

linear algebra and quantum mechanics

Linear Algebra and Quantum Mechanics: An Indispensable Partnership

Introduction:

Stepping into the quantum realm can feel like entering a bizarre, counterintuitive world. Particles behave in ways that defy classical intuition, existing in multiple states simultaneously and exhibiting wave-particle duality. Yet, underlying this apparent strangeness is a profound mathematical elegance: linear algebra. This post will unravel the critical role linear algebra plays in understanding and formulating quantum mechanics, exploring its application from the fundamental principles to advanced calculations. We'll delve into key concepts, demonstrating how linear algebra provides the mathematical framework for describing quantum systems and solving quantum mechanical problems. Prepare to bridge the gap between abstract mathematics and the fascinating world of the very small.

1. Vectors and Quantum States:

Quantum mechanics describes the state of a quantum system using a mathematical object called a state vector. Unlike classical mechanics where a particle's state is defined by its position and momentum, a quantum state vector lives in a complex vector space, often called Hilbert space. This vector space is infinite-dimensional for many systems, representing the potentially infinite number of possible quantum states. Each component of the state vector corresponds to the probability amplitude of finding the system in a particular basis state. For example, a spin-1/2 particle (like an electron) can be in a superposition of spin up and spin down states, represented by a two-dimensional vector. Linear algebra's operations on these vectors (addition, scalar multiplication) allow us to manipulate and combine quantum states, representing processes like superposition and entanglement.

1. Operators and Observables:

Physical quantities like energy, momentum, and angular momentum are represented in quantum mechanics by linear operators. These operators act on state vectors, transforming them. The result of applying an operator to a state vector is a new state vector that reflects the effect of measuring the

corresponding physical quantity. The eigenvalues of these operators represent the possible measurement outcomes, while the eigenvectors correspond to the states that yield those specific values. The fact that these operators are linear is crucial; it ensures that the superposition principle holds – the evolution of a superposition of states is simply the superposition of the evolution of each individual state. Diagonalization of these operators, a cornerstone of linear algebra, allows us to find the eigenvalues and eigenvectors, and therefore predict the results of measurements.

1. The Schrödinger Equation: A Linear Differential Equation:

The time evolution of a quantum system is governed by the Schrödinger equation, a fundamental equation in quantum mechanics. This equation is a linear differential equation, meaning it involves derivatives of the state vector with respect to time. The linearity of this equation is paramount. It implies that the superposition principle applies to the time evolution of the system; the time evolution of a superposition of states is the superposition of the time evolution of individual states. Solving the Schrödinger equation often involves techniques from linear algebra, such as finding eigenfunctions (which are vectors in function space) and eigenvalues of the Hamiltonian operator (which represents the total energy of the system).

1. Matrix Mechanics: A Powerful Representation:

Quantum mechanics can be formulated in different ways. While the Schrödinger equation uses wave functions, matrix mechanics, pioneered by Werner Heisenberg, uses matrices to represent operators and state vectors. This representation is particularly powerful for systems with a finite-dimensional Hilbert space. Matrix multiplication corresponds to the action of operators on state vectors, and matrix diagonalization provides eigenvalues and eigenvectors representing observable quantities and their corresponding states. This formulation elegantly demonstrates the power of linear algebra in tackling quantum mechanical problems.

1. Tensor Products and Entanglement:

When dealing with multiple quantum systems, we use tensor products to combine their Hilbert spaces. This allows us to describe the composite system using a larger state vector that is a tensor product of the individual state vectors. A particularly fascinating phenomenon, entanglement, arises in this context.

Entangled states cannot be described as a simple product of individual states. They exhibit correlations between the subsystems that defy classical explanation. The manipulation and analysis of entangled states heavily rely on linear algebra techniques applied to tensor product spaces.

1. Quantum Computing and Linear Algebra:

The burgeoning field of quantum computing leverages the principles of quantum mechanics, and linear algebra is its essential mathematical backbone. Quantum algorithms, like Shor's algorithm for factoring large numbers and Grover's algorithm for searching unsorted databases, rely on the manipulation of quantum states represented by vectors and the application of quantum gates represented by unitary matrices. Understanding linear algebra is not just beneficial but absolutely crucial for designing, analyzing, and improving quantum algorithms.

