

# A Brief Introduction to Quantum Computation

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## 1 A Simple Computational Model

What are Qubits? That's usually the first question getting addressed in any introduction to quantum computing, for a good reason. If we want to construct a new computational model, we first need to define the most basic building block: a single *bit* of information. In classical computer science, the decision on how to define this smallest building block of information seems quite straight forward. We just take the most basic logical fact: either something is *true* or *false*, either 1 or 0. We have a name for an object holding this information: a **Bit**. Let's envision a computational model based on logical gates. Such a gate has one or more inputs and an output, with each either being *true* or *false*. Now consider a bit  $b$  and a gate  $f : \{0, 1\} \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$ . We have a *bit* of information  $b$  and can get another *bit* of information  $b' := f(b)$ . In a final third step, we introduce a timescale, which means that now our *bit* of information is time dependent. It can have different values at different times. To make it easier, we choose a discrete timescale. Our Bit  $b$  has a distinct value on each point on the timescale. A value of a bit can only be changed in between time steps, by applying a logical gate to it:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccccccc} \text{Bit} & b & \xrightarrow{f_1} & b & \xrightarrow{f_2} & \dots & \rightarrow & b & \xrightarrow{f_k} & b \\ \text{time} & t_0 & \rightarrow & t_1 & \rightarrow & \dots & \rightarrow & t_{k-1} & \rightarrow & t_k \end{array}$$

Of course, we need more than one bit of information, if we want to be able to perform meaningful computations. For this, we simply look at a list, vector or register of bits  $\mathbf{b} \in \{0, 1\}^n$  and modify our gates to be functions  $f : \{0, 1\}^n \rightarrow \{0, 1\}^n$  mapping from bit vectors to bit vectors.

Let's recap: We've now designed a computational model with just three components.

- A notion of Information: bits and registers.
- A way of reasoning: logical gates.
- A dimension to do the reasoning in: the timescale

Notice how the system described above is fully deterministic. The state  $\mathbf{b}_l$  of our system at time  $t_l$  recursively defined by:

$$\mathbf{b}_l = \begin{cases} f_l(\mathbf{b}_{l-1}) & \text{if } l > 0 \\ \mathbf{b}_0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Or by the composition of all gate applications up to this point:  $(f_l \circ f_{l-1} \circ \dots \circ f_1)(\mathbf{b}_0)$ . Actually, a composition of gates is also just another logical gate  $F := (f_l \circ f_{l-1} \circ \dots \circ f_1) : \{0, 1\}^n \rightarrow \{0, 1\}^n$ . If we are not interested in intermediate states, we can thus define our computation in the form of  $\mathbf{b}_{\text{out}} := F(\mathbf{b}_{\text{in}})$ , with  $F : \{0, 1\}^n \rightarrow \{0, 1\}^n$ .

## 2 A Bit of Randomness

### 2.1 Single Bits in Superposition

Many real world problems are believed to not be efficiently solvable on fully deterministic computers like the model described above (if  $\mathbf{P} \neq \mathbf{NP}$ ). Fortunately, it turns out that if we allow for some randomness in our algorithms, we're often able to efficiently find solutions for such hard problems with sufficiently large success probabilities. Often times, the error probabilities can even be made exponentially small. For this reason, we also want to introduce randomness into our model. Algorithms or computational models harnessing the power of randomness are usually called *probabilistic*.

Again, we start with simple one bit systems. Later, we'll see how to expand the following methods to full bit vectors/registers. In the deterministic single bit model above, the state transition of a bit  $b$  in step  $t$  is defined by  $f_t(b) \in \{0, 1\}$ . Now, the transition function (or gate) is simply allowed to flip an unfair coin and either output 0 or 1 for heads or tails respectively. Of course, the state of  $b$  prior to the transition should have an effect on the computation. That is, why we allow different (unfair) coins for either  $b = 0$  or  $b = 1$ . To distinguish between deterministic and probabilistic transition functions, we will denote the latter by  $\delta(b) \in \{0, 1\}$ . Or to reformulate this idea: Depending on the value of  $b$ , the output of  $\delta(b)$  follows one of two Bernoulli trials. There are 4 possible transitions with probabilities  $p_{00}$ ,  $p_{01}$ ,  $p_{10}$  and  $p_{11}$ , where  $p_{ij}$  is the probability of  $b$  transitioning from  $i$  to  $j$ . Obviously,  $\sum_j p_{ij} = 1$  always needs to be satisfied.

