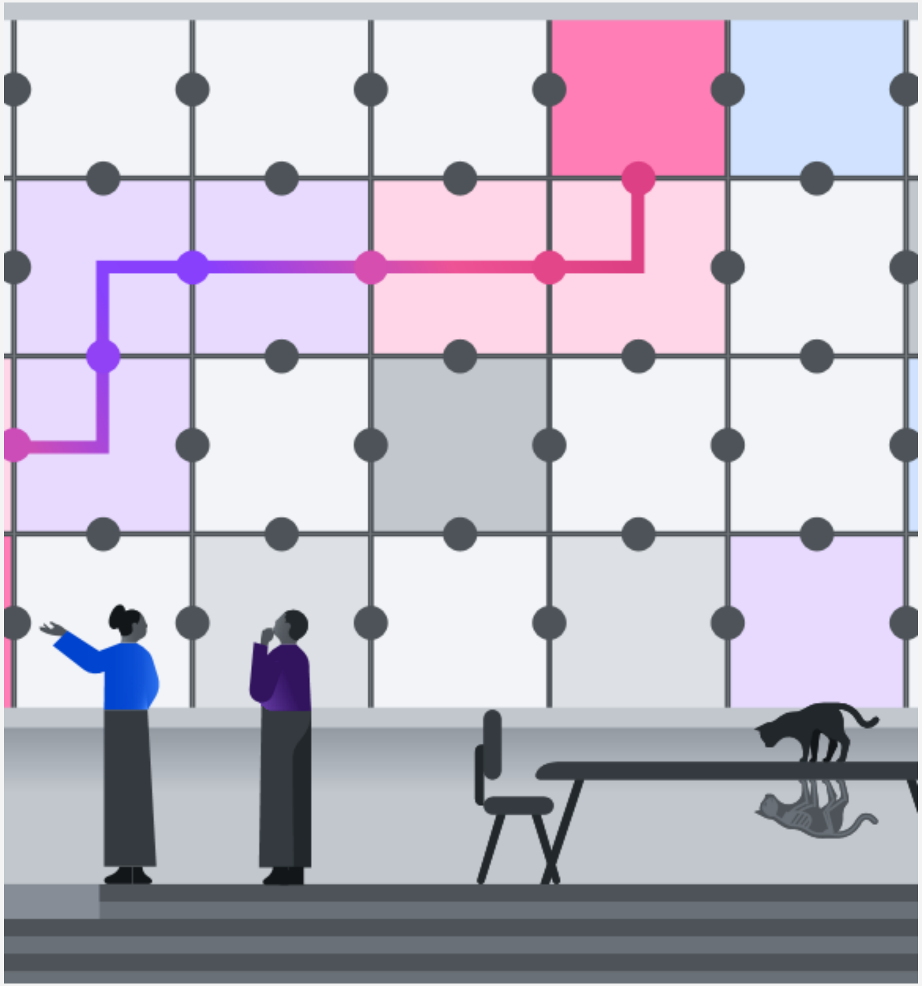
Understanding quantum information and computation

By John Watrous

Lesson 14

The stabilizer formalism



Pauli operations

$$\mathbb{1} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \qquad X = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \qquad Y = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & -i \\ i & 0 \end{pmatrix} \qquad Z = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & -1 \end{pmatrix}$$

Anti-commutation relations:

$$XY = -YX \qquad XZ = -ZX \qquad YZ = -ZY$$

Multiplication rules:

$$XY = iZ \qquad YZ = iX \qquad ZX = iY \qquad XX = YY = ZZ = \mathbb{1}$$

An *n-qubit Pauli operation* is the n-fold tensor product of Pauli matrices. Its *weight* is the number of non-identity Pauli matrices in the tensor product.

$$\begin{aligned} &\mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} && \leftarrow \text{weight } 0 \\ &X \otimes X \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} && \leftarrow \text{weight } 2 \\ &X \otimes Y \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes X \otimes Y \otimes Z && \leftarrow \text{weight } 6 \end{aligned}$$

Pauli operations as generators

$$\mathbb{1} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \qquad X = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \qquad Y = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & -i \\ i & 0 \end{pmatrix} \qquad Z = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & -1 \end{pmatrix}$$

Suppose that $P_1, \ldots, P_r$ are n-qubit Pauli operations.

The set *generated* by $P_1, \ldots, P_r$ includes all matrices that can be obtained from $P_1, \ldots, P_r$ by multiplication (taking any number of each operation and in any order).

