

Complex Analysis and its Applications to Linear Algebra

A self-contained introduction

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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter develops a short but self-contained introduction to complex analysis, with a single goal in mind: arriving at the **spectral projector** formula

$$\Pi_\mu = \frac{1}{2\pi i} \oint_\gamma R_A(z) dz, \quad (1)$$

which extracts the projector onto an eigenspace of a matrix A from a contour integral of its resolvent. Along the way we will build genuine geometric and analytic intuition — not just formulas.

The central thread is a remarkable rigidity phenomenon. A function $f : \mathbb{R} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ can be differentiable everywhere without having a power series representation. A function $f : \mathbb{C} \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$ that is differentiable everywhere in the complex sense is **automatically** a power series. This single fact — whose proof runs through Stokes' theorem and Cauchy's formula — is what makes complex analysis so powerful.

Roadmap. We proceed in five steps:

1. **Holomorphic functions** — what complex differentiability means geometrically (§2)
2. **Contour integrals** — integrating along curves in \mathbb{C} (§3)
3. **Stokes' theorem** — why holomorphic functions have zero loop integrals (§4)
4. **Cauchy's formula** — boundary data determines interior values (§5)
5. **Application to linear algebra** — the spectral projector (§6)

2 HOLOMORPHIC FUNCTIONS

2.1 THE GEOMETRIC MEANING OF COMPLEX DIFFERENTIABILITY

A function $f : \mathbb{R}^2 \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^2$ is differentiable at p_0 if there exists a matrix $Jf(p_0)$ — the Jacobian — such that

$$f(p_0 + h) = f(p_0) + Jf(p_0) \cdot h + o(|h|). \quad (2)$$

The Jacobian can be **any** 2×2 matrix: it could represent a rotation, a shear, a reflection, an asymmetric stretch, or any combination.

The complex plane \mathbb{C} carries extra structure that \mathbb{R}^2 does not: **multiplication**. Multiplying by a complex number $w = re^{i\theta}$ acts on \mathbb{R}^2 as simultaneous rotation by θ and scaling by r . As a matrix:

$$z \mapsto wz \quad \text{corresponds to} \quad \begin{pmatrix} a & -b \\ b & a \end{pmatrix}, \quad w = a + ib. \quad (3)$$

This is a **very** special 2×2 matrix — it has only 2 free parameters instead of 4. The extra constraint is $a_{11} = a_{22}$ and $a_{12} = -a_{21}$.

DEFINITION 2.1 — Let $\Omega \subset \mathbb{C}$ be open and $f : \Omega \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$. We say f is **holomorphic** on Ω if every point $z_0 \in \Omega$ has a neighbourhood on which f is expressible as a convergent power series:

$$f(z) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} a_n (z - z_0)^n. \quad (4)$$

INSIGHT 2.2 — Holomorphic = locally looks like multiplication by a complex number. Zooming in near any point z_0 , the function f behaves as $f(z_0 + h) \approx f(z_0) + f'(z_0) \cdot h$ where $f'(z_0) \in \mathbb{C}$ and the multiplication is **complex** multiplication — a rotation and scaling of the input displacement h . No reflections, no shears, no asymmetric stretches. \diamond

2.2 THE $\bar{\partial}$ OPERATOR AND THE CAUCHY-RIEMANN EQUATIONS

Writing $z = x + iy$, any smooth $f : \mathbb{C} \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$ can be thought of as depending on the two independent “coordinates” z and \bar{z} , since

$$x = \frac{z + \bar{z}}{2}, \quad y = \frac{z - \bar{z}}{2i}. \quad (5)$$

The chain rule gives natural differential operators in this new basis:

$$\partial_z = \frac{1}{2}(\partial_x - i\partial_y), \quad \bar{\partial} \equiv \partial_{\bar{z}} = \frac{1}{2}(\partial_x + i\partial_y). \quad (6)$$

These are not defined this way — they are **derived** from the change of variables. One checks immediately that $\partial_z(z^n) = nz^{n-1}$, $\bar{\partial}(z^n) = 0$, and $\bar{\partial}(\bar{z}) = 1$. So $\bar{\partial}$ is the “anti-holomorphic derivative” — it detects dependence on \bar{z} .

