

## Some Math Jokes and Quotes

by Manjil Saikia - Thursday, August 23, 2012

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"Since the mathematicians have invaded the theory of relativity, I do not understand it myself any more."  
-- Albert Einstein

"Only professional mathematicians learn anything from proofs. Other people learn from explanations." --  
Ralph Boas

"An engineer thinks that his equations are an approximation to reality. A physicist thinks reality is an approximation to his equations. A mathematician doesn't care. "

"A mathematician is a device for turning coffee into theorems." -- Paul Erdos

"A topologist is a person who doesn't know the difference between a coffee cup and a doughnut."

### Mathematics is ...

"Mathematics is the art of giving the same name to different things." -- J. H. Poincare

"Mathematics is a game played according to certain simple rules with meaningless marks on paper." --  
David Hilbert

"Mathematics consists in proving the most obvious thing in the least obvious way." -- George Polya

### Arithmetic is ...

Arithmetic is where the answer is right and everything is nice and you can look out of the window and see the blue sky - or the answer is wrong and you have to start over and try again and see how it comes out this time. ~Carl Sandburg

Arithmetic is where numbers fly like pigeons in and out of your head. ~Carl Sandburg, "Arithmetic"

Arithmetic is numbers you squeeze from your head to your hand to your pencil to your paper till you get the answer. ~Carl Sandburg, "Arithmetic"

### Algebra is ...

"Men are liars. We'll lie about lying if we have to. I'm an algebra liar. I figure two good lies make a positive." -- Tim Allen

"We may always depend on it that algebra which cannot be translated into good English and sound

common sense, is bad algebra." -- William Kingdon Clifford

"I don't know why I should have to learn Algebra... I'm never likely to go there." -- Billy Connolly

"As long as algebra is taught in school, there will be prayer in school. " -- Cokie Roberts

### Calculus is ...

"The whole apparatus of the calculus takes on an entirely different form when developed for the complex numbers." -- Keith Devlin

"The Mean Value Theorem is the midwife of calculus - not very important or glamorous by itself, but often helping to deliver other theorems that are of major significance." -- E. Purcell and D. Varberg

"God does not care about our mathematical difficulties - he integrates empirically" -- Albert Einstein

"But just as much as it is easy to find the differential [derivative] of a given quantity, so it is difficult to find the integral of a given differential. Moreover, sometimes we cannot say with certainty whether the integral of a given quantity can be found or not." -- Johann Bernoulli

"In the fall of 1972 President Nixon announced that the rate of increase of inflation was decreasing. This was the first time a sitting president used the third derivative to advance his case for reelection. -- Hugo Rossi"

### Statistics is ...

"42.7% of all statistics are made up on the spot." -- Steven Wright

"Five out of four people have trouble with fractions." -- Steven Wright

"How many pizzas are consumed each year in the United States? How many words have you spoken in your life? How many different peoples names appear in the New York Times each year? How many watermelons would fit inside the U.S. Capitol building? What is the volume of all the human blood in the world? -- John A. Paulos

"A statistician can have his head in an oven and his feet in ice, and he will say that on the average he feels fine."

- Quapropter bono christiano, sive mathematici, sive quilibet impie divinantium... cavendi sunt, ne consortio daemoniorum irretiant.
  - *Translation:* Therefore, a good Christian should beware that mathematicians, and any others who prophesy impiously... may be entangled in the companionship of demons.
  - [St. Augustine](#), *De Genesi ad Litteram*
  - Augustine uses "mathematicians" in this context to refer mainly to [astrologers](#) and occultists using [numerology](#).

- A mathematician is a machine for turning coffee into theorems.
  - Popularly attributed to [Paul Erdős](#), who was quoting [Alfréd Rényi](#) (Bruce Schechter, *My Brain Is Open: The Mathematical Journeys of Paul Erdős*, 1998, New York: Simon & Schuster, [ISBN 0684846357](#))
- Die Mathematiker sind eine Art Franzosen; redet man zu ihnen, so übersetzen sie es in ihre Sprache, und dann ist es alsobald ganz etwas anders.
  - *Translation*: Mathematicians are [like] a sort of Frenchmen; if you talk to them, they translate it into their own language, and then it is immediately something quite different.
  - [Johann Wolfgang von Goethe](#), *Maximen und Reflexionen*, 2006 (Helmut Koopmann, ed.) [ISBN 3423343788](#)
- The mathematician's best work is art, a high perfect art, as daring as the most secret dreams of imagination, clear and limpid. Mathematical genius and artistic genius touch one another.
  - [Gösta Mittag-Leffler](#)
  - Quoted in N. Rose *Mathematical Maxims and Minims*, Raleigh NC:Rome Press Inc., 1988.
- I have hardly ever known a mathematician who was capable of reasoning.
  - [Plato](#), from [Benjamin Jowett](#)'s interpretive vernacular translation (1871) of *Plato's Republic*, Book VII, 531-e. Plato actually has Socrates say that few mathematicians are dialecticians (?????????) (Jowett, *Plato's Republic: The Greek Text*, Vol. I "Text", 1894), by which he refers to step by step reasoning based on mutual agreement, ([G. M. A. Grube](#), *Plato's Republic* (1974), Book VII, note 13). It is an accurate observation on the primitive mathematics of his day.
- A mathematician is a blind man in a dark room looking for a black cat which isn't there.
  - Uncertain, often misattributed to [Charles Darwin](#)
- A topologist is one who doesn't know the difference between a doughnut and a coffee cup.
  - [John Kelley](#)
- You know we all became mathematicians for the same reason: we were lazy.
  - [Max Rosenlicht](#)
- The mathematician has reached the highest rung on the ladder of human thought.
  - [Havelock Ellis](#)
- There are two kinds of mistakes. There are fatal mistakes that destroy a theory; but there are also contingent ones, which are useful in testing the stability of a theory.
  - [Gian-Carlo Rota](#)
- Give us something to take home!
  - [Dirk Struik](#)
- Some of you may have had occasion to run into mathematicians and to wonder therefore: How

they got that way

- [Tom Lehrer](#)
- It is impossible to be a mathematician without being a poet in soul.
  - [Sofia Kovalevskaya](#)
- Think Explore Solve Lookback.
  - [Assael](#)
- lottery: Taxation for the mathematically inept.
  - [B. Duane Farris](#)
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