1.1 Systems of Linear Equations

A *linear equation in n unknowns* is an equation of the form

$$a_1x_1 + a_2x_2 + \cdots + a_nx_n = b$$

where $a_1, a_2, \ldots, a_n$ and b are real numbers and $x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_n$ are variables. A *linear system* of m equations in n unknowns is then a system of the form

$$\begin{aligned} a_{11}x_1 + a_{12}x_2 + \cdots + a_{1n}x_n &= b_1 \\ a_{21}x_1 + a_{22}x_2 + \cdots + a_{2n}x_n &= b_2 \\ &\vdots \\ a_{m1}x_1 + a_{m2}x_2 + \cdots + a_{mn}x_n &= b_m \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where the a_{ij}'s and the b_i's are all real numbers. We will refer to systems of the form (1) as $m \times n$ linear systems. The following are examples of linear systems:

(a) $\begin{aligned} x_1 + 2x_2 &= 5 \\ 2x_1 + 3x_2 &= 8 \end{aligned}$ **(b)** $\begin{aligned} x_1 - x_2 + x_3 &= 2 \\ 2x_1 + x_2 - x_3 &= 4 \end{aligned}$ **(c)** $\begin{aligned} x_1 + x_2 &= 2 \\ x_1 - x_2 &= 1 \\ x_1 \quad &= 4 \end{aligned}$

System **(a)** is a 2×2 system, **(b)** is a 2×3 system, and **(c)** is a 3×2 system.

By a solution of an $m \times n$ system, we mean an ordered n-tuple of numbers $(x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_n)$ that satisfies all the equations of the system. For example, the ordered pair $(1, 2)$ is a solution of system **(a)**, since

$$1 \cdot (1) + 2 \cdot (2) = 5$$
$$2 \cdot (1) + 3 \cdot (2) = 8$$

Actually, system **(b)** has many solutions. If α is any real number, it is easily seen that the ordered triple $(2, \alpha, \alpha)$ is a solution. However, system **(c)** has no solution. It follows from the third equation that the first coordinate of any solution would have to be 4. Using $x_1 = 4$ in the first two equations, we see that the second coordinate must satisfy

$$4 + x_2 = 2$$
$$4 - x_2 = 1$$

Since there is no real number that satisfies both of these equations, the system has no solution. If a linear system has no solution, we say that the system is *inconsistent*. If the system has at least one solution, we say that it is *consistent*. Thus system **(c)** is inconsistent, while systems **(a)** and **(b)** are both consistent.

2×2 Systems

Let us examine geometrically a system of the form

$$\begin{aligned} a_{11}x_1 + a_{12}x_2 &= b_1 \\ a_{21}x_1 + a_{22}x_2 &= b_2 \end{aligned}$$

Each equation can be represented graphically as a line in the plane. The ordered pair (x_1, x_2) will be a solution of the system if and only if it lies on both lines. For example, consider the three systems

$$\textbf{(i)}\ \begin{aligned} x_1 + x_2 &= 2 \\ x_1 - x_2 &= 2 \end{aligned} \qquad \textbf{(ii)}\ \begin{aligned} x_1 + x_2 &= 2 \\ x_1 + x_2 &= 1 \end{aligned} \qquad \textbf{(iii)}\ \begin{aligned} x_1 + x_2 &= 2 \\ -x_1 - x_2 &= -2 \end{aligned}$$

The two lines in system (i) intersect at the point $(2, 0)$. Thus, $\{(2, 0)\}$ is the solution set of (i). In system (ii) the two lines are parallel. Therefore, system (ii) is inconsistent and hence its solution set is empty. The two equations in system (iii) both represent the same line. Any point on this line will be a solution of the system (see Figure 1.1.1).

