

# Conjectures and Counterexamples

A **conjecture** is a statement that has not been proved to be true, but that someone has suggested might be true.

9. Disproof

9.1  
Counterexamples

9.2  
Disproving  
Existence  
Statements

9.3  
Disproof  
by Contradiction  
Examples

# Conjectures and Counterexamples

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Goldbach Conjecture: Every even integer greater than 2 is the sum of two primes.

Every perfect number is even.

$P = NP$  (where  $P$  and  $NP$  are sets of problems).

9. Disproof

9.1  
Counterexamples

9.2  
Disproving  
Existence  
Statements

9.3  
Disproof  
by Contradiction  
Examples

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To disprove: find one even integer greater than 2 such that no two primes add to it.

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9. Disproof

9.1  
Counterexamples

9.2  
Disproving  
Existence  
Statements

9.3  
Disproof  
by Contradiction  
Examples

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9. Disproof

9.1  
Counterexamples

9.2  
Disproving  
Existence  
Statements

9.3  
Disproof  
by Contradiction  
Examples

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To disprove: find one even integer greater than 2 such that no two primes add to it.

Every perfect number is even.

To disprove: find one odd perfect number.

$P = NP$  (where  $P$  and  $NP$  are sets of problems).

To disprove: find one problem that is in one set but not in the other.

# A Word of Caution

A pattern:  $2^n \not\equiv 3 \pmod n$ :

<b>n</b>	<b><math>2^n</math></b>	<b><math>2^n \equiv 3 \pmod n?</math></b>
$n = 2$	$2^n = 4$	$4 \not\equiv 3 \pmod 2$
$n = 3$	$2^n = 8$	$8 \not\equiv 3 \pmod 3$
$n = 4$	$2^n = 16$	$16 \not\equiv 3 \pmod 4$
$n = 5$	$2^n = 32$	$32 \not\equiv 3 \pmod 5$

9. Disproof

9.1 Counterexamples

9.2 Disproving Existence Statements

9.3 Disproof by Contradiction Examples

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$n = 7$	$2^n = 128$	$128 \not\equiv 3 \pmod 7$
$n = 8$	$2^n = 256$	$256 \not\equiv 3 \pmod 8$
$n = 9$	$2^n = 512$	$512 \not\equiv 3 \pmod 9$
$n = 10$	$2^n = 1024$	$1024 \not\equiv 3 \pmod{10}$

9. Disproof

9.1 Counterexamples

9.2 Disproving Existence Statements

9.3 Disproof by Contradiction Examples

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$n = 10$	$2^n = 1024$	$1024 \not\equiv 3 \pmod{10}$
$n = 1000$	$2^n = [big]$	$2^{1000} \not\equiv 3 \pmod{1000}$

9. Disproof

9.1 Counterexamples

9.2 Disproving Existence Statements

9.3 Disproof by Contradiction Examples



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9. Disproof

9.1 Counterexamples

9.2 Disproving Existence Statements

9.3 Disproof by Contradiction Examples

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$n = 1\,000\,000$	$2^n = [big]$	$2^{1\,000\,000} \not\equiv 3 \pmod{1\,000\,000}$
$n = 4\,700\,063\,496$	$2^n = [big]$	$2^{4\,700\,063\,496} \not\equiv 3 \pmod{4\,700\,063\,496}$

9. Disproof

9.1 Counterexamples

9.2 Disproving Existence Statements

9.3 Disproof by Contradiction Examples

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9. Disproof

9.1 Counterexamples

9.2 Disproving Existence Statements

9.3 Disproof by Contradiction

Examples

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Result: D.H. and Emma Lehmer

Source: Richard K Guy, **The Strong Law of Small Numbers**:

[http://www.maa.org/sites/default/files/pdf/upload\\_library/22/Ford/Guy697-712.pdf](http://www.maa.org/sites/default/files/pdf/upload_library/22/Ford/Guy697-712.pdf) (Recommended read!)

