

prf.1 Introduction

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Based on your experiences in introductory logic, you might be comfortable with a proof system—probably a natural deduction or Fitch style proof system, or perhaps a proof-tree system. You probably remember doing proofs in these systems, either proving a formula or show that a given argument is valid. In order to do this, you applied the rules of the system until you got the desired end result. In reasoning *about* logic, we also prove things, but in most cases we are not using a proof system. In fact, most of the proofs we consider are done in English (perhaps, with some symbolic language thrown in) rather than entirely in the language of first-order logic. When constructing such proofs, you might at first be at a loss—how do I prove something without a proof system? How do I start? How do I know if my proof is correct?

Before attempting a proof, it's important to know what a proof is and how to construct one. As implied by the name, a *proof* is meant to show that something is true. You might think of this in terms of a dialogue—someone asks you if something is true, say, if every prime other than two is an odd number. To answer “yes” is not enough; they might want to know *why*. In this case, you'd give them a proof.

In everyday discourse, it might be enough to gesture at an answer, or give an incomplete answer. In logic and mathematics, however, we want rigorous proof—we want to show that something is true beyond *any* doubt. This means that every step in our proof must be justified, and the justification must be cogent (i.e., the assumption you're using is actually assumed in the statement of the theorem you're proving, the definitions you apply must be correctly applied, the justifications appealed to must be correct inferences, etc.).

Usually, we're proving some statement. We call the statements we're proving by various names: propositions, theorems, lemmas, or corollaries. A proposition is a basic proof-worthy statement: important enough to record, but perhaps not particularly deep nor applied often. A theorem is a significant, important proposition. Its proof often is broken into several steps, and sometimes it is named after the person who first proved it (e.g., Cantor's Theorem, the Löwenheim-Skolem theorem) or after the fact it concerns (e.g., the completeness theorem). A lemma is a proposition or theorem that is used to in the proof of a more important result. Confusingly, sometimes lemmas are important results in themselves, and also named after the person who introduced them (e.g., Zorn's Lemma). A corollary is a result that easily follows from another one.

A statement to be proved often contains some assumption that clarifies about which kinds of things we're proving something. It might begin with “Let φ be a formula of the form $\psi \rightarrow \chi$ ” or “Suppose $\Gamma \vdash \varphi$ ” or something of the sort. These are *hypotheses* of the proposition, theorem, or lemma, and you may assume these to be true in your proof. They restrict what we're proving about, and also introduce some names for the objects we're talking about. For instance, if your proposition begins with “Let φ be a formula of the form $\psi \rightarrow \chi$,” you're proving something about all formulas of a certain sort

only (namely, conditionals), and it's understood that $\psi \rightarrow \chi$ is an arbitrary conditional that your proof will talk about.

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Bibliography