Notation: $\langle P_1, \ldots, P_r \rangle$

Example 1

$$\langle X, Y, Z \rangle = \{\alpha P \,:\, \alpha \in \{1, i, -1, -i\},\; P \in \{\mathbb{1}, X, Y, Z\}\} \qquad \text{(16 elements)}$$

Example 2

$$\langle X, Z \rangle = \{\mathbb{1},\, X,\, Z,\, XZ,\, -\mathbb{1},\, -X,\, -Z,\, -XZ\} \qquad \text{(8 elements)}$$

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Example 2

$$\langle X, Z \rangle = \{\mathbb{1}, X, Z, XZ, -\mathbb{1}, -X, -Z, -XZ\} \qquad \text{(8 elements)}$$

Example 3

$$\langle X \otimes X, Z \otimes Z \rangle = \{\mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1}, X \otimes X, -Y \otimes Y, Z \otimes Z\} \qquad \text{(4 elements)}$$

Pauli observables

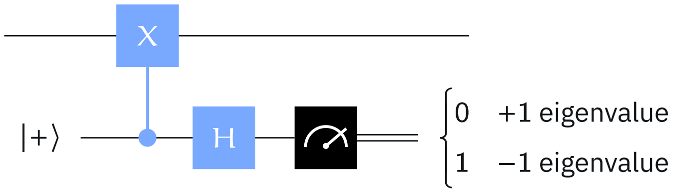
Pauli matrices describe unitary operations — but they also describe *measurements.*

More precisely, we can associate each Pauli matrix with a *projective measurement* defined by its eigenvectors.

$$X = |+\rangle\langle+| - |-\rangle\langle-| \qquad Y = |+i\rangle\langle+i| - |-i\rangle\langle-i| \qquad Z = |0\rangle\langle 0| - |1\rangle\langle 1|$$

For example, an X measurement is a measurement with respect to the basis $\{|+\rangle, |-\rangle\}$. Equivalently it is the measurement described by the set $\{|+\rangle\langle+|,\ |-\rangle\langle-|\}$.

We can perform this measurement non-destructively using *phase estimation.*



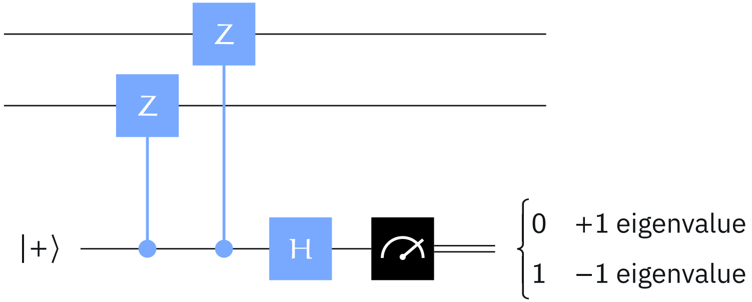
Pauli observables

This extends naturally to n-qubit Pauli operations. For example, consider $Z \otimes Z$.

$$
\begin{aligned}
Z \otimes Z &= \big(|0\rangle\langle 0| - |1\rangle\langle 1|\big) \otimes \big(|0\rangle\langle 0| - |1\rangle\langle 1|\big)\\
&= \big(|00\rangle\langle 00| + |11\rangle\langle 11|\big) - \big(|01\rangle\langle 01| + |10\rangle\langle 10|\big)
\end{aligned}
$$

The associated measurement is the two-outcome projective measurement described by the set $\{|00\rangle\langle 00| + |11\rangle\langle 11|, |01\rangle\langle 01| + |10\rangle\langle 10|\}$.

Again we can perform this measurement non-destructively using phase estimation.



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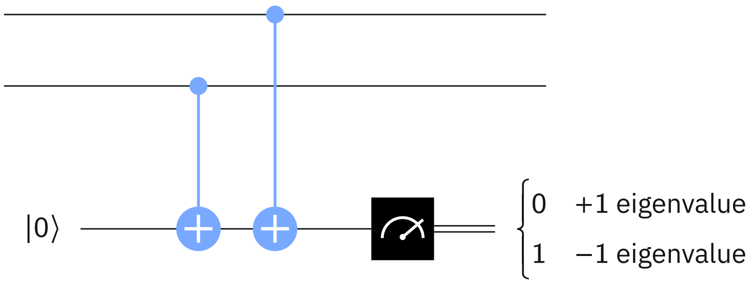