9. Disproof

9.1 Counterexamples

9.2 Disproving Existence Statements

9.3 Disproof by Contradiction Examples

# Example

Conjecture: For every  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $n^2 - n + 11$  is prime.

9. Disproof

**9.1**  
Counterexamples

9.2  
Disproving  
Existence  
Statements

9.3  
Disproof  
by Contra-  
diction  
Examples

# Example

Conjecture: For every  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $n^2 - n + 11$  is prime.

$N$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
$n^2 - n + 11$	11	13	17	23	31	41	53	67	83	101	121

9. Disproof

9.1  
Counterexamples

9.2  
Disproving  
Existence  
Statements

9.3  
Disproof  
by Contradiction

Examples

# Example

Conjecture: For every  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $n^2 - n + 11$  is prime.

$N$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
$n^2 - n + 11$	11	13	17	23	31	41	53	67	83	101	121

The conjecture is false. 11 is a natural number, and  $11^2 - 11 + 11 = 11^2$ , which is not prime.

9. Disproof

9.1  
Counterexamples

9.2  
Disproving  
Existence  
Statements

9.3  
Disproof  
by Contra-  
diction  
Examples

## True or False?

■ True or False: For every  $x, y \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $2^{2x} + 3^{2y+1}$  is prime.

■ True or False:

For every even natural number  $n$  other than  $n = 2$ ,  $2^n - 1$  is not prime.

■ True or False:

For every  $m \in \mathbb{Z}$ , there exists an  $n \in \mathbb{N}$  such that  $|\frac{1}{m} - \frac{1}{n}| > \frac{1}{2}$ .

9. Disproof

9.1  
Counterex-  
amples

9.2  
Disproving  
Existence  
Statements

9.3  
Disproof  
by Contra-  
diction

Examples



## True or False?

- True or False: For every  $x, y \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $2^{2x} + 3^{2y+1}$  is prime.

False: Let  $x = 3$  and  $y = 1$ . Then  $2^{2x} + 3^{2y+1} = 2^6 + 3^3 = 91 = 7 * 13$ , so  $2^{2x} + 3^{2y+1}$  is not prime.

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- True or False:  
For every even natural number  $n$  other than  $n = 2$ ,  $2^n - 1$  is not prime.

True: let  $n$  be an even natural number other than 2. Then  $n = 2x$  for some  $x \in \mathbb{N}$  (since  $n$  is even) and  $x \geq 2$  (since  $n \neq 2$ ). Then  $2^n - 1 = 2^{2x} - 1 = (2^x - 1)(2^x + 1)$ . Since  $x \geq 2$ ,  $2^x + 1 > 1$  and  $2^x - 1 > 1$ . Then  $2^n - 1$  has two factors that are greater than one, hence it is not prime.

- True or False:  
For every  $m \in \mathbb{Z}$ , there exists an  $n \in \mathbb{N}$  such that  $|\frac{1}{m} - \frac{1}{n}| > \frac{1}{2}$ .

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- True or False:

For every  $m \in \mathbb{Z}$ , there exists an  $n \in \mathbb{N}$  such that  $\left| \frac{1}{m} - \frac{1}{n} \right| > \frac{1}{2}$ .

False: consider  $m = 2$ . We claim that for every  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $\left| \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{n} \right| \leq \frac{1}{2}$ .

Case 1:  $n = 1$ . Then  $\left| \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{n} \right| = \frac{1}{2}$ .

Case 2:  $n = 2$ . Then  $\left| \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{n} \right| = 0 \leq \frac{1}{2}$ .

Case 3:  $n \geq 3$ . Then  $\frac{1}{n} < \frac{1}{2}$ , so  $\left| \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{n} \right| = \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{n} < \frac{1}{2}$ .

So, for every  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $\left| \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{n} \right| \leq \frac{1}{2}$ .

To disprove the statement  $\exists x$  s.t.  $P(x)$   
we must prove its negation:  $\forall x \sim P(x)$ .

