

Correspondence

DEAR EDITOR,

In the July 2004 *Gazette*, I was interested to read H Martyn Cundy's comments on the naming of polygons and the attempt to avoid a mixture of Latin and Greek numbers.

For elements high in the Periodic Table, chemists use the following nomenclature:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nil	Un	Bi	Tri	Quad	Pent	Hex	Sept	Oct	Enn

so that element 106 is called *Unnilhexium*, for example. Its chemical symbol is just Unh, this being possible because no two of the codes have the same initial letter.

No doubt this has given some language purists nervous breakdowns, because some prefixes (like *quad*) are Latin while others (like *enn*) are Greek. However, neither Greek nor Latin alone would serve the chemist's purpose, since not every prefix starts with a different letter. For example, 6 and 7 both begin with S in Latin and both with H in Greek. For the same reason, none of French, English or German would be suitable.

So perhaps it would be sensible to copy the chemists and use their notation for polygons. The familiar hexagon and octagon would stay the same. The 7-sided figure would become a septagon, the 9-sided figure an ennagon, as Mr Cundy wants, and the 10, 11 and 12-sided figures would be named unnilagon, ununagon, and unbiagon.

Of course it may be simpler to abolish all these names and just say 6-sided polygon, and so on.

Yours sincerely,

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DEAR EDITOR,

Please accept my apologies for failing to spot a typographical error in my note 'No consecutive heads' in the November 2004 *Gazette*. The denominator of the fraction on line 7 of page 567 should read 10×2^{2n} rather than 10×2^n (which gives rise to probabilities greater than one!).

Yours sincerely,

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