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Surds and rationalising the denominator

Key points

- A surd is the square root of a number that is not a square number, for example $\sqrt{2}, \sqrt{3}, \sqrt{5},$
- Surds can be used to give the exact value for an answer.
- $\sqrt{ab} = \sqrt{a} \times \sqrt{b}$ and $\sqrt{\frac{a}{b}} = \frac{\sqrt{a}}{\sqrt{b}}$
- To rationalise the denominator means to remove the surd from the denominator of a fraction.
- To rationalise $\frac{a}{\sqrt{b}}$ you multiply the numerator and denominator by the surd $\sqrt{b}$
- To rationalise $\frac{a}{b+\sqrt{c}}$ you multiply the numerator and denominator by $b-\sqrt{c}$

Examples

Example 1 Simplify $\sqrt{50}$

$\sqrt{50} = \sqrt{25 \times 2}$	**1** Choose two factors of 50. One must be a square number
$= \sqrt{25} \times \sqrt{2}$	**2** Use the rule $\sqrt{ab} = \sqrt{a} \times \sqrt{b}$
$= 5 \times \sqrt{2}$ $= 5\sqrt{2}$	**3** Use $\sqrt{25} = 5$

Example 2 Simplify $\sqrt{147} - 2\sqrt{12}$

$\sqrt{147} - 2\sqrt{12}$ $= \sqrt{49 \times 3} - 2\sqrt{4 \times 3}$	**1** Simplify $\sqrt{147}$ and $2\sqrt{12}$. Choose two numbers that are factors of 147 and two numbers that are factors of 12. One of each pair of factors must be a square number
$= \sqrt{49} \times \sqrt{3} - 2\sqrt{4} \times \sqrt{3}$	**2** Use the rule $\sqrt{ab} = \sqrt{a} \times \sqrt{b}$
$= 7 \times \sqrt{3} - 2 \times 2 \times \sqrt{3}$	**3** Use $\sqrt{49} = 7$ and $\sqrt{4} = 2$
$= 7\sqrt{3} - 4\sqrt{3}$ $= 3\sqrt{3}$	**4** Collect like terms

Example 3 Simplify $(\sqrt{7} + \sqrt{2})(\sqrt{7} - \sqrt{2})$

$(\sqrt{7} + \sqrt{2})(\sqrt{7} - \sqrt{2})$ $= \sqrt{49} - \sqrt{7}\sqrt{2} + \sqrt{2}\sqrt{7} - \sqrt{4}$	**1** Expand the brackets. A common mistake here is to write $(\sqrt{7})^2 = 49$
$= 7 - 2$ $= 5$	**2** Collect like terms: $-\sqrt{7}\sqrt{2} + \sqrt{2}\sqrt{7}$ $= -\sqrt{7}\sqrt{2} + \sqrt{7}\sqrt{2} = 0$

Pearson

Example 4 Rationalise $\frac{1}{\sqrt{3}}$

$\frac{1}{\sqrt{3}} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{3}} \times \frac{\sqrt{3}}{\sqrt{3}}$	**1** Multiply the numerator and denominator by $\sqrt{3}$
$= \frac{1 \times \sqrt{3}}{\sqrt{9}} \quad = \frac{\sqrt{3}}{3}$	**2** Use $\sqrt{9} = 3$

Example 5 Rationalise and simplify $\frac{\sqrt{2}}{\sqrt{12}}$

$\frac{\sqrt{2}}{\sqrt{12}} = \frac{\sqrt{2}}{\sqrt{12}} \times \frac{\sqrt{12}}{\sqrt{12}}$	**1** Multiply the numerator and denominator by $\sqrt{12}$
$= \frac{\sqrt{2} \times \sqrt{4 \times 3}}{12}$	**2** Simplify $\sqrt{12}$ in the numerator. Choose two numbers that are factors of 12. One of the factors must be a square number
$= \frac{2\sqrt{2}\sqrt{3}}{12}$	**3** Use the rule $\sqrt{ab} = \sqrt{a} \times \sqrt{b}$ **4** Use $\sqrt{4} = 2$
$= \frac{\sqrt{2}\sqrt{3}}{6}$	**5** Simplify the fraction: $\frac{2}{12}$ simplifies to $\frac{1}{6}$

