



Module 4 - Counting

CE– SE–DSGT

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4.1

- Basic Counting Principle-Sum Rule, Product Rule, Inclusion-Exclusion Principle, Pigeonhole Principle

4.2

- Recurrence relations, Solving recurrence relations



The Basics of Counting

Suppose that a password on a computer system consists of six, seven, or eight characters.

Each of these characters must be a digit or a letter of the alphabet. Each password must contain at least one digit.

How many such passwords are there? The techniques needed to answer this question and a wide variety of other counting problems will be introduced in this section.

Counting problems arise throughout mathematics and computer science.

For example, we must count the successful outcomes of experiments and all the possible outcomes of these experiments to determine probabilities of discrete events.

We need to count the number of operations used by an algorithm to study its time complexity.



Basic Counting Principles

The Product Rule

Suppose that a procedure can be broken down into a sequence of two tasks. If there are n_1 ways to do the first task and for each of these ways of doing the first task, there are n_2 ways to do the second task, then there are $n_1 n_2$ ways to do the procedure.

EXAMPLE 1 A new company with just two employees, Sanchez and Patel, rents a floor of a building with 12 offices. How many ways are there to assign different offices to these two employees?

Solution: The procedure of assigning offices to these two employees consists of assigning an office to Sanchez, which can be done in 12 ways, then assigning an office to Patel different from the office assigned to Sanchez, which can be done in 11 ways. By the product rule, there are $12 \cdot 11 = 132$ ways to assign offices to these two employees. ◀

EXAMPLE 2 The chairs of an auditorium are to be labeled with an uppercase English letter followed by a positive integer not exceeding 100. What is the largest number of chairs that can be labeled differently?

Solution: The procedure of labeling a chair consists of two tasks, namely, assigning to the seat one of the 26 uppercase English letters, and then assigning to it one of the 100 possible integers. The product rule shows that there are $26 \cdot 100 = 2600$ different ways that a chair can be labeled. Therefore, the largest number of chairs that can be labeled differently is 2600. ◀



EXAMPLE 3 There are 32 computers in a data center in the cloud. Each of these computers has 24 ports. How many different computer ports are there in this data center?

Solution: The procedure of choosing a port consists of two tasks, first picking a computer and then picking a port on this computer. Because there are 32 ways to choose the computer and 24 ways to choose the port no matter which computer has been selected, the product rule shows that there are $32 \cdot 24 = 768$ ports. ◀

An extended version of the product rule is often useful. Suppose that a procedure is carried out by performing the tasks T_1, T_2, \dots, T_m in sequence. If each task T_i , $i = 1, 2, \dots, m$, can be done in n_i ways, regardless of how the previous tasks were done, then there are $n_1 \cdot n_2 \cdot \dots \cdot n_m$ ways to carry out the procedure. This version of the product rule can be proved by mathematical induction from the product rule for two tasks (see Exercise 76).



EXAMPLE 4 How many different bit strings of length seven are there?

Solution: Each of the seven bits can be chosen in two ways, because each bit is either 0 or 1. Therefore, the product rule shows there are a total of $2^7 = 128$ different bit strings of length seven. ◀

EXAMPLE 5 How many different license plates can be made if each plate contains a sequence of three uppercase English letters followed by three digits (and no sequences of letters are prohibited, even if they are obscene)?

— — — — —
⏟ ⏟
26 choices 10 choices
for each for each
letter digit

Solution: There are 26 choices for each of the three uppercase English letters and 10 choices for each of the three digits. Hence, by the product rule there are a total of $26 \cdot 26 \cdot 26 \cdot 10 \cdot 10 \cdot 10 = 17,576,000$ possible license plates. ◀



EXAMPLE 6 Counting Functions How many functions are there from a set with m elements to a set with n elements?

Solution: A function corresponds to a choice of one of the n elements in the codomain for each of the m elements in the domain. Hence, by the product rule there are $n \cdot n \cdot \cdots \cdot n = n^m$ functions from a set with m elements to one with n elements. For example, there are $5^3 = 125$ different functions from a set with three elements to a set with five elements. ◀

EXAMPLE 7 Counting One-to-One Functions How many one-to-one functions are there from a set with m elements to one with n elements?

Solution: First note that when $m > n$ there are no one-to-one functions from a set with m elements to a set with n elements.

Now let $m \leq n$. Suppose the elements in the domain are a_1, a_2, \dots, a_m . There are n ways to choose the value of the function at a_1 . Because the function is one-to-one, the value of the function at a_2 can be picked in $n - 1$ ways (because the value used for a_1 cannot be used again). In general, the value of the function at a_k can be chosen in $n - k + 1$ ways. By the product rule, there are $n(n - 1)(n - 2) \cdots (n - m + 1)$ one-to-one functions from a set with m elements to one with n elements.

For example, there are $5 \cdot 4 \cdot 3 = 60$ one-to-one functions from a set with three elements to a set with five elements. ◀



EXAMPLE 8

Counting Subsets of a Finite Set Use the product rule to show that the number of different subsets of a finite set S is $2^{|S|}$.

Solution: Let S be a finite set. List the elements of S in arbitrary order. Recall from Section 2.2 that there is a one-to-one correspondence between subsets of S and bit strings of length $|S|$. Namely, a subset of S is associated with the bit string with a 1 in the i th position if the i th element in the list is in the subset, and a 0 in this position otherwise. By the product rule, there are $2^{|S|}$ bit strings of length $|S|$. Hence, $|P(S)| = 2^{|S|}$.

The product rule is often phrased in terms of sets in this way: If A_1, A_2, \dots, A_m are finite sets, then the number of elements in the Cartesian product of these sets is the product of the number of elements in each set. To relate this to the product rule, note that the task of choosing an element in the Cartesian product $A_1 \times A_2 \times \dots \times A_m$ is done by choosing an element in A_1 , an element in A_2 , \dots , and an element in A_m . By the product rule it follows that

$$|A_1 \times A_2 \times \dots \times A_m| = |A_1| \cdot |A_2| \cdot \dots \cdot |A_m|.$$



The Sum Rule

If a task can be done either in one of n_1 ways or in one of n_2 ways, where none of the set of n_1 ways is the same as any of the set of n_2 ways, then there are $n_1 + n_2$ ways to do the task.

EXAMPLE 9

Suppose that either a member of the mathematics faculty or a student who is a mathematics major is chosen as a representative to a university committee. How many different choices are there for this representative if there are 37 members of the mathematics faculty and 83 mathematics majors and no one is both a faculty member and a student?

Solution: There are 37 ways to choose a member of the mathematics faculty and there are 83 ways to choose a student who is a mathematics major. Choosing a member of the mathematics faculty is never the same as choosing a student who is a mathematics major because no one is both a faculty member and a student. By the sum rule it follows that there are $37 + 83 = 120$ possible ways to pick this representative.



We can extend the sum rule to more than two tasks. Suppose that a task can be done in one of n_1 ways, in one of n_2 ways, \dots , or in one of n_m ways, where none of the set of n_i ways of doing the task is the same as any of the set of n_j ways, for all pairs i and j with $1 \leq i < j \leq m$. Then the number of ways to do the task is $n_1 + n_2 + \dots + n_m$. This extended version of the sum rule is often useful in counting problems



EXAMPLE 10

What is the value of k after the following code, where n_1, n_2, \dots, n_m are positive integers, has been executed?

```
k := 0
for  $i_1 := 1$  to  $n_1$ 
    k := k + 1
for  $i_2 := 1$  to  $n_2$ 
    k := k + 1
    .
    .
    .
for  $i_m := 1$  to  $n_m$ 
    k := k + 1
```

Solution: The initial value of k is zero. This block of code is made up of m different loops. Each time a loop is traversed, 1 is added to k . To determine the value of k after this code has been executed, we need to determine how many times we traverse a loop. Note that there are n_i ways to traverse the i th loop. Because we only traverse one loop at a time, the sum rule shows that the final value of k , which is the number of ways to traverse one of the m loops is $n_1 + n_2 + \dots + n_m$. ◀



The sum rule can be phrased in terms of sets as: If A_1, A_2, \dots, A_m are pairwise disjoint finite sets, then the number of elements in the union of these sets is the sum of the numbers of elements in the sets. To relate this to our statement of the sum rule, note there are $|A_i|$ ways to choose an element from A_i for $i = 1, 2, \dots, m$. Because the sets are pairwise disjoint, when we select an element from one of the sets A_i , we do not also select an element from a different set A_j . Consequently, by the sum rule, because we cannot select an element from two of these sets at the same time, the number of ways to choose an element from one of the sets, which is the number of elements in the union, is

$$|A_1 \cup A_2 \cup \dots \cup A_m| = |A_1| + |A_2| + \dots + |A_m| \text{ when } A_i \cap A_j = \emptyset \text{ for all } i, j.$$



EXAMPLE 12

In a version of the computer language BASIC, the name of a variable is a string of one or two alphanumeric characters, where uppercase and lowercase letters are not distinguished. (An *alphanumeric* character is either one of the 26 English letters or one of the 10 digits.) Moreover, a variable name must begin with a letter and must be different from the five strings of two characters that are reserved for programming use. How many different variable names are there in this version of BASIC?

