

# Combinatorial contemplations

Sergey Kirgizov

Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches  
LIB, Université Bourgogne Europe

## Composition du Jury :

Antoine Genitrini, Professeur à Sorbonne Université	Rapporteur
Renzo Pinzani, Professeur émérite à l'Université de Florence	Rapporteur
Eric Rivals, Directeur de Recherches CNRS, Université de Montpellier	Rapporteur
Olivier Bodini, Professeur à l'Université Sorbonne Paris Nord	Examineur
Enrica Duchi, Professeure à l'Université Paris-Cité	Examinatrice
Alain Giorgetti, Professeur à l'Université Marie et Louis Pasteur	Examineur
Elena Barcucci, Ancienne Professeure à l'Université de Florence	Invitée

16 March 2026

1. Introduction: my path to combinatorics
2. Enumeration via generating functions
3. Classical Goulden-Jackson approach
4. Endhered patterns in RNA
5.  $\mathbb{Q}$ -bonacci words
6. Perspectives

# My path to combinatorics



1988 - Born in Tselinograd, Kazakhstan, USSR

1992 - Tselinograd is renamed to Akmola  
(renamed to Astana in 1998)

1993 - Our family moved from Akmola to Barnaul

2009 - B.S. in Mathematics, Altay State University,  
Barnaul, Russia

2011 - Master in Applied Mathematics and Informatics,  
Altay State University

2014 - PhD in Université Pierre et Marie Curie

2014-2019 Postdoc & industry positions

from 2019 - Maître de conférences,

Université Bourgogne Europe

## My recent work in Dijon

is mostly about the structure and enumeration of discrete objects: words, paths, patterns, permutations, ...

In 2023, we organized Permutation Patterns conference.



## PhD Students

- › Abdelhamid Garah (co-supervised with Nader Mbarek), 2021-2024
- › Rémi Maréchal (with Jean-Luc Baril and Vincent Vajnovszki), 2021-2024
- › Nathanaël Hassler (with JLB and VV), 2023-ongoing

## Postdocs

- › Célia Biane, 2023-2024
- › Khaydar Nurligareev, 2023-2024

## Master intern

- › Daniel Pinson, 2024

## Project leader

- › ANR “PICS — Patterns in combinatorics”, 2022-ongoing
- › “Artico — L’art de la combinatoire et ses interactions”, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté region, 2021-2023

**Participant in other projects:** ANR COREGRAPHIE, ANR COMETA-GAE, ...

# Enumeration via generating functions

# Generating functions

Binary alphabet:  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ .

How many words of size  $n$  do we have?

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**How can this infinite sequence be written in a finite way?**



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where  $\varepsilon$  denotes the unique empty word.

Cardinality sequence: 1, 2, 4, 8, 16,...

**How can this infinite sequence be written in a finite way?**

It can be written as

$$\frac{1}{1 - 2x}$$



**But why?**

# Generating functions

Denote the union by  $+$ . The set  $\mathcal{W}$  of binary words is

$$\mathcal{W} = \varepsilon + \alpha + \beta + \alpha\alpha + \alpha\beta + \beta\alpha + \beta\beta + \alpha\alpha\alpha + \alpha\alpha\beta \dots$$

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$\mathcal{W}\alpha$  — append  $\alpha$  to all words from  $\mathcal{W}$ .

(Same for  $\mathcal{W}\beta$  — append  $\beta$ ).

Observe that

$$\mathcal{W} = \varepsilon + \mathcal{W}\alpha + \mathcal{W}\beta$$

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Observe that

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Treat concatenation as multiplication. Replace  $\varepsilon$  by 1.

Denote the result by  $W$ .

$$W = 1 + \alpha + \beta + \alpha^2 + 2\alpha\beta + \beta^2 + \alpha^3 + 3\alpha^2\beta + \dots$$

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Taylor expansion of  $W(\alpha, \beta)$  around  $(0, 0)$  gives

$$\sum_{m=0, k=0}^{\infty} b_{m,k} \alpha^m \beta^k,$$

where  $b_{m,k}$  is the number of binary words of size  $m + k$ , having  $m$   $\alpha$ s and  $k$   $\beta$ s.

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Calculate  $W(x, x) = \frac{1}{1 - 2x}$ . Its Taylor expansion,  $\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} b_n x^n$ ,

gives the sequence  $b_n$ , the number of binary words of size  $n$  (of course  $b_n = 2^n$ ).

**Classical  
Goulden-Jackson  
approach**

## Consecutive patterns in binary words

How many binary words of size  $n$  have exactly  $k$  occurrences of a consecutive pattern 01010 ?

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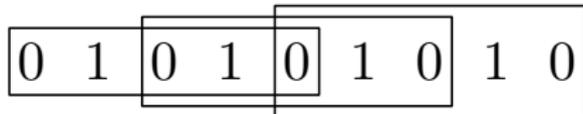
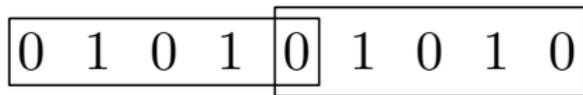
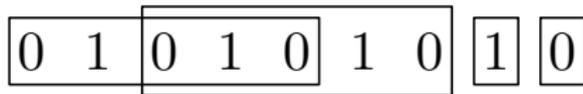
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**Idea:** construct words using 0, 1 and 01010.

**Problems:** duplicates and overlaps.



Same words with different decompositions.

# Autocorrelations and clusters of patterns

01010 can overlap with itself in several ways:

01010	01010	01010
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Overlapping occurrences of a pattern form a *cluster*.

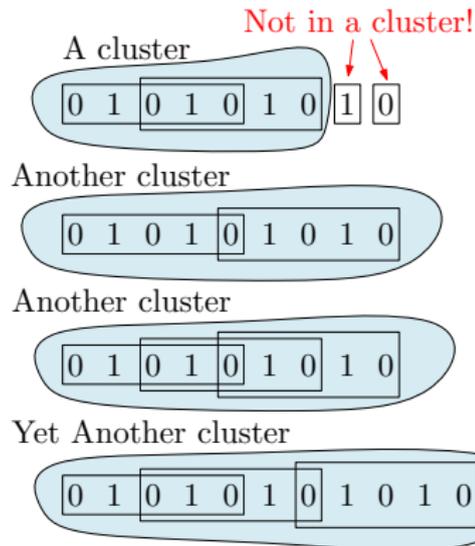
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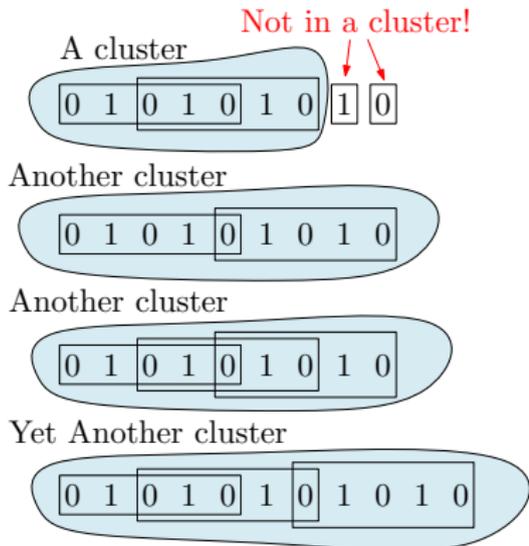
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Generating function for clusters of labelled overlapping patterns

$$C_{01010}(x, u) = \frac{ux^5}{1 - u(x^2 + x^4)},$$

where  $x$  is for size and  $u$  is for labelled patterns.

## Symbolic inclusion-exclusion principle

Imagine we have a g.f. for a distribution of a given pattern  $\mu$ :

$$B_{\mu}(x, y) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} d_{n,k} x^n y^k.$$

There are  $d_{n,k}$  words of size  $n$  with  $k$  occurrences of  $\mu$ .

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We label *some* occurrences of  $\mu$  by the variable  $u$ ,  
i.e.  $y$  is replaced either by 1 (no label) or by  $u$  (label).

$$L_{\mu}(x, u) = B_{\mu}(x, 1 + u).$$

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**It is simpler to construct  $L_\mu(x, u)$  than  $B_\mu(x, y)$  !**

**Once we have  $L_\mu(x, u)$ , we recover  $B_\mu(x, y)$  by the symbolic inclusion-exclusion:  $B_\mu(x, y) = L_\mu(x, y - 1)$**

For binary words and a pattern  $\mu$  we get:

$$B_\mu(x, y) = L_\mu(x, y - 1),$$

$$L_\mu(x, u) = \frac{1}{1 - 2x - C_\mu(x, u)},$$

where  $C_\mu(x)$  is the g.f. for clusters of overlapping labelled occurrences of  $\mu$  calculated using its autocorrelation polynomial  $A_\mu(x)$

$$C_\mu(x, u) = \frac{ux^{|\mu|}}{1 - u(A_\mu(x) - 1)}.$$

For a pattern  $\mu$ ,  $A_\mu$  contains  $x^j$  iff two occurrences can overlap at  $|\mu| - j$  letters.