Example 6 Rationalise and simplify $\frac{3}{2+\sqrt{5}}$

$\frac{3}{2+\sqrt{5}} = \frac{3}{2+\sqrt{5}} \times \frac{2-\sqrt{5}}{2-\sqrt{5}}$	**1** Multiply the numerator and denominator by $2-\sqrt{5}$
$= \frac{3\left(2-\sqrt{5}\right)}{\left(2+\sqrt{5}\right)\left(2-\sqrt{5}\right)}$	**2** Expand the brackets
$= \frac{6-3\sqrt{5}}{4+2\sqrt{5}-2\sqrt{5}-5}$	**3** Simplify the fraction
$= \frac{6-3\sqrt{5}}{-1}$ $= 3\sqrt{5}-6$	**4** Divide the numerator by −1 Remember to change the sign of all terms when dividing by −1

Practice

1 Simplify.

a $\sqrt{45}$ **b** $\sqrt{125}$

c $\sqrt{48}$ **d** $\sqrt{175}$

e $\sqrt{300}$ **f** $\sqrt{28}$

g $\sqrt{72}$ **h** $\sqrt{162}$

> **Hint**
>
> One of the two numbers you choose at the start must be a square number.

2 Simplify.

a $\sqrt{72}+\sqrt{162}$ **b** $\sqrt{45}-2\sqrt{5}$

c $\sqrt{50}-\sqrt{8}$ **d** $\sqrt{75}-\sqrt{48}$

e $2\sqrt{28}+\sqrt{28}$ **f** $2\sqrt{12}-\sqrt{12}+\sqrt{27}$

> **Watch out!**
>
> Check you have chosen the highest square number at the start.

3 Expand and simplify.

a $(\sqrt{2}+\sqrt{3})(\sqrt{2}-\sqrt{3})$ **b** $(3+\sqrt{3})(5-\sqrt{12})$

c $(4-\sqrt{5})(\sqrt{45}+2)$ **d** $(5+\sqrt{2})(6-\sqrt{8})$

4 Rationalise and simplify, if possible.

a $\dfrac{1}{\sqrt{5}}$ **b** $\dfrac{1}{\sqrt{11}}$

c $\dfrac{2}{\sqrt{7}}$ **d** $\dfrac{2}{\sqrt{8}}$

e $\dfrac{2}{\sqrt{2}}$ **f** $\dfrac{5}{\sqrt{5}}$

g $\dfrac{\sqrt{8}}{\sqrt{24}}$ **h** $\dfrac{\sqrt{5}}{\sqrt{45}}$

5 Rationalise and simplify.

a $\dfrac{1}{3-\sqrt{5}}$ **b** $\dfrac{2}{4+\sqrt{3}}$ **c** $\dfrac{6}{5-\sqrt{2}}$

Extend

6 Expand and simplify $\left(\sqrt{x}+\sqrt{y}\right)\left(\sqrt{x}-\sqrt{y}\right)$

7 Rationalise and simplify, if possible.

a $\dfrac{1}{\sqrt{9}-\sqrt{8}}$ **b** $\dfrac{1}{\sqrt{x}-\sqrt{y}}$

Answers

1 **a** $3\sqrt{5}$ **b** $5\sqrt{5}$
c $4\sqrt{3}$ **d** $5\sqrt{7}$
e $10\sqrt{3}$ **f** $2\sqrt{7}$
g $6\sqrt{2}$ **h** $9\sqrt{2}$

2 **a** $15\sqrt{2}$ **b** $\sqrt{5}$
c $3\sqrt{2}$ **d** $\sqrt{3}$
e $6\sqrt{7}$ **f** $5\sqrt{3}$