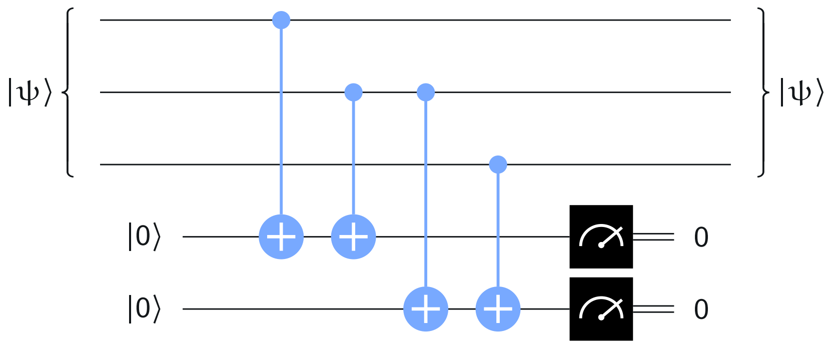
Repetition code revisited

The 3-bit repetition code encodes qubit states as follows:

$$\alpha|0\rangle + \beta|1\rangle \mapsto \alpha|000\rangle + \beta|111\rangle = |\psi\rangle$$

To check that the 3-qubit state $|\psi\rangle$ is a valid encoding of a qubit, it suffices to check these two equations:

$$(Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1})|\psi\rangle = |\psi\rangle$$
$$(\mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z)|\psi\rangle = |\psi\rangle$$



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The 3-qubit Pauli operations $Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1}$ and $\mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z$ are *stabilizer generators* for this code. The *stabilizer* for the code is the set generated by the stabilizer generators.

$$\langle Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1}, \mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z \rangle = \{\mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1},\ Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1},\ \mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z,\ Z \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes Z\}$$

Bit-flip detection

$$\alpha|0\rangle + \beta|1\rangle \mapsto \alpha|000\rangle + \beta|111\rangle = |\psi\rangle$$

$$(Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1})|\psi\rangle = |\psi\rangle$$
$$(\mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z)|\psi\rangle = |\psi\rangle$$

Suppose a bit-flip error occurs on the leftmost qubit.

$$|\psi\rangle \;\mapsto\; (X \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1})|\psi\rangle$$

By treating the stabilizer generators as observables, we can detect this error.

$$(Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1})(X \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1})|\psi\rangle = -(X \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1})(Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1})|\psi\rangle = -(X \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1})|\psi\rangle$$
$$(\mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z)(X \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1})|\psi\rangle = (X \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1})(\mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z)|\psi\rangle = (X \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1})|\psi\rangle$$

$$(Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1})(X \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1}) = -(X \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1})(Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1})$$
$$(\mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z)(X \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1}) = (X \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1})(\mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z)$$

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$$(\mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z)(X \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1}) = (X \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1})(\mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z)$$

	$\mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1}$	$X \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1}$	$\mathbb{1} \otimes X \otimes \mathbb{1}$	$\mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes X$
$Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1}$	$+1$	-1	-1	$+1$
$\mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z$	$+1$	$+1$	-1	-1

syndromes

Syndromes

	$\mathbb{1}\otimes\mathbb{1}\otimes\mathbb{1}$	$X\otimes\mathbb{1}\otimes\mathbb{1}$	$\mathbb{1}\otimes X\otimes\mathbb{1}$	$\mathbb{1}\otimes\mathbb{1}\otimes X$
$Z\otimes Z\otimes\mathbb{1}$	$+1$	-1	-1	$+1$
$\mathbb{1}\otimes Z\otimes Z$	$+1$	$+1$	-1	-1

syndromes

The syndromes partition the 8-dimensional space into four 2-dimensional subspaces.

		$\mathbb{1}\otimes Z\otimes Z$: $+1$	$\mathbb{1}\otimes Z\otimes Z$: -1
$Z\otimes Z\otimes\mathbb{1}$	$+1$	$\vert 000\rangle$ $\vert 111\rangle$	$\vert 001\rangle$ $\vert 110\rangle$
$Z\otimes Z\otimes\mathbb{1}$	-1	$\vert 100\rangle$ $\vert 011\rangle$	$\vert 010\rangle$ $\vert 101\rangle$

They also partition the 3-qubit Pauli operations into 4 equal-size collections. For example, $\mathbb{1}\otimes\mathbb{1}\otimes Z$, $Z\otimes Z\otimes Z$, and $X\otimes X\otimes X$ all cause the same syndrome $(+1,+1)$.

