

**POWER ROOTS OF
POLYNOMIALS OVER
ARBITRARY FIELDS**

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Power Roots of Polynomials over Arbitrary Fields

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Abstract

Let F be an arbitrary field, and $f(x)$ a polynomial in one variable over F of degree ≥ 1 . Given a polynomial $g(x) \neq 0$ over F and an integer $m > 1$ we give necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence of a polynomial $z(x) \in F[x]$ such that $z(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{f(x)}$. We show how our results can be specialized to \mathbb{R} , \mathbb{C} and to finite fields. Since our proofs are constructive it is possible to translate them into an effective algorithm when F is a computable field (e.g. a finite field or an algebraic number field).

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1 Introduction

Let F be an arbitrary field, $f(x)$ a polynomial in one variable over F of degree ≥ 1 , $g(x)$ a nonzero polynomial over F and $m > 1$ an integer.

In [3] Miller gave some sufficient conditions for the existence of a polynomial $z(x) \in F[x]$ such that $z(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{f(x)}$, when F is \mathbb{R} or \mathbb{C} – it is explicitly stated in his paper that the conditions given are not necessary.

In our paper we extend Miller's results by giving necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence of an m^{th} root in $F[x]/(f(x))$, when F is any field, not necessarily \mathbb{C} or \mathbb{R} . While the methods used by Miller in [3] are analytical, ours are purely algebraic.

Moreover, since all the proofs given here are constructive, it is possible to translate them into an effective algorithm when F is a computable field (e.g. an algebraic number field or a finite field).

We can summarize the results of this paper in the following theorem :

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THEOREM 1 *Let F be a field, and $m > 1$ a positive integer, $\text{char}(F) \nmid m$ if $\text{char}(F) > 0$. Let $g(x), f(x)$ be polynomials over F , with $g(x) \neq 0$ and $\deg f(x) \geq 1$. In $F[x]$ the congruence*

$$z(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{f(x)} \quad (1)$$

admits a solution if and only if for every irreducible factor $p(x)$ of $f(x)$: if $l \geq 0$ denotes the highest power of $p(x)$ dividing $g(x)$ and $k \geq 1$ denotes the highest power of $p(x)$ dividing $f(x)$, then either

(i). $k \leq l$, or

(ii). $m \mid l$ and $y(x)^m \equiv g(x)/p(x)^l \pmod{p(x)}$ is solvable for $y(x)$.

When $\text{char}(F) \mid m$ the situation is more complex – we will consider this case in Section 2.2. We will prove Theorem 1 in Section 2. In Sections 3, 4 and 5 we will show how to specialize Theorem 1 to \mathbb{C} , \mathbb{R} and to finite fields.

2 The method

We can assume without loss of generality that $f(x)$ is monic, since if $z(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{f(x)}$ holds, then $z(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{cf(x)}$ holds for any $c \in F$. The method discussed in this paper can be summarized as follows:

- (i). Factor $f(x)$ into monic irreducibles obtaining $f(x) = p_1(x)^{e_1} \dots p_n(x)^{e_n}$
- (ii). Solve each of the congruences $z_i(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{p_i(x)}$ for $z_i(x)$, $i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$;
- (iii). Lift the solutions obtained in the previous step from $F[x]/(p_i(x))$ to $F[x]/(p_i(x)^{e_i})$;
- (iv). Combine the solutions of the previous step using the Chinese Remainder Theorem to obtain a solution of the original congruence.

Step (iv) does not present any technical difficulty, since it relies on the well known isomorphism [4, page 95]:

$$F[x]/(f(x)) \cong F[x]/(p_1(x)^{e_1}) \times \dots \times F[x]/(p_n(x)^{e_n})$$

When $p(x)$ is a monic irreducible polynomial $F[x]/(p(x)) \cong F(\alpha)$ where α is any root of $p(x)$: the actual isomorphism is given by $k(x) + (p(x)) \mapsto$

$k(\alpha)$. It follows that Step (ii), that is the extraction of an m^{th} root of $g(x)$ modulo $p(x)$, is equivalent to the extraction of an m^{th} root of $g(\alpha)$ in $F(\alpha)$.

Therefore, the rest of this section will be devoted to explaining how Step (iii), i.e. the lifting process, can be accomplished.