THEOREM 2.3 (CAUCHY-RIEMANN) — Let $f = u + iv$ (with u, v real-valued) be C^1 . The following are equivalent:

1. $\bar{\partial}f = 0$,
2. $\partial_x u = \partial_y v$ and $\partial_y u = -\partial_x v$ (Cauchy-Riemann equations),
3. The Jacobian Jf has the form $\begin{pmatrix} a & -b \\ b & a \end{pmatrix}$ for some $a, b \in \mathbb{R}$,
4. f is complex-differentiable at every point, with $f'(z_0) = a + ib$.

Proof. The equivalence of (1) and (2) is a direct computation: $\bar{\partial}f = \frac{1}{2}(\partial_x + i\partial_y)(u + iv) = \frac{1}{2}[(\partial_x u - \partial_y v) + i(\partial_x v + \partial_y u)]$, which is zero if and only if $\partial_x u = \partial_y v$ and $\partial_y u = -\partial_x v$.

For (2) \Leftrightarrow (3): the Jacobian is $Jf = \begin{pmatrix} \partial_x u & \partial_y u \\ \partial_x v & \partial_y v \end{pmatrix}$. The Cauchy-Riemann equations are exactly the condition $\partial_x u = \partial_y v$ and $\partial_y u = -\partial_x v$, which gives $Jf = \begin{pmatrix} a & -b \\ b & a \end{pmatrix}$ with $a = \partial_x u$, $b = \partial_x v$.

For (3) \Leftrightarrow (4): Jf of the form $\begin{pmatrix} a & -b \\ b & a \end{pmatrix}$ acts on $h = h_1 + ih_2$ as $(a + ib)(h_1 + ih_2)$ — precisely complex multiplication by $a + ib = f'(z_0)$. \square

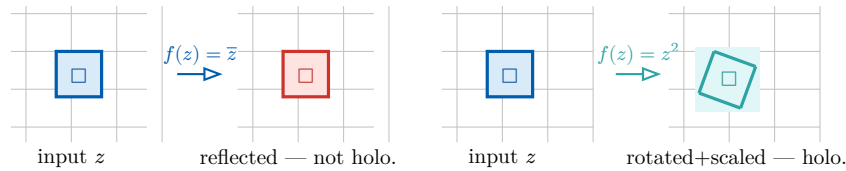


Figure 1: Left: $f(z) = \bar{z}$ reflects the plane — the Jacobian has the form $\begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & -1 \end{pmatrix}$ which is **not** of the form $\begin{pmatrix} a & -b \\ b & a \end{pmatrix}$, so it is not holomorphic. Right: $f(z) = z^2$ locally rotates and scales — Jacobian has the special form, so it is holomorphic.

2.3 EXAMPLES AND NON-EXAMPLES

The following functions are holomorphic:

- Polynomials $p(z) = a_0 + a_1z + \dots + a_nz^n$ (power series terminating after finitely many terms)
- The complex exponential $z \mapsto \exp(z) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{z^n}{n!}$
- The matrix exponential $z \mapsto \exp(zA)$ for fixed $A \in M_n(\mathbb{C})$
- The resolvent $\lambda \mapsto R_A(\lambda) = (A - \lambda I)^{-1}$, on $\mathbb{C} \setminus \text{Sp}(A)$

The following are **not** holomorphic:

- $f(z) = \bar{z}$: gives $\bar{\partial}f = 1 \neq 0$
- $f(z) = |z|^2 = z\bar{z}$: gives $\bar{\partial}f = z \neq 0$ (except at $z = 0$)
- $f(z) = \text{Re}(z) = x$: gives $\bar{\partial}f = \frac{1}{2} \neq 0$