$$\begin{aligned} p_{00} &:= P(\delta(b) = 0 \mid b = 0) \\ p_{01} &:= P(\delta(b) = 1 \mid b = 0) \\ p_{10} &:= P(\delta(b) = 0 \mid b = 1) \\ p_{11} &:= P(\delta(b) = 1 \mid b = 1) \end{aligned}$$

Note that we regain our deterministic transition function  $f$  from  $\delta$ , if we restrict the probabilities:  $p_{00}, p_{10} \in \{0, 1\}$ . At this point, we can randomize our computation from above as follows:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccccccc} \text{Bit} & b & \xrightarrow{\delta_1} & b & \xrightarrow{\delta_2} & \dots & \rightarrow & b & \xrightarrow{\delta_k} & b \\ \text{time} & t_0 & \rightarrow & t_1 & \rightarrow & \dots & \rightarrow & t_{k-1} & \rightarrow & t_k \end{array}$$

Let's have a look at the state of  $b$  after the first transition. In the deterministic model, we know with certainty that at this point in time,  $b$  will have the value  $f_1(b)$ . In a probabilistic model, we can not predict the value of  $b$  at time  $t_1$  with 100% certainty. In the terminology of probability theory, a probabilistic state transition or even the whole computation would be an *experiment* and the value of bit  $b$  at time  $t$  would be described by a *random variable*  $X_t$ . Random variables are defined to take a value out of a set of predefined value options  $\Omega = \{\omega_1, \dots, \omega_n\}$  with certain probabilities  $p_1, \dots, p_n$  for each value. Only after we perform the experiment and *observe* its outcome, we get a specific value  $x_t$  of the random variable  $X_t$ . We say that  $x_t$  is a *random sample* or realization of  $X_t$ . If we don't want to or can't sample (perform) the experiment, we still could compute the *expected value*  $E(X_t) = \sum_i p_i \omega_i$  (if  $\Omega$  mathematically allows for such operations).

Let's return to our example: Just as in the deterministic case we would like to predict the state of  $b$  after the transition  $\delta_t$ . For this we want to calculate the expected state of  $b$  at time  $t$ . Let  $p_{ij}^t$  be the transition probabilities of  $\delta_t$ , furthermore  $p_{b=x}^t$  denotes the probability of  $b$  being in state  $x$  at time  $t$ . Now we have:

$$E(\delta_t(b)) = p_{b=0}^t \cdot \mathbf{0} + p_{b=1}^t \cdot \mathbf{1} \quad (1)$$

$$p_{b=x}^t = \begin{cases} p_{0x}^t \cdot p_{b=0}^{t-1} + p_{1x}^t \cdot p_{b=1}^{t-1} & , t > 0 \\ 0, 1 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (2)$$

It is important to note, that  $\mathbf{0}$  and  $\mathbf{1}$  in eq. (1) are not the scalar values of  $b$ . They define abstract objects denoting the fact that  $b$  is in state 0 or 1, so they are just arbitrary labels. For instance, same states could also be labeled  $\{\mathbf{T}, \mathbf{F}\}$  or  $\{\top, \perp\}$ . But if  $\mathbf{0}$  and  $\mathbf{1}$  are some kind of abstract object and not scalar value, how can eq. (1) be evaluated? As of now it can't. Later we will define representations of these abstract stats, which are closed under addition and scalar multiplication, making eq. (1) also (a representation of) an abstract state.

