EXAMPLE 9 The Subspace of All Polynomials

Recall that a ***polynomial*** is a function that can be expressed in the form

$$p(x) = a_0 + a_1x + \cdots + a_nx^n \tag{1}$$

where $a_0, a_1, \ldots, a_n$ are constants. It is evident that the sum of two polynomials is a polynomial and that a constant times a polynomial is a polynomial. Thus, the set W of all polynomials is closed under addition and scalar multiplication and hence is a subspace of $F(-\infty, \infty)$. We will denote this space by P_∞.

EXAMPLE 10 The Subspace of Polynomials of Degree $\leq n$

Recall that the ***degree*** of a polynomial is the highest power of the variable that occurs with a nonzero coefficient. Thus, for example, if $a_n \neq 0$ in Formula (1), then that polynomial has degree n. It is *not* true that the set W of polynomials with positive degree n is a subspace of $F(-\infty, \infty)$ because that set is not closed under addition. For example, the polynomials

$$1 + 2x + 3x^2 \quad \text{and} \quad 5 + 7x - 3x^2$$

both have degree 2, but their sum has degree 1. What *is* true, however, is that for each nonnegative integer n the polynomials of degree n *or less* form a subspace of $F(-\infty, \infty)$. We will denote this space by P_n. ◀

THEOREM 4.2.2 *If $W_1, W_2, \ldots, W_r$ are subspaces of a vector space V, then the intersection of these subspaces is also a subspace of V.*

A ***solution*** of a linear system in n unknowns $x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_n$ is a sequence of n numbers $s_1, s_2, \ldots, s_n$ for which the substitution

$$x_1 = s_1, \quad x_2 = s_2, \ldots, \quad x_n = s_n$$

makes each equation a true statement. These solutions can be written more succinctly as

$$(s_1, s_2, \ldots, s_n)$$

in which the names of the variables are omitted.

Solution Spaces of Homogeneous Systems

The solutions of a homogeneous linear system $A\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{0}$ of m equations in n unknowns can be viewed as vectors in R^n. The following theorem provides a useful insight into the geometric structure of the solution set.

THEOREM 4.2.4 *The solution set of a homogeneous linear system $A\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{0}$ of m equations in n unknowns is a subspace of R^n.*

Because the solution set of a homogeneous system in n unknowns is actually a subspace of R^n, we will generally refer to it as the ***solution space*** of the system.

Remark Whereas the solution set of every *homogeneous* system of m equations in n unknowns is a subspace of R^n, it is *never* true that the solution set of a *nonhomogeneous* system of m equations in n unknowns is a subspace of R^n.

DEFINITION 2 If $\mathbf{w}$ is a vector in a vector space V, then $\mathbf{w}$ is said to be a ***linear combination*** of the vectors $\mathbf{v}_1, \mathbf{v}_2, \ldots, \mathbf{v}_r$ in V if $\mathbf{w}$ can be expressed in the form

$$\mathbf{w} = k_1\mathbf{v}_1 + k_2\mathbf{v}_2 + \cdots + k_r\mathbf{v}_r \tag{2}$$

where $k_1, k_2, \ldots, k_r$ are scalars. These scalars are called the ***coefficients*** of the linear combination.

THEOREM 4.2.3 *If $S = \{\mathbf{w}_1, \mathbf{w}_2, \ldots, \mathbf{w}_r\}$ is a nonempty set of vectors in a vector space V, then:*

(*a*) *The set W of all possible linear combinations of the vectors in S is a subspace of V.*

(*b*) *The set W in part (a) is the "smallest" subspace of V that contains all of the vectors in S in the sense that any other subspace that contains those vectors contains W.*

The following definition gives some important notation and terminology related to Theorem 4.2.3.

DEFINITION 3 If $S = \{\mathbf{w}_1, \mathbf{w}_2, \ldots, \mathbf{w}_r\}$ is a nonempty set of vectors in a vector space V, then the subspace W of V that consists of all possible linear combinations of the vectors in S is called the subspace of V ***generated*** by S, and we say that the vectors $\mathbf{w}_1, \mathbf{w}_2, \ldots, \mathbf{w}_r$ ***span*** W. We denote this subspace as

$$W = \text{span}\{\mathbf{w}_1, \mathbf{w}_2, \ldots, \mathbf{w}_r\} \quad \text{or} \quad W = \text{span}(S)$$

▶ EXAMPLE 11 The Standard Unit Vectors Span R^n

Recall that the standard unit vectors in R^n are

$$\mathbf{e}_1 = (1, 0, 0, \dots, 0), \quad \mathbf{e}_2 = (0, 1, 0, \dots, 0), \dots, \quad \mathbf{e}_n = (0, 0, 0, \dots, 1)$$

These vectors span R^n since every vector $\mathbf{v} = (v_1, v_2, \dots, v_n)$ in R^n can be expressed as

$$\mathbf{v} = v_1\mathbf{e}_1 + v_2\mathbf{e}_2 + \cdots + v_n\mathbf{e}_n$$

which is a linear combination of $\mathbf{e}_1, \mathbf{e}_2, \dots, \mathbf{e}_n$. Thus, for example, the vectors

$$\mathbf{i} = (1, 0, 0), \quad \mathbf{j} = (0, 1, 0), \quad \mathbf{k} = (0, 0, 1)$$

span R^3 since every vector $\mathbf{v} = (a, b, c)$ in this space can be expressed as

$$\mathbf{v} = (a, b, c) = a(1, 0, 0) + b(0, 1, 0) + c(0, 0, 1) = a\mathbf{i} + b\mathbf{j} + c\mathbf{k}$$

▶ EXAMPLE 13 A Spanning Set for P_n

The polynomials $1, x, x^2, \dots, x^n$ span the vector space P_n defined in Example 10 since each polynomial $\mathbf{p}$ in P_n can be written as

$$\mathbf{p} = a_0 + a_1x + \cdots + a_nx^n$$

which is a linear combination of $1, x, x^2, \dots, x^n$. We can denote this by writing

$$P_n = \text{span}\{1, x, x^2, \dots, x^n\}$$ ◀

The next two examples are concerned with two important types of problems:

- Given a nonempty set S of vectors in R^n and a vector $\mathbf{v}$ in R^n, determine whether $\mathbf{v}$ is a linear combination of the vectors in S.
- Given a nonempty set S of vectors in R^n, determine whether the vectors span R^n.

