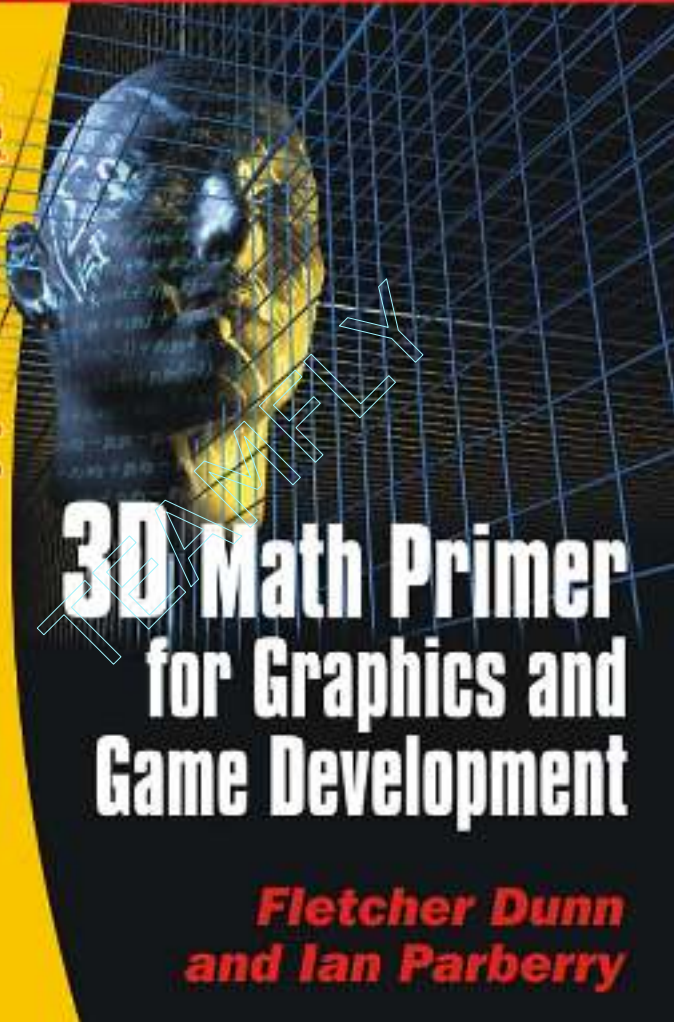


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3D Math Primer for Graphics and Game Development

*Fletcher Dunn
and Ian Parberry*





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**Fletcher Dunn
and Ian Parberry**

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Contents

Acknowledgments	xi
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 What is 3D Math?	1
1.2 Why You Should Read This Book	1
1.3 What You Should Know Before Reading This Book	3
1.4 Overview	3
Chapter 2 The Cartesian Coordinate System	5
2.1 1D Mathematics	6
2.2 2D Cartesian Mathematics	9
2.2.1 An Example: The Hypothetical City of Cartesia	9
2.2.2 Arbitrary 2D Coordinate Spaces	10
2.2.3 Specifying Locations in 2D Using Cartesian Coordinates	13
2.3 From 2D to 3D	14
2.3.1 Extra Dimension, Extra Axis	15
2.3.2 Specifying Locations in 3D	15
2.3.3 Left-handed vs. Right-handed Coordinate Spaces	16
2.3.4 Some Important Conventions Used in This Book	19
2.4 Exercises	20
Chapter 3 Multiple Coordinate Spaces	23
3.1 Why Multiple Coordinate Spaces?	24
3.2 Some Useful Coordinate Spaces	25
3.2.1 World Space	25
3.2.2 Object Space	26
3.2.3 Camera Space	27
3.2.4 Inertial Space	28
3.3 Nested Coordinate Spaces	30
3.4 Specifying Coordinate Spaces	31
3.5 Coordinate Space Transformations	31
3.6 Exercises	34
Chapter 4 Vectors	35
4.1 Vector — A Mathematical Definition	36
4.1.1 Vectors vs. Scalars	36
4.1.2 Vector Dimension	36
4.1.3 Notation	36
4.2 Vector — A Geometric Definition	37

4.2.1 What Does a Vector Look Like?	37
4.2.2 Position vs. Displacement	38
4.2.3 Specifying Vectors	38
4.2.4 Vectors as a Sequence of Displacements	39
4.3 Vectors vs. Points	40
4.3.1 Relative Position	41
4.3.2 The Relationship Between Points and Vectors	41
4.4 Exercises.	42
Chapter 5 Operations on Vectors	45
5.1 Linear Algebra vs. What We Need	46
5.2 Typeface Conventions.	46
5.3 The Zero Vector	47
5.4 Negating a Vector	48
5.4.1 Official Linear Algebra Rules	48
5.4.2 Geometric Interpretation	48
5.5 Vector Magnitude (Length)	49
5.5.1 Official Linear Algebra Rules	49
5.5.2 Geometric Interpretation	50
5.6 Vector Multiplication by a Scalar.	51
5.6.1 Official Linear Algebra Rules	51
5.6.2 Geometric Interpretation	52
5.7 Normalized Vectors	53
5.7.1 Official Linear Algebra Rules	53
5.7.2 Geometric Interpretation	53
5.8 Vector Addition and Subtraction	54
5.8.1 Official Linear Algebra Rules	54
5.8.2 Geometric Interpretation	55
5.8.3 Vector from One Point to Another.	57
5.9 The Distance Formula.	57
5.10 Vector Dot Product.	58
5.10.1 Official Linear Algebra Rules	58
5.10.2 Geometric Interpretation	59
5.10.3 Projecting One Vector onto Another	61
5.11 Vector Cross Product.	62
5.11.1 Official Linear Algebra Rules	62
5.11.2 Geometric Interpretation	62
5.12 Linear Algebra Identities	65
5.13 Exercises	67
Chapter 6 A Simple 3D Vector Class.	69
6.1 Class Interface.	69
6.2 Class Vector3 Definition	70
6.3 Design Decisions	73
6.3.1 Floats vs. Doubles	73
6.3.2 Operator Overloading	73

