

Variations on the Fibonacci binary sequence

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The Fibonacci binary sequence is defined as follows. First consider the substitution rule where 0 is replaced by 01, and 1 is replaced by 0. Applying this substitution rule to a finite string of symbols 0 and 1 means applying it “in parallel” to each 0 and each 1 of the string. For example, applying it to 001 gives 01010 (the first two zeroes were replaced by 01 while simultaneously the last 1 was replaced by 0). Then start from 0 and apply iteratively the substitution rule; you obtain successively

0
01
010
01001
01001010
...

Note that the length of the strings you obtain is 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, ... where you might recognize one of your favorite sequences, and that the sequence of strings “converges” in a reasonable sense to an infinite sequence

$$\mathbf{F} = 0\ 1\ 0\ 0\ 1\ 0\ 1\ 0\ 0\ 1\ 0\ \dots$$

which is thus called the Fibonacci binary sequence.

We will see how this sequence is in some sense one of the “simplest” non-periodic sequences, how it can be obtained by playing billiard on a square and what other sequences share these two properties. Finally we will indicate unexpected inequalities involving these sequences and their shifts; for example if we let S denote the shift on sequences, so that $S\mathbf{F} = 1\ 0\ 0\ 1\ 0\ 1\ 0\ 0\ 1\ 0\ \dots$, $S^2\mathbf{F} = 0\ 0\ 1\ 0\ 1\ 0\ 0\ 1\ 0\ \dots$, and if \leq is the lexicographical order on binary sequences, then for all $k \geq 1$

$$0\ \mathbf{F} \leq S^k(\mathbf{F}) \leq 1\ \mathbf{F}.$$