

Probability Year 9

Terminology

Probability measures the chance something happens. Formally, we say it measures how likely is the outcome of an event. We write $P(\text{result})$ as a shorthand.

An event is some measurable test, measurement or observation. Sometimes trial is used instead.

The results of an event are often called its outcomes. The ones we are interested in are usually termed successes, regardless of their actual type (so having blue eyes can be a “success”).

Mutually exclusive results are the exact opposites of each other: either one or the other must happen. Mathematically, outcomes are mutually exclusive when their probabilities add to 1.

The use of “not” helps with mutually exclusive events: the opposite of “rainy” is best thought of as “not rainy” rather than vague terms such as “fine”.

Another term seen sometimes is “complement”. The complement is marked with a dash, ' , and so we can write that $P(A) + P(A') = 1$

Numerical value

Probability is a number between 0 and 1.

$P(X) = 0$ means that the result X is impossible

$P(X) = 1$ means that the result X is certain.

Many students prefer to think of probability as being from 0% to 100%, which is just the same thing expressed differently.

Students need be prepared to leave descriptions such as “likely” behind. They are sometimes useful to describe what a probability value means, but they are not suitable when asked for a probability.

In general “likely” means a probability of greater than 0.5, becoming very likely around 0.9.

No probability can be bigger than one. If students get an answer larger than 1 then they should immediately recognise that as impossible.

Usually answers may be given in any appropriate form: decimal, fraction or percentage.

Percentages are the least useful because they have to be converted before any calculations are done.

In general fractions are the most useful.

Calculating Simple Probability

Probabilities can be calculated experimentally. A number of trials are conducted (or events are measured) and

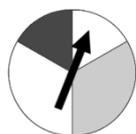
$$\text{Probability} = \frac{\text{number of successes}}{\text{number of trials}}$$

Experimental probability is only an estimate, and will change slightly each time it is measured.

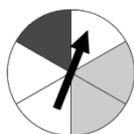
Theoretical probability can be calculated similarly, so long as each result (outcome) is equally likely:

$$\text{Probability} = \frac{\text{successful results}}{\text{all possible results}}$$

When calculating theoretical probability it is important to divide up the outcomes in such a way as to make them equally likely.



needs to be thought of as



so that the white is $\frac{3}{6}$ of the area.

The probability of white is $\frac{3}{6}$.

The calculation of probability is expressed as a fraction because that is, in most cases, the best way to think about the concept.

A probability of 0.2 means very little, but $\frac{1}{5}$ makes it much more obvious that it is one chance in five.

When calculating experimental probability we ideally test the entire population, which is called a “census”.

Often a census is not possible because it is too difficult, too expensive etc or the population is infinite. In those cases we take a sample and work from that. The sample needs to be:

- random
- independent (the outcome of one trial does not affect the result of the others)
- sufficiently large (how large depends on how accurate you need it)

Students may notice that these conditions are the same as those we need for proper sampling for all statistics.

Expected Value

The expected value is the number of successes that are expected for a certain number of trials.

$$\text{Expected value} = \text{Probability} \times \text{number of trials}$$

The expected value is basically the same as the mean (average) number of successes, except that a mean can be a decimal value, whereas an expected value is rounded because it is not possible to have a fractional success.

The probability of 6 on a normal dice is $= \frac{1}{6}$. If we roll the dice 20 times we calculate $\frac{1}{6} \times 20 = 3.33$ sixes on average, but the expected number of sixes is 3.

Calculations with Probabilities

If two results are possible from a single trial, then the probability of either is the probability of each taken alone added together.

e.g. if a test has three possible outcomes: A, B or C, then for any one trial we can say that

$$P(\text{A or B}) = P(\text{A}) + P(\text{B})$$

If two results occur in separate trials, then the probability of one **then** the other is the probability of each taken alone multiplied together.

e.g. if a test has three possible outcomes: A, B or C, then we can say that

$$P(\text{A both times}) = P(\text{A}) \times P(\text{A})$$

It is important when calculating probabilities to consider different arrangements which give the same result as effectively different.

e.g. if we toss two coins, then there are three possible outcomes (two heads, two tails, one of each) but we have to consider HT and TH as different. It can help to consider the coins as different colours, so that red H and blue T is obviously different to red T with blue H.

The probability of one head and one tail from a toss of two coins is $\frac{2}{4}$, not $\frac{1}{3}$.

Probability calculations are made much easier if real life differences which do not matter to the question are ignored.

e.g. when calculating the probability of twice drawing a card from a standard deck without getting a heart it is not helpful to count clubs, diamonds or spades as separate options – for this purpose what matters is that the card is either a heart or not a heart.

$$P(\text{no hearts}) = \frac{3}{4} \times \frac{3}{4} = 0.75 \times 0.75 = 0.5625$$

