



Lecture 2. Convex Optimization Basics

Advanced Optimization (Fall 2024)

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(Constrained) Optimization Problem

- We adopt a *minimization* language

$$\begin{array}{ll} \min & f(\mathbf{x}) \\ \text{s.t.} & \mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X} \end{array}$$

- optimization variable $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^d$
- objective function: $f : \mathbb{R}^d \mapsto \mathbb{R}$
- feasible domain: $\mathcal{X} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$

Unconstrained Optimization

- The optimization variable is feasible over the whole \mathbb{R}^d -space.

$$\begin{array}{ll} \min & f(\mathbf{x}) \\ \text{s.t.} & \mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^d \end{array}$$

- It is one of *the most basic* forms of mathematical optimization and serves as the foundations.

--- “any optimization problem can be regarded as an unconstrained one”

$$\begin{array}{ll} \min & f(\mathbf{x}) \\ \text{s.t.} & \mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X} \end{array} \quad \Longrightarrow \quad \begin{array}{ll} \min & h(\mathbf{x}) \triangleq f(\mathbf{x}) + \delta_{\mathcal{X}}(\mathbf{x}) \\ \text{s.t.} & \mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^d \end{array}$$

barrier/indicator function

$$\delta_{\mathcal{X}}(\mathbf{x}) = \begin{cases} 0, & \mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}, \\ \infty, & \mathbf{x} \notin \mathcal{X}. \end{cases}$$

Convex Optimization

- This lecture focuses on the following simplified setting:
 - Language: *minimization* problem
 - Objective function: *continuous* and *convex*
 - Feasible domain: a *convex* subset of *Euclidean space*

- What is a convex set?
- What is a convex function?
- How to minimize?

Outline

- Convex Set and Convex Function
- Convex Optimization Problem
- Optimality Condition
- Function Properties

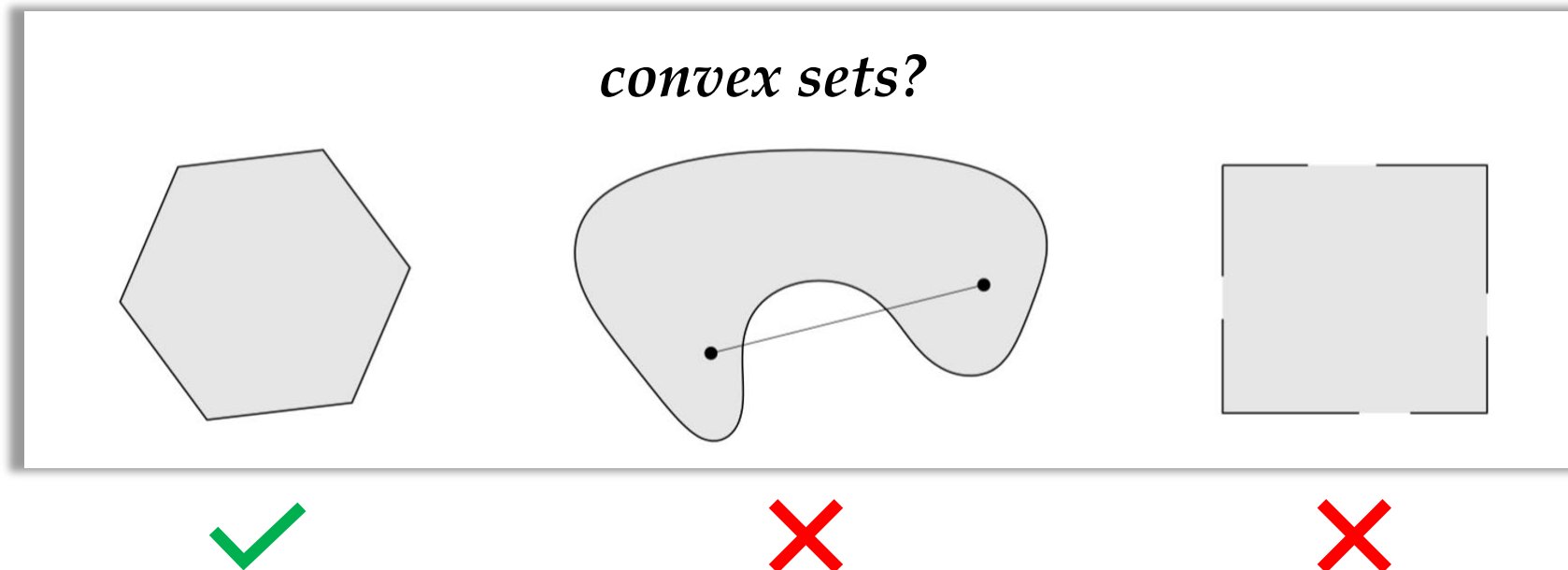
Part 1. Convex Set and Convex Function

- Definition
- Ball and Ellipsoid
- Convex Hull and Projection
- Convex/Concave Function
- Zeroth, First and Second-order Condition

Convex Set

Definition 1 (Convex Set). A set \mathcal{X} is convex if for any $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in \mathcal{X}$, all the points on the line segment connecting \mathbf{x} and \mathbf{y} also belong to \mathcal{X} , i.e.,

$$\forall \alpha \in [0, 1], \alpha \mathbf{x} + (1 - \alpha) \mathbf{y} \in \mathcal{X}.$$



Examples

- A line segment is convex.
- A ray, which has the form $\{\mathbf{x}_0 + \theta \mathbf{v} \mid \theta \geq 0\}$, where $\mathbf{v} \neq \mathbf{0}$, is convex.
- Any subspace is convex.

Convex Set

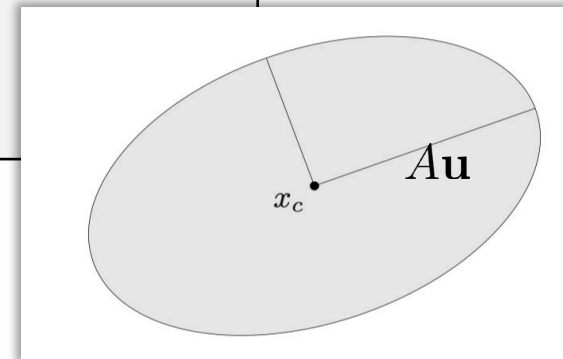
Definition 2 (Ball). A (Euclidean) ball (or just ball) in \mathbb{R}^d has the form

$$\mathbb{B}(\mathbf{x}_c, r) = \{\mathbf{x}_c + \textcolor{red}{r}\mathbf{u} \mid \|\mathbf{u}\|_2 \leq 1\}.$$

Definition 3 (Ellipsoids). An ellipsoid in \mathbb{R}^d has the form

$$\mathcal{E}(\mathbf{x}_c, A) = \{\mathbf{x}_c + \textcolor{red}{A}\mathbf{u} \mid \|\mathbf{u}\|_2 \leq 1\},$$

where A is assumed to be symmetric and positive definite.

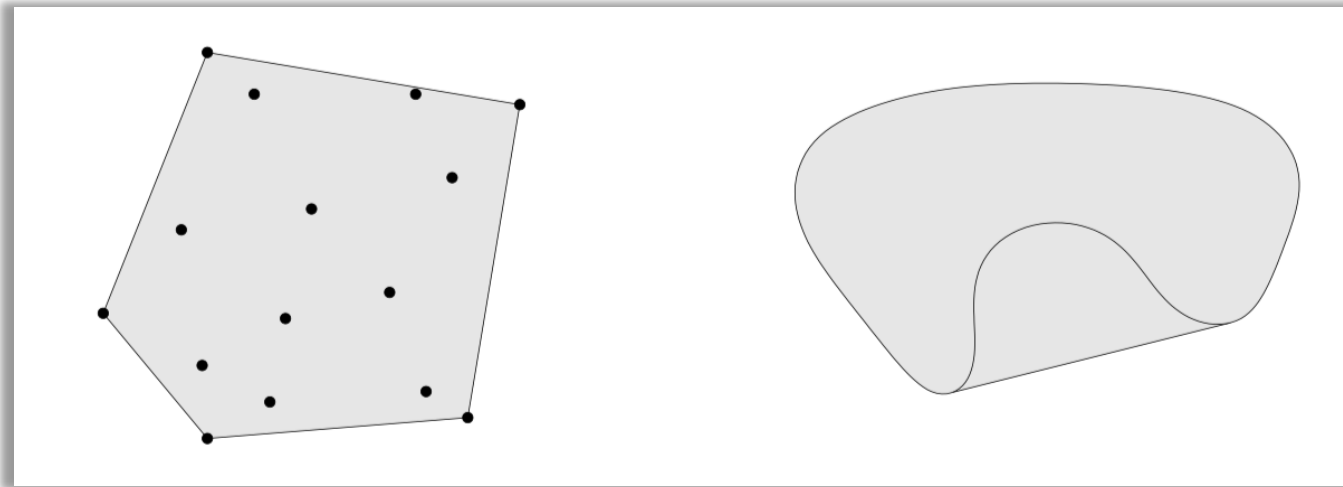


Convex Set

Definition 4 (Convex Hull). The convex hull of a set \mathcal{X} , denoted $\text{conv } \mathcal{X}$, is the set of all convex combinations of points in \mathcal{X} :

$$\text{conv } \mathcal{X} = \{ \theta_1 \mathbf{x}_1 + \cdots + \theta_k \mathbf{x}_k \mid \mathbf{x}_i \in \mathcal{X}, \theta_i \geq 0, i \in [k], \theta_1 + \cdots + \theta_k = 1 \} .$$