6.3.3 Provide Only the Most Important Operations	74
6.3.4 Don't Overload Too Many Operators	74
6.3.5 Use Const Member Functions	75
6.3.6 Use Const & Arguments	75
6.3.7 Member vs. Nonmember Functions	75
6.3.8 No Default Initialization	77
6.3.9 Don't Use Virtual Functions	77
6.3.10 Don't Use Information Hiding	77
6.3.11 Global Zero Vector Constant	78
6.3.12 No "point3" Class	78
6.3.13 A Word on Optimization	78
Chapter 7 Introduction to Matrices	83
7.1 Matrix — A Mathematical Definition	83
7.1.1 Matrix Dimensions and Notation	83
7.1.2 Square Matrices	84
7.1.3 Vectors as Matrices	85
7.1.4 Transposition	85
7.1.5 Multiplying a Matrix with a Scalar	86
7.1.6 Multiplying Two Matrices	86
7.1.7 Multiplying a Vector and a Matrix	89
7.1.8 Row vs. Column Vectors	90
7.2 Matrix — A Geometric Interpretation	91
7.2.1 How Does a Matrix Transform Vectors?	92
7.2.2 What Does a Matrix Look Like?	93
7.2.3 Summary	97
7.3 Exercises	98
Chapter 8 Matrices and Linear Transformations	101
8.1 Transforming an Object vs. Transforming the Coordinate Space	102
8.2 Rotation	105
8.2.1 Rotation in 2D	105
8.2.2 3D Rotation about Cardinal Axes	106
8.2.3 3D Rotation about an Arbitrary Axis	109
8.3 Scale	112
8.3.1 Scaling along Cardinal Axes	112
8.3.2 Scale in an Arbitrary Direction	113
8.4 Orthographic Projection	115
8.4.1 Projecting onto a Cardinal Axis or Plane	116
8.4.2 Projecting onto an Arbitrary Line or Plane	117
8.5 Reflection	117
8.6 Shearing	118
8.7 Combining Transformations	119
8.8 Classes of Transformations	120
8.8.1 Linear Transformations	121
8.8.2 Affine Transformations	122

8.8.3 Invertible Transformations	122
8.8.4 Angle-preserving Transformations	122
8.8.5 Orthogonal Transformations	122
8.8.6 Rigid Body Transformations	123
8.8.7 Summary of Types of Transformations	123
8.9 Exercises	124
Chapter 9 More on Matrices	125
9.1 Determinant of a Matrix	125
9.1.1 Official Linear Algebra Rules	125
9.1.2 Geometric Interpretation	129
9.2 Inverse of a Matrix	130
9.2.1 Official Linear Algebra Rules	130
9.2.2 Geometric Interpretation	132
9.3 Orthogonal Matrices	132
9.3.1 Official Linear Algebra Rules	132
9.3.2 Geometric Interpretation	133
9.3.3 Orthogonalizing a Matrix	134
9.4 4×4 Homogenous Matrices	135
9.4.1 4D Homogenous Space	136
9.4.2 4×4 Translation Matrices	137
9.4.3 General Affine Transformations	140
9.4.4 Perspective Projection	141
9.4.5 A Pinhole Camera	142
9.4.6 Perspective Projection Using 4×4 Matrices	145
9.5 Exercises	146
Chapter 10 Orientation and Angular Displacement in 3D	147
10.1 What is Orientation?	148
10.2 Matrix Form	149
10.2.1 Which Matrix?	150
10.2.2 Advantages of Matrix Form	150
10.2.3 Disadvantages of Matrix Form	151
10.2.4 Summary	152
10.3 Euler Angles	153
10.3.1 What are Euler Angles?	153
10.3.2 Other Euler Angle Conventions	155
10.3.3 Advantages of Euler Angles	156
10.3.4 Disadvantages of Euler Angles	156
10.3.5 Summary	159
10.4 Quaternions	159
10.4.1 Quaternion Notation	160
10.4.2 Quaternions as Complex Numbers	160
10.4.3 Quaternions as an Axis-Angle Pair	162
10.4.4 Quaternion Negation	163
10.4.5 Identity Quaternion(s)	163