REMARK 2.4 — $f(z) = |z|^2$ is complex-differentiable at $z = 0$ (the limit $|h \frac{|z|^2}{h} = \bar{h} \rightarrow 0$ as $h \rightarrow 0$), but nowhere else. Being differentiable at a single isolated point is **not** holomorphic — holomorphicity requires differentiability on an open neighbourhood. \diamond

3 CONTOUR INTEGRALS

3.1 DEFINITION

DEFINITION 3.1 (CONTOUR INTEGRAL) — A *contour* (or *curve*) in \mathbb{C} is a C^1 map $\gamma : [0, T] \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$. The *contour integral* of f along γ is defined by

$$\int_{\gamma} f dz := \int_0^T f(\gamma(t)) \cdot \gamma'(t) dt. \quad (7)$$

This is exactly like a real integral $\int_a^b f(x) dx$, except that:

- We sum over a **curve** in \mathbb{C} rather than a segment in \mathbb{R}
- At each point, we multiply $f(\gamma(t))$ by $\gamma'(t)$ — the **velocity** of the curve, a complex number encoding both speed and direction
- The result is a complex number

The factor $\gamma'(t) dt$ is the infinitesimal displacement dz along the curve. On a real segment $\gamma(t) = t$, we have $\gamma'(t) = 1$ and the definition reduces to an ordinary integral.

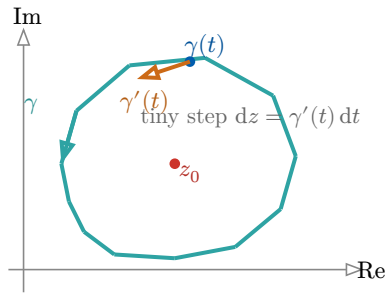


Figure 2: A contour γ in \mathbb{C} . At each point $\gamma(t)$, the velocity $\gamma'(t)$ gives the direction and speed of travel. The contour integral accumulates the products $f(\gamma(t)) \cdot \gamma'(t) dt$ — tiny complex contributions — around the whole curve.

3.2 PATH INDEPENDENCE AND CLOSED LOOPS

Two paths γ_1, γ_2 from z_0 to z_1 give the same integral when

$$\int_{\gamma_1} f dz = \int_{\gamma_2} f dz \iff \int_{\gamma_1} f dz - \int_{\gamma_2} f dz = 0. \quad (8)$$

But “ γ_1 followed by γ_2 reversed” is a **closed loop**. So path independence is equivalent to: **every closed-loop integral is zero**:

$$\oint_{\gamma} f dz = 0 \quad \text{for every closed } \gamma. \quad (9)$$

3.3 A FUNDAMENTAL EXAMPLE: THE WINDING INTEGRAL

Let $z_0 \in \mathbb{C}$ and $\gamma_\varepsilon : \theta \mapsto z_0 + \varepsilon e^{i\theta}$, $\theta \in [0, 2\pi]$ be the circle of radius ε around z_0 . Then $\gamma'_\varepsilon(\theta) = i\varepsilon e^{i\theta}$ and:

$$\oint_{\gamma_\varepsilon} \frac{1}{z - z_0} dz = \int_0^{2\pi} \frac{1}{\varepsilon e^{i\theta}} \cdot i\varepsilon e^{i\theta} d\theta = \int_0^{2\pi} i d\theta = 2\pi i. \quad (10)$$

The ε cancels completely — the answer $2\pi i$ is **independent of the radius**. This is the most important integral in complex analysis.