Examples:



Projection onto Convex Sets

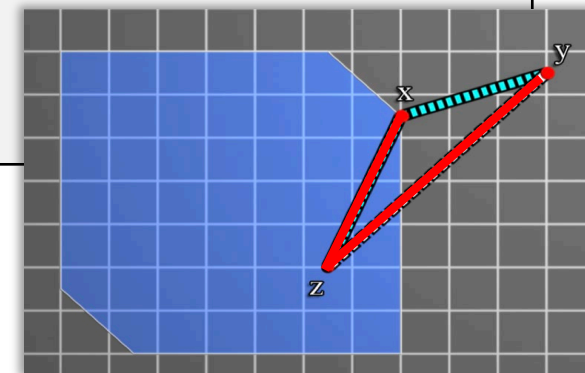
Definition 5 (Projection). The projection of a given point \mathbf{y} onto a convex set \mathcal{X} is defined as the closest point inside the convex set. Formally,

$$\mathbf{x}^* = \Pi_{\mathcal{X}}[\mathbf{y}] \triangleq \arg \min_{\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}} \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y}\|.$$

Note: the projected point \mathbf{x}^ is unique as long as the norm is strictly convex.*

Theorem 1 (Pythagoras Theorem). Let $\mathcal{X} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$ be a convex set, $\mathbf{y} \in \mathbb{R}^d$. Then for any $\mathbf{z} \in \mathcal{X}$ we have

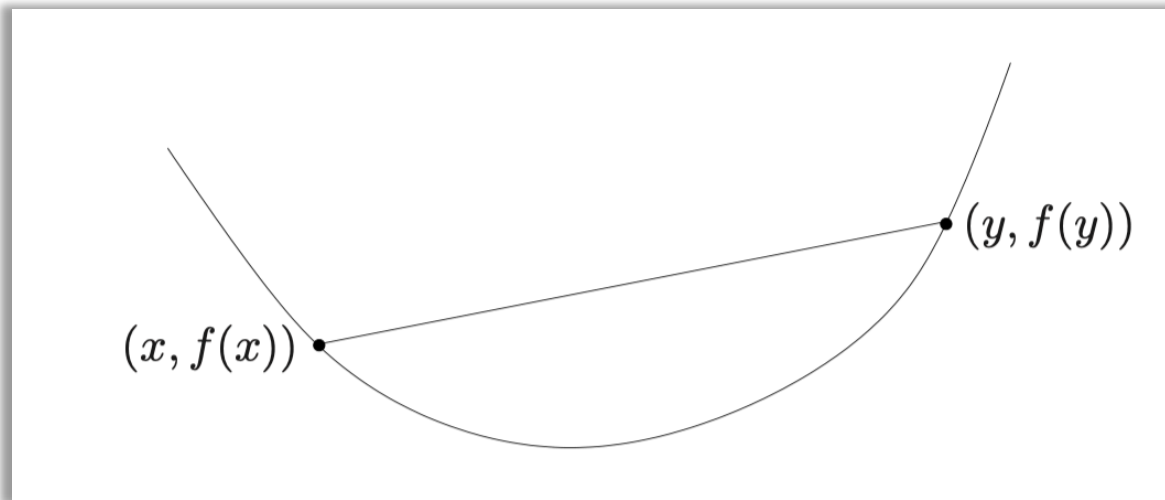
$$\|\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{z}\| \geq \|\Pi_{\mathcal{X}}[\mathbf{y}] - \mathbf{z}\|.$$



Convex Function

Definition 6 (Convex Function). A function $f : \mathcal{X} \mapsto \mathbb{R}$ is called *convex* if for any $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in \mathcal{X}$,

$$\forall \alpha \in [0, 1], \quad f((1 - \alpha)\mathbf{x} + \alpha\mathbf{y}) \leq (1 - \alpha)f(\mathbf{x}) + \alpha f(\mathbf{y}).$$



a convex function

Convex/Concave Function

Definition 6 (Convex Function). A function $f : \mathcal{X} \mapsto \mathbb{R}$ is called *convex* if for any $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in \mathcal{X}$,

$$\forall \alpha \in [0, 1], \quad f((1 - \alpha)\mathbf{x} + \alpha\mathbf{y}) \leq (1 - \alpha)f(\mathbf{x}) + \alpha f(\mathbf{y}).$$

Definition 7 (Concave Function). A function $f : \mathcal{X} \mapsto \mathbb{R}$ is called *concave* if for any $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in \mathcal{X}$,

$$\forall \alpha \in [0, 1], \quad f((1 - \alpha)\mathbf{x} + \alpha\mathbf{y}) \geq (1 - \alpha)f(\mathbf{x}) + \alpha f(\mathbf{y}).$$

- Both definitions have already assumed a *convex* feasible domain.
- We focus on the “*convex language*”, clearly the negative of concave functions are convex.

Convex Function

How to check whether a function is convex or not?

Theorem 2. *A function f is convex **if and only if** $\text{dom } f$ is convex and one of the following properties hold, for all $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in \text{dom } f$ and $\alpha \in [0, 1]$,*

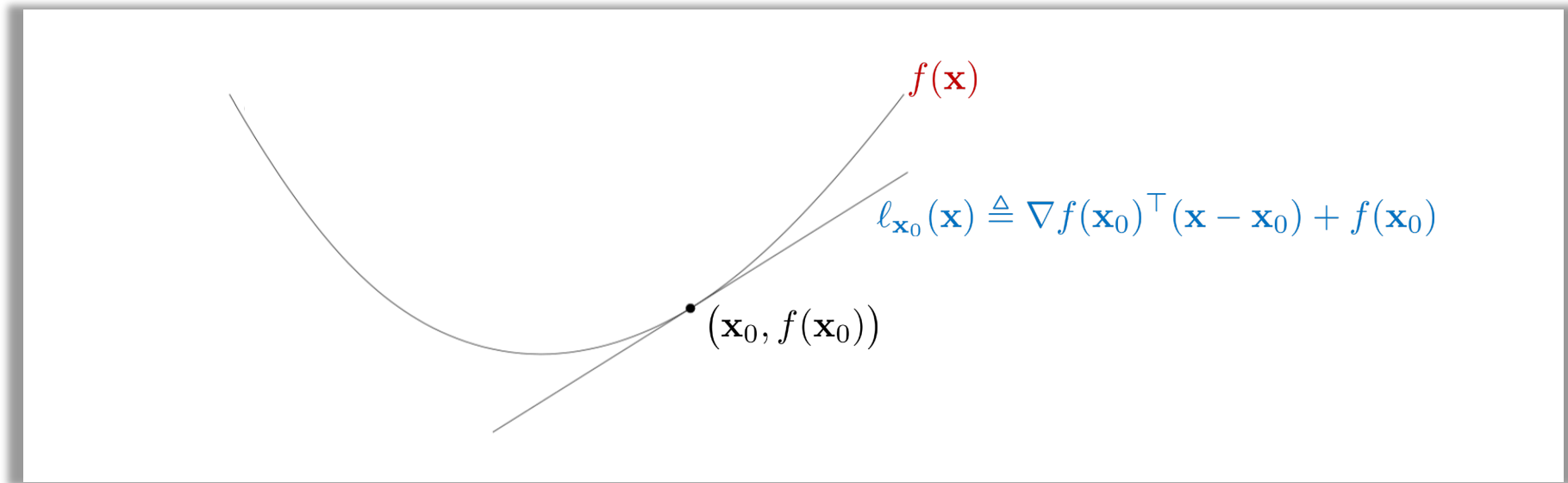
- (i) Zeroth order condition: $f((1 - \alpha)\mathbf{x} + \alpha\mathbf{y}) \leq (1 - \alpha)f(\mathbf{x}) + \alpha f(\mathbf{y})$.*
- (ii) First order condition: $f(\mathbf{x}) + \langle \nabla f(\mathbf{x}), \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x} \rangle \leq f(\mathbf{y})$.*
- (iii) Second order condition: $\nabla^2 f(\mathbf{x}) \succeq 0$.*

Convex Function

If f is convex and differentiable, then $f(\mathbf{x}) + \langle \nabla f(\mathbf{x}), \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x} \rangle \leq f(\mathbf{y})$ for all $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in \text{dom } f$.

the first-order Taylor approximation of f near \mathbf{x}

A commonly used equivalent form: $f(\mathbf{x}) - f(\mathbf{y}) \leq \langle \nabla f(\mathbf{x}), \mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y} \rangle$.



