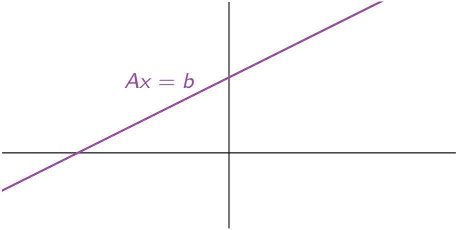
Section 2.4

Solution Sets

Plan For Today

Today we will learn to describe and draw the solution set of an arbitrary system of linear equations $Ax = b$, using spans.



Recall: the **solution set** is the collection of all vectors x such that $Ax = b$ is true.

Last time we discussed the set of vectors b for which $Ax = b$ has a solution.

We also described this set using spans, but it was a *different problem*.

Homogeneous Systems

Everything is easier when $b = 0$, so we start with this case.

Definition

A system of linear equations of the form $Ax = 0$ is called **homogeneous.**

These are linear equations where everything to the right of the $=$ is zero. The opposite is:

Definition

A system of linear equations of the form $Ax = b$ with $b \neq 0$ is called **inhomogeneous.**

A homogeneous system always has the solution $x = 0$. This is called the **trivial solution.** The nonzero solutions are called **nontrivial.**

Observation

$Ax = 0$ has a nontrivial solution

$\iff$ there is a free variable

$\iff$ A has a column with no pivot.

Question

What is the solution set of $Ax = 0$, where

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 3 & 4 \\ 2 & -1 & 2 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}?$$

We know how to do this: first form an augmented matrix and row reduce.

The only solution is the trivial solution $x = 0$.

Observation

Since the last column (everything to the right of the $=$) was zero to begin, it will always stay zero! So it's not really necessary to write augmented matrices in the homogeneous case.

Question

What is the solution set of $Ax = 0$, where

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & -3 \\ 2 & -6 \end{pmatrix}?$$

This last equation is called the **parametric vector form** of the solution.

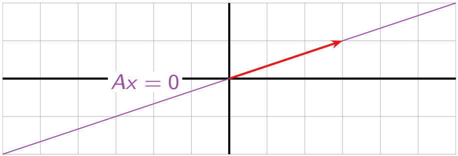
It is obtained by listing equations for all the variables, in order, including the free ones, and making a vector equation.

Question

What is the solution set of $Ax = 0$, where

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & -3 \\ 2 & -6 \end{pmatrix}?$$

Answer: $x = x_2 \begin{pmatrix} 3 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix}$ for any x_2 in $\mathbf{R}$. The solution set is $\text{Span}\left\{ \begin{pmatrix} 3 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} \right\}$.



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Note: *one* free variable means the solution set is a *line* in $\mathbf{R}^2$ ($2 = \#$ variables $= \#$ columns).

Question

What is the solution set of $Ax = 0$, where

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & -1 & 2 \\ -2 & 2 & -4 \end{pmatrix}?$$

Homogeneous Systems

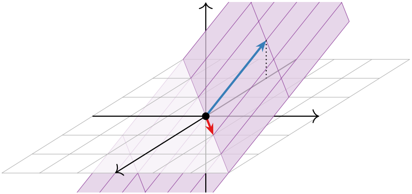
Example, continued

Question

What is the solution set of $Ax = 0$, where

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & -1 & 2 \\ -2 & 2 & -4 \end{pmatrix}?$$

Answer: $\quad \text{Span}\left\{ \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} -2 \\ 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} \right\}.$



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Note: *two* free variables means the solution set is a *plane* in $\mathbf{R}^3$ ($3 = \#$ variables $= \#$ columns).

Question

What is the solution set of $Ax = 0$, where $A =$

$$\begin{pmatrix} 1 & 2 & 0 & -1 \\ -2 & -3 & 4 & 5 \\ 2 & 4 & 0 & -2 \end{pmatrix} \xrightarrow{\text{row reduce}} \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & -8 & -7 \\ 0 & 1 & 4 & 3 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

$$\xrightarrow{\text{equations}} \begin{cases} x_1 \qquad - 8x_3 - 7x_4 = 0 \\ \qquad x_2 + 4x_3 + 3x_4 = 0 \end{cases}$$

$$\xrightarrow{\text{parametric form}} \begin{cases} x_1 = 8x_3 + 7x_4 \\ x_2 = -4x_3 - 3x_4 \\ x_3 = x_3 \\ x_4 = x_4 \end{cases}$$

$$\xrightarrow{\text{parametric vector form}} x = \begin{pmatrix} x_1 \\ x_2 \\ x_3 \\ x_4 \end{pmatrix} = x_3 \begin{pmatrix} 8 \\ -4 \\ 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} + x_4 \begin{pmatrix} 7 \\ -3 \\ 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix}.$$

Question

What is the solution set of $Ax = 0$, where

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 2 & 0 & -1 \\ -2 & -3 & 4 & 5 \\ 2 & 4 & 0 & -2 \end{pmatrix}?$$

Answer: $\text{Span}\left\{ \begin{pmatrix} 8 \\ -4 \\ 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} 7 \\ -3 \\ 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} \right\}.$

[not pictured here]

Note: *two* free variables means the solution set is a *plane* in $\mathbf{R}^4$ ($4 = \#$ variables $= \#$ columns).

Let A be an $m \times n$ matrix. Suppose that the free variables in the homogeneous equation $Ax = 0$ are, for example, x_3, x_6, and x_8.