Solution: Let V equal the number of different variable names in this version of BASIC. Let V_1 be the number of these that are one character long and V_2 be the number of these that are two characters long. Then by the sum rule, $V = V_1 + V_2$. Note that $V_1 = 26$, because a one-character variable name must be a letter. Furthermore, by the product rule there are $26 \cdot 36$ strings of length two that begin with a letter and end with an alphanumeric character. However, five of these are excluded, so $V_2 = 26 \cdot 36 - 5 = 931$. Hence, there are $V = V_1 + V_2 = 26 + 931 = 957$ different names for variables in this version of BASIC. ◀



EXAMPLE 13

Each user on a computer system has a password, which is six to eight characters long, where each character is an uppercase letter or a digit. Each password must contain at least one digit. How many possible passwords are there?

Solution: Let P be the total number of possible passwords, and let P_6 , P_7 , and P_8 denote the number of possible passwords of length 6, 7, and 8, respectively. By the sum rule, $P = P_6 + P_7 + P_8$. We will now find P_6 , P_7 , and P_8 . Finding P_6 directly is difficult. To find P_6 it is easier to find the number of strings of uppercase letters and digits that are six characters long, including those with no digits, and subtract from this the number of strings with no digits. By the product rule, the number of strings of six characters is 36^6 , and the number of strings with no digits is 26^6 . Hence,

$$P_6 = 36^6 - 26^6 = 2,176,782,336 - 308,915,776 = 1,867,866,560.$$

Similarly, we have

$$P_7 = 36^7 - 26^7 = 78,364,164,096 - 8,031,810,176 = 70,332,353,920$$

and

$$\begin{aligned} P_8 &= 36^8 - 26^8 = 2,821,109,907,456 - 208,827,064,576 \\ &= 2,612,282,842,880. \end{aligned}$$

Consequently,

$$P = P_6 + P_7 + P_8 = 2,684,483,063,360.$$





The Subtraction Rule (Inclusion–Exclusion for Two Sets)

THE SUBTRACTION RULE

If a task can be done in either n_1 ways or n_2 ways, then the number of ways to do the task is $n_1 + n_2$ minus the number of ways to do the task that are common to the two different ways.

The subtraction rule is also known as the **principle of inclusion–exclusion**, especially when it is used to count the number of elements in the union of two sets. Suppose that A_1 and A_2 are sets. Then, there are $|A_1|$ ways to select an element from A_1 and $|A_2|$ ways to select an element from A_2 . The number of ways to select an element from A_1 or from A_2 , that is, the number of ways to select an element from their union, is the sum of the number of ways to select an element from A_1 and the number of ways to select an element from A_2 , minus the number of ways to select an element that is in both A_1 and A_2 . Because there are $|A_1 \cup A_2|$ ways to select an element in either A_1 or in A_2 , and $|A_1 \cap A_2|$ ways to select an element common to both sets, we have

$$|A_1 \cup A_2| = |A_1| + |A_2| - |A_1 \cap A_2|.$$



EXAMPLE 14

How many bit strings of length eight either start with a 1 bit or end with the two bits 00?

Solution: Figure 2 illustrates the three counting problems we need to solve before we can apply the principle of inclusion–exclusion. We can construct a bit string of length eight that either starts with a 1 bit or ends with the two bits 00, by constructing a bit string of length eight beginning with a 1 bit or by constructing a bit string of length eight that ends with the two bits 00. We can construct a bit string of length eight that begins with a 1 in $2^7 = 128$ ways. This follows by the product rule, because the first bit can be chosen in only one way and each of the other seven bits can be chosen in two ways. Similarly, we can construct a bit string of length eight ending with the two bits 00, in $2^6 = 64$ ways. This follows by the product rule, because each of the first six bits can be chosen in two ways and the last two bits can be chosen in only one way.

Some of the ways to construct a bit string of length eight starting with a 1 are the same as the ways to construct a bit string of length eight that ends with the two bits 00. There are $2^5 = 32$ ways to construct such a string. This follows by the product rule, because the first bit can be chosen in only one way, each of the second through the sixth bits can be chosen in two ways, and the last two bits can be chosen in one way. Consequently, the number of bit strings of length eight that begin with a 1 or end with a 00, which equals the number of ways to construct a bit string of length eight that begins with a 1 or that ends with 00, equals $128 + 64 - 32 = 160$. ◀

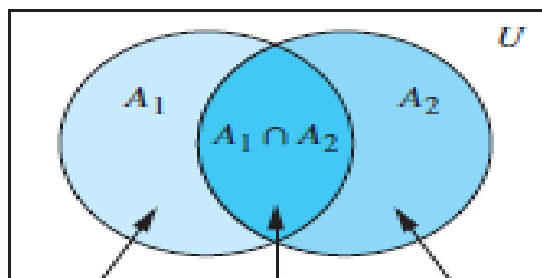


$$\begin{array}{c} \begin{array}{c} \textcolor{brown}{1} \\ \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{c} \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \end{array} \\ \underbrace{\hspace{10em}} \\ 2^7 = 128 \text{ ways} \\ \hline \begin{array}{c} \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \end{array} \begin{array}{c} \textcolor{brown}{0} \textcolor{brown}{0} \\ \textcolor{brown}{0} \textcolor{brown}{0} \end{array} \\ \underbrace{\hspace{10em}} \\ 2^6 = 64 \text{ ways} \\ \hline \begin{array}{c} \textcolor{brown}{1} \\ \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{c} \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \\ \text{-----} \end{array} \begin{array}{c} \textcolor{brown}{0} \textcolor{brown}{0} \\ \textcolor{brown}{0} \textcolor{brown}{0} \end{array} \\ \underbrace{\hspace{10em}} \\ 2^5 = 32 \text{ ways} \end{array}$$

We present an example that illustrates how the formulation of the principle of inclusion–exclusion can be used to solve counting problems.

EXAMPLE 15

A computer company receives 350 applications from college graduates for a job planning a line of new web servers. Suppose that 220 of these applicants majored in computer science, 147 majored in business, and 51 majored both in computer science and in business. How many of these applicants majored neither in computer science nor in business?




$$|A_1| = 220 \quad |A_1 \cap A_2| = 51 \quad |A_2| = 147$$

$$\begin{aligned} |\overline{A_1 \cup A_2}| &= |U| - |A_1 \cup A_2| \\ &= |U| - (|A_1| + |A_2| - |A_1 \cap A_2|) \\ &= 350 - (220 + 147 - 51) \\ &= 350 - 316 \\ &= 34 \end{aligned}$$

Solution: To find the number of these applicants who majored neither in computer science nor in business, we can subtract the number of students who majored either in computer science or in business (or both) from the total number of applicants. Let A_1 be the set of students who majored in computer science and A_2 the set of students who majored in business. Then $A_1 \cup A_2$ is the set of students who majored in computer science or business (or both), and $A_1 \cap A_2$ is the set of students who majored both in computer science and in business. By the subtraction rule the number of students who majored either in computer science or in business (or both) equals

$$|A_1 \cup A_2| = |A_1| + |A_2| - |A_1 \cap A_2| = 220 + 147 - 51 = 316.$$

We conclude that $350 - 316 = 34$ of the applicants majored neither in computer science nor in business. A Venn diagram for this example is shown in Figure 3. 



EXAMPLE 16

In a discrete mathematics class every student is a major in computer science or mathematics, or both. The number of students having computer science as a major (possibly along with mathematics) is 25; the number of students having mathematics as a major (possibly along with computer science) is 13; and the number of students majoring in both computer science and mathematics is 8. How many students are in this class?

