## Properties and Graphs of Quadratic Functions

In this section, we explore an alternative way of graphing quadratic functions. It turns out that if a quadratic function is given in vertex form, $\boldsymbol{f}(\boldsymbol{x})=\boldsymbol{a}(\boldsymbol{x}-\boldsymbol{p})^{2}+\boldsymbol{q}$, its graph can

$$
f(x)=a(x-p)^{2}+q
$$ be obtained by transforming the shape of the basic parabola, $f(x)=x^{2}$, by applying a vertical dilation by the factor of $a$, as well as a horizontal translation by $p$ units and vertical translation by $q$ units. This approach makes the graphing process easier than when using a table of values.

In addition, the vertex form allows us to identify the main characteristics of the corresponding graph such as shape, opening, vertex, and axis of symmetry. Then, the additional properties of a quadratic function, such as domain and range, or where the function increases or decreases can be determined by observing the obtained graph.

## Properties and Graph of the Basic Parabola $f(x)=x^{2}$



Recall the shape of the basic parabola, $f(x)=x^{2}$, as discussed in section $P 4$.


Figure 3.1
Observe the relations between the points listed in the table above. If we start with plotting the vertex $(\mathbf{0}, \mathbf{0})$, then the next pair of points, $(\mathbf{1}, \mathbf{1})$ and $(-1,1)$, is plotted 1 unit across from the vertex (both ways) and 1 unit up. The following pair, $(2,4)$ and $(-2,4)$, is plotted 2 units across from the vertex and 4 units up. The graph of the parabola is obtained by connecting these 5 main points by a curve, as illustrated in Figure 3.1.

The graph of this parabola is symmetric in the $y$-axis, so the equation of the axis of symmetry is $x=0$.

The domain of the basic parabola is the set of all real numbers, $\mathbb{R}$, as $f(x)=x^{2}$ is a polynomial, and polynomials can be evaluated for any real $x$-value.


Figure 3.2

The arms of the parabola are directed upwards, which means that the vertex is the lowest point of the graph. Hence, the range of the basic parabola function, $f(x)=x^{2}$, is the interval $[\mathbf{0}, \infty)$, and the minimum value of the function is $\mathbf{0}$.

Suppose a point 'lives' on the graph and travels from left to right. Observe that in the case of the basic parabola, if $x$-coordinates of the 'travelling' point are smaller than 0 , the point slides down along the graph. Similarly, if $x$ coordinates are larger than 0 , the point climbs up the graph. (See Figure 3.2) To describe this property in mathematical language, we say that the function $f(x)=x^{2}$ decreases in the interval $(-\infty, 0]$ and increases in the interval $[0, \infty)$.

## Properties and Graphs of a Dilated Parabola $f(x)=a x^{2}$



Figure 3.3


Figure 3.4


Figure 3.5

Figure 3.3 shows graphs of several functions of the form $f(x)=a x^{2}$. Observe how the shapes of these parabolas change for various values of $a$ in comparison to the shape of the basic parabola $y=x^{2}$.

The common point for all of these parabolas is the vertex ( 0,0 ). Additional points, essential for graphing such parabolas, are shown in the table below.


For example, to graph $f(x)=3 x^{2}$, it is convenient to plot the vertex first, which is at the point $(0,0)$. Then, we may move the pen 1 unit across from the vertex (either way) and 3 units up to plot the points $(-1,3)$ and $(1,3)$. If the grid allows, we might want to plot the next two points, $(-2,12)$ and $(2,12)$, by moving the pen 2 units across from the vertex and $4 \cdot 3=\mathbf{1 2}$ units up, as in Figure 3.4.

Notice that the obtained shape (in green) is narrower than the shape of the basic parabola (in orange). However, similarly as in the case of the basic parabola, the shape of the dilated function is still symmetrical about the $y$-axis, $x=0$.

Now, suppose we want to graph the function $f(x)=-\frac{1}{2} x^{2}$. As before, we may start by plotting the vertex at $(0,0)$. Then, we move the pen 1 unit across from the vertex (either way) and half a unit down to plot the points $\left(-1,-\frac{1}{2}\right)$ and $\left(1,-\frac{1}{2}\right)$, as in Figure 3.5. The next pair of points can be plotted by moving the pen 2 units across from the vertex and 2 units down, as the ordered pairs $(-2,-2)$ and $(2,-2)$ satisfy the equation $f(x)=-\frac{1}{2} x^{2}$.

