

## What Does The Series $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} (\frac{a}{b})^n$ Converge To?

Well,  $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} (\frac{a}{b})^n = \frac{a}{b-a}$  where  $a, b \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $b \neq 0$  and  $a < b$  (so  $b - a \neq 0$ ). OK, but why?

Here's one way to think about it:

$$\begin{array}{ll}
 S &= \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} (\frac{a}{b})^n && \# \text{ define } S \\
 &= (\frac{a}{b})^1 + (\frac{a}{b})^2 + (\frac{a}{b})^3 + \dots && \# \text{ expand terms} \\
 \Rightarrow &(\frac{b}{a}) \cdot S = (\frac{b}{a}) \cdot [(\frac{a}{b})^1 + (\frac{a}{b})^2 + (\frac{a}{b})^3 + \dots] && \# \text{ multiply both sides by } \frac{b}{a} \\
 \Rightarrow &(\frac{b}{a}) \cdot S = 1 + (\frac{a}{b})^1 + (\frac{a}{b})^2 + (\frac{a}{b})^3 + \dots && \# \text{ multiply through on right side} \\
 \Rightarrow &(\frac{b}{a}) \cdot S = 1 + S && \# \text{ definition of } S \\
 \Rightarrow &(\frac{b}{a}) \cdot S - S = 1 && \# \text{ subtract } S \text{ from both sides} \\
 \Rightarrow &\frac{bS - aS}{a} = 1 && \# \text{ multiply through on left side} \\
 \Rightarrow &S \cdot \frac{b-a}{a} = 1 && \# \text{ factor out } S \\
 \Rightarrow &S = \frac{a}{b-a} && \# \text{ multiply both sides by } \frac{a}{b-a}
 \end{array}$$

So  $S = \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} (\frac{a}{b})^n = \frac{a}{b-a}$  where  $a, b \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $b \neq 0$  and  $a < b$ .

For example, if we let  $a = 1$  and  $b = 2$  then  $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} (\frac{1}{2})^n = \frac{1}{2-1} = 1$ . Similarly, if  $a = 1$  and  $b = 3$  then  $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} (\frac{1}{3})^n = \frac{1}{3-1} = \frac{1}{2}$ .

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to Dave Neary who pointed out that the series diverges if  $a \geq b$ .