Syndromes

The syndromes partition the 8-dimensional space into four 2-dimensional subspaces.

$Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1}$ \ $\mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z$	$+1$	-1
$+1$	$\vert 000\rangle$ $\vert 111\rangle$	$\vert 001\rangle$ $\vert 110\rangle$
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They also partition the 3-qubit Pauli operations into 4 equal-size collections. For example, $\mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes Z$, $Z \otimes Z \otimes Z$, and $X \otimes X \otimes X$ all cause the same syndrome $(+1, +1)$.

Pauli operations that commute with every stabilizer generator but are not themselves in the stabilizer act like Pauli operations on the encoded qubit.

Stabilizer codes

A set $\{P_1, \ldots, P_r\}$ of n-qubit Pauli operations are stabilizer generators for a *stabilizer code* if these properties are satisfied:

1. The stabilizer generators all *commute* with one another.

$$P_j P_k = P_k P_j \qquad \text{(for all } j, k \in \{1, \ldots, r\}\text{)}$$

2. The stabilizer generators form a *minimal generating set.*

$$P_k \notin \langle P_1, \ldots, P_{k-1}, P_{k+1}, \ldots, P_r \rangle \qquad \text{(for each } k \in \{1, \ldots, r\}\text{)}$$

3. At least one nonzero vector is fixed by all of the stabilizer generators.

$$-\mathbb{1}^{\otimes n} \notin \langle P_1, \ldots, P_r \rangle$$

The *code space* defined by the stabilizer generators contains all vectors that are fixed by all of the stabilizer generators.

$$\{|\psi\rangle \,:\, |\psi\rangle = P_1|\psi\rangle = \cdots = P_r|\psi\rangle\}$$

Examples

3-bit repetition code (bit-flips)

$$Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1}$$
$$\mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z$$

3-bit repetition code (phase-flips)

$$X \otimes X \otimes \mathbb{1}$$
$$\mathbb{1} \otimes X \otimes X$$

9-qubit Shor code

$$
\begin{array}{c}
Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \\
\mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \\
\mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \\
\mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \\
\mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{1} \\
\mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes Z \otimes Z \\
X \otimes X \otimes X \otimes X \otimes X \otimes X \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \\
\mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes \mathbb{1} \otimes X \otimes X \otimes X \otimes X \otimes X \otimes X
\end{array}
$$

Examples

3-bit repetition code (bit-flips)

$$\begin{array}{ccc} Z & Z & \mathbb{1} \\ \mathbb{1} & Z & Z \end{array}$$

3-bit repetition code (phase-flips)

$$\begin{array}{ccc} X & X & \mathbb{1} \\ \mathbb{1} & X & X \end{array}$$

9-qubit Shor code

$$\begin{array}{ccccccccc} Z & Z & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \\ \mathbb{1} & Z & Z & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \\ \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & Z & Z & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \\ \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & Z & Z & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \\ \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & Z & Z & \mathbb{1} \\ \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & Z & Z \\ X & X & X & X & X & X & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \\ \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & X & X & X & X & X & X \end{array}$$

Examples

7-qubit Steane code

$$\begin{matrix} Z & Z & Z & Z & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \\ Z & Z & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & Z & Z & \mathbb{1} \\ Z & \mathbb{1} & Z & \mathbb{1} & Z & \mathbb{1} & Z \\ X & X & X & X & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \\ X & X & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & X & X & \mathbb{1} \\ X & \mathbb{1} & X & \mathbb{1} & X & \mathbb{1} & X \end{matrix}$$

5-qubit code

$$\begin{matrix} X & Z & Z & X & \mathbb{1} \\ \mathbb{1} & X & Z & Z & X \\ X & \mathbb{1} & X & Z & Z \\ Z & X & \mathbb{1} & X & Z \end{matrix}$$

E-bit stabilizer code

$$\begin{matrix} Z & Z \\ X & X \end{matrix}$$

GHZ stabilizer code

$$\begin{matrix} Z & Z & \mathbb{1} \\ \mathbb{1} & Z & Z \\ X & X & X \end{matrix}$$

Code space dimension

Suppose that $\{P_1, \ldots, P_r\}$ are n-qubit stabilizer generators for a stabilizer code.