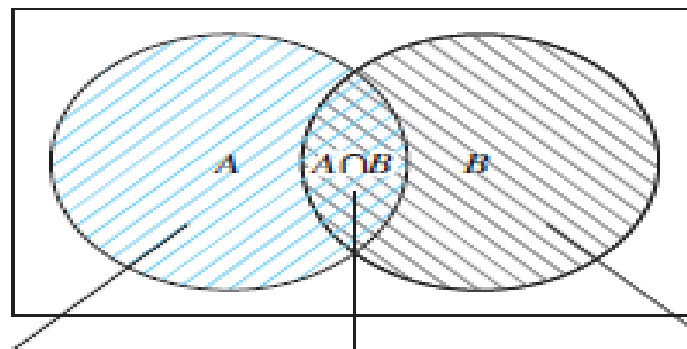
Solution: Let A be the set of students in the class majoring in computer science and B be the set of students in the class majoring in mathematics. Then $A \cap B$ is the set of students in the class who are joint mathematics and computer science majors. Because every student in the class is majoring in either computer science or mathematics (or both), it follows that the number of students in the class is $|A \cup B|$. Therefore,

$$\begin{aligned}|A \cup B| &= |A| + |B| - |A \cap B| \\ &= 25 + 13 - 8 = 30.\end{aligned}$$

Therefore, there are 30 students in the class. This computation is illustrated in Figure 1. 



$$|A \cup B| = |A| + |B| - |A \cap B| = 25 + 13 - 8 = 30$$

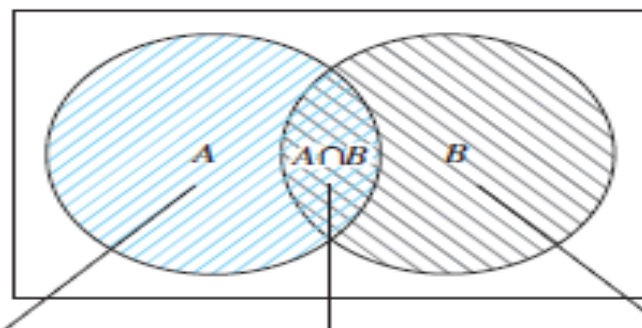


$$|A| = 25$$

$$|A \cap B| = 8$$

$$|B| = 13$$

$$|A \cup B| = |A| + |B| - |A \cap B| = 142 + 90 - 12 = 220$$



$$|A| = 142$$

$$|A \cap B| = 12$$

$$|B| = 90$$




EXAMPLE 17

How many positive integers not exceeding 1000 are divisible by 7 or 11?

Solution: Let A be the set of positive integers not exceeding 1000 that are divisible by 7, and let B be the set of positive integers not exceeding 1000 that are divisible by 11. Then $A \cup B$ is the set of integers not exceeding 1000 that are divisible by either 7 or 11, and $A \cap B$ is the set of integers not exceeding 1000 that are divisible by both 7 and 11. From Example 2 of Section 4.1, we know that among the positive integers not exceeding 1000 there are $\lfloor 1000/7 \rfloor$ integers divisible by 7 and $\lfloor 1000/11 \rfloor$ divisible by 11. Because 7 and 11 are relatively prime, the integers divisible by both 7 and 11 are those divisible by $7 \cdot 11$. Consequently, there are $\lfloor 1000/(11 \cdot 7) \rfloor$ positive integers not exceeding 1000 that are divisible by both 7 and 11. It follows that there are

$$\begin{aligned} |A \cup B| &= |A| + |B| - |A \cap B| \\ &= \left\lfloor \frac{1000}{7} \right\rfloor + \left\lfloor \frac{1000}{11} \right\rfloor - \left\lfloor \frac{1000}{7 \cdot 11} \right\rfloor \\ &= 142 + 90 - 12 = 220 \end{aligned}$$

positive integers not exceeding 1000 that are divisible by either 7 or 11. This computation is illustrated in Figure 2. 



EXAMPLE 18

Suppose that there are 1807 freshmen at your school. Of these, 453 are taking a course in computer science, 567 are taking a course in mathematics, and 299 are taking courses in both computer science and mathematics. How many are not taking a course either in computer science or in mathematics?

Solution: To find the number of freshmen who are not taking a course in either mathematics or computer science, subtract the number that are taking a course in either of these subjects from the total number of freshmen. Let A be the set of all freshmen taking a course in computer science, and let B be the set of all freshmen taking a course in mathematics. It follows that $|A| = 453$, $|B| = 567$, and $|A \cap B| = 299$. The number of freshmen taking a course in either computer science or mathematics is

$$|A \cup B| = |A| + |B| - |A \cap B| = 453 + 567 - 299 = 721.$$

Consequently, there are $1807 - 721 = 1086$ freshmen who are not taking a course in computer science or mathematics.



We will now begin our development of a formula for the number of elements in the union of a finite number of sets. The formula we will develop is called the **principle of inclusion-exclusion**. For concreteness, before we consider unions of n sets, where n is any positive integer, we will derive a formula for the number of elements in the union of three sets A , B , and C . To construct this formula, we note that $|A| + |B| + |C|$ counts each element that is in exactly one of the three sets once, elements that are in exactly two of the sets twice, and elements in all three sets three times. This is illustrated in the first panel in Figure 3.

To remove the overcount of elements in more than one of the sets, we subtract the number of elements in the intersections of all pairs of the three sets. We obtain

$$|A| + |B| + |C| - |A \cap B| - |A \cap C| - |B \cap C|.$$

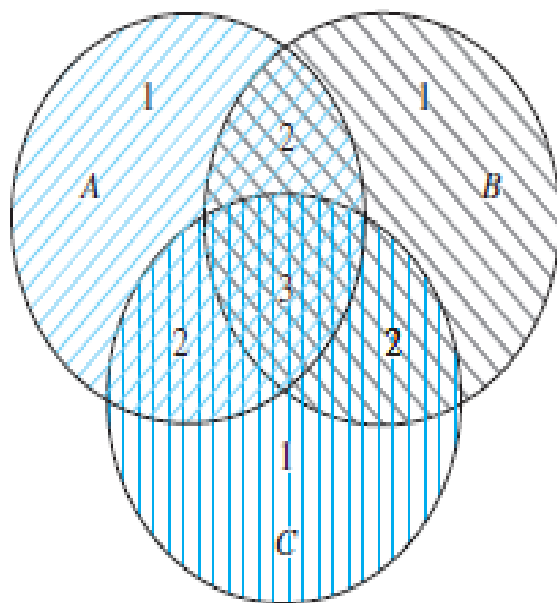
This expression still counts elements that occur in exactly one of the sets once. An element that occurs in exactly two of the sets is also counted exactly once, because this element will occur in one of the three intersections of sets taken two at a time. However, those elements that occur in all three sets will be counted zero times by this expression, because they occur in all three intersections of sets taken two at a time. This is illustrated in the second panel in Figure 3.

To remedy this undercount, we add the number of elements in the intersection of all three sets. This final expression counts each element once, whether it is in one, two, or three of the sets. Thus,

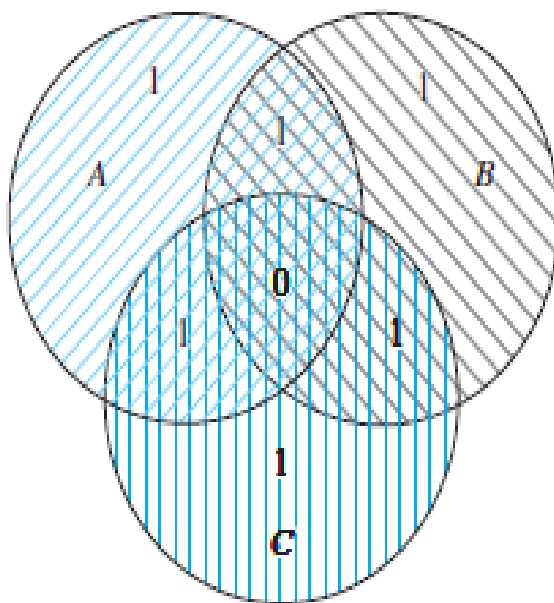
$$|A \cup B \cup C| = |A| + |B| + |C| - |A \cap B| - |A \cap C| - |B \cap C| + |A \cap B \cap C|.$$



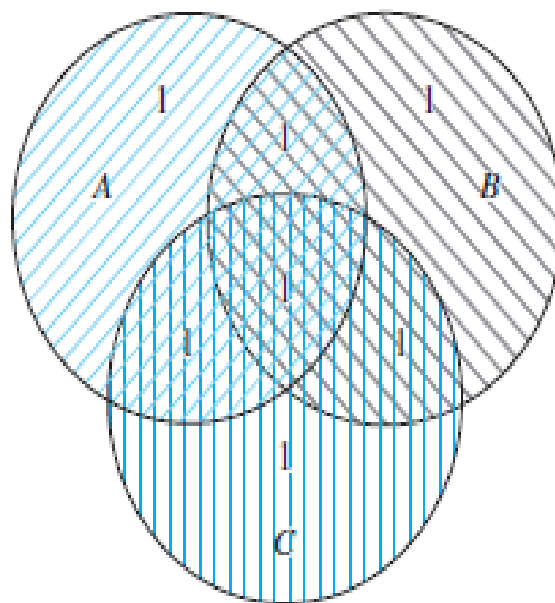
Finding a formula for the number of elements in the union of three sets.