1. Beyond the Basics: Advanced Applications

The applications of linear algebra in quantum mechanics extend far beyond the basics outlined above. Concepts like density matrices, which describe mixed states (probabilistic mixtures of pure states), perturbation theory for approximating solutions to the Schrödinger equation, and advanced techniques in quantum field theory, all heavily depend on linear algebra and its sophisticated tools. Mastering linear algebra is essential for anyone aspiring to delve deeper into the complexities of modern quantum physics.

Book Outline: "Linear Algebra for Quantum Mechanics"

Introduction: Brief overview of linear algebra and its importance in quantum mechanics.

Chapter 1: Vectors and Vector Spaces: Covers complex vector spaces, inner products, and orthonormal bases.

Chapter 2: Linear Operators and Matrices: Explores linear operators, matrix representation, eigenvalues, and eigenvectors.

Chapter 3: The Schrödinger Equation: Detailed explanation of the time-dependent and time-independent Schrödinger equation.

Chapter 4: Matrix Mechanics: Detailed explanation of the Heisenberg picture and its applications.

Chapter 5: Tensor Products and Entanglement: Covers tensor products of vector spaces and entangled states.

Chapter 6: Quantum Measurement and Observables: Explores the mathematical formalism of quantum measurements.

Chapter 7: Applications in Quantum Computing: Introduction to quantum

computing and its reliance on linear algebra.

Conclusion: Summary and future directions.

(Note: The following sections expand on the points in the book outline above, providing a more detailed explanation. Due to space constraints, this is a simplified expansion. A full book would require significantly more detail and mathematical rigor.)

Chapter 1: Vectors and Vector Spaces: This chapter would rigorously introduce complex vector spaces, providing a foundation for understanding quantum states. It would delve into concepts like inner products, which define the "distance" and "angle" between quantum states, and orthonormal bases, crucial for representing states in a convenient way. Examples would illustrate how different choices of basis sets represent the same physical state but in different mathematical forms.

Chapter 2: Linear Operators and Matrices: This chapter would discuss linear operators, which represent physical observables, and their matrix representations. It would explain how matrix multiplication corresponds to the sequential application of operators. Eigenvalues and eigenvectors would be thoroughly covered, explaining their significance in determining measurement outcomes and the states that yield those outcomes.

Chapter 3: The Schrödinger Equation: This chapter would explain the Schrödinger equation in detail, both the time-dependent and time-independent versions. It would show how solving the equation often involves finding the eigenvalues and eigenfunctions of the Hamiltonian operator, which requires substantial linear algebra techniques. Simple examples, like the particle in a box, would be used to illustrate the practical applications of these techniques.

Chapter 4: Matrix Mechanics: This chapter would present the matrix mechanics formulation of quantum mechanics, emphasizing its power in representing physical quantities as matrices and evolution as matrix multiplication. The advantages and disadvantages of matrix mechanics compared to the wave function formulation would be discussed.

Chapter 5: Tensor Products and Entanglement: This chapter would introduce tensor products, showing how to combine the Hilbert spaces of multiple quantum systems. The concept of entanglement, a uniquely quantum phenomenon, would be explained, illustrating its mathematical description using tensor products and its implications. Bell's theorem and its relation to entanglement would be briefly touched upon.

Chapter 6: Quantum Measurement and Observables: This chapter would mathematically formalize the process of quantum measurement. It would explain the role of Hermitian operators, the projection postulate, and the Born rule in calculating probabilities of measurement outcomes.

Chapter 7: Applications in Quantum Computing: This chapter would introduce fundamental concepts of quantum computing, showing how linear algebra is the bedrock of quantum gates, quantum circuits, and quantum algorithms. Simple examples of quantum algorithms would be given to demonstrate the practical use of linear algebra in this field.

Conclusion: This chapter would summarize the central themes of the book, emphasizing the pervasive and indispensable role of linear algebra in quantum mechanics. It would also point to more advanced topics and research areas for readers interested in further exploration.