9. Disproof

9.1  
Counterex-  
amples

**9.2**  
**Disproving**  
**Existence**  
**Statements**

9.3  
Disproof  
by Contra-  
diction  
Examples

To disprove the statement  $\exists x \text{ s.t. } P(x)$   
we must prove its negation:  $\forall x \sim P(x)$ .

■ True or False:  $\exists x \in \mathbb{R} \text{ s.t. } x^3 < x < x^2$ .

■ True or False:  $\exists x \in \mathbb{R} \text{ s.t. } x^4 < x < x^2$ .

9. Disproof

9.1  
Counterex-  
amples

9.2  
Disproving  
Existence  
Statements

9.3  
Disproof  
by Contra-  
diction  
Examples

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9. Disproof

9.1  
Counterexamples

9.2  
Disproving  
Existence  
Statements

9.3  
Disproof  
by Contradiction  
Examples

- True or False:  $\exists x \in \mathbb{R} \text{ s.t. } x^3 < x < x^2$ .  
True:  $-2 \in \mathbb{R}$  and  $(-2)^3 < -2 < (-2)^2$ .

- True or False:  $\exists x \in \mathbb{R} \text{ s.t. } x^4 < x < x^2$ .

To disprove the statement  $\exists x$  s.t.  $P(x)$   
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9. Disproof

9.1  
Counterex-  
amples

9.2  
Disproving  
Existence  
Statements

9.3  
Disproof  
by Contra-  
diction  
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True:  $-2 \in \mathbb{R}$  and  $(-2)^3 < -2 < (-2)^2$ .

- True or False:  $\exists x \in \mathbb{R}$  s.t.  $x^4 < x < x^2$ .  
False. Suppose  $x \in \mathbb{R}$  and  $x < x^2$ . Then  $x < 0$  or  $x > 1$ .  
Case 1:  $x < 0$ . Then  $x^4 > x$  because  $x^4 > 0$ . Then it is not true that  $x^4 < x < x^2$ .  
Case 2:  $x > 1$ . Then  $x^4 > x$ , so it is not true that  $x^4 < x < x^2$ .  
So, for every real  $x$ , it is not true that both  $x < x^2$  and  $x^4 < x$ .

# Disproof by Contradiction.

Method:

“Suppose  $P$  is true.

...

Then something ridiculous happens. Therefore,  $P$  is false.”

9. Disproof

9.1  
Counterex-  
amples

9.2  
Disproving  
Existence  
Statements

**9.3**  
Disproof  
by Contra-  
diction

Examples



# Disproof by Contradiction.

Method:

“Suppose  $P$  is true.

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Then something ridiculous happens. Therefore,  $P$  is false.”

**Statement:** There exists  $x \in \mathbb{R}$  such that  $x^6 + 2x^2 + 1 = 0$ .

9. Disproof

9.1  
Counterexamples

9.2  
Disproving  
Existence  
Statements

9.3  
Disproof  
by Contradiction

Examples

# Disproof by Contradiction.

Method:

“Suppose  $P$  is true.

...

Then something ridiculous happens. Therefore,  $P$  is false.”

**Statement:** There exists  $x \in \mathbb{R}$  such that  $x^6 + 2x^2 + 1 = 0$ .

Suppose the statement is true, and let  $x$  be a real number such that  $x^6 + 2x^2 + 1 = 0$ . Since 6 and 2 are even,  $x^6 \geq 0$  and  $2x^2 \geq 0$ . Then

$$0 = x^6 + 2x^2 + 1 \geq 1$$

so  $0 \geq 1$ . This is a contradiction. We conclude the statement is false.