3 **a** -1 **b** $9-\sqrt{3}$
c $10\sqrt{5}-7$ **d** $26-4\sqrt{2}$

4 **a** $\dfrac{\sqrt{5}}{5}$ **b** $\dfrac{\sqrt{11}}{11}$
c $\dfrac{2\sqrt{7}}{7}$ **d** $\dfrac{\sqrt{2}}{2}$
e $\sqrt{2}$ **f** $\sqrt{5}$
g $\dfrac{\sqrt{3}}{3}$ **h** $\dfrac{1}{3}$

5 **a** $\dfrac{3+\sqrt{5}}{4}$ **b** $\dfrac{2(4-\sqrt{3})}{13}$ **c** $\dfrac{6(5+\sqrt{2})}{23}$

6 $x-y$

7 **a** $3+2\sqrt{2}$ **b** $\dfrac{\sqrt{x}+\sqrt{y}}{x-y}$

Rules of indices

Key points

- $a^m \times a^n = a^{m+n}$
- $\dfrac{a^m}{a^n} = a^{m-n}$
- $(a^m)^n = a^{mn}$
- $a^0 = 1$
- $a^{\frac{1}{n}} = \sqrt[n]{a}$ i.e. the *n*th root of *a*
- $a^{\frac{m}{n}} = \sqrt[n]{a^m} = \left(\sqrt[n]{a}\right)^m$
- $a^{-m} = \dfrac{1}{a^m}$
- The square root of a number produces two solutions, e.g. $\sqrt{16} = \pm 4$.

Examples

Example 1 Evaluate 10^0

$10^0 = 1$	Any value raised to the power of zero is equal to 1

Example 2 Evaluate $9^{\frac{1}{2}}$

$9^{\frac{1}{2}} = \sqrt{9}$ $= 3$	Use the rule $a^{\frac{1}{n}} = \sqrt[n]{a}$

Example 3 Evaluate $27^{\frac{2}{3}}$

$27^{\frac{2}{3}} = \left(\sqrt[3]{27}\right)^2$ $= 3^2$ $= 9$	**1** Use the rule $a^{\frac{m}{n}} = \left(\sqrt[n]{a}\right)^m$ **2** Use $\sqrt[3]{27} = 3$

Example 4 Evaluate 4^{-2}

$4^{-2} = \dfrac{1}{4^2}$ $= \dfrac{1}{16}$	**1** Use the rule $a^{-m} = \dfrac{1}{a^m}$ **2** Use $4^2 = 16$

Example 5 Simplify $\frac{6x^5}{2x^2}$

$\frac{6x^5}{2x^2} = 3x^3$	$6 \div 2 = 3$ and use the rule $\frac{a^m}{a^n} = a^{m-n}$ to give $\frac{x^5}{x^2} = x^{5-2} = x^3$

Example 6 Simplify $\frac{x^3 \times x^5}{x^4}$

$\frac{x^3 \times x^5}{x^4} = \frac{x^{3+5}}{x^4} = \frac{x^8}{x^4}$ $= x^{8-4} = x^4$	**1** Use the rule $a^m \times a^n = a^{m+n}$ **2** Use the rule $\frac{a^m}{a^n} = a^{m-n}$

Example 7 Write $\frac{1}{3x}$ as a single power of x

$\frac{1}{3x} = \frac{1}{3}x^{-1}$	Use the rule $\frac{1}{a^m} = a^{-m}$, note that the fraction $\frac{1}{3}$ remains unchanged

Example 8 Write $\frac{4}{\sqrt{x}}$ as a single power of x

$\frac{4}{\sqrt{x}} = \frac{4}{x^{\frac{1}{2}}}$ $= 4x^{-\frac{1}{2}}$	**1** Use the rule $a^{\frac{1}{n}} = \sqrt[n]{a}$ **2** Use the rule $\frac{1}{a^m} = a^{-m}$