FAQs:

1. Is linear algebra absolutely necessary for understanding quantum mechanics? Yes, a strong grasp of linear algebra is essential for a deep understanding of quantum mechanics. While introductory treatments might gloss over some mathematical details, advanced topics require a solid foundation in linear algebra.
1. What level of linear algebra is required? A good understanding of vector spaces, linear operators, matrices, eigenvalues, and eigenvectors is necessary. Familiarity with complex vector spaces is particularly important.
1. Are there online resources to help me learn the necessary linear algebra? Yes, numerous online resources, including courses on platforms like Khan Academy, Coursera, and edX, offer excellent linear algebra instruction.
1. Can I learn quantum mechanics without knowing linear algebra? You can gain a basic qualitative understanding, but a deep, quantitative understanding requires a strong grasp of linear algebra.
1. What are some good textbooks that combine linear algebra and quantum mechanics? Many quantum mechanics textbooks integrate linear algebra concepts, but look for those that explicitly emphasize the mathematical formalism.

1. Is there a specific type of linear algebra that is more relevant to quantum mechanics? While general linear algebra is crucial, a focus on complex vector spaces and linear operators is particularly important.
1. How does linear algebra simplify the study of quantum mechanics? Linear algebra provides the mathematical language and tools to represent quantum states, observables, and their interactions in a concise and rigorous manner.
1. Are there any programming languages particularly suited for applying linear algebra to quantum mechanics? Python, with libraries like NumPy and SciPy, is a popular choice due to its extensive linear algebra capabilities.
1. Is it possible to self-teach the necessary linear algebra and quantum mechanics? Yes, with dedication, discipline, and the use of readily available online resources and textbooks, it's possible to learn both subjects independently.

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Thomas F. Jordan, 2012-05-23 With this text, basic quantum mechanics becomes accessible to undergraduates with no background in mathematics beyond algebra. Includes more than 100 problems and 38 figures. 1986 edition.

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book begins with a thorough exploration of set theory fundamentals, including mappings, cardinalities of sets, and arithmetic and theory of complex numbers. Next is an introduction to linear spaces, with coverage of linear operators, eigenvalue and the stability problem of linear operators, and matrices with special properties. Material on binary product spaces features self-adjoint operators in a space of indefinite metric, binary product spaces with a positive definite metric, properties of the Hilbert space, and more. The final section is devoted to axioms of quantum theory formulated as trace algebra. Throughout, chapter-end problem sets help reinforce absorption of the material while letting readers test their problem-solving skills. Ideal for advanced undergraduate and graduate students in theoretical and computational chemistry and physics, *Linear Algebra for Quantum Theory* provides the mathematical means necessary to access and understand the complex world of quantum theory.

linear algebra and quantum mechanics: *Introduction to Quantum Algorithms via Linear Algebra, second edition* Richard J. Lipton, Kenneth W. Regan, 2021-04-06 Quantum computing explained in terms of elementary linear algebra, emphasizing computation and algorithms and requiring no background in physics. This introduction to quantum algorithms is concise but comprehensive, covering many key algorithms. It is mathematically rigorous but requires minimal background and assumes no knowledge of quantum theory or quantum mechanics. The book explains quantum computation in terms of elementary linear algebra; it assumes the reader will have some familiarity with vectors, matrices, and their basic properties, but offers a review of the relevant material from linear algebra. By emphasizing computation and algorithms rather than physics, it makes quantum algorithms accessible to students and researchers in computer science who have not taken courses in quantum physics or delved into fine details of quantum effects, apparatus, circuits, or theory.

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linear algebra and quantum mechanics: *Quantum Algorithms via Linear Algebra* Richard J. Lipton, Kenneth W. Regan, 2014-12-05 Quantum computing explained in terms of elementary linear algebra, emphasizing computation and algorithms and requiring no background in physics. This introduction to quantum algorithms is concise but comprehensive, covering many key algorithms. It is mathematically rigorous but requires minimal background and assumes no knowledge of quantum theory or quantum mechanics. The book explains quantum computation in terms of elementary linear algebra; it assumes the reader will have some familiarity with vectors, matrices, and their basic properties, but offers a review of all the relevant material from linear algebra. By emphasizing computation and algorithms rather than physics, this primer makes quantum algorithms accessible to students and researchers in computer science without the complications of quantum mechanical

