

Math 322: Group Theory

Fall Term, 2017

Lior Silberman

v0.8 (September 16, 2017)

Course Website	http://www.math.ubc.ca/~lior/teaching/1718/322_F17/
Contact me at	MAT 229B — 604-827-3031 – lior@math.ubc.ca
My Website	http://www.math.ubc.ca/~lior/
Class	TTh 14:00-15:30, LSK 460
Office Hours	TW 11:00-12:30
Textbook	None required; see below.
Course Prerequisites	(a) Score $\geq 68\%$ in one of MATH 223,310 or (b) one of MATH 152,221,223 and score $> 80\%$ in MATH 220

About the course

Summary and textbook

This is a first course in the abstract algebra sequence, intended for honours students. We will learn the basics of the theory of groups. The sequence is continued by Math 323 (ring theory) in the spring, and by Math 422 (field and Galois theory), Math 412 (advanced linear algebra) and 423 (commutative and homological algebra) the following year. Students who wish to acquire a textbook should choose from the following three options:

1. *Abstract Algebra* by Dummit and Foote is the recommended textbook for both 322 and 323 this year (it contains the material for Math 322, 323, 422 and most of 423, in fact). Buy it if you want a single abstract algebra book.
2. *Contemporary Abstract Algebra* by Gallian is a gentler alternative to Dummit and Foote. It is less dense and gives more details.
3. *An Introduction to the Theory of Groups* by Rotman (GTM 148) covers group theory in much greater depth. Instead of or in addition to buying a hardcopy you can also freely download a PDF for free from the publisher (follow the link from the course website; you must be logged on to the UBC network for this). In the instructor's opinion Rotman's book is the best introductory textbook on group theory.

The material of this course is quite standard, and any book titled “group theory” or “abstract algebra” will include everything.

New this year

There will be several interrelated changes to the course this year.

1. Layered learning goals: the learning goals have been redesigned to clarify the expectations for every achievement (from passing up to A+).

2. Online homework: to support the fundamental calculational skills there will be WebWork assignments.
3. Mastery of basic skills: Certain very basic skills and knowledge (calculation in and structure of a few explicit groups; the basic definitions and their consequences) are crucial in this course, and students will be expected to *master* them, as follows:
 - (a) There will be essentially no part marks in midterm and final exam questions related to these topics.
 - (b) Passing the course will require scoring at least 80% on this material in the midterm and the final. Unlimited retakes of the midterm will be offered.

Why Groups?

Groups are the mathematical objects which encode *symmetry*, and a standard practice in mathematics is learning about an object from the algebraic behaviour of its symmetry group. An example of this pattern is the use of change-of-basis matrices in linear algebra (the object being studied is the vector space, and the invertible matrix is a symmetry). Deeper examples come from physics, where symmetries of the world such as translation (shifting the experimental apparatus), rotation (turning it around) and time-translation (holding the experiment at a different time) are intimately connected to conservation laws (conservation of momentum, angular momentum, and energy, respectively). The atomic structure of crystals is understood in terms of the *crystallographic groups* (describing the symmetries of the arrangements of atoms in a solid). Some of the strangest aspects of quantum mechanics are connected to what happens when the positions of identical particles are swapped (surprisingly, nature can sometimes tell!). Groups are also useful computational tools (most modern encryption schemes rely on computation in a group, for example).

Groups are also the simplest algebraic objects. Understanding them is a pre-requisite for learning more algebra, or any mathematics that relies on algebra. Along the way studying them will give some new perspectives on the linear algebra students have already learned.

In the course

Mathematical content

1. Introductory examples.
2. Basics for mastery
 - (a) Groups and homomorphism.
 - (b) Quotients and the isomorphism theorems.
 - (c) Group actions.
 - (d) Calculation in the groups C_n, D_{2n}, S_n .
3. Main result: the Sylow Theorems.
4. Topics
 - (a) Direct and semidirect products; classification of groups of small and medium order.
 - (b) Finitely Generated Abelian Groups.
 - (c) Normal series, nilpotent and solvable groups.

Metamathematical content

By the end of the course

1. (Basic skills) *you must be able to*
 - (a) Master basic definitions as a foundation for further study.
 - (b) “Unwind definitions 1”: make mathematical statements concrete.
 - (c) “Unwind definitions 2”: recognize and prove purely formal assertions.
 - (d) “Recognize definitions”: notice that you are faced with an instance of a concept you have seen before
 - (e) Avoid cargo-cult mathematics.
2. (Elementary metamathematics) *you will practice*
 - (a) Telling if written arguments are correct or not and constructing counterexamples.
 - (b) Expressing your ideas coherently.
3. (Advanced skills) *you will improve your ability to*
 - (a) Solve problems requiring new ideas.
 - (b) Solve problems requiring multiple ideas.

