Semester II 2026

MA135/MA160 - Algebra II



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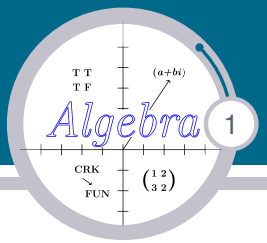
Lecture 9: Complex numbers

Recap (arithmetic)



Let $z = x + yi$ and $w = a + bi$, then

$$z + w = (x + yi) + (a + bi) = (x + a) + (y + b)i.$$
$$z - w = (x + yi) - (a + bi) = (x - a) + (y - b)i.$$
$$zw = (x + yi)(a + bi) = (xa - yb) + (xb + ya)i.$$
$$\frac{z}{w} = \frac{x + yi}{a + bi} = \frac{x + yi}{a + bi} \cdot \frac{a - bi}{a - bi} = \frac{(xa + yb) + (-xb + ya)i}{a^2 + b^2}.$$

Here $\overline{w} = a - bi$ is the conjugate of $w = a + bi$. One way to thing of the conjugate, $\overline{w}$, is that it is a reflection of w through the real axis of an Argand diagram.

Exercise

Let $z = 5 - 2i$ and $w = -3 + i$. Calculate $z + w$, $z - w$, zw and $\frac{z}{w}$.

$$z + w = (5 - 2i) + (-3 + i) = (5 - 3) + (-2i + i) = 2 - i.$$

$$z - w = (5 - 2i) - (-3 + i) = (5 + 3) + (-2i - i) = 8 - 3i.$$

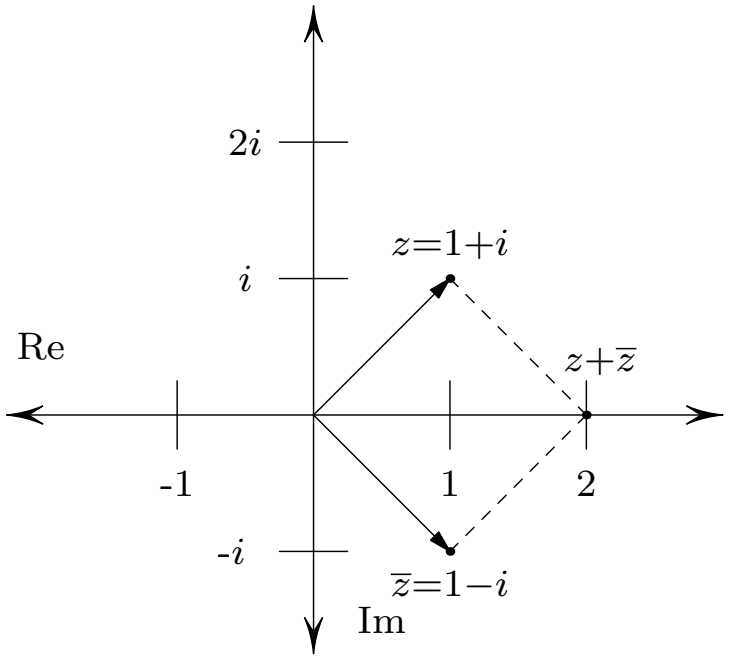
$$\begin{aligned} zw &= (5 - 2i)(-3 + i) = 5(-3 + i) - 2i(-3 + i) \\ &= -15 + 5i + 6i - 2i^2 = -15 + 11i + 2 = -13 + 11i. \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{z}{w} &= \frac{(5 - 2i)}{(-3 + i)} = \frac{(5 - 2i)}{(-3 + i)} \frac{(-3 - i)}{(-3 - i)} \\ &= \frac{(5 - 2i)(-3 - i)}{(-3)^2 + 1^2} = \frac{5(-3 - i) - 2i(-3 - i)}{10} \\ &= \frac{-15 - 5i + 6i + 2i^2}{10} = \frac{-15 + i - 2}{10} \\ &= \frac{-17 + i}{10} = -\frac{17}{10} + \frac{1}{10} i. \end{aligned}$$

Plot z and $\overline{z}$

Remember that $(0, 0)$, z w (or in this case $\overline{z}$) and $z + \overline{z}$ are the vertices of a parallelogram.

Also, note the $z + \overline{z}$ is a real number.