Fundamental to the entire process is the concept of the p -adic expansion of a polynomial f [4, page 189]. Given $f, p \in F[x]$, with $\deg p \geq 1$, there exist unique polynomials $g_0, g_1, \dots, g_t \in F[x]$ such that $\deg g_i < \deg p$ and $f = g_0 + g_1p + g_2p^2 + \dots + g_tp^t$. The polynomials g_i can be computed recursively as follows:

- $g_0 := f \bmod p$
- $g_{i+1} := (f - \sum_{k=0}^i g_k p^k) / p^{i+1} \bmod p$.

The lifting method is based on the following lemma, freely adapted from [2, page 16].

LEMMA 1 *Let p be an irreducible element of $F[x]$. Let $G(y)$ be a polynomial with coefficients in $F[x]$. Assume that there is an element $f_0 \in F[x]$, with $\deg f_0 < \deg p$, such that $G(f_0) \equiv 0 \pmod{p}$ and $G'(f_0) \not\equiv 0 \pmod{p}$. Given any positive integer k there is a unique polynomial $f_{k-1} \in F[x]$ of degree less than $\deg p^k$ such that $G(f_{k-1}) \equiv 0 \pmod{p^k}$ and $f_{k-1} \equiv f_0 \pmod{p}$.*

PROOF: We show how to construct a sequence of polynomials $f_1, \dots, f_{k-1} \in F[x]$ such that for all $n \in \{1, \dots, k-1\}$:

- (i). $G(f_n) \equiv 0 \pmod{p^{n+1}}$
- (ii). $f_n \equiv f_{n-1} \pmod{p^n}$
- (iii). $\deg f_n < \deg p^{n+1}$

We prove that the sequence (f_n) exists and is unique by induction on n . If f_1 satisfies (ii) and (iii) then it must be of the form $f_0 + b_1p$, with $\deg b_1 < \deg p$. When we expand $G(f_1)$ we obtain

$$G(f_1) = G(f_0 + b_1p) = G(f_0) + G'(f_0)b_1p + w$$

where w is a polynomial divisible by p^2 . Since $p \mid G(f_0)$ by assumption, we can write $G(f_0) \equiv a_0p \pmod{p^2}$ where $\deg a_0 < \deg p$. So, in order to get $G(f_1) \equiv 0 \pmod{p^2}$ we must have $a_0p + G'(f_0)b_1p \equiv 0 \pmod{p^2}$, i.e. $a_0 + G'(f_0)b_1 \equiv 0 \pmod{p}$. The last congruence has a unique solution

(mod p) for b_1 since by hypothesis $G'(f_0) \not\equiv 0 \pmod{p}$. Then $f_1 = f_0 + b_1p$ is the unique polynomial satisfying (i), (ii) and (iii) with $n = 1$.

Next, assume that f_1, f_2, \dots, f_{n-1} are known, and we want to find f_n . By (ii) and (iii) we need $f_n = f_{n-1} + b_np^n$ with $\deg b_n < \deg p$. We expand $G(f_n)$ obtaining

$$G(f_n) = G(f_{n-1} + b_np^n) \equiv G(f_{n-1}) + G'(f_{n-1})b_np^n \pmod{p^{n+1}}$$

Since $G(f_{n-1}) \equiv 0 \pmod{p^n}$ by the inductive hypothesis, we obtain

$$G(f_{n-1}) \equiv a_{n-1}p^n \pmod{p^{n+1}}$$

and the condition $G(f_n) \equiv 0 \pmod{p^{n+1}}$ becomes

$$a_{n-1}p^n + G'(f_{n-1})b_np^n \equiv 0 \pmod{p^{n+1}}$$

that is

$$a_{n-1} + G'(f_{n-1})b_n \equiv 0 \pmod{p}$$

Since $f_{n-1} \equiv f_0 \pmod{p}$ it follows that

$$G'(f_{n-1}) \equiv G'(f_0) \not\equiv 0 \pmod{p}$$

and so the previous congruence has a unique solution (mod p) for b_n . Then $f_n = f_{n-1} + b_np^n$ is the unique polynomial satisfying (i), (ii) and (iii). \square

Our objective is to solve the congruence:

$$y(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{p(x)^k} \tag{2}$$

where $p(x)$ is a monic irreducible factor of $f(x)$.

Let $y_0(x)$ be a solution of $y(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{p(x)}$; clearly if such an element $y_0(x)$ does not exist (2) can not admit any solution.

If $my_0(x)^{m-1} \not\equiv 0 \pmod{p(x)}$ we can use the construction given in Lemma 1 with $G(y) := y(x)^m - g(x)$ to obtain a sequence of polynomials $y_1(x), y_2(x), \dots$ such that $y_i(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{p(x)^{i+1}}$. A solution of (2) is then given by $y_{k-1}(x)$, and this solution is unique, modulo $p(x)^k$.