Convex Function

Examples on \mathbb{R} :

- Exponential: e^{ax} , where $a \in \mathbb{R}$.
- Powers: x^a , where $a \geq 1$ or $a \leq 0$.
- Powers of absolute value: $|x|^p$, where $p \geq 1$.
- Negative logarithm: $-\log x$.
- Negative entropy: $x \log x$.

Convex Function

Examples on \mathbb{R}^d :

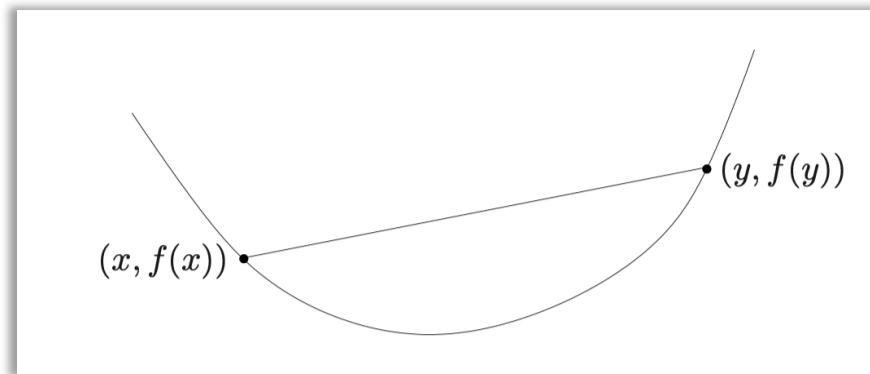
- norm: $f(\mathbf{x}) = \|\mathbf{x}\|$.
- maximum: $f(\mathbf{x}) = \max \{x_1, \dots, x_n\}$.
- Log-sum-exp: $f(\mathbf{x}) = \log (e^{x_1} + \dots + e^{x_n})$.

Jensen's Inequality

Theorem 3 (Jensen's Inequality). *If X is a random variable such that $X \in \text{dom } f$ with probability one, and f is convex, then we have*

$$f(\mathbb{E}[X]) \leq \mathbb{E}[f(X)].$$

Intuition:



$$\text{Convexity: } \underbrace{f(\theta_1 \mathbf{x}_1 + \cdots + \theta_k \mathbf{x}_k)}_{\mathbb{E}[X]} \leq \underbrace{\theta_1 f(\mathbf{x}_1) + \cdots + \theta_k f(\mathbf{x}_k)}_{\mathbb{E}[f(X)]}$$

Part 2. Convex Optimization Problem

- Setup
- Subgradients
- Why Convexity?

Constrained Optimization Problem

- We adopt a *minimization* language

$$\begin{array}{ll} \min & f(\mathbf{x}) \\ \text{s.t.} & \mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X} \end{array}$$

- optimization variable $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^d$
- objective function: $f : \mathbb{R}^d \mapsto \mathbb{R}$
- feasible domain: $\mathcal{X} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$

Convex Optimization Problem

- We adopt a *minimization* language

$$\begin{aligned} \min \quad & f(\mathbf{x}) \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & g_i(\mathbf{x}) \leq 0, \quad i = 1, \dots, m \\ & \mathbf{a}_i^\top \mathbf{x} = b_i, \quad i = 1, \dots, n \end{aligned}$$

- optimization variable $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^d$
- *convex* objective function: $f : \mathbb{R}^d \mapsto \mathbb{R}$
- *convex* inequality constraints: g_1, \dots, g_m

Convex Optimization Problem

- We adopt a *minimization* language

$$\begin{array}{ll}\min & f(\mathbf{x}) \\ \text{s.t.} & g_i(\mathbf{x}) \leq 0, \quad i = 1, \dots, m \\ & \mathbf{a}_i^\top \mathbf{x} = b_i, \quad i = 1, \dots, n\end{array}$$

Example 1 (SVM).

$$\begin{array}{ll}\min_{\mathbf{w}, b} & \|\mathbf{w}\|^2 \\ \text{s.t.} & y_i (\mathbf{w}^\top \mathbf{x}_i + b) \geq 1, \quad i = 1, \dots, n\end{array}$$

Convex Optimization Problem

- We adopt a *minimization* language

$$\begin{aligned} \min \quad & f(\mathbf{x}) \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & g_i(\mathbf{x}) \leq 0, \quad i = 1, \dots, m \\ & \mathbf{a}_i^\top \mathbf{x} = b_i, \quad i = 1, \dots, n \end{aligned}$$

Example 2 (NMF decomposition).

$$\begin{aligned} \min_{U,V} \quad & \|X - UV^\top\|_F^2 \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & U_{i,j}, V_{i,j} \geq 0 \end{aligned}$$

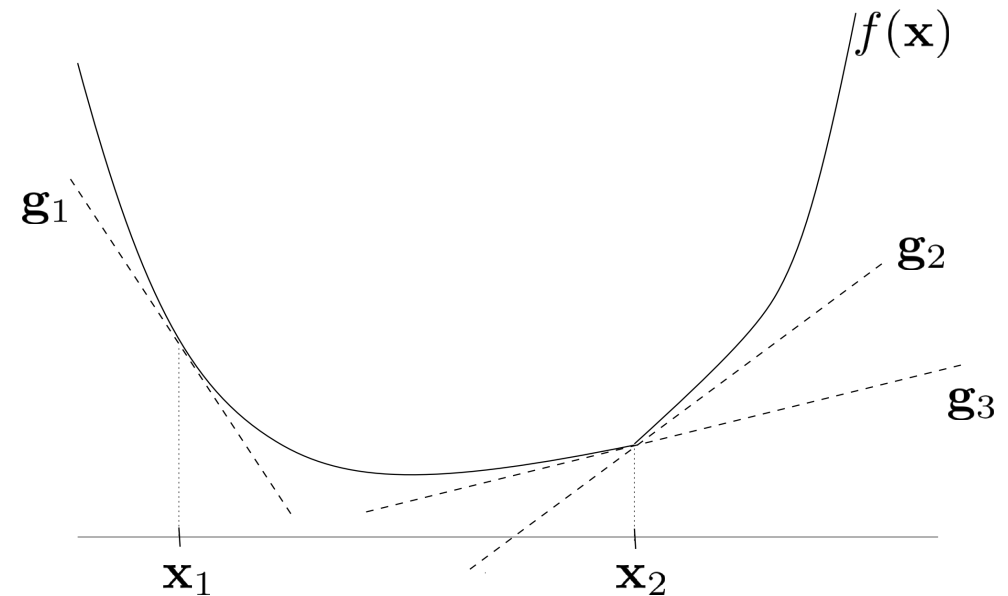
Ref: Lee, DD & Seung, HS (1999). Learning the parts of objects by non-negative matrix factorization. *Nature* 401,788-791.

Subgradient

Definition 8 (Subgradient). Let $f : \mathcal{X} \mapsto \mathbb{R}$ be a proper function and let $\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$. A vector $\mathbf{g} \in \mathbb{R}^d$ is called a *subgradient* of f at \mathbf{x} if

$$f(\mathbf{y}) \geq f(\mathbf{x}) + \langle \mathbf{g}, \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x} \rangle, \text{ for all } \mathbf{y} \in \mathbb{R}^d.$$

Intuition: subgradient $\mathbf{g} \in \partial f(\mathbf{x})$ can be any variable that makes the line $f(\mathbf{x}) + \langle \mathbf{g}, \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x} \rangle$ below the curve f .