10.4.6 Quaternion Magnitude	163
10.4.7 Quaternion Conjugate and Inverse	164
10.4.8 Quaternion Multiplication (Cross Product)	165
10.4.9 Quaternion “Difference”	168
10.4.10 Quaternion Dot Product	169
10.4.11 Quaternion Log, Exp, and Multiplication by a Scalar	169
10.4.12 Quaternion Exponentiation	171
10.4.13 Quaternion Interpolation — aka “Slerp”	173
10.4.14 Quaternion Splines — aka “Squad”	177
10.4.15 Advantages/Disadvantages of Quaternions	178
10.5 Comparison of Methods	179
10.6 Converting between Representations	180
10.6.1 Converting Euler Angles to a Matrix	180
10.6.2 Converting a Matrix to Euler Angles	182
10.6.3 Converting a Quaternion to a Matrix	185
10.6.4 Converting a Matrix to a Quaternion	187
10.6.5 Converting Euler Angles to a Quaternion	190
10.6.6 Converting a Quaternion to Euler Angles	191
10.7 Exercises	193
Chapter 11 Transformations in C++	195
11.1 Overview	196
11.2 Class EulerAngles	198
11.3 Class Quaternion	205
11.4 Class RotationMatrix	215
11.5 Class Matrix4×3	220
Chapter 12 Geometric Primitives	239
12.1 Representation Techniques	239
12.1.1 Implicit Form	239
12.1.2 Parametric Form	240
12.1.3 “Straightforward” Forms	240
12.1.4 Degrees of Freedom	241
12.2 Lines and Rays	241
12.2.1 Two Points Representation	242
12.2.2 Parametric Representation of Rays	242
12.2.3 Special 2D Representations of Lines	243
12.2.4 Converting between Representations	245
12.3 Spheres and Circles	246
12.4 Bounding Boxes	247
12.4.1 Representing AABBs	248
12.4.2 Computing AABBs	249
12.4.3 AABBs vs. Bounding Spheres	250
12.4.4 Transforming AABBs	251
12.5 Planes	252
12.5.1 Implicit Definition — The Plane Equation	252

12.5.2 Definition Using Three Points	253
12.5.3 “Best-fit” Plane for More Than Three Points.	254
12.5.4 Distance from Point to Plane	256
12.6 Triangles	257
12.6.1 Basic Properties of a Triangle.	257
12.6.2 Area of a Triangle	258
12.6.3 Barycentric Space	260
12.6.4 Special Points	267
12.7 Polygons	269
12.7.1 Simple vs. Complex Polygons	269
12.7.2 Self-intersecting Polygons	270
12.7.3 Convex vs. Concave Polygons	271
12.7.4 Triangulation and Fanning	274
12.8 Exercises	275
Chapter 13 Geometric Tests	277
13.1 Closest Point on 2D Implicit Line	277
13.2 Closest Point on Parametric Ray	278
13.3 Closest Point on Plane	279
13.4 Closest Point on Circle/Sphere.	280
13.5 Closest Point in AABB.	280
13.6 Intersection Tests	281
13.7 Intersection of Two Implicit Lines in 2D	282
13.8 Intersection of Two Rays in 3D	283
13.9 Intersection of Ray and Plane	284
13.10 Intersection of AABB and Plane	285
13.11 Intersection of Three Planes	286
13.12 Intersection of Ray and Circle/Sphere	286
13.13 Intersection of Two Circles/Spheres	288
13.14 Intersection of Sphere and AABB	291
13.15 Intersection of Sphere and Plane	291
13.16 Intersection of Ray and Triangle	293
13.17 Intersection of Ray and AABB	297
13.18 Intersection of Two AABBs	297
13.19 Other Tests.	299
13.20 Class AABB3	300
13.21 Exercises.	316
Chapter 14 Triangle Meshes.	319
14.1 Representing Meshes	320
14.1.1 Indexed Triangle Mesh	320
14.1.2 Advanced Techniques	322
14.1.3 Specialized Representations for Rendering.	322
14.1.4 Vertex Caching	323
14.1.5 Triangle Strips	323
14.1.6 Triangle Fans	327

14.2 Additional Mesh Information	328
14.2.1 Texture Mapping Coordinates.	328
14.2.2 Surface Normals.	328
14.2.3 Lighting Values	330
14.3 Topology and Consistency	330
14.4 Triangle Mesh Operations	331
14.4.1 Piecewise Operations	331
14.4.2 Welding Vertices.	331
14.4.3 Detaching Faces	334
14.4.4 Edge Collapse	335
14.4.5 Mesh Decimation	335
14.5 A C++ Triangle Mesh Class	336
Chapter 15 3D Math for Graphics	345
15.1 Graphics Pipeline Overview	346
15.2 Setting the View Parameters	349
15.2.1 Specifying the Output Window	349
15.2.2 Pixel Aspect Ratio.	350
15.2.3 The View Frustum.	351
15.2.4 Field of View and Zoom.	351
15.3 Coordinate Spaces	354
15.3.1 Modeling and World Space	354
15.3.2 Camera Space	354
15.3.3 Clip Space	355
15.3.4 Screen Space.	357
15.4 Lighting and Fog	358
15.4.1 Math on Colors	359
15.4.2 Light Sources	360
15.4.3 The Standard Lighting Equation — Overview	361
15.4.4 The Specular Component	362
15.4.5 The Diffuse Component.	365
15.4.6 The Ambient Component	366
15.4.7 Light Attenuation	366
15.4.8 The Lighting Equation — Putting It All Together	367
15.4.9 Fog.	368
15.4.10 Flat Shading and Gouraud Shading	370
15.5 Buffers	372
15.6 Texture Mapping	373
15.7 Geometry Generation/Delivery	374
15.7.1 LOD Selection and Procedural Modeling.	375
15.7.2 Delivery of Geometry to the API	375
15.8 Transformation and Lighting.	377
15.8.1 Transformation to Clip Space	378
15.8.2 Vertex Lighting	378
15.9 Backface Culling and Clipping.	380