Practice

1 Evaluate.

a 14^0 **b** 3^0 **c** 5^0 **d** x^0

2 Evaluate.

a $49^{\frac{1}{2}}$ **b** $64^{\frac{1}{3}}$ **c** $125^{\frac{1}{3}}$ **d** $16^{\frac{1}{4}}$

3 Evaluate.

a $25^{\frac{3}{2}}$ **b** $8^{\frac{5}{3}}$ **c** $49^{\frac{3}{2}}$ **d** $16^{\frac{3}{4}}$

4 Evaluate.

a 5^{-2} **b** 4^{-3} **c** 2^{-5} **d** 6^{-2}

5 Simplify.

a $\frac{3x^2 \times x^3}{2x^2}$ **b** $\frac{10x^5}{2x^2 \times x}$ **c** $\frac{3x \times 2x^3}{2x^3}$ **d** $\frac{7x^3y^2}{14x^5y}$

e $\frac{y^2}{y^{\frac{1}{2}} \times y}$ **f** $\frac{c^{\frac{1}{2}}}{c^2 \times c^{\frac{3}{2}}}$ **g** $\frac{\left(2x^2\right)^3}{4x^0}$ **h** $\frac{x^{\frac{1}{2}} \times x^{\frac{3}{2}}}{x^{-2} \times x^3}$

6 Evaluate.

a $4^{-\frac{1}{2}}$ **b** $27^{-\frac{2}{3}}$ **c** $9^{-\frac{1}{2}} \times 2^3$

d $16^{\frac{1}{4}} \times 2^{-3}$ **e** $\left(\frac{9}{16}\right)^{-\frac{1}{2}}$ **f** $\left(\frac{27}{64}\right)^{-\frac{2}{3}}$

Watch out!

Remember that any value raised to the power of zero is 1. This is the rule $a^0 = 1$.

7 Write the following as a single power of x.

a $\frac{1}{x}$ **b** $\frac{1}{x^7}$ **c** $\sqrt[4]{x}$

d $\sqrt[5]{x^2}$ **e** $\frac{1}{\sqrt[3]{x}}$ **f** $\frac{1}{\sqrt[3]{x^2}}$

8 Write the following without negative or fractional powers.

a x^{-3} **b** x^0 **c** $x^{\frac{1}{5}}$

d $x^{\frac{2}{5}}$ **e** $x^{-\frac{1}{2}}$ **f** $x^{-\frac{3}{4}}$

9 Write the following in the form ax^n.

a $5\sqrt{x}$ **b** $\frac{2}{x^3}$ **c** $\frac{1}{3x^4}$

d $\frac{2}{\sqrt{x}}$ **e** $\frac{4}{\sqrt[3]{x}}$ **f** 3

Extend

10 Write as sums of powers of x.

a $\frac{x^5+1}{x^2}$ **b** $x^2\left(x+\frac{1}{x}\right)$ **c** $x^{-4}\left(x^2+\frac{1}{x^3}\right)$

Answers

1 **a** 1 **b** 1 **c** 1 **d** 1

2 **a** 7 **b** 4 **c** 5 **d** 2

3 **a** 125 **b** 32 **c** 343 **d** 8

4 **a** $\frac{1}{25}$ **b** $\frac{1}{64}$ **c** $\frac{1}{32}$ **d** $\frac{1}{36}$