If $my_0(x)^{m-1} \equiv 0 \pmod{p(x)}$ the lifting argument can not be applied, although (2) may still have a solution.

Let us assume therefore that $my_0(x)^{m-1} \equiv 0 \pmod{p(x)}$. Since $F[x]/(p(x))$ is a field this may happen only in two cases: if $y_0(x) \equiv 0 \pmod{p(x)}$ or if $\text{char}(F) \mid m$. We discuss the first case in Section 2.1 and the second case in Section 2.2.

2.1 Lifting of zero

It is easy to see that the zero polynomial is a solution of $y(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{p(x)}$ if and only if $p(x) \mid g(x)$. The following lemma deals with this case.

LEMMA 2 *Assume that $p(x) \mid g(x)$. Let l be the highest power of $p(x)$ dividing $g(x)$. If $k \leq l$ the zero polynomial is a solution of (2). If $k > l$ (2) admits a solution if and only if $m \mid l$ and*

$$y(x)^m \equiv g(x)/p(x)^l \pmod{p(x)^{k-l}} \quad (3)$$

admits a solution. In this case if $\hat{y}(x)$ denotes a solution of (3) then $\hat{y}(x)p(x)^{l/m}$ is a solution of (2).

PROOF: If $k \leq l$ the zero polynomial is obviously a solution of (2), so we will suppose that $k > l$.

Assume that $\hat{y}(x)^m \equiv g(x)/p(x)^l \pmod{p(x)^{k-l}}$. This is equivalent to $p(x)^k \mid \hat{y}(x)^m p(x)^l - g(x)$. Thus, if $m \mid l$ we can write the last relation as $p(x)^k \mid \hat{y}(x)^m p(x)^{(l/m)m} - g(x)$, and so $\hat{y}(x)p(x)^{l/m}$ is a solution of (2).

On the other hand, suppose that $k > l$ and (2) admits a solution. Let the $p(x)$ -adic expansion of $g(x)$ be $a_1(x)p(x)^l + a_2(x)p(x)^{l+1} + \dots$, with $a_1(x) \neq 0$. Let $\bar{y}(x) = b_1(x)p(x)^r + \dots$ be a solution of (2), with $b_1(x) \neq 0$. Then the $p(x)$ -adic expansion of $\bar{y}(x)^m$ is $(b_1(x)^m \bmod p(x))p(x)^{rm} + \dots$.

Since $b_1(x) \neq 0$ and $\deg b_1(x) < \deg p(x)$ it follows that $b_1(x) \not\equiv 0 \pmod{p(x)}$ and therefore $b_1(x)^m \not\equiv 0 \pmod{p(x)}$, since $p(x)$ is prime. Now $\bar{y}(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{p(x)^k}$ if and only if $(b_1(x)^m \bmod p(x))p(x)^{rm} + \dots$ and $a_1(x)p(x)^l + \dots$ coincide up to the term in $p(x)^{k-1}$. Since $a_1(x) \neq 0$ and $b_1(x)^m \bmod p(x) \neq 0$ it follows that $l = rm$ and so $m \mid l$ as asserted. \square

COROLLARY 1 *Under the assumptions of the previous lemma, if $\text{char}(F) \nmid m$ and $k > l$ (2) admits a solution if and only if $m \mid l$ and $y(x)^m \equiv g(x)/p(x)^l \pmod{p(x)}$ admits a solution.*

PROOF: The Corollary follows immediately from Lemma 1 since the right hand side of (3) is not divisible by $p(x)$. \square

Note that if $p(x) \mid g(x)$ and at the same time $\text{char}(F) \mid m$, we can use Lemma 2 to reduce this case to the case $p(x) \nmid g(x)$ and $\text{char}(F) \mid m$, which is handled in the next section.

2.2 The exponent m is a multiple of $\text{char}(F)$

In this section we will assume that $p(x) \nmid g(x)$. When $q = \text{char}(F) > 0$ the map $a \mapsto a^q$ is always an endomorphism of F . It follows that if $a(x) = a_0 + a_1x + \dots + a_nx^n$ is a polynomial over F then $a(x)^q = a_0^q + a_1^qx^q + \dots + a_n^qx^{nq}$. We will use this fact frequently in this section.

