# 5 Asymptotic Notation

We are usually not interested in exact running times, but only in an asymptotic classification of the running time, that ignores constant factors and constant additive offsets.

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# Asymptotic Notation

## Formal Definition

Let $f$ denote functions from $\mathbb{N}$ to $\mathbb{R}^+$.

- $\mathcal{O}(f) = \{g \mid \exists c > 0\ \exists n_0 \in \mathbb{N}_0\ \forall n \geq n_0 : [g(n) \leq c \cdot f(n)]\}$
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There is an equivalent definition using limes notation. $f$ and $g$ are functions from $\mathbb{N}$ to $\mathbb{R}^+$.

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## Abuse of notation

1. People write $f = \mathcal{O}(g)$, when they mean $f \in \mathcal{O}(g)$. This is **not** an equality (how could a function be equal to a set of functions).
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# Asymptotic Notation in Equations

How do we interpret an expression like:

$$2n^2 + 3n + 1 = 2n^2 + \Theta(n)$$

Here, $\Theta(n)$ stands for an anonymous function in the set $\Theta(n)$ that makes the expression true.

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How do we interpret an expression like:

$$\sum_{i=1}^{n} \Theta(i) = \Theta(n^2)$$

Careful!

"It is understood" that every occurence of an $\mathcal{O}$-symbol (or $\Theta, \Omega, o, \omega$) on the left represents one anonymous function.

Hence, the left side is **not** equal to

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We can view an expression containing asymptotic notation as generating a set:

$$n^2 \cdot \mathcal{O}(n) + \mathcal{O}(\log n)$$

represents

$$\Big\{f : \mathbb{N} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^+ \mid f(n) = n^2 \cdot g(n) + h(n)$$
$$\text{with } g(n) \in \mathcal{O}(n) \text{ and } h(n) \in \mathcal{O}(\log n)\Big\}$$

# Asymptotic Notation in Equations

Then an asymptotic equation can be interpreted as containement btw. two sets:

$$n^2 \cdot \mathcal{O}(n) + \mathcal{O}(\log n) = \Theta(n^2)$$

represents

$$n^2 \cdot \mathcal{O}(n) + \mathcal{O}(\log n) \subseteq \Theta(n^2)$$

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**Lemma 1**

*Let $f, g$ be functions with the property*
$\exists n_0 > 0\ \forall n \ge n_0 : f(n) > 0$ *(the same for $g$). Then*

- $c \cdot f(n) \in \Theta(f(n))$ *for any constant $c$*
- $\mathcal{O}(f(n)) + \mathcal{O}(g(n)) = \mathcal{O}(f(n) + g(n))$
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*The expressions also hold for $\Omega$. Note that this means that*
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## Comments

- Do not use asymptotic notation within induction proofs.
- For any constants $a, b$ we have $\log_a n = \Theta(\log_b n)$. Therefore, we will usually ignore the base of a logarithm within asymptotic notation.
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In general asymptotic classification of running times is a good measure for comparing algorithms:

- If the running time analysis is tight and actually occurs in practise (i.e., the asymptotic bound is not a purely theoretical worst-case bound), then the algorithm that has better asymptotic running time will always outperform a weaker algorithm for large enough values of $n$.
- However, suppose that I have two algorithms:
  - Algorithm A. Running time $f(n) = 1000 \log n = O(\log n)$.
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