(a) Count of elements by
 $|A| + |B| + |C|$



(b) Count of elements by
 $|A| + |B| + |C| - |A \cap B| -$
 $|A \cap C| - |B \cap C|$



(c) Count of elements by
 $|A| + |B| + |C| - |A \cap B| -$
 $|A \cap C| - |B \cap C| + |A \cap B \cap C|$



Recurrence relations

Suppose that the number of bacteria in a colony doubles every hour. If a colony begins with five bacteria, how many will be present in n hours?

To solve this problem, let a_n be the number of bacteria at the end of n hours. Because the number of bacteria doubles every hour, the relationship $a_n = 2a_{n-1}$ holds whenever n is a positive integer.

This recurrence relation, together with the initial condition $a_0 = 5$, uniquely determines a_n for all nonnegative integers n .

Then we can write $a_n = 5 \cdot 2^n$ for all nonnegative integers n .

We can use recurrence relations to model a wide variety of problems.



Definition

A *recurrence relation* for the sequence $\{a_n\}$ is an equation that expresses a_n in terms of one or more of the previous terms of the sequence, namely, a_0, a_1, \dots, a_{n-1} , for all integers n with $n \geq n_0$, where n_0 is a nonnegative integer. A sequence is called a *solution* of a recurrence relation if its terms satisfy the recurrence relation.

Example 1:

Let $\{a_n\}$ be a sequence that satisfies the recurrence relation $a_n = a_{n-1} - a_{n-2}$ for $n = 2, 3, 4, \dots$, and suppose that $a_0 = 3$ and $a_1 = 5$. What are a_2 and a_3 ?

Solution: We see from the recurrence relation that $a_2 = a_1 - a_0 = 5 - 3 = 2$ and $a_3 = a_2 - a_1 = 2 - 5 = -3$. We can find a_4, a_5 , and each successive term in a similar way. ◀



Example 2:

Determine whether the sequence $\{a_n\}$ is a solution of the recurrence relation $a_n = 2a_{n-1} - a_{n-2}$ for $n = 2, 3, 4, \dots$, where $a_n = 3n$ for every nonnegative integer n . Answer the same question where $a_n = 2^n$ and where $a_n = 5$.

Solution: Suppose that $a_n = 3n$ for every nonnegative integer n . Then, for $n \geq 2$, we see that $2a_{n-1} - a_{n-2} = 2[3(n-1)] - 3(n-2) = 3n = a_n$. Therefore, $\{a_n\}$, where $a_n = 3n$, is a solution of the recurrence relation.

Suppose that $a_n = 2^n$ for every nonnegative integer n . Note that $a_0 = 1$, $a_1 = 2$, and $a_2 = 4$. Since $2a_1 - a_0 = 2 \cdot 2 - 1 = 3 \neq a_2$, we see that $\{a_n\}$, where $a_n = 2^n$, is not a solution of the recurrence relation.

Suppose that $a_n = 5$ for every nonnegative integer n . Then for $n \geq 2$, we see that $a_n = 2a_{n-1} - a_{n-2} = 2 \cdot 5 - 5 = 5 = a_n$. Therefore, $\{a_n\}$, where $a_n = 5$, is a solution of the recurrence relation. ◀



Modeling With Recurrence Relations

Example 3:

Compound Interest Suppose that a person deposits \$10,000 in a savings account at a bank yielding 11% per year with interest compounded annually. How much will be in the account after 30 years?

Solution: To solve this problem, let P_n denote the amount in the account after n years. Since the amount in the account after n years equals the amount in the account after $n - 1$ years plus interest for the n th year, we see that the sequence $\{P_n\}$ satisfies the recurrence relation

$$P_n = P_{n-1} + 0.11P_{n-1} = (1.11)P_{n-1}.$$

The initial condition is $P_0 = 10,000$.

We can use an iterative approach to find a formula for P_n . Note that

$$P_1 = (1.11)P_0$$

$$P_2 = (1.11)P_1 = (1.11)^2 P_0$$

$$P_3 = (1.11)P_2 = (1.11)^3 P_0$$

$$\vdots$$

$$P_n = (1.11)P_{n-1} = (1.11)^n P_0.$$



Modeling With Recurrence Relations

When we insert the initial condition $P_0 = 10,000$, the formula $P_n = (1.11)^n 10,000$ is obtained. We can use mathematical induction to establish its validity. That the formula is valid for $n = 0$ is a consequence of the initial condition. Now assume that $P_n = (1.11)^n 10,000$. Then, from the recurrence relation and the induction hypothesis,

$$P_{n+1} = (1.11)P_n = (1.11)(1.11)^n 10,000 = (1.11)^{n+1} 10,000.$$

This shows that the explicit formula for P_n is valid.

Inserting $n = 30$ into the formula $P_n = (1.11)^n 10,000$ shows that after 30 years the account contains

$$P_{30} = (1.11)^{30} 10,000 = \$228,922.97.$$

Example 4 shows how the population of rabbits on an island can be modeled using a recurrence relation.



Modeling With Recurrence Relations

Example 4:

Rabbits and the Fibonacci Numbers Consider this problem, which was originally posed by Leonardo Pisano, also known as Fibonacci, in the thirteenth century in his book *Liber abaci*. A young pair of rabbits (one of each sex) is placed on an island. A pair of rabbits does not breed until they are 2 months old. After they are 2 months old, each pair of rabbits produces another pair each month, as shown in Figure 1. Find a recurrence relation for the number of pairs of rabbits on the island after n months, assuming that no rabbits ever die.



Modeling With Recurrence Relations











Reproducing pairs (at least two months old)	Young pairs (less than two months old)	Month	Reproducing pairs	Young pairs	Total pairs
		1	0	1	1
		2	0	1	1
		3	1	1	2
		4	1	2	3
		5	2	3	5
		6	3	5	8

FIGURE 1 Rabbits on an island.



Modeling With Recurrence Relations

Solution: Denote by f_n the number of pairs of rabbits after n months. We will show that f_n , $n = 1, 2, 3, \dots$, are the terms of the Fibonacci sequence.

The rabbit population can be modeled using a recurrence relation. At the end of the first month, the number of pairs of rabbits on the island is $f_1 = 1$. Because this pair does not breed during the second month, $f_2 = 1$ also. To find the number of pairs after n months, add the number on the island the previous month, f_{n-1} , and the number of newborn pairs, which equals f_{n-2} , because each newborn pair comes from a pair at least 2 months old.

Consequently, the sequence $\{f_n\}$ satisfies the recurrence relation

$$f_n = f_{n-1} + f_{n-2}$$

for $n \geq 3$ together with the initial conditions $f_1 = 1$ and $f_2 = 1$. Because this recurrence relation and the initial conditions uniquely determine this sequence, the number of pairs of rabbits on the island after n months is given by the n th Fibonacci number. ◀



Modeling With Recurrence Relations

Example 5:

Find a recurrence relation and give initial conditions for the number of bit strings of length n that do not have two consecutive 0s. How many such bit strings are there of length five?

Solution: Let a_n denote the number of bit strings of length n that do not have two consecutive 0s. We assume that $n \geq 3$, so that the bit string has at least three bits. Strings of this sort of length n can be divided into those that end in 1 and those that end in 0. The bit strings of length n ending with 1 that do not have two consecutive 0s are precisely the bit strings of length $n - 1$ with no two consecutive 0s with a 1 added at the end. Consequently, there are a_{n-1} such bit strings.

Bit strings of length n ending with a 0 that do not have two consecutive 0s must have 1 as their $(n - 1)$ st bit; otherwise they would end with a pair of 0s. Hence, the bit strings of length n ending with a 0 that have no two consecutive 0s are precisely the bit strings of length $n - 2$ with no two consecutive 0s with 10 added at the end. Consequently, there are a_{n-2} such bit strings.