Subdifferential

Definition 8 (Subgradient). Let $f : \mathcal{X} \mapsto \mathbb{R}$ be a proper function and let $\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$. A vector $\mathbf{g} \in \mathbb{R}^d$ is called a *subgradient* of f at \mathbf{x} if

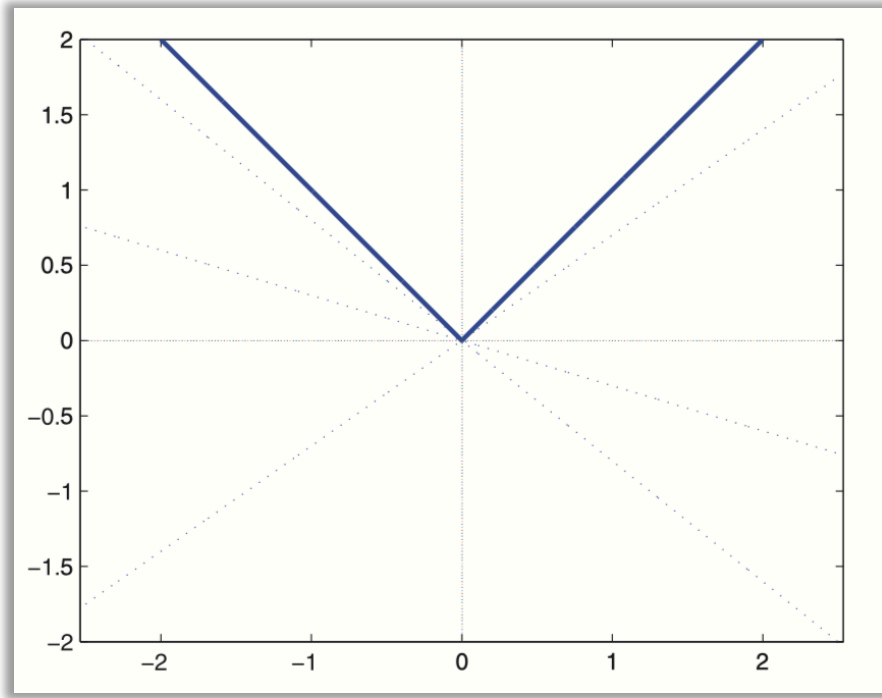
$$f(\mathbf{y}) \geq f(\mathbf{x}) + \langle \mathbf{g}, \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x} \rangle, \text{ for all } \mathbf{y} \in \mathbb{R}^d.$$

Definition 9 (Subdifferential). The set of all subgradients of f at \mathbf{x} is called the *subdifferential* of f at \mathbf{x} and is denoted by $\partial f(\mathbf{x})$,

$$\partial f(\mathbf{x}) \triangleq \{ \mathbf{g} \in \mathbb{R}^d \mid f(\mathbf{y}) \geq f(\mathbf{x}) + \langle \mathbf{g}, \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x} \rangle, \text{ for all } \mathbf{y} \in \mathbb{R}^d \}.$$

Subgradient and Subdifferential

Example 3. The subdifferential of $f(\mathbf{x}) = \|\mathbf{x}\|$ at $\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{0}$ is the dual norm unit ball, i.e., $\partial f(\mathbf{0}) = \{\mathbf{g} \mid \|\mathbf{g}\|_* \leq 1\}$.



an illustration for 1-dim case

$$f(x) = |x|$$

Subgradient and Subdifferential

Example 3. The subdifferential of $f(\mathbf{x}) = \|\mathbf{x}\|$ at $\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{0}$ is the dual norm unit ball, i.e., $\partial f(\mathbf{0}) = \{\mathbf{g} \mid \|\mathbf{g}\|_* \leq 1\}$.

Proof:

By definition, it suffices to prove that $\mathbf{g} \in \partial f(\mathbf{0})$ if and only if

$$\|\mathbf{y}\| \geq \langle \mathbf{g}, \mathbf{y} \rangle \text{ holds for all } \mathbf{y} \in \mathbb{R}^d.$$

① if $\|\mathbf{g}\|_* \leq 1$, then by the Cauchy-Schwarz inequality,

$$\langle \mathbf{g}, \mathbf{y} \rangle \leq \|\mathbf{y}\| \|\mathbf{g}\|_* \leq \|\mathbf{y}\|.$$

② if $\|\mathbf{y}\| \geq \langle \mathbf{g}, \mathbf{y} \rangle$ is true, then by the definition of dual norm,

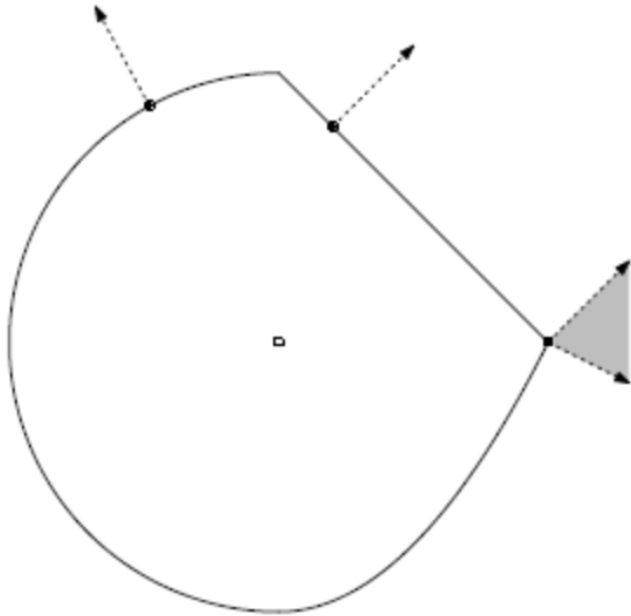
$$\|\mathbf{g}\|_* \triangleq \sup\{\langle \mathbf{g}, \mathbf{y} \rangle \mid \|\mathbf{y}\| \leq 1\} \leq \sup\{\|\mathbf{y}\| \mid \|\mathbf{y}\| \leq 1\} \leq 1.$$

□

Subgradient and Subdifferential

Example 4. For indicator function $f(\mathbf{x}) = \delta_{\mathcal{X}}(\mathbf{x})$, its subdifferential at any point $\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}$ is $N_{\mathcal{X}}(\mathbf{x}) = \partial f(\mathbf{x}) = \{\mathbf{g} \mid \langle \mathbf{g}, \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x} \rangle \leq 0, \forall \mathbf{y} \in \mathcal{X}\}$.

called normal cone



Proof can be found in Example 3.5 of Amir Beck's book.

Existence of Subgradient

- *Existence of subgradients* implies *convexity*.

Theorem 5. Let $f : \mathcal{X} \mapsto \mathbb{R}$ be a proper function and assume \mathcal{X} is convex. If *for any* $\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}$, its subgradients exist, then f is convex.

- A *sufficient condition* for deciding a convex function.
- The reverse direction is *not* always correct (example on the next page).

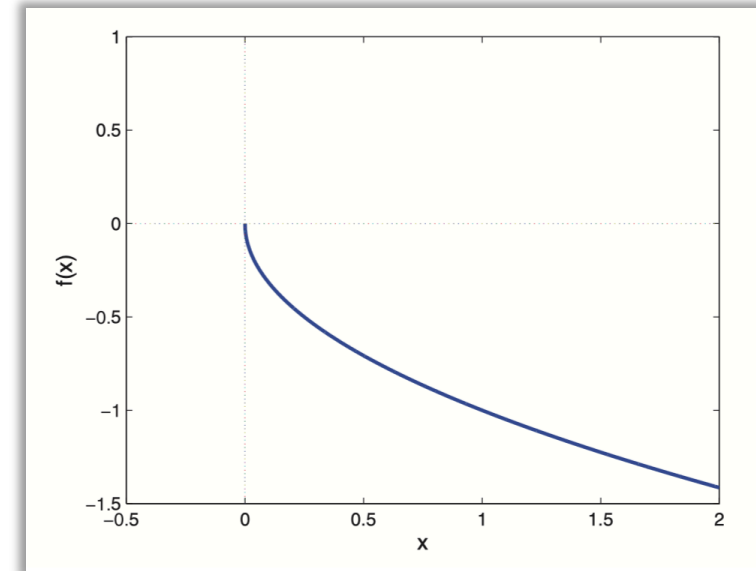
Existence of Subgradient

- Convexity *doesn't* always imply existence of subgradients.

