

Course description and syllabus

General information

Instructors: Prof. Chris Wendl (lectures)
HU Institute for Mathematics (Rudower Chaussee 25), Room 1.301
wendl@math.hu-berlin.de
Office hour: Mondays 15:30–16:30

Sreerag Kumar (problem sessions)
HU Institut für Mathematik (Rudower Chaussee 25), Room 1.303
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Juan Campos (problem sessions)
HU Institut für Mathematik (Rudower Chaussee 25), Room 1.303

Course webpage: <http://www.mathematik.hu-berlin.de/~wendl/Sommer2026/Topologie1/>

Moodle: <https://moodle.hu-berlin.de/course/view.php?id=139756>
enrolment key: `homotopy`

The moodle will be used mainly for communication: you must join it if you want to receive occasional important announcements about the course via e-mail, and you can also use the moodle forum to discuss or ask questions about homework problems. Essential course materials such as lecture notes will be posted on the course website rather than the moodle.

Lectures: Tuesdays 13:15–14:45 in 1.013 (Rudower Chaussee 25)
Wednesdays 13:15–14:45 in 1.013 (Rudower Chaussee 25)

Problem sessions (Kumar): Wednesdays 15:15–16:45 in 3.006 (Rudower Chaussee 25)

Problem sessions (Campos): Wednesdays 15:15–16:45 in 1.011 (Rudower Chaussee 25)

Language: The lectures and problem sessions will be conducted in English.

Prerequisites: Contents of the HU's courses *Analysis I* and *II*, *Lineare Algebra und Analytische Geometrie I* and *II*, and *Algebra I* (or the algebraic content of *Algebra und Funktionentheorie*)

Students will be assumed to be comfortable with the theory of metric spaces from first-year analysis and with the basic notions of groups, rings and fields.

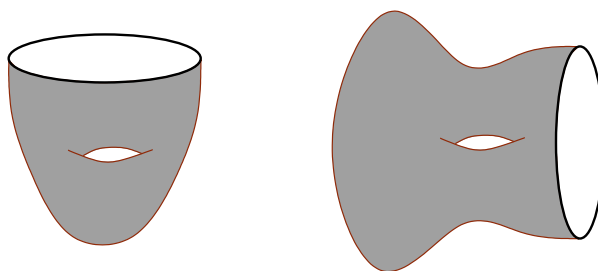
Short description

An introduction to topology with emphasis on geometric applications: metric and topological spaces, separation axioms, compactness and connectedness, the fundamental group, homotopy invariance, Seifert-van Kampen theorem, covering spaces. Introduction to homology theory: topological manifolds, simplicial com-

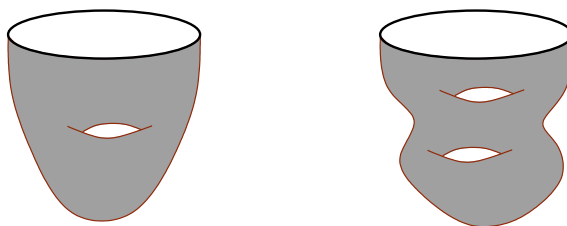
plexes and triangulations, simplicial and singular homology, long exact sequences, the Brouwer fixed point theorem.

Detailed description

Topological spaces are the natural setting for discussing the notion of continuity, hence topology is the study of properties that are preserved under continuous maps with continuous inverses (homeomorphisms). In other words, topology considers these two objects to be equivalent:



while developing methods to prove that these two are not:



The course will begin with the axioms of a topological space and their relation to the special case of metric spaces, generalizing familiar notions such as compactness and connectedness, and delving into less familiar territory with the standard countability and separation axioms (e.g. the Hausdorff property). This portion of the subject is known as “general” (or “point-set”) topology, and it allows for a number of pathological phenomena that are important to consider in infinite-dimensional analysis, though usually of less interest in geometry.

After this initial flirtation with frightening generality, the rest of the course will focus on spaces of geometric interest and will consider various ways to interpret and answer the question, “how many holes are there in this space?” The first of these is the *fundamental group*, an algebraic object that can be associated to every topological space and measures the failure of continuous loops in that space to be fillable by disks. Another essential notion in this context is homotopy, i.e. continuous deformations of continuous maps, and we will prove that the fundamental group is invariant not just under homeomorphism but also under the much more flexible notion of *homotopy equivalence*. We then introduce two useful tools for computing the fundamental group: the Seifert-van Kampen theorem, and the theory of covering spaces, each of which reveals intricate relationships between topology and group theory.

The final portion of the course will introduce the much larger subject of homology, yet another way of counting holes (of various dimensions) in topological spaces. After some preliminary motivation via bordism theory and simplicial complexes, we will define the singular homology groups and the homomorphisms induced on them by continuous maps, together with requisite notions from homological algebra such as chain complexes, exact sequences and “diagram chasing”. This enables us to compute singular homology for a few simple examples, e.g. for spheres, leading to a proof of the Brouwer fixed point theorem. The focus throughout will be on understanding the geometric meaning of the homology groups. If time permits, we will also discuss CW-complexes and give a sketch of cellular homology, a much more powerful computational tool.