We conclude, as illustrated in Figure 4, that

$$a_n = a_{n-1} + a_{n-2}$$

for $n \geq 3$.



Modeling With Recurrence Relations

The initial conditions are $a_1 = 2$, because both bit strings of length one, 0 and 1 do not have consecutive 0s, and $a_2 = 3$, because the valid bit strings of length two are 01, 10, and 11. To obtain a_5 , we use the recurrence relation three times to find that

$$a_3 = a_2 + a_1 = 3 + 2 = 5,$$

$$a_4 = a_3 + a_2 = 5 + 3 = 8,$$

$$a_5 = a_4 + a_3 = 8 + 5 = 13.$$



Remark: Note that $\{a_n\}$ satisfies the same recurrence relation as the Fibonacci sequence. Because $a_1 = f_3$ and $a_2 = f_4$ it follows that $a_n = f_{n+2}$.

Example 4 shows how a recurrence relation can be used to model the number of codewords that are allowable using certain validity checks.



Solving Recurrence Relations

A wide variety of recurrence relations occur in models. Some of these recurrence relations can be solved using iteration or some other ad hoc technique. However, one important class of recurrence relations can be explicitly solved in a systematic way. These are recurrence relations that express the terms of a sequence as linear combinations of previous terms.

Definition 1

A linear homogeneous recurrence relation of degree k with constant coefficients is a recurrence relation of the form

$$a_n = c_1 a_{n-1} + c_2 a_{n-2} + \cdots + c_k a_{n-k},$$

where c_1, c_2, \dots, c_k are real numbers, and $c_k \neq 0$.

The recurrence relation in the definition is **linear** because the right-hand side is a sum of previous terms of the sequence each multiplied by a function of n . The recurrence relation is **homogeneous** because no terms occur that are not multiples of the a 's. The coefficients of the terms of the sequence are all **constants**, rather than functions that depend on n . The **degree** is k because a_n is expressed in terms of the previous k terms of the sequence.

A consequence of the second principle of mathematical induction is that a sequence satisfying the recurrence relation in the definition is uniquely determined by this recurrence relation and the k initial conditions

$$a_0 = C_0, a_1 = C_1, \dots, a_{k-1} = C_{k-1}.$$



Solving Recurrence Relations

Example 1:

The recurrence relation $P_n = (1.11)P_{n-1}$ is a linear homogeneous recurrence relation of degree one. The recurrence relation $f_n = f_{n-1} + f_{n-2}$ is a linear homogeneous recurrence relation of degree two. The recurrence relation $a_n = a_{n-5}$ is a linear homogeneous recurrence relation of degree five. ◀

To help clarify the definition of linear homogeneous recurrence relations with constant coefficients, we will now provide examples of recurrence relations each lacking one of the defining properties.

Example 2

The recurrence relation $a_n = a_{n-1} + a_{n-2}^2$ is not linear. The recurrence relation $H_n = 2H_{n-1} + 1$ is not homogeneous. The recurrence relation $B_n = nB_{n-1}$ does not have constant coefficients. ◀

Linear homogeneous recurrence relations are studied for two reasons. First, they often occur in modeling of problems. Second, they can be systematically solved.



Solving Linear Homogeneous Recurrence Relations with Constant Coefficients

Recurrence relations may be difficult to solve, but fortunately this is not the case for linear homogenous recurrence relations with constant coefficients. We can use two key ideas to find all their solutions. First, these recurrence relations have solutions of the form $a_n = r^n$, where r is a constant. To see this, observe that $a_n = r^n$ is a solution of the recurrence relation $a_n = c_1 a_{n-1} + c_2 a_{n-2} + \dots + c_k a_{n-k}$ if and only if

$$r^n = c_1 r^{n-1} + c_2 r^{n-2} + \dots + c_k r^{n-k}.$$

When both sides of this equation are divided by r^{n-k} (when $r \neq 0$) and the right-hand side is subtracted from the left, we obtain the equation

$$r^k - c_1 r^{k-1} - c_2 r^{k-2} - \dots - c_{k-1} r - c_k = 0.$$

Consequently, the sequence $\{a_n\}$ with $a_n = r^n$ where $r \neq 0$ is a solution if and only if r is a solution of this last equation. We call this the **characteristic equation** of the recurrence relation. The solutions of this equation are called the **characteristic roots** of the recurrence relation. As we will see, these characteristic roots can be used to give an explicit formula for all the solutions of the recurrence relation.



The other key observation is that a linear combination of two solutions of a linear homogeneous recurrence relation is also a solution. To see this, suppose that s_n and t_n are both solutions of $a_n = c_1 a_{n-1} + c_2 a_{n-2} + \cdots + c_k a_{n-k}$. Then

$$s_n = c_1 s_{n-1} + c_2 s_{n-2} + \cdots + c_k s_{n-k}$$

and

$$t_n = c_1 t_{n-1} + c_2 t_{n-2} + \cdots + c_k t_{n-k}.$$

Now suppose that b_1 and b_2 are real numbers. Then

$$\begin{aligned} b_1 s_n + b_2 t_n &= b_1 (c_1 s_{n-1} + c_2 s_{n-2} + \cdots + c_k s_{n-k}) + b_2 (c_1 t_{n-1} + c_2 t_{n-2} + \cdots + c_k t_{n-k}) \\ &= c_1 (b_1 s_{n-1} + b_2 t_{n-1}) + c_2 (b_1 s_{n-2} + b_2 t_{n-2}) + \cdots + c_k (b_1 s_{n-k} + b_2 t_{n-k}). \end{aligned}$$

This means that $b_1 s_n + b_2 t_n$ is also a solution of the same linear homogeneous recurrence relation.

Using these key observations, we will show how to solve linear homogeneous recurrence relations with constant coefficients.



Solving Recurrence Relations

THE DEGREE TWO CASE We now turn our attention to linear homogeneous recurrence relations of degree two. First, consider the case when there are two distinct characteristic roots.

THEOREM 1

Let c_1 and c_2 be real numbers. Suppose that $r^2 - c_1r - c_2 = 0$ has two distinct roots r_1 and r_2 . Then the sequence $\{a_n\}$ is a solution of the recurrence relation $a_n = c_1a_{n-1} + c_2a_{n-2}$ if and only if $a_n = \alpha_1r_1^n + \alpha_2r_2^n$ for $n = 0, 1, 2, \dots$, where α_1 and α_2 are constants.

Proof: We must do two things to prove the theorem. First, it must be shown that if r_1 and r_2 are the roots of the characteristic equation, and α_1 and α_2 are constants, then the sequence $\{a_n\}$ with $a_n = \alpha_1r_1^n + \alpha_2r_2^n$ is a solution of the recurrence relation. Second, it must be shown that if the sequence $\{a_n\}$ is a solution, then $a_n = \alpha_1r_1^n + \alpha_2r_2^n$ for some constants α_1 and α_2 .

We now show that if $a_n = \alpha_1r_1^n + \alpha_2r_2^n$, then the sequence $\{a_n\}$ is a solution of the recurrence relation. Because r_1 and r_2 are roots of $r^2 - c_1r - c_2 = 0$, it follows that $r_1^2 = c_1r_1 + c_2$ and $r_2^2 = c_1r_2 + c_2$.

From these equations, we see that

$$\begin{aligned}c_1a_{n-1} + c_2a_{n-2} &= c_1(\alpha_1r_1^{n-1} + \alpha_2r_2^{n-1}) + c_2(\alpha_1r_1^{n-2} + \alpha_2r_2^{n-2}) \\&= \alpha_1r_1^{n-2}(c_1r_1 + c_2) + \alpha_2r_2^{n-2}(c_1r_2 + c_2) \\&= \alpha_1r_1^{n-2}r_1^2 + \alpha_2r_2^{n-2}r_2^2 \\&= \alpha_1r_1^n + \alpha_2r_2^n \\&= a_n.\end{aligned}$$



This shows that the sequence $\{a_n\}$ with $a_n = \alpha_1 r_1^n + \alpha_2 r_2^n$ is a solution of the recurrence relation.