Example 5. Consider function $f : \mathbb{R} \rightarrow (-\infty, \infty]$ defined by

$$f(x) = \begin{cases} -\sqrt{x}, & x \geq 0 \\ \infty, & \text{else} \end{cases},$$

it is convex but does not have a subgradient at $x = 0$.



Existence of Subgradient

- Nevertheless, if we only care about the *interior* of feasible domain, convexity *does* imply existent subgradients.

Theorem 6. *Let $f : \mathcal{X} \mapsto \mathbb{R}$ be a convex function and assume the feasible domain \mathcal{X} is convex. Consider any interior point $\mathbf{x} \in \text{int}(\mathcal{X})$. Then $\partial f(\mathbf{x})$ is nonempty.*

How to Compute Subgradient

- General principle: unfortunately, hard to give :(
- Ad-hoc calculations: see earlier examples.
- **Good news**: easy for *convex and differential* functions.

Theorem 7. *Let $f : \mathcal{X} \mapsto \mathbb{R}$ be a proper and convex function and assume \mathcal{X} is convex.*

- 1. If f is differentiable at \mathbf{x} , then $\partial f(\mathbf{x}) = \{\nabla f(\mathbf{x})\}$.*
- 2. Conversely, if f has a unique subgradient, then it is differentiable at \mathbf{x} and $\partial f(\mathbf{x}) = \{\nabla f(\mathbf{x})\}$.*

How to Compute Subgradient

Example 6. The subdifferential of ℓ_2 -norm $f(\mathbf{x}) = \|\mathbf{x}\|_2$ is

$$\partial f(\mathbf{x}) = \begin{cases} \left\{ \frac{\mathbf{x}}{\|\mathbf{x}\|_2} \right\}, & \mathbf{x} \neq \mathbf{0} \text{ (gradient of norm)} \\ \{\mathbf{g} \mid \|\mathbf{g}\|_2 \leq 1\}, & \mathbf{x} = \mathbf{0} \text{ (discussed earlier)} \end{cases}$$

Proof can be found in Example 3.34 of Amir Beck's book.

Why Convexity?

- **Local to Global Phenomenon**

For convex (and differentiable) functions, *gradient is highly informative*.

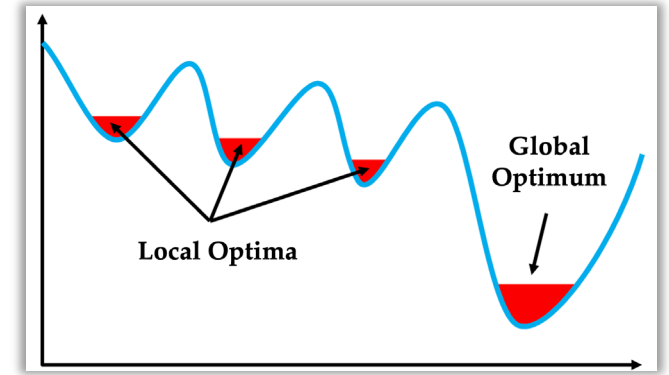
$$\nabla f(\mathbf{x}) \in \partial f(\mathbf{x})$$

- **Local:** the gradient $\nabla f(\mathbf{x})$ is actually computed *locally* over the function f around \mathbf{x} ;
- **Global:** the subdifferential $\partial f(\mathbf{x})$ gives global information in the form of a linear lower bound on the *entire* function.

Why Convexity?

- Local to Global Phenomenon

For convex (unconstrained) optimization, *local minima are global minima*.



Theorem 8. Let f be convex. If \mathbf{x} is a local minimum of f then \mathbf{x} is a global minimum of f .

A simple proof:

Assume that \mathbf{x} is local minimum of f . Then for γ small enough, for any \mathbf{y} ,

$$\underbrace{f(\mathbf{x})}_{\text{(local minima)}} \leq f((1 - \gamma)\mathbf{x} + \gamma\mathbf{y}) \leq (1 - \gamma)f(\mathbf{x}) + \gamma f(\mathbf{y}),$$

which implies $f(\mathbf{x}) \leq f(\mathbf{y})$ and thus \mathbf{x} is a global minimum of f .

Part 3. Optimality Condition

- Fermat's Optimality Condition
- First-order Optimality Condition
- Some Corollaries

Fermat's Optimality Condition

- *Unconstrained* case

Theorem 9 (Fermat's Optimality Condition). *Let $f : \mathbb{R}^d \rightarrow (-\infty, \infty]$ be a proper convex function. Then*

$$\mathbf{x}^* \in \operatorname{argmin}\{f(\mathbf{x}) \mid \mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^d\}$$

if and only if $\mathbf{0} \in \partial f(\mathbf{x}^)$.*

A simple proof:

Combining $f(\mathbf{x}) \geq f(\mathbf{x}^*)$
 $f(\mathbf{x}) \geq f(\mathbf{x}^*) + \langle \mathbf{g}, \mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}^* \rangle, \mathbf{g} \in \partial f(\mathbf{x}^*)$ finishes the proof.

Example

Example 7 (Median). Suppose that we are given n different and ordered numbers $a_1 < a_2 < \dots < a_n$. Denote $A = \{a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n\} \subseteq \mathbb{R}$. The median of A is a number satisfying

$$\text{median}(A) = \begin{cases} a_{\frac{n+1}{2}}, & n \text{ odd} \\ \left[a_{\frac{n}{2}}, a_{\frac{n}{2}+1} \right], & n \text{ even} \end{cases}.$$

Solving the optimization problem:

From an optimization perspective, solving medians equals to solving the following optimization problem.

$$\text{median}(A) = \arg \min_x \left\{ f(x) \triangleq \sum_{i=1}^n |x - a_i| \right\}$$

Example

- *Proof of median*

From an optimization perspective, solving medians equals to solving the following optimization problem.

$$\text{median}(A) = \arg \min_x \left\{ f(x) \triangleq \sum_{i=1}^n |x - a_i| \right\}$$

Denote $f_i(x) = |x - a_i|$, then it hold that $f(x) = f_1(x) + f_2(x) + \cdots + f_n(x)$ and

$$\partial f_i(x) = \begin{cases} 1, & x > a_i \\ -1, & x < a_i \\ [-1, 1], & x = a_i \end{cases}$$

Example

- *Proof of median*

Denote $f_i(x) = |x - a_i|$, then it hold that $f(x) = f_1(x) + f_2(x) + \cdots + f_n(x)$ and

$$\partial f_i(x) = \begin{cases} 1, & x > a_i \\ -1, & x < a_i \\ [-1, 1], & x = a_i \end{cases}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \partial f(x) &= \partial f_1(x) + \partial f_2(x) + \cdots + \partial f_n(x) \\ &= \begin{cases} \# \{i : a_i < x\} - \# \{i : a_i > x\}, & x \notin A, \\ \# \{i : a_i < x\} - \# \{i : a_i > x\} + [-1, 1], & x \in A. \end{cases} \end{aligned}$$

Example

- *Proof of median*

$$\begin{aligned}\partial f(x) &= \partial f_1(x) + \partial f_2(x) + \cdots + \partial f_n(x) \\ &= \begin{cases} \# \{i : a_i < x\} - \# \{i : a_i > x\}, & x \notin A, \\ \# \{i : a_i < x\} - \# \{i : a_i > x\} + [-1, 1], & x \in A. \end{cases}\end{aligned}$$

$$\partial f(x) = \begin{cases} i - (n - i) = 2i - n, & x \in (a_i, a_{i+1}) \\ (i - 1) - (n - i) + [-1, 1] = 2i - 1 - n + [-1, 1], & x = a_i \\ -n, & x < a_1 \\ n, & x > a_n \end{cases}$$

Example

- *Proof of median*

$$\partial f(x) = \begin{cases} i - (n - i) = 2i - n, & x \in (a_i, a_{i+1}) \\ (i - 1) - (n - i) + [-1, 1] = 2i - 1 - n + [-1, 1], & x = a_i \\ -n, & x < a_1 \\ n, & x > a_n \end{cases}$$

① Suppose $x = a_i$. Then,

$$0 \in \partial f(x) = 2i - 1 - n + [-1, 1] \Leftrightarrow |2i - 1 - n| \leq 1 \Leftrightarrow \frac{n}{2} \leq i \leq \frac{n}{2} + 1 \Leftrightarrow x = [a_{\frac{n}{2}}, a_{\frac{n}{2}+1}]$$

② Suppose $x \in (a_i, a_{i+1})$. Then, $0 \in \partial f(x) = 2i - n \Leftrightarrow i = \frac{n}{2} \Leftrightarrow x \in (a_{\frac{n}{2}}, a_{\frac{n}{2}+1})$

Combining the two cases finishes the proof (by further checking n is odd or even). □

First-order Optimality Condition

- *Constrained* Case

Theorem 10 (First-order Optimality Condition). *Let f be convex and \mathcal{X} a closed convex set on which f is differentiable. Then $\mathbf{x}^* \in \arg \min_{\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}} f(\mathbf{x})$ if and only if there exists $\mathbf{g} \in \partial f(\mathbf{x}^*)$ such that*

$$\langle \mathbf{g}, \mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}^* \rangle \geq 0, \forall \mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}.$$

A simple proof: derived from the *Fermat's optimality condition*.

