





# Acknowledgements

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Thanks to John, Jack, Bill, and Hilary for guidance.  
Thanks to all of you for attending.



# Course description

## 21-127 Concepts of Mathematics

All Semesters: 10 units

This course introduces the basic concepts, ideas and tools involved in doing mathematics. As such, its main focus is on presenting informal logic, and the methods of mathematical proof. These subjects are closely related to the application of mathematics in many areas, particularly computer science. Topics discussed include a basic introduction to elementary number theory, induction, the algebra of sets, relations, equivalence relations, congruences, partitions, and functions, including injections, surjections, and bijections. A prerequisite for 15-211. (3 hrs. lec., 2 hrs. rec.)

<http://coursecatalog.web.cmu.edu/melloncollegeofscience/departamentofmathematicalsciences/courses/>





## Material covered

“Topics discussed include a basic introduction to elementary number theory, induction, the algebra of sets, relations, equivalence relations, congruences, partitions, and functions, including injections, surjections, and bijections.”

(“The easier it sounds, the harder it is.”)

- This allows for some variability, by instructor.
- Main goal is to introduce **proof methods** and illustrate them by exploring different topics.
- Certain fundamental topics need to be introduced here so that students are familiar with them later, e.g. induction, sets, functions.
- Other topics can be chosen and developed based on interest or timing, e.g. cardinality, number theory, probability.





# Organization and assessment

- Three 1-hr lectures, MWF
  - Led by instructor, introduces new material and examples.
- Two 1-hr recitations, TR
  - Led by TAs, work on problem-solving and conceptual help.
- 10 written assignments
  - Emphasis on solving problems and writing proofs.
- 3 in-class exams
  - Emphasis on content recall and writing proof details quickly (“time crunch”).
- 1 final
  - Emphasis on synthesizing course content and applying methods to write proofs across areas.

## Genesis and motivation

- Served as TA for 21-127. Found myself agreeing with some students' complaints about the standard text. Started developing ways to work around these conditions to present better material and help student learning.
- Was looking for a project to devote myself to. Realized I was very interested in teaching and already felt motivated to spend lots of time on course design and materials.
- Recognized how important this course is to the math curriculum, in general. Wished I had such a course in my undergrad education.



## Writing

- Spring 2011 — Began writing with Mackey. First three chapters took shape. Stated goals and developed rough plan for the rest. Editing and guidance from Mackey based on his experience.
- Summer 2011 — Used new materials to supplement standard text while instructing. Focused on finding good motivating examples for material, as well as writing exercises to “field test”.
- Fall 2011 — Spent much time helping with logistics of course, including grading (and verifications) and student help. Wrote “recitation sheets” whose content has been repurposed. Also used some of my written problems on homeworks.
- Spring 2012 — Wrote most of the later chapters. Still deciding what to include/omit and how to sequence the material.

# Writing

- Summer 2012 — Used solely my materials while instructing. Large summer class with many AP/EA students. Realized that greater emphasis on proof techniques is needed. Wrote lecture notes and developed many examples and exercises to be used.
- Fall 2012 — Used my materials and collaborated with Prof. Schaeffer on assignments/exams. Further developed lecture and recitation notes, and exercises, which were very useful in finishing the writing of the book and providing supplemental materials.
- Spring 2013 — Took teaching experiences and written materials and finished writing book. Decided on sequencing, examples and exercises. Standardized formatting and chapter structures, created many diagrams.



## Textbook/informality tension

As described later, one major goal is to write less formally than other texts to engage the reader.

### Good:

- This idea developed from direct experiences with students, and it seemed like this is what they wanted (or would unknowingly benefit from).
- Makes the book stand out amongst others; non-standard for a math book designed for budding math-doers.

### Bad:

- Might “turn off” especially rigorous students who were already motivated to pursue higher mathematics.
- Length and “wordiness” can be overwhelming.