LEMMA 3 *Let $q = \text{char}(F)$, $q \neq 0$. Assume that $m = q^t$ for some positive integer t , and $m \geq k$. If (2) admits a solution, then every solution of $y(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{p(x)}$ is a solution of (2).*

PROOF: Let us assume that (2) admits a solution $y_1(x)$. Let $y_0(x)$ be a solution of $y(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{p(x)}$. Then $(y_0(x) - y_1(x))^m = y_0(x)^m - y_1(x)^m \equiv 0 \pmod{p(x)}$. Since $p(x)$ is prime and $k \leq m$ it follows that $p(x)^k \mid (y_0(x) - y_1(x))^m$ and therefore $y_0(x)^m \equiv y_1(x)^m \pmod{p(x)^k}$, i.e. $y_0(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{p(x)^k}$. \square

NOTE: Therefore, to test if (2) is solvable, it is enough to find *any* solution of $y(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{p(x)}$ and check if it satisfies (2). Clearly if $y(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{p(x)}$ does not admit any solution then (2) does not admit any solution.

LEMMA 4 *Let $q = \text{char}(F)$, $q \neq 0$. Assume that $m = q^t$ for some positive integer t .*

If $m \mid k$ (2) admits a solution if and only if $g(x) \bmod p(x)^k$ is a polynomial in x^m and all its coefficients have an m^{th} root in F .

If $m \nmid k$ let $w := \lfloor k/m \rfloor$, let $s := k \bmod m$, let $z(x) := g(x) \bmod p(x)^{mw}$ and $r(x) := (g(x) - z(x))/(p(x)^{mw}) \bmod p(x)^s$. Then (2) admits a solution if and only if $z(x)$ is a polynomial in x^m , all its coefficients have an m^{th} root in F and $j(x)^m \equiv r(x) \pmod{p(x)^s}$ admits a solution.

PROOF: Let $g_0(x) + g_1(x)p(x)^m + \dots$ be the $p(x)^m$ -adic expansion of $g(x)$.

If $y(x)$ is an m^{th} root of $g(x)$ modulo $p(x)^k$ and $y_0(x) + y_1(x)p(x) + \dots$ is its $p(x)$ -adic expansion then $y(x)^m = y_0(x)^m + y_1(x)^mp(x)^m + \dots$ and this expression must coincide with the $p(x)^m$ -adic expansion of $y(x)^m$.

Let us assume first that $m \mid k$. It can be seen that in this case (2) is satisfied if and only if

$$\begin{aligned} g_0(x) + g_1(x)p(x)^m + \dots + g_{k/m-1}(x)p(x)^{m(k/m-1)} &= \\ y_0(x)^m + y_1(x)^mp(x)^m + \dots + y_{k/m-1}(x)^mp(x)^{m(k/m-1)} \end{aligned}$$

Therefore $g_i(x)$ must be the m^{th} power of $y_i(x)$, for $i = 0, \dots, k/m - 1$. But then $g(x) \bmod p(x)^k$ is the m^{th} power of a polynomial $y(x)$, i.e. it must be a polynomial in x^m and each of its coefficients must have an m^{th} root in F — it is easy at this point to find the actual polynomial $y(x)$.

Assume next that $m \nmid k$. The argument used above tells us that $g_i(x) = y_i(x)^m$ for $i = 0, \dots, \lfloor k/m \rfloor - 1$, and $g_i(x) \equiv y_i(x)^m \pmod{p(x)^s}$ for $i = \lfloor k/m \rfloor$, as asserted. Since $s < m$, the last congruence can be handled using Lemma 3. \square

Note that Lemma 3 and Lemma 4 are valid for any field of characteristic $q > 0$. When the map $a \mapsto a^q$ is an automorphism of F (i.e. if F is a perfect field) we can say much more, as the next theorem shows.

THEOREM 2 *Let F be a perfect field of characteristic q . Assume that $m = q^t$ for some integer t . Then (2) admits a solution for any $k \geq 1$.*

PROOF: When F is perfect the map $a \mapsto a^q$ is an automorphism of any finite extension of F , and so is the map $a \mapsto a^m$ since m is a power of q .

Let A be the F -algebra $F[x]/(p(x)^k)$. This algebra is clearly finite dimensional over F .

As a consequence of Nakayama's lemma (see [6, Section 4.2]) the endomorphism $a \mapsto a^m$ of A is onto if and only if the induced endomorphism of $A/\text{rad}(A)$ given by $a + \text{rad}(A) \mapsto a^m + \text{rad}(A)$ is onto.

But $A/\text{rad}(A) \cong F[x]/(p(x))$ and by what we have just said the induced map $a + (p(x)) \mapsto a^m + (p(x))$ is surjective.