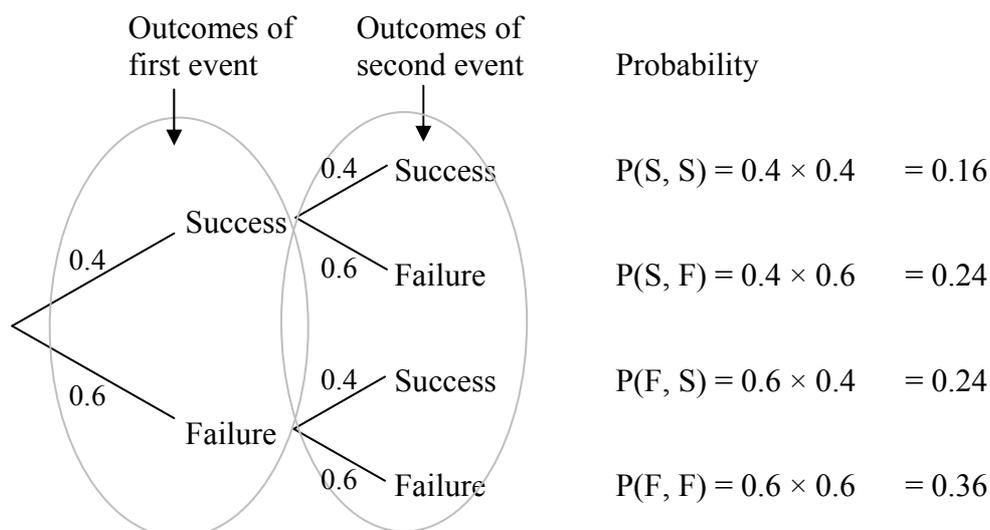
Probability Trees

Trees are generally the best way to resolve complicated problems with multiple paths to success. At Year 9 you only need to be able to draw the simplest trees.

- Start from what is actually happening. You need to be very clear on this.
- What are the potential results of the event you consider first? Draw branches to those outcomes.
- Carry on for each following event from the ends of the previous branch. What potential results can follow? Draw branches to those outcomes.
- When finished with the tree, write on each branch its probability.
- Decide which paths down the branches give the results you are looking for.
- The probability of each result is the probabilities on that branching multiplied.
- The final probability is the sum of all the individual paths of the result of interest.

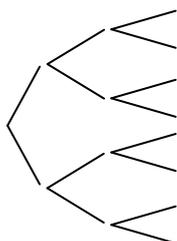
Note: an event is some measurable test or observation. The results of an event are its outcomes.

Each vertical row of a tree represents a separate event: something that happens with a measurable outcome (result). The branches go to those different outcomes, each with its probability attached.

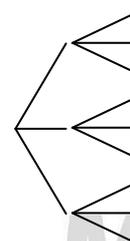


Thus the probability of getting one, and only one, success is $= 0.24 + 0.24 = 0.48$

The key is getting the structure right first, before worrying about the rest. Each event adds another family of branching, while more outcomes at each event means more lines at each branching.



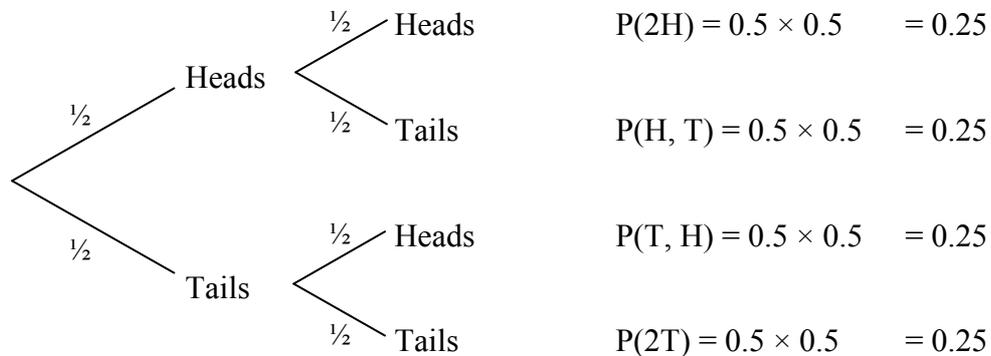
Three events, each with two outcomes



Two events, each with three outcomes

Generally when drawing trees it is wise to work through events in the order they occur, as it is less confusing. If events occur simultaneously then it does not matter which order they are drawn, but separate events must always have separate branching, even when they occur at the same time.

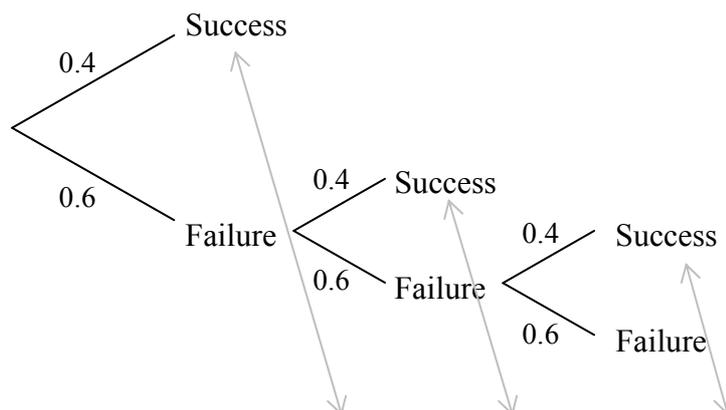
e.g. if two coins are tossed at the same time, the tree is



Note that although the tosses are at the same time, it is important to distinguish the two different ways a head and a tail can be reached. It can help to imagine the coins are different colours, so that red H and blue T is obviously different to red T with blue H.

It is not necessary to draw every branch in many cases. Once further branching has no meaning, either because success or failure is automatic, it can be stopped.

e.g. if we want to draw a tree to see if three trials occur with at least one success, then once any success is reached there is no need to continue the tree further. The tree becomes:



$$P(\text{at least one success}) = (0.4) + (0.6 \times 0.4) + (0.6 \times 0.6 \times 0.4) = 0.784$$

Often it is quicker to work out answers by looking at the complementary (opposite) result.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{In the case above, } P(\text{at least one success in three trials}) &= 1 - P(\text{all three are failures}) \\ &= 1 - (0.6 \times 0.6 \times 0.6) = 0.784 \end{aligned}$$