1. Find the reduced row echelon form of A.
2. Write the parametric form of the solution set, including the redundant equations $x_3 = x_3$, $x_6 = x_6$, and $x_8 = x_8$. Put equations for all of the x_i in order.
3. Make a single vector equation from these equations by putting x_3, x_6, and x_8 as coefficients of vectors v_3, v_6, and v_8, respectively.

The solutions to $Ax = 0$ will then be expressed in the form

$$x = x_3 v_3 + x_6 v_6 + x_8 v_8$$

for some vectors v_3, v_6, v_8 in $\mathbf{R}^n$, and any scalars x_3, x_6, x_8.

In this case, the solution set to $Ax = 0$ is

$$\text{Span}\{v_3,\ v_6,\ v_8\}.$$

The equation above is called the **parametric vector form** of the solution.

We emphasize the fact that **the set of solutions to** $Ax = 0$ **is a span**.

Poll

Question

What is the solution set of $Ax = b$, where

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & -3 \\ 2 & -6 \end{pmatrix} \quad \text{and} \quad b = \begin{pmatrix} -3 \\ -6 \end{pmatrix}?$$

The only difference from the homogeneous case is the constant vector $p = \binom{-3}{0}$.

Note that p is itself a solution: take $x_2 = 0$.

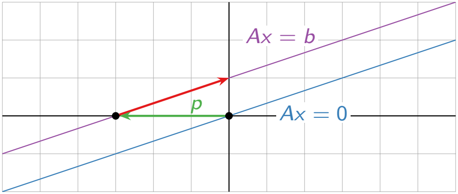
Question

What is the solution set of $Ax = b$, where

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & -3 \\ 2 & -6 \end{pmatrix} \quad \text{and} \quad b = \begin{pmatrix} -3 \\ -6 \end{pmatrix}?$$

Answer: $x = x_2 \begin{pmatrix} 3 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} + \begin{pmatrix} -3 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}$ for any x_2 in $\mathbf{R}$.

This is a *translate* of $\text{Span}\left\{\begin{pmatrix} 3 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix}\right\}$: it is the parallel line through $p = \begin{pmatrix} -3 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}$.



It can be written

$$\text{Span}\left\{\begin{pmatrix} 3 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix}\right\} + \begin{pmatrix} -3 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}.$$

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Question

What is the solution set of $Ax = b$, where

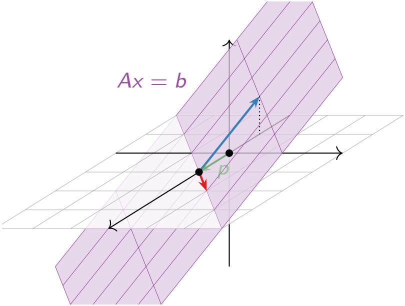
$$A = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & -1 & 2 \\ -2 & 2 & -4 \end{pmatrix} \quad \text{and} \quad b = \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ -2 \end{pmatrix}?$$

Question

What is the solution set of $Ax = b$, where

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & -1 & 2 \\ -2 & 2 & -4 \end{pmatrix} \quad \text{and} \quad b = \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ -2 \end{pmatrix}?$$

Answer: $\text{Span}\left\{ \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} -2 \\ 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} \right\} + \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}.$



The solution set is a *translate* of

$$\text{Span}\left\{ \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} -2 \\ 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} \right\}:$$

it is the parallel plane through

$$p = \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}.$$

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Homogeneous vs. Inhomogeneous Systems

Key Observation

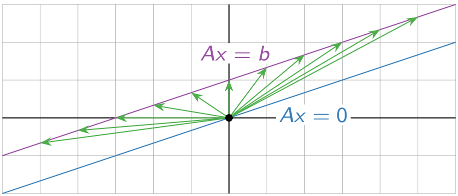
The set of solutions to $Ax = b$, if it is nonempty, is obtained by taking one **specific** or **particular solution** p to $Ax = b$, and adding all solutions to $Ax = 0$.

Why? If $Ap = b$ and $Ax = 0$, then

$$A(p + x) = Ap + Ax = b + 0 = b,$$

so $p + x$ is also a solution to $Ax = b$.

We know the solution set of $Ax = 0$ is a span. So the solution set of $Ax = b$ is a *translate* of a span: it is *parallel* to a span. (Or it is empty.)



This works for *any* specific solution p: it doesn't have to be the one produced by finding the parametric vector form and setting the free variables all to zero, as we did before.

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Solution Sets and Spans of Columns

Very Important

Let A be an $m \times n$ matrix. There are now two *completely different* things you know how to describe using spans:

- The **solution set:** for fixed b, this is all x such that $Ax = b$.
  - This is a span if $b = 0$, or a translate of a span in general (if it's consistent).
  - Lives in $\mathbf{R}^n$.
  - Computed by finding the parametric vector form.
- The **span of the columns:** this is all b such that $Ax = b$ is consistent.
  - This is the span of the columns of A.
  - Lives in $\mathbf{R}^m$.

Don't confuse these two geometric objects!

Much of the first midterm tests whether you understand both.

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Summary

- The solution set to a **homogeneous** system $Ax = 0$ is a span. It always contains the **trivial solution** $x = 0$.
- The solution set to a **nonhomogeneous** system $Ax = b$ is either empty, or it is a translate of a span: namely, it is a translate of the solution set of $Ax = 0$.
- The solution set to $Ax = b$ can be expressed as a translate of a span by computing the **parametric vector form** of the solution.
- The solution set to $Ax = b$ and the span of the columns of A (from the previous lecture) are two completely different things, and you have to understand them separately.