▶ EXAMPLE 14 Linear Combinations

Consider the vectors $\mathbf{u} = (1, 2, -1)$ and $\mathbf{v} = (6, 4, 2)$ in R^3. Show that $\mathbf{w} = (9, 2, 7)$ is a linear combination of $\mathbf{u}$ and $\mathbf{v}$ and that $\mathbf{w}' = (4, -1, 8)$ is *not* a linear combination of $\mathbf{u}$ and $\mathbf{v}$.

Solution In order for $\mathbf{w}$ to be a linear combination of $\mathbf{u}$ and $\mathbf{v}$, there must be scalars k_1 and k_2 such that $\mathbf{w} = k_1\mathbf{u} + k_2\mathbf{v}$; that is,

$$(9, 2, 7) = k_1(1, 2, -1) + k_2(6, 4, 2) = (k_1 + 6k_2, 2k_1 + 4k_2, -k_1 + 2k_2)$$

Equating corresponding components gives

$$\begin{aligned} k_1 + 6k_2 &= 9 \\ 2k_1 + 4k_2 &= 2 \\ -k_1 + 2k_2 &= 7 \end{aligned}$$

Solving this system using Gaussian elimination yields $k_1 = -3$, $k_2 = 2$, so

$$\mathbf{w} = -3\mathbf{u} + 2\mathbf{v}$$

Similarly, for $\mathbf{w}'$ to be a linear combination of $\mathbf{u}$ and $\mathbf{v}$, there must be scalars k_1 and k_2 such that $\mathbf{w}' = k_1\mathbf{u} + k_2\mathbf{v}$; that is,

$$(4, -1, 8) = k_1(1, 2, -1) + k_2(6, 4, 2) = (k_1 + 6k_2, 2k_1 + 4k_2, -k_1 + 2k_2)$$

Equating corresponding components gives

$$\begin{aligned} k_1 + 6k_2 &= 4 \\ 2k_1 + 4k_2 &= -1 \\ -k_1 + 2k_2 &= 8 \end{aligned}$$

This system of equations is inconsistent (verify), so no such scalars k_1 and k_2 exist. Consequently, $\mathbf{w}'$ is not a linear combination of $\mathbf{u}$ and $\mathbf{v}$.

▶ **EXAMPLE 15 Testing for Spanning**

Determine whether the vectors $\mathbf{v}_1 = (1, 1, 2)$, $\mathbf{v}_2 = (1, 0, 1)$, and $\mathbf{v}_3 = (2, 1, 3)$ span the vector space R^3.

Solution We must determine whether an arbitrary vector $\mathbf{b} = (b_1, b_2, b_3)$ in R^3 can be expressed as a linear combination

$$\mathbf{b} = k_1\mathbf{v}_1 + k_2\mathbf{v}_2 + k_3\mathbf{v}_3$$

of the vectors $\mathbf{v}_1$, $\mathbf{v}_2$, and $\mathbf{v}_3$. Expressing this equation in terms of components gives

$$(b_1, b_2, b_3) = k_1(1, 1, 2) + k_2(1, 0, 1) + k_3(2, 1, 3)$$

or

$$(b_1, b_2, b_3) = (k_1 + k_2 + 2k_3,\ k_1 + k_3,\ 2k_1 + k_2 + 3k_3)$$

or

$$\begin{aligned} k_1 + k_2 + 2k_3 &= b_1 \\ k_1 \qquad + \ \ k_3 &= b_2 \\ 2k_1 + k_2 + 3k_3 &= b_3 \end{aligned}$$

Thus, our problem reduces to ascertaining whether this system is consistent for all values of b_1, b_2, and b_3. One way of doing this is to use parts (*e*) and (*g*) of Theorem 2.3.8, which state that the system is consistent if and only if its coefficient matrix

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1 & 2 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 \\ 2 & 1 & 3 \end{bmatrix}$$

has a nonzero determinant. But this is *not* the case here since $\det(A) = 0$ (verify), so $\mathbf{v}_1$, $\mathbf{v}_2$, and $\mathbf{v}_3$ do not span R^3. ◀

THEOREM 4.2.6 *If* $S = \{\mathbf{v}_1, \mathbf{v}_2, \ldots, \mathbf{v}_r\}$ *and* $S' = \{\mathbf{w}_1, \mathbf{w}_2, \ldots, \mathbf{w}_k\}$ *are nonempty sets of vectors in a vector space* V, *then*

$$\mathit{span}\{\mathbf{v}_1, \mathbf{v}_2, \ldots, \mathbf{v}_r\} = \mathit{span}\{\mathbf{w}_1, \mathbf{w}_2, \ldots, \mathbf{w}_k\}$$

if and only if each vector in S *is a linear combination of those in* S', *and each vector in* S' *is a linear combination of those in* S.