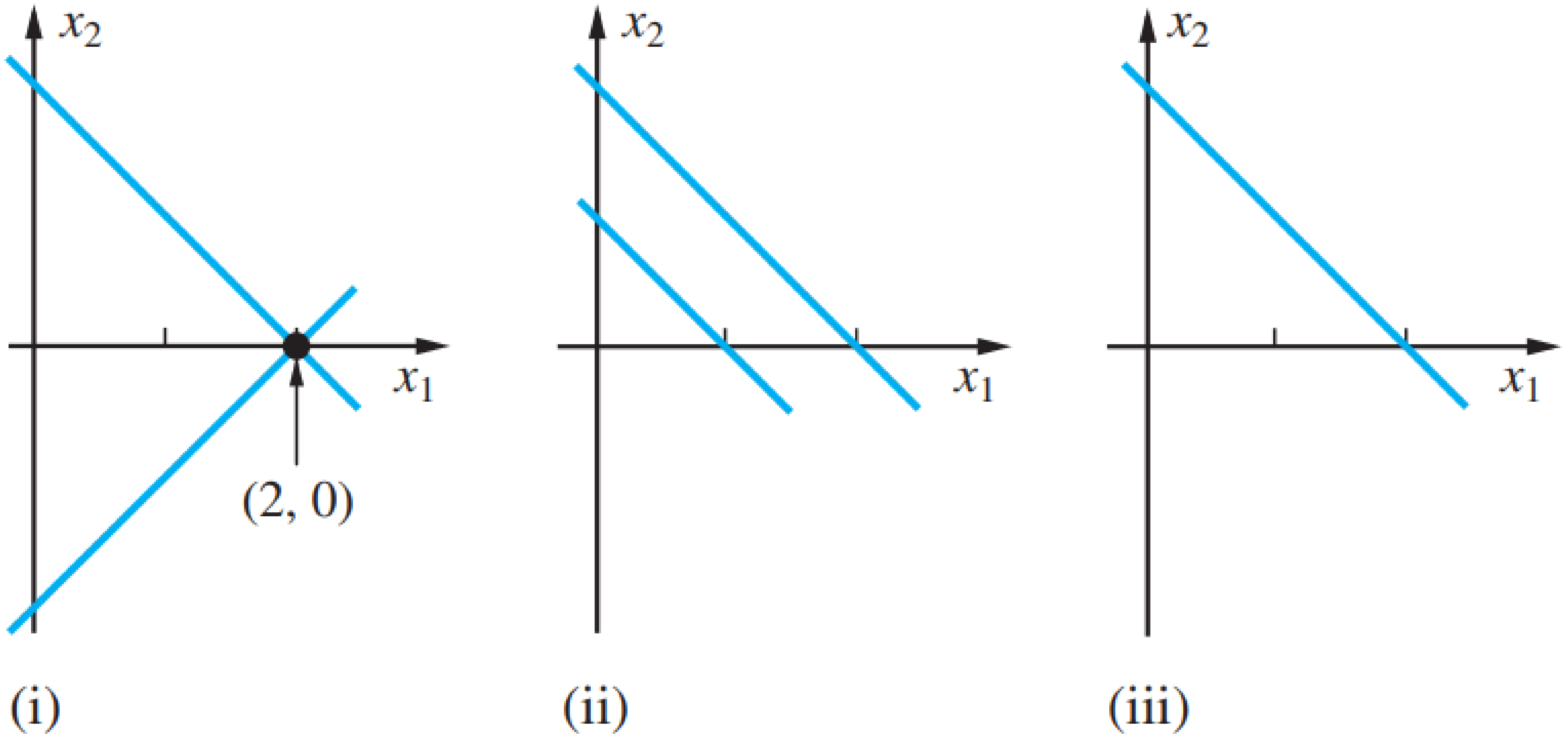

Figure 1.1.1.

Definition

> Two systems of equations involving the same variables are said to be **equivalent** if they have the same solution set.

Clearly, if we interchange the order in which two equations of a system are written, this will have no effect on the solution set. The reordered system will be equivalent to the original system. For example, the systems

$$\begin{aligned} x_1 + 2x_2 &= 4 \\ 3x_1 - x_2 &= 2 \\ 4x_1 + x_2 &= 6 \end{aligned} \qquad \text{and} \qquad \begin{aligned} 4x_1 + x_2 &= 6 \\ 3x_1 - x_2 &= 2 \\ x_1 + 2x_2 &= 4 \end{aligned}$$

both involve the same three equations and, consequently, they must have the same solution set.

If one equation of a system is multiplied through by a nonzero real number, this will have no effect on the solution set, and the new system will be equivalent to the original system. For example, the systems

$$\begin{aligned} x_1 + x_2 + x_3 &= 3 \\ -2x_1 - x_2 + 4x_3 &= 1 \end{aligned} \qquad \text{and} \qquad \begin{aligned} 2x_1 + 2x_2 + 2x_3 &= 6 \\ -2x_1 - x_2 + 4x_3 &= 1 \end{aligned}$$

are equivalent.

To summarize, there are three operations that can be used on a system to obtain an equivalent system:

I. The order in which any two equations are written may be interchanged.
II. Both sides of an equation may be multiplied by the same nonzero real number.
III. A multiple of one equation may be added to (or subtracted from) another.

Given a system of equations, we may use these operations to obtain an equivalent system that is easier to solve.

$n \times n$ Systems

Let us restrict ourselves to $n \times n$ systems for the remainder of this section. We will show that if an $n \times n$ system has exactly one solution, then operations **I** and **III** can be used to obtain an equivalent "strictly triangular system."

Definition

A system is said to be in **strict triangular form** if, in the kth equation, the coefficients of the first $k-1$ variables are all zero and the coefficient of x_k is nonzero ($k = 1, \ldots, n$).

EXAMPLE 1 The system

$$\begin{aligned} 3x_1 + 2x_2 + x_3 &= 1 \\ x_2 - x_3 &= 2 \\ 2x_3 &= 4 \end{aligned}$$

is in strict triangular form, since in the second equation the coefficients are 0, 1, −1, respectively, and in the third equation the coefficients are 0, 0, 2, respectively. Because of the strict triangular form, the system is easy to solve.