*Also possible for joint distribution of several patterns.*

$x$  for size,  $u$  for labelled occurrences of 01010.

$$\left. \begin{array}{l} \underline{010101010} \mapsto x^9 u \\ \quad \quad \quad + \\ 01010\underline{1010} \mapsto x^9 u \\ \quad \quad \quad + \\ 01010\underline{1010} \mapsto x^9 u \\ \quad \quad \quad + \\ \underline{01010\underline{1010}} \mapsto x^9 u^2 \\ \quad \quad \quad + \\ \underline{01010\underline{1010}} \mapsto x^9 u^2 \\ \quad \quad \quad + \\ 01010\underline{\underline{1010}} \mapsto x^9 u^2 \\ \quad \quad \quad + \\ \underline{\underline{010101010}} \mapsto x^9 u^3 \\ \quad \quad \quad + \\ 010101010 \mapsto x^9 \end{array} \right\}$$

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 \end{array} \right\} \implies \left. \begin{array}{l}
 \underline{010101010} \mapsto x^9 (y - 1) \\
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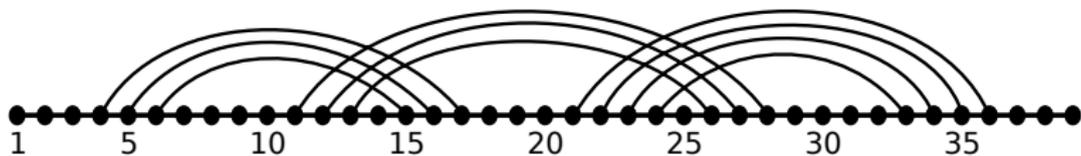
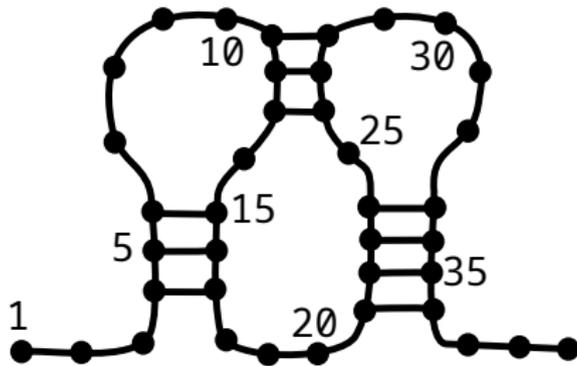
# Endhered patterns in RNA

## Inspiration: absent patterns in ADN

<p>No occurrences of these patterns in the human genome</p>	<p>CGCTCGACGTA, GTCCGAGCGTA, CGACGAACGGT, CCGATACGTCG</p>
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- ✎ *Absent sequences: nullomers and primes, 2007*  
by Greg Hampikian and Tim Andersen

# RNA secondary structures and matchings

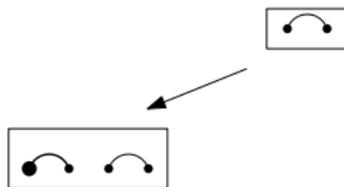


$\dots \left( \left( \left( \dots \left[ \left[ \left[ \cdot \right] \right] \right] \right) \right) \dots \left( \left( \left( \left( \left[ \left[ \left[ \cdot \right] \right] \right] \right) \right) \right) \right) \dots$

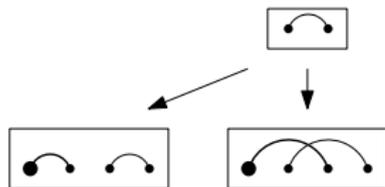
# Perfect matchings



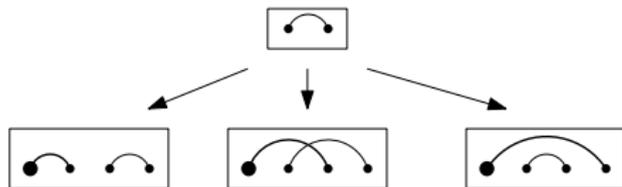
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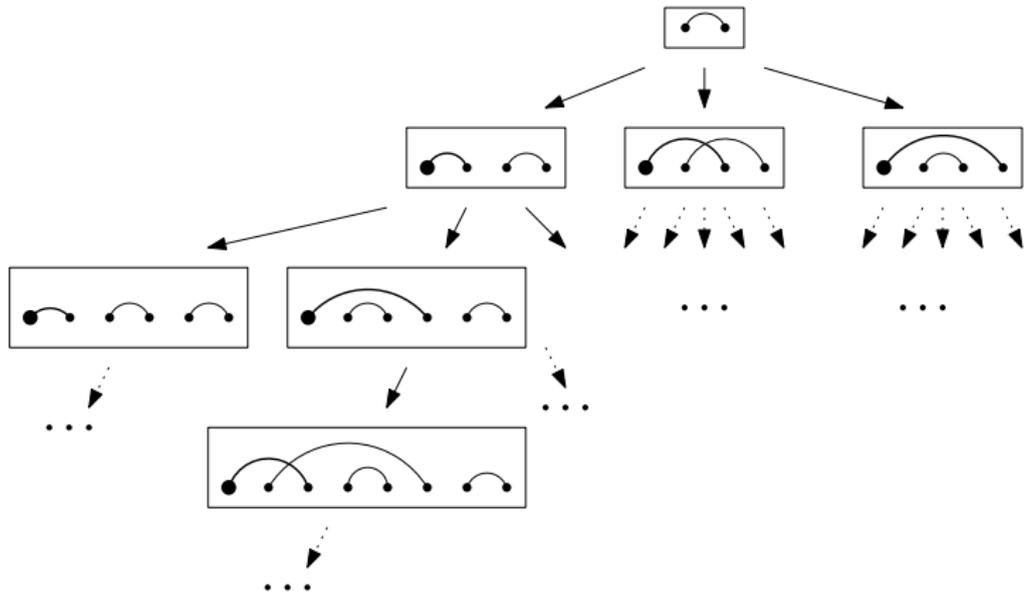
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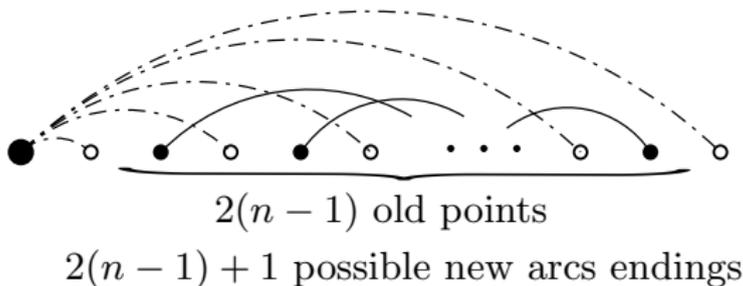
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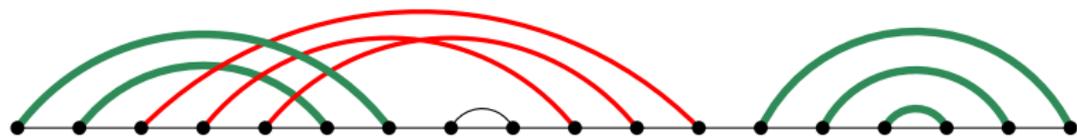


$$a_n = (2n-1) \cdot (2n-3) \cdots 5 \cdot 3 \cdot 1 = (2n-1)!!$$

[A1147](#) in Sloane's Encyclopedia : 1, 3, 15, 105, 945, 10395,...

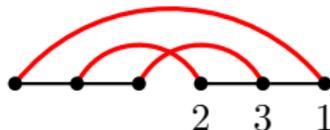
# Endhered patterns in perfect matchings

(endhered = end-adhered)

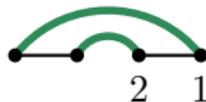


This matching contains

1 occurrence of pattern

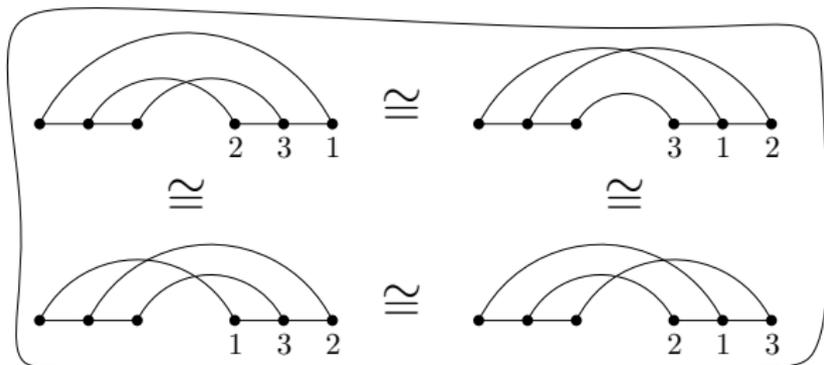
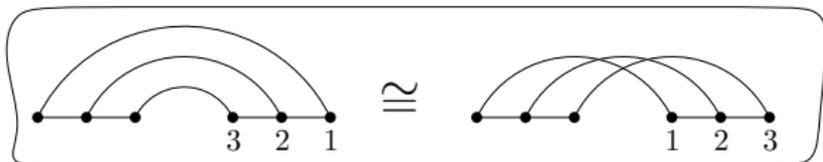
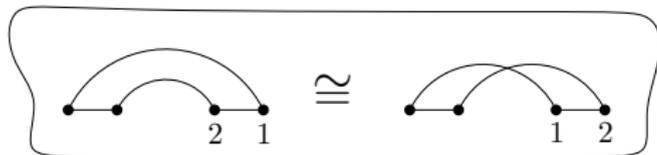


3 occurrences of pattern



We write patterns in condensed form, indicating sequentially the order of starting points corresponding to arc ends.