## Part II

- 6. Relations and Modular Arithmetic: Structuring Sets and Proving Facts About The Integers
- 7. Functions and Cardinality: Inputs, Outputs, and The Sizes of Sets
- 8. Combinatorics: Counting Stuff







## 3. Sets

- 3.1 Intro: objectives, segue, motivation, goals and warnings.
- 3.2 Main idea: examples from everyday life and math
- 3.3 Definition and examples: proper notation, set-builder usage, empty set, Russell's Paradox (and a brief note on axioms)
- 3.4 Subsets: definition and standard examples, finding the power set, equality by containment, the “bag analogy”
- 3.5 Set operations:  $\cap$ ,  $\cup$ ,  $-$ ,  $\overline{A}$  (handout 4, p. 174)
- 3.6 Indexed sets: notation, usage, examples, operations
- 3.7 Cartesian products: ordered pairs, examples
- 3.8 [Optional] Defining  $\mathbb{N}$  via sets: inductive sets, state PMI

## 3. Sets

### 3.9 Proofs involving sets:

Introduces idea of *appealing to formal definitions*.

How to prove  $\subseteq$

Double-containment proofs to show  $=$

Many examples, including indexed operations

Disproving claims (introduces logical negation gently)

### 3.10 Summary

**3.11** Exercises: practice with notation and reading statements, asks reader to provide examples and non-examples, several “spoofs”, proofs involving sets (*avoiding* arguments that would be made easier via logic, e.g. DeMorgan’s Laws)

**3.12** Lookahead: logical ideas, develop proof techniques to apply



## 4. Logic

- 4.1 Intro: objectives, segue, motivation, goals and warnings.
- 4.2 Mathematical statements: variable propositions, examples and non-examples, proper notation
- 4.3 Quantifiers: usage and notation, how to read *and* write statements, “fixed” variables
- 4.4 Negating quantifiers: method and examples, Law of the Excluded Middle, redefine indexed set operations
- 4.5 Connectives:  $\wedge$ ,  $\vee$ ,  $\implies$ ,  $\iff$   
Many examples and non-examples of each, in-depth discussion of  $\implies$  and various forms, redefine set operations

## 4. Logic

- 4.6 Logical equivalence: definition and usage and examples, biconditionals, necessary/sufficient, associative/distributive laws, DeMorgan's Laws, (double-)containment proofs
- 4.7 Logical negations: use DeMorgan's Laws, negating  $P \implies Q$ , method and examples
- 4.8 [Optional] Truth sets: relating connectives to sets
- 4.9 Proof strategies: major focus, outline direct/indirect/other methods for each connective, implement an example showing necessary scratch work ([handout 3, p. 286](#))
- 4.10 Summary
- 4.11 Exercises: applying proof techniques, discovering truths
- 4.12 Lookahead: have learned ideas to revisit induction

## 5. Formal Mathematical Induction

- 5.1 Intro: objectives.
- 5.2 Regular induction: state and prove PMI, provide proof template and illustrate usage, emphasize common errors
- 5.3 Variants: different base case, backwards, evens/odds
- 5.4 Strong induction: state and prove PSMI, provide proof template and illustrate usage, compare to PMI
- 5.5 Variants: “minimal criminal”, WOP, TFAE
- 5.6 Summary
- 5.7 Exercises: more difficult arguments, prove WOP, “spoofs”
- 5.8 Lookahead: new goal, functions

This concludes Part I (just over halfway).

## 6. Relations and Modular Arithmetic

- 6.1 Intro: objectives, segue, motivation, goals and warnings.
- 6.2 Binary relations: definition and examples, properties (reflexive, symmetric, transitive, anti-symmetric) and canonical examples, proving/disproving properties
- 6.3 [Optional] Order relations: posets, tosets, chains, (to include: well orders)
- 6.4 Equivalence relations: examples and motivation, equivalence classes and how to characterize them, partitions, theorems (some proofs as exercises)

## 6. Relations and Modular Arithmetic

- 6.5 Modular arithmetic: equivalence classes mod  $n$ , using mods to prove facts, multiplicative inverses (relatively prime), solving Diophantine equations, CRT, Bézout
- 6.6 Summary
- 6.7 Exercises: proving properties of relations, characterizing equivalence classes, solving number theory claims, proving interesting lemmas and theorems, some “spoofs”
- 6.8 Lookahead: a function is a relation

## 7. Functions and Cardinality

- 7.1 Intro: objectives, segue, motivation, goals and warnings.
- 7.2 Definition and examples: “well-defined”, functional equality, schematics, breaking idea that it’s a “rule” on numbers
- 7.3 Images and pre-images: definitions and easy/hard examples, proof strategies (reiterate sets and logic), constructing counterexamples ([handout 2, p. 488](#))
- 7.4 Properties: “jections”, definitions and examples, proof strategies, how to determine properties
- 7.5 Compositions and inverses: notation and usage and examples, proving inverse by composing both ways to get identity, bijection iff invertible