EXAMPLE 2 Solve the system

$$\begin{aligned} 2x_1 - x_2 + 3x_3 - 2x_4 &= 1 \\ x_2 - 2x_3 + 3x_4 &= 2 \\ 4x_3 + 3x_4 &= 3 \\ 4x_4 &= 4 \end{aligned}$$

Solution

Using back substitution, we obtain

$$\begin{aligned} 4x_4 &= 4 & x_4 &= 1 \\ 4x_3 + 3 \cdot 1 &= 3 & x_3 &= 0 \\ x_2 - 2 \cdot 0 + 3 \cdot 1 &= 2 & x_2 &= -1 \\ 2x_1 - (-1) + 3 \cdot 0 - 2 \cdot 1 &= 1 & x_1 &= 1 \end{aligned}$$

Thus the solution is $(1, -1, 0, 1)$. ■

Augmented Matrices.

The augmented matrix for the linear system

$$\begin{aligned} a_{11}x_1 + a_{12}x_2 + \cdots + a_{1n}x_n &= b_1 \\ a_{21}x_1 + a_{22}x_2 + \cdots + a_{2n}x_n &= b_2 \\ \vdots \qquad\quad \vdots \qquad\qquad\quad \vdots \quad &= \vdots \\ a_{m1}x_1 + a_{m2}x_2 + \cdots + a_{mn}x_n &= b_m \end{aligned}$$

is defined as the rectangular array of numbers

$$\left[\begin{array}{cccc|c} a_{11} & a_{12} & \cdots & a_{1n} & b_1 \\ a_{21} & a_{22} & \cdots & a_{2n} & b_2 \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots & \vdots \\ a_{m1} & a_{m2} & \cdots & a_{mn} & b_m \end{array}\right]$$

Elementary Row Operations.

Since the rows (horizontal lines) of an augmented matrix correspond to the equations in the associated system, the above three algebraic operations correspond to the following operations on the rows of the augmented matrix:

1. Multiply a row through by a nonzero constant.
2. Interchange two rows.
3. Add a constant times one row to another.

These are called elementary row operations on a matrix.

In general, given a system of n linear equations in n unknowns, we will use operations **I** and **III** to try to obtain an equivalent system that is strictly triangular. (We will see in the next section of the book that it is not possible to reduce the system to strictly triangular form in the cases where the system does not have a unique solution.)

EXAMPLE 4 Solve the system

$$\begin{aligned} - x_2 - x_3 + x_4 &= 0 \\ x_1 + x_2 + x_3 + x_4 &= 6 \\ 2x_1 + 4x_2 + x_3 - 2x_4 &= -1 \\ 3x_1 + x_2 - 2x_3 + 2x_4 &= 3 \end{aligned}$$

Solution

The augmented matrix for this system is

$$\left(\begin{array}{rrrr|r} 0 & -1 & -1 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 6 \\ 2 & 4 & 1 & -2 & -1 \\ 3 & 1 & -2 & 2 & 3 \end{array}\right)$$

Since it is not possible to eliminate any entries by using 0 as a pivot element, we will use row operation I to interchange the first two rows of the augmented matrix. The new first row will be the pivotal row and the pivot element will be 1:

$$(\text{pivot } a_{11} = 1) \quad \left(\begin{array}{rrrr|r} \mathbf{1} & \mathbf{1} & \mathbf{1} & \mathbf{1} & \mathbf{6} \\ 0 & -1 & -1 & 1 & 0 \\ 2 & 4 & 1 & -2 & -1 \\ 3 & 1 & -2 & 2 & 3 \end{array}\right) \quad \leftarrow \text{pivotal row}$$

Row operation III is then used twice to eliminate the two nonzero entries in the first column:

$$\left(\begin{array}{rrrr|r} 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 6 \\ \mathbf{0} & \mathbf{-1} & \mathbf{-1} & \mathbf{1} & \mathbf{0} \\ 0 & 2 & -1 & -4 & -13 \\ 0 & -2 & -5 & -1 & -15 \end{array}\right)$$

Next, the second row is used as the pivotal row to eliminate the entries in the second column below the pivot element -1:

$$\left(\begin{array}{rrrr|r} 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 6 \\ 0 & -1 & -1 & 1 & 0 \\ \mathbf{0} & \mathbf{0} & \mathbf{-3} & \mathbf{-2} & \mathbf{-13} \\ 0 & 0 & -3 & -3 & -15 \end{array}\right)$$

Finally, the third row is used as the pivotal row to eliminate the last element in the third column:

$$\left(\begin{array}{rrrr|r} 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 6 \\ 0 & -1 & -1 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & -3 & -2 & -13 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & -1 & -2 \end{array}\right)$$

This augmented matrix represents a strictly triangular system. Solving by back substitution, we obtain the solution $(2, -1, 3, 2)$. ■