5 **a** $\frac{3x^3}{2}$ **b** $5x^2$

c $3x$ **d** $\frac{y}{2x^2}$

e $y^{\frac{1}{2}}$ **f** c^{-3}

g $2x^6$ **h** x

6 **a** $\frac{1}{2}$ **b** $\frac{1}{9}$ **c** $\frac{8}{3}$

d $\frac{1}{4}$ **e** $\frac{4}{3}$ **f** $\frac{16}{9}$

7 **a** x^{-1} **b** x^{-7} **c** $x^{\frac{1}{4}}$

d $x^{\frac{2}{5}}$ **e** $x^{-\frac{1}{3}}$ **f** $x^{-\frac{2}{3}}$

8 **a** $\frac{1}{x^3}$ **b** 1 **c** $\sqrt[5]{x}$

d $\sqrt[5]{x^2}$ **e** $\frac{1}{\sqrt{x}}$ **f** $\frac{1}{\sqrt[4]{x^3}}$

9 **a** $5x^{\frac{1}{2}}$ **b** $2x^{-3}$ **c** $\frac{1}{3}x^{-4}$

d $2x^{-\frac{1}{2}}$ **e** $4x^{-\frac{1}{3}}$ **f** $3x^0$

10 **a** $x^3 + x^{-2}$ **b** $x^3 + x$ **c** $x^{-2} + x^{-7}$

Factorising expressions

Key points

- Factorising an expression is the opposite of expanding the brackets.
- A quadratic expression is in the form $ax^2 + bx + c$, where $a \neq 0$.
- To factorise a quadratic equation find two numbers whose sum is b and whose product is ac.
- An expression in the form $x^2 – y^2$ is called the difference of two squares. It factorises to $(x – y)(x + y)$.

Examples

Example 1 Factorise $15x^2y^3 + 9x^4y$

$15x^2y^3 + 9x^4y = 3x^2y(5y^2 + 3x^2)$	The highest common factor is $3x^2y$. So take $3x^2y$ outside the brackets and then divide each term by $3x^2y$ to find the terms in the brackets

Example 2 Factorise $4x^2 – 25y^2$

$4x^2 – 25y^2 = (2x + 5y)(2x − 5y)$	This is the difference of two squares as the two terms can be written as $(2x)^2$ and $(5y)^2$

Example 3 Factorise $x^2 + 3x – 10$

$b = 3$, $ac = −10$	**1** Work out the two factors of $ac = −10$ which add to give $b = 3$ (5 and −2)
So $x^2 + 3x – 10 = x^2 + 5x – 2x – 10$	**2** Rewrite the b term ($3x$) using these two factors
$= x(x + 5) – 2(x + 5)$	**3** Factorise the first two terms and the last two terms
$= (x + 5)(x – 2)$	**4** $(x + 5)$ is a factor of both terms

Example 4 Factorise $6x^2 - 11x - 10$

$b = -11$, $ac = -60$ So $6x^2 - 11x - 10 = 6x^2 - 15x + 4x - 10$ $= 3x(2x - 5) + 2(2x - 5)$ $= (2x - 5)(3x + 2)$	**1** Work out the two factors of $ac = -60$ which add to give $b = -11$ (-15 and 4) **2** Rewrite the b term ($-11x$) using these two factors **3** Factorise the first two terms and the last two terms **4** $(2x - 5)$ is a factor of both terms

Example 5 Simplify $\frac{x^2 - 4x - 21}{2x^2 + 9x + 9}$

$\frac{x^2 - 4x - 21}{2x^2 + 9x + 9}$	**1** Factorise the numerator and the denominator
For the numerator: $b = -4$, $ac = -21$ So $x^2 - 4x - 21 = x^2 - 7x + 3x - 21$ $= x(x - 7) + 3(x - 7)$ $= (x - 7)(x + 3)$	**2** Work out the two factors of $ac = -21$ which add to give $b = -4$ (-7 and 3) **3** Rewrite the b term ($-4x$) using these two factors **4** Factorise the first two terms and the last two terms **5** $(x - 7)$ is a factor of both terms
For the denominator: $b = 9$, $ac = 18$ So $2x^2 + 9x + 9 = 2x^2 + 6x + 3x + 9$ $= 2x(x + 3) + 3(x + 3)$ $= (x + 3)(2x + 3)$	**6** Work out the two factors of $ac = 18$ which add to give $b = 9$ (6 and 3) **7** Rewrite the b term ($9x$) using these two factors **8** Factorise the first two terms and the last two terms **9** $(x + 3)$ is a factor of both terms
So $\frac{x^2 - 4x - 21}{2x^2 + 9x + 9} = \frac{(x-7)(x+3)}{(x+3)(2x+3)}$ $= \frac{x-7}{2x+3}$	**10** $(x + 3)$ is a factor of both the numerator and denominator so cancels out as a value divided by itself is 1

