



Pre-Calculus

Functions

• A **function** is a relation in which each element of the domain (independent variable) is paired with only one element of the range (dependent variable). In many cases x is the independent variable and y or $f(x)$ is the dependent variable. In this guide y and $f(x)$ are interchangeable.



• A relation can be tested to see whether it is a function by the vertical line test. Draw a vertical line through any graph, and if it hits an x -value more than once, it is not a function.

Linear Functions

• A function is a linear function if it can be written in the form $f(x) = mx + b$ or $y = mx + b$ where m is the slope and b is the y -intercept.

EX: $f(x) = 4x - 1$ is a linear function. The slope is $\frac{4}{1}$ (rise over run), and the y -intercept is -1 .

• The **standard form** of a linear function is $0 = Ax + By + C$. The slope is $m = -\frac{A}{B}$, and the y -intercept is $-\frac{C}{B}$.

• The **zeros** of a function are found by setting y to 0 and solving for x .

EX: Find the zeros of $f(x) = 4x - 1$.

$$0 = 4x - 1 \quad -1 = 4x \quad -\frac{1}{4} = x$$

Polynomial Functions

• A function is a polynomial function if it can be written in the form $f(x) = ax^n + bx^{n-1} + cx^{n-2} + \dots + dx + e$

- The greatest power of a polynomial with one variable is called its **degree**.

- When the degree of the function is an odd integer, there is at least one real zero.

- When the degree is an even integer, there may be no real zeros.

- Both types can have imaginary roots of the form $a + bi$.

EX: $f(x) = 2x^4 + x^3 + x + 10$ has a degree of 4. There are four roots to this polynomial.

EX: $f(x) = 2x^3 + x^2 - 2x + 3$ has a degree of 3. This function has one real zero at $x = -1.17$ and two non-real zeros. (see graph)

EX: $f(x) = x^2 + 1$ has a degree of 2. This function has two non-real roots. Its graph does not cross the x -axis.



Quadratic Functions

• One commonly studied polynomial function is a quadratic function.

A quadratic function takes the form $f(x) = ax^2 + bx + c$

- The graph of a quadratic equation is a **parabola**.

- Some parabolas represent quadratic equations but not quadratic functions. (see graph)

- Quadratic equations can have zero, one, or two solutions.

- The vertex of a parabola is its **critical point**. This is where the graph changes from increasing to decreasing or from decreasing to increasing.

- The quadratic formula $x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$ can be used to find the roots of all quadratic equations.

- The value under the square root symbol is the **discriminant**. It tells the type of roots of a quadratic equation.

• $b^2 - 4ac > 0$, two distinct real roots

• $b^2 - 4ac = 0$, exactly one real root

• $b^2 - 4ac < 0$, no real roots (two distinct imaginary roots)

EX: Find the roots of $f(x) = x^2 - 4x + 1$

The discriminant $b^2 - 4ac$ is $(-4)^2 - 4(1)(1) > 0$, so there are two real roots.

$$x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a} = \frac{-(-4) \pm \sqrt{4^2 - 4(1)(1)}}{2(1)}$$

$$x = 3.732 \text{ and } x = 0.267$$



EX: Find the number and type of the roots of $f(x) = 2x^2 + 2x + 1$

The discriminant is less than 0, so there are two imaginary roots. A graph of this function does not cross the x -axis.

EX: Find the number and type of the roots of $f(x) = x^2 - 2x + 1$. The discriminant is 0, so there is one real root. A graph of this function intersects the x -axis in one place, at -1 .

Rational Functions

• A function is a rational function if it can be written in the form $f(x) = \frac{g(x)}{h(x)}$

EX: $f(x) = \frac{x}{x+3}$, $f(x) = \frac{2}{x}$, and $f(x) = \frac{1}{x-2} + 3$ are rational functions.

- The parent function for all rational functions is $f(x) = \frac{1}{x}$

- The graph of the parent rational function consists of two parts, one in quadrant I and one in quadrant III.

- The branches of rational functions approach asymptotes.