Notice that this time the obtained shape (in green) is wider than the shape of the basic parabola (in orange). Also, as a result of the negative $a$-value, the parabola opens down, and the range of this function is $(-\infty, 0]$.

Generally, the shape of a quadratic function of the form $f(x)=a x^{2}$ is

- $\quad$ narrower than the shape of the basic parabola, if $|a|>\mathbf{1}$;
- $\quad$ wider than the shape of the basic parabola, if $\mathbf{0}<|a|<\mathbf{1}$; and
- the same as the shape of the basic parabola, $y=x^{2}$, if $|a|=\mathbf{1}$.

The parabola opens up, for $\boldsymbol{a}>\mathbf{0}$, and down, for $\boldsymbol{a}<\mathbf{0}$.
Thus the vertex becomes the lowest point of the graph, if $\boldsymbol{a}>\mathbf{0}$, and the highest point of the graph, if $a<0$.

The range of $\boldsymbol{f}(\boldsymbol{x})=a \boldsymbol{x}^{2}$ is $[0, \infty)$, if $\boldsymbol{a}>0$, and $(-\infty, 0]$, if $\boldsymbol{a}<\mathbf{0}$.
The axis of symmetry of the dilated parabola $f(x)=a x^{2}$ remains the same as that of the basic parabola, which is $x=0$.

## Example 1 Graphing a Dilated Parabola and Describing Its Shape, Opening, and Range

For each quadratic function, describe its shape and opening. Then graph it and determine its range.
a. $f(x)=\frac{1}{4} x^{2}$
b. $g(x)=-2 x^{2}$

Solution a. Since the leading coefficient of the function $f(x)=\frac{1}{4} x^{2}$ is positive, the parabola
 opens up. Also, since $0<\frac{1}{4}<1$, we expect the shape of the parabola to be wider than that of the basic parabola.

To graph $f(x)=\frac{1}{4} x^{2}$, first we plot the vertex at $(0,0)$ and then points $\left( \pm 1, \frac{1}{4}\right)$ and $\left( \pm 2, \frac{1}{4} \cdot 4\right)=( \pm 2,1)$. After connecting these points with a curve, we obtain the graph of the parabola.

By projecting the graph onto the $y$-axis, we observe that the range of the function is $[0, \infty)$.
b. Since the leading coefficient of the function $g(x)=-2 x^{2}$ is negative, the parabola opens down. Also, since $|-2|>1$, we expect the shape of the parabola to be narrower than that of the basic parabola.

To graph $g(x)=-2 x^{2}$, first we plot the vertex at $(0,0)$ and then points $( \pm 1,-2)$ and $( \pm 2,-2 \cdot 4)=$ ( $\pm 2,-8$ ). After connecting these points with a curve, we obtain the graph of the parabola.

By projecting the graph onto the $y$-axis, we observe that the range of the function is $(-\infty, 0]$.


## Properties and Graphs of the Basic Parabola with Shifts



Figure 3.6

Suppose we would like to graph the function $f(x)=x^{2}-2$. We could do this via a table of values, but there is an easier way if we already know the shape of the basic parabola $y=x^{2}$.

Observe that for every $x$-value, the value of $x^{2}-2$ is obtained by subtracting 2 from the value of $x^{2}$. So, to graph $f(x)=x^{2}-2$, it is enough to move each point $\left(x, x^{2}\right)$ of the basic parabola by two units down, as indicated in Figure 3.6.

The shift of $y$-values by 2 units down causes the range of the new function, $f(x)=$ $x^{2}-2$, to become $[-2, \infty)$. Observe that this vertical shift also changes the minimum value of this function, from 0 to -2 .

The axis of symmetry remains unchanged, and it is $\boldsymbol{x}=\mathbf{0}$.