In general, if $z = x + yi$ then

$$z + \overline{z} = (x + yi) + (x - yi) = (x + x) + (yi - yi) = 2x.$$

Example

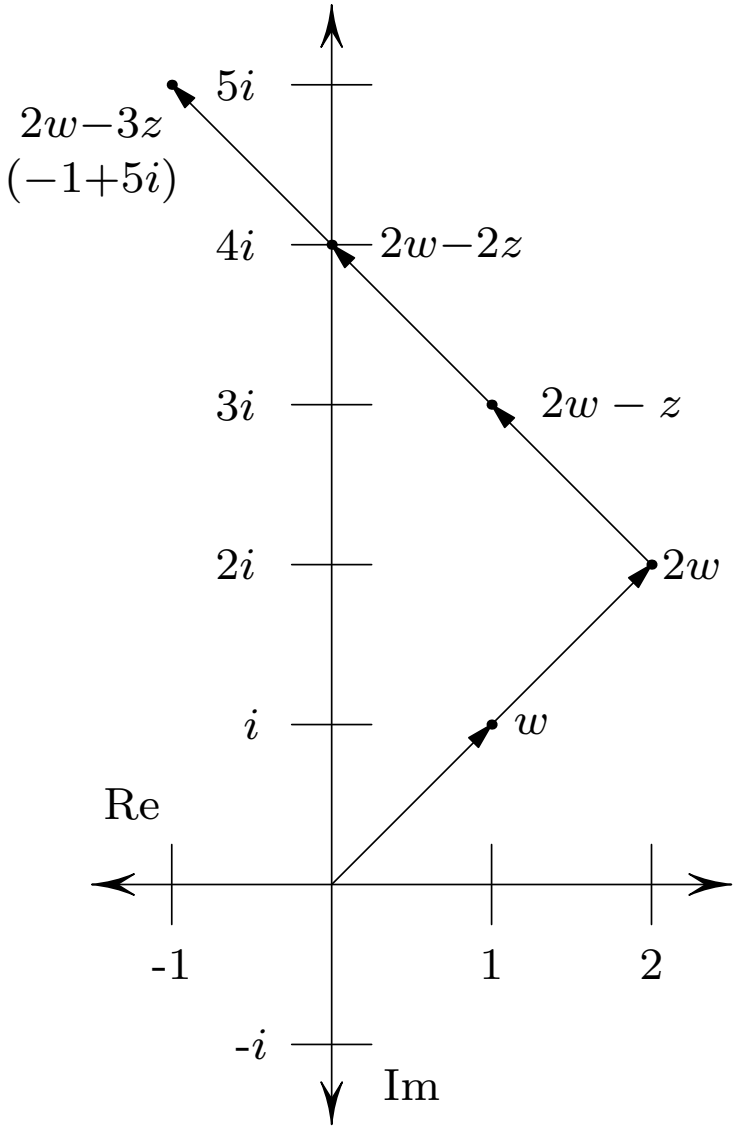
Let $w = 1 + i$ and $z = 1 - i$, and calculate $2w - 3z$.

Solution:

$$\begin{aligned} 2w - 3z &= 2(1 + i) - 3(1 - i) \\ &= (2 + 2i) - (3 - 3i) \\ &= (2 - 3) + (2i + 3i) \\ &= -1 + 5i. \end{aligned}$$

(Note that $-z = -(1 - i) = -1 + i$)

$$2w = 2 + 2i \xrightarrow{-z} 1 + 3i \xrightarrow{-z} 0 + 4i \xrightarrow{-z} -1 + 5i$$