1. $P_j P_k = P_k P_j$ for all $j, k \in \{1, \ldots, r\}$
2. $P_k \notin \langle P_1, \ldots, P_{k-1}, P_{k+1}, \ldots, P_r \rangle$ for each $k \in \{1, \ldots, r\}$
3. $-\mathbb{1} \notin \langle P_1, \ldots, P_r \rangle$

Theorem

The code space defined by $\{P_1, \ldots, P_r\}$ has dimension 2^{n-r}.

(Equivalently, the code defined by these generators encodes $n - r$ qubits.)

3-bit repetition code (bit-flips)

$$Z \; Z \; \mathbb{1}$$
$$\mathbb{1} \; Z \; Z$$

$n = 3$ qubits

$r = 2$ stabilizer generators

$\Rightarrow 3 - 2 = 1$ encoded qubit

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X & Z & Z & X & \mathbb{1} \\
\mathbb{1} & X & Z & Z & X \\
X & \mathbb{1} & X & Z & Z \\
Z & X & \mathbb{1} & X & Z
\end{array}
$$

$n = 5$ qubits
$r = 4$ stabilizer generators

$\Rightarrow 5 - 4 = 1$ encoded qubit

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E-bit stabilizer code

$$\begin{matrix} Z & Z \\ X & X \end{matrix}$$

$n = 2$ qubits
$r = 2$ stabilizer generators

$\Rightarrow 2 - 2 = 0$ encoded qubits

The code space is the 1-dimensional space spanned by the vector $|\phi^+\rangle$.

Code space dimension

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(Equivalently, the code defined by these generators encodes $n - r$ qubits.)

Every element in the stabilizer can be written in a unique way as $P_1^{a_1} \cdots P_r^{a_r}$ for $a_1, \ldots, a_r \in \{0, 1\}$.

$$P_1^{a_1} \cdots P_r^{a_r} = \mathbb{1}^{\otimes n} \quad \Longleftrightarrow \quad (a_1, \ldots, a_r) = (0, \ldots, 0)$$

The projection Π_k onto the $+1$ eigenspace of P_k can be expressed like this:

$$\Pi_k = \frac{\mathbb{1}^{\otimes n} + P_k}{2}$$

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The projections $\Pi_1, \ldots, \Pi_r$ commute. The projection onto the code space is their product.

$$\Pi_1 \cdots \Pi_r = \left(\frac{\mathbb{1}^{\otimes n} + P_1}{2}\right) \cdots \left(\frac{\mathbb{1}^{\otimes n} + P_r}{2}\right) = \frac{1}{2^r} \sum_{a_1, \ldots, a_r \in \{0,1\}} P_1^{a_1} \cdots P_r^{a_r}$$

Code space dimension

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The dimension of the code space is the trace of this projection.

$$\mathrm{Tr}(\Pi_1 \cdots \Pi_r) = \frac{1}{2^r} \sum_{a_1, \ldots, a_r \in \{0,1\}} \mathrm{Tr}\left(P_1^{a_1} \cdots P_r^{a_r}\right) = \frac{2^n}{2^r} = 2^{n-r}$$

Clifford operations and encodings

Clifford operations

Clifford operations are unitary operations that can be implemented by quantum circuits with gates from this list:

- Hadamard gates
- S gates
- CNOT gates

Up to a global phase, an n-qubit unitary operation is a Clifford operation if and only if it maps n-qubit Pauli operations to n-qubit Pauli operations by conjugation.

Equivalently, U is a Clifford operation (up to a global phase) if for every $P_0, \ldots, P_{n-1} \in \{\mathbb{1}, X, Y, Z\}$ there exist $Q_0, \ldots, Q_{n-1} \in \{\mathbb{1}, X, Y, Z\}$ such that

$$U(P_{n-1} \otimes \cdots \otimes P_0)U^\dagger = \pm Q_{n-1} \otimes \cdots \otimes Q_0$$

Clifford operations are *not universal* for quantum computation.

