

01204211 Discrete Mathematics  
Lecture 18: Primality testing (3)

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# The first algorithm

This lecture presents the primality testing algorithm based on the Fermat test.

To perform the test if  $q$  is a prime, we pick an integer  $a$  from the range  $\{2, 3, \dots, q-1\}$  and check that the condition specified by the Fermat's Little Theorem is satisfied.

**PROCEDURE** FermatTest( $q, a$ )

1. **if**  $GCD(q, a) \neq 1$  **then return** "COMPOSITE" **endif**
2. Find  $y = a^{q-1} \bmod q$
3. **if**  $y \neq 1$  **then**
4.   **return** "COMPOSITE"
5. **else**
6.   **return** "PRIME"
7. **endif**

# Guarantees

Let's consider all input/output possibilities. Let  $z = \text{FermatTest}(q, a)$ .

	$z = \text{PRIME}$	$z = \text{COMPOSITE}$
$q$ is prime	Correct	Incorrect
$q$ is composite	Incorrect	Correct

However, from the Fermat's Little Theorem, we know that if  $q$  is prime, the test always return "PRIME"; thus the test is always correct.

## Guarantees

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However, from the Fermat's Little Theorem, we know that if  $q$  is prime, the test always return "PRIME"; thus the test is always correct.

We then need to consider the case when  $q$  is composite. In this case, the Fermat's Little Theorem does not provide any guarantee. However, we hope that if  $q$  is not a prime, we may be able to find  $a$  such that  $\text{FermatTest}(q, a)$  reveals the truth, i.e., it returns COMPOSITE.

# Witness

- ▶ Let's try to be precise. For a composite  $q$ , if  $a$  is an integer such that  $\text{FermatTest}(q, a)$  returns COMPOSITE, we say that  $a$  is a **witness** for  $q$ .
- ▶ From the code of  $\text{FermatTest}$ , an integer  $a$  can be a witness for  $q$  in two cases:
  - ▶ (1) when  $\text{GCD}(q, a) \neq 1$ , or
  - ▶ (2) when  $a^{q-1} \bmod q \neq 1$ .
- ▶ Note that if we pick  $a$  randomly from the set  $\{2, 3, \dots, q-1\}$  and composite  $q$  is a product of very large primes, it is very unlikely that we pick  $a$  that satisfies (1) because  $a$  must be a multiple of some of  $q$ 's prime factors.

## Carmichael numbers

- ▶ It would be great if, for any composite  $q$ , we can quickly find its witness. But unfortunately, there exists a composite  $q$  with very few witnesses. I.e., every witness  $a$  for  $q$  shares its factor (i.e., it is such that  $\gcd(a, q) \neq 1$ ). They are called **Carmichael numbers**.

A **Carmichael** number is a composite number  $q$  such that

$$b^{q-1} \bmod q = 1,$$

for all integers  $1 < b < n$  which are relatively prime to  $q$ .

- ▶ The first Carmichael number is 561. The next ones are 1105, 1729, and 2465.

## Witnesses for non-Carmichael numbers (1)

Let's focus on the bright side. Suppose that  $q$  is not Carmichael, can we say anything about its witnesses? Can we say that there are plenty of them?

## Witnesses for non-Carmichael numbers (2)

Let  $a$  be  $q$ 's witness such that  $\gcd(a, q) = 1$ , i.e., we also have that

$$a^{q-1} \bmod q \neq 1.$$

Let's consider a non-witness  $b$ , i.e.,  $b$  is an integer such that  $\gcd(b, q) = 1$  and

$$b^{q-1} \bmod q = 1.$$

Now, consider  $ab \bmod q$ . We have that

$$\begin{aligned}(ab \bmod q)^{q-1} \bmod q &= (ab)^{q-1} \bmod q \\&= (a^{q-1}b^{q-1}) \bmod q \\&= (a^{q-1} \bmod q)(b^{q-1} \bmod q) \bmod q \\&= a^{q-1} \bmod q \\&\neq 1\end{aligned}$$

Can we use this to say that there are a lot of witnesses?



## A lot of witnesses

Since we can show that given a witness  $a$  and a non-witness  $b$ ,  $ab$  is also witness, we might be able to construct a lot of witnesses from non-witnesses.

Let  $A = \{2, 3, \dots, q-1\}$  be the set of all candidates. Let  $B$  be the set of non-witnesses which are relatively prime to  $q$ , i.e.,

$$B = \{b \in A : (\gcd(b, q) = 1) \wedge (b^{q-1} \bmod q = 1)\}.$$

Let  $C = \{ab \bmod q : b \in A\}$ . We know that every  $c \in C$  is a witness.

If we know that  $|C| = |B|$ , can you show that the probability of choosing a witness from the set  $A$  is large (i.e, at least  $1/2$ ).

Now, is it obvious that  $|C| = |B|$ ? What is missing?

## The missing argument

To show that  $|C| = |B|$ , we need to argue that when we multiply every element of  $B$ , we do not get duplicate elements. I.e., we need to prove that for  $x \in B$  and  $y \in B$  such that  $x \neq y$ ,

$$ax \bmod q \neq ay \bmod q,$$

when  $\gcd(a, q) = 1$ .

**Quick check:** prove this statement.

(Note: From the definitions of  $a$  and  $B$ , you may assume that  $\gcd(q, a) = \gcd(q, x) = \gcd(q, y) = 1$ .)

# Conclusions

From the previous discussion, we know that for non-Carmichael numbers, the Fermat test succeeds with probability at least  $1/2$ .

Further developments:

- ▶ In 1976, Miller and Rabin show that one can deal with Carmichael numbers, providing the first randomized algorithm for testing primes.
- ▶ In 2002, Agrawal, Kayal, and Saxena devise an  $O(m^{12})$ -time deterministic algorithm for primality testing.