15.9.1 Backface Culling	380
15.9.2 Clipping	381
15.10 Rasterization.	383
Chapter 16 Visibility Determination.	385
16.1 Bounding Volume Tests	386
16.1.1 Testing Against the View Frustum	387
16.1.2 Testing for Occlusion	390
16.2 Space Partitioning Techniques	390
16.3 Grid Systems	392
16.4 Quadtrees and Octrees	393
16.5 BSP Trees	398
16.5.1 “Old School” BSPs	400
16.5.2 Arbitrary Dividing Planes	401
16.6 Occlusion Culling Techniques	402
16.6.1 Potentially Visible Sets	402
16.6.2 Portal Techniques	403
Chapter 17 Afterword	407
Appendix A Math Review.	409
Summation Notation	409
Angles, Degrees, and Radians	409
Trig Functions	410
Trig Identities	413
Appendix B References.	415
Index	417

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 What is 3D Math?

This book is about 3D math, the study of the mathematics behind the geometry of a 3D world. 3D math is related to computational geometry, which deals with solving geometric problems algorithmically. 3D math and computational geometry have applications in a wide variety of fields that use computers to model or reason about the world in 3D, such as graphics, games, simulation, robotics, virtual reality, and cinematography.

This book covers theory and practice in C++. The “theory” part is an explanation of the relationship between math and geometry in 3D. It also serves as a handy reference for techniques and equations. The “practice” part illustrates how these concepts can be applied in code. The programming language used is C++, but in principle, the theoretical techniques from this book can be applied in any programming language.

This book *is not* just about computer graphics, simulation, or even computational geometry. However, if you plan to study those subjects, you will definitely need the information in this book.

1.2 Why You Should Read This Book

If you want to learn about 3D math in order to program games or graphics, then this book is for you. There are many books out there that promise to teach you how to make a game or put cool pictures up on the screen, so why should you read *this* particular book? This book offers several unique advantages over other books about games or graphics programming:

- **A unique topic.** This book fills a gap that has been left by other books on graphics, linear algebra, simulation, and programming. It is an *introductory* book, meaning we have focused our efforts on providing thorough coverage on fundamental 3D concepts — topics that are normally glossed over in a few quick pages or relegated to an appendix in other publications (because, after all, you already know all this stuff). Our book is definitely the book you should read *first*, before buying that “Write a 3D Video Game in 21 Days” book. This book is not only an introductory book, it is also a reference book — a “toolbox” of equations and techniques that you can browse through on a first reading and then revisit when the need for a specific tool arises.

- **A unique approach.** We take a three-pronged approach to the subject matter: *math*, *geometry*, and *code*. The *math* part is the equations and numbers. This is where most books stop. Of course, the math is important, but to make it powerful, you have to have good intuition about how the math connects with the *geometry*. We will show you not just one but *multiple* ways to relate the numbers with the geometry on a variety of subjects, such as orientation in 3D, matrix multiplication, and quaternions. After the intuition comes the implementation; the *code* part is the practical part. We show real usable code that makes programming 3D math as easy as possible.
- **Unique authors.** Our combined experience brings together academic authority with in-the-trenches practical advice. Fletcher Dunn has six years of professional game programming experience and several titles under his belt on a variety of gaming platforms. He is currently employed as the principal programmer at Terminal Reality and is the lead programmer on *BloodRayne*. Dr. Ian Parberry has 18 years of experience in research and teaching in academia. This is his sixth book, his third on game programming. He is currently a tenured full professor in the Department of Computer Sciences at the University of North Texas. He is nationally known as one of the pioneers of game programming in higher education and has been teaching game programming to undergraduates at the University of North Texas since 1993.
- **Unique pictures.** You cannot learn about a subject like 3D by just reading text or looking at equations. You need pictures, and this book has plenty of them. Flipping through, you will notice that in many sections there is one on almost every page. In other words, we don't just *tell* you something about 3D math, we *show* you. You'll also notice that pictures often appear beside equations or code. Again, this is a result of our unique approach that combines mathematical theory, geometric intuition, and practical implementation.
- **Unique code.** Unlike the code in some other books, the classes in this book are not designed to provide every possible operation you could ever want. They *are* designed to perform specific functions very well and to be easy to understand and difficult to misuse. Because of their simple and focused semantics, you can write a line of code and have it work the *first* time, without twiddling minus signs, swapping sines and cosines, transposing matrices, or otherwise employing "random engineering" until it looks right. Many other books exhibit a common class design flaw of providing *every* possible operation when only a few are actually useful.
- **A unique writing style.** Our style is informal and entertaining, but formal and precise when clarity is important. Our goal is not to amuse you with unrelated anecdotes, but to engage you with interesting examples.
- **A unique web page.** This book does not come with a CD. CDs are expensive and cannot be updated once they are released. Instead, we have created a companion web page, gamemath.com. There you will be able to experience interactive demos of some of the concepts that are the hardest to grasp from text and diagrams. You can also download the code (including any bug fixes!) and other useful utilities, find the answers to the exercises, and check out links to other sites concerning 3D math, graphics, and programming.