To show that every solution $\{a_n\}$ of the recurrence relation $a_n = c_1 a_{n-1} + c_2 a_{n-2}$ has $a_n = \alpha_1 r_1^n + \alpha_2 r_2^n$ for $n = 0, 1, 2, \dots$, for some constants α_1 and α_2 , suppose that $\{a_n\}$ is a solution of the recurrence relation, and the initial conditions $a_0 = C_0$ and $a_1 = C_1$ hold. It will be shown that there are constants α_1 and α_2 such that the sequence $\{a_n\}$ with $a_n = \alpha_1 r_1^n + \alpha_2 r_2^n$ satisfies these same initial conditions. This requires that

$$a_0 = C_0 = \alpha_1 + \alpha_2,$$

$$a_1 = C_1 = \alpha_1 r_1 + \alpha_2 r_2.$$

We can solve these two equations for α_1 and α_2 . From the first equation it follows that $\alpha_2 = C_0 - \alpha_1$. Inserting this expression into the second equation gives

$$C_1 = \alpha_1 r_1 + (C_0 - \alpha_1) r_2.$$

Hence,

$$C_1 = \alpha_1 (r_1 - r_2) + C_0 r_2.$$

This shows that

$$\alpha_1 = \frac{C_1 - C_0 r_2}{r_1 - r_2}$$

and

$$\alpha_2 = C_0 - \alpha_1 = C_0 - \frac{C_1 - C_0 r_2}{r_1 - r_2} = \frac{C_0 r_1 - C_1}{r_1 - r_2},$$



where these expressions for α_1 and α_2 depend on the fact that $r_1 \neq r_2$. (When $r_1 = r_2$, this theorem is not true.) Hence, with these values for α_1 and α_2 , the sequence $\{a_n\}$ with $\alpha_1 r_1^n + \alpha_2 r_2^n$ satisfies the two initial conditions.

We know that $\{a_n\}$ and $\{\alpha_1 r_1^n + \alpha_2 r_2^n\}$ are both solutions of the recurrence relation $a_n = c_1 a_{n-1} + c_2 a_{n-2}$ and both satisfy the initial conditions when $n = 0$ and $n = 1$. Because there is a unique solution of a linear homogeneous recurrence relation of degree two with two initial conditions, it follows that the two solutions are the same, that is, $a_n = \alpha_1 r_1^n + \alpha_2 r_2^n$ for all nonnegative integers n . We have completed the proof by showing that a solution of the linear homogeneous recurrence relation with constant coefficients of degree two must be of the form $a_n = \alpha_1 r_1^n + \alpha_2 r_2^n$, where α_1 and α_2 are constants. \triangleleft

The characteristic roots of a linear homogeneous recurrence relation with constant coefficients may be complex numbers. Theorem 1 (and also subsequent theorems in this section) still applies in this case. Recurrence relations with complex characteristic roots will not be discussed in the text. Readers familiar with complex numbers may wish to solve Exercises 38 and 39.



Example 3

What is the solution of the recurrence relation

$$a_n = a_{n-1} + 2a_{n-2}$$

with $a_0 = 2$ and $a_1 = 7$?

Solution: Theorem 1 can be used to solve this problem. The characteristic equation of the recurrence relation is $r^2 - r - 2 = 0$. Its roots are $r = 2$ and $r = -1$. Hence, the sequence $\{a_n\}$ is a solution to the recurrence relation if and only if

$$a_n = \alpha_1 2^n + \alpha_2 (-1)^n,$$

for some constants α_1 and α_2 . From the initial conditions, it follows that

$$a_0 = 2 = \alpha_1 + \alpha_2,$$

$$a_1 = 7 = \alpha_1 \cdot 2 + \alpha_2 \cdot (-1).$$

Solving these two equations shows that $\alpha_1 = 3$ and $\alpha_2 = -1$. Hence, the solution to the recurrence relation and initial conditions is the sequence $\{a_n\}$ with

$$a_n = 3 \cdot 2^n - (-1)^n.$$





Example 4

Find an explicit formula for the Fibonacci numbers.

Solution: Recall that the sequence of Fibonacci numbers satisfies the recurrence relation $f_n = f_{n-1} + f_{n-2}$ and also satisfies the initial conditions $f_0 = 0$ and $f_1 = 1$. The roots of the characteristic equation $r^2 - r - 1 = 0$ are $r_1 = (1 + \sqrt{5})/2$ and $r_2 = (1 - \sqrt{5})/2$. Therefore, from Theorem 1 it follows that the Fibonacci numbers are given by

$$f_n = \alpha_1 \left(\frac{1 + \sqrt{5}}{2} \right)^n + \alpha_2 \left(\frac{1 - \sqrt{5}}{2} \right)^n,$$



for some constants α_1 and α_2 . The initial conditions $f_0 = 0$ and $f_1 = 1$ can be used to find these constants. We have

$$\begin{aligned}f_0 &= \alpha_1 + \alpha_2 = 0, \\f_1 &= \alpha_1 \left(\frac{1 + \sqrt{5}}{2} \right) + \alpha_2 \left(\frac{1 - \sqrt{5}}{2} \right) = 1.\end{aligned}$$

The solution to these simultaneous equations for α_1 and α_2 is

$$\alpha_1 = 1/\sqrt{5}, \quad \alpha_2 = -1/\sqrt{5}.$$

Consequently, the Fibonacci numbers are given by

$$f_n = \frac{1}{\sqrt{5}} \left(\frac{1 + \sqrt{5}}{2} \right)^n - \frac{1}{\sqrt{5}} \left(\frac{1 - \sqrt{5}}{2} \right)^n.$$

Theorem 1 does not apply when there is one characteristic root of multiplicity two. If this happens, then $a_n = nr_0^n$ is another solution of the recurrence relation when r_0 is a root of multiplicity two of the characteristic equation. Theorem 2 shows how to handle this case.



THEOREM 2

Let c_1 and c_2 be real numbers with $c_2 \neq 0$. Suppose that $r^2 - c_1r - c_2 = 0$ has only one root r_0 . A sequence $\{a_n\}$ is a solution of the recurrence relation $a_n = c_1a_{n-1} + c_2a_{n-2}$ if and only if $a_n = \alpha_1 r_0^n + \alpha_2 n r_0^n$, for $n = 0, 1, 2, \dots$, where α_1 and α_2 are constants.

The proof of Theorem 2 is left as Exercise 10. Example 5 illustrates the use of this theorem.

EXAMPLE 5

What is the solution of the recurrence relation

$$a_n = 6a_{n-1} - 9a_{n-2}$$

with initial conditions $a_0 = 1$ and $a_1 = 6$?

Solution: The only root of $r^2 - 6r + 9 = 0$ is $r = 3$. Hence, the solution to this recurrence relation is

$$a_n = \alpha_1 3^n + \alpha_2 n 3^n$$

for some constants α_1 and α_2 . Using the initial conditions, it follows that

$$a_0 = 1 = \alpha_1,$$

$$a_1 = 6 = \alpha_1 \cdot 3 + \alpha_2 \cdot 3.$$

Solving these two equations shows that $\alpha_1 = 1$ and $\alpha_2 = 1$. Consequently, the solution to this recurrence relation and the initial conditions is

$$a_n = 3^n + n 3^n.$$





THE GENERAL CASE We will now state the general result about the solution of linear homogeneous recurrence relations with constant coefficients, where the degree may be greater than two, under the assumption that the characteristic equation has distinct roots. The proof of this result will be left as Exercise 16.

THEOREM 3

Let c_1, c_2, \dots, c_k be real numbers. Suppose that the characteristic equation

$$r^k - c_1 r^{k-1} - \dots - c_k = 0$$

has k distinct roots r_1, r_2, \dots, r_k . Then a sequence $\{a_n\}$ is a solution of the recurrence relation

$$a_n = c_1 a_{n-1} + c_2 a_{n-2} + \dots + c_k a_{n-k}$$

if and only if

$$a_n = \alpha_1 r_1^n + \alpha_2 r_2^n + \dots + \alpha_k r_k^n$$

for $n = 0, 1, 2, \dots$, where $\alpha_1, \alpha_2, \dots, \alpha_k$ are constants.

We illustrate the use of the theorem with Example 6.

EXAMPLE 6 Find the solution to the recurrence relation

$$a_n = 6a_{n-1} - 11a_{n-2} + 6a_{n-3}$$

with the initial conditions $a_0 = 2$, $a_1 = 5$, and $a_2 = 15$.