notation, physical concepts, and philosophical issues. After explaining the development of quantum operations and computations based on linear algebra, the book presents the major quantum algorithms, from seminal algorithms by Deutsch, Jozsa, and Simon through Shor's and Grover's algorithms to recent quantum walks. It covers quantum gates, computational complexity, and some graph theory. Mathematical proofs are generally short and straightforward; quantum circuits and gates are used to illuminate linear algebra; and the discussion of complexity is anchored in computational problems rather than machine models. *Quantum Algorithms via Linear Algebra* is suitable for classroom use or as a reference for computer scientists and mathematicians.

linear algebra and quantum mechanics: Quantum Mechanics for Mathematicians Leon Armenovich Takhtadzhian, 2008 Presents a comprehensive treatment of quantum mechanics from a mathematics perspective. Including traditional topics, like classical mechanics, mathematical foundations of quantum mechanics, quantization, and the Schrodinger equation, this book gives a mathematical treatment of systems of identical particles with spin.

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linear algebra and quantum mechanics: Quantum Theory, Groups and Representations Peter Woit, 2017-11-01 This text systematically presents the basics of quantum mechanics, emphasizing the role of Lie groups, Lie algebras, and their unitary representations. The mathematical structure of the subject is brought to the fore, intentionally avoiding significant overlap with material from standard physics courses in quantum mechanics and quantum field theory. The level of presentation is attractive to mathematics students looking to learn about both quantum mechanics and representation theory, while also appealing to physics students who would like to know more about the mathematics underlying the subject. This text showcases the numerous differences between typical mathematical and physical treatments of the subject. The latter portions of the book focus on central mathematical objects that occur in the Standard Model of particle physics, underlining the deep and intimate connections between mathematics and the physical world. While an elementary physics course of some kind would be helpful to the reader, no specific background in physics is assumed, making this book accessible to students with a grounding in multivariable calculus and linear algebra. Many exercises are provided to develop the reader's understanding of and facility in quantum-theoretical concepts and calculations.

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Townsend, 2000 Inspired by Richard Feynman and J.J. Sakurai, *A Modern Approach to Quantum Mechanics* allows lecturers to expose their undergraduates to Feynman's approach to quantum mechanics while simultaneously giving them a textbook that is well-ordered, logical and pedagogically sound. This book covers all the topics that are typically presented in a standard upper-level course in quantum mechanics, but its teaching approach is new. Rather than organizing his book according to the historical development of the field and jumping into a mathematical discussion of wave mechanics, Townsend begins his book with the quantum mechanics of spin. Thus, the first five chapters of the book succeed in laying out the fundamentals of quantum mechanics with little or no wave mechanics, so the physics is not obscured by mathematics. Starting with spin systems it gives students straightforward examples of the structure of quantum mechanics. When wave mechanics is introduced later, students should perceive it correctly as only one aspect of quantum mechanics and not the core of the subject.

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linear algebra and quantum mechanics: *Quantum Mechanics* Leonard Susskind, Art Friedman, 2014-02-25 From the bestselling author of *The Theoretical Minimum*, a DIY introduction to the math and science of quantum physics First he taught you classical mechanics. Now, physicist Leonard Susskind has teamed up with data engineer Art Friedman to present the theory and associated mathematics of the strange world of quantum mechanics. In this follow-up to *The Theoretical Minimum*, Susskind and Friedman provide a lively introduction to this famously difficult field, which attempts to understand the behavior of sub-atomic objects through mathematical abstractions. Unlike other popularizations that shy away from quantum mechanics' weirdness, *Quantum Mechanics* embraces the utter strangeness of quantum logic. The authors offer

crystal-clear explanations of the principles of quantum states, uncertainty and time dependence, entanglement, and particle and wave states, among other topics, and each chapter includes exercises to ensure mastery of each area. Like The Theoretical Minimum, this volume runs parallel to Susskind's eponymous Stanford University-hosted continuing education course. An approachable yet rigorous introduction to a famously difficult topic, Quantum Mechanics provides a tool kit for amateur scientists to learn physics at their own pace.