Operations of Functions

• **Sum:** $(f + g)(x) = f(x) + g(x)$

• **Difference:** $(f - g)(x) = f(x) - g(x)$

• **Product:** $(f \cdot g)(x) = f(x) \cdot g(x)$

• **Quotient:** $\left(\frac{f}{g}\right)(x) = \frac{f(x)}{g(x)}$, $g(x) \neq 0$

EX: Given $f(x) = x + 2$ and $g(x) = \frac{x}{x-4}$

Find the difference: $(f - g)(x) = x + 2 - \frac{x}{x-4} = \frac{(x+2)(x-4) - x}{x-4} = \frac{x^2 - 3x - 8}{x-4}$, $x \neq 4$

Find the product: $(f \cdot g)(x) = (x + 2) \cdot \left(\frac{x}{x-4}\right) = \frac{x^2 + 2x}{x-4}$, $x \neq 4$

Find the quotient: $\left(\frac{f}{g}\right)(x) = \frac{x+2}{\frac{x}{x-4}} = (x+2) \cdot \left(\frac{x-4}{x}\right) = \frac{x^2 - 2x - 8}{x}$, $x \neq 0$

Composition of Functions

• $(f \circ g)(x) = f(g(x))$

EX: Given $f(x) = x + 2$ and $g(x) = \frac{x}{x-4}$, find $(f \circ g)(x)$

$x + 2$ becomes $\left(\frac{x}{x-4}\right) + 2 = \frac{x}{x-4} + \frac{2(x-4)}{x-4} = \frac{x + 2x - 8}{x-4} = \frac{3x - 8}{x-4}$, $x \neq 4$

EX: Using the same functions, find $(g \circ f)(x)$. $\left(\frac{x}{x-4}\right)$ becomes $\frac{x+2}{x+2-4} = \frac{x+2}{x-2}$, $x \neq 2$

Inverse Functions

• To find the inverse of a function, interchange x and y and solve the equation for y .

EX: Find the inverse of $y = 5x - 2$

Interchange x and y : $x = 5y - 2$

$$x + 2 = 5y \quad \frac{x+2}{5} = y$$

• To show two functions are inverses, show that $(f \circ g)(x) = x$ and $(g \circ f)(x) = x$

EX: Given $f(x) = 2x - 4$, $g(x) = \frac{x+4}{2}$, $(f \circ g)(x) = 2\left(\frac{x+4}{2}\right) - 4 = x$, and

$$(g \circ f)(x) = \frac{(2x - 4) + 4}{2} = x$$

Families of Functions

• A **parent graph** is the basic graph in a family. All the other family members translate, rotate, reflect, shrink, or stretch based on changes in values.

• For a general quadratic function, $f(x) = a(x + h)^2 + c$, the following rules show how the function is transformed.

- When a is negative, the graph reflects across the x -axis.
- When a is between 0 and 1, the graph shrinks or compresses.
- When a is greater than 1, the graph expands.
- When h is positive, the graph translates to the left.
- When h is negative, the graph translates to the right.
- When c is positive, the graph translates up.
- When c is negative, the graph translates down.

Note: The parent function (in this case quadratic) could also be an absolute value function, a rational function, an exponential function, etc.

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Table of Contents Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers

1. Understanding the eBook Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers
 - The Rise of Digital Reading Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers
 - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers
 - Exploring Different Genres
 - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
 - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
 - Popular eBook Platforms
 - Features to Look for in an Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers
 - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers

- Personalized Recommendations
 - Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers User Reviews and Ratings
 - Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers and Bestseller Lists
5. Accessing Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers Free and Paid eBooks
 - Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers Public Domain eBooks
 - Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers eBook Subscription Services
 - Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers Budget-Friendly Options
 6. Navigating Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers eBook Formats
 - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
 - Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers Compatibility with Devices
 - Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers Enhanced eBook Features
 7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
 - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers
 - Highlighting and Note-Taking Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers
 - Interactive Elements Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers
 8. Staying Engaged with Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers
 - Joining Online Reading Communities
 - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
 - Following Authors and Publishers Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers
 9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers
 - Benefits of a Digital Library
 - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers
 10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
 - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
 - Minimizing Distractions
 - Managing Screen Time
 11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers
 - Setting Reading Goals Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers
 - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
 12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers

- Fact-Checking eBook Content of Blue Pelican Math Pre Cal Answers
 - Distinguishing Credible Sources
13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
- Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
 - Exploring Educational eBooks
14. Embracing eBook Trends
- Integration of Multimedia Elements
 - Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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