

INTRODUCTION TO AUTOMATA THEORY, LANGUAGES, AND COMPUTATION

JOHN E. HOPCROFT
JEFFREY D. ULLMAN



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JOHN E. HOPCROFT
Cornell University

JEFFREY D. ULLMAN
Princeton University



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PRELIMINARIES

In this chapter we survey the principal mathematical ideas necessary for understanding the material in this book. These concepts include graphs, trees, sets, relations, strings, abstract languages, and mathematical induction. We also provide a brief introduction to, and motivation for, the entire work. The reader with a background in the mathematical subjects mentioned can skip to Section 1.6 for motivational remarks.

1.1 STRINGS, ALPHABETS, AND LANGUAGES

A “symbol” is an abstract entity that we shall not define formally, just as “point” and “line” are not defined in geometry. Letters and digits are examples of frequently used symbols. A *string* (or *word*) is a **finite** sequence of symbols juxtaposed. For example, a , b , and c are symbols and $abcb$ is a string. The *length* of a string w , denoted $|w|$, is the number of symbols composing the string. For example, $abcb$ has length 4. The empty string, denoted by ϵ , is the string consisting of zero symbols. Thus $|\epsilon| = 0$.

A *prefix* of a string is any number of leading symbols of that string, and a *suffix* is any number of trailing symbols. For example, string abc has prefixes ϵ , a , ab , and abc ; its suffixes are ϵ , c , bc , and abc . A prefix or suffix of a string, other than the string itself, is called a *proper* prefix or suffix.

The *concatenation* of two strings is the string formed by writing the first, followed by the second, with no intervening space. For example, the concatenation of *dog* and *house* is *doghouse*. Juxtaposition is used as the concatenation operator. That is, if w and x are strings, then wx is the concatenation of these two