

### Task

Prove that the only prime triple (i.e. three primes, each 2 from the next) is 3, 5, 7.

### Solution

First, observe that (1, 3, 5) is non-prime since 1 is non-prime. Second, observe that, if a triple contains even number, then it is not prime. So let's consider only triples that contain only odd numbers, starting from triple (3, 5, 7) and give them formal definition:

**Definition 1.** A *triple*, denoted  $T_n$ , is three odd numbers, each 2 from the next, i.e.  $T_n = (2n + 1, n + 3, 2n + 5)$ , for any  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ .

**Definition 2.** A *non-prime triple* is a triple that has at least one non-prime element.

Here are some examples of triples:  $T_1 = (3, 5, 7)$ ,  $T_2 = (5, 7, 9)$ ,  $T_3 = (7, 9, 11)$ ,  $T_4 = (9, 11, 13)$ ,  $T_5 = (11, 13, 15)$  and so on.

Notice how  $i$ -th element moves from position 3 to 2 to 1 in 3 consecutive triples:

$$\begin{aligned}T_n &= (2n + 1, 2n + 3, 2n + 5) \\T_{n+1} &= (2n + 3, 2n + 5, 2n + 7) \\T_{n+2} &= (2n + 5, 2n + 7, 2n + 9)\end{aligned}$$

If  $2n + 5$  is non-prime, then both  $T_n$  and  $T_{n+1}$  and  $T_{n+2}$  are non-prime, since  $2n + 5$  is present in all these triples.

**Definition 3.** Triples  $T_i$  and  $T_j$  *intersect* if they share at least one common element for all  $i, j \in \mathbb{N}$ .

So whenever  $T_i$  and  $T_j$  intersect, they are equivalent with respect to being non-prime (if one is non-prime then another is also non-prime). Thus we can consider only *non-intersecting* triples, i.e. triples that have no common elements.

We can see that next nearest triple to  $T_n$  that does not intersect with it is  $T_{n+3}$ , since  $T_{n+3} = (2n + 7, 2n + 9, 2n + 11)$ , and it doesn't have common elements with  $T_n$ .

So the sequence of triples that do not intersect with each other is of this form:

$$[T_n, T_{n+3}, T_{n+6}, \dots]$$

, i.e. all triples of the form  $T_{n+3k}$  for all  $n, k \in \mathbb{Z}, n > 0, k \geq 0$ .

We are only interested in such triples that start from  $(5, 7, 9)$ , so let's give them a formal definition:

**Definition 4.** A *non-intersecting triple* is a triple  $\tau_k = T_{2+3k}$  for all  $k \geq 0$ .

Examples of non-intersecting triples:

$$\begin{aligned}\tau_0 &= T_{2+3 \cdot 0} = T_2 = (5, 7, 9) \\ \tau_1 &= T_{2+3 \cdot 1} = T_5 = (11, 13, 15) \\ \tau_2 &= T_{2+3 \cdot 2} = T_8 = (17, 19, 21)\end{aligned}$$

To prove the original statement we need to prove that all non-intersecting triples of the form  $\tau_k = T_{2+3k}$  for all  $k \geq 0$  are non-primes.

But first we need to prove several additional statements.

**Definition 5.**  $\tau_k^i$  is  $i$ -th element of non-intersecting triple  $\tau_k$

**Lemma 1.**  $\tau_k^3$  is divisible by 3 for all  $k \geq 0$ .

*Proof.* By induction:

*Initial step* ( $k = 0$ ):  $\tau_0^3 = (T_{2+3 \cdot 0})^3 = (T_2)^3 = (5, 7, 9)^3 = 9$  is divisible by 3.