# Endhered pattern equivalence



equivalence = same distribution

# Endhered twist

## Left endhered twist

All runs of consecutive **starting points** are reversed.

## Right endhered twist

All runs of consecutive **ending points** are reversed.

Example of right twist:



Thanks to an endhered twist

 and  have the same distribution!

# Goulden-Jackson cluster method and endhered patterns

# Endhered pattern enumeration in matchings

Imagine we have g.f. for a distribution of a given pattern  $\mu$ :

$$D_{\mu}(z, u) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} d_{n,k} z^n u^k.$$

There are  $d_{n,k}$  matchings of size  $n$  with  $k$  occurrences of  $\mu$ .

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We label some occurrences by variable  $v$ ,  
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$$H_\mu(z, v) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} h_{n,k} z^n v^k = D_\mu(z, 1 + v).$$

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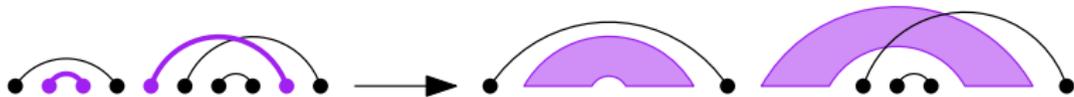
$$H_\mu(z, v) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} h_{n,k} z^n v^k = D_\mu(z, 1 + v).$$

**It is simpler to construct  $H_\mu$  than  $D_\mu$  !**

**By the symbolic inclusion-exclusion:  $D_\mu(z, u) = H_\mu(z, u - 1)$**

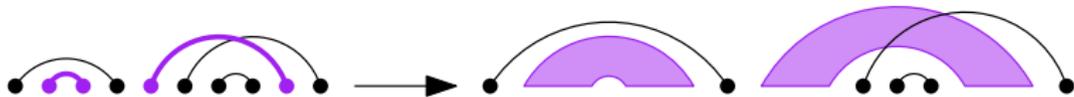
## Idea: replace some arcs by patterns

(simple case without self-overlappings)



## Idea: replace some arcs by patterns

(simple case without self-overlappings)



We label certain arcs by  $\nu$ , these arcs will be replaced by occurrences of pattern  $\mu$ .

$$F(z + z\nu),$$

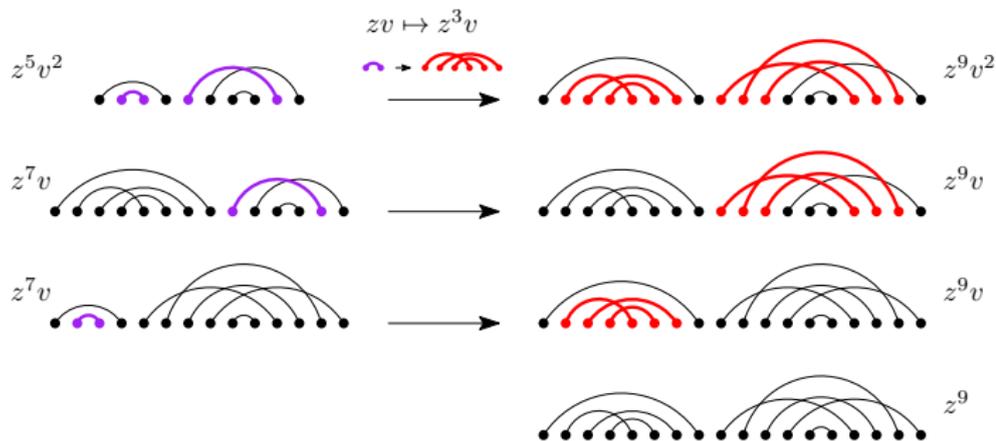
where  $F(z)$  is the ordinary g.f. for all matchings:

$$F(z) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} (2n-1)!! z^n = 1 + z + 3z^2 + 15z^3 + 105z^4 + \dots$$

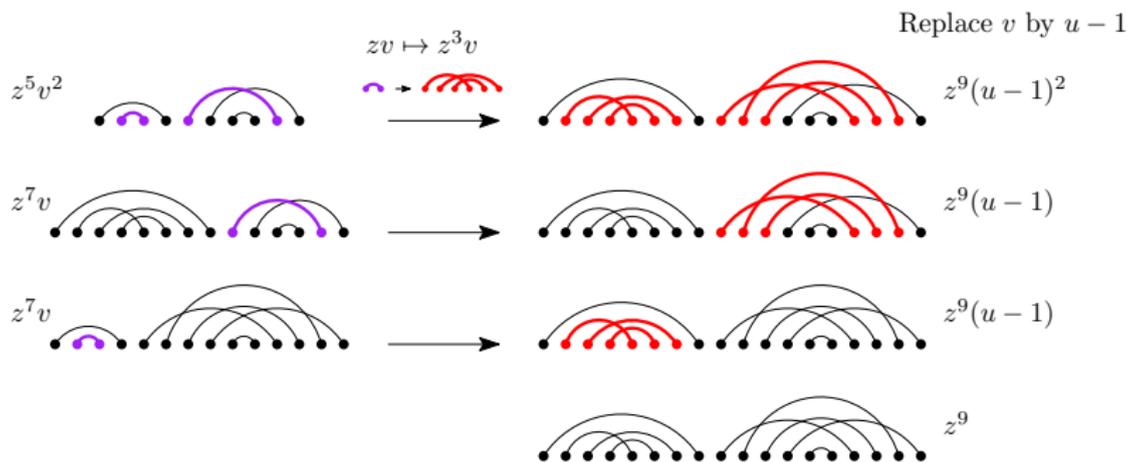
Consider, for instance,  
the endhered pattern



