HW 1 Part 2: Computer Problems

Objective: To explore computer arithmetic.

1. The fibonacci numbers, $f_k$, are defined by $f_0 = 1$, $f_1 = 1$, and

$$f_{k+1} = f_k + f_{k-1}$$  \hspace{1cm} (1)

for any integer $k > 1$. A small perturbation of them, the “pib numbers” (“p” instead of “f” to indicate either the pentium bug or perturbation), $p_k$, are defined by $p_0 = 1$, $p_1 = 1$, and

$$p_{k+1} = c \cdot p_k + p_{k-1}$$  \hspace{1cm} (2)

for any integer $k > 1$, where $c = 1 + \sqrt{3}/100$.

a. Make a SEMILOGY plot of $f_n$ and $p_n$ as a function of $n$. On the plot, mark $1/\epsilon_{mach}$ for double precision IEEE floating point arithmetic. This can be useful in answering the questions below.

b. For various $n$ values, compute the $f_k$ for $k = 2, 3, \ldots, n$ using (1). Then rewrite (1) to express $f_{k-1}$ in terms of $f_k$ and $f_{k+1}$. Use the computed $f_n$ and $f_{n-1}$ to recompute $f_k$ for $k = n-2, n-3, \ldots, 0$. Make a plot of the difference between the original $f_0 = 1$ and the recomputed $f_0$ as a function of $n$. What $n$ values result in no accuracy for the recomputed $f_0$?

c. Repeat b. for the pib numbers. Comment on the striking difference in the way precision is lost in these two cases. Which is more typical? Extra credit: predict the order of magnitude of the error in recomputing $p_0$ using what you may know about recurrence relations and what you should know about computer arithmetic.

2. The binomial coefficients, $a_{n,k}$ (in Matlab nchoosek(n,k)), are defined by

$$a_{n,k} = \binom{n}{k} = \frac{n!}{k!(n-k)!}$$  \hspace{1cm} (3)

To compute the $a_{n,k}$, for a given $n$, start with $a_{n,0} = 1$ and then use the recurrence relation $a_{n,k+1} = \frac{n-k}{k+1} a_{n,k}$.

(a) For a fixed $n$, compute the $a_{n,k}$ this way, noting the largest $a_{n,k}$ and the accuracy with which $a_{n,n} = 1$ is computed. Why is it that roundoff is not a problem here as it was in problem (1)?

b. Use the algorithm of part (a) to compute

$$E(n) = \frac{1}{2^n} \sum_{k=0}^{n} k \cdot a_{n,k} = \frac{n}{2}.$$  \hspace{1cm} (4)

Write a program without any safeguards against overflow or zero divide.\(^1\) Show that the computed answer has high accuracy as long as the intermediate results are within the

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\(^1\)One of the purposes of the IEEE floating point standard was to allow a program with overflow or zero divide to run and print results.
range of floating point numbers. As with (a), explain how the computer gets an accurate, small, answer when the intermediate numbers have such a wide range of values. Why is cancellation not a problem? Note the advantage of a wider range of values: we can compute \( E(n) \) for much larger \( n \) in double precision. Print \( E(n) \) as computed by (4) and \( M_n = \max_k a_{n,k} \). For large \( n \) (somewhere over 1000), one should be \( \text{inf} \) and the other \( \text{NaN} \). Why?

c. For (fairly large) \( n = 40 \), plot \( a_{n,k} \) as a function of \( k = 1, 2, \ldots, n \) to illuminate the interesting “bell shaped” behavior of the \( a_{n,k} \) near their maximum.

d. (Extra; extra credit, extra hard, don’t spend too much time on it!) Find a way to compute

\[
S(n) = \sum_{k=0}^{n} (-1)^k \sin(2\pi \sin(k/n))a_{n,k}
\]

with good relative accuracy for large \( n \).