From eq. (1), we will now derive a standard form of our random bit  $b$ . We don't view  $b$  as being either in state  $\mathbf{0}$  OR  $\mathbf{1}$  anymore. From now on, we think of  $b$  as being in  $\mathbf{0}$  AND  $\mathbf{1}$  simultaneously with certain probabilities  $p_{b=0}$  and  $p_{b=1}$ , The one bit system  $b$  is in a *superposition* of two *basis states*  $\mathbf{0}$  and  $\mathbf{1}$ :

$$b = p_0 \mathbf{0} + p_1 \mathbf{1} \quad , p_0 + p_1 = 1$$

Until now, we have not given an explicit definition of the transition function  $\delta$ , apart from describing its effect. This is partly the case because we were lacking a formalism to describe uncertain states, so there was no direct way to describe the output of  $\delta(b)$ . The other big problem would have been the question of how to handle an uncertain input

state. Building on the superposition formalism  $\delta(b)$  can be defined as a linear function:

$$\begin{aligned}
\delta(b) &= \delta(p_0\mathbf{0} + p_1\mathbf{1}) \\
&= p_0\delta(\mathbf{0}) + p_1\delta(\mathbf{1}) \\
&= p_0(p_{00}\mathbf{0} + p_{01}\mathbf{1}) + p_1(p_{10}\mathbf{0} + p_{11}\mathbf{1}) \\
&= \underbrace{(p_0p_{00} + p_1p_{10})}_{=:p'_0}\mathbf{0} + \underbrace{(p_0p_{01} + p_1p_{11})}_{=:p'_1}\mathbf{1}
\end{aligned}$$

A simple calculation verifies that

$$\begin{aligned}
p'_0 + p'_1 &= (p_0p_{00} + p_1p_{10}) + (p_0p_{01} + p_1p_{11}) \\
&= p_0 \underbrace{(p_{00} + p_{01})}_{=1} + p_1 \underbrace{(p_{10} + p_{11})}_{=1} = p_0 + p_1 = 1
\end{aligned}$$

and thus  $\delta$  preserves valid superpositions, which finally makes predictions of the full computation through all steps possible. In line with the fully deterministic model the state of  $b$  at time  $t$  can be described by:

$$\begin{aligned}
b_t &= \begin{cases} \delta_t(b_{t-1}) & \text{if } t > 0 \\ b_0 \in \{\mathbf{0}, \mathbf{1}\} & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \\
&= (\delta_t \circ \delta_{t-1} \circ \dots \circ \delta_1)(b_0)
\end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

## 2.2 Collapsing Superpositions

Extending this formalism to bit registers is actually fairly straight forward. Systems can be in superposition of arbitrary many basis states. But first, it is time to talk a bit more about the concept of superposition.

**Definition 1** (Superposition of Probabilities). If  $\mathbf{E} := \{E_1, E_2, \dots, E_n\}$  is the set of all possible outcomes of an experiment, then a superposition of probable outcomes is defined by:

$$E := \sum_{i=1}^n p_i E_i \quad \text{with } p_i = P(E_i) \text{ and } \sum_{i=1}^n p_i = 1 \tag{4}$$

The states (outcomes) in  $\mathbf{E}$  are called basis states (outcomes).

As mentioned above, a superposition can not immediately be evaluated. It rather should be seen as a mathematical object holding incomplete knowledge about a certain property of some (stochastic) process, described by a random distribution  $(p_i)_{i=1}^n$ . To actually evaluate a superposition, the missing information needs to be filled in by some kind of extra process e.g. performing an experiment, measuring an observable. After this extra information is filled in the property under consideration is fully known and the superposition *collapses* to one of the actually realizable outcomes in  $\mathbf{E}$ . In this model a

system can be in an uncertain state which only can be made concrete by some external influence like measuring an observable. This sounds quite abstract and especially the fact that a measurement could alter the state of a real physical system seems quite counterintuitive, but we will later see that this principle is actually grounded in reality.

Let's consider the experiment of rolling a dice. Of course, for the observable *number of eyes* the expected outcomes are  $\mathbf{E} = \{1, 2, \dots, 6\}$ . While the dice is still in the cup and in the state of being shaken number of eyes can not be reasonably determined, even if a transparent cup is being used. The dice is in a superposition  $E = \sum_{i=1}^6 \frac{1}{6} \mathbf{i}$  of showing all numbers of eyes 1 to 6 with uniform probability  $\frac{1}{6}$ . In order to determine the number of eyes thrown, the dice needs to rest on a solid base, such that one side is evidently showing up. So by *throwing the dice* we interfere with the system by stopping to shake the cup and placing the dice on a solid base (table). With the dice now laying on the table it is clearly showing only one number of eyes. The superposition collapsed!