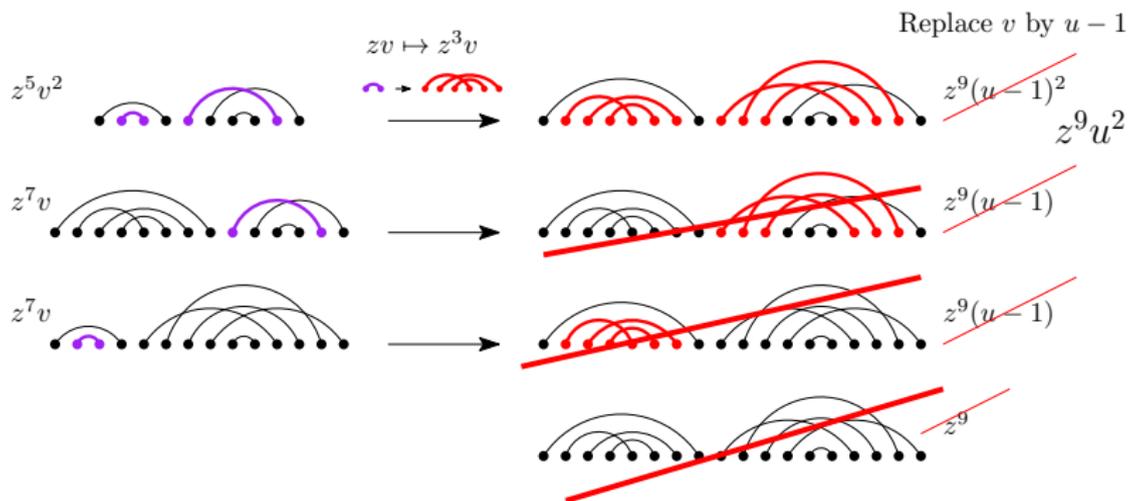
# Zero self-overlappings



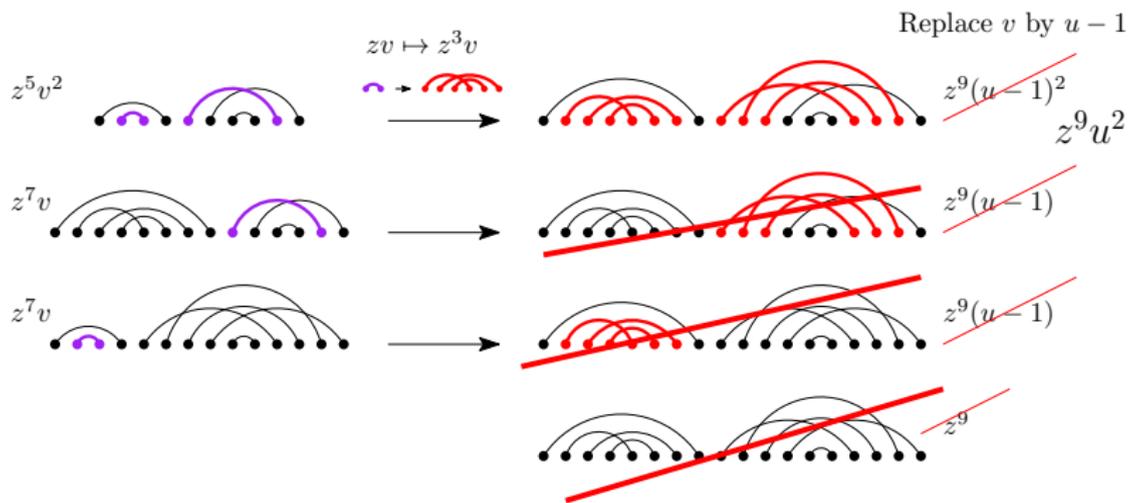
# Zero self-overlappings



# Zero self-overlappings



# Zero self-overlappings



$$H_{\mu}(z, v) = F(z + z^{\ell} v),$$

$$D_{\mu}(z, u) = H_{\mu}(z, u - 1),$$

where  $\ell$  is the size of pattern  $\mu$ .

With  
self-overlappings?

# Autocorrelation encodes self-overlappings

An autocorrelation polynomial  $A_\pi(z)$  for an endhered pattern  $\pi$  of size  $n$  is

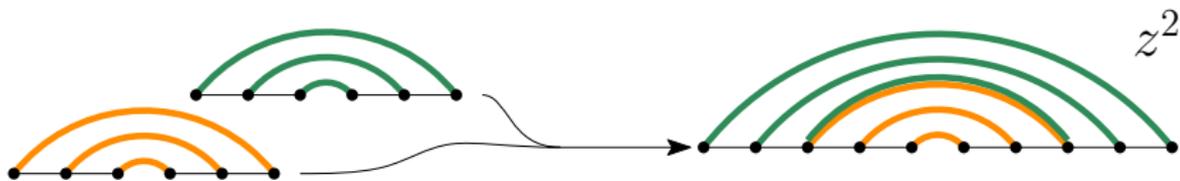
$$A_\pi(z) = 1 + \sum_{k \in S} z^{n-k},$$

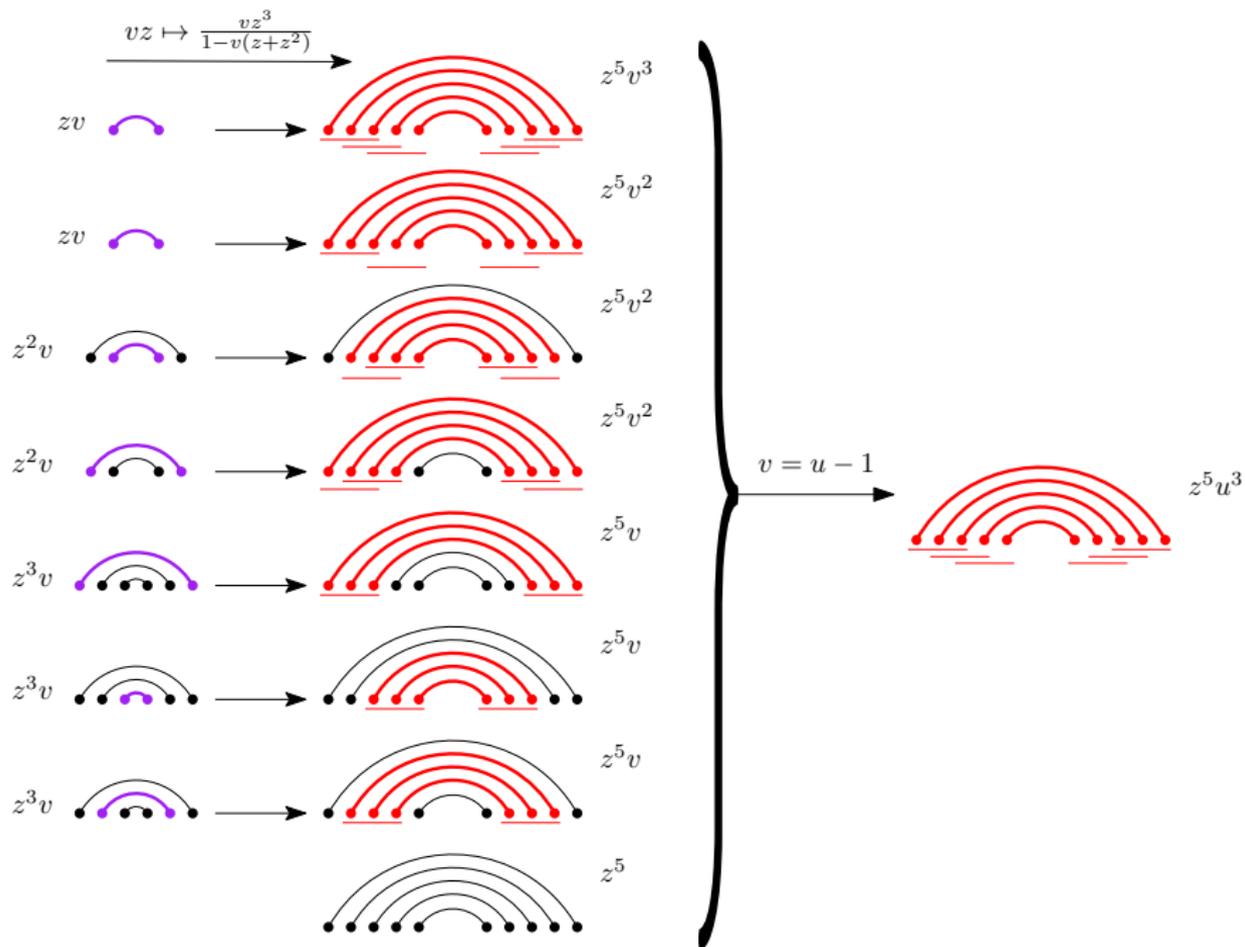
where  $S$  is the set of lengths of possible overlappings of two different occurrences of the pattern  $\pi$  in some matching.

In other words,  $z^{n-k}$  means that two occurrences have  $k$  edges in common.

Pattern	Autocorrelation
	$A_{21}(z) = 1 + z,$
	$A_{12}(z) = 1 + z,$
	$A_{132}(z) = 1,$
	$A_{321}(z) = 1 + z + z^2,$
	$A_{3412}(z) = 1 + z^2,$
	$A_{7564231}(z) = 1 + z^3 + z^6.$

# Examples of endhered pattern overlappings





## Distribution of a given pattern

Let  $\pi$  be an endhered pattern of size  $\ell$ , with autocorrelation  $A_\pi(z)$ . The distribution is given by

$$\sum_{n,k \geq 0} a_{n,k} z^n u^k = F \left( z + \frac{(u-1)z^\ell}{1 - (u-1)(A_\pi(z) - 1)} \right),$$

where  $F(z)$  is the ordinary g.f. for all matchings:

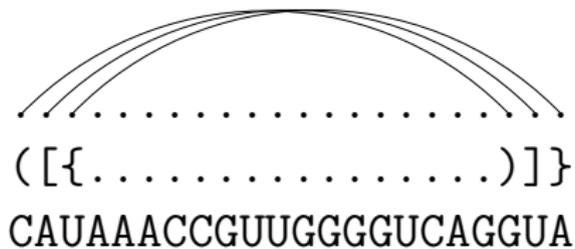
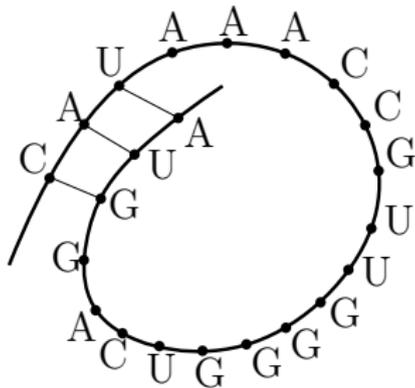
$$F(z) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} (2n-1)!! z^n = 1 + z + 3z^2 + 15z^3 + 105z^4 + \dots$$

*Also possible for joint distribution of several patterns.*

**Well... what about  
the real-world data?**



# Snail-like pseudoknotted RNA



Does it exist in nature?

# Interactive web application by Daniel Pinson

<https://rna.kirgizov.link>



Data comes from Protein Data Bank, we have used X3DNA-DSSR to obtain matchings from 3D coordinates of atoms. FR3D Python can also be used.

## Possible research directions

The distribution of endhered patterns in real-world data is different from their distribution in matchings.