REMARK 3.2 — The function $\frac{1}{z - z_0}$ acts like a “vortex” centered at z_0 : it is holomorphic everywhere except at z_0 itself, and integrating around z_0 always gives $2\pi i$ regardless of the loop shape, as long as it winds once around z_0 . \diamond

4 STOKES’ THEOREM AND ZERO LOOP INTEGRALS

4.1 THE CURL AND STOKES’ THEOREM

For a vector field $\vec{A} = A_x \vec{e}_x + A_y \vec{e}_y$ on \mathbb{R}^2 , the **scalar curl** (rotationnel) measures local rotation:

$$\text{rot}(\vec{A}) = \partial_x A_y - \partial_y A_x. \quad (11)$$

Geometrically: place a tiny paddle wheel at a point in the fluid. If the flow makes it spin, the curl is nonzero there. If the flow is locally “balanced” — as much coming from one side as the other — the curl is zero and the wheel stays still.

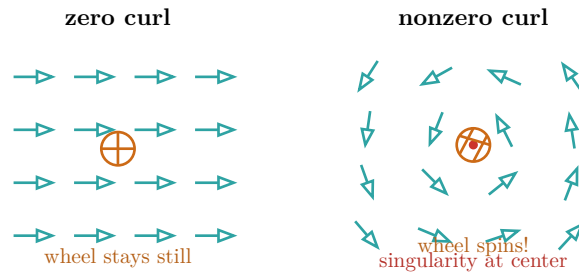


Figure 3: Left: uniform flow has zero curl — a paddle wheel placed anywhere stays still. Right: a vortex has nonzero curl — the paddle wheel spins. The curl measures local rotation of the fluid.

THEOREM 4.1 (STOKES / GREEN) — Let $\Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^2$ be a bounded open set with smooth boundary $\gamma = \partial\Omega$ (oriented counterclockwise), and $\vec{A} : \bar{\Omega} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^2$ a C^1 vector field. Then

$$\oint_{\partial\Omega} \vec{A} \cdot d\vec{T} = \iint_{\Omega} \text{rot}(\vec{A}) \, dx \, dy. \quad (12)$$

The proof idea: tile Ω by tiny squares of side ε . On each square, contributions from shared interior edges cancel (opposite orientations). What remains is the outer boundary. On each tiny square the integrand is approximately constant, giving a contribution $\approx \text{rot}(\vec{A}) \cdot \varepsilon^2$.

4.2 CONNECTING TO COMPLEX INTEGRALS

Writing the complex integral $\int_{\gamma} f \, dz$ in real coordinates with $f(x, y)$ and $\vec{A}(x, y) = f(x, y)\vec{e}_x + if(x, y)\vec{e}_y$, one computes:

$$\text{rot}(\vec{A}) = i\partial_x f - \partial_y f = i(\partial_x f + i\partial_y f) = 2i\bar{\partial}f. \quad (13)$$

PROPOSITION 4.2 — Let $f : \Omega \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$ be C^1 with $\bar{\partial}f = 0$. Then for every closed curve γ in Ω ,

$$\oint_{\gamma} f \, dz = 0. \quad (14)$$

Proof. By Stokes, $\oint_{\gamma} f \, dz = \iint_{\text{interior}} \text{rot}(\vec{A}) \, dx \, dy = \iint 2i\bar{\partial}f \, dx \, dy = 0$. \square

INSIGHT 4.3 — Why does $\bar{\partial}f = 0$ give zero loop integrals? Because holomorphic functions **locally look like rotation and scaling**. Walking around any loop and multiplying each step by a local rotation+scaling, the contributions from opposite sides of the loop cancel perfectly. Non-holomorphic functions break this symmetry — they can stretch differently in different directions, and the cancellation fails. The curl $\text{rot}(\vec{A}) = 2i\bar{\partial}f$ measures exactly this asymmetry. \diamond

4.3 THE TINY-SQUARE COMPUTATION

Let us verify the key estimate explicitly. Consider a square with corner at $z_0 = x_0 + iy_0$ and side ε . Walking counterclockwise, the four sides contribute:

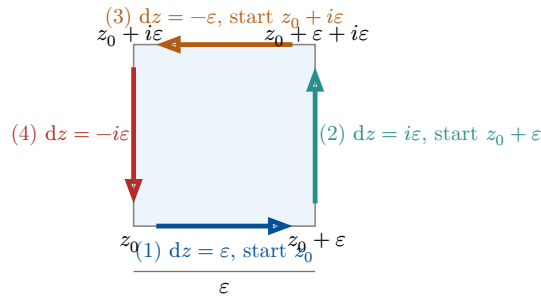


Figure 4: The four sides of a tiny square of side ε with corner at z_0 , traversed counterclockwise. Each side contributes $f(\text{corner}) \times dz$ to the contour integral.

