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Arthur T. Benjamin
Harvey Mudd College

Fritz Juhnke
Reed College

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ANOTHER WAY OF COUNTING N^{N^*}

ARTHUR T. BENJAMIN[†] AND FRITZ JUHNKE[‡]

Abstract. An original combinatorial proof of a combinatorial identity is presented.

Key words. combinatorial enumeration, graph theory

AMS(MOS) subject classification. 05A19

1. Introduction. We provide a combinatorial proof that

$$N^N = \sum_{\substack{0 \leq k_1 \leq 1 \\ 0 \leq k_1 + k_2 \leq 2 \\ \vdots \\ 0 \leq k_1 + k_2 + \dots + k_{N-1} \leq N-1}} \dots \sum \frac{N!}{k_1!k_2! \dots k_{N-1}!}.$$

2. Sequence graphs and cycle sets. We count the number of sequences of N integers between 1 and N , which we call N -sequences, in two ways, which give us the left- and right-hand sides of our equation, respectively. Counting in the obvious way, there are N choices for each integer, yielding N^N total N -sequences. Next, after setting up some apparatus, we answer the same question in a way that yields the summation.

As is done in [1] and [2], we define an N -sequence graph (N -graph) as a directed graph of N nodes, where each node has out-degree 1. We can set up a one-to-one correspondence between N -sequences and N -graphs as follows: Let the (directed) edge originating at node i of a N -graph terminate at node j , where j is the i th integer of the corresponding N -sequence. For example, the 12-sequence 433744657575 corresponds to the 12-graph of Fig. 1. This one-to-one correspondence allows us to count N -graphs instead of N -sequences.

To attain the right-hand side of our identity, we associate with each N -graph a unique sequence k_1, k_2, \dots, k_{N-1} , which meets the conditions of the summation. We then show that the number of N -graphs associated with k_1, k_2, \dots, k_{N-1} is $N! / k_1!k_2! \dots k_{N-1}!$.

To that end, we define the *cycle set* \mathcal{C} of an N -graph to be the set of all nodes in the graph which are contained in at least one cycle. (Since our graph is finite, and each node has out-degree 1, it is clear that \mathcal{C} is nonempty.) Note that, by construction, all edges originating at nodes of \mathcal{C} point to nodes of \mathcal{C} , and no two of these edges terminate at the same node. In our example, $\mathcal{C} = \{3, 4, 6, 7\}$.

3. Ordered forests. An N -graph can be reduced to a forest by removing the edges originating at nodes contained in \mathcal{C} , and letting the nodes in \mathcal{C} serve as roots. The forest generated by doing this to the 12-graph of Fig. 1 is shown in Fig. 2. To remove ambiguity, we then rearrange the forest into what we will call an *ordered forest* by placing the roots in ascending order from left to right, and doing the same for all *sibling sets* (i.e., children of the same node). (See Fig. 3.)

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[†] Harvey Mudd College, Claremont, California 91711.

[‡] Reed College, Portland, Oregon 97202.

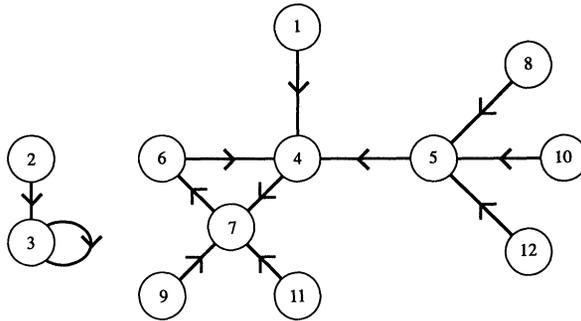


FIG. 1. The 12-graph of the 12-sequence 433744657575.

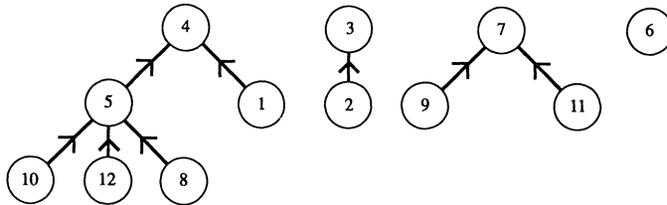


FIG. 2. A forest from 433744657575.

Next, we label each tree from left to right in *postorder*. Starting with the root node of a tree, the postorder labeling process may be defined recursively as follows: postorder the subtrees whose roots are the nodes that point to the current root, going from left to right among these subtrees, then label the current root. (See [3].) We let the first postorder label be zero. In Fig. 3, we have written the postorder label alongside each node. Note that, by construction, the label assigned to each node must be greater than the labels of its descendant nodes.

We can now uniquely determine the sequence k_1, k_2, \dots, k_{N-1} from our ordered forest by letting k_j be the number of children of the node with postorder label j . Note that k_0 must always be zero. In Fig. 3, k_1 through k_{11} are equal to 1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 3, 2, 0, 0, 0, 2, respectively. Note that the condition $0 \leq k_1 + k_2 + \dots + k_j \leq j$ is met for all j between 1 and 11. This is true in general: $k_1 + k_2 + \dots + k_j$ is equal to the number of children possessed by nodes 0 through j , all of which must have postorder labels less than j .

It remains to show that there are $N!/k_1!k_2! \dots k_{N-1}!$ N -graphs with k -sequence k_1, k_2, \dots, k_{N-1} . In [3] it is proved that every *unlabeled* rooted forest is characterized by its postorder degree sequence. Hence our k -sequence completely determines the shape of the ordered forest. For example, any unlabeled forest with k -sequence 10000320002 must look like Fig. 4.

Since the elements of \mathcal{C} and the sibling sets (circled in Fig. 4) must be written in ascending order, we can convert the unlabeled forest of Fig. 4 into a labeled ordered

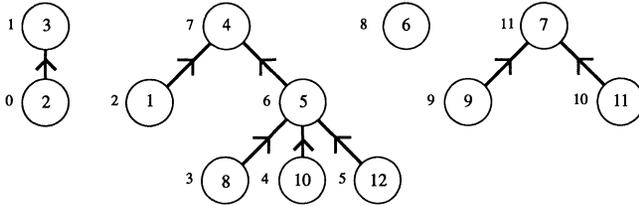


FIG. 3. The ordered forest of 433744657575 with postorder labels.

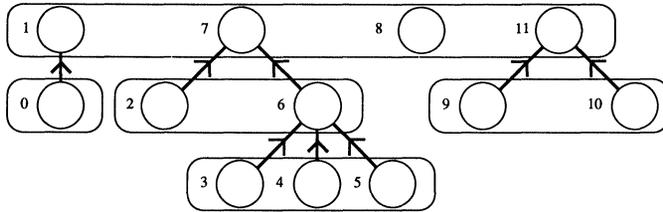


FIG. 4. Unlabeled graph for k -sequence 10000320002.

forest in $12!/1!3!2!2!4!$ ways.

In general, any unlabeled forest with k -sequence k_1, k_2, \dots, k_{N-1} can be labeled $N!/k_1!k_2! \dots k_{N-1}!|\mathcal{C}|!$ ways. Finally, each labeled ordered forest with root set \mathcal{C} gives rise to $|\mathcal{C}|!$ N -graphs because the edges leaving the nodes of \mathcal{C} must enter different nodes of \mathcal{C} .

Therefore each k -sequence corresponds to $N!/k_1!k_2! \dots k_{N-1}!$ N -graphs, as asserted. Since each sum counts the correct number of N -graphs, we have finished our second count and have established the identity.

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