

## The Analogies between Binomial and Trinomial Coefficients

The binomial coefficients and the trinomial coefficients are close siblings.<sup>1</sup> The binomial coefficient  $\binom{n}{r_1, r_2}$  is the coefficient of  $x_1^{r_1} x_2^{r_2}$  in the expansion of  $(x_1 + x_2)^n$ . The trinomial coefficient  $\binom{n}{r_1, r_2, r_3}$  is the coefficient of  $x_1^{r_1} x_2^{r_2} x_3^{r_3}$  in the expansion of  $(x_1 + x_2 + x_3)^n$ . Here are the analogies, arranged side-by-side.

<p>Before gathering terms, <math>(x_1 + x_2)^n</math> has <math>2^n</math> terms.</p>		<p>Before gathering terms, <math>(x_1 + x_2 + x_3)^n</math> has <math>3^n</math> terms.</p>
<p>After gathering terms, <math>(x_1 + x_2)^n</math> has <math>\binom{\binom{2}{n}}</math> terms, one for each composition of <math>n</math> into 2 parts.</p>		<p>After gathering terms, <math>(x_1 + x_2 + x_3)^n</math> has <math>\binom{\binom{3}{n}}</math> terms, one for each composition of <math>n</math> into 3 parts.</p>
<p>The coefficient of <math>x_1^{r_1} x_2^{r_2}</math> is <math>\binom{n}{r_1, r_2} = \frac{n!}{r_1! r_2!}</math>.</p>		<p>The coefficient of <math>x_1^{r_1} x_2^{r_2} x_3^{r_3}</math> is <math>\binom{n}{r_1, r_2, r_3} = \frac{n!}{r_1! r_2! r_3!}</math>.</p>
<p>Recurrence: <math>\binom{n}{n, 0} = \binom{n}{0, n} = 1</math></p>		<p>Recurrence: <math>\binom{n}{n, 0, 0} = \binom{n}{0, n, 0} = \binom{n}{0, 0, n} = 1</math></p>
<p><math>\binom{n}{r_1, r_2} = \binom{n-1}{r_1-1, r_2} + \binom{n-1}{r_1, r_2-1}</math></p>		<p><math>\binom{n}{r_1, r_2, r_3} =</math>  <math>\binom{n-1}{r_1-1, r_2, r_3} + \binom{n-1}{r_1, r_2-1, r_3} + \binom{n-1}{r_1, r_2, r_3-1}</math></p>
<p>(Pascal's Triangle)</p>		<p>(Pascal's Tetrahedron?)</p>
<p><math>\binom{n}{r_1, r_2}</math> is the number of permutations of <math>r_1</math> 1's and <math>r_2</math> 2's.</p>		<p><math>\binom{n}{r_1, r_2, r_3}</math> is the number of permutations of <math>r_1</math> 1's, <math>r_2</math> 2's, and <math>r_3</math> 3's.</p>
<p><math>\binom{n}{r_1, r_2}</math> is the number of ways to place <math>r_i</math> students in dorm <math>i</math> for <math>i = 1, 2</math></p>		<p><math>\binom{n}{r_1, r_2, r_3}</math> is the number of ways to place <math>r_i</math> students in dorm <math>i</math> for <math>i = 1, 2, 3</math></p>

**Exercise:** Make another column for the *knomial* coefficients. What are the correct generalizations?

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<sup>1</sup> To make the closeness of the analogies even clearer, I need a new notation for binomial coefficients: in place of  $\binom{n}{r}$  I will write  $\binom{n}{r, n-r}$  or  $\binom{n}{r_1, r_2}$  (where  $r_1 + r_2 = n$ ). Throughout: on the left,  $r_1 + r_2 = n$ ; and on the right,  $r_1 + r_2 + r_3 = n$ .