Graphing quadratic functions. Class/Section _______Name __________________ Date ________

A quadratic function is a function of the form $y = ax^2+bx+c$, where a,b, and c are real numbers.

Skill #1. Evaluating a quadratic function.

Example. $f(x) = 3x^2-4x-5$. Evaluate f(x) for x= -2/3.

Answer: $f(2/3) = 3(-2/3)^2-4(-2/3)-5 = 3(4/9) -4(-2/3) -5 = 4/3 + 8/3 - 15/3 = -3/3 = -1$.

Skill #2. Calculating the discriminant.

A quadratic function has a discriminant $\Delta = b^2-4ac$.

The discriminant of the function $f(x) = 3x^2-4x-5$ is calculated as follows.

First write down a,b, and c:

a = 3
b = -4
c = -5

Then write:

$\Delta = b^2-4ac$
$= (\ )^2 - 4\ (\ )\ (\ )$
$= (-4)^2 - 4\ (3)\ (-5)$
$= 16 + 60 = 76.$

Skill #3. Using the discriminant.

The discriminant Δ tells you several things.

(a) If Δ is a perfect square integer (Δ = 0,1,4,9,16,25, etc), then the quadratic polynomial factors over the integers.
(b) If Δ > 0, then the quadratic function has two different real roots.
(c) If Δ = 0, then the quadratic function has one real double root.
(d) If Δ < 0, then the quadratic function has no real roots, but it has two complex conjugate roots.

Example: the polynomial function $f(x) = 3x^2-4x-5$ has discriminant 76. Since 76 is not a perfect square, the polynomial cannot be factored over the integers. Since 76 > 0, the polynomial has two different real roots.

Skill #4. Does the parabola open up or down?

The graph of a quadratic function opens upwards (∪) if the coefficient of x^2 is a positive number. The graph opens downwards (∩) if the coefficient of x^2 is a negative number.

Skill #5. Finding the x-coordinate of the vertex, and the line of symmetry.

The vertex of a parabola (or quadratic function) is the (x,y) point which is the highest or lowest point on the curve. The x-value of the vertex is half-way between the two roots, or the average of the two roots. It may be calculated directly by the formula x = -b/2a .

Example: the x-value of the vertex of the equation $f(x) = 3x^2-4x-5$ is

x= - b/2a = - (-4)/(2(3)) = 4/6 = 2/3.

The line of symmetry of the parabola is the vertical line through the vertex.

Skill #6. Finding the y-coordinate of the vertex.

The y-coordinate of the vertex is found by evaluating f(x) at the x-coordinate of the vertex. In the above example, the y-coordinate of the vertex is f(-b/(2a)) = f(2/3) = -1. (see Skill #1 above).

Skill #7. Finding the roots.

Use factoring; but if the polynomial is not factorable, use the quadratic formula.

The QF (quadratic formula) for the roots of a quadratic function may be stated as follows:

If $ax^2+bx+c = 0$, then $= \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2-4ac}}{2a} = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{\Delta}}{2a}$.

Before evaluating the QF, be sure to write the values of a,b,c (see skill #2).

Note: from this formula, you can see that -b/(2a) is the average of the roots. Further, the distance between the roots is ± √Δ / a, and the distance along the x axis from either root to the line of symmetry is √Δ / (2a) .

Skill #8. Finding the y-intercept.

Find the y-intercept by evaluating the polynomial at x=0.

In our example $f(0) = 3(0)^2 -4(0) -5 = -5$. The y-intercept is at the point (0,-5).

Skill #9. Finding the symmetric point.

The symmetric point is at the same height as the y-intercept point. It is symmetric about the axis of symmetry to the y-intercept; so it is the same distance from the axis of symmetry as the y-intercept: (y-intercept) --------- axis ------------ (symmetric point).

So the symmetric point is a distance 2 (-b/2a) = -b/a from the y-axis.

Skill #10. Graphing the quadratic function.

When graphing, do all the above things in order.

Your sketch should show: (a) the roots; (b) the vertex ; (c) the line of symmetry; (d) the y-intercept; (e) the symmetric point; and perhaps one or two other points.

Skill #11. Solving the quadratic by completing the square. [not discussed here].

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Exercises. Graph the following quadratic functions. Calculate the roots, the vertex, and the discriminant. Find the y-intercept and the symmetric point. Show at least one or two other points on the graph.

	Equation	a	b	c	Δ	# of real roots	vertex	y-intercept	Symmetric point	roots
1	$f(x) = x^2-6x+8$									
2	$f(x) = x^2+4x+3$									
3	$f(x) = x^2-2x-15$									
4	$f(x) = x^2+2x-8$									
5	$f(x) = -x^2-2x+3$									
6	$f(x) = -x^2-4x+5$									
7	$f(x) = 2x^2+7x+3$									
8	$f(x) = 3x^2-7x+2$									
9	$f(x) = -4x^2 +4x-1$									
10	$f(x) = x^2+6x+9$									
11	$f(x) = x^2+2x+5$									
12	$f(x) = -2x^2+4x-3$									
13	$f(x) = x^2+2x-5$									
14	$f(x) = -x^2+4x-1$									