- › Can one characterise real-world RNA secondary structures by pattern distributions (avoidance-presence)?

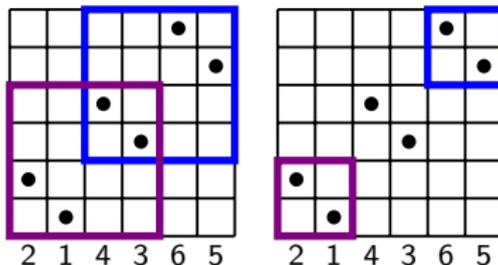
- › Explain possible autocorrelations or endhered patterns, (in other words, period sets)

1, 2, 4, 4, 7, 7, 11, 12, 18, ... ? (shift of [A304178](#) ?)

Bijection with sets of palindrome prefix lengths, over all binary palindromes of length  $n$ ???

- ✍ Endhered patterns in matchings and RNA  
Célia Biane, Greg Hampikian, Sk, Khaydar Nurligareev  
<https://arxiv.org/abs/2404.18802>  
Journal of Computational Biology, 32(1), 2025

- ✍ Asymptotics of self-overlapping permutations  
Sk and Khaydar Nurligareev  
<https://arxiv.org/abs/2311.11677>  
Discrete Mathematics, 348(5), 2025



- 🖥 Interactive web application by Daniel Pinson *et al.*  
<https://rna.kirgizov.link>
- 💬 Distribution of endhered patterns in RNA-related secondary structures  
Célia Biane, Greg Hampikian, Sk, Khaydar Nurligareev, Daniel Pinson  
SeqBIM 2024, Rennes, 2024
- ✍ Clusters of endhered patterns in permutations and mathematics.  
In preparation. With Khaydar Nurligareev.

$\mathbb{Q}$ -bonacci words

## $\mathbb{Q}$ -bonacci or $q$ -decreasing words

An  $n$ -length binary word is  $q$ -decreasing,  $q \in \mathbb{R}^+$ , if every of its length maximal factors of the form  $0^a 1^b$  satisfies  $a = 0$  or  $q \cdot a > b$ .

$$\dots 1 \left| \underbrace{000 \dots 00}_a \underbrace{111 \dots 11}_b \right| 0 \dots$$

Let  $\mathcal{W}_{q,n}$  be the set of such words of length  $n$ ,  $\mathcal{W}_q = \bigcup_{n \in \mathbb{N}} \mathcal{W}_{q,n}$ .

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**Ex.**

11100101**011**0001 is not 2-decreasing ( $2 \cdot 1 \not> 2$ )

**01111** is not  $\pi$ -decreasing ( $\pi \cdot 1 \not> 4$ )

001111 is  $\pi$ -decreasing ( $\pi \cdot 2 > 4$ )

# 1-decreasing words, $\mathcal{W}_1$

In a 1-decreasing word every run of 0s is immediately followed by a strictly shorter run of 1s.

$$\dots 1 \mid \underbrace{000 \dots 00}_a \underbrace{111 \dots 11}_b \mid 0 \dots \quad a > b \text{ or } a = 0$$

Let's count!

$n$	1	2	3	4	$\dots$
	2	3	5	8	Fibonacci

			0000	
			0001	
		000	0010	
0	00	001	1000	
1	10	100	1001	$\dots$
	11	110	1100	
		111	1110	
			1111	

## 2-decreasing words, $\mathcal{W}_2$

$$\dots 1 \mid \underbrace{000 \dots 00}_a \underbrace{111 \dots 11}_b \mid 0 \dots \quad \text{where } 2a > b \text{ or } a = 0$$

Let's count!

$n$	1	2	3	4	$\dots$
	2	4	7	13	Tribonacci

				0000	
				0001	
				0010	
			000	0011	
			001	0100	
	00		010	0101	
0	01		100	1000	$\dots$
1	10		101	1001	
	11		110	1010	
			111	1100	
				1101	
				1110	
				1111	

## $q$ -decreasing words with natural $q$

- › Bijections between  $q$ -decreasing words and words avoiding factors  $1^{q+1}$ .
- › Efficient generation and Gray codes
- › Solved Eĝecioĝlu-Irŝiĉ conjecture  
(Hamiltonian path always exists in Fibonacci-run graphs)

- ✍ Gray codes for Fibonacci  $q$ -decreasing words.  
Jean-Luc Baril, Sk and Vincent Vajnovszki  
Theoretical Computer Science, 2022, <https://arxiv.org/abs/2010.09505>
- ✍ Fibonacci-run graphs I: Basic properties. Ömer Eĝecioĝlu and Vesna Irŝiĉ  
Discrete Applied Mathematics, 2021, <https://arxiv.org/abs/2010.05518>
- ✍ Asymptotic bit frequency in Fibonacci words. BKV, GASCom 2022  
<https://kirgizov.link/talks/gascom2022.pdf>  
Pure Mathematics and Applications, 2022, <https://arxiv.org/abs/2106.13550>
- ☰ Qubonacci words. BKV  
Permutations patterns 2021, <https://kirgizov.link/talks/qubonacci.pdf>



# $q$ -decreasing words with rational and real $q$

- 🗨️ Q-bonacci words and numbers. Sk, Fibonacci conference
- 📄 The Fibonacci Quarterly, 2022  
<https://kirgizov.link/talks/fiboconf.pdf>  
<https://arxiv.org/abs/2201.00782>
- 🗨️ Sturm meets Fibonacci in Minkowski's fractal bar.  
Sergey Dovgal and Sk  
Permutation Patterns 2023  
<https://kirgizov.link/publications/pp23.pdf>
- 📄 Structure and growth of  $\mathbb{R}$ -bonacci words.  
Sergey Dovgal and Sk  
Electronic Journal of Combinatorics, 2025  
<http://arxiv.org/abs/2310.01213>

How fast does  $|\mathcal{W}_{q,n}|$   
grow ?

Consider the following function

$$\Phi(q) = \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{|\mathcal{W}_{q,n+1}|}{|\mathcal{W}_{q,n}|}$$

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For  $q = 5/3$  ?

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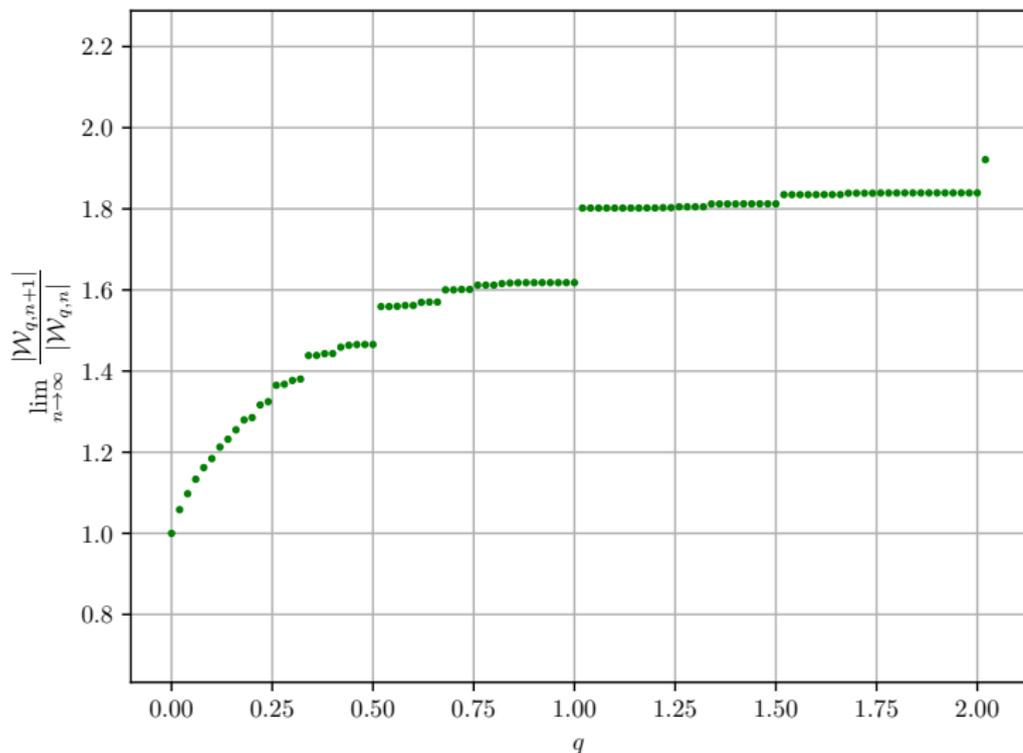
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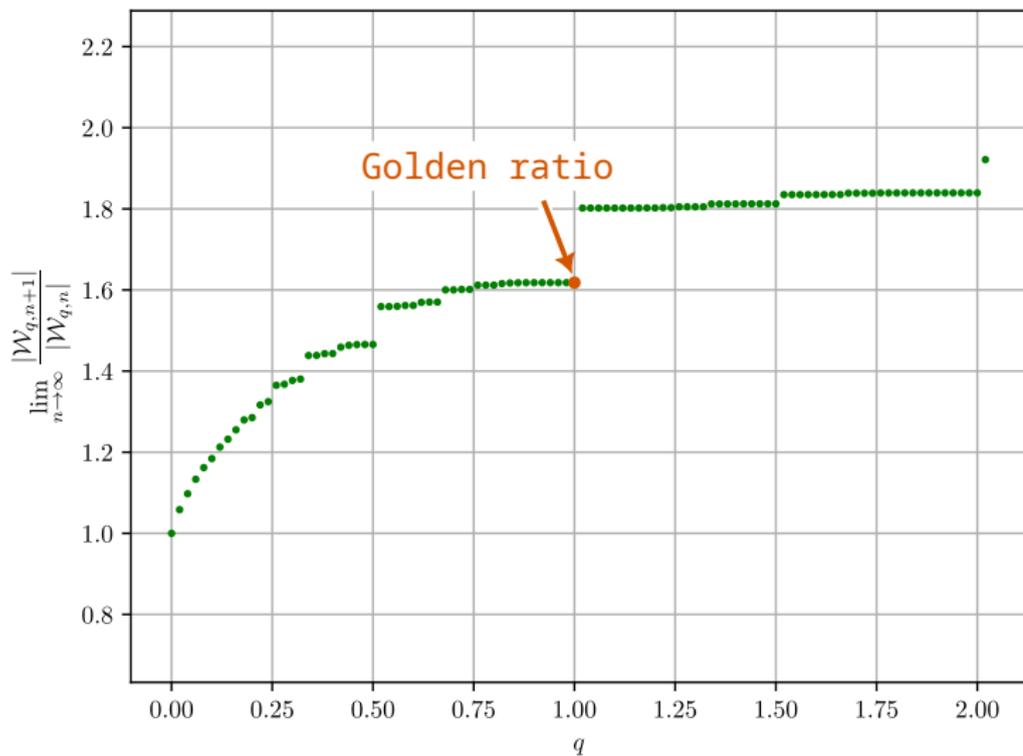
For  $q = \varphi$  ?

