

# The Pigeonhole Principle

If a set of  $n$  distinct objects is partitioned into  $k$  subsets, where  $0 < k < n$ , then at least one subset contains at least two elements.

**Proof:** Let  $|A| = n$ , and  $A_1, \dots, A_k$  be a partition of  $A$ ; in particular, each  $A_i$  is not empty.

Assume that each  $A_i$  has only one element. Since  $A = \bigcup_{i=1}^k A_i$  is a partition of  $A$ , we know that  $|A| = |\bigcup_{i=1}^k A_i|$ , with the  $A_i$  pairwise disjoint, so  $|\bigcup_{i=1}^k A_i| = \sum_{i=1}^k |A_i|$ .

Notice that then  $n = |A| = |\bigcup_{i=1}^k A_i| = \sum_{i=1}^k |A_i| = k$ .

It is impossible for  $k < n$  and  $n = k$ , so we have a contradiction. So there is at least one  $A_i$  that has at least two elements.