Teaching and learning

Significant prerequisites

- Basic linear algebra: vector spaces, subspaces and linear maps. Invertibility of matrices.
- Proofs (at the level of 223 or 220): constructing simple proofs and checking them for correctness.

What you can expect from me

- Demanding homework and examinations.
 - It is impossible to learn rigorous mathematics without practising it. The transition to rigorously solving homework problems is not easy, but is necessary for students to progress in mathematics.
 - All students will be progressing together; I will post grade statistics for all to see.
 - Homework (and possibly course) marks will be scaled at the end of the course to account for the difficulty.
- Responses to your questions and concerns: continuously in class and during my office hours, within reasonable time by e-mail outside class.
- Clear explanations of what is correct in your work and what is not, and how you can improve.

What's expected from you

- Come prepared to class. You will need to read relevant material in a textbook – information will be posted on the course website.
- Actively participate in the course: do some reading, think about the material, solve the problem sets, and ask questions.
 - Asking questions when you don't understand, or want to learn more, ensures that you get what you want out of the course. Ask me questions in class, by email, and during office hours. Also, ask your colleagues questions outside of class – you will both benefit from the discussion!
 - Working on the problem sets is *absolutely essential* for learning the material. **It is extremely rare for students who skip problem sets to do well on exams.**
 - Practice problems in the homework are also important – they are important for getting a “concrete feel” for the abstract mathematics we will be doing.
 - I may call on you in class.
- Submit written work that is readable and communicates your ideas.
 - Reasoning needs to be conveyed in English sentences, not as a sequence of formulas.
 - Unnecessarily convoluted writing may be marked down.
 - If you need help with this beyond my office hours, try the Math Learning Centre.

Official Policies

General policies

- **Late or missed exams and assignments will not be accepted for credit and will be given a grade of zero.** In exceptional circumstances (a proof of the emergency is required, and advance notification if possible will be required) the missed work will be registered (and not count toward the average of that part of the course) if you finish it and hand it in after the emergency has passed.
- All assertions require *proof* unless the problem explicitly states otherwise. No matter the operative word (“find”, “solve”, “establish”, “calculate”, “determine” ...), you must justify your answer.
- Written work should be presented carefully, in complete English sentences, and with sufficient detail. A “correct sequence of formulas” will only merit partial credit. Examples of the expectations may be distributed together with the first problem set.
- The instructor may designate material (e.g. definitions) for self-study, in which case you are responsible for learning this material before it is used in class and in problem sets.

Homework

- There will be up to twelve problem sets posted to the course website, due at the *beginning* of class on the day shown. The lowest two scores will be dropped when calculating the homework grade.
 - Problems will focus on conceptual material.
 - Each problem set will feature “bonus” problems which are more difficult; these will be scored separately.

- You are encouraged to work on solving the problems together. However, each of you must write your solutions independently, in your own words. You may (and should) share your ideas but *you may not share your written work*.
- It is possible that only certain problems from a problem set will be selected for grading.
- To the extent possible solutions will be posted on the secure (Connect) website.
- There will be online homework (WebWork)
 - These will focus on calculations.
 - For most problems you get unlimited tries, but should resist the temptations to guess the solution.
- There will be a posted file containing off-line practice problems which cannot fit into WebWork.
 - The problems will be computational as well as simple and direct applications of definitions and theorems.
 - You will be expected to *master* this material: the midterm will also test your ability to quickly solve problems of this type.

Exams

- There will one in-class midterm, on October 17th.
 - You will be asked to demonstrating *mastery* of the basic material. Scoring well on this part will be required, but you will be allowed to repeat this part.
 - In addition, there will be conceptual problems.
- There will be a final exam during the usual exam period.
- Special concerns:
 - If you need special accommodations when taking written exams, please contact the Office of Access & Diversity (access.diversity@ubc.ca).
 - If the midterm (or final) exam conflicts with a religious observance, or if you have any other legitimate conflict, please contact me *at least two weeks ahead of time* so we can make appropriate arrangements.

Final grade

- The final grade will be calculated as follows:

Written problem sets: 25%
Online homework: 5%
Midterm: 20%
Final exam: 50%

References

- [1] Dummit and Foote, *Abstract Algebra*
- [2] Gallian, *Contemporary Abstract Algebra*
- [3] Rotman, *Introduction to Theory of Groups*