1.3 What You Should Know Before Reading This Book

The *theory* part of this book assumes a prior knowledge of basic algebra and geometry, such as:

- Manipulating algebraic expressions
- Algebraic laws, such as the associative and distributive laws
- Functions and variables
- Basic 2D Euclidian geometry

In addition, some prior exposure to trigonometry is useful, but not required. A brief review of some key mathematical concepts is included in Appendix A.

For the *practice* part, you need to understand some basics of programming in C++:

- Program flow control constructs
- Functions and parameters
- Object-oriented programming and class design

No specific compiler or target platform is assumed. No “advanced” C++ language features are used. The few language features that you may be unfamiliar with, such as operator overloading and reference arguments, will be explained as they are needed.

1.4 Overview

- **Chapter 1** is the introduction, which you have almost finished reading. Hopefully, it has explained for whom this book is written and why we think you should read the rest of it.
- **Chapter 2** explains the Cartesian coordinate system in 2D and 3D and discusses how the Cartesian coordinate system is used to locate points in space.
- **Chapter 3** discusses examples of coordinate spaces and how they are nested in a hierarchy.
- **Chapter 4** introduces vectors and explains the geometric and mathematical interpretations of vectors.
- **Chapter 5** discusses mathematical operations on vectors and explains the geometric interpretation of each operation.
- **Chapter 6** provides a usable C++ 3D vector class.
- **Chapter 7** introduces matrices from a mathematical and geometric perspective and shows how matrices can be used to perform linear transformations.
- **Chapter 8** discusses different types of linear transformations and their corresponding matrices in detail.
- **Chapter 9** covers a few more interesting and useful properties of matrices.
- **Chapter 10** discusses different techniques for representing orientation and angular displacement in 3D.

- **Chapter 11** provides C++ classes for performing the math from Chapters 7 to 10.
- **Chapter 12** introduces a number of geometric primitives and discusses how to represent and manipulate them mathematically.
- **Chapter 13** presents an assortment of useful tests that can be performed on geometric primitives.
- **Chapter 14** discusses how to store and manipulate triangle meshes and presents a C++ class designed to hold triangle meshes.
- **Chapter 15** is a survey of computer graphics with special emphasis on key mathematical points.
- **Chapter 16** discusses a number of techniques for visibility determination, an important issue in computer graphics.
- **Chapter 17** reminds you to visit our web page and gives some suggestions for further reading.



Chapter 2

The Cartesian Coordinate System

This chapter describes the basic concepts of 3D math. It is divided into three main sections.

- Section 2.1 is about 1D mathematics, the mathematics of counting and measuring. The main concepts introduced are:
 - ◆ The math concepts of natural numbers, integers, rational numbers, and real numbers.
 - ◆ The relationship between the naturals, integers, rationals and reals on one hand and the programming language concepts of **short**, **int**, **float**, and **double** on the other hand.
 - ◆ The First Law of Computer Graphics.
- Section 2.2 introduces 2D Cartesian mathematics, the mathematics of flat surfaces. The main concepts introduced are:
 - ◆ The 2D Cartesian plane
 - ◆ The origin
 - ◆ The x - and y -axes
 - ◆ Orienting the axes in 2D
 - ◆ Locating a point in 2D space using Cartesian (x,y) coordinates
- Section 2.3 extends 2D Cartesian math into 3D. The main concepts introduced are:
 - ◆ The z -axis
 - ◆ The xy , xz , and yz planes
 - ◆ Locating a point in 3D space using Cartesian (x,y,z) coordinates
 - ◆ Left- and right-handed coordinate systems

3D math is all about measuring locations, distances, and angles precisely and mathematically in 3D space. The most frequently used framework to perform such measurements is called the *Cartesian coordinate system*. Cartesian mathematics was invented by, and named after, a brilliant French philosopher, physicist, physiologist, and mathematician named René Descartes who lived

from 1596 to 1650. Descartes is not just famous for inventing Cartesian mathematics, which at the time was a stunning unification of algebra and geometry. He is also well known for taking a pretty good stab at answering the question “How do I know something is true?” This question has kept generations of philosophers happily employed and does not necessarily involve dead sheep (which will disturbingly be a central feature of the next section), unless you really want it to. Descartes rejected the answers proposed by the ancient Greeks, which are *ethos* (roughly, “because I told you so”), *pathos* (“because it would be nice”), and *logos* (“because it makes sense”), and set about figuring it out for himself with a pencil and paper.

2.1 1D Mathematics

You’re reading this book because you want to know about 3D mathematics, so you’re probably wondering why we’re bothering to talk about 1D math. Well, there are a couple of issues about number systems and counting that we would like to clear up before we get to 3D.



Figure 2.1: One dead sheep

Natural numbers, often called *counting numbers*, were invented millennia ago, probably to keep track of dead sheep. The concept of “one sheep” came easily (see Figure 2.1), then “two sheep” and “three sheep,” but people very quickly became convinced that this was too much work. They gave up counting at some point and invariably began using “many sheep.” Different cultures gave up at different points, depending on their threshold of boredom. Eventually, civilization expanded to the point where we could afford to have people sitting around thinking about numbers instead of doing more survival-oriented tasks, such as killing sheep and eating them. These savvy thinkers immortalized the concept of zero (no sheep), and while they didn’t get around to naming *all* of the natural numbers, they figured out various systems whereby we *could* name them if we really wanted to, using digits such as “1”, “2”, etc. (or if you were Roman, “M”, “X”, “I,” etc.). Mathematics was born.