Generally, the graph of a quadratic function of the form $\boldsymbol{f}(\boldsymbol{x})=x^{2}+q$ can be obtained by

- shifting the graph of the basic parabola $\boldsymbol{q}$ steps up, if $\boldsymbol{q}>\mathbf{0}$;
- shifting the graph of the basic parabola $|\boldsymbol{q}|$ steps down, if $\boldsymbol{q}<\mathbf{0}$.

The vertex of such parabola is at $(0, q)$. The range of it is $[q, \infty)$.
The minimum (lowest) value of the function is $q$.
The axis of symmetry is $x=0$.


Now, suppose we wish to graph the function $f(x)=(x-2)^{2}$. We can graph it by joining the points calculated in the table below.

| $x$ | $(x-2)^{2}$ |
| :---: | :---: |
| 0 | 4 |
| 1 | 1 |
| 2 | 0 |
| 3 | 1 |
| 4 | 4 |

Observe that the parabola $f(x)=(x-2)^{2}$ assumes its lowest value at the vertex. The lowest value of the perfect square $(x-2)^{2}$ is zero, and it is attained at the $x$-value of 2 . Thus, the vertex of this parabola is $(2,0)$.

Notice that the vertex $(2,0)$ of $f(x)=(x-2)^{2}$ is positioned 2 units to the right from the vertex $(0,0)$ of the basic parabola.

Figure 3.7
This suggests that the graph of the function $f(x)=(x-2)^{2}$ can be obtained without the aid of a table of values. It is enough to shift the graph of the basic parabola 2 units to the right, as shown in Figure 3.7.

Observe that the horizontal shift does not influence the range of the new parabola $f(x)=$ $(x-2)^{2}$. It is still $[0, \infty)$, the same as for the basic parabola. However, the axis of symmetry has changed to $x=2$.

Generally, the graph of a quadratic function of the form $\boldsymbol{f}(\boldsymbol{x})=(\boldsymbol{x}-\boldsymbol{p})^{2}$ can be obtained by

- shifting the graph of the basic parabola $\boldsymbol{p}$ steps to the right, if $\boldsymbol{p}>\mathbf{0}$;
- shifting the graph of the basic parabola $|\boldsymbol{p}|$ steps to the left, if $\boldsymbol{p}<\mathbf{0}$.

The vertex of such a parabola is at $(\boldsymbol{p}, \mathbf{0})$. The range of it is $[0, \infty)$.
The minimum value of the function is $\mathbf{0}$.
The axis of symmetry is $x=p$.

## Example $2-$ Graphing Parabolas and Observing Transformations of the Basic Parabola

Graph each parabola by plotting its vertex and following the appropriate opening and shape. Then describe transformations of the basic parabola that would lead to the obtained graph. Finally, state the range and the equation of the axis of symmetry.
a. $f(x)=(x+3)^{2}$
b. $g(x)=-x^{2}+1$
a. The perfect square $(x+3)^{2}$ attains its lowest value at $x=-3$. So, the vertex of the parabola $f(x)=$ $(x+3)^{2}$ is $(-\mathbf{3}, \mathbf{0})$. Since the leading coefficient is 1 , the parabola takes the shape of $y=x^{2}$, and its arms open up.

The graph of the function $f$ can be obtained by shifting the graph of the basic parabola 3 units to the left, as shown in Figure 3.8.

The range of function $f$ is $[\mathbf{0}, \infty)$, and the equation of the axis of symmetry is $\boldsymbol{x}=\mathbf{- 3}$.
b. The expression $-x^{2}+1$ attains its highest value at $x=0$. So, the vertex of the parabola $g(x)=-x^{2}+1$ is $(\mathbf{0}, \mathbf{1})$. Since the leading coefficient is -1 , the parabola takes the shape of $y=x^{2}$, but its arms open down.

The graph of the function $g$ can be obtained by:

- first, flipping the graph of the basic parabola over the $\boldsymbol{x}$-axis, and then
- shifting the graph of $y=-x^{2} 1$ unit up, as shown in Figure 3.9.


Figure 3.8


Figure 3.9

The range of the function $g$ is $(-\infty, \mathbf{1}]$, and the equation of the axis of symmetry is $\boldsymbol{x}=\mathbf{0}$.