**Definition 2** (Collapse of Superposition). A state in superposition of basis states  $\mathbf{E} = \{E_1, E_2, \dots, E_n\}$  can be evaluated by collapsing it on one of its basis states. This is done by a measuring operator

$$M_{\mathbf{E}} \left( \sum_{i=1}^n p_i E_i \right) := E_i \quad \text{with probability } p_i \quad (5)$$

*Remark 1.* The basis states are not unique. To see this, consider the experiment of rolling a dice. If the observable is *the number of eyes* we have the basis states  $\mathbf{E}_{\text{eye}} = \{\mathbf{i}\}_{i=1}^6$ . On the other hand, if the measurement is only supposed to distinguish between *even or odd* numbers of eyes we have  $\mathbf{E}_{\text{parity}} = \{\text{even}, \text{odd}\}$ . The corresponding measuring operators are  $M_{\mathbf{E}_{\text{eye}}}$  and  $M_{\mathbf{E}_{\text{parity}}}$ .

### 2.3 Bit Registers in Superposition

Extending the probabilistic one-bit model from section 2.1 to bit registers is almost trivial given the definitions from section 2.2. A  $n$ -bit register can be in  $N = 2^n$  possible states, giving rise to a superposition of  $N$  basis states for probabilistic register states.

**Definition 3.** The state of a  $n$ -bit register in a probabilistic computation is defined by a superposition of all possible basis states  $\mathbf{B} = \{\mathbf{0}, \mathbf{1}\}^n = \{\mathbf{0}, \mathbf{1}, \dots, \mathbf{N} - \mathbf{1}\}$ .

$$\mathbf{b} := \sum_{i=0}^{N-1} p_i \cdot \mathbf{i} \quad \text{with } P(\mathbf{b} = \mathbf{i}) = p_i \quad (6)$$

*Remark 2.* It should be noted that the number representation  $\{\mathbf{i}\}_{i=0}^{N-1}$  is defined as the bit string  $\{\mathbf{0}, \mathbf{1}\}^n$  in a base of 10. So it is just a shorter label for the state of a  $n$ -bit register and NOT a scalar value.

Similar to section 2.1 the transition function  $\delta$  can be defined on its effect on basis states. For each transition the probabilities of transitioning from basis state  $\mathbf{i}$  to basis state  $\mathbf{j}$  must be defined. The mapping between states in superposition will then be defined linearly.

**Definition 4.** Let  $\mathbf{b} = \sum_{i=0}^{N-1} p_i \mathbf{i}$  be a  $n$ -bit register as defined in definition 3 and let  $p_{ij}$  be the probability of transitioning from basis state  $\mathbf{i}$  to basis state  $\mathbf{j}$ , then the transition function is defined by:

$$\delta(\mathbf{b}) := \sum_{i=0}^{N-1} p_i \delta(\mathbf{i}) = \sum_{i=0}^{N-1} \sum_{j=0}^{N-1} p_i p_{ij} \mathbf{j} \quad (7)$$

**Theorem 1.** *A transition function as defined by definition 4 maps superposition to valid superpositions.*

*Proof.* Let  $\delta$  be a probabilistic transition function and let  $\mathbf{b}$  a register state in superposition. By definition 4 we get  $\delta(\mathbf{b}) = \sum_{i=0}^{N-1} \sum_{j=0}^{N-1} p_i p_{ij} \mathbf{j}$  a simple reordering leads to

$$\delta(\mathbf{b}) = \sum_{j=0}^{N-1} \left( \sum_{i=0}^{N-1} p_i p_{ij} \right) \mathbf{j}$$

Obviously,  $p_i p_{ij} = P(\mathbf{b} = \mathbf{i}) P(\delta(\mathbf{b}) = \mathbf{j} \mid \mathbf{b} = \mathbf{i})$ . It follows directly from the law of total probability that  $\sum_{j=0}^{N-1} \sum_{i=0}^{N-1} p_i p_{ij} = \sum_{j=0}^{N-1} P(\delta(\mathbf{b}) = \mathbf{j}) = 1$   $\square$

