

set.1 Subsets

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Sets are made up of their elements, and every element of a set is a part of that set. But there is also a sense that some of the elements of a set *taken together* are a “part of” that set. For instance, the number 2 is part of the set of integers, but the set of even numbers is also a part of the set of integers. It’s important to keep those two senses of being part of a set separate.

Definition set.1 (Subset). If every element of a set X is also an element of Y , then we say that X is a *subset* of Y , and write $X \subseteq Y$.

Example set.2. First of all, every set is a subset of itself, and \emptyset is a subset of every set. The set of even numbers is a subset of the set of natural numbers. Also, $\{a, b\} \subseteq \{a, b, c\}$.

But $\{a, b, e\}$ is not a subset of $\{a, b, c\}$.

Note that a set may contain other sets, not just as subsets but as **elements!** In particular, a set may happen to *both* be an **element** and a subset of another, e.g., $\{0\} \in \{0, \{0\}\}$ and also $\{0\} \subseteq \{0, \{0\}\}$.

Extensionality gives a criterion of identity for sets: $X = Y$ iff every **element** of X is also an **element** of Y and vice versa. The definition of “subset” defines $X \subseteq Y$ precisely as the first half of this criterion: every **element** of X is also an **element** of Y . Of course the definition also applies if we switch X and Y : $Y \subseteq X$ iff every **element** of Y is also an **element** of X . And that, in turn, is exactly the “vice versa” part of extensionality. In other words, extensionality amounts to: $X = Y$ iff $X \subseteq Y$ and $Y \subseteq X$.

Definition set.3 (Power Set). The set consisting of all subsets of a set X is called the *power set* of X , written $\wp(X)$.

$$\wp(X) = \{Y : Y \subseteq X\}$$

Example set.4. What are all the possible subsets of $\{a, b, c\}$? They are: \emptyset , $\{a\}$, $\{b\}$, $\{c\}$, $\{a, b\}$, $\{a, c\}$, $\{b, c\}$, $\{a, b, c\}$. The set of all these subsets is $\wp(\{a, b, c\})$:

$$\wp(\{a, b, c\}) = \{\emptyset, \{a\}, \{b\}, \{c\}, \{a, b\}, \{b, c\}, \{a, c\}, \{a, b, c\}\}$$

Problem set.1. List all subsets of $\{a, b, c, d\}$.

Problem set.2. Show that if X has n **elements**, then $\wp(X)$ has 2^n **elements**.

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Bibliography