Completing the square

Key points

- Completing the square for a quadratic rearranges $ax^2 + bx + c$ into the form $p(x + q)^2 + r$
- If $a \neq 1$, then factorise using a as a common factor.

Examples

Example 1   Complete the square for the quadratic expression $x^2 + 6x - 2$

$x^2 + 6x - 2$ $= (x + 3)^2 - 9 - 2$ $= (x + 3)^2 - 11$	**1** Write $x^2 + bx + c$ in the form $$\left(x + \frac{b}{2}\right)^2 - \left(\frac{b}{2}\right)^2 + c$$ **2** Simplify

Example 2   Write $2x^2 - 5x + 1$ in the form $p(x + q)^2 + r$

$2x^2 - 5x + 1$ $= 2\left(x^2 - \frac{5}{2}x\right) + 1$ $= 2\left[\left(x - \frac{5}{4}\right)^2 - \left(\frac{5}{4}\right)^2\right] + 1$ $= 2\left(x - \frac{5}{4}\right)^2 - \frac{25}{8} + 1$ $= 2\left(x - \frac{5}{4}\right)^2 - \frac{17}{8}$	**1** Before completing the square write $ax^2 + bx + c$ in the form $$a\left(x^2 + \frac{b}{a}x\right) + c$$ **2** Now complete the square by writing $x^2 - \frac{5}{2}x$ in the form $$\left(x + \frac{b}{2}\right)^2 - \left(\frac{b}{2}\right)^2$$ **3** Expand the square brackets – don't forget to multiply $\left(\frac{5}{4}\right)^2$ by the factor of 2 **4** Simplify

Practice

1 Write the following quadratic expressions in the form $(x + p)^2 + q$

    a $x^2 + 4x + 3$ **b** $x^2 - 10x - 3$

    c $x^2 - 8x$ **d** $x^2 + 6x$

    e $x^2 - 2x + 7$ **f** $x^2 + 3x - 2$

2 Write the following quadratic expressions in the form $p(x + q)^2 + r$

    a $2x^2 - 8x - 16$ **b** $4x^2 - 8x - 16$

    c $3x^2 + 12x - 9$ **d** $2x^2 + 6x - 8$

3 Complete the square.

    a $2x^2 + 3x + 6$ **b** $3x^2 - 2x$

    c $5x^2 + 3x$ **d** $3x^2 + 5x + 3$

Extend

4 Write $(25x^2 + 30x + 12)$ in the form $(ax + b)^2 + c$.