# Generalization of the golden ratio



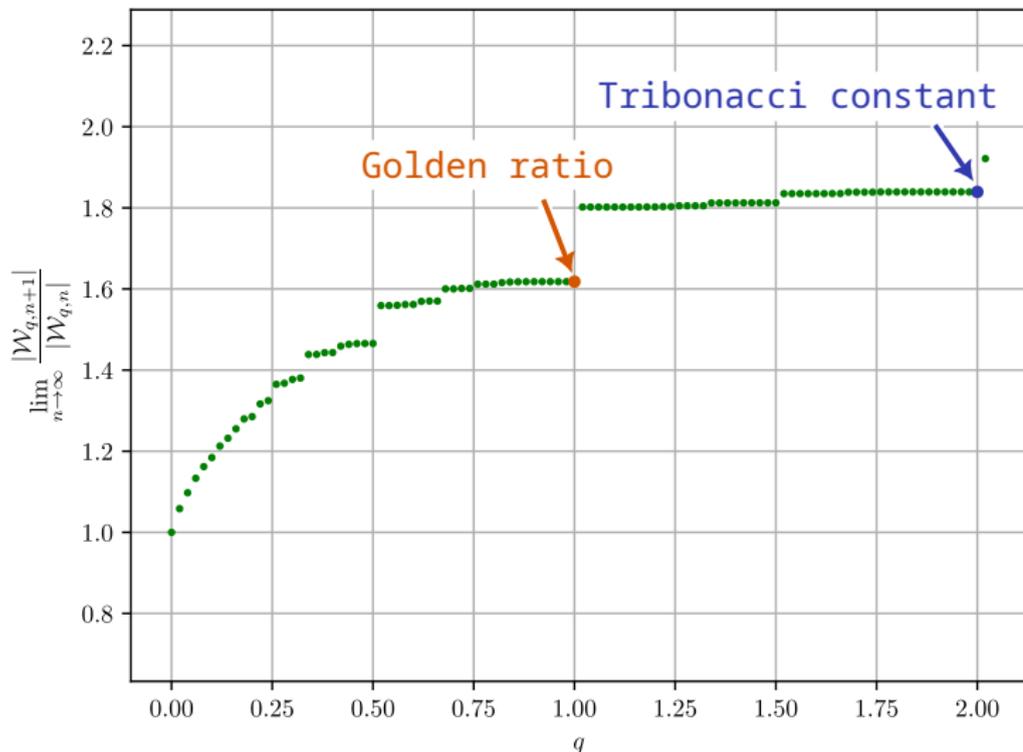
$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{|\mathcal{W}_{q,n+1}|}{|\mathcal{W}_{q,n}|}$  as a function of  $q$ .