Therefore (2) admits a solution for any $k \geq 1$. \square

REMARK: When $q \mid m$ but m is not a power of q , write m as $q^t r$, with $q \nmid r$. Write (2) as $(y(x)^{q^t})^r \equiv g(x) \pmod{p(x)^k}$.

Set $z(x) := y(x)^{q^t}$ and solve $z(x)^r \equiv g(x) \pmod{p(x)^k}$ for $z(x)$. Finally solve $y(x)^{q^t} \equiv z(x) \pmod{p(x)^k}$ for $y(x)$ to obtain a solution of (2).

3 The complex case

In $\mathbb{C}[x]$ an irreducible polynomial $p(x)$ can have only degree 1, and therefore we can take $p(x) = x - \alpha$, with $\alpha \in \mathbb{C}$. We recall here that $\mathbb{C}[x]/(x - \alpha) \cong \mathbb{C}$ under the isomorphism $g(x) + (x - \alpha) \mapsto g(\alpha)$.

If $p(x) \nmid g(x)$, the congruence $y(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{p(x)}$ always admits a (nonzero) solution and this solution can be lifted to a solution modulo $p(x)^k$.

If $g(x) \equiv 0 \pmod{p(x)}$ then (2) admits a solution if and only if the conditions imposed by Lemma 2 are satisfied. We summarize our results in the following theorem:

THEOREM 3 *In $\mathbb{C}[x]$ the congruence (1) admits a solution if and only if for every common root α of $f(x)$ and $g(x)$ either the multiplicity of α in $g(x)$ is greater than or equal to the multiplicity of α in $f(x)$ or else m divides the multiplicity of α in $g(x)$.*

4 The real case

In $\mathbb{R}[x]$ an irreducible polynomial $p(x)$ can have only degree 1 or 2. Assume first that $p(x) \nmid g(x)$.

If $\deg p(x) = 1$, then we can take $p(x) = x - \alpha$, with $\alpha \in \mathbb{R}$; then $\mathbb{R}[x]/(p(x)) \cong \mathbb{R}$ under the isomorphism $g(x) + (p(x)) \mapsto g(\alpha)$. Then $y(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{p(x)}$ admits a solution unless $g(\alpha) < 0$ and m is even. Moreover this solution can always be lifted to a solution modulo $p(x)^k$.

If $\deg p(x) = 2$, then $\mathbb{R}[x]/(p(x)) \cong \mathbb{C}$. In this case $y(x)^m \equiv g(x) \pmod{p(x)}$ admits a nonzero solution and this solution can be lifted to a solution modulo $p(x)^k$.

Assume next that $p(x) \mid g(x)$. If $\deg p(x)$ is 1 or 2 then (2) admits a solution if and only if the conditions imposed by Lemma 2 are satisfied. We summarize our results in the following theorem:

THEOREM 4 *In $\mathbb{R}[x]$ the congruence (1) admits a solution if and only if the following holds for every (real or complex) root α of $f(x)$: if l denotes the multiplicity of α in $g(x)$ and k the multiplicity of α in $f(x)$, then either*

(i). $k \leq l$, or

(ii). $m \mid l$, and whenever α is real either $(g/p^l)(\alpha) > 0$ or else m is odd.

5 Finite fields

When K is a finite field there is an easy criterion to decide if an element a has an m^{th} root in it, namely let $e := (|K| - 1)/(m, |K| - 1)$ and test if a^e is equal to 1 or not: in the first case a has exactly $(m, |K| - 1)$ roots in the field, in the second case it has no roots. We summarize our results in the following theorem:

THEOREM 5 *Let F be a finite field of characteristic q . Write m as $q^t r$ with $q \nmid r$. In $F[x]$ the congruence (1) admits a solution if and only if the following holds for every irreducible factor $p(x)$ of $f(x)$: if $d := \deg p(x)$, $e := (|F|^d - 1)/(r, |F|^d - 1)$, l is equal to the highest power of $p(x)$ dividing $g(x)$ and k is equal to the highest power of $p(x)$ dividing $f(x)$, then either*

(i). $k \leq l$, or

(ii). $m \mid l$ and $(g(x)/p(x)^l)^e \equiv 1 \pmod{p(x)}$.

We would like to add the fact that when F is a finite field there are very efficient algorithms for factoring polynomials over F [1, 5], for computing the roots of polynomials over F [7, 5] and for taking m^{th} roots of elements of F [8].

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