*Induction step:* Assume  $\tau_k^3$  is divisible by 3, thus it can be expressed in a form  $\tau_k^3 = 3n$ , for some  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ .

$$\begin{aligned}\tau_k^3 &= (T_{3k+2})^3 \text{ (by definition of } \tau_k) \\ &= (2(3k+2) + 1, 2(3k+2) + 3, 2(3k+2) + 5)^3 \text{ (by definition of } T_n) \\ &= (6k+5, 6k+7, 6k+9)^3 \text{ (by algebra)} \\ &= 6k+9 \text{ (by definition of } \tau_k^i) \\ \tau_{k+1}^3 &= (T_{3(k+1)+2})^3 \text{ (by definition of } \tau_k) \\ &= (T_{3k+5})^3 \text{ (by algebra)} \\ &= (2(3k+5) + 1, 2(3k+5) + 3, 2(3k+5) + 5)^3 \text{ (By definition of } T_n) \\ &= (6k+11, 6k+13, 6k+15)^3 \text{ (By algebra)} \\ &= 6k+15 \text{ (By definition of } \tau_k^i)\end{aligned}$$

Hence,  $\tau_{k+1}^3 = \tau_k^3 + 6$

$= 3n + 6$  (by induction hypothesis)

$= 3(n+2)$  - this is divisible by 3.

Thus, by principle of mathematical induction,  $\tau_k^3$  is divisible by 3 for all  $k \in \mathbb{Z}, k \geq 0$ .  $\square$

**Lemma 2.**  $\tau_k$  is non-prime for all  $k \geq 0$ .

*Proof.* By Lemma 1,  $\tau_k^3$  is divisible by 3 for all  $k \geq 0$ . This implies that  $\tau_k^3$  is non-prime for all  $k \geq 0$  (by definition of prime number).

But then it implies that  $\tau_k$  is non-prime for all  $k \geq 0$  (since  $\tau_k$  contains  $\tau_k^3$  for all  $k$ ).

Thus, we proved that all non-intersecting triples are non-prime.  $\square$

**Lemma 3.** *For all  $n \geq 2$  there exists  $k \geq 0$  such that  $T_n$  and  $\tau_k$  have common element. In other words, for each triple starting from  $(5, 7, 9)$  there exists a non-intersecting triple that it shares element with.*

*Proof.* Take arbitrary  $T_n = (2n + 1, 2n + 3, 2n + 5)$  (by definition of  $T_n$ ).

We need to find  $k$  such that  $n = 2 + 3k$ , i.e.  $3k = n - 2$ .

By division theorem,  $n$  can be expressed in one of these forms:  $3m, 3m + 1, 3m + 2$  for some  $m \geq 1$ .

Case  $n = 3m$ :  $T_n = T_{3m} = (6m + 1, 6m + 3, 6m + 5)$

Case  $n = 3m + 1$ :  $T_n = T_{3m+1} = (6m + 3, 6m + 5, 6m + 7)$

Case  $n = 3m + 2$ :  $T_n = T_{3m+2} = (6m + 5, 6m + 7, 6m + 9)$

In each of three cases, take  $k = m$ .

Then  $\tau(m) = T_{3m+2} = (6m + 5, 6m + 7, 6m + 9)$

We can observe that  $6m + 5$  is shared by  $\tau_m$  and  $T_n$  for each of three cases.

Since we have exhausted all cases, we proved that for all  $n \geq 2$  there exists  $k \geq 0$  such that  $T_n$  and  $\tau_k$  have common element.  $\square$

**Lemma 4.** *All triples  $T_n$  where  $n \in \mathbb{N}, n \geq 2$  are non-prime.*

*Proof.* By Lemma 2 all non-intersecting triples are non-prime, and by Lemma 3 any other triple  $T_n$  where  $n \geq 2$  shares at least one common element with some non-intersecting triple.

Thus all triples  $T_n$  where  $n \geq 2$  are non-prime.  $\square$

Now we are in a position to prove the original proposition:

**Original proposition.** *For all  $n \in \mathbb{N}$  among all triples of the form  $(n, n + 2, n + 4)$  there exists only one prime triple, namely,  $(3, 5, 7)$ .*

*Proof.* Since even numbers are not prime, all triples of the form  $(2n, 2n + 2, 2n + 4), n \in \mathbb{N}$ , are non-prime. By Lemma 4, all triples of the form  $(2n + 1, 2n + 3, 2n + 5), n \in \mathbb{N}, n \geq 2$ , are non-prime. Hence we are left with two triples:  $(1, 3, 5)$  and  $(3, 5, 7)$ . Triple  $(1, 3, 5)$  is non-prime since 1 is non-prime.

Hence, the only prime triple is  $(3, 5, 7)$ . This constitutes the proof of the original proposition.  $\square$