Solution: The characteristic polynomial of this recurrence relation is

$$r^3 - 6r^2 + 11r - 6.$$



The characteristic roots are $r = 1$, $r = 2$, and $r = 3$, because $r^3 - 6r^2 + 11r - 6 = (r - 1)(r - 2)(r - 3)$. Hence, the solutions to this recurrence relation are of the form

$$a_n = \alpha_1 \cdot 1^n + \alpha_2 \cdot 2^n + \alpha_3 \cdot 3^n.$$

To find the constants α_1 , α_2 , and α_3 , use the initial conditions. This gives

$$a_0 = 2 = \alpha_1 + \alpha_2 + \alpha_3,$$

$$a_1 = 5 = \alpha_1 + \alpha_2 \cdot 2 + \alpha_3 \cdot 3,$$

$$a_2 = 15 = \alpha_1 + \alpha_2 \cdot 4 + \alpha_3 \cdot 9.$$

When these three simultaneous equations are solved for α_1 , α_2 , and α_3 , we find that $\alpha_1 = 1$, $\alpha_2 = -1$, and $\alpha_3 = 2$. Hence, the unique solution to this recurrence relation and the given initial conditions is the sequence $\{a_n\}$ with

$$a_n = 1 - 2^n + 2 \cdot 3^n.$$



We now state the most general result about linear homogeneous recurrence relations with constant coefficients, allowing the characteristic equation to have multiple roots. The key point is that for each root r of the characteristic equation, the general solution has a summand of the



form $P(n)r^n$, where $P(n)$ is a polynomial of degree $m - 1$, with m the multiplicity of this root. We leave the proof of this result as Exercise 51.

THEOREM 4

Let c_1, c_2, \dots, c_k be real numbers. Suppose that the characteristic equation

$$r^k - c_1 r^{k-1} - \dots - c_k = 0$$

has t distinct roots r_1, r_2, \dots, r_t with multiplicities m_1, m_2, \dots, m_t , respectively, so that $m_i \geq 1$ for $i = 1, 2, \dots, t$ and $m_1 + m_2 + \dots + m_t = k$. Then a sequence $\{a_n\}$ is a solution of the recurrence relation

$$a_n = c_1 a_{n-1} + c_2 a_{n-2} + \dots + c_k a_{n-k}$$

if and only if

$$\begin{aligned} a_n = & (\alpha_{1,0} + \alpha_{1,1}n + \dots + \alpha_{1,m_1-1}n^{m_1-1})r_1^n \\ & + (\alpha_{2,0} + \alpha_{2,1}n + \dots + \alpha_{2,m_2-1}n^{m_2-1})r_2^n \\ & + \dots + (\alpha_{t,0} + \alpha_{t,1}n + \dots + \alpha_{t,m_t-1}n^{m_t-1})r_t^n \end{aligned}$$

for $n = 0, 1, 2, \dots$, where α_{ij} are constants for $1 \leq i \leq t$ and $0 \leq j \leq m_i - 1$.

Example 7 illustrates how Theorem 4 is used to find the general form of a solution of a linear homogeneous recurrence relation when the characteristic equation has several repeated roots.



EXAMPLE 7 Suppose that the roots of the characteristic equation of a linear homogeneous recurrence relation are 2, 2, 2, 5, 5, and 9 (that is, there are three roots, the root 2 with multiplicity three, the root 5 with multiplicity two, and the root 9 with multiplicity one). What is the form of the general solution?

Solution: By Theorem 4, the general form of the solution is

$$(\alpha_{1,0} + \alpha_{1,1}n + \alpha_{1,2}n^2)2^n + (\alpha_{2,0} + \alpha_{2,1}n)5^n + \alpha_{3,0}9^n.$$

We now illustrate the use of Theorem 4 to solve a linear homogeneous recurrence relation with constant coefficients when the characteristic equation has a root of multiplicity three.

EXAMPLE 8 Find the solution to the recurrence relation

$$a_n = -3a_{n-1} - 3a_{n-2} - a_{n-3}$$

with initial conditions $a_0 = 1$, $a_1 = -2$, and $a_2 = -1$.

Solution: The characteristic equation of this recurrence relation is

$$r^3 + 3r^2 + 3r + 1 = 0.$$

Because $r^3 + 3r^2 + 3r + 1 = (r + 1)^3$, there is a single root $r = -1$ of multiplicity three of the characteristic equation. By Theorem 4 the solutions of this recurrence relation are of the form

$$a_n = \alpha_{1,0}(-1)^n + \alpha_{1,1}n(-1)^n + \alpha_{1,2}n^2(-1)^n.$$



To find the constants $\alpha_{1,0}$, $\alpha_{1,1}$, and $\alpha_{1,2}$, use the initial conditions. This gives

$$a_0 = 1 = \alpha_{1,0},$$

$$a_1 = -2 = -\alpha_{1,0} - \alpha_{1,1} - \alpha_{1,2},$$

$$a_2 = -1 = \alpha_{1,0} + 2\alpha_{1,1} + 4\alpha_{1,2}.$$

The simultaneous solution of these three equations is $\alpha_{1,0} = 1$, $\alpha_{1,1} = 3$, and $\alpha_{1,2} = -2$. Hence, the unique solution to this recurrence relation and the given initial conditions is the sequence $\{a_n\}$ with

$$a_n = (1 + 3n - 2n^2)(-1)^n.$$





Linear Nonhomogeneous Recurrence Relations with Constant Coefficients

We have seen how to solve linear homogeneous recurrence relations with constant coefficients. Is there a relatively simple technique for solving a linear, but not homogeneous, recurrence relation with constant coefficients, such as $a_n = 3a_{n-1} + 2n$? We will see that the answer is yes for certain families of such recurrence relations.

The recurrence relation $a_n = 3a_{n-1} + 2n$ is an example of a **linear nonhomogeneous recurrence relation with constant coefficients**, that is, a recurrence relation of the form

$$a_n = c_1 a_{n-1} + c_2 a_{n-2} + \cdots + c_k a_{n-k} + F(n),$$

where c_1, c_2, \dots, c_k are real numbers and $F(n)$ is a function not identically zero depending only on n . The recurrence relation

$$a_n = c_1 a_{n-1} + c_2 a_{n-2} + \cdots + c_k a_{n-k}$$

is called the **associated homogeneous recurrence relation**. It plays an important role in the solution of the nonhomogeneous recurrence relation.



EXAMPLE 9 Each of the recurrence relations $a_n = a_{n-1} + 2^n$, $a_n = a_{n-1} + a_{n-2} + n^2 + n + 1$, $a_n = 3a_{n-1} + n3^n$, and $a_n = a_{n-1} + a_{n-2} + a_{n-3} + n!$ is a linear nonhomogeneous recurrence relation with constant coefficients. The associated linear homogeneous recurrence relations are $a_n = a_{n-1}$, $a_n = a_{n-1} + a_{n-2}$, $a_n = 3a_{n-1}$, and $a_n = a_{n-1} + a_{n-2} + a_{n-3}$, respectively. ◀

The key fact about linear nonhomogeneous recurrence relations with constant coefficients is that every solution is the sum of a particular solution and a solution of the associated linear homogeneous recurrence relation, as Theorem 5 shows.

THEOREM 5 If $\{a_n^{(p)}\}$ is a particular solution of the nonhomogeneous linear recurrence relation with constant coefficients

$$a_n = c_1 a_{n-1} + c_2 a_{n-2} + \cdots + c_k a_{n-k} + F(n),$$

then every solution is of the form $\{a_n^{(p)} + a_n^{(h)}\}$, where $\{a_n^{(h)}\}$ is a solution of the associated homogeneous recurrence relation

$$a_n = c_1 a_{n-1} + c_2 a_{n-2} + \cdots + c_k a_{n-k}.$$



Proof: Because $\{a_n^{(p)}\}$ is a particular solution of the nonhomogeneous recurrence relation, we know that

$$a_n^{(p)} = c_1 a_{n-1}^{(p)} + c_2 a_{n-2}^{(p)} + \cdots + c_k a_{n-k}^{(p)} + F(n).$$

Now suppose that $\{b_n\}$ is a second solution of the nonhomogeneous recurrence relation, so that

$$b_n = c_1 b_{n-1} + c_2 b_{n-2} + \cdots + c_k b_{n-k} + F(n).$$

Subtracting the first of these two equations from the second shows that

$$b_n - a_n^{(p)} = c_1 (b_{n-1} - a_{n-1}^{(p)}) + c_2 (b_{n-2} - a_{n-2}^{(p)}) + \cdots + c_k (b_{n-k} - a_{n-k}^{(p)}).$$

It follows that $\{b_n - a_n^{(p)}\}$ is a solution of the associated homogeneous linear recurrence, say, $\{a_n^{(h)}\}$. Consequently, $b_n = a_n^{(p)} + a_n^{(h)}$ for all n . ◀

By Theorem 5, we see that the key to solving nonhomogeneous recurrence relations with constant coefficients is finding a particular solution. Then every solution is a sum of this solution and a solution of the associated homogeneous recurrence relation. Although there is no general method for finding such a solution that works for every function $F(n)$, there are techniques that work for certain types of functions $F(n)$, such as polynomials and powers of constants. This is illustrated in Examples 10 and 11



EXAMPLE 10 Find all solutions of the recurrence relation $a_n = 3a_{n-1} + 2n$. What is the solution with $a_1 = 3$?