⇒ deploying the Fermat's optimality condition on the unconstrained “surrogate” objective

$$h(\mathbf{x}) \triangleq f(\mathbf{x}) + \delta_{\mathcal{X}}(\mathbf{x})$$

First-order Optimality Condition

- *Constrained* Case

Theorem 10 (First-order Optimality Condition). *Let f be convex and \mathcal{X} a closed convex set on which f is differentiable. Then $\mathbf{x}^* \in \arg \min_{\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}} f(\mathbf{x})$ if and only if there exists $\mathbf{g} \in \partial f(\mathbf{x}^*)$ such that*

$$\langle \mathbf{g}, \mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}^* \rangle \geq 0, \forall \mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}.$$

Example 4. For indicator function $f(\mathbf{x}) = \delta_{\mathcal{X}}(\mathbf{x})$, its subdifferential at any point $\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}$ is $N_{\mathcal{X}}(\mathbf{x}) = \partial f(\mathbf{x}) = \{\mathbf{g} \mid \langle \mathbf{g}, \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x} \rangle \leq 0, \forall \mathbf{y} \in \mathcal{X}\}$.

$$\Rightarrow \partial h(\mathbf{x}) = \partial f(\mathbf{x}) + N_{\mathcal{X}}(\mathbf{x})$$

Set Addition: elementwise sum

First-order Optimality Condition

- *Constrained* Case

Theorem 10 (First-order Optimality Condition). *Let f be convex and \mathcal{X} a closed convex set on which f is differentiable. Then $\mathbf{x}^* \in \arg \min_{\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}} f(\mathbf{x})$ if and only if there exists $\mathbf{g} \in \partial f(\mathbf{x}^*)$ such that*

$$\langle \mathbf{g}, \mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}^* \rangle \geq 0, \forall \mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}.$$

Fermat's optimality condition says that \mathbf{x}^* is optimal if and only if $\mathbf{0} \in \partial f(\mathbf{x}^*)$.

$$\mathbf{0} \in \partial h(\mathbf{x}^*) = \partial f(\mathbf{x}^*) + N_{\mathcal{X}}(\mathbf{x}^*)$$

$$\Rightarrow -\partial f(\mathbf{x}^*) \cap N_{\mathcal{X}}(\mathbf{x}^*) \neq \emptyset$$

$$\Rightarrow \exists \mathbf{g} \in -\partial f(\mathbf{x}^*) \quad \text{s.t.} \quad \langle \mathbf{g}, \mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}^* \rangle \leq 0, \forall \mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}$$

□

Karush–Kuhn–Tucker (KKT) Conditions

Theorem 11. Consider the minimization problem

$$\begin{aligned} \min \quad & f(\mathbf{x}) \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & g_i(\mathbf{x}) \leq 0, \quad i \in [m], \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

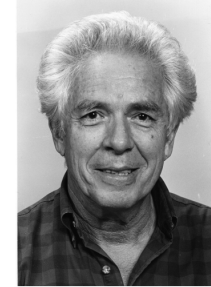
where f, g_1, g_2, \dots, g_m are real-valued convex functions.

1. Let \mathbf{x}^* be an optimal solution of (1), and assume that Slater's condition is satisfied. Then there exist $\lambda_1, \dots, \lambda_m \geq 0$ for which

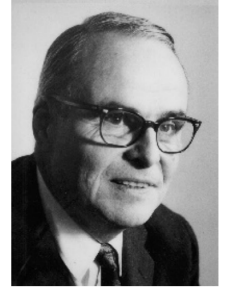
$$\mathbf{0} \in \partial f(\mathbf{x}^*) + \sum_{i=1}^m \lambda_i \partial g_i(\mathbf{x}^*) \tag{2}$$

$$\lambda_i g_i(\mathbf{x}^*) = 0, \quad i \in [m]. \tag{3}$$

2. If \mathbf{x}^* satisfies conditions (2) and (3) for some $\lambda_1, \lambda_2, \dots, \lambda_m \geq 0$, then it is an optimal solution of problem (1).

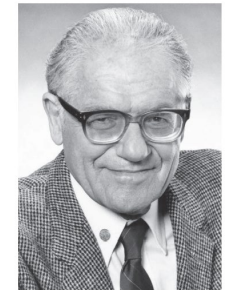


Harold Kuhn
1925-2014



Albert Tucker
1905-1995

Published conditions in 1951.



William Karush
1917-1997

Developed (necessary) conditions in 1939 in his (unpublished) MS thesis.

Understanding the role of KKT Conditions

- On the one hand, KKT conditions depict properties of the optimization solution (consider the dual form and interpretation in SVM).

1. Let \mathbf{x}^* be an optimal solution of (1), and assume that Slater's condition is satisfied. Then there exist $\lambda_1, \dots, \lambda_m \geq 0$ for which

$$\mathbf{0} \in \partial f(\mathbf{x}^*) + \sum_{i=1}^m \lambda_i \partial g_i(\mathbf{x}^*)$$
$$\lambda_i g_i(\mathbf{x}^*) = 0, \quad i \in [m].$$

- On the other hand, many optimization methods can be thought of as iterative approximations to solve the KKT conditions.

2. If \mathbf{x}^* satisfies conditions (2) and (3) for some $\lambda_1, \lambda_2, \dots, \lambda_m \geq 0$, then it is an optimal solution of problem (1).

Part 4. Function Properties

- Smoothness
- Strong Convexity

Lipschitz Continuity

Definition 1 (Continuity). A function $f : \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^m$ is continuous at $\mathbf{x} \in \text{dom } f$ if for all $\epsilon > 0$ there exists a $\delta > 0$ with $\mathbf{y} \in \text{dom } f$, such that

$$\|\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}\|_2 \leq \delta \Rightarrow \|f(\mathbf{y}) - f(\mathbf{x})\|_2 \leq \epsilon.$$

Definition 2 (Lipschitz Continuity). A function $f : \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^m$ is G -Lipschitz-continuous if for all $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in \text{dom } f$,

$$\|f(\mathbf{x}) - f(\mathbf{y})\| \leq G \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y}\|.$$

Lipschitzness and Subgradient

- Relationship between *Lipschitzness* and *bounded subgradient*

Theorem 1. Let $f : \mathcal{X} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ be a convex function. Consider the following two claims:

- (i) *Lipschitzness*: $|f(\mathbf{x}) - f(\mathbf{y})| \leq G\|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y}\|$ for any $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in \mathcal{X}$.
- (ii) *Bounded subgradient*: $\|\mathbf{g}\|_* \leq G$ for any $\mathbf{g} \in \partial f(\mathbf{x}), \mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}$.

Then

- (a) (ii) \Rightarrow (i).
- (b) if \mathcal{X} is open, then (i) \Leftrightarrow (ii).

Smoothness

Definition 3 (Smoothness). A function f is L -smooth with respect to the $\|\cdot\|$ norm if, for any $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in \text{dom } f$,

$$\|\nabla f(\mathbf{x}) - \nabla f(\mathbf{y})\|_* \leq L \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y}\|.$$

Smoothness is also called *gradient Lipschitz* in many literature.

Smoothness is defined over the primal-dual norms, which become ℓ_2 -norm when specialized to Euclidean space (and then, $\|\nabla f(\mathbf{x}) - \nabla f(\mathbf{y})\|_2 \leq L \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y}\|_2$).

