

Structure of an induction proof

February 5, 2009

To prove: [write out statement here]

To prove: the sum of the numbers $1 + 2 + \dots + n$ is $n(n+1)/2$ for every positive integer n .

We'll prove this by induction. Let $P(n)$ be the statement that *fill in predicate here*.

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$$1 + 2 + \dots + n = n(n + 1)/2.$$

Let S be the set of positive integers k such that $P(k)$ is true.

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So $P(1)$ is true, and $1 \in S$.

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Inductive step: For some fixed but unknown positive integer k , we'll assume $P(k)$ is true, i.e., we'll assume that *write out $P(k)$ here*.

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$$1 + 2 + \dots + k = k(k + 1)/2.$$

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$$\begin{aligned} 1 + 2 + \dots + k + 1 &= (k + 1)((k + 1) + 1)/2 \\ &= (k + 1)(k + 2)/2. \end{aligned}$$

Start from $P(k)$ *and argue the truth of* $P(k + 1)$.

We've assumed that

$$1 + 2 + \dots + k = k(k + 1)/2.$$

Adding $k + 1$ to each side yields

$$1 + 2 + \dots + k + (k + 1) = k(k + 1)/2 + (k + 1).$$

Doing a little algebra on the right hand side, we get

$$\begin{aligned} 1 + 2 + \dots + (k + 1) &= k(k + 1)/2 + 2(k + 1)/2 \\ &= [k(k + 1) + 2(k + 1)]/2 \\ &= [(k + 2)(k + 1)]/2 \\ &= (k + 1)(k + 2)/2, \end{aligned}$$

which is exactly the statement $P(k + 1)$, which we promised to prove.

We conclude, by induction, that S contains all positive integers, so $P(n)$ is true for every positive integer n .

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