The sum of all four contributions is:

$$f(z_0) \cdot \varepsilon + f(z_0 + \varepsilon) \cdot i\varepsilon + f(z_0 + i\varepsilon) \cdot (-\varepsilon) + f(z_0) \cdot (-i\varepsilon). \quad (15)$$

Grouping and using $f(z_0 + \varepsilon) \approx f(z_0) + \varepsilon \partial_x f$ and $f(z_0 + i\varepsilon) \approx f(z_0) + i\varepsilon \partial_y f$:

$$= \varepsilon^2 [i \partial_x f - \partial_y f] = \varepsilon^2 \cdot i (\partial_x f + i \partial_y f) = 2i\varepsilon^2 \bar{\partial} f(z_0). \quad (16)$$

So $\oint_{\partial \square} f dz \approx 2i\varepsilon^2 \bar{\partial} f(z_0)$. If $\bar{\partial} f = 0$, every square contributes zero, and the full loop integral vanishes.

5 CAUCHY'S FORMULA

5.1 STATEMENT

THEOREM 5.1 (CAUCHY'S INTEGRAL FORMULA) — Let $f : \Omega \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$ be C^1 with $\bar{\partial} f = 0$, and let $z_0 \in \Omega$. For any closed curve γ that winds once counterclockwise around z_0 and lies entirely in Ω :

$$\oint_{\gamma} \frac{f(z)}{z - z_0} dz = 2\pi i f(z_0). \quad (17)$$

Equivalently:

$$f(z_0) = \frac{1}{2\pi i} \oint_{\gamma} \frac{f(z)}{z - z_0} dz. \quad (18)$$

INSIGHT 5.2 — This formula says something astonishing: the value of a holomorphic function at a single interior point z_0 is **completely determined** by its values on the boundary loop γ . In real analysis, a function's values at interior points are independent of boundary values. For holomorphic functions, the boundary values rigidly control everything inside — like a soap film stretched across a wire loop, where the wire (boundary) determines the film's shape (interior) completely. \diamond

Proof. The function $g(z) = \frac{f(z)}{z - z_0}$ is holomorphic on $\Omega \setminus \{z_0\}$ but has a singularity at z_0 .

Step 1: deformation. Since g is holomorphic in the annular region between γ and any small circle γ_ε of radius ε around z_0 , Stokes gives:

$$\oint_{\gamma} g dz = \oint_{\gamma_{\varepsilon}} g dz. \quad (19)$$

The big loop can be shrunk to a tiny loop without changing the integral.

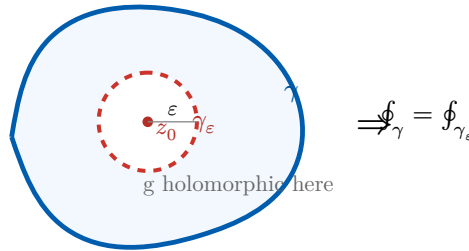


Figure 5: Deformation of contour. Since $g = f/(z - z_0)$ is holomorphic in the shaded annular region between γ and the small circle γ_{ε} , both integrals are equal. We can shrink γ to the tiny circle without changing the integral.