A direct consequence of theorem 1 is that the space of probabilistic transition functions is also closed under composition. In accordance to eq. (3) the state of a register  $\mathbf{b}$  in a probabilistic computation at time  $t$  can be described by:

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{b}_t &= \begin{cases} \delta_t(\mathbf{b}_{t-1}) & \text{if } t > 0 \\ \mathbf{b}_0 \in \{\mathbf{0}, \mathbf{1}\}^N & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \\ &= (\delta_t \circ \delta_{t-1} \circ \dots \circ \delta_1)(\mathbf{b}_0) \end{aligned} \quad (8)$$

### 3 Introducing: Linear Algebra

The definitions of section 2 fully describe a probabilistic computational model. Unfortunately, working with them can be quite cumbersome. This section will introduce an algebraic apparatus based on the definitions from above, with many helpful tools to describe computations and state evolutions. As some terminology and especially the linear properties of definition 4 already suggest the mathematical framework of choice will be linear algebra. Let's start by assessing the components of the model described above. We have:

- States (in superposition)
- State transitions
- Measurements (collapse of superposition)

As it turns out, all three components and their interactions can be expressed in the language of linear algebra. Readers familiar with that field of mathematics probably already noticed that  $\delta$  is a linear function and the space of states in superposition looks a lot like a vector space.

### 3.1 The State Space

The defining property of a superposition is the probability distribution of its basis states. Given an enumeration all basis states the superposition is fully defined by the list of probabilities  $(p_0, p_1, \dots, p_{N-1})$ .

**Definition 5** (State Spaces of Probabilistic Computations). Given a state basis  $\mathbf{B}$  of a  $n$ -bit register, the state space of probabilistic computations on this register is defined as:

$$\mathbf{B}^n := \left\{ \mathbf{b} = \sum_{i=0}^{N-1} p_i \mathbf{i} \mid p_i \in \mathbb{R}_+, \sum_{i=0}^{N-1} p_i = 1 \right\}$$

**Definition 6.** The coordinate map is a linear function  $\Psi_{\mathbf{B}} : \mathbf{B}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^N$  mapping the state space to  $\mathbb{R}^N$ :

$$\forall \mathbf{b} \in \mathbf{B}^n : \Psi_{\mathbf{B}}(\mathbf{b}) = (p_0, p_1, \dots, p_{N-1})^T = \sum_{i=1}^N p_i \mathbf{e}_i$$

Often  $\Psi_{\mathbf{B}}(\mathbf{b})$  is called the coordinate vector of  $\mathbf{b}$  with respect to the basis  $\mathbf{B}$ .

**Lemma 1.** *The state space of probabilistic computations is isomorphic to the surface of the unit sphere in the first quadrant of  $\mathbb{R}^N$ .*

$$\mathbf{B}^n \cong \left\{ \mathbf{v} \in \mathbb{R}_+^N \mid \|\mathbf{v}\| = 1 \right\}$$

*Proof.* For an arbitrary state  $\mathbf{b}$  the coordinate vector  $\Psi_{\mathbf{B}}(\mathbf{b}) = \mathbf{v}$  is the direction of a ray in the first quadrant of  $\mathbb{R}^N$  starting from the origin. Rescaling  $\mathbf{v}$  results in the point where this ray intersects the unit sphere  $\varphi(\mathbf{v}) = \frac{\mathbf{v}}{\|\mathbf{v}\|} = \mathbf{v}'$  which can be inverted by  $\varphi^{-1}(\mathbf{v}') = \frac{\mathbf{v}'}{\|\mathbf{v}'\|_1} = \mathbf{v}$ . Thus,  $\varphi \circ \varphi^{-1} = \varphi^{-1} \circ \varphi = \text{id}$  and

$$\Psi_{\mathbf{B}}(\mathbf{B}^n) = \{ \mathbf{v} \in \mathbb{R}_+^N \mid \|\mathbf{v}\|_1 = 1 \} \cong \{ \mathbf{v} \in \mathbb{R}_+^N \mid \|\mathbf{v}\| = 1 \}$$