Note: The order of transformations in the above example is essential. The reader is encouraged to check that shifting the graph of $y=x^{2}$ by 1 unit up first and then flipping it over the $x$-axis results in a different graph than the one in Figure 3.9.

## Properties and Graphs of Quadratic Functions Given in the Vertex Form $f(x)=a(x-p)^{2}+q$

So far, we have discussed properties and graphs of quadratic functions that can be obtained from the graph of the basic parabola by applying mainly a single transformation. These transformations were: dilations (including flips over the $x$-axis), and horizontal and vertical shifts. Sometimes, however, we need to apply more than one transformation. We have already encountered such a situation in Example 2b, where a flip and a horizontal shift was applied. Now, we will look at properties and graphs of any function of the form $\boldsymbol{f}(\boldsymbol{x})=$ $\boldsymbol{a}(\boldsymbol{x}-\boldsymbol{p})^{2}+\boldsymbol{q}$, referred to as the vertex form of a quadratic function.

Suppose we wish to graph $f(x)=2(x+1)^{2}-3$. This can be accomplished by connecting the points calculated in a table of values, such as the one below, or by observing the
 coordinates of the vertex and following the shape of the graph of $y=2 x^{2}$. Notice that the vertex of our parabola is at $(-1,-3)$. This information can be taken directly from the equation $f(x)=2(x+\underbrace{1)^{2}-3=2(x-(-1))^{2}-3 \text {, }}_{\begin{array}{c}\text { opposite to the } \\ \text { number in the bracket }\end{array}} \begin{array}{c}\text { the same last } \\ \text { number }\end{array}$,
without the aid of a table of values.
The rest of the points follow the pattern of the shape for the $y=2 x^{2}$ parabola: 1 across, 2 up; 2 across, $4 \cdot 2=$ 8 up. So, we connect the points as in Figure 3.10.

Notice that the graph of function $f$ could also be obtained as a result of translating the graph of $y=2 x^{2}$ by 1 unit left and 3 units down, as indicated in Figure 3.10 by the blue vectors.

Here are the main properties of the graph of function $f$ :

- It has a shape of $y=2 \boldsymbol{x}^{2}$;
- It is a parabola that opens up;
- It has a vertex at $(-\mathbf{1},-\mathbf{3})$;


Figure 3.10

- It is symmetrical about the line $\boldsymbol{x}=\mathbf{- 1}$;
- Its minimum value is $-\mathbf{3}$, and this minimum is attained at $x=-1$;
- Its domain is the set of all real numbers, and its range is the interval $[-3, \infty)$;
- It decreases for $x \in(-\infty, \mathbf{- 1}]$ and increases for $x \in[\mathbf{1}, \infty)$.

The above discussion of properties and graphs of a quadratic function given in vertex form leads us to the following general observations:

## Characteristics of Quadratic Functions Given in Vertex Form $f(x)=a(x-p)^{2}+q$

1. The graph of a quadratic function given in vertex form

$$
f(x)=a(x-p)^{2}+q, \text { where } a \neq \mathbf{0}
$$

is a parabola with vertex $(p, q)$ and axis of symmetry $\boldsymbol{x}=\boldsymbol{p}$.
2. The graph opens up if $\boldsymbol{a}$ is positive and down if $\boldsymbol{a}$ is negative.
3. If $\boldsymbol{a}>\mathbf{0}, q$ is the minimum value. If $\boldsymbol{a}<\mathbf{0}, q$ is the maximum value.
3. The graph is narrower than that of $y=x^{2}$ if $|a|>1$. The graph is wider than that of $y=x^{2}$ if $\mathbf{0}<|a|<\mathbf{1}$.
4. The domain of function $f$ is the set of real numbers, $\mathbb{R}$.

The range of function $f$ is $[q, \infty)$ if $\boldsymbol{a}$ is positive and $(-\infty, q]$ if $\boldsymbol{a}$ is negative.

