

Fifty Challenging Problems in Probability

1. A drawer contains red socks and black socks. When two socks are drawn at random, the probability that both are red is $\frac{1}{2}$.

a) How small can the number of socks in the drawer be?

Answer: 4

b) How small if the number of black socks is even?

Answer: 20

2. A three-man jury has two members each of whom independently has probability p of making the correct decision and a third member who flips a coin for each decision (majority rules). A one-man jury has probability p of making the correct decision. Which jury has the better probability of making the correct decision?

Answer: The 2-juries have identical probability

3. In a common carnival game, a player tosses a penny from a distance of about 5 feet onto the surface of a table ruled in 1-inch squares. If the penny (24 inch in diameter) falls entirely inside a square, the player receives 5 cents but does not get his penny back; otherwise he loses his penny. If the penny lands on the table, what is his chance to win?

Answer: 5/16

4. Chuck-a-Luck is a gambling game often played at carnivals and gambling houses. A player may bet on any one of the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Three dice are rolled. If the player's number appears on one, two or three of the dice, he receives respectively one, two, or three times his original stake plus his own money back; otherwise he loses his stake. What is the player's expected loss per unit stake? (Actually the player may distribute stakes on several numbers, but each such stake can be regarded as a separate bet.)

Answer: 80/649

5. Mr. Brown always bets a dollar on the number 13 at roulette against the advice of Kind Friend. To help cure Mr. Brown of playing roulette, Kind Friend always bets Brown \$20 at even money that Brown will be behind at the end of 36 plays. How is the cure working? (Most American roulette wheels have 38 equally likely numbers. If the player's number comes up, he is paid 35 times his stake and gets his original stake back; otherwise he loses his stake.)

Answer: Kind Friend will be ahead first.

6. We often read of someone who has been dealt 13 spades at bridge. With a well-shuffled pack of cards, what is the chance that you are dealt a perfect hand (13 of one suit)? (Bridge is played with an ordinary pack of 52 cards, 13 in each of 4 suits, and each of 4 players is dealt 13.)

Answer: $52 \times 1/27$

7. The game of craps, played with two dice, is one of America's fastest and most popular gambling games. Calculating the odds associated with it is an instructive exercise.

The rules are these. Only 1 is left for the two dice count. The player throws the dice and wins at once if the total for the first throw is 7 or 11, loses at once if it is 2, 3, or 12. Any other throw is called his "point". If the first throw is a point, the player throws the dice repeatedly until he either wins by throwing his point again or loses by throwing 7. What is the player's chance to win?

Answer: 80/99

8. An urn contains 10 black balls and 10 white balls, identical except for color. You choose "black" or "white". One ball is drawn at random, and if its color matches your choice, you get \$10, otherwise nothing. Write down the maximum amount you are willing to pay to play the game. The game will be played just once.

Answer: What we care is that you should be willing to pay at least as much to play the second game as the first.

9. Two strangers are separately asked to choose one of the positive whole numbers and advised that if they both choose the same number, they both get a prize. If you were one of these people, what number would you choose?

Answer: 1

10. Two strangers who have a private recognition signal agree to meet on a certain Thursday at 12 noon in New York City, a town familiar to neither; to discuss an important business deal, but later they discover that they have not chosen a meeting place, and neither can reach the other because both have embarked on trips.

Answer: Explain Step-By-Step

11. Three prisoners, A, B, and C, with apparently equally good records have applied for parole. The parole board has decided to release two of the three, and the prisoners know this but not which two. A warden friend of prisoner A knows who are to be released. Prisoner A swears that it would be unethical to let the warden if he, A, is to be released, but thinks of asking for the name of the one prisoner other than himself who is to be released. He thinks that before he asks, his chances of release are 2/3. He thinks that if the warden says "B" will be released," his own chances have no longer seem to 1/3, because neither A and B or B and C are to be released. And so A decides not to reduce his chances by asking. However, A is mistaken in his calculations. Explain.

Answer: Prop. of A's release = 2/3

12. Coupons in cereal boxes are numbered 1 to 5, and a set of one of each is required for a prize. With one coupon per box, how many boxes on the average are required to make a complete set?

Answer: 11.42

50 Challenging Problems In Probability With Solutions

Katrin Zwirgmaier



50 Challenging Problems In Probability With Solutions:

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