Generating functions

"A generating function is a clothesline on which we hang up a sequence of numbers for display."

— *Generatingfunctionology*, H. S. Wilf

Definition: For any sequence $\{a_k\}_{k\geq 0} = a_0, a_1, a_2, a_3, \ldots$, its generating function is the formal power series

$$A(x) = a_0x^0 + a_1x^1 + a_2x^2 + a_3x^3 + \cdots = \sum_{k\geq 0} a_k x^k.$$

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Example. Let f_k be the Fibonacci numbers starting $f_0 = f_1 = 1$. Then

$$F(x) = \sum_{k\geq 0} f_k x^k = 1 + 1x^1 + 2x^2 + 3x^3 + 5x^4 + 8x^5 + 13x^6 + 21x^7 + \cdots.$$

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This expression sometimes simplifies. For the Fibonacci numbers,

$$F(x) = 1\big/\big(1 - x - x^2\big).$$

We will call this the compact form of the generating function.

Why Generating Functions?

We will use generating functions to:

- Find an exact formula for the terms of a sequence.
- Prove identities involving sequences.
- Understand partitions of integers.
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Others use generating functions to:

- Use complex analysis to solve combinatorial problems.
- Understand the asymptotics of a sequence.
- Find averages and statistical properties.
- Understand **something** about a sequence.

Generating function example: Basketball

Example. In how many ways can a team score a total of six points in basketball? (Recall that a shot is worth either 1, 2, or 3 points.)

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Solution. This is a partition of 6 into parts of size at most 3, so 7:

$$3+3 \qquad 3+2+1 \qquad 3+1+1+1 \qquad 2+2+2$$
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Generating functions will help us keep track of the possibilities.

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To start, break down the possible ways of getting six points total into one-point, two-point, and three-point shots.

Generating function example: Basketball

How many points could be scored using one-point shots?

0 pts	or	1 pt	or	2 pts	or	3 pts	or	4 pts	or	5 pts	or	6 pts
x^0	$+$	x^1	$+$	x^2	$+$	x^3	$+$	x^4	$+$	x^5	$+$	x^6

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How many points could be scored using two-point shots?

How many points could be scored using three-point shots?

Multiply these algebraic expressions together:

$$1 + x + 2x^2 + 3x^3 + 4x^4 + 5x^5 + 7x^6 + 7x^7 + 8x^8 + 8x^9 + 8x^{10} + 7x^{11} + 7x^{12} + 5x^{13} + 4x^{14} + 3x^{15} + 2x^{16} + x^{17} + x^{18}$$

and find the coefficient of the x^6 term.

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Why does this work? A score a from 1-pt, b from 2-pt, c from 3-pt, gives a term in the product of $x^a x^b x^c = x^{a+b+c}$. Collecting like terms makes the coefficient of x^k the number of ways to score k points. (x^{15}?)

Generating function example: Basketball

To take into account all ways to score 98 points, include more terms:

One-point shots: $1 + x + x^2 + \cdots +$ $=$ ________.

Two-point shots: $1 + x^2 + x^4 + \cdots +$ $=$ ________.

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Conclusion: The generating function for the number of ways to score any number of points in basketball is

$$b(x) = \frac{1}{(1-x)(1-x^2)(1-x^3)}.$$

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Notation: $[x^k]f(x)$ is the coefficient of x^k in the expansion of the generating function $f(x)$. Example. $[x^{98}]b(x) = 850$.

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- The number of apples is even.
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- The number of pears is zero or one.

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- The number of apples is even.
- The number of bananas is a multiple of five.
- The number of oranges is at most four.
- The number of pears is zero or one.

Strategy. Write down a power series for each piece of fruit, multiply them together, and extract the coefficient of x^k.

Key series

◦ Use these key series to collapse sums to compact forms or extract coefficients. ◦

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$$(1+x)^n = \sum_{k\geq 0} \binom{n}{k} x^k$$

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Manipulations on $A(x) = \sum_{k\geq 0} a_k x^k$

Example. Find the coefficient of x^9 in $\frac{1}{(1-4x)^{12}}$.

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$$\sum_{k\geq 1} a_{k-1} x^k = \qquad\qquad \sum_{k\geq 0} a_{k+1} x^k =$$

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Example. Find the compact form of $\sum_{k \geq 2} (-3)^{k-2} x^k$.

Memories of calculus. . .

With formal power series, we interchange derivatives, integrals, sums.

$$\sum_{k \geq 0} \int_0^x x^k \, dx = \int_0^x \sum_{k \geq 0} x^k \, dx$$

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