Syllabus

The course is divided roughly into three units:

- I. **General topology** (weeks 1–4)
- II. **The fundamental group** (weeks 4–9)
- III. **Homology** (weeks 10–14)

The following week-by-week plan for the lectures is tentative and subject to change.

1. General introduction and motivation, metric spaces, continuity and sequential continuity.
2. Axioms of a topological space, bases and subbases, standard examples and constructions (subspaces, products, disjoint unions), countability axioms, convergence of nets.
3. Compactness and sequential compactness, separation axioms, Tychonoff's theorem.
4. Connected and path-connected spaces, quotient topologies, paths and homotopy, fundamental group.
5. Simply connected spaces, retractions and deformation retractions, homotopy equivalence.
6. Cone and suspension, group presentations, statement of the Seifert-van Kampen theorem.
7. Proof of the Seifert-van Kampen theorem, applications to surfaces and knot theory.
8. Covering spaces, lifting theorem, deck transformations.
9. The Galois correspondence, the universal cover, topological groups and group actions.
10. Topological manifolds, connected sum, triangulations, sketch of the classification of closed surfaces.
11. Bordism groups, simplicial complexes and simplicial homology, basic homological algebra.
12. Singular homology, subdivision and homotopy invariance, short and long exact sequences.
13. Excision, the homology of the sphere, the Brouwer fixed point theorem.
14. If time permits: introduction to cellular homology.

Literature

Lecture notes in English for this course will appear in regular updates on the course webpage.¹

Almost all topics in the initial point-set topology unit of the course (with the notable exception of net convergence) are well covered in the book by Jänich, which also has the advantage of being amusingly written. The original German version has gone through several new editions since the English translation was published in 1984, but the revisions have been minor, so the two are still essentially the same book:

- Jänich, *Topologie*, 8. Auflage, Springer 2005
(online access available via the HU library)
- Jänich, *Topology*, translated from the German by Silvio Levy, Springer 1984
(available in the HU library, Freihandbestand)

¹The notes will be similar to the notes for my course in 2023, which are still available in full at <https://www.mathematik.hu-berlin.de/~wendl/Sommer2023/Topologie1/lecturenotes.pdf>.

Starting from week four and continuing into the followup course next semester, we will focus on *algebraic* topology, for which the most popular book is:

- Allen Hatcher, *Algebraic Topology*, Cambridge University Press 2002
(also freely downloadable from the author's homepage:
<https://pi.math.cornell.edu/~hatcher/AT/ATpage.html>)

I can also highly recommend the following algebraic topology books, especially for material that is often covered in Topology II:

- Glen Bredon, *Topology and Geometry*, Springer GTM 1993
(online access available via the HU library)
- James W. Vick, *Homology Theory*, Springer GTM 1994
(online access available via the HU library)
- R. Stöcker und H. Zieschang, *Algebraische Topologie - Eine Einführung*, Teubner 1994
(available in the HU library, Freihandbestand)

Unfortunately there is not enough time in this course to discuss the closely related subject of *differential* topology, but I would nonetheless like to mention two books on this topic that might serve as interesting reading in your spare time. The first, in particular, is a classic that everyone should read at some point (and it is short!):

- John Milnor, *Topology from the Differentiable Viewpoint*, Princeton University Press 1997
- Morris W. Hirsch, *Differential Topology*, Springer GTM 1976
(online access available via the HU library)

Finally, here is a standard reference for an in-depth treatment of *general* topology, i.e. the portion of the subject that deals with unrestricted classes of topological spaces, rather than algebraic invariants or applications to geometry. (Here I'm using the word "reference" to mean "I would never recommend this as a textbook for a course, but I feel reassured to know that it is on my bookshelf".)

- John L. Kelley, *General Topology*, Springer GTM 1975

Exam and problem sets

Grades in the course will be determined by a three-hour **open-book written exam** shortly after the end of the semester (with a resit option shortly before the beginning of the following semester). Books and notes may be used during the exam; electronic devices may not be.

Problem sets will be distributed and posted on the course website every Wednesday, and solutions discussed in the problem session on the following Wednesday.

Update (11.05.2026): *Starting with Problem Set 5, it will be possible to submit solutions to the problems marked with the symbol "(†)" and receive grades for these. Submitting solutions is not required, but it will be incentivized as described below.*

It is **strongly recommended** in any case that you at least think through every problem before the problem session each week, since this is the single best way to ensure that you are keeping up with the material in the course.

There will also be a special homework assignment midway through the semester, the so-called **take-home midterm**, which you will have two weeks to work on and can submit for a grade. Both the midterm and

the problem sets are voluntary, but your score on each can be used to boost your final exam grade according to the following rules:

- Midterm 60%–79% \Rightarrow 2,0 \rightsquigarrow 1,7 or 1,7 \rightsquigarrow 1,3 etc.
- Midterm 80%–100% \Rightarrow 2,0 \rightsquigarrow 1,3 or 1,7 \rightsquigarrow 1,0 etc.
- Problem sets (from set 5 onward) \geq 70% \Rightarrow 2,0 \rightsquigarrow 1,7 or 1,7 \rightsquigarrow 1,3 etc.
- Midterm 60%–100% and Problem sets (from set 5 onward) \geq 70% \Rightarrow 2,0 \rightsquigarrow 1,3 or 1,7 \rightsquigarrow 1,0 etc.