Example 3 Identifying Properties and Graphing Quadratic Functions Given in Vertex Form $f(x)=a(x-p)^{2}+q$

For each function, identify its vertex, opening, axis of symmetry, and shape. Then graph the function and state its domain and range. Finally, describe transformations of the basic parabola that would lead to the obtained graph.
a. $f(x)=(x-3)^{2}+2$
b. $\quad g(x)=-\frac{1}{2}(x+1)^{2}+3$

Solution a. The vertex of the parabola $f(x)=(x-3)^{2}+2$ is $(3,2)$; the graph opens up, and the equation of the axis of symmetry is $\boldsymbol{x}=\mathbf{3}$. To graph this function, we can plot the vertex first and then follow the shape of the basic parabola $y=x^{2}$.

The domain of function $f$ is $\mathbb{R}$, and the range is $[2, \infty)$.
The graph of $f$ can be obtained by shifting the graph of the basic parabola 3 units to the right and 2 units up.

b. The vertex of the parabola $g(x)=-\frac{1}{2}(x+1)^{2}+3$ is

$(-\mathbf{1}, \mathbf{3})$; the graph opens down, and the equation of the axis of symmetry is $\boldsymbol{x}=$ -1. To graph this function, we can plot the vertex first and then follow the shape of the parabola $y=-\frac{1}{2} x^{2}$. This means that starting from the vertex, we move the pen one unit across (both ways) and drop half a unit to plot the next two points, $\left(0, \frac{5}{2}\right)$ and symmetrically $\left(-2, \frac{5}{2}\right)$. To plot the following two points, again, we start from the vertex and move our pen two units across and 2 units down (as $-\frac{1}{2}$. $4=-2$ ). So, the next two points are $(1,1)$ and symmetrically $(-4,1)$, as indicated in Figure 3.11.

The domain of function $g$ is $\mathbb{R}$, and the range is $(-\infty, 3]$.

Figure 3.11

The graph of $g$ can be obtained from the graph of the basic parabola in two steps:

1. Dilate the basic parabola by multiplying its $y$-values by the factor of $-\frac{1}{2}$.
2. Shift the graph of the dilated parabola $y=-\frac{1}{2} \boldsymbol{x}^{2}, \mathbf{1}$ unit to the left and $\mathbf{3}$ units up, as indicated in Figure 3.11.

## Q. 3 Exercises

Vocabulary Check Complete each blank with the most appropriate term or phrase from the given list: axis of symmetry, horizontal, maximum, minimum, opens, shape, up, vertex, vertical.

1. A quadratic function can be stated in a form $f(x)=a(x-p)^{2}+q$. This form is referred to as the
$\qquad$ form because it allows for quick identification of the vertex of the corresponding parabola.
2. The line $x=p$ is the $\qquad$ of the parabola $f(x)=a(x-p)^{2}+q$.
3. The $\qquad$ of the function $f(x)=a(x-p)^{2}+q$ is the same as the shape of the parabola $y=a x^{2}$.
4. If $a>0$, the parabola $f(x)=a(x-p)^{2}+q$ opens ___. If $a<0$, the parabola $f(x)=a(x-p)^{2}+q$
$\qquad$ down.
5. The value $p$ in the formula $f(x)=a(x-p)^{2}$, represents the $\qquad$ shift of the parabola $y=$ $a x^{2}$ needed to obtain the graph of function $f$.
6. The value $q$ in the formula $f(x)=a x^{2}+q$, represents the $\qquad$ shift of the parabola $y=a x^{2}$ needed to obtain the graph of function $f$.
7. If $a>0$, then the vertex $(p, q)$ of the parabola $f(x)=a(x-p)^{2}+q$ is its $\qquad$ . If $a<0$, then the vertex $(p, q)$ of the parabola $f(x)=a(x-p)^{2}+q$ is its $\qquad$ .

## Concept Check

8. Match each quadratic function a.-d. with its graph I-IV.
a. $f(x)=(x-2)^{2}-1$
b. $f(x)=(x-2)^{2}+1$
I

II

c. $f(x)=(x+2)^{2}+1$
d. $f(x)=(x+2)^{2}-1$
III


9. Match each quadratic function a.-d. with its graph I-IV.
a. $g(x)=-(x-2)^{2}+1$
b. $g(x)=x^{2}-1$
I

II

c. $g(x)=-2 x^{2}+1$
d. $g(x)=2(x+2)^{2}-1$
III

IV


## Concept Check

10. Match each quadratic function with the characteristics of its parabolic graph.
a. $f(x)=5(x-3)^{2}+2$
I vertex (3,2), opens down
b. $f(x)=-4(x+2)^{2}-3$
II vertex ( 3,2 ), opens up
c. $f(x)=-\frac{1}{2}(x-3)^{2}+2$
III vertex ( $-2,-3$ ), opens down
d. $f(x)=\frac{1}{4}(x+2)^{2}-3$
IV vertex $(-2,-3)$, opens up

