



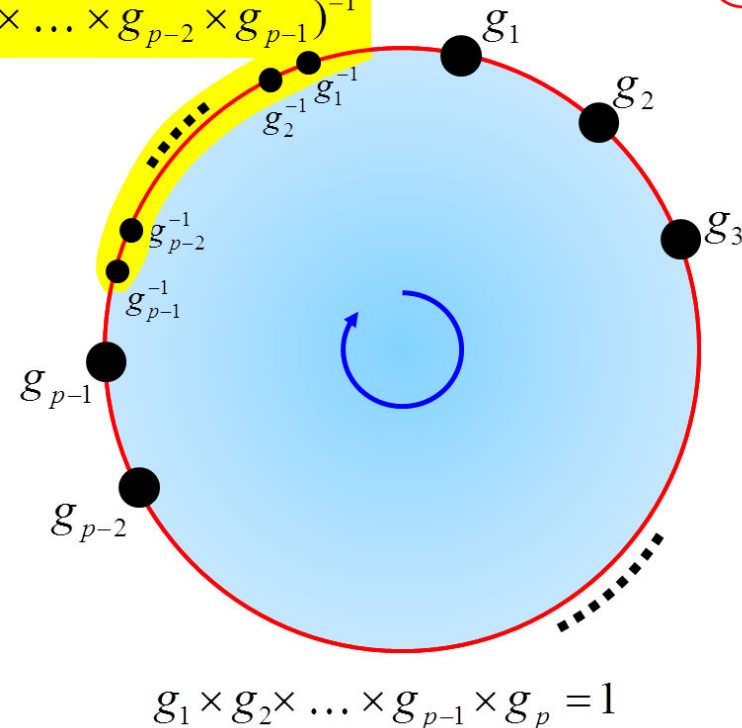
# THEOREM OF THE DAY

**Cauchy's Theorem in Group Theory** *If the order of a finite group  $G$  is divisible by a prime  $p$  then  $G$  contains an element of order  $p$ .*

$$g_p = (g_1 \times g_2 \times \dots \times g_{p-2} \times g_{p-1})^{-1}$$

The multiplication table shown near right defines a group of order 10: there are 10 elements each appearing once in every row and column; one element, namely  $e$  (the **identity**) leaves everything unchanged by multiplication; and associativity holds so that, for example,  $(t \times r) \times w = j \times w = e$  agrees with  $t \times (r \times w) = t^2 = e$ . We observe, incidentally, that  $t$  is an element of order 2: Cauchy's theorem says such an element must exist since 2 divides 10. It is not so easy to confirm that  $x^5 = e$  also has a solution. In fact there are five (including the trivial solution  $x = e$ ) so if you take a guess you have a better than 40% chance of spotting one. Or perhaps you recognise the dihedral group  $D_{10}$  in which case you know the answer.\*

$\times$	$e$	$t$	$r$	$d$	$j$	$a$	$w$	$s$	$k$	$i$
$e$	$e$	$t$	$r$	$d$	$j$	$a$	$w$	$s$	$k$	$i$
$t$	$t$	$e$	$j$	$k$	$r$	$i$	$s$	$w$	$d$	$a$
$r$	$r$	$w$	$e$	$s$	$a$	$j$	$t$	$d$	$i$	$k$
$d$	$d$	$a$	$k$	$j$	$w$	$s$	$i$	$r$	$t$	$e$
$j$	$j$	$s$	$t$	$w$	$i$	$r$	$e$	$k$	$a$	$d$
$a$	$a$	$d$	$w$	$t$	$k$	$e$	$r$	$i$	$j$	$s$
$w$	$w$	$r$	$a$	$i$	$e$	$k$	$d$	$t$	$s$	$j$
$s$	$s$	$j$	$i$	$a$	$t$	$d$	$k$	$e$	$w$	$r$
$k$	$k$	$i$	$d$	$r$	$s$	$w$	$a$	$j$	$e$	$t$
$i$	$i$	$k$	$s$	$e$	$d$	$t$	$j$	$a$	$r$	$w$



\*And you can recover the usual multiplication table of  $D_{10}$  by spotting that the group elements are an anagram of the name of a famous scientist.

## Proof.

Denote by 1 the identity in an arbitrary finite group  $G$  of order, say,  $n$ . If  $p$  divides  $n$  then the number of solutions of  $x^p = 1$  must in fact be a positive multiple of  $p$ . To see this, consider the set  $X_p$  all products of  $p$  elements of  $G$  giving the identity:  $g_1 g_2 \dots g_{p-1} g_p = 1$ . We can choose any values for  $g_1, \dots, g_{p-1}$ , after which  $g_p$  is fixed; see the illustration above right. So  $|X_p| = n^{p-1}$ . Now for some products in  $X_p$  all the  $g_i$  are identical. These are solutions to  $x^p = 1$ ; suppose there are  $A$  such products. Every other product has two properties: (1) it gives a different element of  $X_p$  if its elements are cycled round, because  $p$  is prime, so that a  $p$ -gon with non-identical vertices has no symmetries; and (2) if its elements are cycled round then they still multiply to 1, because  $g_p$  can be rewritten as  $g_{p-1}^{-1} \dots g_2^{-1} g_1^{-1}$  and cancellation of all elements will occur regardless of where we start multiplying (see the illustration). So the number, say  $B$ , of products in  $X_p$  which are not solutions to  $x^p = 1$  is a multiple of  $p$ . And now since  $A + B = n^{p-1}$  and  $B$  and  $n$  are both divisible by  $p$ , so must  $A$  be. And  $A$  is not zero, since 1 is a solution to  $x^p = 1$ , so  $A$  is a positive multiple of  $p$ .

Elements of order  $p$  generate subgroups of order  $p$  so Lagrange's Theorem, that a group's order must be divisible by that of any of its subgroups, has here a partial converse, greatly strengthened in Sylow's celebrated theorems of 1872. Cauchy proved his theorem (independently asserted without proof by Evariste Galois) in his seminal 1845 'Mémoire sur les arrangements que l'on peut former avec des lettres données'. The proof given above is due to James H. McKay, 1959.

**Web link:** [qchu.wordpress.com/2013/07/09/](http://qchu.wordpress.com/2013/07/09/). McKay's original article can be read at [math.uga.edu/~pete/McKay59.pdf](http://math.uga.edu/~pete/McKay59.pdf).

**Further reading:** *Topics in Group Theory* by Geoff Smith and Olga Tabachnikova, Springer, 2000, chapter 3.