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linear algebra and quantum mechanics: *An Introduction to Quantum Mechanics* Tilak Sinha, 2021-08-19 The core content of even the most intricate intellectual edifices is often a simple fact or idea. So is it with quantum mechanics; the entire mathematical fabric of the formal description of quantum mechanics stems essentially from the fact that quantum probabilities interfere (i.e., from the superposition principle). This book is dedicated to substantiating this claim. In the process, the book tries to demonstrate how the factual content of quantum mechanics can be transcribed in the formal language of vector spaces and linear transformations by disentangling the empirical content from the usual formal description. More importantly, it tries to bring out what this transcription achieves. The book uses a pedagogic strategy which reverse engineers the postulates of quantum mechanics to device a schematic outline of the empirical content of quantum mechanics from which the postulates are then reconstructed step by step. This strategy is adopted to avoid the disconcerting details of actual experiments (however simplified) to spare the beginner of issues that lurk in the fragile foundations of the subject. In the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, the key idea is measurement. But measurement carries an entirely different meaning from the connotation that the term carries elsewhere in physics. This book strives to underline this as strongly as possible. The book is intended as an undergraduate text for a first course in quantum mechanics. Since the book is self contained, it may also be used by enthusiastic outsiders interested to get a glimpse of the core content of the subject. Features: Demonstrates why linear algebra is the appropriate mathematical language for quantum mechanics. Uses a reconstructive approach to motivate the postulates of quantum mechanics. Builds the vocabulary of quantum mechanics by showing how the entire body of its conceptual ingredients can be constructed from the single notion of quantum measurement.

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linear algebra and quantum mechanics: *Quantum Mechanics* B. H. Bransden, 2000-09

linear algebra and quantum mechanics: *Alice and Bob Meet Banach* Guillaume Aubrun, Stanisław J. Szarek, 2024-07-29 The quest to build a quantum computer is arguably one of the major scientific and technological challenges of the twenty-first century, and quantum information theory (QIT) provides the mathematical framework for that quest. Over the last dozen or so years, it has become clear that quantum information theory is closely linked to geometric functional analysis (Banach space theory, operator spaces, high-dimensional probability), a field also known as asymptotic geometric analysis (AGA). In a nutshell, asymptotic geometric analysis investigates quantitative properties of convex sets, or other geometric structures, and their approximate symmetries as the dimension becomes large. This makes it especially relevant to quantum theory, where systems consisting of just a few particles naturally lead to models whose dimension is in the thousands, or even in the billions. *Alice and Bob Meet Banach* is aimed at multiple audiences connected through their interest in the interface of QIT and AGA: at quantum information researchers who want to learn AGA or apply its tools; at mathematicians interested in learning QIT, or at least the part of QIT that is relevant to functional analysis/convex geometry/random matrix

theory and related areas; and at beginning researchers in either field. Moreover, this user-friendly book contains numerous tables and explicit estimates, with reasonable constants when possible, which make it a useful reference even for established mathematicians generally familiar with the subject.

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linear algebra and quantum mechanics: Linear Algebra and Group Theory for Physicists and Engineers Yair Shapira, 2023-01-16 This textbook demonstrates the strong interconnections between linear algebra and group theory by presenting them simultaneously, a pedagogical strategy ideal for an interdisciplinary audience. Being approached together at the same time, these two topics complete one another, allowing students to attain a deeper understanding of both subjects. The opening chapters introduce linear algebra with applications to mechanics and statistics, followed by group theory with applications to projective geometry. Then, high-order finite elements are presented to design a regular mesh and assemble the stiffness and mass matrices in advanced applications in quantum chemistry and general relativity. This text is ideal for undergraduates majoring in engineering, physics, chemistry, computer science, or applied mathematics. It is mostly self-contained—readers should only be familiar with elementary calculus. There are numerous exercises, with hints or full solutions provided. A series of roadmaps are also provided to help instructors choose the optimal teaching approach for their discipline. The second edition has been revised and updated throughout and includes new material on the Jordan form, the Hermitian matrix and its eigenbasis, and applications in numerical relativity and electromagnetics.