Practice

1 Factorise.

a $6x^4y^3 - 10x^3y^4$ **b** $21a^3b^5 + 35a^5b^2$

c $25x^2y^2 - 10x^3y^2 + 15x^2y^3$

Hint

Take the highest common factor outside the bracket.

2 Factorise

a $x^2 + 7x + 12$ **b** $x^2 + 5x - 14$

c $x^2 - 11x + 30$ **d** $x^2 - 5x - 24$

e $x^2 - 7x - 18$ **f** $x^2 + x - 20$

g $x^2 - 3x - 40$ **h** $x^2 + 3x - 28$

3 Factorise

a $36x^2 - 49y^2$ **b** $4x^2 - 81y^2$

c $18a^2 - 200b^2c^2$

4 Factorise

a $2x^2 + x - 3$ **b** $6x^2 + 17x + 5$

c $2x^2 + 7x + 3$ **d** $9x^2 - 15x + 4$

e $10x^2 + 21x + 9$ **f** $12x^2 - 38x + 20$

5 Simplify the algebraic fractions.

a $\frac{2x^2 + 4x}{x^2 - x}$ **b** $\frac{x^2 + 3x}{x^2 + 2x - 3}$

c $\frac{x^2 - 2x - 8}{x^2 - 4x}$ **d** $\frac{x^2 - 5x}{x^2 - 25}$

e $\frac{x^2 - x - 12}{x^2 - 4x}$ **f** $\frac{2x^2 + 14x}{2x^2 + 4x - 70}$

6 Simplify

a $\frac{9x^2 - 16}{3x^2 + 17x - 28}$ **b** $\frac{2x^2 - 7x - 15}{3x^2 - 17x + 10}$

c $\frac{4 - 25x^2}{10x^2 - 11x - 6}$ **d** $\frac{6x^2 - x - 1}{2x^2 + 7x - 4}$

Extend

7 Simplify $\sqrt{x^2 + 10x + 25}$

8 Simplify $\frac{(x+2)^2 + 3(x+2)^2}{x^2 - 4}$

Answers

1 **a** $2x^3y^3(3x - 5y)$ **b** $7a^3b^2(3b^3 + 5a^2)$
c $5x^2y^2(5 - 2x + 3y)$

2 **a** $(x + 3)(x + 4)$ **b** $(x + 7)(x - 2)$
c $(x - 5)(x - 6)$ **d** $(x - 8)(x + 3)$
e $(x - 9)(x + 2)$ **f** $(x + 5)(x - 4)$
g $(x - 8)(x + 5)$ **h** $(x + 7)(x - 4)$

3 **a** $(6x - 7y)(6x + 7y)$ **b** $(2x - 9y)(2x + 9y)$
c $2(3a - 10bc)(3a + 10bc)$

4 **a** $(x - 1)(2x + 3)$ **b** $(3x + 1)(2x + 5)$
c $(2x + 1)(x + 3)$ **d** $(3x - 1)(3x - 4)$
e $(5x + 3)(2x + 3)$ **f** $2(3x - 2)(2x - 5)$

5 **a** $\frac{2(x+2)}{x-1}$ **b** $\frac{x}{x-1}$
c $\frac{x+2}{x}$ **d** $\frac{x}{x+5}$
e $\frac{x+3}{x}$ **f** $\frac{x}{x-5}$

6 **a** $\frac{3x+4}{x+7}$ **b** $\frac{2x+3}{3x-2}$
c $\frac{2-5x}{2x-3}$ **d** $\frac{3x+1}{x+4}$

7 $(x + 5)$

8 $\frac{4(x+2)}{x-2}$