□

### 3.2 Transition Matrices

It follows directly from eq. (1) that  $\delta : \text{span}(\mathbf{B}) \rightarrow \text{span}(\mathbf{B})$  is a linear transformation on the space spanned by state basis  $\mathbf{B}$  and theorem 1 even states that  $\delta : \mathbf{B}^n \rightarrow \mathbf{B}^n$  and  $\mathbf{B}^n$  is closed under  $\delta$ . It is well known, that the space of all linear maps  $\text{hom}_{\mathbb{R}}(V, W)$  between two finite-dimensional real vector spaces  $V$  and  $W$  is isomorphic to  $\mathbb{R}^{(\dim(W), \dim(V))}$ . So, there must exist an isomorphism between transition functions  $\delta$  and  $\mathbb{R}^{(N, N)}$ .

**Theorem 2.** *Let  $\mathbf{B} = \{\mathbf{b}_i\}_{i=1}^N$  be a  $n$ -bit state basis and  $\mathcal{B} = \{\mathbf{v}_j\}_{j=1}^N$  a basis of  $\mathbb{R}^N$ , then there exists a matrix  $A = (a_{ij}) \in \mathbb{R}^{(N, N)}$  such that*

- $\forall \mathbf{b}_i \in \mathbf{B} : \delta(\mathbf{b}_i) = \sum_{j=1}^N a_{ji} \mathbf{v}_j$

- $\delta\left(\sum_{i=1}^N x_i \mathbf{b}_i\right) = \sum_{j=1}^N y_j \mathbf{v}_j \iff A(x_1, x_2, \dots, x_N)^T = (y_1, y_2, \dots, y_N)^T$

*Remark 3.* Usually it is custom to choose the standard basis  $\{\mathbf{e}_i\}_{i=1}^N$  for  $\mathbb{R}^N$ , then theorem 2 describes how  $A$  can be used to describe how  $\delta$  affects basis states in coordinate space. The  $j$ -th column vector  $A\mathbf{e}_j = \mathbf{a}^j = (a_{1j}, a_{2j}, \dots, a_{Nj})^T$  represents the probability distribution of  $\delta(\mathbf{b}_j)$ . It follows that  $a_{ij} = p_{ji}$ , with  $p_{ji}$  being the probability of transitioning from  $\mathbf{b}_j$  to  $\mathbf{b}_i$ . Consequently,  $A = P^T$  with  $P = (p_{ij})$ .

### 3.3 Measurements

The final component that still needs to be expressed in the framework of linear algebra are measurements. Let's go back and think about what measuring actually means in our case. The computational model described in section 2 provides a macroscopic view of randomized computations. The result of such a randomized computation will be a random state. Usually it is only of interest if a computation outputs a desired state given a specific input, which entails the correctness of said computation. For randomized computations, such an analysis requires the final random state distribution. Superposition states are exactly that. Asking "How likely is it to end up in state  $\mathbf{k}$ ?" corresponds to measuring the quotient of  $\mathbf{k}$  in the final superposition  $\mathbf{b}$ . In the framework of linear algebra this means calculating the scalar product  $(\mathbf{k} \cdot \mathbf{b})$ .

**Definition 7.** Let  $\mathbf{b} := \sum_{i=1}^N p_i \mathbf{b}_i \in \mathbf{B}^n$  with basis states  $\{\mathbf{b}_i\}_{i=1}^N$ , then there exist  $N$  operators  $\hat{M}_k : \mathbf{B}^n \rightarrow [0, 1]$

- in state space:  $\hat{M}_k(\mathbf{b}) = (\mathbf{b}_k \cdot \mathbf{b}) = p_k$
- in coordinate space:  $M_k = \mathbf{b}_k^t \in \mathbb{R}^{(1, N)}$ ,  $M_k \mathbf{b} = \mathbf{b}_k^t \mathbf{b}$  With  $\mathbf{b}^t$  being the transposed vector of  $\mathbf{b} \in \mathbb{R}^N$

## 4 Making it Quantum