Solution: To solve this linear nonhomogeneous recurrence relation with constant coefficients, we need to solve its associated linear homogeneous equation and to find a particular solution for the given nonhomogeneous equation. The associated linear homogeneous equation is $a_n = 3a_{n-1}$. Its solutions are $a_n^{(h)} = \alpha 3^n$, where α is a constant.

We now find a particular solution. Because $F(n) = 2n$ is a polynomial in n of degree one, a reasonable trial solution is a linear function in n , say, $p_n = cn + d$, where c and d are constants. To determine whether there are any solutions of this form, suppose that $p_n = cn + d$ is such a solution. Then the equation $a_n = 3a_{n-1} + 2n$ becomes $cn + d = 3(c(n-1) + d) + 2n$. Simplifying and combining like terms gives $(2 + 2c)n + (2d - 3c) = 0$. It follows that $cn + d$ is a solution if and only if $2 + 2c = 0$ and $2d - 3c = 0$. This shows that $cn + d$ is a solution if and only if $c = -1$ and $d = -3/2$. Consequently, $a_n^{(p)} = -n - 3/2$ is a particular solution.

By Theorem 5 all solutions are of the form

$$a_n = a_n^{(p)} + a_n^{(h)} = -n - \frac{3}{2} + \alpha \cdot 3^n,$$

where α is a constant.

To find the solution with $a_1 = 3$, let $n = 1$ in the formula we obtained for the general solution. We find that $3 = -1 - 3/2 + 3\alpha$, which implies that $\alpha = 11/6$. The solution we seek is $a_n = -n - 3/2 + (11/6)3^n$. ◀



EXAMPLE 11 Find all solutions of the recurrence relation

Extra
Examples

$$a_n = 5a_{n-1} - 6a_{n-2} + 7^n.$$

Solution: This is a linear nonhomogeneous recurrence relation. The solutions of its associated homogeneous recurrence relation

$$a_n = 5a_{n-1} - 6a_{n-2}$$

are $a_n^{(h)} = \alpha_1 \cdot 3^n + \alpha_2 \cdot 2^n$, where α_1 and α_2 are constants. Because $F(n) = 7^n$, a reasonable trial solution is $a_n^{(p)} = C \cdot 7^n$, where C is a constant. Substituting the terms of this sequence into the recurrence relation implies that $C \cdot 7^n = 5C \cdot 7^{n-1} - 6C \cdot 7^{n-2} + 7^n$. Factoring out 7^{n-2} , this equation becomes $49C = 35C - 6C + 49$, which implies that $20C = 49$, or that $C = 49/20$. Hence, $a_n^{(p)} = (49/20)7^n$ is a particular solution. By Theorem 5, all solutions are of the form

$$a_n = \alpha_1 \cdot 3^n + \alpha_2 \cdot 2^n + (49/20)7^n.$$

In Examples 10 and 11, we made an educated guess that there are solutions of a particular form. In both cases we were able to find particular solutions. This was not an accident. Whenever $F(n)$ is the product of a polynomial in n and the n th power of a constant, we know exactly what form a particular solution has, as stated in Theorem 6. We leave the proof of Theorem 6 as Exercise 52.



THEOREM 6

Suppose that $\{a_n\}$ satisfies the linear nonhomogeneous recurrence relation

$$a_n = c_1 a_{n-1} + c_2 a_{n-2} + \cdots + c_k a_{n-k} + F(n),$$

where c_1, c_2, \dots, c_k are real numbers, and

$$F(n) = (b_t n^t + b_{t-1} n^{t-1} + \cdots + b_1 n + b_0) s^n,$$

where b_0, b_1, \dots, b_t and s are real numbers. When s is not a root of the characteristic equation of the associated linear homogeneous recurrence relation, there is a particular solution of the form

$$(p_t n^t + p_{t-1} n^{t-1} + \cdots + p_1 n + p_0) s^n.$$

When s is a root of this characteristic equation and its multiplicity is m , there is a particular solution of the form

$$n^m (p_t n^t + p_{t-1} n^{t-1} + \cdots + p_1 n + p_0) s^n.$$


Note that in the case when s is a root of multiplicity m of the characteristic equation of the associated linear homogeneous recurrence relation, the factor n^m ensures that the proposed particular solution will not already be a solution of the associated linear homogeneous recurrence relation. We next provide Example 12 to illustrate the form of a particular solution provided by Theorem 6.



EXAMPLE 12 What form does a particular solution of the linear nonhomogeneous recurrence relation $a_n = 6a_{n-1} - 9a_{n-2} + F(n)$ have when $F(n) = 3^n$, $F(n) = n3^n$, $F(n) = n^22^n$, and $F(n) = (n^2 + 1)3^n$?

Solution: The associated linear homogeneous recurrence relation is $a_n = 6a_{n-1} - 9a_{n-2}$. Its characteristic equation, $r^2 - 6r + 9 = (r - 3)^2 = 0$, has a single root, 3, of multiplicity two. To apply Theorem 6, with $F(n)$ of the form $P(n)s^n$, where $P(n)$ is a polynomial and s is a constant, we need to ask whether s is a root of this characteristic equation.

Because $s = 3$ is a root with multiplicity $m = 2$ but $s = 2$ is not a root, Theorem 6 tells us that a particular solution has the form $p_0n^23^n$ if $F(n) = 3^n$, the form $n^2(p_1n + p_0)3^n$ if $F(n) =$

$n3^n$, the form $(p_2n^2 + p_1n + p_0)2^n$ if $F(n) = n^22^n$, and the form $n^2(p_2n^2 + p_1n + p_0)3^n$ if $F(n) = (n^2 + 1)3^n$. 

Care must be taken when $s = 1$ when solving recurrence relations of the type covered by Theorem 6. In particular, to apply this theorem with $F(n) = b_in_i + b_{i-1}n_{i-1} + \cdots + b_1n + b_0$, the parameter s takes the value $s = 1$ (even though the term 1^n does not explicitly appear). By the theorem, the form of the solution then depends on whether 1 is a root of the characteristic equation of the associated linear homogeneous recurrence relation. This is illustrated in Example 13, which shows how Theorem 6 can be used to find a formula for the sum of the first n positive integers.



EXAMPLE 13 Let a_n be the sum of the first n positive integers, so that

$$a_n = \sum_{k=1}^n k.$$

Note that a_n satisfies the linear nonhomogeneous recurrence relation

$$a_n = a_{n-1} + n.$$

(To obtain a_n , the sum of the first n positive integers, from a_{n-1} , the sum of the first $n - 1$ positive integers, we add n .) Note that the initial condition is $a_1 = 1$.

The associated linear homogeneous recurrence relation for a_n is

$$a_n = a_{n-1}.$$

The solutions of this homogeneous recurrence relation are given by $a_n^{(h)} = c(1)^n = c$, where c is a constant. To find all solutions of $a_n = a_{n-1} + n$, we need find only a single particular solution. By Theorem 6, because $F(n) = n = n \cdot (1)^n$ and $s = 1$ is a root of degree one of the characteristic equation of the associated linear homogeneous recurrence relation, there is a particular solution of the form $n(p_1 n + p_0) = p_1 n^2 + p_0 n$.



Inserting this into the recurrence relation gives $p_1 n^2 + p_0 n = p_1 (n-1)^2 + p_0 (n-1) + n$. Simplifying, we see that $n(2p_1 - 1) + (p_0 - p_1) = 0$, which means that $2p_1 - 1 = 0$ and $p_0 - p_1 = 0$, so $p_0 = p_1 = 1/2$. Hence,

$$a_n^{(p)} = \frac{n^2}{2} + \frac{n}{2} = \frac{n(n+1)}{2}$$

is a particular solution. Hence, all solutions of the original recurrence relation $a_n = a_{n-1} + n$ are given by $a_n = a_n^{(h)} + a_n^{(p)} = c + n(n+1)/2$. Because $a_1 = 1$, we have $1 = a_1 = c + 1 \cdot 2/2 = c + 1$, so $c = 0$. It follows that $a_n = n(n+1)/2$. (This is the same formula given in Table 2 in Section 2.4 and derived previously.) ◀