Permutations and combinations

CSC/MAT 208: Discrete Structures
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Permutations

In the reading on mathematical induction, we proved that for any natural number \( n \), the number of sequences of length \( n \) that can be formed from \( n \) distinct values, without repetition, is \( n! \). These sequences are called the permutations of the values.

The inductive structure of the proof suggests a recursive algorithm for constructing the class of all the permutations of the members of a given class \( C \):

**Base case:** \( |C| = 0 \). Then the only permutation is \( () \), so the result should be \( \{ () \} \).

**Recursive case:** \( |C| = k + 1 \). Then \( C \) has one or more members, any of which can be the initial element in a permutation. For each member \( c \) of \( C \) in turn, use recursion to generate all the permutations of \( C \setminus \{ c \} \), then prepend \( c \) onto the front of each of those permutations. Collect the results for all the choices of \( c \) into one big class of sequences.

For very small classes \( C \), it is reasonable to implement this strategy in a procedure that returns the class of permutations as a value. Since the function \( n! \) grows very rapidly, however, the data structure quickly becomes unmanageable as \( |C| \) increases.

If we start with a bag \( B \) rather than a class, but still aim to compute the number of distinct permutations of the members of \( B \) (or to generate the class of all such permutations), we find that any repeated members in the bag reduces the number of different permutations. In fact, if the members of \( B \) include \( i \) different values with multiplicities \( m_0, m_1, \ldots, m_{i-1} \), then the number of permutations is

\[
\frac{(\sum_{j=0}^{i-1} m_j)!}{\prod_{j=0}^{i-1} m_j!}
\]
the factorial of the sum of the multiplicities, divided by the product of their factorials. For example, if $B = [a, a, a, b, b, c]$, then there are

$$\frac{(3 + 2 + 1)!}{3! \cdot 2! \cdot 1!} = \frac{720}{12} = 60$$

distinct permutations of the members of $B$.

### Combinations

In the reading on combinatorial problems, where we first encountered binomial coefficients, we used them to count the number of different $k$-member committees that can be formed in an organization with $n$ members. This is, of course, just a less intimidating way of stating the problem of counting the $k$-member subclasses of a class of cardinality $n$. The binomial coefficient $\binom{n}{k}$ gives the answer to this question.

The combinatorial proof of the law that $\binom{n+1}{k+1} = \binom{n}{k} + \binom{n}{k+1}$ suggests a recursive approach to building a class containing the $k$-member subclasses of a given class $C$:

**Base case:** $k = 0$. $\emptyset$ is a zero-member subclass of any $C$, so the result should be {$\emptyset$}.

**Recursive case:** $k$ is a successor. If $C$ is empty, it is impossible for any subclass of $C$ to have a positive number of members, so the result should be $\emptyset$. If $C$ is not empty, then designate an element $c$ of $C$, use recursion to generate all the $(k - 1)$-member subclasses of $C - \{c\}$, then drop $c$ into each of those subclasses. Also, use recursion to generate all the $k$-member subclasses of $C - \{c\}$ (and refrain from dropping any additional values into them). The union of the results of these two recursions is the class of all $k$-member subclasses of $C$. 
Exercises

1. Determine the number of permutations of the members of a class of cardinality 12.

2. Determine the number of eight-member subclasses of a class of cardinality 16.

3. Determine the number of distinct permutations of the members of the bag [red, red, red, orange, yellow, yellow, green, blue, blue, blue, blue].

4. Give a combinatorial argument for the law that

\[ \sum_{k=0}^{n} \binom{n}{k} = 2^n. \]

(Hint: What do the individual terms of the summation count?)