# Generalization of the golden ratio



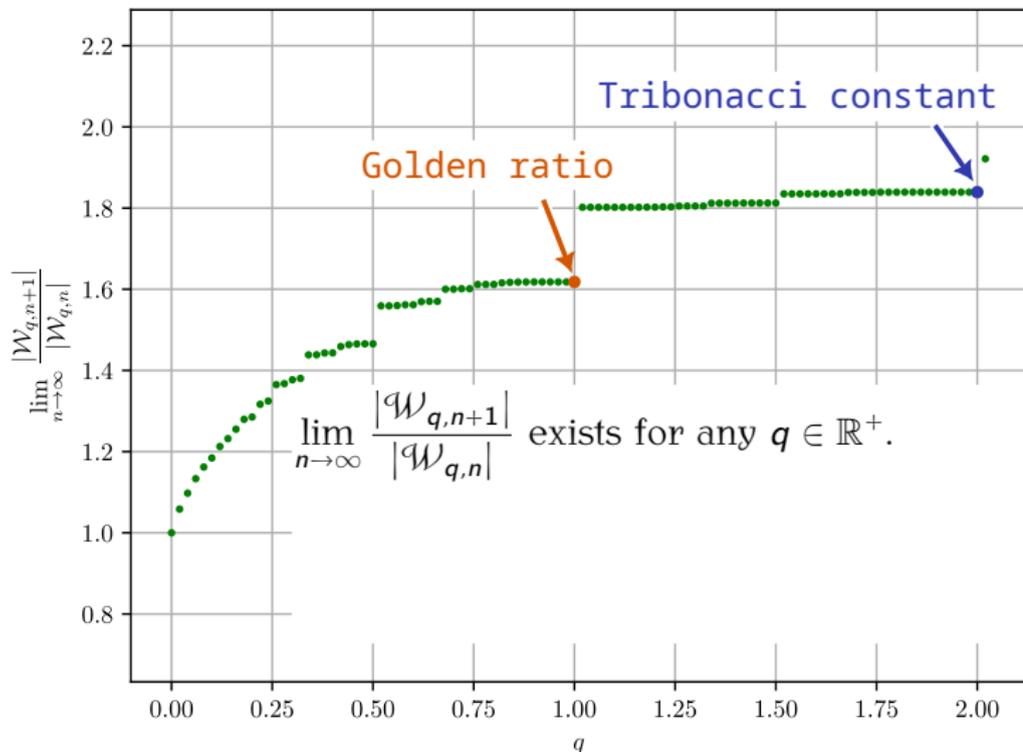
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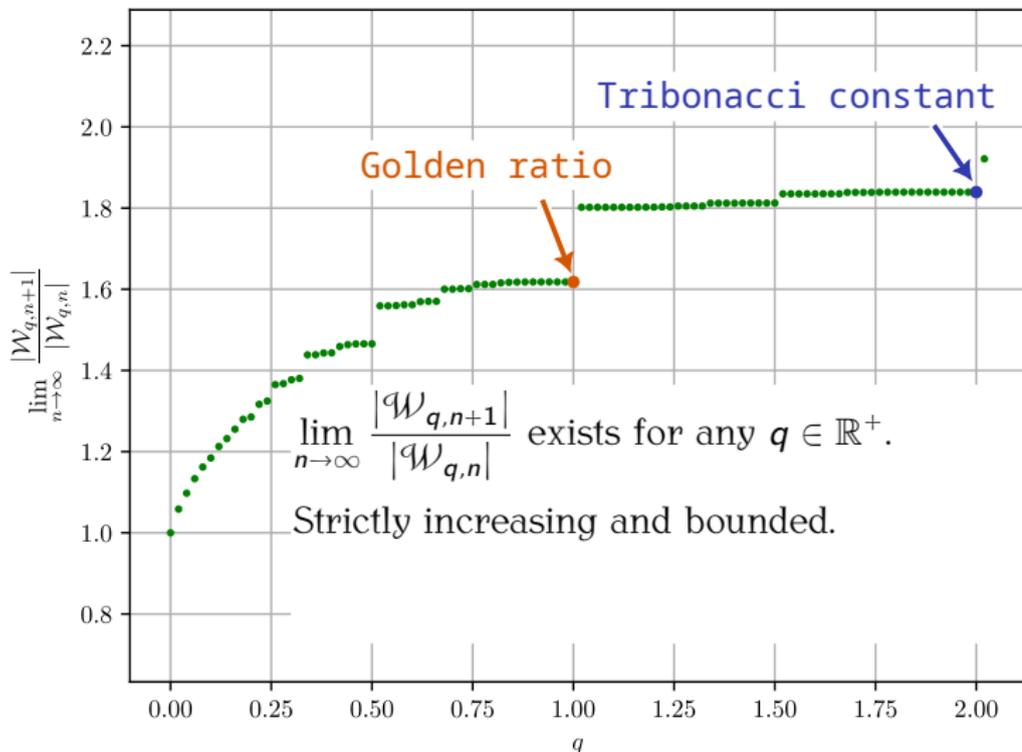
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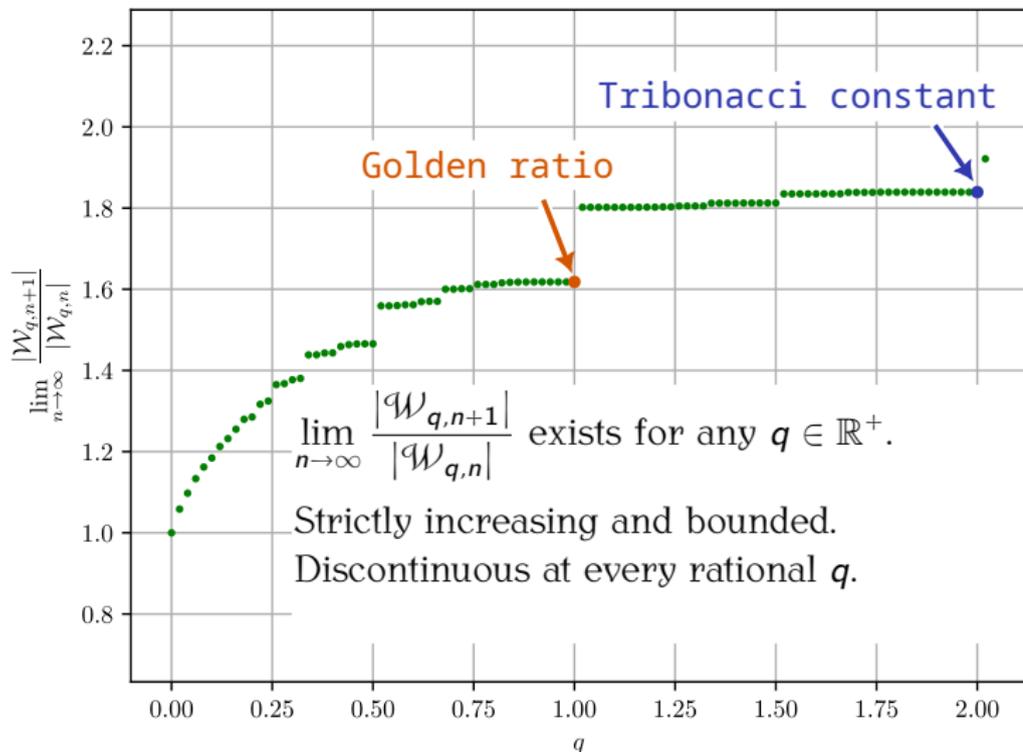
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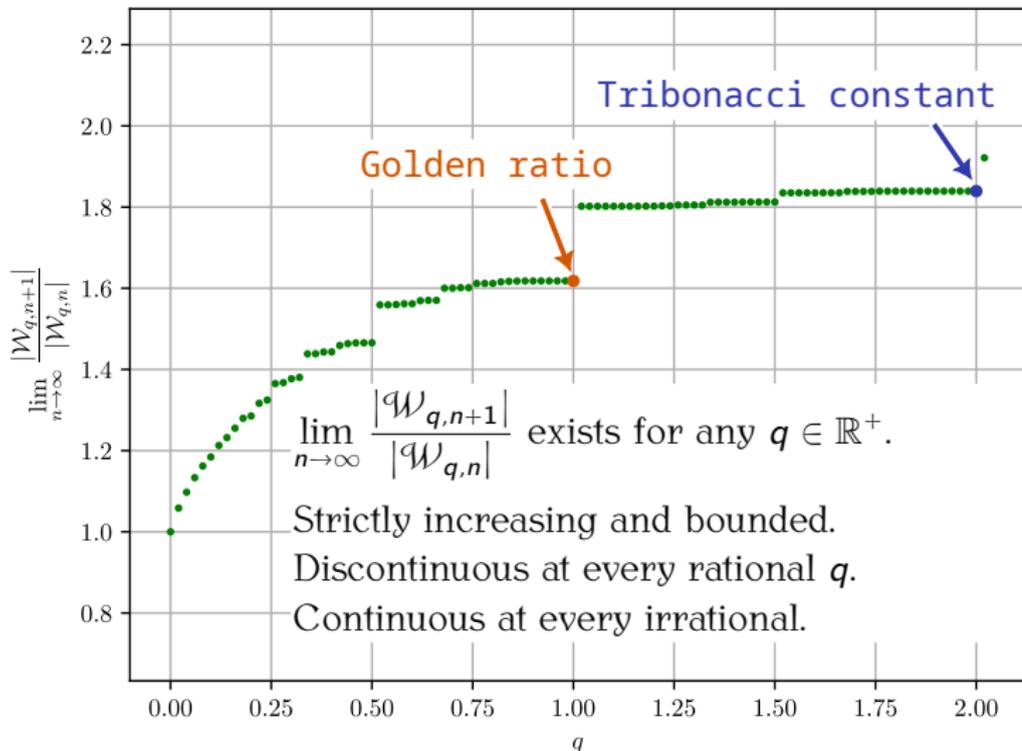
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## Open questions for $\mathbb{Q}$ -bonacci words

In a  $k$ -Gray code consecutive words differs in at most  $k$  positions.

**Conjecture.** There is a 1-Gray code for  $q$ -decreasing binary words of size  $n$ , for any  $q \in \mathbb{N}$ .

In 2022, in the original paper, Baril, K. and Vajnovszki presented a 1-Gray code for  $q = 1$  and 3-Gray code for  $q > 1$ .

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For some values of  $n$  and  $q \notin \mathbb{N}$  no 1-Gray code can exist. For example,  $q = 2/3, n = 5$ .

# More!

Beautiful links with Dyck paths, integer compositions:

- ✎ Dyck paths enumerated by the  $\mathbb{Q}$ -bonacci numbers.  
Elena Barcucci, Antonio Bernini, Stefano Bilotta, Renzo Pinzani  
GASCom 2024, E. Proceedings in Theoretical Computer Science
- ✎ Rational Dyck paths.  
Elena Barcucci, Antonio Bernini, Stefano Bilotta, Renzo Pinzani  
Journal of Integer Sequences, 2025.

A new set of pattern avoiding binary words in bijection with  $q$ -decreasing words, for  $q \in \mathbb{Q}^+$ :

- ✎ Pattern avoiding and  $q$ -decreasing binary words.  
Elena Barcucci, Antonio Bernini, Stefano Bilotta, Renzo Pinzani  
RAIRO - Theoretical Informatics and Applications, 2025

## Even more!

-  Fibonacci Cubes with Applications and Variations.  
Ömer Eğecioğlu, Sandi Klavžar and Michel Mollard  
World Scientific, 2023
-  Combinatorial Gray codes-an updated survey, Torsten Mütze  
<https://arxiv.org/pdf/2202.01280.pdf>  
Electronic Journal of Combinatorics, 2022
-  Generating cyclic 2-Gray codes for Fibonacci  $q$ -decreasing words.  
Dennis Wong, Bowie Liu, Chan-Tong Lam and Marcus Im  
WALCOM: Algorithms and Computation, 2024.
-  Greedy gray codes for some restricted classes of binary words.  
Nathanaël Hassler, V. Vajnovszki and Dennis Wong  
GASCom 2024, E. Proceedings in Theoretical Computer Science
-  Enumeration in the lattice of  $q$ -decreasing words.  
Jean-Luc Baril, Nathanaël Hassler and Sk.  
Preprint. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2511.09480>

# Perspectives

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- › Nathanaël Hassler will defend his PhD this year.
- › Invited Speaker at GASCom 2026, Italy, June 8-12 2026



- › Finish and submit papers currently in preparation.

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- › Nathanaël Hassler will defend his PhD this year.
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- › Finish and submit papers currently in preparation.
- › Investigate pattern avoidance in words produced by a given grammar.
- › Try to obtain an European Research Council grant.
- › Continue my dilettante philosophical explorations.
- › More cooperation with life sciences.

**Merci !**

# Knuth-Fibonacci words

# Poetry metrics

da DUM da DUM da DUM ...

DUM da DUM da DUM da ...

da da DUM da da DUM ...

da DUM da da DUM da da DUM da ...