## Prove or disprove each of the following statements.

### 9. Disproof

#### 9.1 Counterexamples

#### 9.2 Disproving Existence Statements

#### 9.3 Disproof by Contradiction

#### Examples

- Let  $A$ ,  $B$ , and  $C$  be sets. If  $A \times C = B \times C$ , then  $A = B$ .
- Every even integer is the sum of three *distinct* even integers.
- There exists an irrational number  $p$  and a rational number  $q$  such that  $\frac{p}{q}$  is rational.
- There exists a rational number  $p$  and an irrational number  $q$  such that  $\frac{p}{q}$  is rational.
- There exist prime numbers  $p$  and  $q$  such that  $p - q = 513$ .

## Prove or disprove each of the following statements.

### 9. Disproof

#### 9.1 Counterexamples

#### 9.2 Disproving Existence Statements

#### 9.3 Disproof by Contradiction

#### Examples

- Let  $A$ ,  $B$ , and  $C$  be sets. If  $A \times C = B \times C$ , then  $A = B$ .  
False
- Every even integer is the sum of three *distinct* even integers.  
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- There exists an irrational number  $p$  and a rational number  $q$  such that  $\frac{p}{q}$  is rational.  
False
- There exists a rational number  $p$  and an irrational number  $q$  such that  $\frac{p}{q}$  is rational.  
True
- There exist prime numbers  $p$  and  $q$  such that  $p - q = 513$ .  
False

*Let  $A$ ,  $B$ , and  $C$  be sets. If  $A \times C = B \times C$ , then  $A = B$ .*

**False:** Let  $C = \emptyset$ ,  $A = \emptyset$ , and  $B = \{1\}$ . Then  $A \times C = \emptyset = B \times C$ , but  $A \neq B$ .

9. Disproof

9.1  
Counterex-  
amples

9.2  
Disproving  
Existence  
Statements

9.3  
Disproof  
by Contra-  
diction

**Examples**

*Every even integer is the sum of three distinct even integers.*

True: let  $a$  be an even integer. If  $a = 0$ , then  $a = 6 + (-4) + (-2)$ . If  $a \neq 0$ , then  $a = 4a + (-2a) + (-a)$ , and all those integers are even and distinct.

9. Disproof

9.1  
Counterexamples

9.2  
Disproving  
Existence  
Statements

9.3  
Disproof  
by Contradiction

Examples

*There exists an irrational number  $p$  and a rational number  $q$  such that  $\frac{p}{q}$  is rational.*

False. We prove by contradiction. Suppose  $p$  is irrational, and  $q$  is rational, so  $q = \frac{x}{y}$  for some nonzero integers  $x$  and  $y$ . If  $\frac{p}{q}$  is rational, then  $\frac{p}{q} = \frac{a}{b}$  for some nonzero integers  $a$  and  $b$ . Then  $q = \frac{aq}{b}$ , and both numerator and denominator are integers, contradicting that  $q$  is irrational. We conclude that, for every irrational number  $p$  and every rational number  $q$ ,  $\frac{p}{q}$  is irrational.

9. Disproof

9.1

Counterexamples

9.2

Disproving  
Existence  
Statements

9.3

Disproof  
by Contradiction

Examples

*There exists a rational number  $p$  and an irrational number  $q$  such that  $\frac{p}{q}$  is rational.*

True: let  $p = 0$  and let  $q$  be any irrational number. Then  $\frac{p}{q} = 0$ , which is rational.

9. Disproof

9.1  
Counterexamples

9.2  
Disproving  
Existence  
Statements

9.3  
Disproof  
by Contradiction

Examples



*There exist prime numbers  $p$  and  $q$  such that  $p - q = 513$ .*

False. Suppose the statement is true. If  $p$  and  $q$  have an odd difference, then they have different parity, so one of them is even. The only even prime is 2, so  $p$  or  $q$  is equal to 2. Since  $p - q$  is positive,  $q$  is smaller than  $p$ , so  $q = 2$  because 2 is the smallest prime.

Then  $p = 513 + 2 = 515$ , but  $5|515$ , contradicting that  $p$  is prime.

We conclude that for every pair of primes  $p$  and  $q$ ,  $p - q \neq 513$ .