## 7. Functions and Cardinality

- 7.6 Cardinality: finite vs. infinite, comparing via functions (discussion on axioms/defs), Cantor's Theorem, countably infinite sets (Hilbert Hotel, examples and theorems, infinite vs. arbitrarily large), uncountably infinite sets (examples and theorems, levels of infinity)
- 7.7 Summary
- 7.8 Exercises: wide range of difficulties, many lemmas from chapter, exploring properties, prove/find counterexample, "spoofs", sets of binary strings ([handout 5, p. 556](#))
- 7.9 Lookahead: focus on finite sets

## 8. Combinatorics

- 8.1 Intro: objectives, segue, motivation, goals and warnings.
- 8.2 Basic counting principles: Rules of Sum and Product, fundamental objects and formulae (permutations, selections, binomial coefficients, arrangements), relation to functions
- 8.3 Counting arguments: combining ROS/ROP, case analysis, decision processes, being careful of under/overcounts, other objects ( $n$ -tuples, alphabets, anagrams, lattice paths)
- 8.4 Counting in two ways: method summary, examples, theorems and uses, how to analyze an identity and construct an argument
- 8.5 Selections with repetition: Pirates & Gold (stars & bars), balls in bins, indistinguishable dice, examples



## 8. Combinatorics

- 8.6 Pigeonhole: statement and proof (logic), examples
- 8.7 Inclusion/Exclusion: statement and proof, examples where intersections have fixed size, other examples (sels. w/rep.)
- 8.8 Summary
- 8.9 Exercises: wide variety of difficulties, many counting in two ways, some “spoofs” to identify over/undercounts, Fermat’s Little via binomial coeffs, comparing selections with and w/o repetition
- 8.10 Lookahead: go forth and prosper

# Appendix

Definitions and Theorems

Separated by topic (not necessarily chronology)

Proof strategies for connectives, functions, induction

Cardinality catalog

Acronyms and phrases

Helpful reference (suggested by students)

## Prose: readable, engaging, but meaningful

- See [handout 1](#), p. 131-134.
- Encourage reader to explore the concepts and examples on their own. Ask insightful questions to guide them.
- Present motivation and analysis as if in the role of a knowledgeable fellow student, but backed by expert insight.
- Admittedly, writing looks “texty” but this is broken up by section headings, itemized lists, diagrams, and questions.
- Encouraging the reader: we are on the same journey.
- Written as if I were speaking in the classroom, but benefits from organization and foresight.
- Not an *informational* reference necessarily, but a *conceptual* reference. (Where else can students find fully explained and motivated theorems and examples?)

## Information: avoiding “expert blind-spots”

- See [handout 2](#), p. 488-491.
- Mathematical writing tends to treat the reader as a fellow expert, with no mention of work “behind the scenes”.
- “We often skip or combine critical steps when we teach. Students, on the other hand, don’t yet have sufficient background and experience to make these leaps and can become confused, draw incorrect conclusions, or fail to develop important skills. They need instructors to break tasks into component steps, explain connections explicitly, and model processes in detail.” Eberly Center: <http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/principles/teaching.html>
- Somewhat like the “follow this example” method but emphasizes *critical thinking*, not a rote algorithm.
- See [handout 3](#), p. 286-291 for a combo of these approaches.

## Consistency of chapter structures

Each chapter has the following outline:

- Introduction:
  - Objectives
  - Segue from previous chapter
  - Motivation
  - Goals and warnings for the reader
- Sections:
  - Content
  - Questions: Remind Yourself
  - Exercises: Try It
- Conclusion:
  - Summary
  - Chapter exercises
  - Lookahead

## Consistency of chapter structures

Example of objectives (from Chapter 8: Combinatorics):

**By the end of this chapter, you should be able to . . .**

- State the Rules of Sum and Product, and use and combine them to construct simple counting arguments.
- Categorize several standard counting objects, as well as state corresponding counting formulas and understand how to prove them.
- Understand the meaning of binomial coefficients, how to use them in counting arguments, and how to derive their numerical formula.
- Critique a proposed counting argument by properly demonstrating if it is an undercount or overcount.
- Prove combinatorial identities by constructing “counting in two ways” proofs.
- Understand various formulations of selection with repetition, and use them to solve problems.
- State the Pigeonhole Principle and use it in counting arguments.
- State the Principle of Inclusion/Exclusion and use it in counting arguments.

