Theorem *For every real $x > 0$ and every integer $n > 0$ there is one only one real y such that $y^n = x$.*

This number y is written $\sqrt[n]{x}$ or $x^{1/n}$.

Proof That there is at most one such y is clear, since $0 < y_1 < y_2$ implies $y_1^n < y_2^n$.

Let E be the set consisting of all positive real numbers t such that $t^n < x$.

If $t = x/(1+x)$ then $0 < t < 1$. Hence $t^n < t < x$. Thus $t \in E$, and E is not empty.

If $t > 1 + x$ then $t^n > t > x$, so that $t \notin E$. Thus $1 + x$ is an upper bound of E.

Hence Theorem 1.19 implies the existence of

$$y = \sup E.$$

To prove that $y^n = x$ we will show that each of the inequalities $y^n < x$ and $y^n > x$ leads to a contradiction.

The identity $b^n - a^n = (b - a)(b^{n-1} + b^{n-2}a + \cdots + a^{n-1})$ yields the inequality

$$b^n - a^n < (b - a)nb^{n-1}$$

when $0 < a < b$.

Assume $y^n < x$. Choose h so that $0 < h < 1$ and

$$h < \frac{x - y^n}{n(y+1)^{n-1}}.$$

Put $a = y$, $b = y + h$. Then

$$(y+h)^n - y^n < hn(y+h)^{n-1} < hn(y+1)^{n-1} < x - y^n.$$

Thus $(y+h)^n < x$, and $y + h \in E$. Since $y + h > y$, this contradicts the fact that y is an upper bound of E.

Assume $y^n > x$. Put

$$k = \frac{y^n - x}{ny^{n-1}}.$$

Then $0 < k < y$. If $t \geq y - k$, we conclude that

$$y^n - t^n \leq y^n - (y-k)^n < kny^{n-1} = y^n - x.$$

Thus $t^n > x$, and $t \notin E$. It follows that $y - k$ is an upper bound of E.

But $y - k < y$, which contradicts the fact that y is the *least* upper bound of E.

Hence $y^n = x$, and the proof is complete.