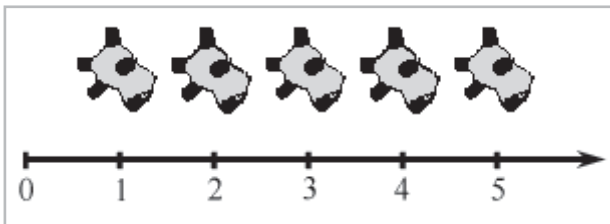


Figure 2.2: A number line for the natural numbers

The habit of lining sheep up in a row so that they can easily be counted leads to the concept of a *number line*, that is, a line with the numbers marked off at regular intervals, as in Figure 2.2. This line can, in principle, go on for as long as we wish, but to avoid boredom we have stopped at five sheep and put on an arrowhead to let you know that the line can continue. Clear thinkers can visualize it going off to infinity, but historical purveyors of dead sheep probably gave this concept little thought, outside of their dreams and fevered imaginings.

At some point in history it was probably realized that you can sometimes, if you are a particularly fast talker, sell a sheep that you don't actually own, thus, simultaneously inventing the important concepts of *debt* and *negative numbers*. Having sold this putative sheep, you would in fact own "negative one" sheep. This would lead to the discovery of *integers*, which consist of the natural numbers and their negative counterparts. The corresponding number line for integers is shown in Figure 2.3.

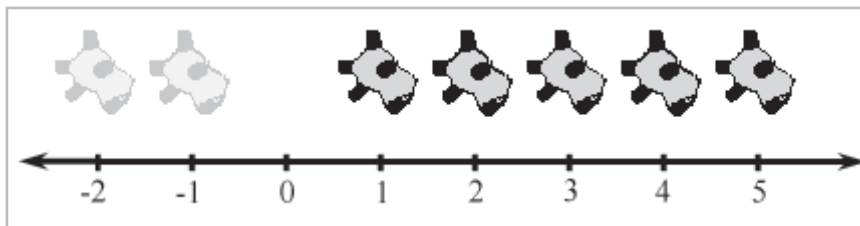


Figure 2.3: A number line for integers (note the ghost sheep for negative numbers)

The concept of poverty probably predated that of debt, leading to a growing number of people who could afford to purchase only half a dead sheep, or perhaps only a quarter. This led to a burgeoning use of fractional numbers, consisting of one integer divided by another, such as $2/3$ or $111/27$. Mathematicians called these *rational numbers*, and they fit in the number line in the obvious places between the integers. At some point, people became lazy and invented decimal notation, like writing "3.1415" instead of the longer and more tedious $31415/10000$.

After a while, it was noticed that some numbers that appear to turn up in everyday life are not expressible as rational numbers. The classic example is the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter, usually denoted as π (pronounced "pi"). These are the so-called *real numbers*, which include rational numbers and numbers such as π that would, if expressed in decimal form, require an infinite number of decimal places. The mathematics of real numbers is regarded by many to be the most important area of mathematics, and since it is the basis for most forms of engineering, it can be credited with creating much of modern civilization. The cool thing about real numbers is that while rational numbers are countable (that is, placed into one-to-one correspondence with the natural numbers), real numbers are uncountable. The study of natural numbers and integers is called *discrete mathematics*, and the study of real numbers is called *continuous mathematics*.

The truth is, however, that real numbers are nothing more than a polite fiction. They are a relatively harmless delusion, as any reputable physicist will tell you. The universe seems to be not only discrete, but also finite. If there are a finite amount of discrete things in the universe, as currently appears to be the case, then it follows that we can only count to a certain fixed number. Thereafter, we run out of things to count — not only do we run out of dead sheep, but toasters, mechanics, and telephone sanitizers also. It follows that we can describe the universe using only

discrete mathematics, and requiring the use of only a finite subset of the natural numbers at that. (Large, yes, but finite.) Somewhere there may be an alien civilization with a level of technology exceeding ours that has never heard of continuous mathematics, the Fundamental Theorem of Calculus, or even the concept of infinity; even if we persist, they will firmly but politely insist on having no truck with π , being perfectly happy to build toasters, bridges, skyscrapers, mass transit, and starships using 3.14159 (or perhaps 3.1415926535897932384626433832795, if they are fastidious) instead.

So why do we use continuous mathematics? It is a useful tool that allows us to do engineering, but the real world is, despite the cognitive dissonance involved in using the term “real,” discrete. How does that affect you, the designer of a 3D computer-generated virtual reality? The computer is by its very nature discrete and finite, and you are more likely to run into the consequences of the discreteness and finiteness during its creation than you are likely to in the real world. C++ gives you a variety of different number forms that you can use for counting or measuring in your virtual world. These are the **short**, the **int**, the **float** and the **double**, which can be described as follows (assuming the current PC technology). The **short** is a 16-bit integer that can store 65,536 different values, which means that “many sheep” for a 16-bit computer is 65,537. This sounds like a lot of sheep, but it isn’t adequate for measuring distances inside any reasonable kind of virtual reality that take people more than a few minutes to explore. The **int** is a 32-bit integer that can store up to 4,294,967,296 different values, which is probably enough for your purposes. The **float** is a 32-bit value that can store a subset of the rationals — 4,294,967,296 of them, the details not being important here. The **double** is similar, though using 64 bits instead of 32. We will return to this discussion in Section 6.3.1.