For each quadratic function, describe the shape (as wider, narrower, or the same as the shape of $y=x^{2}$ ) and opening (up or down) of its graph. Then graph it and determine its range.
11. $f(x)=3 x^{2}$
12. $f(x)=-\frac{1}{2} x^{2}$
13. $f(x)=-\frac{3}{2} x^{2}$
14. $f(x)=\frac{5}{2} x^{2}$
15. $f(x)=-x^{2}$
16. $f(x)=\frac{1}{3} x^{2}$

Graph each parabola by plotting its vertex, and following its shape and opening. Then, describe transformations of the basic parabola that would lead to the obtained graph. Finally, state the domain and range, and the equation of the axis of symmetry.
17. $f(x)=(x-3)^{2}$
18. $f(x)=-x^{2}+2$
19. $f(x)=x^{2}-5$
20. $f(x)=-(x+2)^{2}$
21. $f(x)=-2 x^{2}-1$
22. $f(x)=\frac{1}{2}(x+2)^{2}$

For each parabola, state its vertex, shape, opening, and the equation of its axis of symmetry. Then, graph the function and describe transformations of the basic parabola that would lead to the obtained graph.
23. $f(x)=3 x^{2}-1$
24. $f(x)=-\frac{3}{4} x^{2}+3$
25. $f(x)=-\frac{1}{2}(x+4)^{2}+2$
26. $f(x)=\frac{5}{2}(x-2)^{2}-4$
27. $f(x)=2(x-3)^{2}+\frac{3}{2}$
28. $f(x)=-3(x+1)^{2}+5$
29. $f(x)=-\frac{2}{3}(x+2)^{2}+4$
30. $f(x)=\frac{4}{3}(x-3)^{2}-2$

## Discussion Point

31. Four students, $\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B}, \mathbf{C}$, and $\mathbf{D}$, tried to graph the function $f(x)=-2(x+1)^{2}-3$ by transforming the graph of the basic parabola, $y=x^{2}$. Here are the transformations that each student applied

## Student A:

- shift 1 unit left and 3 units down
- dilation of $y$-values by the factor of -2


## Student B:

- dilation of $y$-values by the factor of -2
- shift 1 unit left
- shift 3 units down


## Student C:

- flip over the $x$-axis
- shift 1 unit left and 3 units down
- dilation of $y$-values by the factor of 2

Student D:

- shift 1 unit left
- dilation of $y$-values by the factor of 2
- shift 3 units down
- flip over the $x$-axis

With the assumption that all transformations were properly applied, discuss whose graph was correct and what went wrong with the rest of the graphs. Is there any other sequence of transformations that would result in a correct graph?

For each parabola, state the coordinates of its vertex and then graph it. Finally, state the extreme value (maximum or minimum, whichever applies) and the range of the function.
32. $f(x)=3(x-1)^{2}$
33. $f(x)=-\frac{5}{2}(x+3)^{2}$
34. $f(x)=(x+2)^{2}-3$
35. $f(x)=-3(x+4)^{2}+5$
36. $f(x)=-2(x-5)^{2}-2$
37. $f(x)=2(x-4)^{2}+1$
38. $f(x)=\frac{1}{2}(x+1)^{2}+\frac{3}{2}$
39. $f(x)=-\frac{1}{2}(x-1)^{2}-3$
40. $f(x)=-\frac{1}{4}(x-3)^{2}+4$
41. $f(x)=\frac{3}{4}\left(x+\frac{5}{2}\right)^{2}-\frac{3}{2}$

## Analytic Skills

Given the graph of a parabola, state the most probable equation of the corresponding function. Hint: Use the vertex form of a quadratic function.
42.

43.

44.

45.

46.

47.