Smoothness (in Optimization theory)

Definition 4. Let $\mathcal{X} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$. We denote by $C_L^{a,b}(\mathcal{X})$ the class of functions with the following properties:

- (i) any $f \in C_L^{a,b}(\mathcal{X})$ is a times continuously differentiable on \mathcal{X} .
- (ii) f 's b -th derivative is Lipschitz continuous on \mathcal{X} with constant L :

$$\|\nabla^b f(\mathbf{x}) - \nabla^b f(\mathbf{y})\|_* \leq L\|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y}\|, \quad \forall \mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in \mathcal{X}.$$

- Lipschitz continuous functions belong to $C_L^{0,0}(\mathcal{X})$.
- L -smooth functions can be denoted by $C_L^{1,1}(\mathcal{X})$.

Ref: Lectures on Convex Optimization, Yurii Nesterov. Page 23-24.

Smoothness

Example 1. Linear function $f(\mathbf{x}) = \mathbf{w}^\top \mathbf{x} + c$ is 0-smooth.

Example 2. Quadratic function $f(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{2} \mathbf{x}^\top A \mathbf{x} + \mathbf{w}^\top \mathbf{x} + c$ is $\|A\|_{\text{op},p}$ -smooth w.r.t. $\|\cdot\|_p$ norm.

Proof. The proof is direct by the definition of smoothness and the operator norm:

$$\|\nabla f(\mathbf{x}) - \nabla f(\mathbf{y})\|_p = \|A\mathbf{x} - A\mathbf{y}\|_p \leq \|A\|_{\text{op},p} \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y}\|_p.$$

Definition 6 (Matrix Operator Norm). The operator norm (or called induced norm) of a matrix $A \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times n}$ is defined by

$$\|A\|_{\text{op},p} \triangleq \max \left\{ \frac{\|A\mathbf{x}\|_p}{\|\mathbf{x}\|_p} \mid \mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^d, \mathbf{x} \neq \mathbf{0} \right\}.$$

Smoothness

Example 3. Log-sum-exp function $f(\mathbf{x}) = \log(e^{x_1} + e^{x_2} + \dots + e^{x_n})$ is 1-smooth w.r.t. ℓ_2 -norm and ℓ_∞ -norm.

Example 4. Function $f(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{2} \|\mathbf{x}\|_p^2$ is $(p - 1)$ -smooth w.r.t. ℓ_p -norm.

Example 5. Function $f(\mathbf{x}) = \sqrt{1 + \|\mathbf{x}\|_2^2}$ is 1-smooth w.r.t. ℓ_2 -norm.

Example 6. Function $f(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{2} \|\mathbf{x} - \Pi_{\mathcal{X}}[\mathbf{x}]\|^2$ is 1-smooth w.r.t. ℓ_2 -norm, where $\Pi_{\mathcal{X}}[\mathbf{x}]$ denotes the Euclidean projection of \mathbf{x} onto a *convex* domain \mathcal{X} .

Smoothness

Example 5. Function $f(\mathbf{x}) = \sqrt{1 + \|\mathbf{x}\|_2^2}$ is 1-smooth w.r.t. ℓ_2 -norm.

Proof:

$$\nabla f(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{\mathbf{x}}{\sqrt{\|\mathbf{x}\|_2^2 + 1}}$$

$$\Rightarrow \nabla^2 f(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{\|\mathbf{x}\|_2^2 + 1}} \left(I - \frac{\mathbf{x}\mathbf{x}^\top}{\|\mathbf{x}\|_2^2 + 1} \right) \preceq \frac{1}{\sqrt{\|\mathbf{x}\|_2^2 + 1}} I \preceq I \quad \square$$

Example 6. Function $f(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{2} \|\mathbf{x} - \Pi_{\mathcal{X}}[\mathbf{x}]\|^2$ is 1-smooth w.r.t. ℓ_2 -norm, where $\Pi_{\mathcal{X}}[\mathbf{x}]$ denotes the Euclidean projection of \mathbf{x} onto a *convex* domain \mathcal{X} .

Smoothness

The next lemma is an *equivalent* condition of smoothness.

Lemma 1 (Descent Lemma). *Let f be an L -smooth function over a given convex set \mathcal{X} . Then for any $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in \mathcal{X}$*

$$f(\mathbf{y}) \leq f(\mathbf{x}) + \nabla f(\mathbf{x})^\top (\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}) + \frac{L}{2} \|\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}\|^2.$$

Proof:

$$f(\mathbf{y}) - f(\mathbf{x}) = \int_0^1 \langle \nabla f(\mathbf{x} + t(\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x})), \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x} \rangle dt \quad (\text{calculus})$$

$$\implies f(\mathbf{y}) - f(\mathbf{x}) - \langle \nabla f(\mathbf{x}), \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x} \rangle = \int_0^1 \langle \nabla f(\mathbf{x} + t(\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x})) - \nabla f(\mathbf{x}), \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x} \rangle dt$$

$$(\text{Cauchy-Schwarz}) \leq \int_0^1 \|\nabla f(\mathbf{x} + t(\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x})) - \nabla f(\mathbf{x})\| \|\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}\| dt$$

$$(\text{smoothness}) \leq L \|\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}\|^2 \int_0^1 t dt \leq \frac{L}{2} \|\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}\|^2 \quad \square$$

Smoothness

Theorem 2 (*First-order* Characterizations of L -smoothness). Let $f : \mathcal{X} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ be a convex function, differentiable over \mathcal{X} . Then the following claims are equivalent:

- (i) f is L -smooth.
- (ii) $f(\mathbf{y}) \leq f(\mathbf{x}) + \langle \nabla f(\mathbf{x}), \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x} \rangle + \frac{L}{2} \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y}\|^2$ for all $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in \mathcal{X}$.
- (iii) $f(\mathbf{y}) \geq f(\mathbf{x}) + \langle \nabla f(\mathbf{x}), \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x} \rangle + \frac{1}{2L} \|\nabla f(\mathbf{x}) - \nabla f(\mathbf{y})\|_*^2$ for all $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in \mathcal{X}$.
- (iv) $\langle \nabla f(\mathbf{x}) - \nabla f(\mathbf{y}), \mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y} \rangle \geq \frac{1}{L} \|\nabla f(\mathbf{x}) - \nabla f(\mathbf{y})\|_*^2$ for all $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in \mathcal{X}$.
- (v) $f(\lambda \mathbf{x} + (1 - \lambda) \mathbf{y}) \geq \lambda f(\mathbf{x}) + (1 - \lambda) f(\mathbf{y}) - \frac{L}{2} \lambda(1 - \lambda) \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y}\|^2$ for any $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in \mathcal{X}$ and $\lambda \in [0, 1]$.

Proofs can be found below Theorem 5.8 of Amir Beck's book.

Smoothness

Theorem 3 (*Second-order* Characterization of L -smoothness). *Let f be a twice continuously differentiable function over \mathbb{R}^d . Then for a given $L \geq 0$, L -smoothness w.r.t. the ℓ_p -norm ($p \in [1, \infty]$) is equivalent to*

$$\|\nabla^2 f(\mathbf{x})\|_{op,p} \leq L,$$

for any $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^d$.

Strong Convexity

Definition 5 (Strong Convexity). A function f is σ -strongly convex with respect to norm $\|\cdot\|$ if, for any $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in \text{dom } f$ and $\lambda \in [0, 1]$,

$$f(\lambda \mathbf{x} + (1 - \lambda) \mathbf{y}) \leq \lambda f(\mathbf{x}) + (1 - \lambda) f(\mathbf{y}) - \frac{\sigma}{2} \lambda (1 - \lambda) \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y}\|^2.$$

- Clearly, for generally convex functions, $\sigma = 0$.

Examples:

- $f(\mathbf{x}) = \|\mathbf{x}\|_p^2$ is 2-strongly-convex with respect to norm $\|\cdot\|_p$.
- Negative entropy $f(\mathbf{x}) = \sum_{i=1}^d x_i \ln x_i$ over probability distribution (i.e., $x_i \in [0, 1]$ and $\sum_{i=1}^d x_i = 1$) is 1-strongly-convex with respect to norm $\|\cdot\|_1$.

Strong Convexity

Theorem 3 (*First-order* Characterizations of Strong Convexity). *Let f be a proper closed and convex function. Then for a given $\sigma > 0$, the followings equal:*

(i) f is σ -strongly convex.