Step 2: approximation. On γ_{ε} , as $\varepsilon \rightarrow 0$ we have $f(z) \rightarrow f(z_0)$, so:

$$\oint_{\gamma_{\varepsilon}} \frac{f(z)}{z - z_0} dz \approx f(z_0) \oint_{\gamma_{\varepsilon}} \frac{1}{z - z_0} dz = f(z_0) \cdot 2\pi i, \quad (20)$$

where the last integral was computed explicitly in §3. The error in the approximation is $O(\varepsilon)$ and vanishes as $\varepsilon \rightarrow 0$, completing the proof. \square

5.2 FROM CAUCHY'S FORMULA TO POWER SERIES

Cauchy's formula is a **power series generator**. Fix z_0 and write w for a nearby point. Expand the Cauchy kernel in a geometric series:

$$\frac{1}{z - w} = \frac{1}{(z - z_0) - (w - z_0)} = \frac{1}{z - z_0} \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{(w - z_0)^n}{(z - z_0)^n}. \quad (21)$$

Substituting into Cauchy's formula and swapping the sum and integral (justified by uniform convergence):

$$f(w) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \underbrace{\left[\frac{1}{2\pi i} \oint_{\gamma} \frac{f(z)}{(z - z_0)^{n+1}} dz \right]}_{=: a_n} (w - z_0)^n. \quad (22)$$

This is a genuine power series for f around z_0 — proving that complex differentiability everywhere **forces** f to be a power series. This is the miracle that has no analogue in real analysis.

6 APPLICATION: THE SPECTRAL PROJECTOR

We now arrive at the linear algebra payoff. Throughout this section $A \in M_n(\mathbb{C})$.

6.1 THE RESOLVENT

DEFINITION 6.1 — The *spectrum* of A is $\text{Sp}(A) = \{\mu \in \mathbb{C} \mid A - \mu I \text{ not invertible}\}$. For $\lambda \notin \text{Sp}(A)$, the *resolvent* is

$$R_A(\lambda) = (A - \lambda I)^{-1}. \quad (23)$$

The resolvent is a matrix-valued function of λ . It is holomorphic on $\mathbb{C} \setminus \text{Sp}(A)$: by the Neumann series, for $|\lambda - \lambda_0| < 1/\|R_A(\lambda_0)\|$,

$$R_A(\lambda) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} (\lambda - \lambda_0)^n R_A(\lambda_0)^{n+1}. \quad (24)$$

The singularities of $R_A(\lambda)$ are precisely the eigenvalues of A .

6.2 THE SPECTRAL PROJECTOR

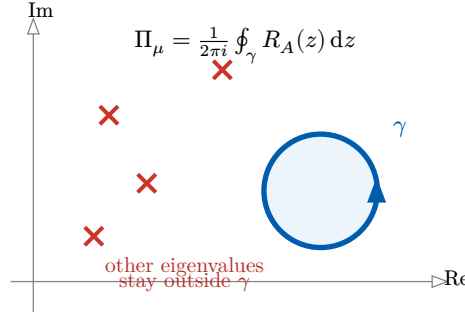


Figure 6: The contour γ winds once around the target eigenvalue μ (blue cross), while all other eigenvalues (red crosses) remain outside γ . The contour integral of the resolvent extracts the spectral projector onto the eigenspace E_μ .

PROPOSITION 6.2 (SPECTRAL PROJECTOR) — Let $A \in M_n(\mathbb{C})$ be diagonalisable, μ an eigenvalue of A , and γ a closed curve winding once counterclockwise around μ but not around any other eigenvalue. Then

$$\Pi_\mu := \frac{1}{2\pi i} \oint_\gamma R_A(z) dz \quad (25)$$

is the projector onto the eigenspace $E_\mu = \ker(A - \mu I)$, parallel to the sum of all other eigenspaces.

Proof. Since A is diagonalisable, write $A = P^{-1} \begin{pmatrix} \mu & 0 \\ 0 & D' \end{pmatrix} P$ where $\mu \notin \text{Sp}(D')$.

