conclude h is injective. Hence, h is an isomorphism.

The above demonstrates the *disjoint union* operation $A \amalg B$ for any two sets A and B is, indeed, well-defined *up to isomorphism*.

EXERCISE 2.10. Suppose A and B are finite sets. Then, any one of the $|A|$ elements in A can be mapped to any one of the $|B|$ elements in B . Thus, there are exactly $|B|^{|A|}$ ways of constructing a function $A \rightarrow B$. Hence, $|B^A| = |B|^{|A|}$.

EXERCISE 2.11. Let A be a set, and let 2^A denote the set of functions from A to $2 = \{0, 1\}$. Then, define a mapping $f : 2^A \rightarrow \mathcal{P}A$, where $\mathcal{P}A$ is the powerset of A , as follows: Any function $A \rightarrow 2$ is mapped to the subset consisting of all those elements of A that are mapped to 1 under such a function. Then, it is easy to check f is both surjective and injective, and hence, a bijection.

3. Categories

EXERCISE 3.1. Let \mathcal{C} be a category. Consider a structure \mathcal{C}^{op} with

- $\text{Obj}(\mathcal{C}^{op}) := \text{Obj}(\mathcal{C})$;
- for A, B objects of \mathcal{C}^{op} (hence objects of \mathcal{C}), $\text{Hom}_{\mathcal{C}^{op}}(A, B) := \text{Hom}_{\mathcal{C}}(B, A)$.

We can make \mathcal{C}^{op} into a category as follows.

- For every object A of \mathcal{C}^{op} , its identity morphism in \mathcal{C}^{op} is defined as the identity morphism 1_A in \mathcal{C} .
- For any two morphisms $f \in \text{Hom}_{\mathcal{C}^{op}}(A, B)$ and $g \in \text{Hom}_{\mathcal{C}^{op}}(B, C)$, the composite $g \circ f \in \text{Hom}_{\mathcal{C}^{op}}(A, C)$ is defined as the composite $f \circ g$ in \mathcal{C} .
- The associativity of composition in \mathcal{C}^{op} is a direct consequence of associativity of composition in \mathcal{C} .
- The fact that identity morphisms in \mathcal{C}^{op} are identities with respect to composition is a direct consequence of identity morphisms in \mathcal{C} being identities with respect to composition.

The above construction, thus, shows \mathcal{C}^{op} is a category. This **opposite category** is simply obtained by ‘reversing all the arrows’ in \mathcal{C} .

EXERCISE 3.2. If A is a finite set, then $|\text{End}_{\text{Set}}(A)| = |A^A| = |A|^{|A|}$.

EXERCISE 3.3. In Example 3.3, to say $1_a = (a, a)$ is the identity of element $a \in S$ with respect to composition means that any $f = (a, b) \in \text{Hom}(a, b)$ remains unchanged when composed with 1_a or 1_b in the appropriate manner. In the first case, we have $a \sim a$ and $a \sim b$, and thus, by transitivity, $a \sim b$, from which we conclude $f1_a = (a, b) = f$. Similarly, in the second case, we conclude $1_b f = f$.

EXERCISE 3.4. Suppose we can define a category in the style of Example 3.3 using the relation $<$ on the set \mathbb{Z} . Then, any element (object) $n \in \mathbb{Z}$ will have an identity morphism $1_n = (n, n)$ that would imply $n < n$, which is impossible. Hence, we can’t define such a category using the relation $<$ on the set \mathbb{Z} .

EXERCISE 3.5. Example 3.4 is an instance of the categories considered in Example 3.3 in the sense that set inclusion \subseteq (morphisms) between subsets of S (objects) satisfies the reflexivity and transitivity axioms for \sim .

EXERCISE 3.6. (Assuming some familiarity with linear algebra.) Define a category \mathbf{V} by taking $\text{Obj}(\mathbf{V}) = \mathbb{N}$ and letting $\text{Hom}_{\mathbf{V}}(n, m) =$ the set of $m \times n$ matrices with real entries, for all $n, m \in \mathbb{N}$. Composition is defined as products of matrices. Note, for all $n \in \mathbb{N}$,

$$\text{Hom}_{\mathbf{V}}(n, 0) = \emptyset = \text{Hom}_{\mathbf{V}}(0, n).$$

This category does *not* ‘feel’ familiar, since it is quite unlike any of the other categories we have seen before. Objects of \mathbf{V} are not like the usual sets or elements we have encountered so far, and its morphisms are matrices which are not the typical set-theoretic functions.

EXERCISE 3.7. Let \mathcal{C} be a category, and A an object of \mathcal{C} . We define a category \mathcal{C}^A as follows:

- $\text{Obj}(\mathcal{C}^A) :=$ collection of all morphisms from A to any object of \mathcal{C} ; that is, an object of \mathcal{C}^A is a morphism $f \in \text{Hom}_{\mathcal{C}}(A, B)$ for some object B of \mathcal{C} .
- For any two objects $f_1 : A \rightarrow B$ and $f_2 : A \rightarrow C$ of \mathcal{C}^A , morphisms $f_1 \rightarrow f_2$ are defined to be commutative diagrams

$$\begin{array}{ccc} & A & \\ f_1 \swarrow & & \searrow f_2 \\ B & \xrightarrow{\sigma} & C \end{array}$$

in the ‘ambient’ category \mathcal{C} . That is, morphisms $f_1 \rightarrow f_2$ correspond precisely to those morphisms $\sigma : B \rightarrow C$ in \mathcal{C} such that $\sigma \circ f_1 = f_2$.