linear algebra and quantum mechanics: Quantum Theory for Mathematicians Brian C. Hall, 2013-06-19 Although ideas from quantum physics play an important role in many parts of modern mathematics, there are few books about quantum mechanics aimed at mathematicians. This book introduces the main ideas of quantum mechanics in language familiar to mathematicians. Readers with little prior exposure to physics will enjoy the book's conversational tone as they delve into such topics as the Hilbert space approach to quantum theory; the Schrödinger equation in one space dimension; the Spectral Theorem for bounded and unbounded self-adjoint operators; the Stone-von Neumann Theorem; the Wentzel-Kramers-Brillouin approximation; the role of Lie groups and Lie algebras in quantum mechanics; and the path-integral approach to quantum mechanics. The numerous exercises at the end of each chapter make the book suitable for both graduate courses and independent study. Most of the text is accessible to graduate students in mathematics who have had a first course in real analysis, covering the basics of L^2 spaces and Hilbert spaces. The final chapters introduce readers who are familiar with the theory of manifolds to more advanced topics, including geometric quantization.

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linear algebra and quantum mechanics: Advanced Quantum Mechanics Reinhold Blumel, 2010-04-28 This book provides a coherent introduction to Gutzwiller's trace formula accessible to well-prepared science, mathematics, and engineering students who have taken introductory courses in linear algebra, classical, and quantum mechanics. In addition to providing an enrichment of the undergraduate curriculum, this book may serve as the primary text for graduate courses on semiclassical methods. Since periodic-orbit expansions may be used to solve all types of wave systems that typically occur in mathematics, physics, and engineering, this book is attractive for professional scientists and engineers as well. Following a thorough review of elementary concepts in classical and quantum mechanics the reader is introduced to the idea of classical periodic orbits, the

foundation of Gutzwiller's approach to quantum spectra. The trace formula itself is derived following an introduction to Feynman's path integrals. Numerous applications, including the exact solutions of "unsolvable" one-dimensional quantum problems, illustrate the power of Gutzwiller's method. Worked examples throughout the text illustrate the material and provide immediate "hands-on" demonstrations of tools and concepts just learned. Problems at the end of each section invite the reader to consolidate the acquired knowledge.

linear algebra and quantum mechanics: *Introduction to Algebraic and Constructive Quantum Field Theory* John C. Baez, Irving E. Segal, Zhengfang Zhou, 2014-07-14 The authors present a rigorous treatment of the first principles of the algebraic and analytic core of quantum field theory. Their aim is to correlate modern mathematical theory with the explanation of the observed process of particle production and of particle-wave duality that heuristic quantum field theory provides. Many topics are treated here in book form for the first time, from the origins of complex structures to the quantization of tachyons and domains of dependence for quantized wave equations. This work begins with a comprehensive analysis, in a universal format, of the structure and characterization of free fields, which is illustrated by applications to specific fields. Nonlinear local functions of both free fields (or Wick products) and interacting fields are established mathematically in a way that is consistent with the basic physical constraints and practice. Among other topics discussed are functional integration, Fourier transforms in Hilbert space, and implementability of canonical transformations. The authors address readers interested in fundamental mathematical physics and who have at least the training of an entering graduate student. A series of lexicons connects the mathematical development with the underlying physical motivation or interpretation. The examples and problems illustrate the theory and relate it to the scientific literature. Originally published in 1992. The Princeton Legacy Library uses the latest print-on-demand technology to again make available previously out-of-print books from the distinguished backlist of Princeton University Press. These editions preserve the original texts of these important books while presenting them in durable paperback and hardcover editions. The goal of the Princeton Legacy Library is to vastly increase access to the rich scholarly heritage found in the thousands of books published by Princeton University Press since its founding in 1905.

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the reader to better understand the material. Some of the applications are illustrated in the chapter appendices. The author's unique melding of topics evolved from a two semester course that he taught at the University of British Columbia consisting of an undergraduate honors course on abstract linear algebra and a similar course on the theory of groups. The combined content from both makes this rare text ideal for a year-long course, covering more material than most linear algebra texts. It is also optimal for independent study and as a supplementary text for various professional applications. Advanced undergraduate or graduate students in mathematics, physics, computer science and engineering will find this book both useful and enjoyable.

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