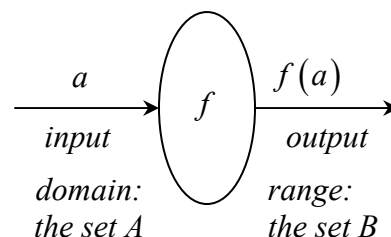


Functions in Precalculus and Beyond

Mark Barsamian, fall 2004

Definition: *function*

- Symbol: $f : A \rightarrow B$
- Spoken: “ f is a *function* from A to B ”, or “ f *maps* A to B ”
- Usage: A and B are sets. Set A is called the *domain* and set B is called the *range*.
- Meaning: f is a machine that takes, as input, an element of set A and spits out, as output, an element of set B .
- Other notation: If an element $a \in A$ is used as the input to the function f , then the symbol $f(a)$ is used to denote the corresponding output. We say that the output $f(a) \in B$ is the *image* of the input $a \in A$. In many cases, the sets A and B are sets of numbers. In such a case, we could say that the function f is a *numerical function*. We will often use a *machine diagram* – a drawing like the one to the right – to visualize a function.

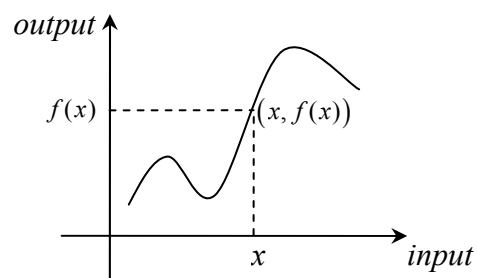


Displaying Numerical Functions on Graphs

The *horizontal axis* (formerly known as the “ x -axis”) is used for the input numbers. For this reason, we will also refer to it as the *input axis*.

The *vertical axis* (formerly known as the “ y -axis”) is used for the output numbers. For this reason, we will also refer to it as the *output axis*.

If an input $x \in A$ causes an output $f(x)$, then the point $(x, f(x))$ is on the graph, and vice-versa.



Graphs as Functions

You’re all familiar with functions that are described by mathematical equations, and you’re used to the idea that those functions have corresponding graphs. (In Math 115 this fall, we’ve been relating the behavior of these graphs to the behavior of the corresponding equations.) But now, we have a new definition of function, as a sort of “numerical machine”. Nothing in that definition requires that the function be described by an equation. In fact, sometimes a function will be described purely in words, or by a graph. If a function is going to be described by a graph (without a corresponding equation), then we need to be sure and describe clearly how that is going to work. That is, we need to describe how the graph is going to be used as a “numerical machine”.

To interpret a graph as a function:

- Given an input number x , locate the number x on the horizontal axis of the graph.
- Go up (or down) until you hit the graph.
- Go left (or right) until you hit the vertical axis.
- There will be a number on the vertical axis at the spot where you hit. This number to be interpreted as the output, $f(x)$, that corresponds to the input x .