## Section exercises: easy concept checks

See [handout 4](#), p. 174-175

- **Questions: Remind Yourself**  
Checking the ability to recall a definition or theorem, use proper notation, identify the difference between two concepts, name canonical examples/non-examples.
- **Exercises: Try It**  
Require some more thought/effort but are not meant to be too challenging. Reminds the reader they need to *do* math.
- **Together**, summarizing and reinforcing main ideas from the section. Building up understanding to move on with more content. Easing into more difficult chapter exercises.

## Chapter exercises: variety and synthesis

See [handout 5](#), p. 556-565.

- Combines material from that chapter and all previous.
- Problems range widely in difficulty. (Typically, easiest ones come first; remainder are spread out.)
- Easy problems can amount to understanding definitions and notation.
- Always features a few “spoofs”: find the flaw (if any!) in a proposed argument. *Essential* mathematical skill.
- Often asks reader to prove lemmas/theorems we stated.
- Several prove/disprove problems.
- Some difficult problems *scaffolded* to guide the reader (e.g. [7.8.30](#), p. 561, structured double induction).
- Various hints and suggestions.



## Supplements

## Class notes

- Lecture notes:  
Condensed versions of definitions and examples, with some discussion. Some new examples and questions.  
Helpful for instructor to set pace/timing of course.  
Helpful for student to have (perhaps) more digestible notes.
- Recitation notes:  
Extra examples and exercises to work through.  
Supplements course material with problems that wouldn't squeeze into a lecture (time/content).  
(Two versions: one for TA notes, one for student handout.)  
Helpful for instructor/TAs to have suggested problems.  
Helpful for student to have written record of (often) predominantly verbal problem-solving sessions.



Why bother?

Aren't there many books/courses that do this?

I *knew* there could be a better book, one that would be more helpful for students and would bring more of them into the world of mathematics. (In particular, I wish I'd had such a book.)

“The D.A. thesis . . . [is expected] to demonstrate an ability to organize, understand, and present mathematical ideas in a scholarly way, usually with sufficient originality and worth to produce publishable work.”

<http://www.math.cmu.edu/graduate/PhDprogram.html>

# Addresses teaching principles

Effective teaching involves ...

<http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/principles/teaching.html>

- ... acquiring relevant knowledge about students and using that knowledge to inform our course design and classroom teaching.
- ... articulating explicit expectations regarding learning objectives and policies.
- ... prioritizing the knowledge and skills we choose to focus on. (“Coverage is the enemy.”)
- ... recognizing and overcoming our expert blind spots.
- ... adopting appropriate teaching roles to support our learning goals.

## Made from experience and trial

- Much of the content was developed first in recitations, seeing where students needed more/fewer examples, more/less illustration of theorems/proofs vs. applications, and gathering helpful heuristic explanations.
- This was developed into full-fledged lecture notes and textbook writing.
- Likewise, interactions in office hours, plus lots of rubric writing and grading, have informed decisions about exercises and expectations.
- Use of AnnotateMyPDF has brought suggestions and criticisms directly from a variety of readers.  
“This example was helpful.” “I didn’t understand this theorem until ...”



## Potential for both self-study and use in teaching

- Engaging writing style could be perfect for a motivated reader, even without the structure of a course/instructor.
- No knowledge presumed beyond familiarity with numbers and algebra, so could easily be recommended to a developed high-schooler wondering where to go.
- Varied difficulty in exercises can appropriately test anyone from a casual reader to a devoted student.
- Breadth of examples and exercises gives instructor lots of choices. Course can follow book closely or use it as a reference for further development of material.
- Points out “lack of time/space” wherever relevant. Instructor could supplement these sections with notes/problems.

# Potential issues with both self-study and use in teaching

- Might be difficult to significantly alter sequencing of course material, e.g. formal logic entirely before sets.
- Might be difficult to significantly alter pacing of course material, e.g. length of chapters does not correlate to classroom time, and e.g. whether or not to assign readings.
- Worry that a reader will expect all texts to be like this.
- Worry that engaging style might cut down on external study and dedicated work (despite insistence otherwise).













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P. Lockhart

*A Mathematician's Lament*

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