There are only finitely many n-qubit Clifford operations and their actions on standard basis states can be efficiently simulated classically by the *Gottesman–Knill theorem.*

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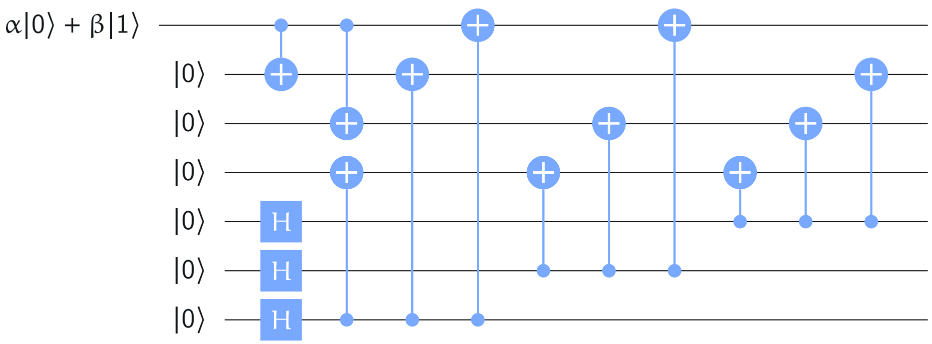
Encodings for stabilizer codes can always be performed by Clifford operations. At most $O(n^2/\log(n))$ gates are required.

Example: encoder for the 7-qubit Steane code



Detecting errors

Let $P_1, \ldots, P_r$ be stabilizer generators for an n-qubit stabilizer code, and let E be an n-qubit Pauli operation, representing a *hypothetical error.*

Errors are detected in a stabilizer code by *measuring the stabilizer generators* (as observables). The r outcomes form the syndrome.

Case 1: $E = \alpha Q$ for $Q \in \langle P_1, \ldots, P_r \rangle$.

> This error *does nothing* to vectors in the code space: $E|\psi\rangle = \alpha|\psi\rangle$ for every encoded state $|\psi\rangle$.

Case 2: $E \neq \alpha Q$ for $Q \in \langle P_1, \ldots, P_r \rangle$, but $EP_k = P_k E$ for every $k \in \{1, \ldots, r\}$.

> This error changes vectors in the code space and goes *undetected* by the code.

Case 3: $P_k E = -EP_k$ for at least one $k \in \{1, \ldots, r\}$.

> This error is *detected* by the code.

The *distance* of a stabilizer code is the *minimum weight* of a Pauli operation that changes vectors in the code space but goes undetected by the code.

Notation: an $[[n, m, d]]$ stabilizer code is one that encodes m qubits into n qubits and has distance d.

7-qubit Steane code

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} Z & Z & Z & Z & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \\ Z & Z & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & Z & Z & \mathbb{1} \\ Z & \mathbb{1} & Z & \mathbb{1} & Z & \mathbb{1} & Z \\ X & X & X & X & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \\ X & X & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & X & X & \mathbb{1} \\ X & \mathbb{1} & X & \mathbb{1} & X & \mathbb{1} & X \end{array}$$

The *distance* is the minimum weight of an n-qubit Pauli operation that

1. commutes with every stabilizer generator, and
2. is not proportional to a stabilizer element.

This code has distance 3.

We can first reason that every Pauli operation with weight at most 2 that commutes with every stabilizer generator must be the identity operation.

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} P & Q & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \\ Z & \mathbb{1} & Z & \mathbb{1} & Z & \mathbb{1} & Z \\ X & \mathbb{1} & X & \mathbb{1} & X & \mathbb{1} & X \end{array}$$

7-qubit Steane code

$$
\begin{array}{ccccccc}
Z & Z & Z & Z & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \\
Z & Z & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & Z & Z & \mathbb{1} \\
Z & \mathbb{1} & Z & \mathbb{1} & Z & \mathbb{1} & Z \\
X & X & X & X & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \\
X & X & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & X & X & \mathbb{1} \\
X & \mathbb{1} & X & \mathbb{1} & X & \mathbb{1} & X
\end{array}
$$

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$$
\begin{array}{ccccccc}
\mathbb{1} & Q & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1}
\end{array}
$$

$$
\begin{array}{ccccccc}
Z & \mathbb{1} & Z & \mathbb{1} & Z & \mathbb{1} & Z \\
X & \mathbb{1} & X & \mathbb{1} & X & \mathbb{1} & X \\
Z & Z & Z & Z & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \\
X & X & X & X & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1}
\end{array}
$$

7-qubit Steane code

$$\begin{matrix} Z & Z & Z & Z & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \\ Z & Z & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & Z & Z & \mathbb{1} \\ Z & \mathbb{1} & Z & \mathbb{1} & Z & \mathbb{1} & Z \\ X & X & X & X & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \\ X & X & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & X & X & \mathbb{1} \\ X & \mathbb{1} & X & \mathbb{1} & X & \mathbb{1} & X \end{matrix}$$