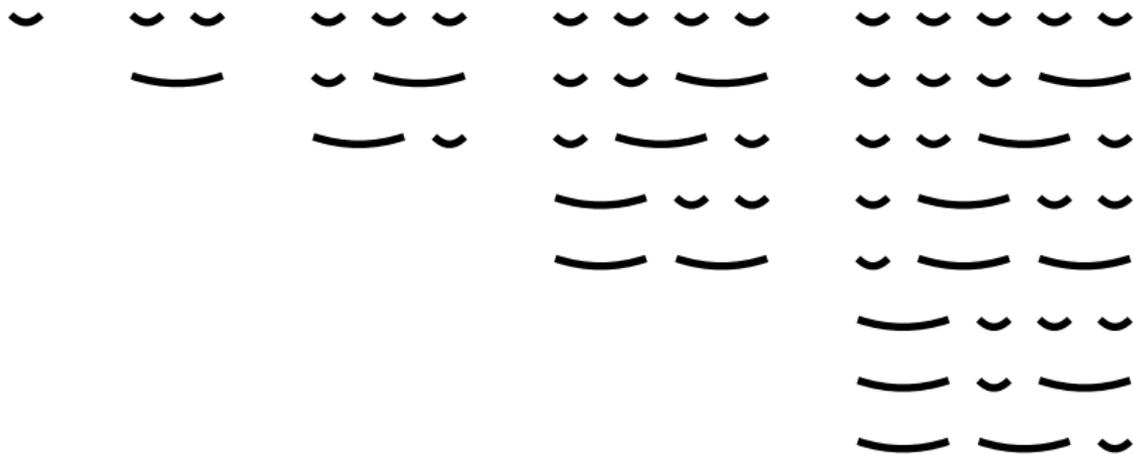
DUM da da DUM da da ...

## Poetry metrics

In Ancient Greek, Latin, Sanskrit and some other languages there are two types of syllables: short and long.

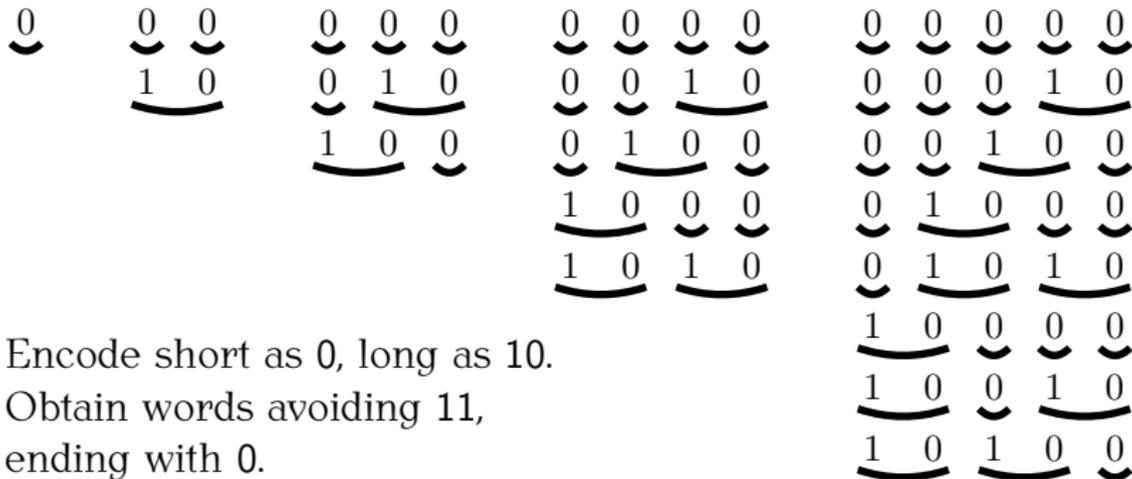
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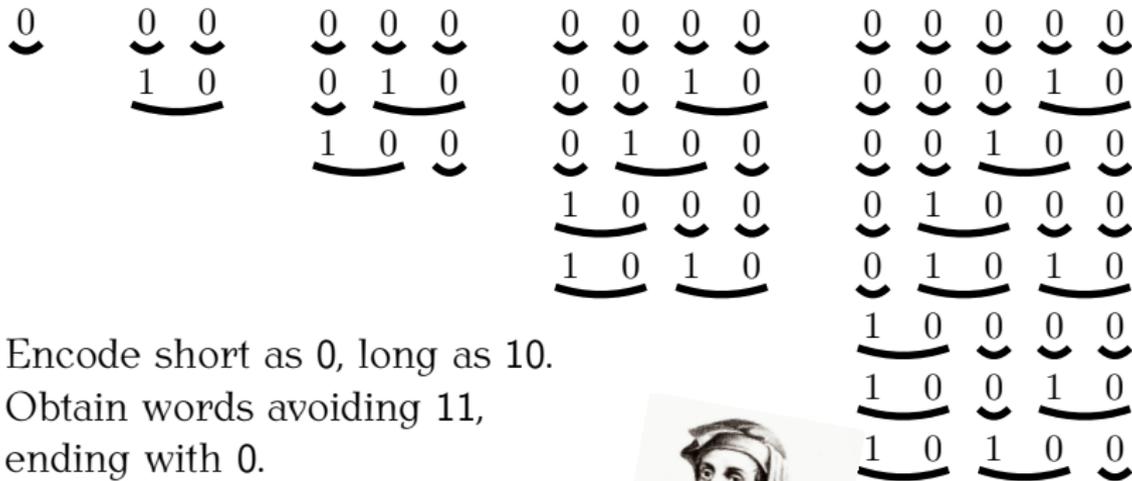
Encode short as 0, long as 10.

Obtain words avoiding 11,  
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How many metres we have ?

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Encode short as 0, long as 10.

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How many metres we have ?

1, 2, 3, 5, 8,...



# Knuth-Fibonacci words

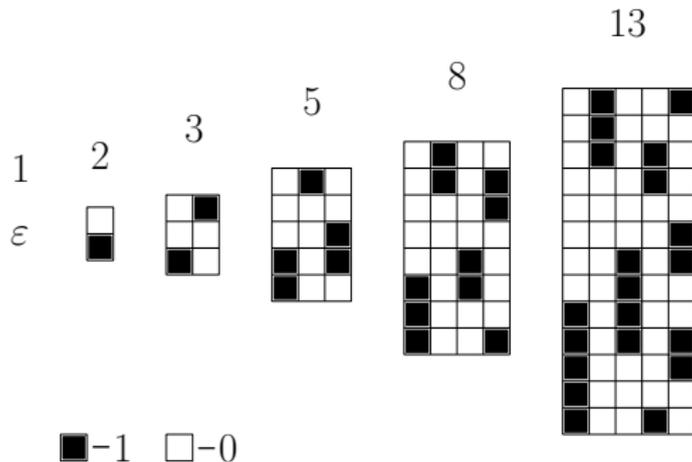
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# Knuth-Fibonacci words

Words avoiding  $1^k$  are counted by generalized  $k$ -step Fibonacci numbers.

Words avoiding 11 are counted by Fibonacci

$$a_n = a_{n-1} + a_{n-2}$$



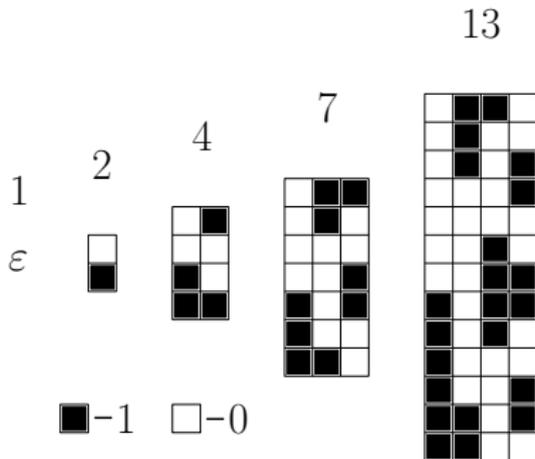
Words are listed in Gray order (consecutive differs in only 1 bit)

# Knuth-Fibonacci words

Words avoiding  $1^k$  are counted by generalized  $k$ -step Fibonacci numbers.

Words avoiding 111 are counted by Tribonacci

$$a_n = a_{n-1} + a_{n-2} + a_{n-3}$$



Words are listed in Gray order (consecutive differs in only 1 bit)

# Knuth-Fibonacci words literature

-  The Art of Computer Programming, Vol. 3: Sorting, and Searching, 2 ed. (page 286), 1998, Donald Knuth
-  Matters Computational (Section 14.2), 2010, Jörg Arndt  
<https://www.jjj.de/fxt/fxtbook.pdf>
-  Generalized Fibonacci cubes are mostly Hamiltonian  
Jenshiuh Liu, Wen-Jing Hsu, Moon Jung Chung, 1994
-  Gray codes for A-free strings. Matthew B. Squire, 1996
-  A loopless generation of bitstrings without  $p$  consecutive ones  
Vincent Vajnovszki, 2001
-  An  $O(1)$  time algorithm for generating Fibonacci strings  
Kenji Mikawa and Ishiro Semba, 2005