(ii) For any $\mathbf{x} \in \text{dom}(\partial f)$, $\mathbf{y} \in \text{dom}(f)$ and $\mathbf{g} \in \partial f(\mathbf{x})$,

$$f(\mathbf{y}) \geq f(\mathbf{x}) + \langle \mathbf{g}, \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x} \rangle + \frac{\sigma}{2} \|\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}\|^2.$$

commonly used

(iii) For any $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in \text{dom}(\partial f)$, and $\mathbf{g}_{\mathbf{x}} \in \partial f(\mathbf{x})$, $\mathbf{g}_{\mathbf{y}} \in \partial f(\mathbf{y})$,

$$\langle \mathbf{g}_{\mathbf{x}} - \mathbf{g}_{\mathbf{y}}, \mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y} \rangle \geq \sigma \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y}\|^2.$$

(iv) Function $f(\cdot) - \frac{\sigma}{2} \|\cdot\|^2$ is convex.

Strong Convexity

Proof: (i)→(ii)

$$\begin{aligned} f(\lambda \mathbf{y} + (1 - \lambda)\mathbf{x}) &\leq \lambda f(\mathbf{y}) + (1 - \lambda)f(\mathbf{x}) - \frac{\sigma}{2}\lambda(1 - \lambda)\|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y}\|^2 \\ \Rightarrow \frac{f(\mathbf{x} + \lambda(\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x})) - f(\mathbf{x})}{\lambda} &\leq f(\mathbf{y}) - f(\mathbf{x}) - \frac{\sigma}{2}(1 - \lambda)\|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y}\|^2 \quad (\text{rearrange}) \\ \Rightarrow f'(\mathbf{x}; \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}) &\triangleq \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow 1} \frac{f(\mathbf{x} + \lambda(\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x})) - f(\mathbf{x})}{\lambda} \leq f(\mathbf{y}) - f(\mathbf{x}) - \frac{\sigma}{2}\|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y}\|^2 \end{aligned}$$

$f'(\mathbf{x}; \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x})$: the *directional derivative* of f at point \mathbf{x} along direction $\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x}$

$$\forall \mathbf{g} \in \partial f(\mathbf{x}), \quad \langle \mathbf{g}, \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x} \rangle \leq f'(\mathbf{x}; \mathbf{y} - \mathbf{x})$$

Plugging $\mathbf{g} = \nabla f(\mathbf{x})$ finishes the proof. □

Strong Convexity

Theorem 4. Let \mathcal{X} be a Euclidean space. Then f is σ -strongly convex with respect to norm $\|\cdot\|$ if and only if the function $f(\cdot) - \frac{\sigma}{2} \|\cdot\|^2$ is convex.

f is “as least as convex” as a quadratic function.

Example 8. $f(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{2} \mathbf{x}^\top A \mathbf{x} + \mathbf{w}^\top \mathbf{x} + c$ is σ -strongly convex w.r.t. the ℓ_2 -norm if and only if $A \succeq \sigma I$.

Proof: f is σ -strongly convex if and only if $h(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{2} \mathbf{x}^\top (A - \sigma I) \mathbf{x} + \mathbf{w}^\top \mathbf{x} + c$ is convex

$$\implies \nabla^2 h(\mathbf{x}) = A - \sigma I \succeq 0$$

□

Strong Convexity

Theorem 5 (*Second-order* Characterization of Strong Convexity). Let \mathcal{X} be a Euclidean space. Then f is σ -strongly convex with respect to $\|\cdot\|$ if and only if for any $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{w} \in \mathcal{X}$,

$$\underline{\mathbf{w}^\top \nabla^2 f(\mathbf{x}) \mathbf{w}} \geq \sigma \|\mathbf{w}\|^2.$$

a more familiar form: $\|\mathbf{w}\|_{\nabla^2 f(\mathbf{x})}^2$

Furthermore, when using ℓ_2 -norm, it is equivalent to $\nabla^2 f(\mathbf{x}) \succeq \sigma I$.

- Negative entropy $f(\mathbf{x}) = \sum_{i=1}^d x_i \ln x_i$ over probability distribution (i.e., $x_i \in [0, 1]$ and $\sum_{i=1}^d x_i = 1$) is 1-strongly-convex.

Strong Convexity

Theorem 6. *Let f be a proper closed and σ -strongly convex function. Then*

- *f has a unique minimizer, denoted by \mathbf{x}^* .*
- *$f(\mathbf{x}) - f(\mathbf{x}^*) \geq \frac{\sigma}{2} \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}^*\|^2$ for all $\mathbf{x} \in \text{dom}(f)$.*

Strongly Convex and Smooth

If function f is both σ -strongly convex and L -smooth w.r.t. ℓ_2 -norm, then

- $\sigma I \preceq \nabla^2 f(\mathbf{x}) \preceq LI$
- f is *γ -well-conditioned* where $\gamma \triangleq \sigma/L \leq 1$ is called the condition number.

Relationship

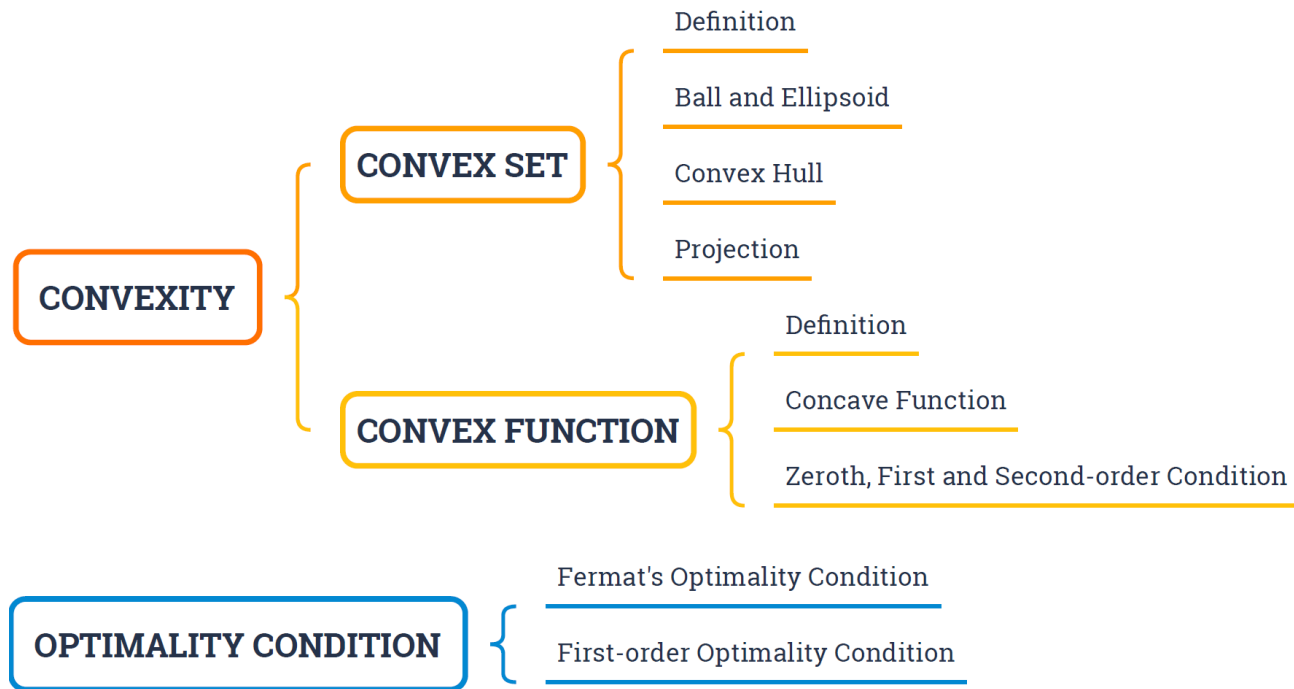
Theorem 7 (Conjugate Correspondence). *Consider the conjugate function:*

$$f^*(\mathbf{y}) \triangleq \max_{\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}} \{ \langle \mathbf{y}, \mathbf{x} \rangle - f(\mathbf{x}) \}.$$

- (a) *If the function f is convex and $\frac{1}{\sigma}$ -smooth w.r.t. the norm $\|\cdot\|$, then its conjugate f^* is σ -strongly convex w.r.t. the dual norm $\|\cdot\|_*$.*
- (b) *If f is proper closed σ -strongly convex w.r.t. the norm $\|\cdot\|$, then f^* is $\frac{1}{\sigma}$ -smooth w.r.t. the dual norm $\|\cdot\|_*$.*

Reference: Kakade et al., [On the duality of strong convexity and strong smoothness: Learning applications and matrix regularization](#). 2009.

Summary



Q & A

Thanks!