The bottom line in choosing to count and measure in your virtual world using **ints**, **floats**, or **doubles** is not, as some misguided people would have it, a matter of choosing between discrete **shorts** and **ints** versus continuous **floats** and **doubles**. It is more a matter of precision. They are all discrete in the end. Older books on computer graphics will advise you to use integers because floating-point hardware is slower than integer hardware, but this is no longer the case. So which should you choose? At this point, it is probably best to introduce you to the First Law of Computer Graphics and leave you to think about it:

The First Law of Computer Graphics: If it looks right, it *is* right.

We will be doing a large amount of trigonometry in this book. Trigonometry involves real numbers, such as π , and real-valued functions, such as sine and cosine (which we’ll get to later). Real numbers are a convenient fiction, so we will continue to use them. How do you know this is true? You know because, Descartes notwithstanding, we told you so, because it would be nice, and because it makes sense.

2.2 2D Cartesian Mathematics

You have probably used 2D Cartesian coordinate systems even if you have never heard the term *Cartesian* before. *Cartesian* is mostly just a fancy word for rectangular. If you have ever looked at the floor plans of a house, used a street map, seen a football game, or played chess, you have been exposed to 2D Cartesian coordinate space.

2.2.1 An Example: The Hypothetical City of Cartesia

Let's imagine a fictional city named Cartesia. When the Cartesia city planners were laying out the streets, they were very particular, as illustrated in the map of Cartesia in Figure 2.4.

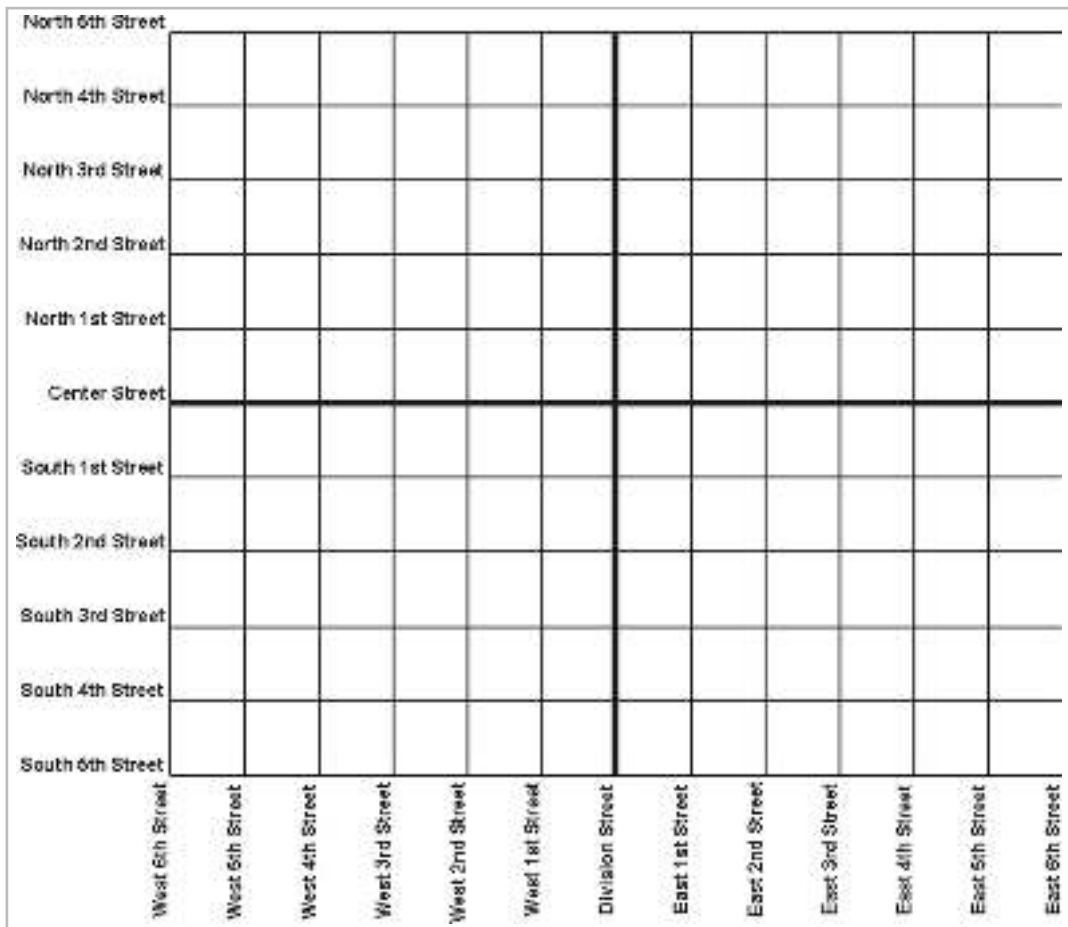


Figure 2.4: Map of the hypothetical city of Cartesia

As you can see from the map, Center Street runs east-west through the middle of town. All other east-west streets (parallel to Center Street) are named based on whether they are north or south of Center Street and how far away they are from Center Street. Examples of streets which run east-west are North 3rd Street and South 15th Street.

The other streets in Cartesia run north-south. Division Street runs north-south through the middle of town. All other north-south streets (parallel to Division Street) are named based on whether they are east or west of Division street, and how far away they are from Division Street. So we have streets such as East 5th Street and West 22nd Street.

