

THE INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT MATHEMATICS

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Mathematics occupies a crucial and unique role in the human societies and represents a strategic key in the development of the whole mankind. The ability to compute, related to the power of technology and to the ability of social organisation, and the geometrical understanding of space-time, that is the physical world and its natural patterns, show the scientific and cultural role of Mathematics in the history of Civilisation and in the future development of the Information Society.

The number 10 is used as a convenient base to count with, but the Gauls of ancient France, the Mayas of Central America, and other people used a base of 20. The Sumerians, the Babylonians, and others after them used a base of 60—convenient because 60 can be evenly divided by 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 15, 20, and 30. The use of base 60 survives in the division of hours into minutes and minutes into seconds, and the division of the circle into 360 degrees.

The earliest known unit of length was used around 2,300 B.C. by megalithic tomb builders in ancient Britain. The name of the unit is not known, but its length was about 2.72 feet.

Syracuse's leading citizen in the third century B.C. was the greatest scientist and mathematician of ancient times, Archimedes, nine of whose famous treaties on geometry and hydrostatics survive. When the Roman consul Marcellus conquered Syracuse, he instructed his men that Archimedes was not to be harmed. But Archimedes was run through by a sword when he begged a Roman soldier not to destroy geometrical figures he had drawn in the sand.

A theory put forward by Polish mathematicians Steven Banach and Alfred Tarski in the early 20th century states that there is a way of dividing a sphere into separate parts and rearrange them so that they fill all of a larger.

Leonhard Euler (1707-1783) was probably the most productive mathematician of all time, publishing enough mathematical papers to fill 90 volumes of books. Even though he became completely blind at the age of 60, he still published over 400 mathematical papers, most of which he dictated to a servant untrained in mathematics.

A trick question! There is no Nobel Prize in mathematics. Why not? That question has created numerous stories, myths, and anecdotes. The most popular is that Nobel's wife had an affair with a mathematician, usually said to be Mittag-Leffler, and in revenge Nobel refused to endow one of his prizes in mathematics.

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