The resolvent block-diagonalises as:

$$R_A(z) = (A - zI)^{-1} = P^{-1} \begin{pmatrix} (\mu - z)^{-1} & 0 \\ 0 & (D' - zI)^{-1} \end{pmatrix} P. \quad (26)$$

Integrating over γ :

$$\frac{1}{2\pi i} \oint_\gamma R_A(z) dz = P^{-1} \begin{pmatrix} \frac{1}{2\pi i} \oint_\gamma \frac{dz}{\mu - z} & 0 \\ 0 & \frac{1}{2\pi i} \oint_\gamma (D' - zI)^{-1} dz \end{pmatrix} P. \quad (27)$$

Top-left block: By the winding integral of §3,

$$\frac{1}{2\pi i} \oint_\gamma \frac{dz}{\mu - z} = \frac{1}{2\pi i} \oint_\gamma \frac{dz}{\mu - z} = 1. \quad (28)$$

Bottom-right block: $(D' - zI)^{-1}$ is holomorphic inside γ (since no eigenvalue of D' lies inside γ). By Proposition 3.1, its integral over γ is zero.

Therefore:

$$\frac{1}{2\pi i} \oint_{\gamma} R_A(z) dz = P^{-1} \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix} P = \Pi_{\mu}. \blacksquare \quad (29)$$

□

6.3 THE FUNCTIONAL CALCULUS

The spectral projector is a special case of a much more general construction. For any function f holomorphic in a neighbourhood of $\text{Sp}(A)$, define:

$$f(A) = \frac{1}{2\pi i} \oint_C \frac{f(z)}{z - A} dz, \quad (30)$$

where C is any contour enclosing all of $\text{Sp}(A)$. This is the **holomorphic functional calculus**.

INSIGHT 6.3 – This extends the natural definition $f(A) = \sum a_n A^n$ (for f a power series) to **all** holomorphic f , regardless of convergence issues. Need $(I + A)^{-1}$ when $\|A\| > 1$? Write it as a contour integral. Need $\log(A)$ for a matrix with no zero eigenvalue? Use the functional calculus. The contour integral avoids all radius-of-convergence limitations. \diamond

The key properties are:

- $\text{Id}(A) = A$ (the identity function gives back A)
- $(fg)(A) = f(A)g(A)$ (multiplicativity)
- If $f(z) = \sum a_n z^n$ converges and $\|A\| < \text{radius}$, then $f(A) = \sum a_n A^n$ (consistency with power series)

7 SUMMARY: THE LOGICAL CHAIN

The whole chapter follows one thread:

$$\begin{aligned} \bar{\partial}f = 0 &\Rightarrow \text{Stokes} \Rightarrow \oint_{\gamma} f dz = 0 \Rightarrow \text{path independence} \\ &\Rightarrow \text{Cauchy} \Rightarrow f(z_0) = \frac{1}{2\pi i} \oint_{\gamma} \frac{f(z)}{z - z_0} dz \\ &\Rightarrow \text{power series} \Rightarrow \text{spectral projector } \Pi_{\mu} = \frac{1}{2\pi i} \oint_{\gamma} R_A(z) dz \end{aligned}$$

Each arrow corresponds to one section of this chapter. The geometric intuition behind each step:

Step	Formula	Geometric meaning
§2	$\bar{\partial}f = 0$	Jacobian = rotation + scaling; no shear, no reflection
§3	$\int_{\gamma} f dz$	Accumulate $f \times \text{velocity}$ along a curve in \mathbb{C}

Step	Formula	Geometric meaning
§4	$\oint f dz = 0$	Uniform rotation+scaling cancels around any loop
§5	Cauchy's formula	Boundary values rigidly determine interior values
§5	Power series	Cauchy's kernel expands into geometric series
§6	Spectral projector	Contour around μ picks out only the μ -eigenspace

The deepest insight is that $\bar{\partial}f = 0$ — “no anti-holomorphic part” — is simultaneously four things: a condition on the Jacobian matrix, an absence of curl, path independence of integrals, and the rigid link between boundary and interior values that makes the spectral projector possible.