The naming convention used by the city planners of Cartesia may not be creative, but it certainly is practical. Even without looking at the map, it is easy to find the doughnut shop at North 4th and West 2nd. It's also easy to determine how far you will have to drive when traveling from one place to another. For example, to go from that doughnut shop at North 4th and West 2nd to the police station at South 3rd and Division, you would travel seven blocks south and two blocks east.

2.2.2 Arbitrary 2D Coordinate Spaces

Before Cartesia was built, there was nothing but a large flat area of land. The city planners arbitrarily decided where the center of town would be, which direction to make the roads run, how far apart to space the roads, etc. Much like the Cartesia city planners laid down the city streets, we can establish a 2D Cartesian coordinate system anywhere we want — on a piece of paper, a chessboard, a chalkboard, a slab of concrete, or a football field.

Figure 2.5 shows a diagram of a 2D Cartesian coordinate system.

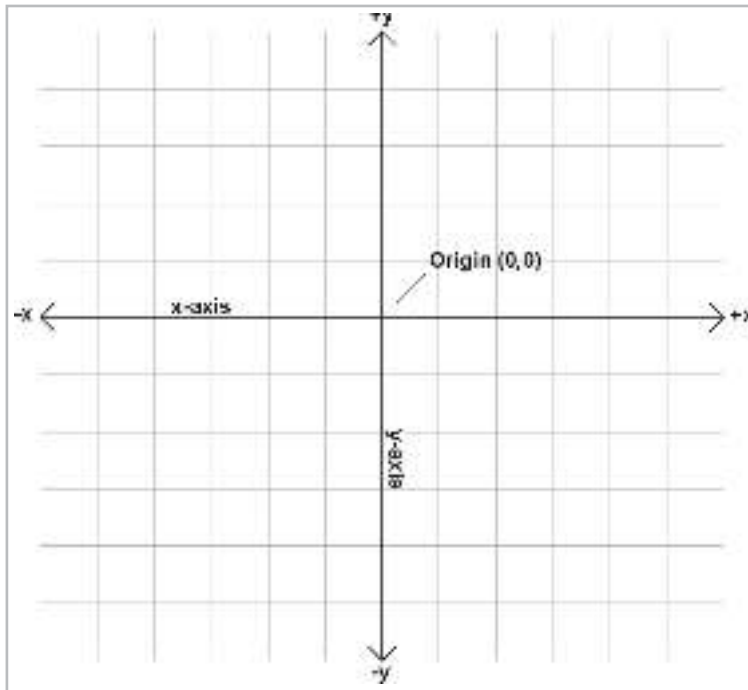


Figure 2.5: A 2D Cartesian coordinate space



As illustrated in Figure 2.5, a 2D Cartesian coordinate space is defined by two pieces of information:

- Every 2D Cartesian coordinate space has a special location, called the *origin*, which is the “center” of the coordinate system. The origin is analogous to the center of the city in Cartesia.
- Every 2D Cartesian coordinate space has two straight lines that pass through the origin. Each line is known as an *axis* and extends infinitely in two opposite directions. The two axes are perpendicular to each other. (Actually, they don’t *have* to be, but most of the coordinate systems we will look at will have perpendicular axes.) The two axes are analogous to Center and Division streets in Cartesia. The grid lines in the diagram are analogous to the other streets in Cartesia.

At this point, it is important to highlight a few significant differences between Cartesia and an abstract mathematical 2D space:

- The city of Cartesia has official city limits. Land outside of the city limits is not considered part of Cartesia. A 2D coordinate space, however, extends infinitely. Even though we usually only concern ourselves with a small area within the plane defined by the coordinate space, this plane, in theory, is boundless. In addition, the roads in Cartesia only go a certain distance (perhaps to the city limits), and then they stop. Our axes and grid lines, on the other hand, each extend potentially infinitely in two directions.
- In Cartesia, the roads have thickness. Lines in an abstract coordinate space have location and (possibly infinite) length, but no real thickness.
- In Cartesia, you can only drive on the roads. In an abstract coordinate space, *every* point in the plane of the coordinate space is part of the coordinate space, not just the area on the “roads.” The grid lines are only drawn for reference.

In Figure 2.5, the horizontal axis is called the x -axis, with positive x pointing to the right. The vertical axis is the y -axis, with positive y pointing up. This is the customary orientation for the axes in a diagram. Note that “horizontal” and “vertical” are terms that are inappropriate for many 2D spaces that arise in practice. For example, imagine the coordinate space on top of a desk — both axes are “horizontal,” and neither axis is really “vertical.”

The city planners of Cartesia could have made Center Street run north-south instead of east-west. Or they could have placed it at a completely arbitrary angle. (For example, Long Island, New York is reminiscent of Cartesia, where for convenience the streets numbered “1st Street,” “2nd Street,” etc., run across the island and the avenues numbered “1st Avenue,” “2nd Avenue,” etc., run along its long axis. The geographic orientation of the long axis of the island is an arbitrary freak of nature.) In the same way, we are free to place our axes in any way that is convenient to us. We must also decide for each axis which direction we consider to be positive. For example, when working with images on a computer screen, it is customary to use the coordinate system shown in Figure 2.6. Notice that the origin is in the upper left-hand corner, $+x$ points to the right, and $+y$ points *down* rather than up.

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