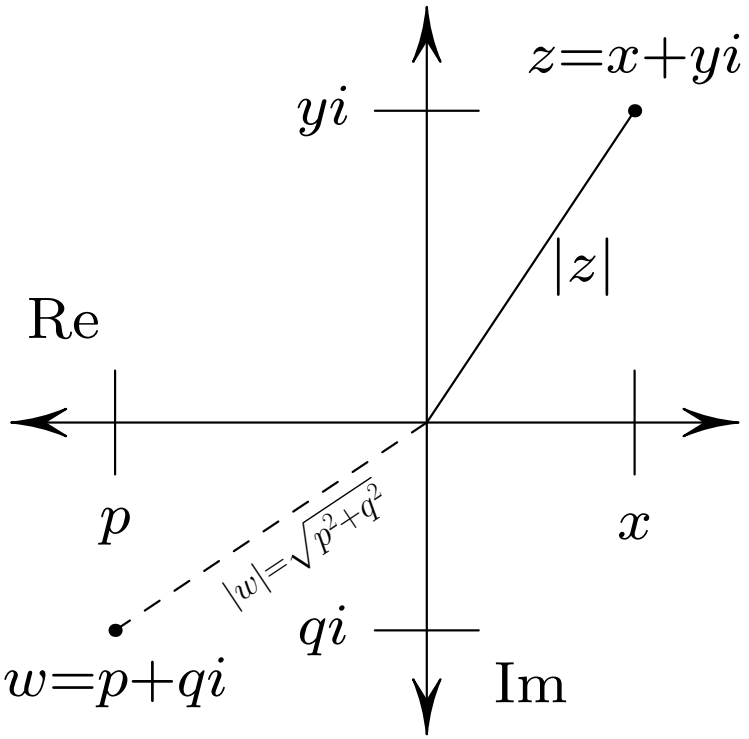


Modulus

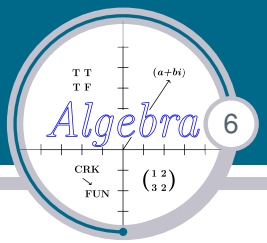
Definition: For $z = x + yi$ we define the modulus, $|z|$, to be $|z| = \sqrt{x^2 + y^2}$.

If we plot the point $z = x + yi$ on an Argand diagram then $|z|$ is the distance between the origin, $o := (0, 0)$, and the point z, i.e., the length of the straight line between o and z.

Note, $|w| \geq 0$, even though both $p, q < 0$, since it is a measurement of length and by convention $\sqrt{1}$ gives the positive square root.



Modulus examples

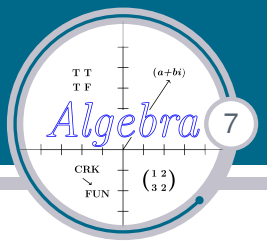


Find $|z|$ for $z = 3 - 4i$ and $|w|$ for $w = -\frac{2}{3} + \frac{4}{3}i$.

$$|z| = |3 - 4i| = \sqrt{3^2 + (-4)^2} = \sqrt{9 + 16} = \sqrt{25} = 5.$$

$$\begin{aligned} |w| = \left|-\frac{2}{3} + \frac{4}{3}i\right| &= \sqrt{\left(-\frac{2}{3}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{4}{3}\right)^2} \\ &= \sqrt{\frac{4}{9} + \frac{16}{9}} = \sqrt{\frac{20}{9}} = \frac{\sqrt{20}}{3}. \end{aligned}$$

Modulus example



Find $|z|$ for

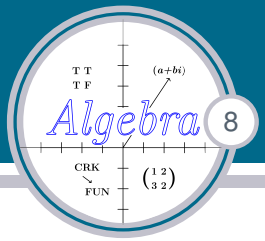
$$z = \frac{2+i}{3-2i}.$$

Solution: First need to state z in the form $x + yi$.

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{2+i}{3-2i} &= \frac{(2+i)}{(3-2i)}\frac{(3+2i)}{(3+2i)} = \frac{2(3+2i)+i(3+2i)}{3^2+2^2} \\ &= \frac{6+4i+3i+2i^2}{13} = \frac{6+7i-2}{13} \\ &= \frac{4+7i}{13} = \frac{4}{13} + \frac{7}{13}i.\end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}|z| &= \sqrt{\left(\frac{4}{13}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{7}{13}\right)^2} = \sqrt{\left(\frac{16}{169}\right) + \left(\frac{49}{169}\right)} \\ &= \sqrt{\left(\frac{65}{169}\right)} = \frac{\sqrt{65}}{13}.\end{aligned}$$

Modulus exercises



Find $|z|$ for $z = 2 + 5i$ and $|w|$ for $w = \dfrac{1+i}{1-i}$

$$|z| = |2 + 5i| = \sqrt{2^2 + (5)^2} = \sqrt{4 + 25} = \sqrt{29}.$$

$$\begin{aligned} w &= \frac{1+i}{1-i} = \frac{1+i}{1-i}\frac{1+i}{1+i} \\ &= \frac{1(1+i) + i(1+i)}{1^2 + (-1)^2} = \frac{1 + i + i + i^2}{2} \\ &= \frac{1 + 2i - 1}{2} = \frac{2i}{2} = i \end{aligned}$$