(Composition) Two morphisms $f_1 \rightarrow f_2$ and $f_2 \rightarrow f_3$ in \mathcal{C}^A correspond to putting two commutative diagrams side-by-side:

$$\begin{array}{ccccc} & A & & & \\ f_1 \swarrow & \downarrow f_2 & \searrow f_3 & & \\ B & \xrightarrow{\sigma} C & \xrightarrow{\tau} D & & \end{array}$$

Then, the diagram obtained by removing the central arrow, *i.e.*

$$\begin{array}{ccc} & A & \\ f_1 \swarrow & & \searrow f_3 \\ B & \xrightarrow{\tau \circ \sigma} & D \end{array}$$

also commutes, since \mathcal{C} is a category.

EXERCISE 3.8. A *subcategory* \mathcal{C}' of a category \mathcal{C} consists of a collection of objects of \mathcal{C} , with morphisms $\text{Hom}_{\mathcal{C}'}(A, B) \subseteq \text{Hom}_{\mathcal{C}}(A, B)$ for all objects A, B in $\text{Obj}(\mathcal{C}')$, such that identities and compositions in \mathcal{C} make \mathcal{C}' into a category. A subcategory \mathcal{C}' is *full* if $\text{Hom}_{\mathcal{C}'}(A, B) = \text{Hom}_{\mathcal{C}}(A, B)$ for all A, B in $\text{Obj}(\mathcal{C}')$.

We can construct a category of *infinite sets* as follows. The objects of this category are all infinite sets from **Set**, and morphisms from an infinite set A to another infinite set B are just the usual set-functions. Then, it is clear that this category is indeed a full subcategory of **Set**.

EXERCISE 3.9.

EXERCISE 3.10. Given any set A in **Set**, the subsets (subobjects) of A are in a one-to-one correspondence with functions $A \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$. Thus, $\Omega = \{0, 1\}$ is a *subobject classifier* of **Set**.

EXERCISE 3.11. The category $\mathcal{C}^{A, B}$ consists of the following pieces of data:

- $\text{Obj}(\mathcal{C}^{A,B}) = \text{diagrams}$



- morphisms $(f_1 : A \rightarrow Z_1, g_1 : B \rightarrow Z_1) \rightarrow (f_2 : A \rightarrow Z_2, g_2 : B \rightarrow Z_2)$ are commutative diagrams



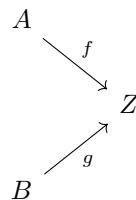
- (Composition) Given commutative diagrams



the following diagram commutes:



- (Identities) The identity morphism of



is $Z \xrightarrow{1_Z} Z$, thus making the following diagram commute:



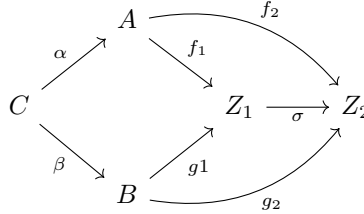
Given a category \mathcal{C} and two fixed morphisms $\alpha : C \rightarrow A$ and $\beta : C \rightarrow B$, the category $\mathcal{C}^{\alpha, \beta}$ consists of the following pieces of data:

- $\text{Obj}(\mathcal{C}^{\alpha, \beta}) = \text{commutative diagrams}$



in \mathcal{C} .

- Morphisms correspond to commutative diagrams



- Composition and identities are defined in the obvious way.
- The usual composition and identity laws for $\mathcal{C}^{\alpha, \beta}$ follow from the composition and identity laws in \mathcal{C} .

4. Morphisms

EXERCISE 4.1. Suppose $A_0 \xrightarrow{f_1} A_1 \xrightarrow{f_2} A_2 \xrightarrow{f_3} \dots \xrightarrow{f_n} A_n$ is a sequence of $n > 0$ morphisms in a category \mathcal{C} . We claim any choice of placement of parentheses for $f_n f_{n-1} \dots f_1$ equals

$$(\dots((f_n f_{n-1}) f_{n-2}) \dots) f_1.$$

We use induction on n to prove our claim.

(Base cases) We note $f_1 = (f_1)$. And, also $f_2 f_1 = (f_2) f_1$. So the statement holds for $n = 1, 2$.

(Inductive case) Suppose the statement holds for some $n > 1$. Now, consider the placement of parentheses for the expression $E = f_{n+1} f_n f_{n-1} \dots f_1$. Any such choice will correspond to a representation of E in the form ee' , where both e and e' contain at least one term. This also implies both e and e' contain at most n

terms. So, assume e contains the terms f_{n+1}, f_n, \dots, f_i and e' contains the terms f_{i-1}, \dots, f_1 for some $1 < i \leq n+1$. Then, by the inductive hypothesis,

$$\begin{aligned} e &= (((f_{n+1}f_n) \dots) f_i) \\ e' &= (f_{i-1}(\dots (f_2f_1))) \end{aligned}$$

Then, through repeated use of the associativity of morphisms under composition, we have E

$$\begin{aligned} &= ee' \\ &= e(f_{i-1}(\dots (f_2f_1))) \\ &= (((ef_{i-1})f_{i-2})f_{i-3}) \dots f_1 \\ &= (\dots ((f_{n+1}f_n)f_{n-1}) \dots) f_1 \end{aligned}$$

So, the statement holds for $n+1$ as well, and hence, by induction, the statement holds for all naturals $n > 0$. And, we are done.