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$$\begin{matrix} \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \end{matrix}$$

$$\begin{matrix} Z & \mathbb{1} & Z & \mathbb{1} & Z & \mathbb{1} & Z \\ X & \mathbb{1} & X & \mathbb{1} & X & \mathbb{1} & X \\ Z & Z & Z & Z & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \\ X & X & X & X & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} \end{matrix}$$

7-qubit Steane code

$$
\begin{array}{ccccccc}
Z & Z & Z & Z & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1}\\
Z & Z & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & Z & Z & \mathbb{1}\\
Z & \mathbb{1} & Z & \mathbb{1} & Z & \mathbb{1} & Z\\
X & X & X & X & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1}\\
X & X & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & X & X & \mathbb{1}\\
X & \mathbb{1} & X & \mathbb{1} & X & \mathbb{1} & X
\end{array}
$$

The *distance* is the minimum weight of an n-qubit Pauli operation that

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2. is not proportional to a stabilizer element.

This code has distance 3. ✓

We can first reason that every Pauli operation with weight at most 2 that commutes with every stabilizer generator must be the identity operation.

On the other hand, there are weight 3 Pauli operations that commute with every stabilizer generator and fall outside of the stabilizer.

Two examples:

$$
\begin{array}{ccccccc}
\mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & X & X & X\\
\mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & \mathbb{1} & Z & Z & Z
\end{array}
$$

Correcting errors

Let $P_1, \ldots, P_r$ be stabilizer generators for an n-qubit stabilizer code.

- The 2^r syndromes partition the n-qubit Pauli operations into equal-size sets, with $4^n/2^r$ Pauli operations in each set.
- If E is an error and $S \in \langle P_1, \ldots, P_r \rangle$ is a stabilizer element, then E and ES are equivalent errors: $E|\psi\rangle = ES|\psi\rangle$ for every $|\psi\rangle$ in the code space.
- This leaves 4^{n-r} inequivalent classes of errors for each syndrome.

So, unless $r = n$ (i.e., the code space is one-dimensional) we cannot correct every error. Rather, we must choose *one correction operation for each syndrome* (which corrects at most one class of equivalent errors).

Natural strategy

For each syndrome s, choose a *lowest weight* Pauli operation that causes the syndrome s as the corresponding correction operation.

For a distance d stabilizer code, this strategy corrects all errors having weight at most $(d-1)/2$.

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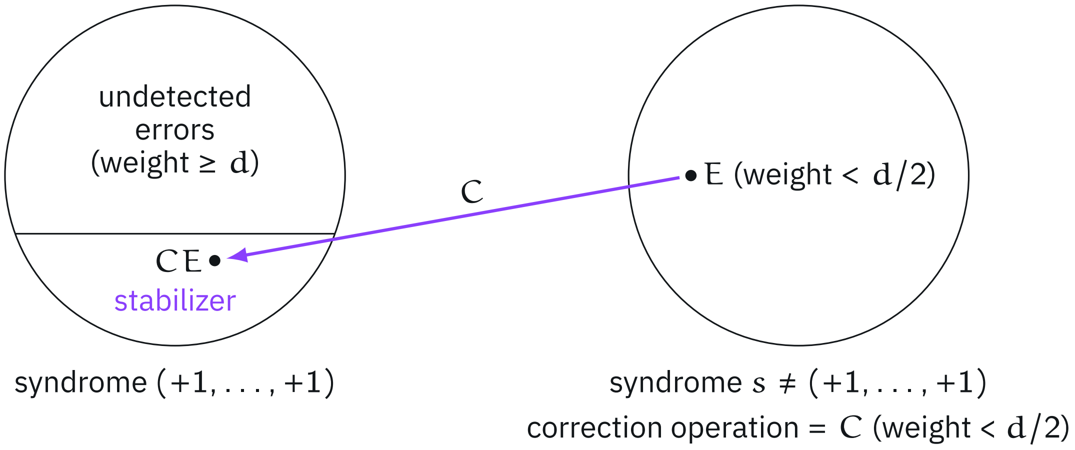

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Unfortunately, for a given choice of stabilizer generators and a syndrome, it is *computationally difficult* to find the lowest weight Pauli operation causing that syndrome.

Finding codes for which this can be done efficiently is part of the artistry in code design.